

# Reflections on a Memorial Bench and LinkedIn

Category: Gratitude

written by Brian R. Smith | December 28, 2021

While on a recent hike, I reached the top of a hill. It wasn't much of a climb, but I was glad to be alone so I didn't have to hide the fact that I was out of breath. Perched at the top was a bench. I sat down, still breathing hard, and took in the vista. During the climb, my eyes had been focused on the ground in front of me. I took a picture that I'd probably never look at again.

Then I looked around me and noticed a plaque on the bench. It had a shiny, worn surface suggestive of frequent polishing. Etched into the brass were a name, a date of birth and date of death that were much too close together, and a message about how this person had "lived and loved fully."

I pulled out my phone and searched for her on Google. I felt guilty about my curiosity but wanted to know if she had some insight for me—insight in how to "live and love fully."

The first result was her LinkedIn profile. I scrolled past it and clicked on her obituary.

I read about how she had died, facing a terminal diagnosis head-on with grace. I read how she was the person people turned to when they needed comfort and advice. I read how her husband and son and sisters and dog and friends and colleagues all missed her. I read about the ripples she had left in the world—the programs she'd started, the books she'd written, the examples she set. Above all, I read about gratitude. She infused gratitude into all that she did—and received it back a thousandfold.

I went back to the Google search, clicked on her LinkedIn profile, and sent her a connection request. It felt fitting. I wiped some tears off the screen and put my phone away.

For a while I sat there, watching the wind tousle the grass like a mother tousles a son's hair. A fawn crept by and looked into my eyes for a few seconds, then sauntered off toward other clearings. I felt my phone buzzing in my pocket, felt my life calling me back. I stayed still, basking in the sun and the view and her company.

And when I was ready, I took some of her gratitude with me and walked back down the hill.

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