

## Hero in the home wins award

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This is a love story at its best.

When Tahir Qureshi was a young man of 22 in his native Pakistan, he met a 14-year-old girl named Tahira for whom he fell head over heels.

It didn't matter that Tahira suffered from muscular dystrophy, that she already spent much of her time in a wheelchair and could only walk if Tahir helped hold her up.

It didn't matter that her condition would only get worse.

Tahir went to Tahira's family, asking if he could marry her.

Tahira's mother warned her daughter's suitor that the disease that had begun destroying the girl's muscles at the age of eight would eventually leave her helpless.

But when Tahir insisted he loved Tahira and would always take care of her, the girl's family relented.

"Her parents said, 'You know she is sick and the disease will get worse day by day. Can you do it?' I said 'Why not?' No person can say all your life you will be normal. It can happen to anyone. It is not her fault," said Tahir, sitting in the family's modest Scarborough apartment.

"If she is away from me for one day, I feel I can't survive, I swear to God."

Tahir and Tahira married the following year, in 1997.

Two days later, they came to Canada.

After they first immigrated, Tahir, who had a job in the computer department of an advertising firm in Pakistan, worked a couple of part-time jobs.

But after the couple's first daughter, Anam, was born in 1998, he quit to take care of his growing family full-time. Four years after Anam, son Iqbal was born and almost three years ago, Alia made the family complete.

Because Tahira can now only move her hands and her head, Tahir does everything to care for his wife, including brushing her hair, carrying her to the washroom and getting up several times in the night to roll her over so she is more comfortable.

Tahir, who is diabetic, is also responsible for taking care of the children and all the household chores.

"All the credit goes to him. He is the one who does everything for the kids. He lifts me, I can't help at all," said Tahira, who loves to sketch and teach their children lessons from the Qur'an and how to speak Urdu.

"He knew when he married me what I had. Even knowing all that, he said, 'I will marry you.' He said, 'I like you'. He always says I'm not guilty for what I have. He is the one who gives me positive thoughts. He says, 'Go see yourself in the mirror. You're so beautiful, what more do you want from God than that?'"

Once, when Tahira was two months pregnant and the power went out, Tahir carried her down 17 flights of stairs.

"He is my good luck. This is something that makes me special," she said.

On Monday, June 8 Tahir was presented with a Heroes in the Home award by VHA Home HealthCare, a not-for-profit organization that provides home care services to people at home, in long-term care facilities and in hospital.

The family receives one hour of help from a VHA personal support worker in the morning and another hour in the evening.

VHA field educator Elizabeth Peralta, who nominated Tahir for the award, is impressed he does most of the work himself, always with a smile.

"Tahir looks after Tahira 24 hours a day to provide for all her physical needs and at the same time looks after the children with all their needs," she said.

"I hope that Mr. Qureshi's good deeds can be seen and appreciated by a lot of people and inspire them to never give up when life is challenging."

Tahir has never given Tahira any cause to doubt his love and devotion to her, although she had reason to be concerned. Her sister, who also suffers from muscular dystrophy, was five months pregnant when her husband left her, saying he could not handle caring for a wife who would become increasingly helpless.

Tahir dismisses any suggestion that he is special, saying he gladly takes on the responsibility of caring for his wife and children.

He also suggests God has given him a gift of only being able to see the positives of being with Tahira, rather than looking at any of her limitations as burdens.

"If I were reborn again, I would marry her. That is my decision," he said,

"We are so happy in our lives. So far, no complaints."