

## **My Modern-Day Super Heroes**

Today I attended the funeral of a friend of mine. He was 56 years old -- too young to be departing this world -- but in his 56 years he had endured many lifetimes worth of suffering. Heroes are in short supply these days, but this young man and his wife are on my personal "Hero List." Let me tell you a little about my friends, Greg Phillips and his wife, Sandra. Their story is one of devotion and love -- and I think this world certainly needs more of these types of people! To me, Greg and Sandra are modern-day Super Man and Super Woman, and their story is nothing short of amazing.

In early 1981, Greg was around 21 years old. He and Sandra were married, had a very young son, and life was rolling along -- he was in the prime of life! One day he was out in the yard playing football with some of his friends, and something happened that day that would change his life forever. In a freak accident -- an awkward fall -- Greg was injured. He was rushed to the hospital, and it was determined he had a spinal cord injury. He was paralyzed from the neck down! In the early going, it was not known if Greg would even survive his injuries. However, Greg did survive -- and he went on to live another 35 years in this condition!

You might expect Greg would have been bitter, angry with God, and in a continual state of self-pity due to his condition and the "unfair" circumstances of his life. However, he was none of these things, and neither was Sandra. Greg had one of the most positive outlooks on life you could imagine. He smiled. He laughed. He picked at people. He encouraged people. He loved God, he loved his family, and he loved his church. Sandra was right at his side -- hospitable, cheerful, and always busy! I'm sure Greg and Sandra both struggled at times -- like we all do -- it is just the nature of life. But overall, they took on the challenges of life with a smile -- which to me is nothing short of amazing!

Greg was faithful to God. He is one of the few people that I have ever known who "preached a sermon" every time he came to church -- whether he spoke a word or not. His example, his determination, and his desire to serve God were obvious. He had every reason to shut himself up in his house -- but he didn't. He had every reason to sit in his wheelchair and let others lead and serve -- but he didn't. If he could possibly be at church -- he would be there! Greg would lead prayers, teach, and even preach on occasion! He would lead Care Groups, help with men's meetings, and do what he could to keep the church grounds immaculate. He spent time at home in the word of God and in prayer. He loved to talk to others about God and His word. He loved God, and this was obvious in the way he lived his life.

I could say much more about this beautiful couple. They may not realize it, but they have been an encouragement to many over the years -- and to me personally. How many marriages would have survived this type of struggle? Not only did they survive -- they thrived! They raised a fine boy (Jimmy) who himself is a hard-working Christian man with a growing family! Greg got to live long enough to see two wonderful grandchildren be born into this world -- what a blessing!

Greg had struggled with his physical problems for 35 years, and in particular, he had been sick quite often in this past year -- in and out of hospitals several times. He told Sandra recently -- "I

am tired. I am ready to go.” And a few short days later, he was gone -- gone from this world and into the next where he is no longer confined to a wheelchair. I look forward to seeing him again in God’s presence.

I am quite certain that Greg will not soon be forgotten, and his life will continue to impact many generations to come. Sometimes when I face a challenge, or a hardship, or life punches me in the face -- I think of Greg and Sandra. I think of the way they struggled with incredible hardship, but I also think of the way they faced life with grace, and humor, and good cheer, and faith... and then I think, maybe -- just maybe -- I can make it through my struggle after all.

Yes, I have a short List of Heroes I keep with me at all times (in my mind). And from time to time -- especially when I need a dose of encouragement -- I pull out this list and read the names of people I have known who have made a difference in my life. Greg and Sandra Phillips are on my list, and I am so thankful for their example of faithfulness in the face of great adversity.

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