

Prompt: **A friend who has died**

6/23/25

Reading this prompt, I immediately think of my friend Susan Block, later Susan Miller after she married her life-long friend Marty Miller. (At their wedding, there was an early film of them as toddlers crawling together up the outside stairs at the Miller's house.)

Susan and I always considered ourselves BFF's, long before that expression was coined. We met in second or third grade and immediately were drawn to each other. Even though she and Marty stayed in Syracuse and I moved around "out of state," we managed to maintain that tight friendship.

Should I begin at the beginning or the end? Perhaps I'll start near the end as I've written about our beginning before.

I came home to Syracuse often in those last few years, starting in the late 90's. My mother and step-father, Nick, were facing medical challenges so I trekked to Syracuse often, ultimately about every three weeks, for extended weekends, as I was still working at that time. Susan and I really enjoyed being able to be in touch in person for a change. After Nick died and we sold their house, I lost my home base. Susan and Marty stepped in and gave me a key to their house and use of a bedroom. What a lifesaver that was! I don't know what I would have done without this kind gesture as I was there often to visit my mother in the nursing home.

Later, I was still coming fairly often to stay with my cousin at her house and Susan and I would meet for breakfast and a long chat at the Panera's near her house. During the last of these talks, she told me that she was questioning her Jewish faith, a real surprise as she and Marty had always been very active in their temple. I wondered about this change. I think this was my first clue that something odd was going on. The next time we got together was in her front yard. She had become uncomfortable driving even the short distance to Panera's. She, Marty and I had a lovely long talk on a pleasant day, but near the end, she started commenting about seeing something down the street that neither Marty nor I had seen. Those incidents were the early stages of what turned out to be Lewy Body dementia, visual hallucinations being a common first symptom.

The last time that we were together, Marty brought Susan to join Bob and me at their daughter Jennifer's house. Susan was very energetic and talkative, relating all kinds of wonderful accomplishments of her grandson. During this monologue, Marty was sitting behind her shaking his head, no. All of these accomplishments, though totally believable, were figments created by her rapidly damaging brain.

That was the last time that I saw her, as my regular trips to Syracuse had come to an end. I did get a phone call from Jennifer who was worried because her mother was convinced that I had died. I called Susan and we had a lovely talk. Apparently she was not surprised in the least to hear from me. I suppose she had forgotten her worry that I had died.

The story has a very sad ending. Marty had decided that he would continue to care for Susan at home, a great stressor for him as it turned out, as he died suddenly of a heart attack. Jennifer and her family took over her mother's care but that eventually proved to be too much for even her, and Susan was placed in a care facility until her death.

What a tragic end for life-long friends.