

From the Revelation to John we read:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
'See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'

The first thing- the life on this earth- has passed away with Susie's death. God has wiped away her tears resulting from the various sorrows this life held for her. God has welcomed her home. Her mind and body are fully restored. It is in this sense that Jesus spoke to his disciples as we read in the Gospel of John:

Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.

At this moment, we are most likely not yet at a place in our own lives that our pain over Susie's death has turned into joy. With God's help we will, someday, be able to leave the pain behind and rejoice in Susie's new life with God.

Transitions are often hard and most especially when we are the ones left behind. When we are the ones who have yet to walk into the unknown. Our anxiety can be lessened when we remember that our faith tells us that we must die to this life in order to begin a new life with God even as we do not know what that new life will

be like. Human beings don't always do well with abstractions. And yet, God has told us that God will be with us in this life and in the next. There is never a time when God is absent from us.

The death of the second of our parents is a transition like no other. No longer are you, the seven children of Jim and Susie Smith, children, despite your chronological age. You are adults with all the responsibilities and expectations that go along with being an adult. You are now the "older" generation – no longer able to defer to or to ask for advice or guidance from your parents. What you say goes – freedom and responsibility. This is the natural order of our human life. Most often, parents die before children.

The responsibility that falls upon you, the siblings, includes deciding what you want your family to look like – what you want your family to be – now that both Jim and Susie are gone. You can choose to drift apart. You can choose to argue. And, you can choose to form a new family: one that looks to each other for love and support. It is up to each of you to choose. Some of you may choose differently than others, and that's ok. God gives us free choice to be or to not be a family that loves and cares for each other, through laughter and through tears. I hope you will look to each other with grace and caring, setting aside old hurts. Setting aside those buttons that only you know how to push. Finding in your siblings, your children and in your siblings families a new way to be together – carrying on the best of what you learned growing up with Susie and Jim as parents.

The actor Ted Danson spoke recently about the death of his mother – the second of his parents to die. He said:

When my mother died, I was 57. Highly successful and content but when I would take time to grieve; I was like a 9-year-old sobbing. I didn't know how I could go on without her. ... Death is so intensely real. When someone close to you dies, it shines a light on life's basics: family, relationships, what's important. And what's important? Do the right thing in this moment, and be happy, joyful. That's about it. Be kind and the rest will take care of itself.¹

Despite the death of Susie, and of Jim earlier, you are not alone. You have children, spouses, friends and other family if you choose. It is now your turn to decide what your earthly family will look like and how you will treat each other.

We know, because God tells us so, that God is with us in laughter and joyous times as well as in heartbreaking time with lots of tears. God is a steady, comforting presence if we are willing to be in relationship with God. God is the one from whom our help comes. God is the one who watches over us awake and asleep. We can take comfort in that. This model of relationship is one that I hope you will take with you once you leave this place. Once you say your final goodbyes today to Susie.

Joyce Maynard in her memoir about the death of her husband from pancreatic cancer writes:

Where did any of us get the idea that life was supposed to be easy, or that loss would pass us by? The more you love, the more you stand to

¹ Ted Danson in *AARP Magazine*. October/November 2017, p61 et seq.

lose....Trouble can always find us. Same as happiness did. Sorrow found me. But sweetness endures.²

Sorrow found us when Susie died. I hope sweetness will endure for you as you remember Susie. Celebrate her life and what she meant to you- whether mother, grandmother, friend. Susan reminded us a few minutes ago of Susie's many talents and gifts and the love she had for her family.

Even after Susie and Jim moved to Marquette Manor, they would periodically show up at St. John's. It was always a delight to see them – and the wonderful hats that Susie would wear. Up until a couple of years ago, Susie was able to be part of Women's Week at Waycross Camp and Conference Center. There are so many good memories of Susie- charging ahead even when sometimes it must have been difficult for any number of different reasons. Susie was grounded in her faith and her comfort that God would provide. God has provided and Susie is now home with the Lord. She is once again the Susie you knew. The Susie who led the way with funny antics and yet with the soul of an artist who brought so much joy to others through her painting and other gifts. God has provided. Susie is at peace. Thanks be to God. Amen.

² Joyce Maynard in *AARP Magazine*, October/November 2017, p 71.