

The Quiet Steady Friend
By Patti Hummel

My Don was sick when we married, and we were unable to secure mortgage insurance. His death impacted every cell in my body, but also I was left with a stack of medical bills with no help from anyone. I recall looking at those bills and crying so hard that my face hurt. "God, what am I going to do?" Added to the mountain of debts, my kids needed me, and there was other "stuff" that required my attention. In those twelve years of being married to a man critically ill much of the time, I had become terribly weary. I was on the brink of physical and mental exhaustion; however people kept telling me how strong I was so I continued pushing hard to keep things looking normal on the surface. All the while, the depth of my weary soul began to cave in and I was ill equipped to handle the onslaught of suffering inside myself. I did not want to be strong: I wanted to waddle in my pain for a while, to take a break from life and rest for a while. I wanted some time to myself, time when I wasn't up half the night doing laundry, cleaning house, or preparing meals at 3 AM. I found myself sleeping less, unable to see how anyone, even God could get me out of the mess my life had become.

Life was hard, but God had not left me to face the days alone. Joan, a dear friend called at a time when no one else could have done for me what she did. She said, "I don't understand what you are going through, but I'm here to listen to you cry, and to cry with you, if that will help." And we did just that! Together, we cried for an hour and she listened as I talked about my Don, my children, and the ways they were suffering over the death of their father. I don't recall another person ever asking me how the children were dealing emotionally with losing their dad. The tears stopped and we laughed and enjoyed good fellowship. That was twenty-five years ago but I have recalled it many times as I share with others the need to just be a friend. A friend who might not understand, but who is there to listen, to share tears, and to laugh! That time with Joan has remained a source of strength for me over the years.