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A reflection at my mother's death

Mary Ann McGivern | Apr. 18, 2012 NCR Today

My mother, Genevieve, moved into a retirement home 18 years ago when she was 77. She was funny and direct -- I was helping her clean her apartment in Chicago because she wanted to get her deposit back, and she asked me to bring SOS from the kitchen to the bathroom. I said I'd already packed it. No, she said, I'm not taking it. I'm never using SOS again.

She was a good bridge player. She'd been playing for some years on Saturdays in Chicago at the Potawatomi casino with her partner -- never her husband, because she liked to win. She moved to the retirement community and continued playing at Potawatomi. If you are a good, regular duplicate bridge player with a partner, you get reserved seating. You are expected at the game; it's a community that depends in part on your participation.

About 10 years ago, Mom began to use a walker. It was hard for me to see that sign of loss of mobility. But Genevieve viewed it as a way to regain some mobility. She went right on playing, for instance, at Potawatomi, though she took a cab now, not a bus.

Then one winter Saturday, during the game, it began to snow. When she came out, the snow was ankle-deep, and she had to go out into the street to hail a cab. As she told the story later, she thought to herself, I can't do this again. But, as I said, if you don't go to big duplicate bridge games because of rain or snow or a sore hip, you lose your regular place. It's not as much fun because you don't play with the best players.

Mom didn't say anything to any of us, but on that Monday morning, she went to the activities director at the retirement home and offered to start a Saturday afternoon duplicate bridge game -- it was being set up down the hall during the family memorial reception.

That's Genevieve. These years, as I watched my mother age, she never complained. When she moved to assisted living and then to skilled nursing, when they told her she couldn't leave the floor without someone with her, when she fell and they said it's wheelchair time -- each time she assessed what she could do, looked around at the people who were there to help her, said thank you, and went on, eager for what would come next. When it was clear that death was next, my mother was a little irritated that God was slow. Genevieve was never slow.

She had a full life. I continue to learn from her as I tell her stories. Her faith was strong and I lean on it.

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