

Conversations with strangers, hairdresser edition

By [Ruth Everhart](#)

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While I waited for my hair appointment, I chatted with two women over the magazines. They mentioned they were sisters, so I said, "How nice to make your hair a family affair."

"It *is* nice, but it's not for a nice reason. Our mother died the other day."

I felt surprised at this, and glanced at the other sister. Tears sprang from the woman's eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She wiped them with the back of her hand. She said, in a still-stunned voice, "She was only 90."

"You're never ready to lose someone you love," I agreed.

They told me all about their mom, how she had dementia, and had a cough that turned out to be stage IV cancer. How their father took care of her at first, but he's 92, and had a broken neck himself. So eventually they moved Mom into one sister's home. One sister quit her job in order to help with the care full time.

"We fed her well right up to the end," one said.

The other nodded with satisfaction. "And we surrounded her with love."

"That's obvious," I said. "It's obvious how much you loved her."

Fresh tears rolled down their faces. "I'm worried about Dad. What will he do without her?"

"At least they got to celebrate their 70th anniversary. It was last November, about the time she was diagnosed. Oh, she died too soon!"

"But she saw her new grandbaby, remember. She got to meet her."

I watched them grieve, together and separately, finding bits of solace and offering them to each other, like a piece of music passing the melody line from soprano to tenor and back again.

Then it was time for my haircut. Jen put a cape around my neck. Jen's an artist when she isn't cutting hair, and a priest-confessor when she is. We usually talk about love and death and art. We ask each other the questions all artists should ask each other, but seldom do. Plus I get a haircut.

I told Jen: "The women over there are sisters who just lost their mother."

Jen groaned and shook her head. "It's always too soon," she said. "Always."

To think I get to inhabit the planet with such giants, these ordinary people who know what love is.

*Originally posted at [Love the Work \(do the work\)](#)*