

### The Little Things

Jasmina is a seventy-nine-year-old woman who immigrated to the United States from Serbo-Croatia decades ago. For the past four years, she has lived in a board and care home. When I introduced myself to her on my first visit, she repeated my name, “Susan—that’s a sad name.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“In my language, *susan* means sad,” she explained.

“Could that be right?” I wondered. My Google searches later were inconclusive. Fortunately, I happen to have an acquaintance who is also originally from Serbo-Croatia. Marko confirmed that in his language *susan* does mean sad. “But you must understand,” he added, “words for ‘sorrow’ in my language are like words for ‘snow’ in Eskimo languages. We have many words for sorrow.”

Sorrow indeed characterized much of what Jasmina shared with me. She is recuperating from a disfiguring surgery that removed a cancerous tumor, has become blind in the last several years, has no family in this country, and is often lonely. She expressed that she has lost her will to live. After we explored these experiences, I asked her, “Is there anything that helps when you’re feeling down?”

“Breakfast,” she replied.

“Breakfast?” I said, inviting her to say more.

“They make really good breakfasts here,” she explained.

“Oh?” I responded.

“Yes, with eggs and toast, coffee and juice,” she elaborated.

We moved on to discussing her desire to reconnect with her church, but she is not in a position to make that happen. I offered to read her some prayers, and she readily agreed. After getting started, she slowed me down, repeating every line after me. “The Lord is my shepherd,” I said. “The Lord is my shepherd,” she’d repeat. “I shall not want,” I recited. “I shall not want,” she repeated, and so we continued.

When we finished, she requested that we talk about the prayer, line by line, then say the whole prayer again—in the pattern of my saying a line and her repeating it. She sought to memorize the prayer, to integrate it within her, to savor the words now in order to know them well enough to savor them later.

I am moved by Jasmina’s strategy for coping with her deep suffering: pay attention, notice, appreciate, savor the little things, contemplate. She inspires me to reflect on my own life. Though I do not suffer the way Jasmina does, I can learn from her about slowing down enough to appreciate life’s nuances.

Jasmina does notice and experience many nuances of sorrow. Can I notice

## THE SOUL OF A CHAPLAIN

and appreciate the many shades of sorrow experienced by the patients I visit? My hope for Jasmina is that life's small pleasures, such as breakfast and savoring the lines of an age-old prayer, can be a source of comfort and reassurance. My hope for myself is that *I* remember to savor breakfast as well as the many little joys and delights scattered throughout my day. A reflection from Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of mindfulness-based stress reduction, is quite fitting here. As he teaches, "The little things? The little moments? They aren't little."

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