

Regrets



by Joan Seliger Sidney, PhD

I stare out the window of my pine-paneled study.
Half the hemlock waves in wind, the rest hides
behind the side of the house. What others see,
smiles or frowns, dress-up or dress-down clothes
conceal or reveal what I choose to show.
I shudder to remember how I hid the truth

of my illness from Mom and Dad, afraid truth
would hurt them. Holocaust survivors. An A+ student
through my PhD, I believed I had to be perfect, not show
I had MS, a disease their 60-ish neighbor couldn't hide.
Despite her life bound to a wheelchair, she was clothed
in love from her husband and mother. Mom and Dad saw,

admired their devotion. But Mom's words chain-sawed
through: "What a terrible old age for her mother!" True.
As my legs grew weaker, how could I disclose?
"I'm too busy to walk with you," I lied, staying in my study.
"Your legs will forget how," Mom said, not hiding
her annoyance. But how could I let my jello-legs show?

A mistake I can't take back, too late to show
how, in my late 40s, I tried to protect them from seeing
my leg muscles tighten, refuse to make another step, by hiding
in front of my desktop computer screen to block truth

or by pulling pachysandra from the walk outside my study
on hands and knees, sweating in summer clothes.

Dad passed at 80, two years later. I tore my clothes,
sat shiva with Mom, letting our love show.
From our hearts we talked, sitting on the sofa in my study.
“We thought you didn’t love us. We didn’t see
you couldn’t walk.” I pulled Mom close. “Not true!
I didn’t want you to see and suffer, so I hid.”

“Come live with me in Delray Beach. Stop hiding.
I’ll care for you, bring this nightmare to a close.”
If only this could come true.
But I know MS is showier:
Secondary Progressive, my neurologists saw.
Not even Mom’s love could undo medical studies.

A lifetime can’t hide mistakes that don’t show.
This truth pursues me like a door that won’t close.
Alone in my pine-paneled study, this is what I see.

Did you know?

This poem is a sestina, an intricate form used by many poets, including Dante, across the ages. In a sestina, the end words of each line recur in a strict pattern based on sixes. However, within this pattern, the poet can play with variations of each word (such as “see” and “saw”).

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Read a discussion on [when, why and how to disclose your MS](#).

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