

Choices

Category: Palliative and Hospice Care

written by Judy Goldthorp | September 16, 2024

Life is a series of choices—some important, some mundane. This is a story about a rather mundane choice of mine that was very important to someone else.

It was Friday. Because of the location of my visits that day as a hospice nurse, I'd had no opportunity to get lunch. Now, finally headed home, I decided to find a restaurant for dinner. I wanted a relatively quiet place so I finish writing my last few care plans and notes as I ate. I remembered Uncle Joe's—a nice little Italian restaurant; even if it was full, it had no more than 12 tables. I hadn't been there in a while but knew they had good iced tea, so I decided it would be just right.

I ate my chicken and shrimp fra diavolo and sipped on my iced tea as I finished my notes. After dinner, I was working on the last few care plans and feeling liberated that I'd have no more work once I got home.

As I was writing away, one of the servers looked over my shoulder and made a comment about working during dinner on a Friday night. One thing led to another, and I mentioned I was a hospice nurse. She responded with the usual "How can you do that? Don't you get attached?" Then she sat down at my table and proceeded to tell me about her father's death. She wanted reassurance that her father had heard what she'd said to him before he died. I told her that people can hear even if they're too weak to reply. A tear rolled down her cheek. She said she'd been thinking about her father all day, hoping for a sign that things were okay. She decided that meeting me was the sign.

She called the owner from the back and introduced us. They both said they hoped I'd return, and I said I would. I finished my updates and my iced tea and waited for the check. Finally, I walked toward the cash register. The other server met me and said dinner "was on the house." What a surprise! A practical decision (where will I eat?) had ended up being a positive sign for a woman who missed her father very much.

A patient's daughter once told our chaplain, "There are no coincidences." (That is another story . . .) I'm not sure I'd go that far, but I must admit, there were enough coincidences that Friday evening to make one wonder.

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