

Viewing Life Through Lenses of Hope & Beauty

The youngest patient I ever provided support to was in her early sixties. Julia was a fighter, a fierce scholar, and an extraordinary poet. The last year of her life was the brightest in a series of tumultuous years and Julia maintained an enviable connection to the world around her, choosing to view life through lenses of hope and beauty.

By the time I met her, Julia had amassed a collection of hand-written poems that she wanted to digitize and self-publish. This was my role as hospice volunteer. Each week when we met, Julia would greet me saying, "I'm so glad you're here!" and we would trade – she'd give me her hand-written poems and I'd hand her back the typed versions from the week before.

At first, she would just share snippets of her life, pre cancer diagnosis. As the weeks turned into months, I would sit enthralled with her extraordinary recollections of civil rights marches, young love, failed marriages, and difficult decisions.

At the end of one of our visits, she offered me a hand-written poem, with a sweet smile and the explanation, "Whenever you come to visit, people think you are my daughter." Julia never had any children of her own and she didn't know my mother died two years earlier. The title of the poem was, "If I had a daughter." I waited until I got to my car, where I read through her blue, looping cursive and cried.

Each time a patient dies, I am always caught off guard. After a year of knowing Julia, I sat by her bed, held her hand, and whispered how grateful I was to have met her, feeling selfish for everything she'd given me.