

“*Spouse in the House* combines two of my favorite things: practical marriage advice and humor. Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby weave together wit, wisdom, and biblical principles in a relatable way to help everyone from newlyweds to long-marrieds have a marriage that is enriching and joyful. Married for over forty years with a SITH (spouse in the house) of my own, I found myself highlighting insightful tips and doable strategies, chuckling out loud, and nodding in agreement as I made my way through this enjoyable read.”

Shel Harrington, humorist, family law attorney, and author of
Over 50, Defined

“I just finished *Spouse in the House* and wrote seventeen pages of application for our marriage of thirty-eight years! I wish I’d had this book in the early days of my marriage when I struggled to maintain togetherness without losing my individuality. Becky and Cynthia’s authentic stories, as well as the attitude adjustments and practices they suggest, have moved me to action already. What a treat that the authors talk back and forth about common issues in marriage and have their husbands contribute too. This book is a sheer gift!”

Tammy McLeod, Harvard chaplain and coauthor of *Hit Hard*

“With their incredibly vulnerable, well-researched, and often mirthful writing, Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby provide a timely and timeless resource for anyone who wants to improve their relational life. The wisdom and practicality of *Spouse in the House* applies to more than just marriage, but to ‘everything God wants to see happen in a church, in the world, . . . in families and couples.’”

Dr. Patrick McLeod, Harvard chaplain and coauthor of
Hit Hard

“For twenty-three years, my husband and I have shared our work space as we’ve each run a business from home. I’m clear about the challenges our situation creates. Yet Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby’s new book gave me renewed hope that perhaps we’ll both make it out alive—and well. With candid humor, the authors share laugh-out-loud stories, great resources, and tips from a myriad of friends who know the life-sucking potential of all that closeness. Whether you’re living the togetherness dream or anticipating it with dread, don’t miss *Spouse in the House!*”

Deb DeArmond, coauthor of *Don’t Go to Bed Angry: Stay Up and Fight!*

“*Spouse in the House* says it all. With honesty, humor, warmth, and wisdom, Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby give encouragement and practical suggestions for couples sharing the same space 24/7. They remind us that our spouse can’t read our mind, respecting and easing the other’s workload is a gift we can offer each other, and togetherness means more than our bodies being in close proximity. As someone who lives full-time aboard a sailboat with my hubby who works from home, I found this book incredibly insightful.”

Grace Fox, codirector of International Messengers Canada, and author of *Finding Hope in Crisis*

“It’s a rare book whose title makes you grin and whose content keeps you nodding in recognition on almost every page. *Spouse in the House* is the gift I want to give every couple trying to maintain a healthy relationship while navigating the uncertain terrain of two people coexisting in the same space. With wit and wisdom, Ruchti and Melby share insights from their own experience along with practical guidance on finances, communication, and a host of other issues confronting those who bump up against their spouse every loving day.”

Maggie Wallem Rowe, author of *This Life We Share*

“I’ve desperately needed this book for at least five years, since my sweet husband retired . . . and settled down at home. For good. We’ve both had to pivot to discover new ways to coordinate a homelife that no longer includes four children and two working parents. Thus, I’m absolutely delighted Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby have gifted those of us in the HHATT (He’s Home All the Time) Club with this perky and practical book. With their wise-friend-next-door tone, the authors cover hard topics with grace and mercy. If you’re looking to build greater love and health into your marriage, begin with this fabulous book!”

Lucinda Secrest McDowell, award-winning author of
Soul Strong and *Life-Giving Choices*

“Yes, I have a spouse in the house—or rather, on our eight-hundred-square-foot live-aboard boat. And during the pandemic, we lived in a three-hundred-square-foot RV so we could care for my ninety-two-year-old in-laws! All I can say is that the wisdom, advice, common sense, and practical help in this book took a very stressful circumstance and transformed it into an opportunity to dance lovingly with each other instead of dancing around each other. Couples can move from being mad to being madly in love again. And Bill, my HHATT (Husband Home All the Time), is equally grateful!”

Pam Farrel, codirector of Love-Wise, and coauthor of the best seller *Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti*

SPOUSE IN THE **HOUSE**

**Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make
Room for Each Other**

Cynthia Ruchti & Becky Melby



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CHAPTER 1

Honey, I'm Home . . . All. The. Time.

— Cynthia —

I'm a member of the HHATT Club. Yes, that's how it's spelled—*He's Home All the Time*.

The concept started out as a fictional club. A character in one of my novels (*Song of Silence*) lost a job she loved and found herself home all day every day when she'd expected that the best years of her career were ahead of her. The woman's oh-so-kind-but-a-teensy-bit-oblivious husband had retired early with the express purpose of doing nothing with the rest of his life. And he was skilled at it. (Read further into the book to see how I—I mean, *the character*—changed her attitude about his “nothing.”)

In the book, a wise counselor suggested the by now depressed woman should consider joining a book club—the HHATT Club, specifically. My character followed through, assuming the women who met in the back room of a quaint coffee shop would discuss, well, books.

Instead, the self-appointed coordinator said, “We're writing the book . . . on how to survive when your husband's home all . . . the . . . time.”

The main character felt compelled to say, “I love my husband. He's a good man.”

One of the other members answered, “It’s a prerequisite for the HHATT Club. We all love our husbands. We love being with them. It’s the 24/7 part that needs a little help.”¹

Like most novelists, I learned a thing or two while writing that book. I got to know the HHATT Club members and their unique, proactive approach to making it work, finding equilibrium amid a sudden overload of togetherness.

The need for equilibrium is perhaps greater than ever. Not since the Industrial Revolution transformed American life from what had been largely agricultural and family-run businesses have we seen such a seismic shift back to two spouses at home. This migration to more time at home can be traced to many factors:

- Advanced degrees can now be earned entirely online.
- A rising entrepreneurial spirit is creating more and more home-run businesses (many with “work-linked” spouses collaborating on the same business, or each running a business of their own).
- Company employees increasingly work remotely to cut down on overhead, commuting a few feet from kitchen to office rather than two hours in sluggish traffic.
- Combine all those realities with as many as ten thousand baby boomers retiring *every day* in the United States.

More and more Americans are finding themselves *not* saying “Have a great day” as both spouses head off to work. Work doesn’t necessarily mean leaving the house. They’re together more than they expected. And they’re unsure what that’s supposed to look like relationally. And practically.

When I speak for women’s groups and mention the phrase “he’s home all the time,” I can count on one response reverberating through the audience like a well-timed wave in a football

stadium. Each woman lifts her chin a little, then nods knowingly. “Ah. Uh-huh. Yes.”

They get it. We get it.

And so do our husbands.

It's not always—okay, it rarely is—a smooth transition when two bodies share the same air. The same remote. The same bathroom. The same standing-room-only spot in the kitchen. We navigated the dance steps without much trouble as newlyweds. Maybe we were delirious.

But now, when more husbands and wives have work-from-home options and are trying to find space for two desks and two office chairs and two business phone calls or online meetings happening concurrently in what was once a spare room . . .

Now, when a deployed spouse is home, but home looks and feels different and the roles they had to abdicate to serve their country aren't easy to reclaim and harder still to relinquish . . .

Now, when retirement throws wide the door of togetherness but every room in the house feels like it's shrinking . . .

The interesting thing about 24/7 is that a minute past the “24” part is a brand-new 24/7 with no blank space between. So being home together is not a phenomenon we need to learn to embrace for an entire day. It may be for the rest of our breaths.

And it may be a forced togetherness brought on by illness or impairment, which is already stressful. Or a layoff. Or a company-wide pivot to use remote workers only. Or a world-wide pandemic.

Wow, that sounds melodramatic, doesn't it? If only we were exaggerating. The book in your hands was contracted long before *pandemic* became a household word. For every single household.

Being home together is not a phenomenon we need to learn to embrace for an entire day. It may be for the rest of our breaths.

Some of these chapters were written in the early months of its raging. Talk about live-in research.

We can whine about the inconvenience of having a spouse in the house more than we think normal, grumble about not having the elbow room we long for, and complain to the person who is experiencing the same thing from the other side of the breakfast bar. Or we can figure out how to survive, discover what our friends are doing to manage their reasons for too much togetherness, and—in our case—put it in a book.

Spouse in the House shares tips and tools we've gathered, insights we often return to for this lifelong learning curve. We *can* move from uncertainty, confusion, or claustrophobia to peace and relationship vitality when both spouses are in the house—whether due to retirement, job loss, caregiving, deployment and reentry, building a business at home, working remotely, or juggling the “they're here, they're gone” of a spouse whose job necessitates long stretches away followed by long stretches at home.

Can we coexist without co-exhausting?

Thriving through the togetherness involves learning new dance moves that will keep us from tripping over each other when we're “gifted” with a 24/7 partner who is dancing to some other tune.

— Becky —

It was 1980. A Friday afternoon in November. My husband (who, for the sake of clarity, I'm calling Dr. Snuggles) arrived home from work with a pink slip in hand. He'd been laid off. My first thought was that we needed to give up the idea of trying for a third child. But Dr. Snuggles (yes, I will explain this nickname in a future chapter, and, yes, I have his tepidly enthusiastic permission to use it) assured me it would only be a short layoff.

Right.

Fast-forward eight months. I waddled through the living room, stepping around toys littered by our two sons, full laundry basket propped on what had once been distinguishable as a hip bone. Where was my husband? Sitting on the couch. Why was I the one doing all the work? Couldn't he see my swollen feet, my protruding belly obscuring the laundry-basket hip?

I know what you're thinking. *What a louse. He hadn't budged off that couch or lifted a finger to help her for eight months. The poor beached-whale-looking woman was doing all the cooking, cleaning, and laundry while he just sat there staring at the TV, oblivious to the mess. Not fair!*

But maybe that's not the whole picture. In reality, Dr. Snuggles had taken on several temporary jobs and enrolled in night classes while waiting to get called back to work. On top of that, he had been working full-time and going to school part-time for the prior eight years while I, on the other hand, had worked for two years and then had the luxury of staying home with our children for the next six. Not that the stay-at-home-mom job is a luxury, but for me the option of staying home is.

Looking back on that year, why is that laundry basket versus couch moment the memory that floats to the top? Why don't I remember the times we made meals or cared for the kids together? Why don't I instantly think of how wonderful it was that the four and a half of us could spend extra time together, or that I had a man around who would take over so I could rest my swollen feet and take a nap, a guy who loved me enough to get down on his knees to help me put on my shoes?

Fast-forward to 2017. Our four sons had left the nest and blessed us with four daughters-in-love and fifteen grandchildren. My husband had a successful chiropractic clinic—a career change that was a direct result of the layoff I had whined about. I was working on my eighteenth novel. Life was good. And then . . .

Together we decided it was time for him to enter semi-retirement. We talked about it, thought we were both prepared. We had a good relationship. What could go wrong?

I moved my work space to a desk in one of our spare bedrooms. I used to have all day and the whole house to myself, alternating between the kitchen table, couch, and standing at a counter with my laptop. But this new arrangement would work, wouldn't it? I had a beautiful view from the window of my spring-green-walled room. If I worked smart, I could reach my daily word count in only two hours a day, six days a week. We would talk about our schedules every evening. We could do this.

And then came the day I was sitting at my desk, finally getting my thoughts in order to begin writing, when I was suddenly aware of a presence in the doorway. Dr. Snuggles stood there, patiently waiting for me to look up. When I did, he said, "Breakfast with the guys got canceled so I'm home all morning."

My fingernails curled into my palms. The cords in my neck tightened. I attempted a calming breath and failed. To my credit, I simply nodded. And waited until the words had fully formed in my head. Then I let him have it.

"I don't think you understand. Do you realize *my* job description hasn't changed one bit? I'm not retired! Everything I used to do in nine hours a day I now have to find a way to squeeze into teensy blocks so I have time for you. I have to get my writing done. I can't drop what I'm doing just because you're free." (Notice the overuse of the singular first-person pronoun.)

As I vented, my hubby's face morphed from shock to hurt to anger. It didn't dawn on me until much later the man was simply communicating that his plans had changed. He wasn't actually asking anything of me. That was the moment I knew I was not prepared for 24/7 togetherness. That was the moment I knew I needed help.

For months, Cynthia and I joked about writing this book. I

remember saying, “Couples go to premarital counseling before saying ‘I do.’ Why doesn’t somebody create preretirement counseling so we’re ready to say, ‘I still do. All. The. Time?’”

When Cynthia came up with our title—*Spouse in the House*—I wrote it as an acronym in an email. SITH. As in Sith lords, those Star Wars antagonists drawing their power from the dark side of the Force, bent on carrying out their evil agendas of domination over their rivals.

The comparison between the spouses in our houses and these Machiavellian warlords made me laugh and wince at the same time. Though exaggerated, there are some parallels to the way I was looking at my very own SITH. And therein lies a key: *the way I was looking at my spouse*. I’m embarrassed to admit it was a light bulb moment when I realized my husband was not the enemy. He is not the antagonist in our life story. He is not my rival. He is not attempting to gain power and dominion over my life or our home.

True, we had things to talk about and work through, but the biggest conflict was in my head, in my idea that our home was *my* domain and *my* time should be my own. It’s an ongoing journey, but simply realizing we are on the same team has turned me from a defensive complainer into a woman who is (mostly) thoroughly enjoying more time with her husband, the flexibility and freedom of retirement, and the renewed intimacy this freedom can bring. (BTW, my phone decided that *renewed* should be spelled “re-nude,” which gave me the idea to address this topic later in the book.)

The biggest conflict was in my head, in my idea that our home was *my* domain and *my* time should be my own.

I look forward to sharing my foibles and misconceptions with you as we learn together, with God’s help, how to embrace sharing living space (and mental space) with our SITHs.

CHAPTER 2

Love Keeps No Record of Who Cleaned the Toilet Last

— Becky —

What do you do when a system that worked for forty-five years suddenly . . . doesn't?

I was raised in the fifties and sixties by parents whose roles were defined by gender. Dad worked in an office; Mom stayed home and took care of my brother and me, cooked, cleaned, shopped, and ironed my dad's shirts, handkerchiefs, and boxer shorts.

I am not my mother. I do not iron boxer shorts. Still, for more than four decades Dr. Snuggles and I had a plan for who did what when that divided pretty evenly along gender lines. Even during the seasons when I worked in or out of the home, I handled the same stuff my mother did, and Dr. Snuggles took care of the yard, the cars, home repairs, and paying the bills.

And then retirement hit. I know, that makes it sound like an unexpected tidal wave slamming down on us. It wasn't that we hadn't talked and talked and talked about it. But it wasn't until he was actually home (All. The. Time.) that the reality of the change to my life hit like a massive storm surge. How was I going to squish all the things I'd filled my days with into far fewer lines on my planner so I could enjoy my hubby's freed-up time?

You're probably yelling the answer. I know, I know. *Make him help!*

I was fortunate to marry a man who was a good cook. Before we had children, we split the cooking duties, or we cooked together. Once our children came along and my husband's work responsibilities escalated, I took over the culinary role and trained our sons to help. The men always carried the Master of the BBQ role and as each son married, he was given a new gas BBQ grill and the rehearsal dinner was created on the new grill. Now that the kids have launched and we both work from home, we revert back to sharing the cooking (one cooks and the other cleans up) or we both cook.

—Pam Farrel, author of *Red-Hot Monogamy*

Again, I am not my mother. But her voice is still in my head. She taught, by words and example (tapping into what was more pop culture than scripturally sound), how to serve a man, how to never ask for anything, how to be (or at least tell yourself you are) content in any circumstance. My mother would never, ever have made a honey-do list.

So for the first few days of my husband's retirement, I continued on as before, trying to work a little faster and more efficiently. And then came the day . . .

We'd invited friends for dinner. I'd spent the day alternating between cleaning, cooking, and writing. Now it was crunch time. I had less than an hour to put the finishing touches on dinner, set the table, change clothes, do my hair, and put on makeup. I'm embarrassed to say that, looking back, I have no recollection of what Dr. Snuggles had done all day. Maybe he'd been working in the yard. What I do remember is where he was at the moment my internal pressure gauge registered *overwhelmed*.

In. His. Recliner.

Couldn't he see what needed to be done?

I couldn't stomp quite as thunderously then as I had when I was eight months pregnant. In fact, I was doing my best to keep it all bottled up inside and tightly corked . . . except for the occasional slam of a potlid.

And then, just as the cork started to wiggle free, my man walked into the kitchen and said the six most magical words in the English language. No, not "You are beautiful. I love you." He said, "What can I do to help?"

I had a couple of options here. I could have said, "Fine timing, buddy. Look around. It's almost all done already." I could have laser-glared. But I made a choice. I threw my arms around him, kissed him soundly, and then, with a little eye batting and without my go-to snarkiness, told him what still needed to be accomplished.

Corny? Yes. But grace and humor cover a multitude of missed cues. That one little question was a turning point for us. For me, it was accepting, once again, that my man can't read my mind. How is he to know that (in my opinion) there are things that need to be done if I don't verbalize it? We don't always get this right, but we've started taking time most nights to talk about the next day. "What do you have scheduled?" "What do we want to do for fun?" "What do we need to get done first?" And then we ask each other those six magical words: "What can I do to help?"

**Grace and
humor cover
a multitude of
missed cues.**

The key to making a division of labor work is to make it work for *you*. There isn't just one right way. But there is one destined-to-fail system: the fifty-fifty method.

Working together to create a master list of everything that needs to be done inside and outside and then categorizing and prioritizing tasks as daily, weekly, and monthly is a great place to start. But treating each item on that list like a playing card—one

for you, one for me, one for you, one for me—is a setup for future frustration.

Getting along well requires recognizing that we have different expectations in many situations. Depending on the guests we've invited, I may think the state of the yard and their first impression as they drive up to the house is more important than having the house spotlessly clean. So I'm out there working on that (maybe even obsessing over that) while Becky's inside, wondering why I'm not helping her finish up what she feels is critical but impossible to get done alone.

The point is, who gets to decide what is most important? I'm sure there is a minimum level we can agree on for both the inside and the outside of the house, and we need to help with, or at least allow the other to focus on, that minimum. Beyond that, we need to honor each other's preferences and not expect our spouses to sacrifice what they honestly believe is important so they can help us with what we think is more important. My perceived needs and preferences are not more right or important than hers, and neither are hers more right or important than mine.

—Dr. Snuggles

Inevitably, some days everything on your list is crossed off, but he hasn't touched his. The trash is overflowing, the kids' nose-prints are still smeared on the front window, and the toothpaste dabs in the sink have petrified. But when you've spent the day meeting a work deadline, tending to a sick child, or supporting a friend in her marriage crisis, the last thing you need is your spouse jabbing his finger at *your* side of the list.

Built into the fifty-fifty method is the assumption that absolute fairness is achievable. And to make it happen, we must over-

see each other. Trouble in the making. There's an adage that fits here: I'm only the boss of *me*.

For ten years I was my husband's office secretary and paralegal. I have to remind him every now and then that I am not his secretary anymore. Each of us has our own business. I don't feed his cattle. He doesn't write my books.

—Maxine R.

Another approach to the who-does-what-when question is to talk about likes, dislikes, strengths, and weaknesses. Maybe you can't stomach even looking at the brown goo on the bottom of the crisper drawer while he's got guts of titanium. Nothing makes him gag, and cleaning out the fridge is an adventure of discovery. Or he's tried his hand at gardening, but he loses interest when it's time to weed. You love sinking your fingers into the dirt and yanking out those invaders. Embrace and maximize your preferences.

When it comes to a job neither of you enjoy, consider doing it together: one of you fills a trash bag with fossilized French fries from the floor of the van and scrapes dehydrated grape juice out of the cup holders while the other vacuums.

Doing it together works for a lot of daily chores. The math is magical. Two people putting clean sheets on a bed takes far less than half the time of one person doing it alone. If you're emptying the dishwasher while he's scrambling eggs and frying bacon, you're constantly bumping elbows, but what if you decide nudging each other can be fun instead of annoying? What if we use the close quarters to chat and fit in a little playful snuggle time, as Dr. Kevin Leman proposed in his book by that title, *Sex Begins in the Kitchen?*

Just sayin'.

I'd like to tag a footnote onto the comments Dr. Snuggles

made earlier about expectations. One day he finished loading the dishwasher and announced, “The dinner plates should go here in the back instead of the front. See? This way, they don’t slide around when you pull out the rack.”

Did you know that “retired husband syndrome” is a thing? It’s a stress response that affects women globally when their spouse stops working at his job or career. Italian researchers Marco Bertoni and Giorgio Brunello report that almost half the women they studied whose husbands had recently retired experienced escalating stress levels, depression, and insomnia, among other issues.¹ The perception is that a man in the house who no longer is employed and has yet to discover a healthy rhythm of recreation and meaningful activity creates a nightmarish scenario for the entire household. Retired husband syndrome. You weren’t imagining things.

—Becky

I’ve been loading dishwashers for decades. *Who is he to think*—? But then I stopped my internal rant and decided to give it a try. Guess what? He’s right. For decades I’d put up with plates rolling out of place. Who knew there was a simple answer?

Lesson learned: it’s *our* dishwasher. Not mine. And that same earth-shattering truth applies to the whole place. If he wants to rearrange the spice cabinet, fold bath towels in thirds instead of fourths, or roast the cauliflower instead of steaming it, I need to stop and ask myself if he’s actually doing it wrong or simply not doing it my way.

— Cynthia —

Division of labor, huh? We’re supposed to divide it? I do not think my husband got that memo. Or if he did, it was written in

a language he has not yet studied. He's fluent in English. Pretty fluent. That's it.

"I have called this meeting to order to—"

My husband (who hereafter will be known as Wonderhubby for reasons I'll explain later, but mostly because both Becky and I married men named Bill) squirmed. "Are you firing me?"

"No!" Awkward pause. "Wait. I can do that? No, of course not. But we need to talk."

"I'm always eager to have a serious discussion with you, my love. Especially if it involves me changing something I'm doing. Bring it on."

Okay, I made up that last line.

Let's just pretend he said, "Go on."

"How long was it, my beloved, before you let on that one of your assignments at your job entailed cleaning toilets? How long before you let on that you knew how to perform that task?"

"A while."

I tilted my head coyly to the side.

"Twenty-seven years," he said.

We did have a discussion close to this one, but it started with our working to figure out how to balance the load a little more evenly when company is on its way, much like Becky's initiation into this concept.

He long ago defaulted the kitchen to me, although I personally think it's important to learn how to fend for yourself in the kitchen should KFC and Burger King ever close their doors. But because there's so much last-minute kitchen detail when we're expecting company or extended family, we both knew I needed help.

I drew up a list of the 105 last-minute tasks and offered him the "opportunity" to pick the ones he found least offensive. We established a new tradition. Without my needing to ask, he now takes it upon himself to vacuum the carpeting and clean the toilets. That leaves me with a manageable 103 last-minute tasks. Success!

And it turns out, now that he's home all the time, I can tap into his desire for efficiency if he needs to go to town. He doesn't mind stopping at the grocery store, as long as each grocery item is clearly spelled out on the list. What spurs him on is his love of a bargain. His eyes light up when he can report that he saved twenty-three cents on spaghetti noodles and got two boxes of cereal for the price of one.

And I celebrate with him.

But there's no denying we have yet to master the dance steps that will make us feel the workload is evenly distributed. The unfortunate truth is that home chores never retire. But how they're divided may need to change.

Even distribution is not the goal, though, as Becky said. It's unattainable and fluctuates with our individual calendars, health issues, interests, and skills. The true goal is to manage expectations when two spouses share the same space but not necessarily the same work schedules.

Home all the time isn't the same thing as *free all the time*. For either spouse. Respecting and easing the other's workload is a gift we can offer each other.

For us, surprise attacks spell certain doom. If he asks, unannounced, if I can help him for "a few minutes" with the project he's working on in the garage, I adjust my expectations by assuming it will be a few minutes to the tenth power. And he adjusts his expectations by knowing I need a heads-up. If I'm aware of it ahead of time, I can do my best to shuffle some must-dos so I can be available for his "Would you please . . . ?"

Home all the time isn't the same thing as *free all the time*. For either spouse.

Respecting and easing the other's workload is a gift we can offer each other.

In few instances will your workload balance itself naturally.

For most of us, we'll have to have a sit-down talk. The goal can't be even-Steven or someone will always be disappointed. But imagine how the atmosphere in the home changes when we ask each other, "What can I do to help shoulder your burden today?"

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

You may recall something similar from the Bible when the apostle Paul said this: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2 ESV).

At one time, I didn't think that verse of Scripture applied to husbands and wives, since Paul was addressing brothers and sisters in Christ in a church context. Then it struck me. He may be my husband, but he's also my brother in Christ. On days when the burden bearing seems one-sided, remembering that "he ain't heavy, he's my brother" helps me realign my thoughts like a dance student aligning her feet with the footprints painted on the studio floor.

Love empowers us to bear each other's burdens, and not only carry each other's troubles but carry out God's design.

There it is again. That word that changes everything—*love*.

As a preteen with stars in my eyes, I saw that tall, dark sixth grade guy with the soft gray eyes as a superhero. I married him eight years later, reaching out to tug on the hem of his superhero cape to make sure it was still intact. But the cape needed washing and ironing and lost a little of its gleam in the dusty atmosphere of life.

One day, it struck me that a man who is faithful, who stays, who loves and sacrifices and for a while made pancakes for every meal because my morning sickness couldn't tolerate the smell of anything else is the best kind of superhero.

Leaps tall buildings? No. But he loves me well. Hence, Wonderhubby.

I use the nickname a lot on social media. When people meet my Bill, they often say, “Oh! Is this Wonderhubby?” Embarrassing for him the first time. Now, it’s the nickname he chose when I offered him several options for this book so readers can tell if it’s my Bill or Becky’s Bill we’re talking about.

(The other options were a lot more embarrassing.)

—Cynthia

Though my Bill is and will always be my hero, his nickname is not quite as superheroish as Wonderhubby’s. Sometime in our first years of marriage we started using gag-worthy cutesy names on Christmas gift tags. Neither of us can remember when or why, but he became Snuggles and I was Cuddles. Years later, after he earned his doctor of chiropractic degree, I discovered a children’s TV show created in the UK called *Doctor Snuggles*, so I upgraded his nickname. I don’t often call him that in real life, but now that the name is public, all of our friends are using it. You’re welcome, honey.

—Becky