

Gratitude

Dad finally went on Hospice this past week. I say “finally” because his various doctors and healthcare professionals have been telling him for many months that he could qualify ... IF he stopped his chemo treatments. Ah, therein lies the rub. Dad has been very resistant to doing that. Why? Because he’s an engineer. Engineers fix things. In his mind, to stop that kind of treatment when the cancer hadn’t been “fixed” yet made no sense. In his mind, it was the same as giving up and it’s rare to find an engineer willing to do that, especially one like my dad who is an engineer to the core of his being. He also happens to be *very* stubborn.

And he hasn’t given up on that stubbornness. He just had a ramp installed to the backdoor, the door he used for the occasional doctor appointments that required him to leave the house. His lady friend told him that was ridiculous. He had just decided to stop going to doctor appointments. He wasn’t going to need to leave the house anymore. Why spend that money *now*? He replied that even if he used it one time only, it would have been worth it. He also told her (with a fading twinkle in his eye, I’m sure) that he’d need it for the motorcycle ride he was going to take her on. So, he hasn’t given up on his sense of humor either.

I’m grateful for this because his pain has intensified, requiring him to increase the amount of pain medication he takes each day. For the first year or so after his diagnosis, we were all so grateful that, while he certainly had a LOT of stuff going on medically that had to be dealt with, pain wasn’t one of them. And remembering how much Mom had suffered in her final months, largely because of the pain she had endured, this was something in Dad’s case to be grateful for, indeed.

But that’s not the case anymore. And being in pain, *any* kind of pain, rightfully gives the sufferer permission to be grumpy and resentful and anything but grateful, in my opinion. This has actually sort of been Dad’s demeanor for much of the past nine months or so, mainly due to his overall situation, rather than pain, and because he’s been a frustrated engineer facing a problem he couldn’t fix. Now increased pain has been added to that equation, as well as the decision to “give up” by going on Hospice. I wasn’t sure what was going to greet me when I called him that first night, so I braced myself.

Well, what greeted me was gratitude. I asked how he was doing, and he immediately launched into how lucky he was to have two strong, strapping sons to help him with his frailties ... a large, caring family who had lovingly tended to his various needs throughout this cancer journey ... insurance and Medicare that provided him with the scores of needed treatments and tests and drugs and doctor visits ... the many things he had been able to do and experience in his 87+ years. “I’ve had it so much better than so many other people ... I have no room to complain about anything.”

Knowing how “Hospice” had been somewhat of a forbidden word for him, I gently congratulated him for having given his condition a good fight, his all, that he had nothing to be ashamed about for going on Hospice. “And, Dad, Jimmy Carter started Hospice back in February and he’s still kicking!” That launched us into a long and delightful conversation about how wonderful ol’

Jimmy was—and not just in his post-presidential years. He lauded Jimmy for a number of things he had done (which was in sharp contrast to the diatribe he usually goes into over Ronald Reagan!).

Perhaps he was a little in denial over this current condition and the final chapter of his life that it predicted. Maybe his sunny disposition was a bit of a defense mechanism. Or maybe, on some level, he'd gotten to the point where he could truly understand and appreciate what a program like Hospice could offer. The root of the word Hospice is the same as the root for words like host, hostel, hospitality, even hospital—offering comfort and care to a visitor, stranger, traveler in need. Dad may not be traveling outside his actual home anymore (upcoming motorcycle ride aside 😊) but he's definitely on a journey. And he's at the part of that journey where he needs more comfort and care than ever before. I'm grateful that he's accepted that fact and is willing to receive help from strangers in “solving” this ultimately unsolvable problem.

Dictionary

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hos·pice

/ˈhɒspɪs/

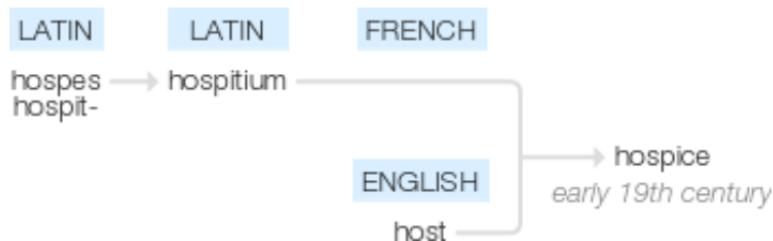
noun

noun: **hospice**; plural noun: **hospices**

a home providing care for the sick or terminally ill.
"hospice workers"

- **ARCHAIC**
a lodging for travelers, especially one run by a religious order.

Origin



early 19th century: from French, from Latin *hospitium*, from *hospes*, *hospit-* (see [host](#)¹).