

Down Home: Happiness is changing your wife's flat tire. No, really

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Every now and then, something happens in a marriage that starts out as a great annoyance and arcs into a thing of beauty.

Like changing a flat tire on a scorching parking lot.

Joanna called me as she drove across a busy North Texas expressway. She said something about a “flapping sound,” and I could hear the near-panic in my wife’s voice.

She stopped when she got off the expressway, and whatever made the flapping sound was long gone. By then, a tire-warning sign glowed on her dashboard. But the tire wasn’t flat. And she absolutely, positively needed to make that appointment.

By then, she was off the expressway for good and not too far from her destination.

‘I’ll be there soon’

“Go on. Since the tire didn’t blow out, you’ve probably got enough air to get you there,” I told her. “Leave your keys with the receptionist, and I’ll get there soon.”

She parked her car in a lot in the Lakewood section of Dallas, about 25 miles from my office in Plano. I enjoyed the air conditioning in my car on the drive down there, because the outside temperature already had reached the mid-90s by late morning.

The receptionist smiled as I walked into the office. “You must be Mr. Knox,” she said, holding up a familiar set of keys. I think she smiled, a display of pity and encouragement.

Sure enough, the rear tire on the passenger side of Jo’s car looked pretty much as I expected—pancake-ish.

So, I opened the back hatch, retrieved the jack, pulled the spare tire out of the well and tugged on my vintage *Baptist Standard* cap to prevent my head from frying. Then I fished the lugnut lock out of the glove compartment and scanned the owner’s manual to make sure where to set the jack.

White khakis, 95 degrees

Changing a flat tire isn’t very hard. Changing a tire without getting white khakis dirty is a challenge. Changing a tire in 95 degrees without sweating through every thread of clothing is, in my case at least, impossible.

A few minutes later, I had the spare tire on the wheel and was threading lugnuts. Bending over, sweating into my eyes, squinting at the lugnuts and vainly attempting to keep my britches from getting filthy, I just about jumped out of my skin when a cheery familiar voice hollered out, “Look at that hunk!”

Realistically, I looked like a cross between an underweight, beat-up wrestler and a drowned badger. But to my dear wife, who possesses neither the knowledge nor the arm strength to change a flat, I looked absolutely hunky.

I’m not sure how many times Jo thanked me for driving down and changing her flat in the heat. I stopped counting at seven. She took my car and bought me an iced coffee while I finished tightening the lugnuts, lowered the jack and heaved the flat tire into the back of her car.

When she returned with my coffee, she found me standing under a shade tree, looking like I just showered in my clothes. My utter soakedness prompted another round of thank-yous and heartfelt gratitude, which I appreciated.

Reciprocity, one of marriage's blessings

Reciprocity is one of the great blessings of marriage. Jo and I both have our strengths and weaknesses—physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. But we cover for each other, and we smooth out the rough places for each other.

Of course, eventually, I did things again that annoyed Jo. For about a week or so, I played Danny Kaye to her Bing Crosby from *White Christmas*. At the first of the movie, Danny Kaye saves Bing Crosby's life, and then Danny never lets Bing forget it. So, when I'd do something dumb, I'd say, "Remember when the temperature was 108 and I changed your nasty flat tire wearing my good work clothes, which because it was so hot, I sweated all the way through?"

I still think about how joyful I made my wife by doing something for her my daddy taught me when I was just a boy. So, although I'm not really a hunk, the memory of it all makes me one happy husband.