

***Blue Skirt Waltz in Brown**

Aides were lining up wheelchairs along the back wall, marching in the dementia patients, keeping them in line, seating them close to their protectors. The next few rows were filled with assisted living patients who could manage to seat themselves, and independently negotiate their wheelchairs and walkers.

As the musician warmed up for an hour's respite from the bleakness of January in Minnesota, windows in the nursing home lobby were frosted over with cold, yet acting as barriers keeping the warmth in along with the patients. Visiting family members were welcomed and seated on the couches and chairs. The music began.

Starting with "How Much is That Doggie in the Window," and moving quickly through some Johnny Cash, and Dean Martin, the musician sang and played his keyboard guitar for an hour. There was a definite audience response even amongst those that could no longer speak, sing, or clap along with the music. Their heads would bob in time to the music or their feet would be keeping time even though their bodies were stiff with arthritis or silent from stroke or medication.

Then, the magic happened and it was beautiful. Although I had witnessed it a couple of times before when I accompanied my mom; I wasn't sure it would happen every time. As the musician slowly moved into some well-known waltz numbers, he encouraged the audience to sing, dance or clap along with the music. I looked toward a slightly built woman who had danced solo several times before, although she used a walker regularly. This time she didn't move. I felt an immediate gut-wrenching sadness...silently commanding her to "get up". My teeth were clenched cheering for her inner strength to rush in and raise her to her feet. She was so much braver than I could ever be—dancing by herself and not caring what others thought letting her body move perfectly to the music. She was immaculately dressed today, all in brown, brown heels, brown slacks, brown sweater, and even noticeable makeup. She seemed "put together," ready for a dance.

As the musician continued to play the accordion he slowly waltzed his way over to the lady in brown. He obviously knew her, and she knew him. She was usually the first to arrive, taking a front seat. Usually she would be tossing smart remarks back and forth to him but not today. She seemed sad to me; different than when I had seen her before. She still did not look up...but then he offered her his hand and tentatively she took it. Together they held hands and swung their arms in motion to the music, "blue were her eyes and blue were the skies and blue was the skirt that she wore..." then, she slowly rose up, hanging on to the walker with her left hand while continuing to hold right hands with the musician. I silently blessed him for being so kind and understanding. Every woman there wanted to be the one to dance with him because their own partners were no longer there yet the music made their memories strong and their bodies alive again.

As he stood waiting for her to get her balance, he played one more verse...and suddenly she dropped his hand, let go of the walker and freely danced a perfect waltz as if she were once again in the arms of a loved one, her body responding to the music and the memories. Whomever she had danced with in her youth must have really been something! Did she remember his Old-Spice cologne, the crispness of his white starched shirt or the beating of his heart? Did she remember his warm breath on her neck as they moved around the dance floor, his hand on the small of her back leading her, holding her close, moving to the music effortlessly? Would she ever know how brave she was in the grace of her years and how beautiful in brown?

*With gratitude for Randy Roloff as he entertained residents at Regina Medical Center, January 2015. Blessings to all who serve the aged and whose actions allow the elderly to almost navigate as they once did, their memories returning, giving them brief moments of joy as the "old familiar music plays. --Diane Saed /2015