

Transcription

Media File Name: Jane Meyer EDIT (online-audio-converter.com).mp3

Media File ID: 2985303

Media Duration: 6:35

Order Number: 2003290

Date Ordered: 2021-03-26



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My mother died in May of 2020 at the age of 97. She was at the time living in a skilled nursing facility that was part of her continuing care retirement community. So she had lived in the community about 10 years and had been in the skilled nursing part for about 3 years and she was suffering from dementia. So my sister and I knew that she was getting close to dying. We had watched her decline through the years. And one of the hardest things through this is we didn't get to visit her in her last couple of months. We did get in twice, but that was so difficult as she was going downhill to not get to go in and see her.

Her dementia was pretty bad, but she knew us and was glad to see us. About a week before she died, they let us come to see her because she was near death and they said we could be there for half an hour. And so we went and we spent the half-hour with her and it felt really good to do it. And that was our time to say goodbye to her because we knew we wouldn't get in again. Oddly enough, a couple of days after that, it was determined that she had been exposed to COVID and they tested her and she tested positive. My sister and I and my brother-in-law had to get tested and we were all negative, which was certainly a relief. It seemed not likely that we'd be positive, but it was kind of a strange wrinkle to throw in the middle of the process of dying.

A week from when we last saw her, she died, and we would have wanted to be there, but we couldn't. The helpful thing is that the director of nursing, who my mom liked quite a lot, was with her and held her hand as she died. And that was incredibly comforting to us that somebody she liked was there watching her and being with her. When we found out she had died, we called the funeral home to make arrangements. And the restrictions at that time, which was just two months into our time with COVID, were that we had to have graveside service. We could not have more than 10 people including the rabbi and the person from the funeral home. There would be no chairs because at that time we still thought that touching a surface might spread COVID. So there were some different rules.

My family is small enough that the number of people allowed for my sister and her husband and kids and their husbands and me to be there. So we were okay with the limit of 10. We had a rabbi who we liked a lot and who knew my mother very well. Going into it, we felt really bad that we wouldn't have the normal process of shivah, but as it turned out that day, the burial service was actually comforting. It was very intimate. The rabbi spoke and my sister spoke and one of my nieces spoke and we all stood there and that actually worked out. It was emotionally satisfying.

We did a Zoom shivah that night. We kept it very small. We chose to keep it to people who knew her well. So a friend who's a cantor conducted a service for

us and then he left and my family plus a couple of out of town cousins and a few local close friends who had been in my mother's life for years spent time together on Zoom reminiscing and talking and processing. So the things that we did were good and helpful and satisfying, but I certainly missed having the opportunity to have friends come by, to be together, to mourn as a community. I definitely miss that. I got cards and phone calls and that helped, but I think our Jewish rituals of mourning are so good and helpful, and not having all of that was tough. So what we did was good, but what we couldn't do, I missed.

Watching her fade away helped us deal with her death because her life was very limited, and she was 97, and it was time. I didn't want her to die, but I didn't want her to live the way she was living. And anybody who's gone through something like that with a parent I think understands. But it feels bad in a way to say it, and I had feelings like that in her last couple of years watching her fade away. That was hard, and then it was really hard during COVID to not get to see her, but I knew she was cared for. And she knew the people who came in and took care of her every day. They were, I think, more present for her than we were anyway.

I mean, luckily I didn't have to deal with her not knowing me but I think she was more comforted by the faces she saw day in and day out. And I understand that because she was in a different state of mind and they were there and they cared about her. Most of the people there were very caring and she was very friendly and nice to the end and that helps with the caretakers so they liked her. So thank goodness she was who she was in that way. She was friendly and she waved to everybody and she had a smile and that was good.