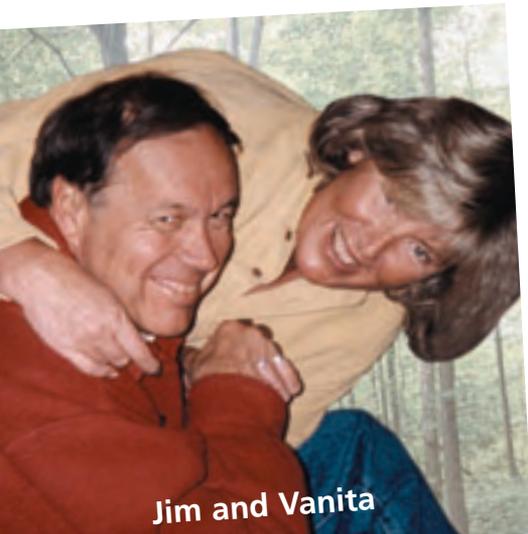


## Caring with eyes wide-open

**V**anita and Jim Oelschlager fell in love in high school. But their lives took different directions. Years later, after each had earlier marriages and children, they found each other again. They married in 1991. That Jim had been living with MS since 1973 was no deterrent to



Jim and Vanita

Vanita. Caring for another is a given in relationships.

But burn-out is an issue for even the most loving of partners. Vanita Oelschlager said, "You have to take care of yourself. One way I do this is

by writing. It keeps my sanity."

Vanita is the author of several children's books and now a new book of poetry dedicated to caregivers, **Air Mask: Poems of Passion, Love, Life and Survival**. On airplanes, we're instructed to put on our oxygen mask before we help others, she explained. But it isn't easy to put yourself first, as her poem "Dependency" shows:

Sometimes I cry or fall apart  
And I long for a few days  
To be all alone ...

Introducing the book, Vanita says, "We are being asked to love in a way we never expected to ..." and writes:

**I'm Heavy, Baby**

... I felt I'd been working for hours  
I felt sorry for me  
And a little resentful.  
Maybe.  
He lay there quietly  
Just looking at me  
With those soft brown eyes  
That I love.  
And out of his mouth  
Came words to melt my heart  
"I know I'm heavy, Baby."

The Oelschlagers are members of the Ohio Buckeye Chapter and Jim is a founding partner of Oak Associates, Ltd. In 2001, they founded the Oak Clinic for MS in Uniontown, Ohio. Sales of Vanita's books support programs and research at Oak Clinic. To order **Air Mask** (\$19.95), go to [www.vanitabooks.net](http://www.vanitabooks.net) or call your chapter. ■

DAVE SHOENFELT