

Window of Lucidity

Category: Gratitude

written by Julie A. Dickson | April 18, 2022

I sat by her bed for many consecutive days in the ICU, tubes running out from under stiff white sheets, making the trip to Boston after working all day. *No hope* was whispered around corners, from the quiet lips of nurses, and in a physician's office the impossibility of a heart valve replacement was given to us.

She was already on a heart pumping machine and kidney dialysis, and the nephrologist told us it was not her heart, but her extreme kidney failure that made surgery impossible. She already had a DNR, but when evaluated for surgery it was delayed. It was in this office that my father and I exchanged glances and he signed the form to discontinue life support.

When I entered my mother's room, she was looking at me. I stopped, momentarily in shock since she had not been conscious at all in the past few days. She immediately asked, "How are the children?"

I could barely speak but nodded, with a lump in my throat, cleared to have a five minute conversation, the length of time in my allowed visit. I held her hand, tears in my eyes as she spoke again, "Take good care of yourself." It was her coined phrase for many years, and I knew she was completely cognizant. I gently kissed her goodbye and returned to the waiting room.

Those were her last words. When other family members went to say their goodbyes she had slipped back into unconsciousness. Once they turned off all support equipment, the family sat around her bed and watched as her breaths became shallow and further apart. And then she was gone, my mother.

I didn't know about the window of lucidity that sometimes occurs in the last stage of illness, but I did know I had received a final gift from the woman who had been my mother for forty-seven years.

Julie A. Dickson

Exeter, New Hampshire