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Mother in Hospice, April 2005

Daniel R. Schwarz

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Mother in Hospice, April 2005

by Daniel R. Schwarz

“I am drowning,” she mumbled.
“I am ready to die. I don’t want
my family’s lives in suspension.”
But her mind was lucid.
Crowded into cubicle with
Living remnants of her body, four of us—
my taciturn brother who
put life on hold to be caregiver;
my second wife, Marcia,
who knew what to do and say;
my younger son, Jeff, who had never
seen death’s color and texture;
and myself, guilty for not doing more,
frustrated that doctors knew so little—
were, in halting whisper,
counseled to love each other,
avoid strife, anger.
Her final words were who she was.
To my wife: “Take care of Danny.”
Eyes close, few minutes silence:
“Marcia, you make wonderful *rugelah*.
How is your ailing father doing?”
To me: “You have found joy in
sharing interests with your wife.” Pause.
“We need to find someone for you, Jeff.”

With barely audible laughter,
she recalled defending me
to fifth grade teacher who
thought I was inattentive, even ironic:
“You were smarter than your teachers;
children need to laugh and have fun.”



She taught us to die with grace and dignity.
“A great lady!” I tearfully told my son
as we watched her fight for breath.
“She was quite a beauty into her sixties, but
is she not even more beautiful
radiating love for family?”

In intermittent moments of clarity,
she lived in fabric of
human feelings and memories.
She always knew what I have come to learn.
Savoring small pleasures—smiles, touches;
sunrises, sunsets; cardinals feeding;
herons, deer visiting pond;
intimacies between tick and tock
when life momentarily blazes—
are not mere interstices
between ambition and career success,
but warp and woof of life itself.

Her favorite color was blue.

