

Essay/Personal Reflection

Cite this article: Rousseau P (2023). Blips. On the death of my wife. *Palliative and Supportive Care* **21**, 361. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478951522000487>

Received: 9 March 2022

Accepted: 5 April 2022

Author for correspondence:

Paul Rousseau,
Palliative Care, 1541 Wakendaw Road,
Mount Pleasant, Charleston, SC 29464, USA.
E-mail: palliativedoctor@aol.com

The heart monitor glows fluorescent.

Blip, blip, blip.

I am sitting on the floor. It is a solid, secure floor, with large green tiles. The walls are also green, as are the cabinets. The uniform color reminds me where I am.

Blip, blip, blip.

I am unsettled, although the measured cadence of the *blips* is calming. They are a link to normalcy. Outside, a rain falls with weight. The droplets pelt the window. I observe their glistening dollops until a smack of thunder shudders my body. I glance at the clock. It has been three hours since life support was withdrawn. “It could be minutes, it could be hours, it could be days before she dies,” they had cautioned. I have the time. So does she.

Blip, blip, blip.

A chaplain visits. He carries a worn Bible. I profess a lack of faith. Still, he imposes. “Do you want to pray?” “No, I do not want to pray.” He persists. “No,” I cry, angrily, “I do not want to pray.” We sit in stilted silence. “I need to be alone, please.” He slips out the door. I wonder if I should have prayed.

I rise from the floor and glimpse myself in a mirror. I swivel my head side to side. My hair is disheveled, my brow furrowed, my eyes red and surrendered. Dry spittle specks the corners of my mouth. I do not recognize the face. A dog-eared photograph is wedged in the margin of the mirror. It is a photograph of me and our two daughters. I look away. I do not feel like a husband or a father; I feel helpless.

Blip, blip—blip.

Disturbed *blips*. I glance at the heart monitor.

Blip—blip—blip, blip—blip.

I feel a pounding in my temples. I am frantic; I want to disappear. A nurse enters the room and grabs my arm, gently. “Her heart is slowing.” My shoulders slump. I taste the salt of tears.

Blip—blip—

A soft moan crosses her lips. I lean forward and take a breath of her last breath.