

3-1-19 The Journey Continues

I am helping a friend to die. I don't mean I am assisting him in suicide. I mean I am doing whatever I can to support him in this journey. It is full of unknowns. How do you plan a journey when you don't know where you are going? And I am not even yet speaking of death and whether there is an afterlife. I am referring to the day-to-day moods and decisions to make.

One day is full of fatigue and naps. Another day is full of anger and frustration. Others have laughter. There are times of acceptance. The acceptance of death seems to be settling in, becoming a friend rather than an enemy. And then, acceptance vanishes, replaced by cynicism and desperation.

Listening to my friend helps my friend. He can express whatever he wants without criticism or judgment. I answer his questions honestly. Now, he returns to the notion of suicide as an option. I sometimes simply shrug my shoulders as a response, as if to say, "That is in an option. I am not commenting on it though."

Occasionally I comment on his commentary. When he says, "This is no way to live." I remind him that he is not in pain, that we love him, as do many other people. He agrees these are truths. I know his depression will return.

I was reminded this last weekend of his need for hospice and wanted to talk about that. I was unaware that a recent offer from the oncologist of something that can "strengthen the bones", although not cure the cancer, was eagerly accepted by my friend and his health care proxy/power of attorney. This new medication was reviewed by a nurse and they were told that it fell in the category of chemotherapy. If being "treated", my friend cannot receive hospice care.

Another category! He is bounced from one to another; eligible for physical therapy, not eligible for physical therapy. Eligible for hospice care; not eligible for hospice care

This man, this person is categorized in and out of categories, resulting in numbers and labels on computers, to the point of not being seen as human any more. He is a label. Yet, he has unmet needs. Yes, he has food and water and a walker. His ability to ambulate with a walker meant that he was well enough to be ineligible for physical therapy. His receiving a medication that won't treat his cancer, yet is still considered chemotherapy, so he cannot receive hospice.

This is a crazy journey, both for the dying person and his supporters. We are doing the best we can, considering the learning curve.

I think it is time for my friend to consider an achievable “bucket list”. What would really make him happy to see? To do? We shall see. I will ask.

He has not lost his sense of humor. When we were at lunch last Saturday, his long time (very long time) companion asks, “Would you like to come back to my home for a while?”

He responds with, (in a low, sexy voice), “What did you have in mind?”

We all laugh. He is funny! And that is such a gift! It is gift to himself and to all of us!

I will contact a hospice organization so that I can learn from the experts. Until my friend is eligible for hospice care, I will learn how to provide the best support I can during this crazy journey.

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