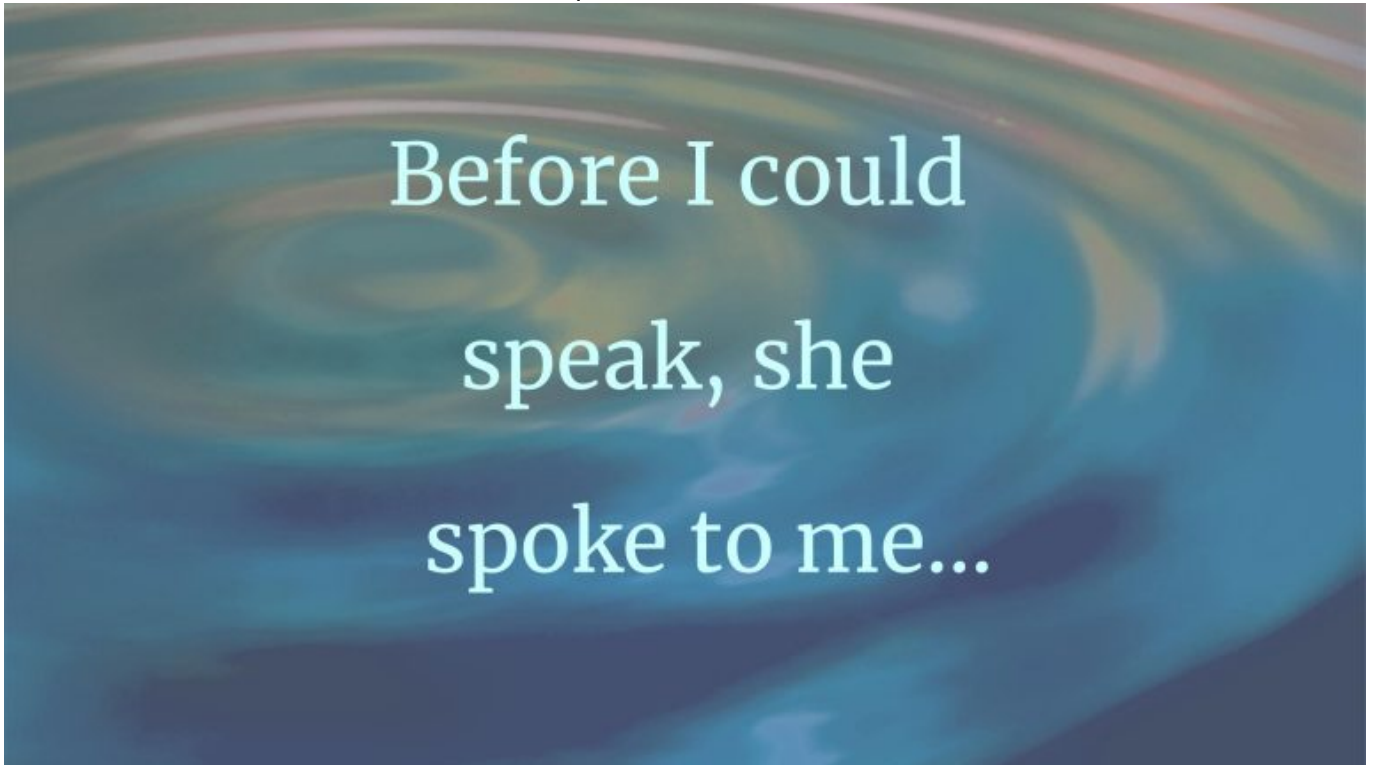


# A Conversation With My Dead Wife

Category: Stories

written by Louis J. Cutrona Jr. | November 1, 2024



Sunday, October 31, 2021. Micalyn's eightieth birthday.

A week ago, I texted my friend Sandy:

I had a reasonable day, but I felt lonely.

It's so damn frustrating to have lost my best friend, Micalyn. Whenever I think of something I will want to tell her the next time I see her, reality comes crashing down on me. I will never see her again. All that love for her, and she'll never get any of it again.

The following day, Sandy wrote:

Before you mentioned that you were lonely, I was quite worried that you were. All that dealing with M's estate kept you busy, but not on your walks, not when you were cooking and eating. Where was your lovely girl?

Don't you feel like talking to her? Please do so.

Me:

Sandy, I can't talk to her at the moment. Whenever I try, I break down in tears.

Whenever I look at her piano and know that I will never hear her playing again, I break down in tears.

Whenever I see, on the dresser, the Halloween/birthday card I got her in September because I knew she would never see Halloween, her birthday, again, I break down in tears.

All I want to do is cradle her in my arms and tell her, "Oh, my poor darling! Oh, my poor darling!" I break down in tears. I know I can never tell her anything again.

Sandy:

Then talk to me. Tell me about the friends you have seen and texted with recently and every new thing that comes your way.

A good suggestion, but Sandy had raised a possibility in my mind. Did I want to talk to Micalyn? Should I? *Could* I talk with her in any way? Would it do any good?

I decided that rather than talk to her directly, I would *imagine* talking with her. The distinction is subtle, I admit, but the point was that I was not going to try to hallucinate her; I was going to keep one foot in reality while I probed fantasy with a toe of the other.

The result was startling. I'd imagined that I could talk to her, but before I could speak, she spoke to me.

She said, gently, "What are you doing, Louis? I'm dead."

"I was imagining talking with you. It's your birthday."

"But, to what end? You know I'm dead. You're making this up. I'm not here. I can't speak. I can't *do* anything. I *don't* do anything. All that is left of me is in that tasteful and unobtrusive black box in the closet."

"I wanted to talk with you. Stuff I want to share with you. Stuff I knew you'd be interested in."

"Of course you do. If I existed at all, you know I'd be interested. But you are having this conversation with yourself, not with me, Micalyn. You know that I loved you, but I don't, can't, love anything now, because I don't exist."

I started crying.

She continued, "When I was still alive, I told you not to cry, but I thought better of it. You had to cry for me. I know it. No, I don't know. *I* don't know anything, now. You know I knew it. You know I knew you had to cry for me *while I was alive*. But now, I'm gone. Not gone away, just gone. I'm the woman by the side of the river. You have to leave me there and continue your voyage.

"That doesn't mean you have to forget me. You will always remember me, as I remembered you until my death. Now, there is no remembering for me. I am not.

"You said that you would love me forever, and you knew even when you said it and wrote it that it could not be literally true. You can love me until you die. That is easy to believe. I loved you until I died. But *I* can't even say that. Only you can say it for me, and all you can say is that you know that I loved you until I died and then, *finis*, the end, nevermore.

"You're the psychologist, and you are just telling yourself this. Good. It was time for the full implications of this—what you imagine me saying—to occur to you. If it took conjuring me up to prod you into analyzing your situation more closely, you know I would have been glad to be up-conjured. You know I would have been willing to help you in any way. You know you were my best friend. And my best lover. And my everything.

"You know I wanted you to remember me and celebrate my life. It is all you have left, but for all that, it is a rich and wondrous heritage. And you will revel in it for as long as you continue to live."

Well, that was not at all what I had expected when I set out to imagine Micalyn on her birthday. It activated my "inner therapist" and got me to do some important work on my grieving. I have been mired in memories of how she suffered, as if she were suffering still, right now. I still have the memories, but I have reminded myself that her actual suffering ended with her death. And that, oddly enough, is a great relief.

It's all in how you hold it.

Let's see what that does for me, going forward. At the very least, it will get me through today, Halloween / her birthday, on a more even keel.