

Playing Scrabble

The first hospice patient I ever visited was 92-year-old Ms. E. One of her remaining pleasures in life was playing Scrabble. And so that was the "support" I provided: companionship in the form of Scrabble.

When I arrived on a typical Tuesday evening, Ms. E. was usually finishing her meal, half-watching *MASH* reruns. We would make casual small-talk ("*How are you?*" "*How was today?*") as she finished sipping her hot tea. Sitting at the table in her one-bedroom apartment, I would open the Scrabble box, pull out the tiles and flip each one over to hide the letter on the other side.

The *MASH* reruns continued once she joined me at the table, providing the backdrop for our games. Ms. E. was an adept wordsmith when we first began playing, but as the weekly visits continued, the length between our turns increased. Seemingly searching for words that used to come easily, she would sometimes make questionable plays. Wanting to be a fair opponent, I would push, "Ms. E., are you sure that's a word?" More often than not, she would assure me that her play was in fact a real word and the game would continue.

I remember there was one word she played on a Tuesday halfway into December that I knew was not in any dictionary but certainly should be in them all. Ms. E. had six tiles left for the last play of the game and her hand, holding a *G* tile, moved toward *JOY*. Next came *A*, and *L* and *O*. My confusion faded with the last two letters: *R* and *E*.

JOYGALORE

An abundance of joy.

I smiled at the profoundly simple magnitude of that moment, calculated the points, and congratulated Ms. E. on the win.