

REFLECTIONS



SHUTTERSTOCK

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A human touch can have long-lasting effects

Regina Heroux, RN, MS, OCN

More than 20 years ago, I met Mr N, a middle-aged man who was a leader of a major company. Our worlds overlapped when he became a patient of mine during the last 2 weeks of his life. Mr N's career forced him to travel often, and he once told me his biggest regret was not being able to slow down and have children. Mrs N's was the fact that the love and center of her life was dying.

I remember taking care of him and their fondness for me as a young nurse, new to oncology. Mr N was always a true gentleman. Even when his pain escalated, he'd say something like, "Pain, pain, go away, and don't come back another day!" Mrs N always stayed by his side, held his hand, wiped his brow, offered ice chips, and, finally, hummed when he fell asleep after receiving some intravenous morphine. Although a young bride myself, I was still mesmerized by this loving couple.

When lucid, he told me about their life together and all she had had to "put up with" in their 20-plus years of marriage. His love was evident, yet somehow I knew those feelings were mutual, as his career had provided her with a comfortable life. I learned much about life and love while caring for Mr N and his wife and wrote a poem about their love, framed it, and gave it to her shortly after he passed. She hugged me and said, "We will never forget you." It's funny how that was my exact sentiment as well....

A few months ago, I received a call at my house. The voice message said that she had been trying to "find" me and hoped I still

remembered her. I called Mrs N back that evening, and she told me she was doing well but she had never remarried or ever intended to. When I asked how she came to call me, she was silent for a moment and then said that she wanted to ask me for a special favor. The framed poem I wrote for her years ago that hung in the main room of her home had faded from exposure to the sun. She wanted to know if I would write over the original poem so that it could be readable again. I agreed, of course, and I bought a fine-tipped permanent marker and worked carefully on reconstructing the letters and words of each line in the poem. When I finished, aside from the faded onion-skinned paper, the poem looked brand new.

I sent the frame back to her and received a call from a tearful Mrs N. She told me how grateful and touched she was, and how preserving this poem was of enormous value to her. She wished to pay me for my time and the wonderful job she felt I did. She also told me her eyesight had been deteriorating from glaucoma, but now she could read the poem with ease. I ended that memorable conversation by telling her she owed me nothing and that I was happy to be able to do this for her. Truth be told, I too was immensely moved by our brief reunion. I hung up realizing the lasting impact that we as nurses can have ... whatever form of touch we use. ■

Regina Heroux is the director for a chronic disease clinic that serves uninsured adults in Wake County, North Carolina.