



Gratitude

BY OUR READERS • DECEMBER 2023

In honor of The Sun's fiftieth year in print, we're revisiting topics that have appeared in past issues and reprinting some of the original responses. "Gratitude" ran in our March 2002 issue.

OUR
50TH
YEAR

— Ed.



MY DOCTOR DAUGHTER-in-law announced the time of death: 8:57 PM on a Saturday night. With that, my husband's fifteen-month ordeal of home hospice for grueling pancreatic cancer ended. Grave, black-suited men brought a stretcher and a gorgeous, hand-embroidered cloth to cover Roger as they removed his body. Exhausted family members decamped to their own houses to

resume the lives they'd put on hold. Ambien gave me the first full night's sleep I could remember.

In the morning I wandered through the hushed house, feeling lost. Then I realized it was Sunday, and I could go to church. I felt a small whiff of relief to have a reason to get dressed and go out.

At church I sat in a back pew, where I hoped people wouldn't be distracted by my grief. Most of the congregation knew about Roger's illness. They'd seen this handsome six-foot-four man shrivel to a skeleton. Two weeks earlier he'd come to church with me for the last time, enjoying the fuss people made over getting him settled and bringing Communion to him.

Alone in my pew, I saw Nina approach. She told me to "move all that shit over" so she could sit with me. As I gathered my purse, coat, and tissues, she asked what was going on.

"Roger died last night," I said.

She shook her head and said, "Men!"

My eyebrows rose to my hairline. What kind of reaction was that?

"I had two husbands, and they both died on me," she said. "I'm still mad at Ray for leaving."

I burst out laughing, and so did she. Then the two of us got the giggles so bad we couldn't stop. Her words had punctured a dam inside me, letting out some of the pain.

I felt a touch on my shoulder. At first I thought someone was trying to get us to shut up, but then I felt more hands on my arm, my neck, my head. I turned my head and saw a crowd of parishioners standing close behind, delivering a silent, heartfelt message: *You are not alone.*

Julia Steiny

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