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Each year I jumpstart my Christmas mood by having Christmas music playing continuously. When I walk away from my desk, I'm amazed to realize I hear myself singing the carol I've just heard.

This year is no different, even though my life has changed drastically. I'm at peace and can speak as freely about inner joy today as I did a year ago. I write that even though the biggest event of this year was Shirley's death.

We'd known from the beginning of our long marriage that I would likely outlive her. As painful as it was to me, we faced that inevitability several times. More than once she assured me, "I'm ready to go."

A couple of months after Shirley died, I had a dream in which both of us started to leave a building. I could see our car in front, but I forgot something and went back to get it. When I came outside, I couldn't see her. I called her name and looked everywhere.

Just then a deep voice behind me said, "She's gone on ahead."

I think of that dream often and it gives me deep peace.

Before I close off this letter, I want to thank many of you for your initial responses to my grief. The kindness and love shown to me has been far more than I would have imagined.

Cecil (Cec) Murphey

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