

Case #6: John Lithcovich

"I just can't take this any more," John said to his wife, Mary, over Friday dinner. His microbiology textbooks were stacked on a shelf behind him. He leaned over the white plastic kitchen table and took a bite of the casserole Mary had made.

Mary turned around to face him. She looked tired. It had been a long day of caring for three children. She was wearing a yellow apron and carrying their youngest daughter, Susan, on one hip. "You've got to stick with it," she said. "It's your dream. You've always wanted to go to nursing school. Don't give up now. You have to take this course."

"I know, honey," said John. "But there's no way I'm going to make the grade. I can never find time to meet with the other students in my group. They always want to meet in the evenings when I have to work. And there's another problem, too – after my shift, I'm too tired to keep up with the homework. I didn't realize how much work it is, being in college."

"Isn't there anything you could do to reduce your hours?" Mary asked. "Maybe you could take out another student loan."

"Daddy! I can't reach the butter!" said Nina, Susan's six-year-old sister.

"Here it is, honey," said John. He buttered a slice of bread for her, and she took a large bite.

"Now, what do you say?" John said patiently.

"Thank you," said Nina, with her mouth full.

"Good," said John. He turned back to Mary. "I know I could take out more loans, but they wouldn't be enough to cover our mortgage and bills, with neither of us working. I found that out when I talked with someone at the financial aid office, after I signed up for classes."

John paused and took another forkful. He was so angry that he could hardly taste it. "I don't want to come across like I'm blaming people. But everything would be all right if my professor understood that we don't all have time for this group work and extra projects. He calls it 'student-centered teaching.' I don't want to talk to him, because I don't want to come off like I'm telling him what to do. Plus, I can't make it to office hours." John pushed his plate aside and stood up. "I tried talking to this guy at the beginning of the semester. I told him I hadn't taken biology since high school and I wanted to make sure I would do well in the course. He said it would be fine."

Mary set Susan down in a high chair and gave her some baby food. "Isn't there some kind of office for returning students at your college?" she said.

"I don't know," said John. He began pacing across the linoleum. "These 12-hour days - they don't design paramedic jobs around schooling, and they certainly don't design college for anyone who has to work." He paused. "I'll do the dishes tonight, okay? You've had a long day."

"Don't worry about it," Mary replied.