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Topic: How Courage Looks as I Age or Home

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Every breath you take....

I read obituaries these days. There was a simple one line obit in the Boulder Daily Camera that I particularly liked. In essence it said: *John Johnson was a decent and quiet man who lived his life decently and quietly.*

For whatever reason I am not afraid of death. I watched my mother struggling to breathe when I was 18 and then 27 years later watched my dying mother-in-law trying to breathe. In the first case I wanted to breathe with her, hoping she could take a good deep breath in that claustrophobic oxygen tent and be her wise-cracking self again. My mother's death was sudden and unexplained, especially to a teenager getting ready to leave for college and with a stoic Scandinavian father who could say nothing except that "She's gone" as he wiped away a tear. In the second case I wanted the breathing to stop. In a strange way it was quite cathartic.

I was extremely close to my mother-in-law but didn't refer to her as such. I wasn't comfortable calling her "Mom" even though she truly did become a second mother and dear friend to me and I don't think she expected me to call her that either. Marilyn was very similar in looks and personality to my mother; they would have bonded easily and quickly. It turned out that I had more years with her than *with* my mother. When she developed terminal cancer we spent as much time visiting her in Seattle as possible. One night she began to hemorrhage and her mother, who was staying with her, panicked and called 911. We had been told not to do so, so she could pass away at home. She had read **Final Exit** and stockpiled Seconal to take when she was ready. In the hospital her doctor said as soon as she could walk a lap around the nurse's station she could go home. She was determined to do so and did.

We had a lovely week with her in her solarium overlooking Meydenbauer Bay. The weather was perfect; unusual for January's usual grey Seattle drizzle. We spent hours with her sharing stories and photos, laughing and crying. My children were sent home when we knew the end was near. As I mixed the Seconal into the Tapioca pudding I started laughing somewhat hysterically at the quote on the back of the box: *Swiss Miss is the Perfect Go Anywhere Snack.* Marilyn could hear me from her bedroom where she was waiting for her "snack" and asked if I was all right. At that point, everyone left my husband and I to follow through with her exit plan.

We sat with her as she ate the pudding, chatted as she closed her eyes and slowly, quietly, peacefully quit breathing. My husband looked at me with panic in his eyes and said "she's not breathing!" I gently reminded him that that was the "plan" and kissed her on her forehead.