

Connecting to Peace

Category: House Calls and Home Care
written by Kurt Stange | December 6, 2025

Years ago, two of my patients were retired nurses and close friends. They were so inseparable that they saw me together for their office visits.

Gladys always wore a sour face and complained about her aches and overwhelming fatigue. I never could get her to talk about the hysterectomy she had at a young age that left her childless, but it clearly was the reason she swore off any surgery, even the minor procedure I was convinced would eliminate most of her symptoms.

Her friend, Mary, always came in with an ethereal smile that absorbed every drop of her friend's constant negativity, and had bottomless capacity left over to ask about my family and to appreciate whatever medical ministrations I attempted on Mary's and Gladys' behalf.

As aging and debility physically isolated the two friends, I started doing house calls in their separate homes. They each stayed true to form, and I longed for Mary's buffering of Gladys' complaints. I always left Gladys' home feeling like I hadn't managed to help her over the past traumas that seemed to diminish her potential for health in the present. I also never discerned the source of Mary's perpetual blissfulness, but sensed that she had a direct connection to the source of unity that binds us all together.

Mary's illnesses finally caught up with her, and she entered home hospice care. Others I'd cared for with the same degree of end-stage lung disease typically looked anxious as they anticipated each tenuous next breath, but Mary remained calm. When the hospice nurse and I could no longer help her manage at home, she got a bed at the inpatient hospice facility overlooking Lake Erie.

I sensed the end was near for Mary. One evening, after reading bedtime stories to my children and tucking them in, I drove through the snow and then walked down the dimly lit nighttime halls of the hospice, intending to provide whatever comfort I could.

Mary lay with her head elevated to forty-five degrees. Her relaxed smile expressed a total lack of unmet need. She reflected back my reassurances as she asked about my family and consoled me, in my grief, as I anticipated losing the palliative effect that she had on me.

I had gone there to comfort my patient, but she was comforting me. And I still carry a bit of Mary's peace with me every day.

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