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Views: One Marriage To Another

A friend of mine lost her husband the other day. I watched as their 54 years of marriage saw its final days. In the shadow of this life-shattering event, my partner and I made the final preparations for our wedding. It was as if there could only be a finite number of marriages in the universe. One marriage had to end before another could begin.

Although this seems unrelated, I have a confession to make. The weeks around September 11, 2001 were some of the happiest in my life. On August 1st, I had met the woman I would marry. Within four weeks, I was arranging to move from Alaska to join her in Los Angeles. The horrors of 9/11 could not darken the glow inside of me. I was so blissfully happy and hopeful I could hardly breathe. And then I watched the destruction that day. Overwhelmed, sick with the loss, I could not fathom the breathtaking despair for those who would learn that their partner was in that hellhole and would never come home. Yet *for me*, I was as happy as I'd ever been. The incongruity of emotions was powerful and troubling.

Last month, as my friend's husband quickly faded, I was reminded of that incompatible conflict of feelings that had washed over me after 9/11. As our wedding neared and my partner and I seemed to be more in love each day, my friend made the

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final arrangements to lose her husband. They had been inseparable companions since a blind date in 1951. I felt the pending loneliness envelop her as the hospice nurses gently moved in. They taught her about the oxygen tank and the respirator, and he helplessly watched from the hospital bed that now filled their sunny kitchen. Her family closed ranks and helped in the daily

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routine of caring for this dearly loved, dying man. The house was full of food and flowers. Well wishers called and stopped by. In my parallel universe, our families were about to gather for a great wedding party to celebrate us, with food, flowers, and gifts.

And then I watched with utter sadness as my friend saw her companion slip away. One morning, he did not wake. It was over. The loss was complete. And my partner and I left town for our Canadian wedding. One marriage died and another was born.

We are married now and incredibly happy. In a twisted way, I am envious of my friend. She had more than a half-century to share with the one love of her life. Becky and I met in our 40s, and I fear we will not have fifty years together. For all the time that we have, though, I vow each day to carry on the great love affair that I glimpsed in my friend's devoted marriage. Far from being a threat to our society, I believe that my marriage is the continuation of an incredible, enduring love affair

that has been passed along from the beginning of time. ▼

Susan McMillan married Becky Roberts in Sault Ste. Marie on June 29. McMillan is the volunteer assistant editor of Out in the Mountains.

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