

WORDS AND PHRASES we shared with our loved one

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When your loved one died, you lost so much. This brief article is about one of those losses: the loss of words and phrases we shared with that precious person.

Let me start off with a story. When I was 5 or 6 years old, one day my mother said to me, “Do you know what a boy’s best friend is?”

I said something like, “I don’t know—like a dog or something?”

She responded, “No, a boy’s best friend is his mother.”

I probably shrugged and said, “Okay.”

As the years went by, she would ask the same question maybe once or twice a year. So, at age 11 or 15 or 20, I would answer, “Yeah, I know—his mother.”

Fast forward 25+ years and my mother at age 66 ended up with terminal cancer and a stroke on top of it. She could not take food by mouth so she needed tube feedings every four hours. With a live-in nurse we were able to keep her at home. To help the nurse, each of us four siblings would stay overnight to give her feedings at 10 p.m., 2 a.m. and 6 a.m.

Many nights I remember being asleep on the couch when, at 2 a.m., the clock would jangle me awake. I then prepare the feeding and stumble into Mom’s room. She gradually awakens, realizing it’s that time again. As I hover over her, I lean in and whisper in her ear, “What’s a boy’s best friend?” and, groggy as she is, she always responds, “His mother.”

Every time I share this story in one of my workshops, I still feel the emotion of that moment—an intimate exchange between a son and his mother.



There is a term for the shared understanding of words and phrases between two human beings. It's called Shared Knowledge Structure.

It is a type of short-hand communication whereby one person utters a word or a phrase and the other person knows exactly what is meant.

It is what my mother and I had with that simple question and answer. It is one of the thousand things I lost when she died.

Here is my question to you: "What words and phrases did you share with your loved one?"

I don't have to tell you, those words will continue to be precious long after your loved one died. Yes, it is a loss, but these shared memories tell us that our loved one still lives on in our mind and our heart.

And, isn't that what love is all about?