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(Unsplash/Patrick Perkins)

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About a year ago, my husband Jerry had a stroke. It has been quite a journey for both of us to get where we are today. Jerry went from not being able to remember

the names of our grandchildren, to now having only mild memory issues.

Every morning, I set out a tall glass of water, his pills and messages written on scraps of paper in big black marker, because we both have cataracts. The first notes say things like, "Take your pills. Drink all the water. Don't forget your chocolate protein shake." As he leaves for work he sees more notes which, along with red hearts and drawings of him smiling in his cap, contain the captions "Be careful on the roads" and "Don't forget your belt." I also set out a Scripture card each day. Today's read: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" ([Romans 12:2](#)).

Indeed, the renewal of our minds is a work in progress. Some days there are setbacks, other days triumphs. We are just ordinary people, living ordinary lives, with ordinary hope. Benedictine Sr. [Macrina Wiederkehr](#), a friend and author of one of my favorite books, [Gold in Your Memories](#), sent me an email before she died with just two words on it: "Carry on." At the time, I had thought, "Wow, that is really to the point," and I wondered in what ways the message would prove prophetic to me. Now I know, because that is the theme Jerry and I live out.

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Anne Lamott [writes](#) that aging is about being practical, kind and simplistic. To Jerry and me, that says it all. We too are in that deepening, distilling season as elders and grateful every day for life and the improvement Jerry has experienced.

Before bed most nights, we play a little game of Bible Trivia. I pretend I am a game show host and ask all the questions, such as, "What parable tells of a son that leaves home, loses all his money, but is still welcomed home?" and, "How many times did Noah send the dove out to look for dry land?" Jerry, an avid Bible reader, knows nearly all the answers. His memory is great in this area, even though this morning he put the instant coffee in the refrigerator and has trouble getting the light switches straight. Once he put the ice cream in the microwave, which we still laugh about. "Oh well," I say, "it could be worse!"

Another time, he came into the house saying he heard robins in the trees. Since we had knee-deep snow at the time, I said, "You did not!" He said, "Yes, I did, I know that sound." I quipped, "I'll believe it when I see it!" He beckoned me to the front

window, where sure enough, I could see that there were half a dozen robins hopping happily along the road.

"I'll believe it when I see it" has a lot of connotations to us "sometimes" skeptics, putting us in good company and kinship with the people in the Bible who said the same thing. I like to think God is always waiting to welcome us home, even if instead of losing our money, we may lose our memories or faith — and how, like with Noah, God is always sending out symbolic messenger doves to our hearts to encourage us. The imagery reminds me of our friend St. Joseph Sr. Mary Southard's beautiful [artwork](#).



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So, what could be next in our life's pilgrimage? Jerry recently experienced what he calls a miracle. Because he deals with a lot of fatigue from his stroke, his job working on heavy equipment was getting harder all the time. He would come home exhausted and I was very concerned that he could have another stroke. One day, out of the blue, he got a call from the golf course two miles from our house, asking

him if he could work as their head mechanic. Jerry's great passion in life is golf and he took the position, landing his dream job and new beginnings at the age of 71. Sometimes good things come to us when we least expect it and we get to feel overjoyed, filled with wonder.

When I heard about the new job, I was so delighted I laughed. We have been through a lot in life, as has everyone by this age, including loss of my health, loss of a child, challenges to our marriage and much more. Yet, Macrina's message, "Carry on," holds true. These words sustain us, when we are filled with sorrow, anxiety and troubles of every kind. To carry on does not mean to move on so much as to, as Jerry said today, "Embrace what is and make the best of things with God's help."

Ann Dawson explains it this way in her lovely book [\*A Season of Grief\*](#) following the death of her son, "I realize what a gift the ability to laugh really is. Laughter is a song of triumph. It is a song of faith and a song of hope. It is our cry to the universe that we are undefeated by the sorrows and hardships of this life. Laughter is a hymn about overcoming obstacles and a prayer of trust that our God will comfort us and bring us joy."

When viewed through the eyes of the soul, opening ourselves to the wholeness that rises out of the inclusion of sacred laughter is of the deepest, most lasting and life-giving kind there is. It is part of the love work we bring to the healing of our hearts and the world as we carry on.

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