

THE TWO MEN MY WIFE MARRIED

It's Valentine's Day, and I'm thinking of the person my wife married in her youth.

He was a young man. With a full head of dark hair, he was slim and trim and pretty strong for his size. With most of his life before him, he had enough enthusiasm to believe that any difficulty could eventually be overcome. He was seldom discouraged and viewed problems as no more than opportunities in work clothes.

The husband she has today is a lot different. He's old, and what little hair he has left is mostly gray. With his endurance and slim waistline gone the way of the buffalo, he's tired a lot of the time. And though it shouldn't be that way, he often finds himself discouraged, even worrying over little things. Rather than seeing problems as opportunities, they are more like devils on steamrollers in hot pursuit.

It's hard to believe that the young man was as she remembers him. But he really was; she has pictures to prove it. But the passage of 33 years has changed a lot of things about me, not all of them for the best. Time often does that in such a way that we might not even notice the transition. Unless, of course, we look back and compare, as I'm doing today.

I'm grateful that her faithfulness to me has not been based on physical attractiveness. Had it been, I would surely have been the loser.

Butterflies flit from one flower to another, attracted by the beauty and fragrance of the bloom. But that's what butterflies are supposed to do. When people do the same thing, the results are far more consequential.

Still, it happens all the time. Someone with greater physical beauty comes along, and a life-long mate is abandoned. Relationships

built on physical qualities are on shifting sand and prone to topple; time has a way of wrecking physical beauty.

Now, in the autumn of our lives, we are able to enjoy the fruit of years of shared experiences. And while many of them have been difficult, working through them together makes them all the more meaningful. But none of these rewards would have been possible had either of us decided to flit around like butterflies "on golden wings" and seek the beauty of the moment.

ON GOLDEN WINGS

The fragrant air of summer days
Brings golden wings that tempt and tease
And flit till flow'r and bloom are gone,
Then fade into our memories.

Though thus the bloom of youth may fade,
Enduring love's no flitting thing
That's true as long as beauty stays
And then departs on golden wings.

We have the autumn of our lives
To reap the fruit we sowed in spring,
And bonds of love that last that long
Were never borne on golden wings.

