

My Clientbecomefriend

Category: Bedside Manner

written by Sue Sherratt | September 2, 2023

I no longer see the tubes, the apparatus, or hear the respirator's cadencing rhythm. Your face is calm, relaxed, somewhat naked without your glasses. It seems fuller somehow; I hope (in vain?) that it is swelled with peace (and nothing sinister). I kiss your shiny forehead, saying hullo. It would have been on your cheek, but this is tricky at the moment. I expect your smile to leap up as it always does but your face is impassive.

Your son stands by, disconcerted. Is he wondering about our relationship? You started as a patient/client in our aphasia group, struggling to say anything after your stroke. Over the years, our relationship transformed into caring and friendship.

I reminisce out loud to you about group meetings, about trips and outings, funny events, sad times, you as the pivot.

You brightened everyone's day. Bright smile, cheerfulness, heart-wrenchingly self-deprecating about what you perceived to be your inadequacies in communication. Perfect words, perfect grammar, perfect sentences? – no longer that easy conversation. "Can't say prop'ly" was your motto since your stroke. You communicated with such verve, enthusiasm, concern and enjoyment. Everyone who met you remembered you and we all wanted a piece of you and your progress. Everyone loved to see you and waited for you. Still do. If we look quickly, will we see you walking in, smiling your smile?

Your dark days were dark. You wanted to close the curtains and hide. You struggled, tried, everyday battling to do what we all do without taking stock. You went out, forced yourself out, walking, just wanting to say "Hi. How're going?" Just simple things.

And then, all that work, all that effort, all your determination ended. No reward for all those years, but perhaps this is the reward you wanted: another stroke, a huge stroke, and into a coma.

I kiss you on leaving.

We know it is best if you drift away but right now, we do not want what is best.

I want you to be back, smiling. I need it, we need it. It is not fair. Your death is not fair to us therapists, to your friends, to our future plans and hopes for you. Is this what happens if you care? I miss you, my clientbecomefriend.

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