

SGH Column

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Celebrating and mourning the loss of two women

By Sherri Gardner Howell

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It has been a month of loss for our family. As with most deaths, each one has had moments to celebrate, moments to reflect and moments to just be profoundly sad. They were very different, these two losses, yet one similarity joins them both.

The first was a friend from the past. Linda Monk and I met when our youngest children were in day care together. Spencer and my son, Brett, were the best of 3-year-old buddies, two peas in a pod who were thick as thieves with the Royale Day Care group that included Cameron, Billy, two Brads and Zach. That group grew up together, and, when they were old enough, Linda and I were their Tiger Cubs and then Cub Scout leaders. We had a much fun as they did.

Spencer and Brett went to different high schools, and then the Monks moved away when the boys were in their last years in high school. Linda and I kept in touch for a while, then, well, you know... When I heard from a mutual friend several years ago that Linda had cancer and that it didn't look good, my heart broke. I talked to her a few times, but she was so far away.

I wasn't surprised when Linda beat the odds and lived years longer than the doctors predicted. I knew her love of family would push her to grab every minute that she could and fight for another one. In the end, Spencer said she was just too tired to fight it anymore. She and her family celebrated life every day during those last years when they knew death was just around the corner. You talk to each other when you know the end is coming, and those seeds of love yield happiness long after the end has come.

The second death was my mother-in-law, Alliene Howell. Alliene fought her own kind of battle, one she didn't even realize she was fighting: Alzheimer's Disease. The six years were long ones, and the disease won more battles than we did, but we all did the best we could. It was gut-wrenching to experience. I think we all believed it would be easy to let go when the time came.

But here is where the sad similarities come into play. In one case, there was a friend I had not seen in years; in the other, a family member who was a part of our daily lives. Both Linda and Alliene deserved some peace, some rest. As their friend and family, I knew in my brain that both were now pain free and had moved on to a place of happiness. So why do I feel so lousy?

It's the loss. No matter how we see death, how we celebrate our loved ones life on earth and how we try to be rational and intelligent when someone's suffering is over, we are still left with the fact that they aren't here anymore. I had not seen Linda in years, but, inexplicably, I miss her. I watched the person Alliene was slip away more and more every day, yet I miss sitting with her and trying to make

sense of the scenarios she was creating in her mind. I am joyful that they are no longer in pain, but that joy is tinged with a shadow of sadness.

I am no stranger to losing people I love. I know that time will help. I know that the right thing to say is to embrace my faith and acknowledge the obvious: They are in a better place. But while I try to do that and while time passes and brings its healing, I just have to say what I am really feeling: Linda, Alliene – I miss you.