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my cousin,
succumbed to death and
a new existence.
How gently and graciously
she left all her attachments behind.

I recently came to a new understanding of the word “attachment.” It took on new meaning as I reflected on the death of a favorite first cousin. She was 86 years old. I had always felt uniquely attached to her, though we were nearly 20 years apart.

About two years ago, she made a specific decision about her cancer prognosis, which was to do very little by way of treatment. The reality of her leaving caused a growing sadness. To me, she had been a picture of my mother’s family, the black and white pictures of the 1920’s and 30’s, a time of struggle yet wonderful family fun and growth and support, laughter and music, frequent visiting and parties, shared garden crops, harvest and canning sessions, wedding dances and rustic picnics, swimming in the river and tobogganing on the hay field hills.

These pictures never change. They come back to me in my mind, and are permanently etched in my life experience.

Attachment

My cousin was also a “location.” She had always lived in the same small town and the same one story house.

The same trees and brook are still there by the house, flower boxes under the living room window, and the one car garage. Nothing could be more permanent. Always there too, the invitation to stop in, the meeting on the screened porch, the welcome hug, the couches, those pictures on the walls and the laughter and love in conversation.

“Every meeting implies a departure some day.”

Siddhartha

Last week, death arrived at that same door to deliver a permanent change. She is gone. A friend and constant, my cousin, succumbed to death and a new existence. How gently and graciously she left all her attachments behind.

During her last two years of preparation, she was writing a book — spiral notebooks, about 40 pages each, hand copied — to be distributed after her death to her

children, grandchildren, and a few lucky acquaintances (*others including me*). I’m guessing about 15 books in all. Among the pages, she included copies of photos to illustrate. It’s all there in black and white, highlights of her life story from her point of view and that of the camera. Her book is truly something for all of us to hang on to as a memory.

The death of my cousin has, in ways, enriched my view of her, of the past, clarifying my understanding of our connection and more, our friendship. Now that she is gone,



I see more clearly the things that caused me to feel such a closeness to her, and an attachment, clarified by her departure.