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## Are You Awake?

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*College of DuPage*

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Are You Awake?

Mardelle Fortier

Hi, how are ya? Oh, I'm OK, if I can just stay awake. Can I help you with something? Need cigarettes?

Oof, chair's in the way, give me a minute, I've been stumbling all over the store. Just not a morning person. Must-a got up at 7 a.m. *Seven a.m.!* I didn't even know there was a 7 a.m. I knew there was a 7 p.m.

Just let me ramble on, it'll keep me awake. Sheez... My wife hasn't called to check for five minutes. You know, she's in stage four so I gotta take care of her. "Honey, I love ya" and "I'll stay awake"—that's all I need to do.

Take a late shift? Can't, I'm filling in for the owner. He's been way too nice to me, so I'll help him out. He's on vacation. Maybe if I straighten up these cases of beer, I'll stay conscious.

Sit down and shut my eyes a minute? You kidding? If I did that, I'd fall bang off my chair like a cruise missile. Right through the floor. Gotta open my eyes wide, keep walking and talking.

Why doesn't my wife call? She'll go, "Are you awake?" Had a crush on her from back in fifth grade; she sent me a Valentine. Smiled like sunshine on the gray day that was my life.

We got married out of high school. I got jobs as a bartender and stuff. Late hours. Worked for me. She cooked me hamburgers, suffered through miscarriages, and nagged me through a bad case of pneumonia, in my late 30's.

I'm 48 now. They can't kill me, not easy anyway. I've been shot, stabbed, run over by a car. Gramps was a Vet from World War II—he beat emphysema; pulled out an oxygen tube and lit up a cigarette. Lasted till a ripe old age.

All I need: to stay alive long enough to take care of my wife. Whoa, here goes the phone. *My eyes haven't closed. Honey, I love you.*