

## ***Remembering Wilma Faulk***

Wilma was asleep when I came inside her room at Mother Joseph Care Center. How different she looked from the last time I saw her in church compared to now seeing her on bed looking so fragile after the stroke. I studied her face and small framed body for a few minutes and got prompted to run my fingers through her thin gray hair. A bruise on her face apparently from the fall brought an ache within. I closed my eyes to reminisce her well-known winning smile and a surge of warmth enveloped my being. Memories of her and Ernie I have relished so tenderly within my soul – this wonderful couple whom I have considered an extension to my family.

Wilma stirred, opened her eyes and saw me standing on the side. I decided to sit beside on the side of the bed as she had difficulty hearing. Unspoken words were compensated by her captivating smile and her gentle squeezing of my hand. I took this opportunity to just look at her and listened to her every move. I was glad she was alert and though words came out somewhat in muffled sounds, my heart understood what she wanted to convey. That kindred spirit between us filled the gap of unspoken words. GOD offered understanding of simple sounds and made it possible for us to share that moment of peace and serenity in His caring embrace.

Wilma welcomed the wishes of friends that I brought along during my visits. There was always that wonderful smile and a gentle squeeze when I said a name or two. My heart understood her simple responses but Ernie understood the most. He came later that day.

It was so wonderful to see their love in the midst of trials. I saw that undying devotion on Ernie's face whenever he looked at Wilma. In turn, she would give him the sweetest smile he so adored. This alone brought satisfaction and contentment to his soul which needed tending on his own. Even now when he opens his wallet and looks at the woman he married more than 63 years ago, his mind dances in the rhythm of love eternal.

Ernie and Wilma savored and basked in the LORD's touch. I witnessed this blessed togetherness in church or when I visited them in their home. It was the same togetherness I watched at the convalescent center. Their strong faith in the LORD bound them strongly.

Leaving both Wilma and Ernie at the center sometimes brought a challenge on my part but their togetherness filled the emptiness and the pangs in my soul. How I ached for their beautiful love! Seeing their gentle love for each other was seeing GOD's affection.

Ernie was the encouraging support for his wife every day. He was there as a coach, mentor, cheerleader, inspirer for all the little achievements she accomplished each day. To see Wilma learn again how to hold a spoon or fork invigorated his soul to do more for the one he loved. He was diligent in his aim to take care of her needs and his prayers for her comfort were unceasing.

Ernie would stay until Wilma closed her eyes for the night. In the morning he was there to greet her with his usual encouragements, making her smile, coaxing her to eat. He was her tireless coach – always motivating, inspiring, encouraging. Their love deepened more each day.

My smiles were unending when I would see Ernie feeding Wilma. She often looked at him with the glint in her eyes and without a word gave him that radiant smile. I knew this captivated his heart. The lack of words was compensated by the exchanges of smiles. Always when their eyes interlocked time got suspended and witnessing this was indeed a special blessing and inspiration. It was seeing GOD's beautiful love. GOD's touch was there for both of them. How I thanked Him profusely so! He made them be together – in joyful occasions and in predicaments such as this. Their faith in the ALMIGHTY was so contagious to behold.

The day Wilma passed away there was no doubt that JESUS was the One who welcomed her at heaven's gates.

These days, Ernie looks at Wilma's pictures and remembers her ever-contagious smiles in mind and heart. Though sad, he is forever grateful to the LORD for giving his wife the comfort she needed. His faith in Him never diminishes but gets deepened and stronger each day. He knows that with the LORD, Wilma has eternal joy and peace; and the thought of the LORD JESUS being near his beloved warms his soul and makes him live!

GOD be praised!