
ESSAY/PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

My final thoughts

SUSIE RYAN

“Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass,
But about learning to dance in the rain”

When we are baptized a pure white cloth is placed over our chest. This represents our purity and innocence. We come into this world not knowing anyone or anything. I used to think we were a clean slate; that we had to learn how to love, how to have meaningful relationships. And although that is somewhat true, I think we are also born with innate gifts. We need to find our own talents; not to try to copy someone else, or feel we “ought” to do such and such. This is so because when we get to those pearly gates, St. Peter won’t ask “Why were you not perfect?” He will ask, “Why were you not your best self?”

When you look at the patchwork quilt pall that is covering me today (look at the white cloth beneath my urn), I want you to imagine it representing my life. How I have learned to love and build friendships. How I have tried to use my talents, whatever they may have been. I would like to think that my life would look a little like Joseph’s technicolor coat. Each patch is a different color and a different size. They represent a snapshot of my life. Those whom I love the most; my husband, Bob, who has always been my protector, my pillar of strength, my biggest fan, my greatest love, my best friend. He taught me how to love. My children, Bobby, Colleen, Brian, they are my life, my heart, my purpose as a wife and mother. I tried to teach and show you love. I have been proud of you and what you have become; loving, caring, and thoughtful people.

My beautiful grandchildren, my chick-a-dees, who are my favorite playmates, Ryane, Edison, and Frances. Of all the titles I’ve received in life – wife, mother, sister, aunt, in-law and out-law – my favorite title and my favorite word is Oma. To more loved ones, my brother, Dave (who always protected me

because I was his baby sister); and his wife Kathy (who is like a sister to me); my sister Laurie, (with whom I have shared many fun memories of our childhood and beyond, and shared confidences and many laughs); all the out-laws, Kim, Gloria, and Bill; and my in-laws, Harry, Judy, Jim, and Mary Beth. My dear friends. And I can’t forget my nieces and nephews, whom I have felt much love for and from. These have the largest patches and the most beautiful colors. Everyone who has crossed my path or anyone whose life I may have touched has a place on my quilt as well. They may be different sizes and they are different colors. Just imagining this beautiful, colorful quilt illustrates how much my life has been enriched and blessed by knowing all of you. And not only knowing you, but loving you and being loved by you.

So unlike the time when I first arrived on the scene, I have learned to love, and will continue to love even though I have left this scene. My life’s been full; good family, good friends, good times; I could not have asked for more. I thank all of you for teaching me to love, especially my Bob – who is the definition of love itself. He is the reason for my charmed life. Sure, over the years my heart has been broken. How could my heart not break, after losing two babies and having cancer three times? But broken hearts give us strength and compassion and help us to learn how to love unconditionally. I prayed that I would find peace and tried to know that at every stage of my life, I was exactly where I was supposed to be. I wish that for all of you too. Have faith in that, accept it, embrace it. I believe we can heal each other by the bond we form with one another. It allows our hearts to become connected. You and you alone are responsible for creating the meaning in your life. The meaning of your life is what you make it mean.

I don’t like the expression that I “lost my battle with cancer” (even though I have been fighting for 18 years). Treatments may have failed me, but I never failed the treatment. I have ended one journey and now start on another. And I want you all to know,

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Bob Ryan,
1440 N. Lake Shore Dr., #27H, Chicago, IL 60610.
E-mail: arelare@aol.com

that every patch on that quilt is important to me. I would never have been the person I turned out to be without all of your influences. Most were good influences and some maybe not so good! But I might still get in some trouble because I do plan for some mischievous stunts and have some chuckles. How boring it would be to have no sense of humor just because you are in Heaven. My Heaven will be a place of laughter, love, and maybe a little wine.

And so, my little chick-a-dees: talk to me when you need or want to. I will enjoy the conversation. I want to tell you a little story. Next time you see a bumble bee, look at how big his body is in comparison to his small wings. He shouldn't be able to fly; but he does, he does the impossible. And so can you. These struggles make us strong.

Once again, look to nature. If a butterfly doesn't fight and struggle to come out of its cocoon, if someone cuts the cocoon so he doesn't have to struggle, that butterfly will never be able to fly. Its wings are too weak; they couldn't develop properly because he never had that physical struggle that would make him strong. Struggles make us strong, and help us grow.

So no matter how big or small the patch that represents you, you have a place on my quilt as well as in my heart. My biggest wish for you is that you can always live in peace. Please don't forget me, I will not forget you. And please remember to be good to each other.

I Love you all,
Sue/Oma