

2-22-19 Easing the Path

When a friend has been given the news of a certain and limited amount of time to live, there is so much to do, so much to plan and so many feelings bouncing around at the same time. Yet, the person is still alive and there is so much to accomplish there, also. Decisions to be made daily, doctor's appointments to make and keep. Updates to and from the staff. And advocating for the patient!

It is a delicate dance, this threshold we stand on, with half a foot in preparations for the death of a loved one and the other foot here and now, amongst the living, making practical and necessary decisions,

And then, the dance continues, as both worlds collide at that threshold. How many shirts are needed? How many pairs of pants and how many jackets? Clearly, we can donate some.

As the dance continues, there is the coded language also. When we say, "He looks so handsome in this suit." We mean exactly that, here and now while he is alive and yet, we know we mean something else, also. This might be the suit he wears later, when we cannot speak with him.

The dance is delicate, and the communications are delicate. Delicacy still allows for honesty. My friend tells me he knows he will die soon and that he believes he has a good attitude about it. He is right. It is his way of saying he is ready, or almost ready. He has lived his whole life afraid of death and, yet, now that he is facing it, he is not afraid,

He is consumed with day to day and moment to moment details and annoyances, and they keep him very busy and annoyed! That makes him tired; time for a nap.

Still, we are blessed. He is not in pain. He has some time. People can visit. There is time to enjoy photos and discover and copy photos. We do not always have that "luxury". It certainly does not feel luxurious, but I personally know that we do not always have much time to prepare.

During this threshold time, a foot in this world and the other foot in the other world, the circle begins to both widen and close in. Time is short; that is a closing in. Word gets out and well-meaning friends want to visit and that feels like a widening, but the recipient of the well-wishes may not have the energy for that. A few understanding, diplomatic friends may be needed to help explain why their

friend greatly appreciates their intentions, he does not have the energy for the visit. Or, he may be able to visit briefly, but is not able to return correspondence, something he ordinarily enjoyed. In fact, it is understandable that someone would expect a response, because it is well known that he appreciated all communications, took them seriously (and humorously) and enjoyed reciprocating. And he saved them all!

Sadness is layered with joy and appreciation during this time. And that widens and deepens our time with him.

How do we ease the path? We can help by being supportive and the only way we can know how to support is to ask. We can also offer specific tasks and gifts, depending on the situation. In this case, of an elderly person, one might ask,

Do you need assistance with house cleaning?

Do you need assistance with cleaning out and delivering donations?

Would you like a meal delivered? If so, what are some favorites and are there any dietary restrictions?

Is there an errand I can do for you? (Consider the parallel to someone moving. That person needs boxes, markers, tape, bubble wrap, etc. My friend is moving all right; he is moving to another sphere. As for his current earthly home, the same moving needs apply. Boxes, tape, post it notes, markers and, in this case, photos to be copied and put on DVD are tasks to be accomplished.

We hold hands, we laugh, we talk about the medical stuff, we enjoy the memories, we keep his car in the driveway as a symbol of his independence and we ease his path any way we can.

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