

# MEMORIAL TRIBUTE TO MY HUSBAND

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At the Chattanooga Theatre Centre

"Where have you been all my life?" Hubert said to me on our third date, just after he parked his father's Pontiac at a scenic overlook on Lookout Mountain. In the dark, the lights of the city below seemed to blaze with the same burning excitement he and I felt. Not waiting for my response, he drew me into his arms for our first passionate kiss. He was 21 and I 18, so neither of us had imagined suddenly finding a soul mate. But Hubert's dramatic somewhat exaggerated question, I would learn, was typical of the real romantic he was.

Yes, ours was romance from start to finish. Our love grew and grew through both the stressful and easier stages alike. A friend in Texas, who was widowed several years ago, warned me in her sympathy note what to expect. She said, "It is no fun being the sole survivor of a great love."

One of the stories Hubert delighted in telling was his vivid remembrance of my mother sitting him down at the onset of our courtship to inform him that he had no chance of winning her daughter's hand in marriage.

To begin with, I was too young. And secondly, Mother saw no prospects for an artist being able to support a wife. "Hubert," she said in an unmistakably condescending tone, "My daughter, Phyllis, is a blueblood." With that startling assertion she intended to scare off the suitor she perceived to be dangerously amorous and overly confident. But Hubert, who always rose to a challenge and was attracted to whatever seemed of quality, liked what he heard. In fact, he was not dissuaded in the least, but further motivated.

We married a year later without Mother's approval, and quite honestly, with her considerable opposition. It took a number of years for Hubert to earn Mother's respect and affections. She died last May, and for the last 30 years of her life loved Hubert as if he were her own son.

Despite my still missing Mother and now longing for Hubert, I can be grateful for priceless happy memories made in the more than 47 years he and I had as lovers, friends, partners, parents, and then grandparents. What a blessing he was to my life. And not just to my life. He touched everyone who knew him as well as unknown thousands – those who sensed they knew him from his paintings and two art books. There was a spiritual energy in those works. Each subject was approached with insight and compassion because those were the emotions that flowed from his mind and heart.

During the past eight months of his failing health, Hubert and I had candid conversations about his medical prognosis and what I should do if left without him. Yet the gloom hanging over us was accompanied with prayers and hopes of his living a while longer. Hundreds of people likewise prayed with and for us. Phone calls and cards of encouragement came daily, along with in-person visits. Each day was cherished. He fought a courageous battle to survive and with the idea of returning to his easel. "I have many more paintings

I want to do," he said. Frankly, I truly believe he will be doing them, joining other luminaries who vowed to continue painting on the other side of life.

Although beyond our sight, Hubert's strong beautiful spirit abides. He had a great gift and with it gifted us all. Standing there with our three children at his bedside on the morning of his death, I said to them, "Your father did not belong only to us, but to the world. Her leaves a legacy to be revered in our time and in generations to come."

The Chattanooga National Cemetery, where Hubert's cremains were buried with full military honors, asked me to designate for his marker three titles to encapsulate his life and character. I responded: Gentleman, Sportsman, and Beloved Artist. How I wished I could have included the rest of the story: A man's man and a woman's dream of one; an adoring and faithful husband; a wise and wonderful father; a humble genius of innumerable talents and skills; a man of deep faith and uncompromised ethics; a charismatic public speaker and an engaging storyteller; a genuine friend whose graciousness extended to people at all times and in varying circumstances of life.

A longtime dear friend wrote to me her heartfelt feelings of loss. She said, "Hubert was bigger than life. I can still remember the first time I met him. He welcomed me, as did you as if I were a friend he had known and loved for years. You could always expect a bear hug, a kiss, a broad smile; then that wonderful laugh and voice of his that made you so glad to be in his presence."

And another condolence message cited his friendship as a dear blessing. The poignant poem inscribed within the card seems to express for our collective reminiscence the essence of his giving of himself in both his art and personality. The poem offers this:

*"Some friendships are a blessing  
Because people freely share,  
Are willing to be honest,  
And reveal how much they care.*

*Some friendships are a blessing,  
Because memories of past years,  
Are filled with deep emotions  
Shared in times of joy and tears.*

*Every kind of friendship is a  
Precious work of art,  
For friendship is a blessing  
And a treasure of the heart."*

Thank you, dear ones, for coming to pay tribute to and bid farewell to our treasured friend – for celebrating with gratitude a life well lived. So very, very well-lived.