

Vital Statistics

I know that there is no way Marge could have *known* my mom in the 30 seconds it took her to review her e-chart on the computer. After all, her job was simply to quickly retrieve information that was relevant to Mom's admission to the hospital. Since Mom had just been in the hospital ER a few weeks before, not much had changed: address, type of insurance, correct spelling of the first and last name...

But then Marge made a declaration to confirm one of Mom's most recent vital statistics: *widower*.

Hearing that word spoken - out loud – and hearing it attributed to my mom, momentarily numbed my brain. Marge quickly went on to the next question accepting the downward slope of my head as a “yes.” She didn’t realize my head dropped more as a reaction to a loss of breath and air that made me feel like I might lose consciousness. *Widower*?

It was true that only three months earlier my dad had begun his final transition in the very same hospital where my mom now resided. There is no way that Marge could have known that, just like she couldn’t have known about my mom and dad’s 53 years of marriage. We hadn’t told mom about dad’s death because her Alzheimer’s would have prevented her from remembering the devastating news. Even telling her repeatedly was no guarantee that the sadness and the gravity of such news would really latch on. Each time she would have to submit to the cruel grip of sorrow, only to inevitably be released into dark forgetfulness.

If Marge had known, she would have never let that word – *widower* – fill the small space in the room. But she did. If Mom heard, she didn’t understand, and if she understood, she didn’t respond. Maybe she didn’t respond because although the mind forgets, the spirit never does. Maybe it wasn’t just a gross coincidence that my dad had so recently and terminally been in the same hospital wing. Maybe some part of his spirit was hovering near – protecting Mom and soothing her, helping her to stay in perfect peace.

It wasn’t Marge’s fault that the list of adjectives to choose from on the form was so limited. Mom wasn’t *single* or *divorced*, and legally she wasn’t *married*, so technically, Marge selected the most appropriate option. Words like *mother*, *wife*, *grandma*, *teacher*, *friend*, *gentle spirit*, *lover of God*, *lifelong church member*, *the woman who loved me unconditionally every day of my life...* Those aspects of the 135 pound body laying naked and curled up beneath the thin hospital blanket weren’t choices on the e-chart list.

There is a great paradox in someone’s life being handled, determined, promoted and ended in a place where his or her identity fades behind beeps and slow-drip bags, rubber gloves and the sound of shaky wheeled beds being pushed up and down fluorescent hallways. These sounds ironically suggest immense efforts to prolong life and humanity.

Thankfully, God sees the heart of mankind. A powerful passage in the 43rd chapter of Isaiah says that He formed us and called us by name. God declares that, “You are Mine.” He promises that He will never leave us, even as we face consuming fires and waters. God’s adjectives for us are “honored,” “precious,” and “loved.”

Marge left Mom’s room and went on to retrieve the required information from the next patient. The person in Room 4 was my mom, but she was identified in part, as an African American widower residing in Williamsville, New York. She faded off to sleep almost as quickly as her information faded off the computer screen. Marge probably wouldn’t remember mom, but God never forgets. He is forever mindful of us and always blesses us.

What is your story?

Write about your core identity. How do you think other people see you? Does that description mesh with how you see yourself?