

Writing Samples – Jessica C. Goodman

Hospice, counseling help widow carry on

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After losing her husband to lung cancer, Viola “Sis” Brevard feared the drive home from work. Marvin “Bud” Brevard was 76 at the time of his death, and the couple was married for almost 40 years.

When she returned to her part-time job at Carolina Village, the daily tasks would fill the time, but grief would find her again once she got into her car.

“As I drove up in my driveway, I knew I was going into an empty house,” Sis Brevard said. “He was always sitting there at the kitchen table, waiting on me. Just waiting on someone to talk to.”

She was in shock for the first few weeks following his death in the spring of 2008.

“There are things you have to do, things you have to take care of,” she said. “We had the service to plan for and then other things after the funeral. It was so hard, yet you're just going through the motions because you're really in shock.”

Slowly, as she realized Bud was never coming back, Sis became overwhelmed. Seeing his empty chair, she would start crying.

“And it would go into wailing,” she added. “I would be wailing. It would be the only way to describe it. And with each day, I'd realize more and more, he's not coming back.”

Eventually, she would seek help to deal with her grief through a counselor at Four Seasons, the local hospice organization, and begin to overcome her grief.

“You can't go back. You must go forward,” Sis said.

In the beginning

Sis and Bud met while working at Kimberly-Clark. Bud Brevard was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force who served during the Korean War. He was married before and had two children, Marvin “Buddy” Brevard and Linda Motola.

Sis had started working at Kimberly-Clark in 1966. She was 19 when they met, and Bud was 35.

“I just saw him walking by,” she said, with a timid smile. “He had to walk by my department several times a day. And I saw him, and I was attracted to him.”

Sis clearly remembered the first day they went for a ride together after a Sunday dinner. It was May 25, 1967. Her father, a minister, was visiting a family, and Bud lived next door.

"I decided that there were too many people in the kitchen, so I would go eat in the car," Sis Brevard said, with a sheepish grin. "And he came out to the car and started talking to me. That afternoon, we went for a ride. Then we started dating."

On Aug. 12, they were married in Gaffney, S.C.

"There's a 15-year difference in our age, which my parents were not very thrilled about. And they didn't hide it," Sis said. "But they learned to love him like I did. As I look back, I can tell why they were upset."

They didn't have a church wedding or any pictures. They were married by a justice of the peace and came home that night. Sis Brevard was back at work the next day.

Bud was a hard worker. They soon bought a home off Zeb Corn Road, and Bud's goal was to pay it off as soon as possible.

"I didn't understand that, because I wanted to do other things with the money," Sis said. "But as I look back, I see how everything just fell into place in our lives."

In 1982, when Bud suffered a massive stroke and was unable to work, Sis didn't have a mortgage payment to worry about.

Bud retired from Kimberly-Clark following his stroke. He was 49. He had other illnesses, including cancer of the jawbone and seizures. He also had emergency surgery for a subdural hematoma.

In 2007, a chest X-ray revealed he had a large mass in his left lung.

Diagnosis of cancer

Bud's doctors were certain the mass was cancer, which was confirmed by a biopsy. Sis remembers when the doctor came to tell them following the surgery. She was waiting with her stepdaughter at the hospital, and the look on the doctor's face confirmed what they already knew.

"That it was malignant. That it was in a place that was inoperable," Sis said. "He was sorry, and he walked out of the room."

The first words out of Bud's mouth when his family came to see him were, "Was it malignant?"

"And my daughter said, 'Yes, daddy.' Then the look on his face. It was a look of horror. Then we all three cried together," Sis said.

A lung specialist confirmed the findings. There was no way to operate. There was nothing to do. Bud was given three months to live.

"I looked at my husband then. And the look on his face, I shall never forget," Sis said. "He just looked so pitiful."

As Sis went to pay the bill, she started crying. As Bud ventured out to the car, Sis followed, trying to figure out what she would say.

"You think you're going to know all the right things to say, but we were both hurting so bad, we rode in silence," she said.

Bud said little after the doctor's diagnosis. In the afternoon, he finally told his wife, "It's terrible when you get your death sentence," and started crying.

"I said, 'I don't know how, but were' going to make it. We're going to make it through this together.' "

Bud Brevard was entered into the hospice program with Four Seasons in Flat Rock.

An absence of friends

Under hospice care, a nurse, doctor, social worker and chaplain came to see him often. Sis Brevard looked forward to their visits because her friends didn't come around.

"I guess they didn't know what to say," Sis said. "The point is, they didn't have to say anything. Just be there. Just say, 'I'm here. If you need me for anything, call me.' I think that's an important thing to get across. Friends need to stand behind you, even if they don't know what to say. They don't need to say anything. They just need to listen to me or to the one that's hurting."

One friend, Sis calls her Melba, came every day after work. She mowed the lawn when needed. She'd bring food, and she could always cheer up Bud.

"When she came in, she seemed to light the room up for him," Sis recalled. "I will never forget her friendship."

Bud did not stay home for long. Two weeks after the biopsy, his leg was swollen. The nurse felt he had a blood clot, and he was taken to the Elizabeth House.

"I was a little naive in that I didn't think we were going there to stay," Sis said. "I didn't think of it being the end."

Sis remembered how Bud kept asking to go home in his last days. She remembered he was looking at her with his big brown eyes, and it hurt her each time she had to say no. She knew the Elizabeth House was the best place for him.

Bud got scared and didn't want to stay. They had four nurses in there one day, laying on top of him to get him to stay in bed.

"He had what they call terminal irritation," Sis said. "People do go through this. Almost everyone. It's just the unknown, being afraid of dying, because you don't know what you're going through."

A nurse pulled Sis aside on a Wednesday and told her Bud was getting ready for the end. "That afternoon the nurse came in, and I told her I was hoping we could take him home," Sis recalled. "She said, 'He's not going home.' I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'I can only tell you from experience. But he is in the last stages of dying. I can't give you a time, but if you have anyone who needs to get here, they need to come.' "

By Wednesday night, the room was full of people recalling their favorite stories of Bud. He had a comical side, and the family shared tales of the stunts he pulled in his 76 years. Bud Brevard's son, Buddy, decided not to come to the Elizabeth House, telling his family he couldn't handle it.

At one point, the nurse asked everyone to leave, except Sis.

“She pulled me over to the corner and she said, ‘You have to be strong. You have to tell him it's OK to go. You've got to tell him how good a husband he is, how good a father. Talk about all the good times that you've had.’ And she said, ‘I'm going to leave you in here with him. You can do it.’” Sis said.

She started crying as the nurse left the room. Her husband was not talking, but she knew he could hear her. Sis told her husband for the last time what a good husband he had been, and she apologized for the times she had misunderstood him. Then she told him it was OK for him to go and that she would make it.

He died the next morning.

After death

At first, Sis sequestered herself from the world. She curled up in her recliner and would sit there for hours.

“I didn't want to be bothered,” she said. “I didn't answer the phone.”

When the phone ring, she'd let the answering machine pick up the message. If it was her mother, she'd call back. Everyone else, she didn't bother with.

“This went on for months,” she said.

Sis felt a lot of guilt after Bud's death, especially over little things.

“If I could just go back and do this. If I could just go back and tell him one more time that I loved him,” she said.

Sis and a couple of friends went to a memorial service in November at First Methodist Church in Hendersonville. The service was organized by Four Seasons, and Sis brought a picture of her husband.

One of the chaplains noticed that she was grieving hard and recommended that she come in for counseling.

Sis started seeing Linda Dunbar, a counselor with Four Seasons. They bonded at the first moment. Dunbar told Sis that she had done the best she could under the circumstances.

“I was there for him,” Sis said. “I wish I had been there for him more. I realized how much time he spent alone, which tears me apart now.”

Loss of her son

Sis was still working through her grief when tragedy struck again.

On June 8, 2009, Sis heard a knock at the door. She was getting ready to go to work and was in the shower.

It was her neighbor. He said Sis's daughter needed to talk to her.

“I said, ‘What's wrong? And I started crying then. He told me Buddy Brevard had passed,’” Sis said. “It was a total shock. He was 46. I started screaming, crying, and saying, ‘No, no, no. Not my son.’” She fell backward again as grief overtook her.

"I thought then 'Oh God, how could you do this to me? How can I take this?' " she said. Day in, day out the grief came. She went to work and visited the cemetery at Forest Lawn where both her husband and her stepson were buried.

"After he died, it made my husband's death seem so real again," she said.

Journey of grief

Sis has a poem that she reads, which reminds her of her journey through grief. She received "Falling Apart" by Eloise Cole at a group session.

The poem spoke to her. It touched on misplacing things, and Sis was constantly searching for her keys or her cellphone, or she'd forget her appointments.

"I was all the time hunting something," she said.

One sentence touched her: "Anxiety and restlessness are my constant companions."

Recognizing she was dealing with grief helped Sis get a handle on her situation. At first, she thought she was crazy. She couldn't concentrate. She didn't want to live.

"I thought I was only going through motions. I really did not want the sun to come up. I didn't really want to get out of bed," she said. "I forced myself to get up."

She even went to the doctor, because she thought she was losing it. It was all because of her heavy grief.

During the first year following Bud's death, Sis would visit her husband's grave six to seven times a week. She would take a stool and sit in front of his headstone and cry.

"I'd talk to him. I'd tell him what had been going on," she said.

Sis purchased a bench. Eventually, she would get to the point of visiting without crying. The bench is situated between both her husband and her son's graves, and when she sits on the edge she can see both of them.

"Somehow we go on," she said. "Somehow life goes on. It goes on whether we want it to or not."

Literacy Council tutors help with English skills

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For Rosa Martha Paniagua, teaching is a passion.

Born in Mexico in 1960, she taught at a public elementary school for 20 years. She holds a degree in primary education and a bachelor's degree in mathematics, both from schools in Mexico.

"They're not recognized in this country," Rosa Martha explained.

Her husband, Ernesto, was working in the country with his residence card for seven years when Rosa Martha moved with her children to Hendersonville in 2000.

"For me, it was great to come to this country," she said. "A country with opportunities for my children."

However, when the family arrived, Rosa Martha couldn't speak any English. She could no longer teach and was working in a factory.

"I was very sad because I loved my job," she said. "I had the knowledge, but without English, I felt like a deaf-mute person."

"I was crying whenever my husband and my children couldn't see me," she added.

One of Rosa Martha's brothers was a student at the Blue Ridge Literacy Council and invited her to come meet with the tutors in 2000.

She began working on her English and worked odd jobs. In 2005, she started work as a teacher's assistant at the Western Carolina Community Action's Head Start and More at Four programs. Within five months, she was promoted to lead teacher and now works at the Sugar Hill Child Care Center.

"She's got 18 kids in her classroom. Eleven of them are native Spanish speakers," explained Glenn Rodgers, Rosa Martha's tutor.

She mixes it up in her classroom. When students work in pairs, she tends to have native English speakers sit with native Spanish speakers.

In 2008, the program required teachers to have North Carolina birth through kindergarten certification, but Rosa Martha still needed help on her English. The certification requires college-level reading and writing skills.

She was still struggling with correct grammar and pronunciation of some words. She fights with irregular verbs. Reenter the Literacy Council and Rosa Martha's new tutor, Glenn Rodgers.

"It's a way of giving back, and I like the challenge of making something work," Glenn said. "In my previous life, I was an architect and (that's) very project-oriented."

Glenn and his wife, Kathryn, retired to Flat Rock in 2004. Soon after, they started as tutors at the council. One of his first students is now a court interpreter for the Fairfax County, Va., District Court. He and Rosa Martha have been working together since August 2008.

The majority of students who come through the Literacy Council's door are English as a Second Language students.

Currently the council has about 135 students, and 75 percent are ESL students, according to Diane Bower, executive director of the council. Usually students first come because they want to help their children at school.

"A lot of the goals revolve around parenting and being able to communicate with people at work," Bowers added. "Having hit that goal, they'll usually come back five to six years later" to continue to improve their English.

"It takes 18 years to become as fluent as if you were born here," Bowers added. "It's an arduous process, with students having to stick with it and make it work."

"Our students are from all over the world," said Nancy Bulow, faculty coordinator for the English for Speakers of Other Languages course at Blue Ridge Community College.

The college classes see about 500 students per year, explained Bulow. There are 17 instructors at the college and they teach at eight levels of ability.

"Usually, students will stay with us a whole year," Bulow said. "In our county, our population of students is a high percentage of Hispanic, who have a background of a sixth- to ninth-grade education level."

A speaker who has no English skills by the end of the year is at the understanding of a second- or third-grade reading and speaking level.

"If they stay with us, then the program becomes more academic," Bulow added. "We're seeing more long-term students."

Some goals center around moving students into a GED program or other college training. The council also offers citizenship classes and in the past five years, 52 students have become citizens of the United States. Rosa Martha attained her U.S. citizenship on June 18, 2009.

"They want to be able to fit into this community and contribute," Bowers added.

The college wants to reach out to families. A literacy program with childcare is grant-funded and run by the college at three schools during the evenings: Bruce Drysdale, Dana and Fletcher elementaries.

The sites offer tutoring for the parents and school-age children and educational play for small children to get them ready for kindergarten.

Bulow said that when people first move to the country, they are concerned more about finding a job and taking care of the family.

"They're just at a time in their life that they're in survival mode," she added.

It takes a few years for families to settle and then they'll start seeking classes.

For the literacy council, they see about 135 active students at this time, with 75 percent being English as a Second Language students.

The waiting list is currently at 46 people, with some students expected to wait up to a year to be matched with a tutor.

For Rosa Martha, her English education continues. She makes lesson plans for her students, has meetings with other elementary school teachers and is settling into her new language.

Glenn expects the certification to be completed in 2012.

"I like the intellectual challenge and the fact that it's a long process. If you make a mistake, you can adjust and refocus," Glenn said.

Tom Nebbia, photographer for National Geographic

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A Mickey Mouse phone, red, yellow and white with big black eyes, sits on Tom Nebbia's desk beneath shelves of black-bound leather binders. Carefully marked on each spine is a place: China, Mexico, Egypt, Disney. Each binder is filled with thousands of images, the body of work from his 25 years as a National Geographic photographer.

Nebbia points to the Mickey Mouse phone, explaining that he did a lot of business on that phone.

He motions toward a photo of Walt Disney he took for National Geographic: Walt sitting at his desk surrounded by his numerous awards, seeming to float in air. (They were all suspended by wire, thanks to Disney technicians.) A big blue globe of Earth floats behind Disney.

"You're taking a part of history without even knowing it," Nebbia says. "Until you're looking back."

Nebbia's hair has grayed and his face is gently lined, but he looks years younger than his 80 years. He lives with his wife, Gitte, outside of Mills River, and still loves photography. His eyes twinkle as he relates each story associated with the photos.

He clicks through them on his computer, and as the image pops up on the computer screen, he eases back into his black office chair.

They say a photograph is worth a thousand words, but Nebbia interweaves his personal stories as he shares his photographs of historic figures.

"I spent a month with Walt Disney. I got to know him pretty well," he says.

Yet, he never had his own picture made with Disney. He did dress up as Goofy, though, and ambled around Disneyland in California in the silly suit.

"I asked Walt if I could get into the Goofy costume to photograph reactions to Goofy," Nebbia says.

The photos didn't turn out so great.

His mind's eye works simply, always composing and cropping.

"When I see things, I automatically see an image, and I try to get that image," Nebbia says.

Getting started

Born in Rochester, N.Y., Nebbia didn't become interested in photography until he joined the U.S. Army. He started out as an Army combat cameraman in the Korean Conflict. He was with the Signal Corps and was offered a chance to specialize and chose photography, because art had interested him in high school.

"It saved my life," he says. "I was in the infantry in Japan when the war broke out in Korea."

He became a war correspondent. One of his photographs from the front lines of the conflict ended up in Life magazine on Aug. 14, 1950. It was a two-page spread.

"It set up my whole career, to see my work in Life magazine," he says.

The spread from Life is framed and hangs on his office wall.

His home has become a collection of relics and tales from his extensive travels around the world.

As he sits sharing stories about taking photographs at the White House after Jacqueline Kennedy redecorated, he jumps up, remembering something. He brings in another photo, a signed print of the interior of the White House. It's inscribed to Tom Nebbia, and the eloquent, fluid script comes from the beautiful First Lady, Mrs. Kennedy.

Nebbia first met her on assignment for National Geographic magazine. He was taking photos of Kennedy's decorating changes at the White House and her secretary introduced them.

Nebbia happily suffered a lot of ribbing from other National Geographic staff about that one.

His National Geo days

After serving his time in Korea, Nebbia landed a job with the State-Record, a newspaper in Columbia, S.C.

Nebbia won several awards for his work including the top prize of \$2,000 in the international Popular Photography Magazine photo contest in 1957.

The National Geographic first asked him to do freelance work shooting some photographs down in Charleston, S.C.

He was asked to take photographs of South Carolina Gov. James F. Byrnes, a former secretary of state under Harry Truman.

Byrnes was writing his memoirs at the time and needed a photograph for his book.

"I was the big hotshot photographer down there," Nebbia says.

Byrnes mentioned he knew an editor at the National Geographic. Nebbia asked if Byrnes would write a letter of recommendation for him. It was 1958.

Three months later, at the age of 28, the National Geographic offered Nebbia a photography job shooting color and black and white photos for the magazine.

"I had to thank him profusely," he says.

Traveling abroad

For most of his photos, which took him across the globe, Nebbia used a Nikon.

"The camera I used was a Nikon FM, which was not the best, but I always maintained that it's not the car, but the driver," he says.

Nebbia has been to China at least 13 times: "Visually, it's a photographer's paradise," he says.

In 1980, he and his wife, Gitte, were the second people allowed into Tibet.

A picture of Nebbia and his wife materializes on his computer screen. Holding her in his arms, they are posing in front of Victoria Falls in what was then Rhodesia on their wedding day in 1974. The country is now Zimbabwe.

"We were the only foreigners there because the war was going on," Nebbia says.

He was covering the war-torn country and had gotten to know members of the Rhodesian government well. "The government flew up a cake from the capital of Rhodesia."

He flips through more digital copies of old photographs, now stored on his computer.

"These are wonderful experiences that you can't repeat," he says.

Above his computer desk are numerous CDs, containing countless numbers of photographs. It's not all the photos he has taken in his career, though.

"We were pioneers," he says. "We were the second Americans to go east of Laos. They drove us across. We had lunch with the Chinese Army."

He stops flipping at another photograph. It's a portrait of the three granddaughters of James Hall, author of "Mutiny on the Bounty." He took their photo in Tahiti in the 1980s.

More flips. On the Island of Tonga, he spent three days shooting photos of Charles Lindbergh, after he had completed the world's first non-stop flight across the Atlantic. He vividly recalls how nervous Lindbergh seemed about having his photo taken.

"We were having drinks in the bar," Nebbia says. "I could see he was getting fidgety. I said, 'Mr. Lindbergh, what made you think you could do it?'"

Nebbia was referring to Lindbergh's landmark flight. Lindbergh replied: "I had faith in the engine."

Nebbia asked him what he meant.

"I helped build it," Lindbergh said.

Reaching for the moon

These days Nebbia spends much of his time working on programs for the Henderson County Public Library.

He often combines music and photographs to recount parts of history. Many older people who attend are moved by his presentations.

"Their whole lives are going backwards," he says.

"They're reflecting back on their lives. It affects me, because I'm doing something."

He took a photo of Hollywood actress Janet Leigh in her house.

"I remember her first film," he says. "I was 18 or something. I went wild over her."

Leigh asked Nebbia what she should wear for the photo. He picked out a bright fuschia dress because of its vivid color.

Another photo catches his eye as he flips.

He did freelance work for the London Times, who assigned him to take some photos of Alfred Hitchcock. He contacted Hitchcock's people to set up a time and place.

"They said Mr. Hitchcock will give you five minutes," Nebbia says. He laughs as he recalls his good fortune: "He loved my wife. He gave me an hour. He took us to his home. He invited us to dinner."

Nebbia worked at National Geographic until 1985, when he quit over a disagreement over one of his stories about working dogs, which Nebbia considered one of his best, photographically.

"Think big," Nebbia says. "That's the privilege of being a National Geographic photographer. "

Now, even at 80, Nebbia is always keeping an eye open for his next project.

He recently wrote to the First Lady Michelle Obama, expressing the need for a worldwide musical event to bring people and cultures together.

It will be hard to top his days with National Geo.

"I asked for the moon and I got it," he says. "I'm still asking for the moon."