

Life After Death

by J. Mykell Collinz

If opposites attract, that might explain it, Doreen and I. Conjugally blissed through thick and thin. Forty some odd years. Since June of sixty five. Our three boys are grown men now. The four of us nursed her at home around the clock for weeks leading up to her death. Sixty eight years old, too young to die. And it happened so quickly. Cancer. I'll never forget the strength expressed in her eyes. She worried more about us.

On one of her last lucid days, a social worker from the hospice came by the house to ask her some questions:

"Which do you prefer, burial or cremation?"

I wanted to stop the woman from continuing until I heard Doreen calmly say:

"Cremation."

"And is there something special you would like done with your ashes?"

Doreen answered with a long rambling journey, a journey she wanted us to follow, carrying her ashes along with us.

Later that day, she became extremely agitated and complained of increasing pain. When she vomited immediately after taking her pain and anxiety medications, I called the emergency number for the hospice.

A women immediately answered and wanted to know the patient's name and condition. Doreen's nurse was busy with another patient,

the woman said, and wasn't answering her cell phone, but she would call as soon as possible to tell me when she could be here.

The phone rang in less than a minute. It was a different woman. She identified herself as a nurse, and said:

"Here's what I want you to do right now, give her the morphine."

A hospice worker had supplied us with a bottle of morphine on the first visit, telling us to put it away. They just wanted it to be there in case the nurse needed it because they didn't carry it around with them. It was a last resort and we probably wouldn't be the ones to administer it to her. Although they did leave us with instructions on how to do that and what to look for in the final stages.

Doreen continued to require constant attention even with the regular doses of morphine. She would sleep for awhile but then she wanted to sit up on the edge of her bed, lean forward, and stare into space, sometimes appearing awestruck. I sat with her for hours, day and night, stroking the thick stubble of hair on her head, massaging her neck and shoulders, arms and back. She would gently sway her body and quietly moan to indicate her approval. I wanted her to sleep but then again I didn't, knowing these were our last hours together.

I feel her presence, still. Imagination, memories, wishful thinking, yes, and a breath of divine hope.

