

# Peace in Passing

**Anne McHugh** recounts her experience of consolation at the time of the death of a resident in the nursing home she worked in.

Tom and Evelyn were a devoted couple who lived happily together for many years in a lovely nursing home. I never knew Evelyn, as I came to work in the nursing home not long after she had died. Over time I came to love all the residents. I enjoyed caring for them and making sure they were contented.

One day I arrived in to work to learn that my colleague was out sick. With a busy day ahead, I hoped that everything would go smoothly – of course, that was not to be. While I was sorting clothes that had come back from the laundry, Tom arrived at my elbow with a question, ‘Have you seen Evelyn?’ I was unsure what to say, but I told Tom that I hadn’t seen anyone. I assured him that his son would be in soon, and he would know everything. He was happy enough with that answer and ambled off down the corridor.

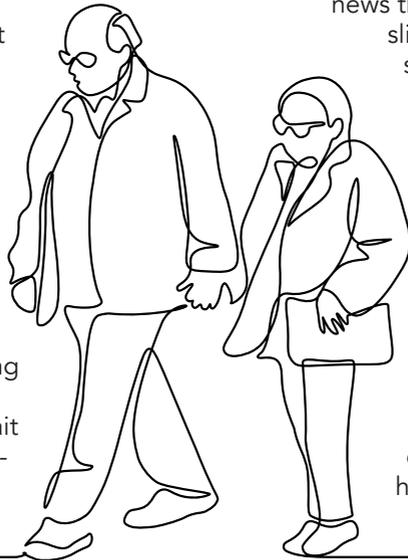
Ten minutes later, Tom arrived back asking the same question. Again, I told him to wait for his son. This continued every ten minutes or so for the whole

afternoon. As the evening wore on, Tom was getting tired, which was not surprising since he had been so active all day. In the contrary ways of the world, the son who rarely missed a daily visit did not show up.

Tom enjoyed his evening meal and later we tucked him in for the night. I checked on him a short while later and was relieved to find him sleeping peacefully. When we handed over to the night staff, we told them about Tom’s anxiety throughout the day. They promised to keep an eye on him during the night.

The next morning I received a call from the nursing home with the sad news that Tom had quietly slipped away in the small hours.

When I met his family later that day I told them how Tom had spent the previous day looking for Evelyn. They were very moved by the story and took it to mean that Tom had sensed that Evelyn was around and had come to take him home. I felt the same way. Their love and



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devotion for each other had transcended death.

For the funeral Mass the family chose the following reading from the Book of Genesis.

The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' So out of the ground he formed every animal and bird, and brought them to the man to name them. But for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man; then he took one of his ribs and made it into a woman and brought her to the man, who said:

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

**They were very moved by the story and took it to mean that Tom had sensed that Evelyn was around and had come to take him home.**

'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.' (Genesis 2:18–24)

Sitting at the back of the church, I knew why they had chosen it. My tears flowed freely in wonder and awe that I had been given the unique privilege of witnessing this most wonderful expression of enduring love. 

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