

A Call In The Night

Category: Getting the News

written by Pris Campbell | January 2, 2017

I married him in-between tours of Vietnam as a Navy junior officer, and even though we divorced after eight years, we stayed in touch and saw each other over the years.

When he emailed two years ago to say he'd been diagnosed with esophageal cancer, I was concerned. But after radiation and an operation he wrote that his first two scans were good, and the doctors were hopeful. He was always a strong man and had been healthy, so I relaxed my fear somewhat.

When I wrote him a few months later, his reply was strange. He just said, "A lot is going on here," and didn't sign the note. He still worked as a lawyer, so I thought he was doing well and busy again. But no followup note came.

Then came that message from his brother who was visiting France, telling me he would call me if I emailed my phone number. His brother wasn't one to call from out of country for a trivial reason, so I knew something was wrong. I stayed by my phone, watching the clock obsessively, hoping he checked messages soon.

The call came. My first husband's heart had been badly damaged by the radiation, and the odds weren't good. He had likely been headed for the hospital for the operation to replace his heart valves and do other repair when he last wrote.

It felt like someone was crushing the air out of me. How could he survive the cancer, now not this? He lingered in bad shape for a couple of months, his body wasting down to a shadow of his old self, unable to take a call from me to say goodbye. I could barely look at the photo his brother sent.

He died right after Christmas a year ago. He was a bedrock in my life, and I thought for sure I'd die before him.

His loss still overwhelms me, whenever I think about it. And sometimes I imagine he's in Vietnam again, not dead. But I'm kidding myself.

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