



Moving On

This is not in answer to a problem or question of another. This has no answers and is my response to what I am going through.

My husband of 42 years, Ullrich Klamm de Betas, died last week as the result of a severe stroke. He was in the ICU at MUSC for two weeks and in the neurological ICU unit for one. I was arranging to bring him back to Beaufort for hospice when he died. I knew he would do that. He had the willpower of a hungry cat, and would not be caged. I told our friends that I said "hospice" and he heard "hostage."

I am devastated and heartbroken and having a very difficult time believing he is physically gone from this earth. Today is my first day alone, and now my work must begin.

My first instinct besides being incredibly sad is to see what I can learn from this experience. Here is what I have learned so far, and I hope it will help those who enter the vast wilderness created by the loss of a spouse.

1) At first, I thought no one had ever suffered the pain that I feel. But it soon dawned on me that no matter how much I hurt, I cannot lose sight of the fact that I am not the only one who has to suffer through a death. It happens to almost everyone, one way or another. We lose people we

love and have to work through it. Keep those others in mind and know this isn't about me or you. This is about the world, the nature of life, and love.

2) If you go through a medical process beforehand, be sure to be there as much as physically possible. Even the best hospitals are overworked. I had to call for help over and over when Ullrich would try to pull out tubes, and was there to rub Shea oil on his nose rubbed raw by tape and tubes, and around the stitches on his head. You can't expect nurses to do that. Those are luxuries in a world of urgent necessities.

Play favorite music, and show short videos. that you know he/she would like. Talk to your love constantly, and don't worry about whether the sound gets through. Knowing that it might is enough.

3) Take advantage of hospital amenities. They have nice showers, and also a list of discounted hotels, and loving clergy and palliative care professionals.

4) Eat well and sleep. The cafeteria at MUSC is very good, but I made it a point to find good cafes and restaurants nearby so I wouldn't be eating in an institutional environment and could return to the room refreshed a bit. This also forced me to walk.

Fortunately, we have a camper van and the hospital was kind enough to let my dog, Frankie, and me stay overnight in their parking lot so I was nearby and could visit constantly. I also had friends of a friend in Charleston offer their apartment for a couple of nights when a little comfort was more than welcome, which brings me to another important thing to remember:

5) ACCEPT HELP. We live in a community full of love. Neighbors and strangers alike rise to any occasion. Let them. This is very difficult for me, but is a true spiritual exercise. Do not deprive others of the ability to ease your pain.

6) Be honest. Tell people when they are overloading you with well meant advice or advice you can't deal with at the moment. Be polite. They are trying to help, but just say it. Be strong and be real.

7) Limit your phone calls to those who can support you because of your history with them. My friend of over 50 years is a nurse practitioner who loved Ullrich and loves me. She was invaluable in giving me the support I needed and advising me on the medical aspects of the horror. Everyone wants to help. That is a wonderful thing, but you have to husband your energy until later.

8) Have (or not) the kind of memorial service and burial you know your spouse would love. Do not worry about “what other people do.”

Ullrich never did anything like “other people.” After all, he did walk the dog wearing pajamas and a velvet smoking jacket – all throughout the Point. He had no problem going to bed when we had a house full of guests because he wouldn’t object if someone else did that at their own house. The cremation people were completely freaked out when I told them Ullrich had purchased an urn a couple of years ago when he was looking at a website for pet funerals. His was made for a very large dog. A conventional send off would have been too weird for him.

My dear neighbors quickly put together a celebration. I invited those who were especially dear to Ullrich and me and kept it small. I made it as personal and as unusual as Ullrich was. We set up in our driveway because our house is small, and people could meander in and out. (And, yes, some invitations slipped through the cracks. I wasn’t operating with a complete brain.)

Ullrich loved hats. I lined the balustrade on the porch with his hats and a sign explaining that everyone should feel free to take one. It was amazing to see how perfect the selections were for the people who chose them, from the Russian beret to the Rastafarian cap with lots of braids.

He also loved cardinal red socks, which he bought from the same store in Rome where the Cardinals get theirs. The socks were in a basket for anyone to take.

I displayed things which meant a lot to Ullrich with signs explaining why he loved—among others—Seneca and Carlos Cardel, the tango singer, and talked to Voltaire on a regular basis.

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy

Tuesday, 17 April 2018 14:18 - Last Updated Wednesday, 18 April 2018 05:47

9) Have the religious ceremony you know your spouse would want. Ullrich loved the pomp and circumstance of organized religion, the “smells and the bells” as he called it, but he was not devoted to one religion or church. He was thrilled by them all. However, he adored Bishop Alden Hathaway and lovely Shirley Parsons, so they read some lovely liturgy and we all recited Psalm 23.

10) Try to bathe, change clothes and groom yourself. This was a challenge for me, and I failed many a day, but, when I did take care, it was worth it.

11) Try not to canonize your spouse. I tend to remember only the good things, but none of us is perfect, and, while you certainly don't have to dwell on or broadcast the flaws, if you spend all your energy on remembering your perfect spouse, you will spend all your time sobbing, and won't be able to honor him/her by moving forward with your life – the life you created together. Plus, eventually people will snicker.

12) Grieve how you grieve: laugh, cry, hide, surround yourself with people, go dancing, get massages. Promise yourself that you will never again worry about what other people think. There is no one way. Do it your way.