

Keeping Warm

By Marge Cheston

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Cold weather can be pretty to look at when we see it pictured on our local weather channel, on postcards, and in the photographs our friends show us, but we know that it can be uncomfortable, even painful, for those living with it. Living with chronic pain and fibromyalgia seems a lot like the cold. We are pretty to look at, but it can be painful and uncomfortable to live here. If our fibromyalgia bodies had a change of seasons, do you think we would feel better?

This past October my good friend, Joan, found it necessary to drive from Florida to Vermont. The two of us had gone to grade school and high school together, but we had lost touch with each other and many of our other classmates for many years. Recently, we regained contact and through internet searches have been able to bring a large number of old school friends back together again. It has been a glorious thing for all of us.

When I first saw Joan again, I learned that she had developed lung cancer in 1995. She beat it then only to have it show up later in her bones, requiring her to undergo radiation and chemotherapy treatments. When I heard that she wanted to take this trip to Vermont, I was very afraid for her to travel alone. I worried what could happen or how she would manage if she became ill on the roadway. I offered to ride with her—not that I would be all that much help—but at least she would not be alone.

We made our plans, packed way too much, and hit the open roads. You should have seen us! Two white-haired, Social Security-collecting, 1955 high school graduates in a convertible with the top down! We rode along snacking on grapes and cheese as if we didn't have a care in the world. We traded life stories and news of friends while taking in all of the scenery. Her cancer and my fibromyalgia took a back seat.

We truly must have been a vision. Cars passed with smiling people giving us the “thumbs up” or “you go, girl!” approval. I know that some were envious of our adventure and others were envious of our car. I could swear I heard young people saying, “Where is the justice in this world?” If they only knew!

Our first day out, there was not a cloud in the sky. Another day, we were stuck in traffic for over an hour—the top still down but the heater running full blast. Along the way, we made a little goof and got on the wrong road. We pulled into a gas station in a small

town to ask for directions to the closest motel. Joan got out and went into the office where a rather scary looking guy sat staring at his computer. He didn't move or even look up but only mumbled an unintelligible answer. I held my pepper spray as Joan backed out the door. We climbed into the car and roared off laughing like fools at our *Thelma & Louise* type adventure.

After finding a motel, food, and a warm shower and bed, I looked at Joan taking her breathing treatments and realized that what had started out to be helping an ill friend had turned into an adventure for both of us. It was also doing good things. As the hours of the trip passed, my heart grew very warm. My mind let go of my fibromyalgia. The trip had become wonderfully soul and body renewing. I just wish all of you could have had that experience.

One day as we were getting started, Joan announced that she was taking me to the CIA. Just as I was beginning to wonder if I truly knew this person or not, she confessed that she was referring to the Culinary Institute of America where her son, Kelly, had become "Chef Kel". It was impressive to see how seriously and carefully food can be handled by so many. From there we saw the Roosevelt estate and the Vanderbilt estate and grounds. The most beautiful view, however, was the autumn leaves which were at peak, surrounding us on all sides. I could look out over the river and see the other side reflecting the colors and the grand homes. It was a sight beyond words. The feeling of being there was surreal.

Yes, we walked a few steps, rested, walked a few more, and looked for a bench along the way, but we were doing it, by God! We were taking it all in. There was so much to see: the Berkshire Mountains, the Green Mountains, Shaker Village, Grandma Moses' town, and the pumpkin patch with homemade apple donuts and cider.

We stayed in a ski lodge, courtesy of Joan's cousin, and we visited the area surrounding Joan's early childhood home where she lived before moving to Florida. Joan marveled at huge pine trees reaching to the sky—the result of seeds she had planted as a young girl. We then went to the church where her parents had been married and emerged to find it raining. Back in the car, it wasn't long before Joan pointed out that the patterns on the windshield were no longer rain, but had turned to snow...SNOW! I had not seen snow since I was eight years old (a very long time ago). I was so excited that I couldn't wait to get out of the car and actually feel it. (The Yankee in Joan still had her grumbling about the snow.)

My mind was full of views and visions, and my heart was full of warmth and gratitude for all life has to give if we allow it. My tummy was full of treats including the Chef's Treat at his Brazilian restaurant in Burlington, Vermont, where they serve Rhodesio-style—a treat for royalty. I can now reflect on these many memories that were one of my life's greatest experiences—a bond between two old school chums that will live in our memories forever.

You, my fibro friends, owe it to yourself to warm your heart in some way and to have

some nice times for yourself to keep your spirit alive. Your physical limitations need a vacation regardless of how close to home or brief your adventure is. Being in pain or seriously ill, feeling life isn't fair, or wondering "Why Me?" can make us shut out a lot of nice times. We all need to warm our inner selves and have some fun. You owe it to yourself. Take a word of advice from two old gals who live with pain, illness, and uncertain futures: **Go For It!**

Years ago, I started out with the "Golden Rule" of doing unto others as I would have them do unto me. Now, I feel like I have ended up with a "Silver Rule" I have invented which tells me to do unto myself as I would do unto others. We all need to adopt that Silver Rule and once in a while just do for ourselves and reap the rewards of an adventure. It doesn't have to be a trip as I did. It can be a day out in the sunshine, renting that video or DVD of a movie that you always wished you had seen. It might be as simple as going for a haircut or any little something that would make you feel good. If you have been down and droopy, maybe just sprucing up your appearance a little bit could help. If you can't imagine anything else, then how about just relaxing someplace and running your memories through your mind....when you were a child, or a teen on a first date.

You are the bravest person you know. You are a fibromyalgia person who deserves a break today. Give yourself one...adopt the Silver Rule! You are worth it!

*This article has the endorsement of my friend Joan who continues her treatments and increases her positive attitude daily. Of our trip, she writes:

Margie and I went to school together. I remember her well from that time. Since finding her again, it's really lightened up my life. Going through the cancer treatments, I now have a close friend to share all the drama, and sometimes heartache, plus the good times with this trip. I was so thankful that she would go with me. It was without a doubt the BEST ever trip for me! I get tears when I think on it, but they are what I refer to as 'happy tears'. It was such a great time in my life, and I'll cherish the memories forever. To think she has a health problem, too, and that she would be willing to go with me so that I wouldn't have to be alone. Well, it was overwhelming and makes my heart feel very happy. I pray that everyone can have a 'Margie' in their life like I do! God bless you, my precious friend!