

Thursday Seven

My wife died on Good Friday, April 2.

We had simply left for a doctor's appointment one cold January morning. My wife had not been feeling well over the holidays. Within twenty-four hours she was in the air heading back to the medical facilities where she was being treated. I was there by early afternoon. The decision this time was to put her through a very intense radiation treatment to slow the growth of the tumors. She had some hard days in her future, but all it served to do was to slow the inevitable, ease some of her pain and discomfort, ultimately gave her some relief and maybe a little more time.

My wife had been diagnosed with a very aggressive type of cancer a year earlier and although she fought an incredibly courageous battle, the cancer was advanced and continued to spread quickly. This last episode had taken everything she had left. Unfortunately, she continued to deteriorate further from both the cancer and the treatments. The decision was made for her to enter end-of-life care, where she could at least be comfortable and pain free. Well, as pain free as one-can-be doped up like she was.

She had been air-flighted right after the New Year and I had spent the better part of the last four months with her three hundred miles from home. One of the great disadvantages of living in a mountain town is you don't have adequate medical care facilities, so you have to go where those facilities are.

Because she had left so abruptly, for what we thought would be just another doctor visit, she didn't have a chance to gather her personal items or finish chores she started. On the kitchen table sat the grocery list she had made for us to pick up on our way back home from a treatment. I'm sure she was fully expecting to come back home. Do her usual daily routine. But, she never did.

Picking up the pieces afterward is always a blur. The everyday life you take for granted. Coat still on the rack. Keys on the table. Clothes about. There is no way to describe the felling of walking through the empty house. Knowing she is never coming back. Seeing her items everywhere as she had left them.

I took a few days to gather it all in, but I knew I had to start the process. I had to go through her "stuff." Fortunately she had given me a punch list of what to do, like donating all her clothes to the local thrift shop for one.

It is amazing what we accumulate during our life and seems to gather as we go along. My wife and I were very adamant about not accumulating and were vigilant about getting rid of anything and everything, either by donating or

tossing out. The whole ordeal left me to wonder what someone would think going through my “stuff.” Maybe, I should start cleaning mine up now.

In my travels through her things, I came across a note that simply said: *Thursday Seven*, in her handwriting on a small piece of paper. I went back to the task at hand. Dresser drawers and closets were easy, clothes and things mostly already had a designation. Desk drawers filled with papers and other objects one gathers over time. Donated what made sense, trashed others and simply kept some. Well, because I wanted too.

The piece of paper now sat on top of her desk. I sat in her chair at her desk and stared at the paper. I thought about those two words. Maybe a doctor’s appointment? I checked her calendar. My wife was a very meticulous person and kept very copious notes and details of appointments. No, nothing there on any of the last Thursdays. I checked into January and back into December of the prior year. Nothing there to give me any clues to its meaning. The note was obviously written before we left that fateful morning. It must have had to do with something in the past.

I went back to my task of finishing her desk. I closed her accounts. Filed the death certificate with those that needed one. All so much paper, is that all a life is? So much paper?

Next, I moved on to other parts of the house. The kitchen, her teas of every kind, I gave to a neighbor. I only drank tea when she said I had too. Specialty items she liked to eat. The bathroom had all those girly things every woman has. Her makeup. Toiletries. The usual things you would find in the bathroom. I did what I could. The local pharmacy took all of her meds so they could be properly disposed off. I donated her special medical equipment to a local hospital unit to recycle to a needy patient(s).

My task, I thought, was finished. It had taken over a week to do that much. There were still many memories of her around. The bedding was picked by her. The furnishings. All her, of course. A package had come for her while we were gone I had put aside. I finally opened it. Inside was a curtain and rod she had ordered for something.

The note continued to sit on her desk with those simple two words: *Thursday Seven*. I wondered if it was some kind of med schedule. Maybe, something like on Thursday she needed to take seven pills or seven combinations of meds. But, I had no way to verify. I pushed the note around got up and left the paper on her desk.

Going through her files – all so much paper we keep – I had fond memories, sad moments and generally a picture of her and our time together. I

decided right then and there, I was going to destroy every piece of paper I had so someone else wouldn't have to do this after. But, simply smiled at the absurdity of the thought.

A couple of more weeks went by. I settled back into my normal life. What the hell is normal after the death of a loved one? Back on the job. Normal daily activities. A little recreation. Meeting up with friends. Moving along day by day.

The mail brought another stack of her medical costs. The never-ending insurance statements. I had an organized filing system of her medical journey consolidating the events where I filed each of these bundles of papers. I now had a rather large stack to organize and file away. And there sat the note.

I sat down in her chair in front of her desk and looked at the note. Picking the piece of paper up and turning it in my hand. I looked at the back, but it was blank. All it said on the front was *Thursday Seven*. No date and really no indication of when it may have been written or why. What did it all mean? Certainly her handwriting. Had she started something or simply made a quick note? But, of what? Finally, I placed the note back down on her desk right next to the stack of papers still to be filed.

On a following Saturday, as I was doing the man's version of cleaning the house, I was working in our office and decided I needed to take care of those medical papers. After I finished the cleaning, I went back to the office and sat at her desk. I gathered the file box and set about to get those papers into the right event folders.

I usually took a cursory glance at each sheet, both to determine which folder this needed to be filed in and basically to see what this one covered or was about. Because each treatment required a slew of activities, it appeared each step had their own set of papers. The MRIs, the CAT scans, the blood work, xrays, radiation treatments, doctor(s) follow ups, oncologist, the specialist, various office visits, hospital stays and of course, the treatment itself. Each step had its own piles of paper.

During the battle, she had been accepted into an experimental chemo treatment specific to her type of cancer. This required follow-ups. Pre testing. Pre blood work. After testing. After blood work. I had created a separate event folder for those treatments and even though it happened the previous summer, I was still getting paper on it.

I had everything sorted into their specific events and had each stack spread out to file into their respective folder. As usual I looked the paper over before inserting it in. The papers for that treatment were quite thick and as I

went through them, I came across a report from the doctor's office giving a rundown on the treatment progress.

Basically we would go down—three hundred miles away—on a day or two before, and usually on Friday she would have the MRI and CAT scan and whatever other tests were required. Monday we would report to the doctor's office. She would be fitted with the twenty-four hour chemo pump. After which we would go back to the place we were staying locally for the night. Tuesday we would go back and the pump would be removed. She would then be poked and prodded with a battery of tests. Once finished, we would immediately head back to our home as she became very nauseous from the chemo. About the time we arrived home, usually six hours of traveling time, she would be worn out, literally spending the next couple of days in bed. By the end of the week she would start to feel better and her routine was to call the treatment doctor's office to get an update from the staff.

In the stack of those forms was a piece of paper from the doctor's office with details of her treatment that week. It looked like something we may have picked up on a subsequent visit, as there were notes in ink. I checked the date on the form and traced it back to a Thursday. My curiosity perked up and I scanned the form for more information and there it was. Among the items on the form was a line circled in blue ink, which stated that her tumors had shrunk seven percent since the previous visit.

She must have called on Thursday and had been told the tumors had shrunk seven percent, which she had written on the paper as a quick note, simply *Thursday Seven*.

I checked her emails around the date and sure enough she had sent emails to close friends and family excited about the positive report. These treatments were apparently working, however painful and all encompassing they may have been. A truly happy day. The battle may not have been won, but a victory was scored that day and she had simply noted it.

I put the piece of paper with the simple words: *Thursday Seven* on the stack to be filed with the rest of the papers for that event. Closing the folder I placed it back into the file box, satisfied that I finally knew what it meant and the knowledge, at least on that day, she must have been very happy. Of all the items I found in her papers that one more than any other brought a smile to my face and another tear to my eye.