

Memories



By Pamela Spahr

When my husband came home from the hospital, after suffering several major strokes and as a result, dementia, nothing was the same for either of us. Several large areas of his memory were destroyed and so many memories of our lives together were lost to him. It was hard to remember that he was the same person that I had married decades ago.

Gone was the person who teased me unmercifully; the person who said outrageous things. Gone was the funny fellow across the table who would remind me of the meals that I had burned or the chocolate that I turned to crystal sugar or the multitude of cookies that I disintegrated during a lifetime together. Gone was the husband, who despite his objections loved his birthdays with the cake, and the candles, and the half dozen light and breezy cards, and of course, the birthday presents. He loved the witty cards and the sassy cards. Did you know that he kept a lot of them? I found the cards tucked in the back

of a drawer when we moved years later. I was so surprised, moved and just a little teary-eyed.

Gone was the person who teased me about whether we should open Christmas presents on Christmas Eve or Christmas day. In my heart I always knew he wanted to open them on Christmas Eve, just so that he could see what I had bought for him. And then, he could see my eyes light up when I opened something that really, truly delighted me.

Often, we would sit in companionable silence at the kitchen table and read for hours or talk about this and that: the kind of conversation that fills the time of happy couple's lives: the inconsequential, the irrelevant.

As I look back, gone was the person who would know what was coming when on New Year's Eve, I would drag out a split of champagne and we would toast another year at 10:00 at night, both of us knowing that we would be sound to sleep by midnight. We didn't need the hoopla and hype of New Year's parties to know that we had had another amazing year together.

Gone was the person who snuck Valentine's Day cards into the pockets of my jacket and who opened gifts of cute stuffed bears

in coffee cups and then pretended that he really liked that "sappy, sweetheart" stuff.

Gone was the person who celebrated the minor holidays with me by going on long mountain bike rides, preferably along the cold, windy, rainy Northern California coast line, through green fields and along rutted trails.

In the years since the dementia, a very interesting thing has happened. My husband has developed a new personality. This personality laughs at me when I mischievously move his coffee cup from his side of the kitchen table to my side of the table. This new personality playfully sticks his tongue out at me when I say something outrageous. Nowadays, he loves fist bumps, high fives and telling long stories. I have to admit that this new personality is every bit as endearing as the old one.

Even though he may never be able to retrieve old memories, today I look forward to creating new special times and new precious memories together.

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