

Dear Friends,

The following was written by Michele Feist. She is a lay minister and congregation member of Lions Gate Priory. Grant Brusegard, her husband, passed away on August 27th, 2014. He was also a lay minister and member of our congregation.

gassho,

Koten

August 26th., 2015

On the Eve of the First Anniversary of My Husband's Death.

There are so many things I could write about how Grant approached his illness and death. From the prognosis, given by the fresh faced, rather sad oncologist at the Cancer Agency, to the way Grant accepted and didn't look away.

What floods my mind, however, on this the day before the one year anniversary of his death is compassion, and how it was expressed by others, Buddhist and non- Buddhist alike on the last days of his life.

First, the two women, strangers to each other, who moved into our home without much fanfare, or even a lot of pre-planning. The uncanny way that we complemented one another, it was a dance without discussion really. These two women dropped everything at the front door and allowed space for both Grant and me while providing superb nursing care at the same time. They allowed me the opportunity to care for Grant and provided me the time to get what little rest any of us could get. The meditation carried us. They gave Grant and me the space to be together, in a way that would have been very difficult to do in another place. The weather was hot, and in the last days of Grant's life we were administering medications almost every fifteen minutes. We were sleep deprived, grieving, working so hard. I remember the three of us trying to rest one early, early morning, and Grant making some indication of need - all three of us rising from our mats on the floor, staggering around, fumbling for glasses to see, one heading for the medication, one heading for Grant, one ready to be where needed. All without words.

Both women understood when, at 2 in the morning, I was hit by a sense of something very important, that we not "play God" that we not attempt to speed his dying, that what was required was that we listened deeply and trusted that we were doing the best we could. Grant's body was very strong and his great heart kept beating past what anyone expected. Pancreatic cancer is very, very painful. Grant told me once, when he was still able to speak, that he could "sit" below the pain. We occasionally encouraged him to keep doing this, but I don't know if he needed the encouragement or whether the words were a reassurance for those of us who watched and cared. All I knew at the time was that I could trust these two women implicitly, and we gave the medications, sat as still as we could in this altered state of exhaustion and grief and that was enough.

I have never talked to the palliative team that came to help about this, and never will. I am grateful for their trust (they gave us total access to the pain medications, a bit unusual) and suspect they would have looked away if we had given Grant enough medication to speed the process of his dying. There was a karmic memory that arose for me, at 2 in the morning, between Grant and me involving

just this kind of decision done in the past. The old memory was of someone caring for another as they died in great pain, and of someone not able to bear the watching and ending the person's life for them. It was clear - the important thing was to trust, and not decide for the Eternal.

While all this was going on, life was proceeding along outside our little bubble. Dragon Flower Mountain and Victor's home were at risk of burning and they were all evacuated to the nearby town. And in the midst of all this, the merit for Grant and for me and for all beings was flowing. It was palpable, and it was what people just did. Rev. Master Koten was here, his heart was here, just as it was at Dragon Flower Mountain, as they faced the possibility that this too may be lost.

The sense of all these people just sitting with us, the flowing of merit, it was coming from everywhere. As they went about their lives, a small part of their hearts were sitting with us. I know this in my bones.

I have told the following many times, and I worry that telling it too often might "solidify it" in some way. Personally I don't have an affinity for enshrining events, or creating a mythology about such things. But this did truly happen and I think it may help people to hear it.

The second last day of Grant's life, the palliative team offered us a pump to use to continuously give him medication. The pump required specialists to set up, and could not be done until the next day, so we continued to give him medications through what was called a butterfly (the medication was put just under the skin, a pretty effective way to do it) till the team arrived. Grant had been unresponsive for at least a couple of days at this point. While the team was doing their thing, behind us in the kitchen, I sat on the arm of his chair. It was impossible to touch him much, not without causing pain, but I wanted to be near. As I half listened to the nurse specialists talk in the next room, Grant opened his eyes. With tremendous effort he said: "I appreciate". I couldn't reply, my heart was breaking. then he smiled, and said: "Give me a kiss". And when I did so, said: "Give me another one", then as I moved to give him yet a third, he was under again, gone back to that place where he sat beneath the pain.

To die with gratitude and love. In the midst of pain, just like all those statues we see of Fudo sitting in the flames, a deep stillness, this is why we sit.