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My Beautiful Mother

By Shelli Johnson



It was 12:30 in the morning on Tuesday, when Jerry's cell phone on our nightstand rang. I sat straight up in bed, in a panic. I never want the phone to ring during the night because when it does, it's likely bad news, an emergency and/or a tragedy.

It was my Dad calling and I could hear his words as he talked to Jerry. Something had happened to my mom. (My parents had been in Las Vegas for the last five days after driving their RV there and parking it for the season.) My mom had been in bed asleep, and my Dad, who was sleeping next to her in their RV, was awakened by shaking and jerking. The bed, and their RV, were moving from my mom's terrible shaking.

He guessed she was experiencing a major (grand mal) seizure because her body was contorted and nothing about it was natural, but he also feared it might be a stroke. It was terrifying and my Dad said he had tried to steady and calm her, but was ineffective and helpless as he quickly called 911. Fortunately the ambulance arrived right away and my mom

was on her way to the hospital as he followed the ambulance, placing calls to me and my siblings. He promised to keep us posted.

I was consumed with worry. My mom is one of the most special people in my life. I don't want to lose her.

Precious Cargo

My beautiful mother is 76 years old and is the most resilient person I know. For almost 40 years, my mom has lived with multiple sclerosis. She's a breast cancer survivor and in recent years, she has struggled with the beginning stages of dementia. I love her so much and I can't help but feel protective of her.

Despite all of these struggles and the pain and suffering she has experienced as a result of these conditions, she is the most loving, positive, joyous, and kind human I've ever known.

I often lay awake worrying about my mom's health. I lose sleep, worrying about what the path ahead may be like for her, and for all of us, as a result. She is so special, so loved by all of us, and by all who know her.

For years, my mom used to refer to her children (and grandchildren) as "precious cargo." Whenever any of us were traveling, my mom would say "Promise me you'll be safe and be so careful. You're all precious cargo to me."

My mom is precious cargo.

Mobilizing

Jerry was up and had coffee brewing and I worked quickly, thinking about all I needed to do if I were to travel to Las Vegas so I could be with my mom, and to support my Dad. I took a shower and quickly packed a suitcase.

After I figured my dad had made all of the initial calls, I tried him again. He was in the waiting room at the ER. I tried not to cry, but he replayed the events of the evening with me and I couldn't hold the tears. It was too much, and I could hear in my dad's voice how rattled and concerned he was. He said an ER doctor reported they still didn't know anything, but they reassured him she was stable.

Some minutes passed and my Dad texted our family group chat that my mom was stable, that she was sedated, and that she had been intubated.

The last part scared me and I was now certain I was going to Las Vegas. Jerry helped me research plane tickets. There was a flight out of nearby Riverton that would have me in Las Vegas by early afternoon, but there was only a 5am flight and it was already 3am. He found me a flight out of Casper, a 2.5-hour drive from home, that would have me in Las Vegas by 7pm. I booked the flight while Jerry went and put fuel in my car and made a thermos of coffee for me.

My older sister, Alicia, a nurse who lives in Montrose, CO., had also decided she would travel to Las Vegas. I was glad to hear this since she's the nurse in the family and we often turn to her with our medical questions. She could help us navigate, and understand what was going on with my mom. I'd fly and she'd drive (10 hours). We estimated we'd arrive in Vegas around the same time, hopefully by early evening.

My younger sister, Amber, and my brother, Michael, also wanted to be at our mom's side, but didn't travel to Vegas because the hospital would allow only two visitors at a time in my mom's room, and besides, Michael's step daughter was getting married that weekend. Amber and her youngest daughter planned to travel to Washington and attend the wedding, and to help represent the rest of us who couldn't attend.

After driving to Casper, I checked into my flight only to learn it would be delayed. It would be a tight connection in Denver and I was concerned about making my flight to Vegas but it still seemed possible. Unfortunately a half hour later, I was notified that my flight was further delayed. It would be virtually impossible to make my connecting flight in Denver.

I found a vacant corner in the airport and cried. I needed to get to my mom. I needed to see her and to hold her hand, to be with her, to assure her that everything would be okay.

Eventually I was on my flight to Denver. It would be a short flight and the pilot informed us he'd try to make up some time, but I knew it would take a miracle for me to make my connecting flight.

As I sat next to the window in the first row on the small plane to Denver, I turned my thoughts to my Dad. I imagined what it must have been like to experience my mom when she was having such a violent seizure, how scared he must have felt and how alone and urgent the situation must have been. I desperately wanted to be by my mom's side and to hold her hand and to hug her, but I also wanted to see my Dad, to embrace him, and to be there to support him.

Eventually the plane landed in Denver and even though I had only 4 minutes to make it from Gate B-54 to A-14, I gave it my best shot and sprinted.

No offense to the United rep in Casper, but when I expressed concern about making the tight connection, he responded with, "The gates aren't that far apart, it's A and B, they're right next to each other. If I wasn't so upset, I would have laughed out loud. I'm a long distance day hiker, happy to cover great distances with efficiency, not to mention I have spent a lot of time in the Denver airport. You can trust me when I say it's more than a sprint to get from literally outside, and at the very end of the B Terminal, gate B-54, to gate A-14. They're anything but right next to each other. (Now, it's funny.)

But once out of the plane, I sprinted anyway. I hadn't even made it to the train that would take me to the A terminal before my United app notified me I had missed my flight. Fortunately I was automatically booked on the next flight. I was relieved there was another flight, but now I wouldn't get to Las Vegas until about 10pm, one hour after visiting hours would end at the hospital. I would not get to see my mom tonight. I located the women's restroom and went into a stall and sat and cried.

Fortunately, Alicia was ahead of me in her travels. At least she'd be able to see my mom in the evening.

It was decided that my sister would spend the night in the hospital with my mom, so after I landed in Vegas, I took an Uber to a hotel that was close to the hospital, where I met my dad. My Dad and I hugged and shared a short meal, during which my dad replayed what had happened. We both shared our concerns, but tried to remain hopeful. He reassured me that she was in good hands in the neuro ICU unit of Sunrise Hospital and Medical Center.

Visiting hours would start at 4:30am the next day, so we said good night and agreed to see each other at the hospital bright and early the next morning. I set my alarm but didn't need it, for it was a restless and sleepless night.

At 430am, my sister met me in front of the hospital. We hugged and cried and proceeded to my mom's room.

When I walked in, I saw my mom laying on her back. She was entangled in tubes and cords that were connected to monitors that blinked and beeped and occasionally sent out alarms. My mom's face was pale and covered in patches that had cords running to machines behind her bed, and her head was wrapped in gauze that covered several electrodes that were part of the EEG machine that was monitoring her brain for seizure activity. She had a thick tube running into her mouth and deep into her trachea that was connected to a ventilator to help her breathe.

She was heavily sedated. She was resting deeply, but she didn't look restful. Her brows were furrowed. She looked so uncomfortable, as if she was fighting and trying to resist her circumstances. She looked sad. My puffy eyes welled up as I fought to hold back tears.

I kissed my mom's cheek and stroked her arm and then stood by her side, holding and grasping her hand. I noticed how beautiful her hands were. They are strong hands, the hands of a hard worker, of someone who loves doing yard work. By the looks of it, she had only recently applied new fingernails and they were perfect and beautiful. (I recalled a time at our cabin a few weeks ago, when I found one of my mom's fingernails from last Thanksgiving, while cleaning the kitchen counter.)

I squeezed her hand and it didn't squeeze back and I cried again. Because she was intubated and had a sizable tube running down her throat, her hands were tied down to the bed at her sides. This is common practice since otherwise the patient would likely try to yank their tube out of their mouth and throat, but it only made me more sad.

After only a few moments of holding her hand, I had to excuse myself to the nearby bathroom, where I had to use the wall to steady myself. I felt as if I might faint, and I felt nauseous. I didn't have the ability to experience this and I was feeling sick inside, like my heart was in my stomach, and as if I couldn't find air. I took some deep inhales through my nose, and slow exhales through my mouth and reminded myself of how blessed I was that I was no longer not here, that I was finally here with my beautiful mother.

One of my most important people

In the keynote presentation I'm hired by organizations to deliver in an effort to inspire their leaders, I have a slide in the *Cherish Your People* section about my mom. On the slide there's a photo of the two of us, captured together one Thanksgiving at our cabin as we carved the turkey. In the photo, we're both wearing baseball caps.

Seeing this photo during my presentation always makes me chuckle inside because I know that my mom has a sock or a folded hand towel stuffed into the top of her ball cap. Her head's so small that, in order to help "fill out" the top of the hat, she always places an item(s) into the top of her hat before she places it on her head. I always tease her and suggest she ought to use the space to pack a lunch or some other item that would actually be of some use to us.

I use this particular slide to share something that I've learned from people who are approaching the end of their life. When you ask someone who is approaching the end of their life, "What is the most important thing?" All of them say, *The people in your life are the most important thing.*

I think we all know this, that our people are the most important thing. But if you're like me—human, imperfect and fallible—you take the people you love the most for granted sometimes. We think they'll always be there, so we don't always prioritize them.

Wednesday tea

Ten years ago I was working with a coach and on one of our calls, she asked me, "Who are your most important people?" I remember thinking it was sort of a softball of a question because of course I knew who my most important people were. But because I had invested money and time to work with a coach, I wanted to do the work.



So that night, I journaled and made a list of all of my most important people. My mom was near the top of the list, and during my reflection, I realized I wanted more one-on-one time with my mom.

We live in the same town as my parents and we've been blessed to share so many holidays and wonderful experiences and adventures with my parents. But at the time my coach asked me about my most important people, I realized that most of the time I had with my parents, and my mom in particular, was with the kids.

I wanted to carve out some one-on-one time with my mom, so I had the idea to have tea with her on a weekly basis, when the kids were at school and while my dad was working. We chose Wednesday afternoon at 3pm.

Lately, for our Wednesday teas, I've been taking my mom up Sinks Canyon, where we sit in an empty campsite near the Popo Agie River. We do as much sitting and being as we do talking. The last time we did this was a couple of weeks ago, the day before they headed to Vegas in their RV. My mom commented about how the leaves on all the Aspen trees were changing and while she loved this, and hearing the leaves flutter in the wind, she wasn't looking

forward to the time that was coming when all of the trees would no longer have their leaves. We both decided to make the moment last as long as we could, while the leaves were still so beautiful.

The Wednesday tea tradition with my mom has been one of the best ideas I've ever had. We've had hundreds of tea dates since, and I cherish the conversations and time we have shared, especially given my mom's current cognitive and short-term memory issues.

I don't know what I'll do without her.

Pulling for my mom

My sister and I took turns holding my mom's hand and whispering and encouraging her. We predicted she may be able to hear us even though she was heavily sedated. We hoped she could hear us.

As I looked at my mom's beautiful face, and examined her features, like I had never so intently done before, I noticed how beautiful, and how young she looked, despite her 76 years and the discomfort she was in right now.

I thought of all of the times she has supported me. There have been so many.

When I blew out my knee during fall basketball training my freshman year at the University of Montana, my mom traveled to Missoula to be with me and to help me. She stayed with me in the hospital for three days.

When I got out of surgery, and was in recovery, my nurse was a devil. For a moment, I thought the surgery hadn't gone well and that I had been sent to hell. But fortunately, it was Halloween, and the nurse was only dressed up like the devil.

When I finally made it out of recovery and into the room I'd spend a couple nights in, I shared the story with my mom and she laughed so hard.

My mom and I both love gummy bears and she had purchased a bag of them from the airport when she landed earlier in the day and they were in her purse. As she sat next to my hospital bed, she was enjoying a mouthful of gummy bears and I was jealous.

I had been informed that I could not have anything to eat until the doctor gave me permission, since the anesthesia was still wearing off and it could make me nauseous. But as my mom enjoyed her gummy bears, I couldn't resist and begged her for just a small handful. She finally gave in, and together we enjoyed chewing and chomping on the juicy little bears.

A moment later, I threw up in my little vomit tray. All of the gummy bears I had just consumed had returned to their original full body forms, and my mom and I laughed and laughed, and couldn't contain ourselves even when the nurse came in and saw the evidence and I was reprimanded for disobeying her orders.

A constant support

When Jerry and I started our family 23 years ago, it was such a blessing to be living in the same town as my parents. After delivering each of my sons and during the early weeks of each of their lives, my mom knew how particularly exhausting and hard it could be and she was such a tremendous and loving support. She stopped by our house often to help care for and cuddle our son, and to provide some relief for me during which I could take a shower, or prepare a meal. She loved/loves doting on her grandchildren.

I honestly don't know how I could have done it in those early weeks of each of my sons' lives without the support and help from my Mom.

She is the best grandma to our boys, and to all of her grandchildren. They call her "Mommom" and I have countless vivid memories of all the special moments and experiences she has created and provided for our sons and all of her grandchildren.

Having her back

One of the hardest things to see while being with my mom in the Neuro ICU was when the respiratory therapist had to suction out mom's breathing tube. It created a lot of discomfort for my mom and often had to be done 2-3 times in a row. This was necessary to prevent infection, but hard to witness because you could see the pain and struggle in my mom's face, and we felt helpless.

I would coach her gently and tell her to relax and that this was necessary. I would hold the back of her neck and shoulders and tell her to relax into her shoulders if she could, that doing so would make it a little easier. I could feel her following my instructions as her shoulders would sink back into my arm. I loved being able to support her in this way and I felt so connected to her when caressing her skin and helping to prop her up to help get the suctioning out and then letting her fall back into my arm.

After the suction part was over, my mom would make an effort to open her eyes. She couldn't open them all the way, but enough that we could see my mom's unique and beautiful blue eyes. It was as if she wanted my sister and I to know she was with us and that she heard us, and that she appreciated our efforts to comfort her, and opening her eyes and looking at us was part of that.

Alicia took a warm washcloth and lightly massaged my mom's eyelids for several minutes, and soon my mom was able to open her eyes completely. It was such a special gift to see her eyes fully open and it was a way for us to more meaningfully connect. It filled my heart to look into my mother's eyes.

My mom has the most bright and beautiful blue eyes of any I've ever seen. Everyone remarks about them. They are the color of a September blue sky, the color of my very favorite alpine wildflower, the forget-me-not. To see my mom's eyes as she laid there, otherwise helpless in the hospital bed, was one of the greatest gifts, and I was filled with relief, and great hope every time she revealed them to us.

I also came to love holding my mom's toes. She wiggled them often and we loved it because it seemed like it was her way of communicating to us that she was alive and kicking.

Rejoice!

The second morning of my mom's hospital stay, we waited impatiently for the neurologist to make her rounds and get to our room. My mom remained heavily sedated and her vitals had been consistently good for several hours now. Every now and again she'd make an effort to try to raise her eyebrows when we, or the nurses asked her simple questions. So there was a lot to encourage us, but she had yet to move or respond with her left hand and we were worried.

We were filled with anxiety about what the results of her MRI, Cat scan, blood work, and other tests might show. There were concerns about what had caused the grand mal seizure. Could it have been a stroke? A brain tumor? Or did she have a major infection like Sepsis, or some brain bleed or other cause of inflammation in the brain?

Finally the neurologist entered the room, and to our great relief, the scans and tests had all come back clear. No tumor, no stroke, no brain bleed or infection was detected in her brain. All that appeared on the scans were chronic, old lesions associated with her M.S., which was no surprise since these regularly show up whenever she has CAT scans and MRIs.

More good news came after two days worth of EEG data revealed no other seizure activity. The neurologist guessed that it could have been her old lesions that triggered the seizure, but we'll never know for certain the cause of the seizure. She'll be on seizure medications to hopefully help prevent more in the future.



The next milestone would be to wean her off the ventilator so we could get that tube, which was agitating her to no end, out of her mouth and throat.

The respiratory therapist introduced herself and explained that she would turn down the ventilator in an effort to get mom to try breathing naturally on her own. Lori, a wonderful woman with 37 years of experience in respiratory therapy, explained to us that she didn't expect mom to pass the test on the first go, and to be patient.

We were excited to be at this stage, to begin to get that tube out of mom's throat so she might be able to smile and talk to us.

She only hit 5s and 6s and 7s, and the aim was to hit 18-20, so there would be more tries every hour. My mom is super competitive and I felt certain she understood the instructions and that she was highly motivated to hit the numbers and get rid of the breathing tube.

Evening came so my sister and I headed for the hotel to get a good night's sleep and my dad came to spend the night with my mom.

With a few efforts of weaning behind her, we had hoped and expected that they might not try again until the morning. The respiratory therapist told us she felt like as soon as mom was less sedated—more awake—she'd pass the test and get rid of the tube quickly. She just needed to be more time to wake up and then she'd better be able to let her air flow naturally.

Going with the flow

Several years ago, in 1986, my mom was driving with me from our home in Lander, WY, to Missoula, MT. I would attend the University of Montana that Fall, and we were making a quick recon trip prior to my starting college.

In Wyoming we sometimes joke that there are only two seasons: Winter and Road Construction. Three hours into our 11-hour road trip, we were stuck in road construction. Our timing wasn't great as we arrived at the construction zone and were stopped by a person standing in the middle of the road in front of us waving a stop sign. We watched as a long group of cars was led in front of us through the temporary single lane of dirt road. We had narrowly missed the opportunity to continue. There was only one car in front of us, and before long, several cars were parked and lined up behind us. The person holding the stop sign told us to expect a delay of 30 minutes.

But soon, the only car in front of us—a pink Cadillac with a license plate that read FLO—started driving. Not really thinking about it, I followed suit. We drove slowly over the rough road, close behind the pink Cadillac.

A couple of minutes later, though, I noticed that none of the other cars had followed us. There was only one car behind us and it was a highway patrolman with flashing lights and he was coming up fast behind us.

My mom and I wondered out loud if he was trying to pull us over or what the deal was. We weren't speeding. The pink Cadillac in front of us continued, seemingly unconcerned. My mom and I, ever the rule followers, decided to pull over in case the patrolman was directing his lights at us. Which he was. He walked up to my driver's side window and we greeted the highway patrolman cheerfully. He was not so cheerful, scolding, "You are supposed to wait for a pilot car to lead you through the construction!" Oops.

My mom and I looked at each other, and then, my mom pointed at the pink Cadillac, which by now was getting farther ahead of us but was still within sight, and offered, in her famously kind and gentle voice, as she pointed ahead at the Cadillac, "I'm sorry, Sir, but we were just going with the Flo."

No matter how much my mom's memory or health may decline, I want to be a loving, kind, and patient daughter. I want to be able to be with her, to just sit with her, and support her—and to just go with the flow/FLO.

A wonderful thing to wake up to



Back at the hotel, Alicia and I had turned off our phones, and instructed our Dad to call the hotel phone number if there was an emergency. We were hoping to get some much-needed sleep.

We slept hard and when we woke the next morning and turned our phones back on, we were greeted by a text from my Dad that featured a photo of my mom with no breathing tube down her throat. Her eyes were closed but she was smiling and finally we could see her entire face. My sister and I raced to get ready so we could get to the hospital and talk to her!

When we got there, it was a new day and my mom was back! She was smiling and talking and we were so happy and relieved!

Alicia, who before becoming a nurse was a hairdresser, worked to wash and comb mom's hair and we made jokes and celebrated how far my mom had come.



Graduating from ICU



Thankfully, my mom kept progressing and soon she was moved out of the Neuro ICU and into a regular hospital room.

I spent the next night with my mom in her new digs, a private room that was a little larger than a closet and it was a long night. Every time my mom fell asleep, a nurse or therapist would come in to administer medicines or check particular vitals. This is necessary, of course, but the traffic and activity prevented my mom from getting any quality sleep.

So throughout the night, we talked to each other, and over and over again, my mom expressed her gratitude and how blessed she felt about our family.

Although we were both exhausted, especially her, we spent much of the night recalling fond memories from times and experiences that spanned her lifetime. We got a lot of laughs recalling a trip she made with me years ago for a press check in Denver during a printing of one of the tourism magazines I published. We had been struck with terrible winter weather on Interstate 80, which was

closed when we were on it and in the middle of nowhere. We were two hours from any town and had to sit in my car going nowhere for five hours, before snowplows cleared the way for us to make it to a town with a hotel. I think we found the last vacant hotel room in town and it was called the Bucking Bronco Inn. The desk managers debated in a language we didn't understand what our price should be before settling on too high of a price, but desperate for a roof over our head we happily paid up and got a key to our room. The hotel room's door wouldn't close all the way and there was no toilet paper, and the roof leaked causing water to collect in a puddle on one of the beds.

When we called home to talk to my Dad and Jerry, they were in the hot tub drinking cold beers after spending the afternoon watching football. Our conditions were bad enough without embellishment, but hearing about our husbands' luxurious circumstances caused me to describe our conditions as being even worse than they actually were. I kept adding made-up details and as my mom and I recalled my creative and fictitious storytelling abilities while reporting our conditions to our husbands from the Bucking Bronco Inn (not to be confused with the Buckingham Palace) my mom and I laughed and laughed until our stomachs hurt.

The tiny hospital room continued to be Grand Central Station so even though my mom and I tried hard to find sleep, it was elusive and we referred to ourselves as the "partyless animals." We made the most of our restless night, though, and it meant so much to me to be able to be there with her and to get to hold her hand some more.

Some things about my wonderful mother

When my mom excitedly tries to tell a joke, she delivers the punchline first.

She falls asleep during movies and it's sometimes her only cure for insomnia. And speaking of movies, she hates movies that have car chases in them.

She loves daisies and hummingbirds. More than one time I've been sitting on a rock somewhere in the wilderness during a hike, and I'll be thinking about my mom, when a hummingbird flies in front of me or buzzes my ear or stops at a flower or shrub in front of me.

She loves deer and ducks. She has many ducks and they are dear to her heart.

She loves meadowlarks and mountain bluebirds, and the smell of wet sage.

She loves aspen trees, and their fluttering leaves.

She collects Nutcrackers and Nativity Scenes.

For years during Easter, my Dad has been the Easter Bunny and put on epic Easter egg hunts for any of us who were with them during Easter. We've had Easter egg hunts in Utah's Canyonlands, and other national parks, during various spring break trips with our sons and my parents. But the best ones have been the ones at their home and beautiful property in Lander. My mom loves hunting for things and it's a running joke—a truth—that the Easter egg hunt is as much for my mom as it is for the kids. She is giddy when hunting for eggs.

For as long as I remember, she has loved going on picnics.

For years, my mom loved building snowmans. When my sons were little and even as they grew older, my mom always had them over after a big snow to build a snowman.

My mom also loves making snow angels—laying on her back and moving her arms and legs to leave the perfect snow angel for all to see. I have followed her tradition and when hiking, or anywhere there is new snow, I can't help myself, I make a snow angel. It always makes me feel particularly connected to her in those moments and when I do that it makes me feel I'm a part of her. I hope that I've inherited my mom's zeal for life and finding and creating joy and fun wherever she goes.

My mom loves doing crossword puzzles, and putting together jigsaw puzzles in her sunroom, from which she has a spectacular view of the mountains, and their property, which has a creek and several ponds and almost always, deer feeding or walking through. And also her beloved ducks, who are never in a row. Hahaha

She also loves playing scrabble and she is quite competitive. She plays to win. And when she does, she's boisterous, and when she doesn't, she's not a good loser. Lol.

She likes smoking a "bigar" on the 4th of July, but only so she can help light the firecrackers and fireworks. 🧨

At the start of the pandemic, in early April of 2020, we started a tradition of playing cornhole with parents on Sundays. Jerry and our youngest son, the only one still at home, made the cornhole sets and because my parents are in the vulnerable age group, and especially given my mom's health concerns, we started the tradition every Sunday as a way to spend time with them safely and outdoors. We've kept up the tradition.



When she wins at something, or hits a ringer in Cornhole, she says, like only she can, "Am I good or what?!" accompanied by a victorious pose that is unique to my mom. I'm so glad I have this captured in photos and videos.

There were some years when my mom and dad loved margaritas. My dad was "in search of the best margarita" and always trying to improve on the last ones he made. One time when we lived in the country, my mom may have had one too many margaritas and then decided to go on a bike ride. She rode one of us kids' bikes, and at the time she wasn't accustomed to riding bikes. (It had been since she was a young girl!) She headed off, hooping and hollering and showing off for all of us as she pointed the bike down the steep gravel lane.

Buzzing on margaritas and having an epic time of it, she eventually crashed at the end of the lane after she mistakenly thought the brakes were on the pedals. When she tried to apply the brakes, she did not slow down or stop. Fortunately, she wasn't injured and we all got quite a laugh over it. I think we have it on video. Probably on VHS, so it would take some digging, but no matter, I remember it vividly.

In late 1999, when my mom was due to go to Denver, to a cancer center to have her breast cancer surgery, there were concerns because she had had trouble coming out of anesthesia during a past surgery. I remember we were having dinner with my parents, at their home, the night before going to Denver for her surgery, and they invited the priest from their church at the time, over for dinner and to bless my mom before her operation.

We were all sitting around the table after dinner, drinking coffee and about to enjoy some pie for dessert when the priest suggested we pray a St. Thérèse Novena for my mom's health and upcoming operation. Which we did. It was a short prayer we all read from small cards the priest shared with all of us.

After we said Amen and started to eat our pie, the priest added, "I encourage you to look for roses. Be on the lookout for them." (He shared that when people pray to St. Therese, they will often receive a rose as a gift from St. Therese, and they can be comforted that their prayers were heard.)

The next day, Jerry and I drove with my parents to Denver, to be with them during my mom's breast cancer surgery. As soon as she was admitted, she was taken to her hospital room, and we accompanied her. When we entered, there were roses everywhere. The walls were covered in wallpaper that had hundreds of beautifully illustrated bouquets of roses. We were all struck by it.

After my mom was settled, I wandered the halls and peeked into several other rooms. I wondered if all of the hospital rooms had rose-covered wallpaper. They didn't. Only my mom's hospital room had rose wallpaper.

In Closing



On behalf of my family, we thank all of the wonderful humans who helped my mom, including the EMTs, the ER doctors and staff, the nurses, therapists, the neurologist, and all who had a hand in providing my mom with warm, wonderful, and skilled care.

We will forever be grateful to you all!

My mom is out of the hospital now and she and my dad are enjoying the warmth of Las Vegas and the comfort and simple life that life in their RV provides for them. They have a network of close friends nearby. She will be receiving some assistance and therapies that will hopefully help lead her to a full recovery.

As my mom continues to age, I want to be a daughter who is loving and patient, who is as kind to her as she is to everyone who meets her or crosses her path.

She is precious cargo, and every day with her in my life—in our life—is a blessing.

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(My brother, Michael, and younger sister, Amber, in Washington, before Alexys' and Taylor's wedding on Saturday.)