

## The Last Gift, lost ...

Today I visit a favorite store in Glen Ellyn. It is a place where Bob bought me jewelry for special occasions, a place where the proprietor “knows my name” and knew his. It’s a place where, when I visited a few weeks after he died, the owner, Margo, asked, “and how’s Bob?” When I told her he had died she began to cry, came around the counter, and hugged me.

Today I am on a mission. I am on a mission to replace the last gift he bought me on Valentine’s Day 2016. He bought it three weeks before he passed to heaven. The gift is a beautiful bracelet with semi-precious stones of variable colors and designs, linked with silver so that it hangs loosely on my wrist. He wrote a Valentine message in an accompanying card which I keep in my Bible. I wear the bracelet every day. And every night I take it off with my watch and place it on the cherry red velvet seat of an antique chair in my bedroom, ready to be worn the next day.



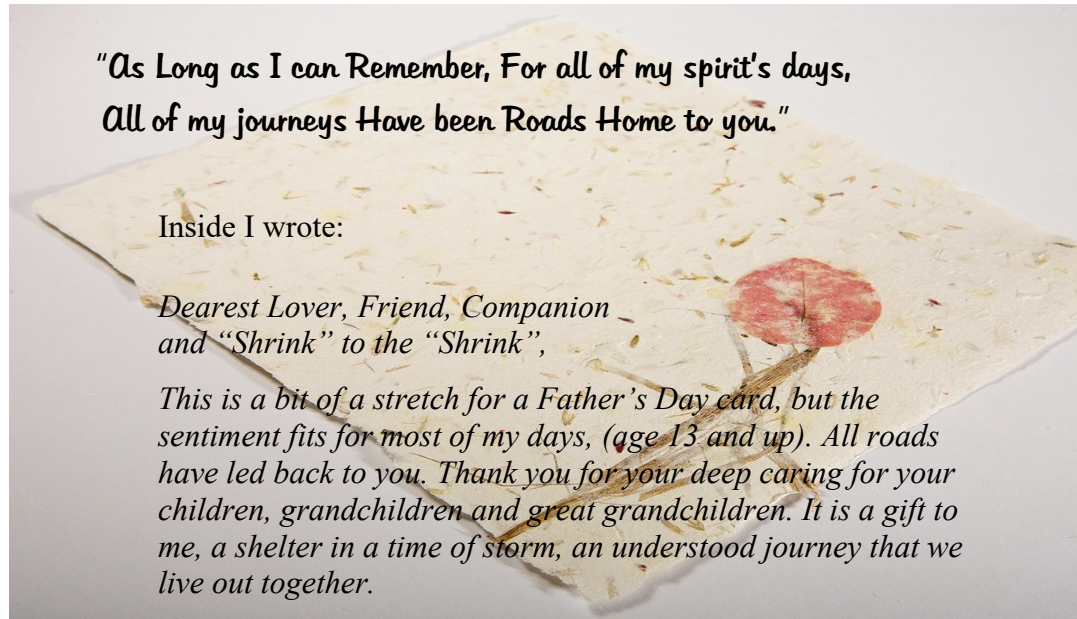
It is Thursday night, last. Without thinking, I remove my watch and reach for the clasp on my bracelet. The bracelet is missing. I am momentarily concerned but begin retracing my steps in the house. Did I inadvertently place it on another surface? Did it slide between a cushion? I search “Bob’s” big leather chair (now “my” chair) by the TV, scoot the ottoman

out of place, trek to the garage and hunt the crevices of the car, retrace my steps into the house, think which rooms I entered this Thursday evening. Then I remember - I was at the Glen Art theater, watched "A Star is Born," and earlier that day tried on a sweater at a local boutique. Friday morning I call the boutique, and they kindly search the dressing room. They'll call if it turns up. Friday evening I visit the theater and another helpful person looks through the lost and found box. Sunglasses, key chains, a few bracelets and single earrings tumble onto the candy counter.

Now I'm back at the gift shop. I tell Margo, the owner that I lost the bracelet, and I am crying as I explain. The tears startle me. I choke them back. It is a thing, after all. She is all caring business, understanding completely. We look through sample books of jewelry. She is utterly patient. We find the style and then the one that color-wise looks most like Bob's gift to me. I make a choice. We talk of life and loss. We talk about my house and how I think, right now it would break my heart to leave it, all the memories, the grandchildren sleeping in sleeping bags before the fire that Papa builds, the scones for breakfast, the hikes in the forest preserve. She tells me her dad lived in his house until he was 89 and that he felt safe and happy there all his life.

She cries with me at the loss of *her* loved ones and at the stories they leave behind. I order the bracelet. She comes around the counter and hugs me with tears.

At home I clean my kitchen desk, read through a basket of cards, and find one that I wrote to Bob on Father's Day, 2015. On the front it says:



Loss accumulates. It is lost bracelets, ordinary days of house silence, lone walks, seasons passing, empty chairs, laughter stilled, touch ended, an "understood journey" lived out alone. It is profound. I have no shame for tears that linger. I make no excuse for lament. But this morning the sun streams gold through the oaks, just now turning. Leaves flutter silent, true to Autumn's call. I cling, with confidence, to joy that surprises, present day provision, remembered love and future HOPE. 🍃

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