

By Kathleen M. Pike, PhD
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Five *on* Friday

Musings on Mental Health

Grazie, Gaby

This week I write from Bologna, one of the places that I call home. It is almost 40 years ago that I arrived as a university student. Gabriella Conti was in search of an English tutor for her young sons in exchange for room and board. It was a match made in heaven.



On Tuesday of this week, Gaby left the worries of this world behind. She died peacefully with family around her. There are volumes written about the psychology of death and dying that I need not reproduce here. The best I can do is share a few reflections from the last five days.

1. Lunedì: Gratitudine | Monday: Gratitude. Andrea, Gaby's eldest son, and I had been in frequent contact over the past few weeks. I was already planning to visit for Gaby's 80th birthday on October 6th, but last week he said that if I could arrive sooner, it would be better. I am grateful that I was able to be with Gaby on Monday evening. We reminisced. We talked about her second book that is in press. She asked about each of my kids. We reviewed the menu for her upcoming birthday. Seared in my memory, I see Gaby's three sons, who are grown men now, standing around her as I held her hand. She looking at them. They at her. A moment of silence. As her doctor said, the truth is not spoken, it is communicated.

2. Martedì: Paradosso | Tuesday: Paradox. With one of her sons at her side, Gaby died

in the wee hours of Tuesday. Anticipated. Surreal. A universal part of life that remains enigmatic. I don't understand and years ago stopped searching for certainty. Accepted not knowing. Paradoxical peace. No doubt she died. No doubt she is not gone.

3. Mercoledì: Prima di partire | Wednesday: Before you go. A chance to say goodbye one last time to the body that held your spirit. How much you are loved. Admired. Respected. Your sons. Your sister. Your daughters-in-law. Your extended family. Your friends. Your beneficiaries. Standing around your body bearing witness.

4. Giovedì: Onore | Thursday: Honor. I remember talking with a rabbi many years ago. In contrast to other life milestones, he commented that when a loved one dies, those who remain, more than anything else, want to "get it right." Your funeral was just right.

5. Venerdì: la Parrucchiera | Friday: The Hairdresser. Little did I know when I scheduled to go to the hairdresser this morning that I filled your weekly appointment, which was lying open. Gaby, in all you did, you were present. You filled a room with your presence. And now, your absence is present in so many places. We will fill in where we can. Give us some time. We will carry you with us. You taught us well.

I write this from Via Belmeloro, sitting in the café at The Johns Hopkins Bologna Center where Gaby and I met nearly forty years ago. Life is a journey back home.