

An Editor's Invitation: Silver Linings

Category: Silver Linings

written by Paul Gross | March 1, 2021

Dear *Pulse* readers,

I'd like to think that every cloud has a silver lining, and every unfortunate occurrence brings moments of grace.

That's sometimes true with illness.

When my Belgian mother became ill with Alzheimer's, it brought headaches and heartaches. After every fall or episode of getting lost, we'd try to talk with her about the future. Her answer was always the same: "I'll cross that bridge when I get to it."

Meanwhile, she was on her own, a widow living with a chihuahua, whom she fed with slices of roast beef purchased from a nearby deli. When we visited, her refrigerator was practically bare. "I'm fine," she'd insist testily.

Eventually, my brother and I got her to stay with each of us for a month at a time, until that became too stressful for us, and we found her a residence, against her will, in an assisted living facility. By that time, she was fairly confused. "Do you live here now?" she asked my brother and me, as we escorted her into the tiny apartment, her new home.

Maman lived for several more years, and in that time her physical and mental capacities declined in tandem. She went from walking to being wheeled in a wheelchair. Her memory slipped to the point that she couldn't remember what happened two minutes ago, let alone yesterday or the day before. It's hard to have a conversation with someone who can't recall anything, including what's just been said.

So where was the silver lining, as this once vibrant, energetic woman—a powerhouse in her day—dwindled before our eyes?

For one, the best parts of her remained to the end. Maman had a temper, and I'd always worried that as her abilities waned, she'd become angry and bitter. But mercifully, her mental decline kept a step ahead of her physical losses. So she didn't seem to realize what she could no longer do.

With her memory floating off and her temper on hold, what remained was an affectionate nature and a wonderful sense of humor.

She never lost the ability to laugh. Or to express affection. "I love you," she said to her Jamaican aide. "I love you," she told the Filipino nurse and the Irish art therapist. "I love you," she said to the gay music therapist.

Small wonder she was such a hit with the nursing home staff.

Here was another silver lining: My brother and I, who lived miles apart, had

to negotiate every step of her journey with one another. We had to discuss everything. Where should we place her? When could we sell her apartment? Could we afford to hire aides? What would we do with her possessions?

It brought us closer.

The one time we had a difference of opinion—about whether it was okay to put her in a nursing home—my brother said the most generous thing imaginable: “If you’re comfortable with this, Paul, then I’m okay with it. I don’t want this to come between us.”

I could have cried.

The loveliest silver lining was that she didn’t suffer a lot. When she did have an irritable or tearful moment, the angst didn’t last. And it didn’t leave a residue.

At age ninety-six, she died in her sleep, on Thanksgiving morning. Another silver lining.

What about you? Have health issues brought you silver linings? Or have there been times when you looked for them and came up empty?

March’s *More Voices* theme is [Silver Linings](#). Send us your lived experience of silver linings wished for or known. And while you’re at it, take a look at last month’s theme, [Healing](#).

For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#)—or go directly to the [More Voices Submission Form](#). Remember, your healthcare-related story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

Stay safe and take good care.

With my best regards,

Paul Gross
Editor