

Cousin Mary knew a thing or two. Or a million. She seemed to know things before you even knew them. Like this email she sent to me when I was in the depths of mothering three very little boys: She writes: "Isn't this the best time of your life ever? Even with the exhaustion and chaos and overwhelming stuff that never ends with young children? (Hope I've caught you on a good day as I write this). Relish this incredibly precious time of life.... you've heard it before, but it's true, they grow up and that is also wonderful, but there is nothing quite like the moments you are having now."

And of course Mary knew that from experience because her entire life was dedicated to loving and caring for others, in the midst of exhaustion and chaos and overwhelming stuff. And she loved every minute of being a wife, a mother, a sister, a friend. She relished her life. Which is why it seems especially cruel that her life ended simply way too soon. And it's a really big deal that she's gone. There is no question that there wasn't nearly enough time with her, that it's not fair, or right, or even believable.

One might find that regret creeps in at times like these. "I should've called more, visited more, spent more time..." And all the things that "could've been" threaten to drown you. But Mary, in an instant, would wave it all away. And probably offer you some tea. She'd say, oh so comfortingly, "I know, I know, I know." Mary always knew. She would listen then say, "Yes, yes, I understand." And every time, you believed her and you felt better.

In a world so often filled with judgment, and sizing up, and better-than, she got right down to the heart of what actually matters- kindness, love, acceptance. She was an unwavering cheering section. Her laugh was like music, like light. So now, when you wonder who you'll call, who you'll tell, who'll you'll ask to make it better, and when you think about all the things that will not be, that will instead have to be imagined, remembered, in those lonely moments when you think, "She should be here. She would have loved this." It's my prayer that you'll hear her voice still, And feel her presence like a seal on your heart.

Like a scripture in Solomon says: "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away."

What Mary knew, she left us to learn It's her gift, her legacy: To see the good in everyone. To cheer on those you love. To be kind. To be a soft place to land.

I think she taught us well.