

Praise for *The Hospice Doctor's Widow*

“A beautiful tribute to caregivers and survivors.”

— Rachel Reichblum, founder of That Good Grief

“I am spellbound by this wonderful book. I finished it in one evening because I couldn't stop turning pages to see what special thoughts and collaged items were next. It made me cry . . . but that's okay.”

— Diana B. Denholm, PhD, author of *The Caregiving Wife's Handbook*

“Altogether different from the many books which address grief and loss from psychological or philosophical points of view, *The Hospice Doctor's Widow* is a collage of experiences, documents, tips, and those thoughts many have but few acknowledge. O'Brien's singularly moving and beautiful book maps one woman's journey, illuminating the road that lies ahead for all of us.”

— Nina Corwin, LCSW, Author of *The Uncertainty of Maps*

“Eloquent and intimate. Informative without the trappings of self-help.”

— Marney Rich Keenan, retired career columnist for *The Detroit News*

“This raw and beautiful book describes loving someone that you know you will lose. Just as life is full of pain and joy, so is caregiving and navigating this ‘other world’ of life with a serious illness. *The Hospice Doctor's Widow* encourages early and honest conversations and can help with meaningful time together as well as preparations.”

— Sarah Beth Harrington, MD, Program Director – Palliative Care,
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

“This resource fills a gap between what I provide for my patients and what their family caregivers need. I have kept my advance copy and loaned it to each of the caregivers for the three patients I recently diagnosed with ALS.” — Robert Silzer, MD, Neurologist

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for the survivors
forever changed, still here



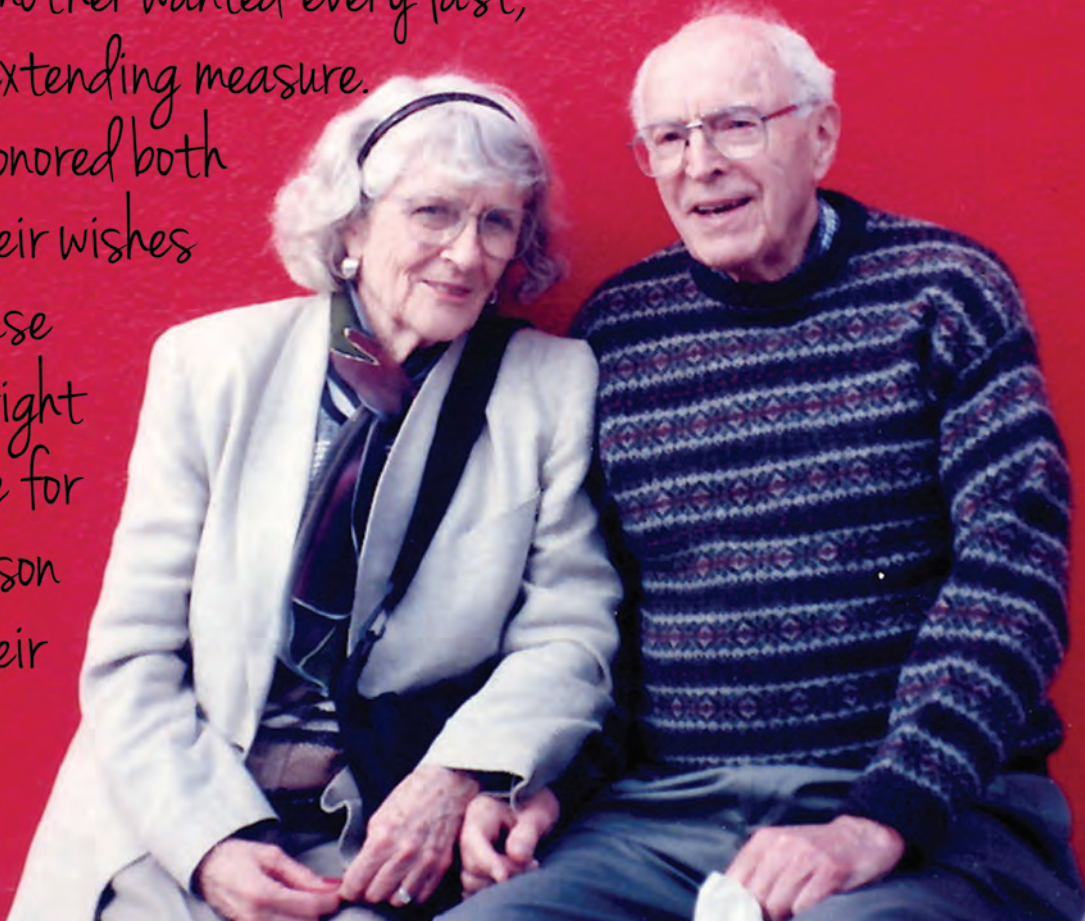
He helps patients understand the personalization of end-of-life choices by telling them about his own parents.

"My dad wanted only to be kept comfortable.

My mother wanted every last, life-extending measure.

We honored both of their wishes

because the right choice for a person is their own."



Desiderata by Max Ehrmann

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He keeps a sheet of paper with this poem on it in a drawer in our bathroom.

We read it to each other most mornings when we are getting ready for work.

Sometimes we read it in a silly voice, sometimes in a serious one.

Either way, it's a meaningful moment together.
Centers us for the day we each have ahead.

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e-mail update

Sent: March 12

To: Family and Friends

Subject: Initial Diagnosis

Yesterday we had a visit with the oncologist. We learned that the origin of the malignant, metastatic tumor is renal. This is much better news than what we were told on Tuesday night, which was that the origin was unknown and could be melanoma.

Brain MRI this morning was clear, which was expected.

Tomorrow morning is the PET scan which is another big rule-out opportunity. If no big operative masses show up on that, then no surgery.

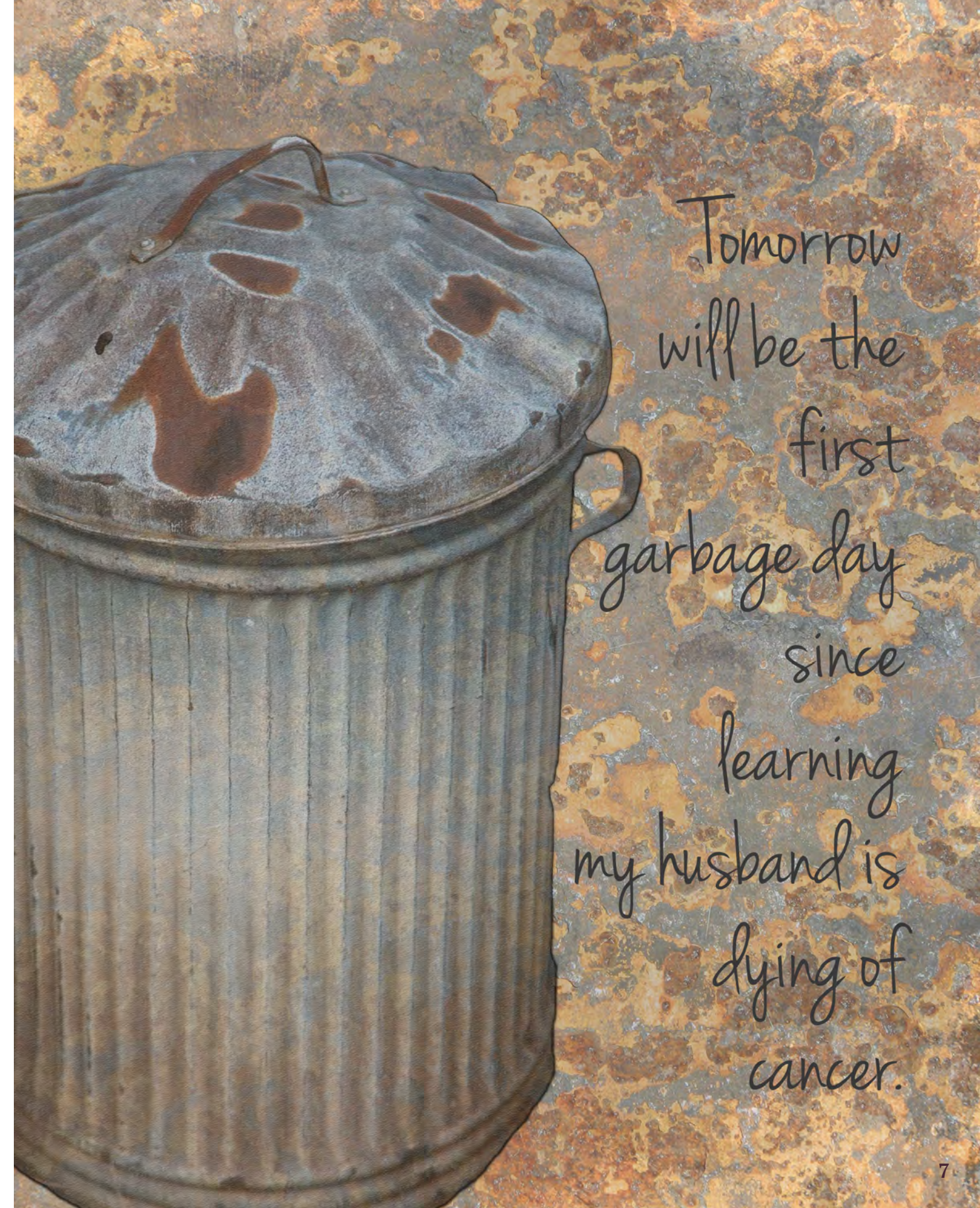
The pathology is being sent to a lab in Houston, where they will analyze it for a possible medication match (sometimes they select the medication based on the genetic make up of the tumor(s)). This will take a couple of weeks.

We still have a very long, potentially rough road ahead but this news is very good.

Some renal cancers can be cured with medication.

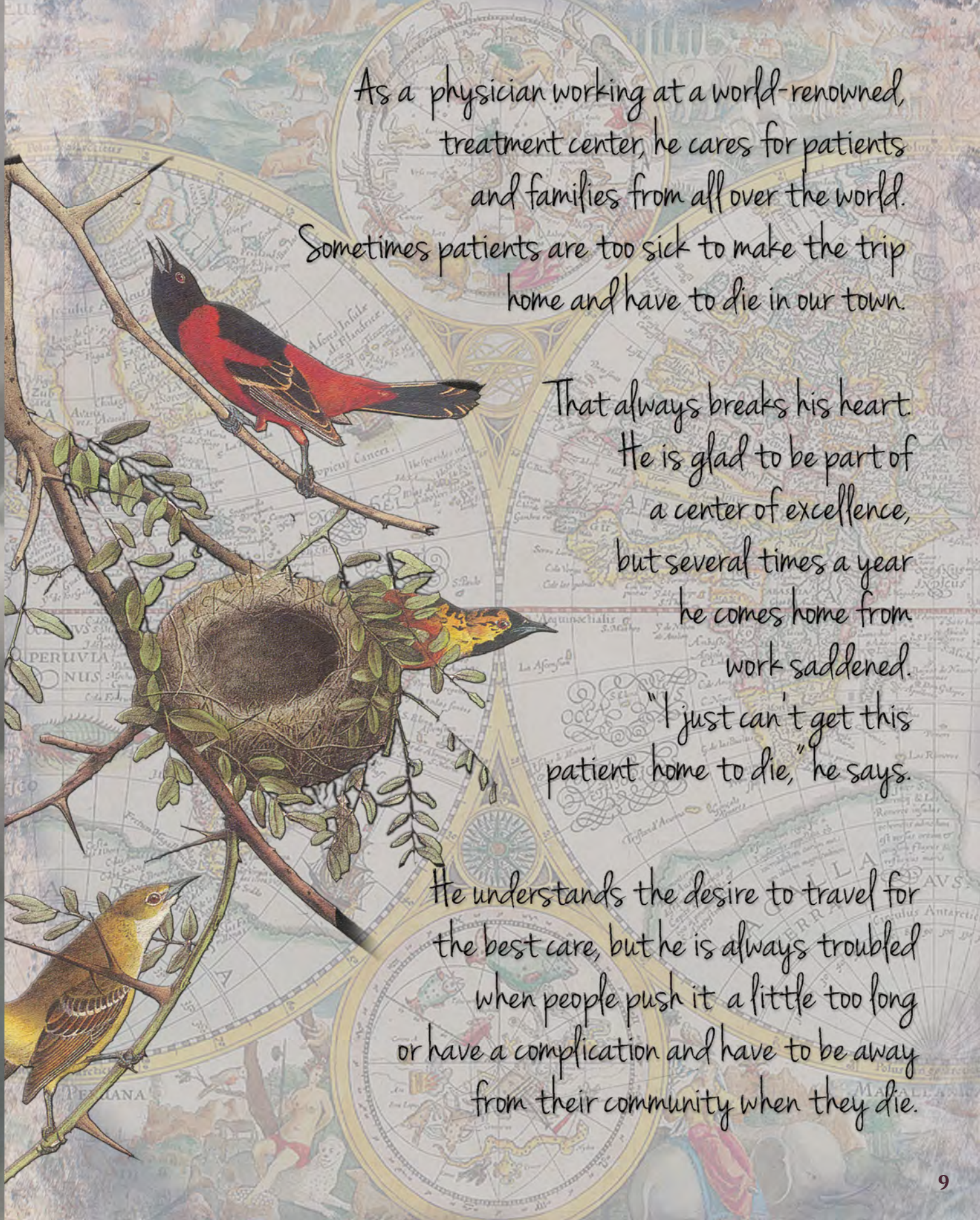
You are welcome to share this information with anyone.

love,
jen



Tomorrow
will be the
first
garbage day
since
learning
my husband is
dying of
cancer.

The sun is not out again today.
It's a big problem.

An illustration of three birds on a branch with a nest. One bird is black and red, another is yellow and black, and the third is yellow and brown. They are perched on a branch with green leaves. In the background, there is a detailed celestial map or star chart with various constellations and labels like 'PERUVIA' and 'ANTARCTICA'.

As a physician working at a world-renowned treatment center, he cares for patients and families from all over the world. Sometimes patients are too sick to make the trip home and have to die in our town.

That always breaks his heart. He is glad to be part of a center of excellence, but several times a year he comes home from work saddened. "I just can't get this patient home to die," he says.

He understands the desire to travel for the best care, but he is always troubled when people push it a little too long or have a complication and have to be away from their community when they die.

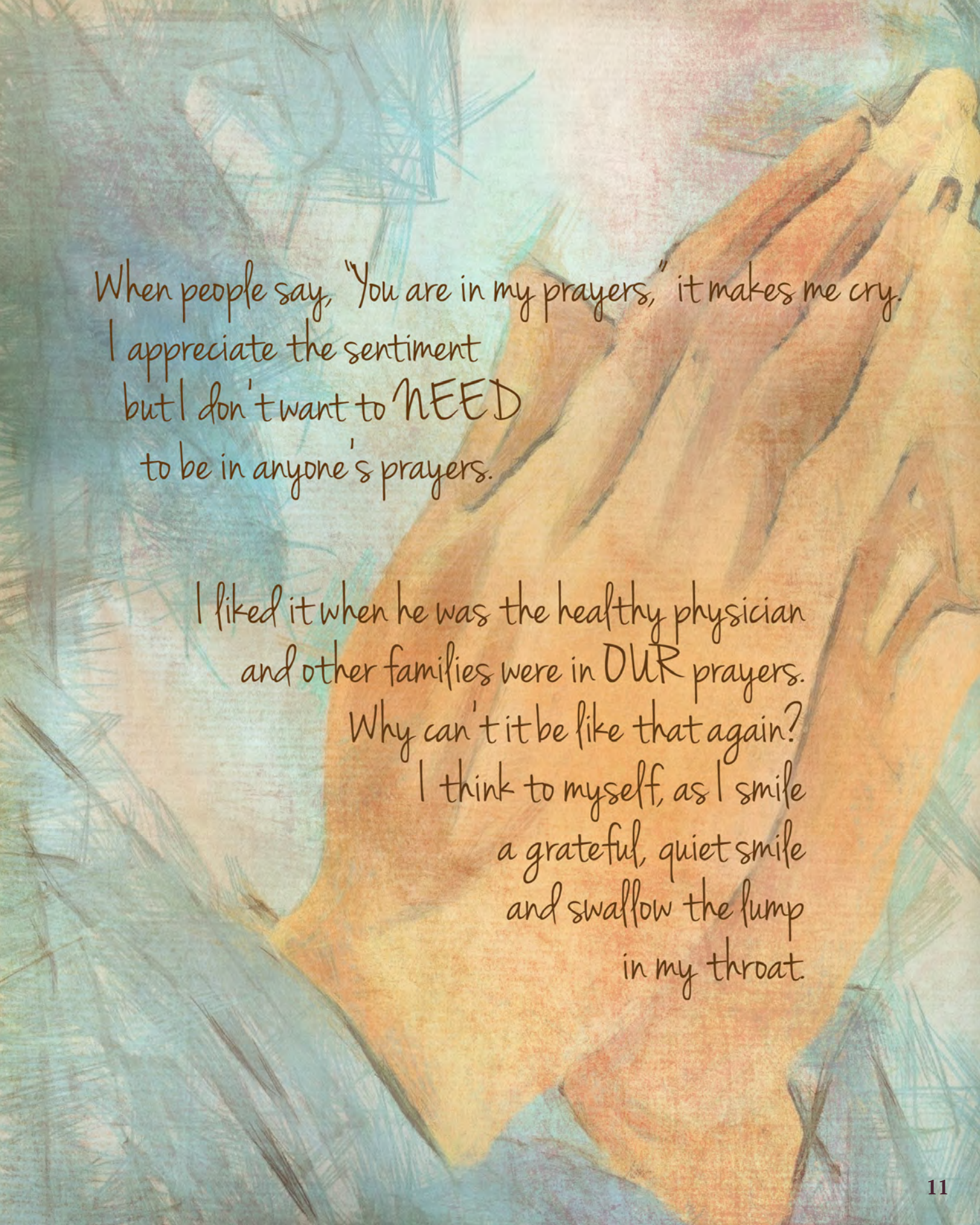


HOPE FOR THE BEST

&

PREPARE FOR THE WORST

The "best" and the "worst" change over time...
At first, the best may be a cure and the worst is death.
Then, the best may become laughter and appreciation
and the worst is pain and suffering...



When people say, "You are in my prayers," it makes me cry.
I appreciate the sentiment
but I don't want to **NEED**
to be in anyone's prayers.

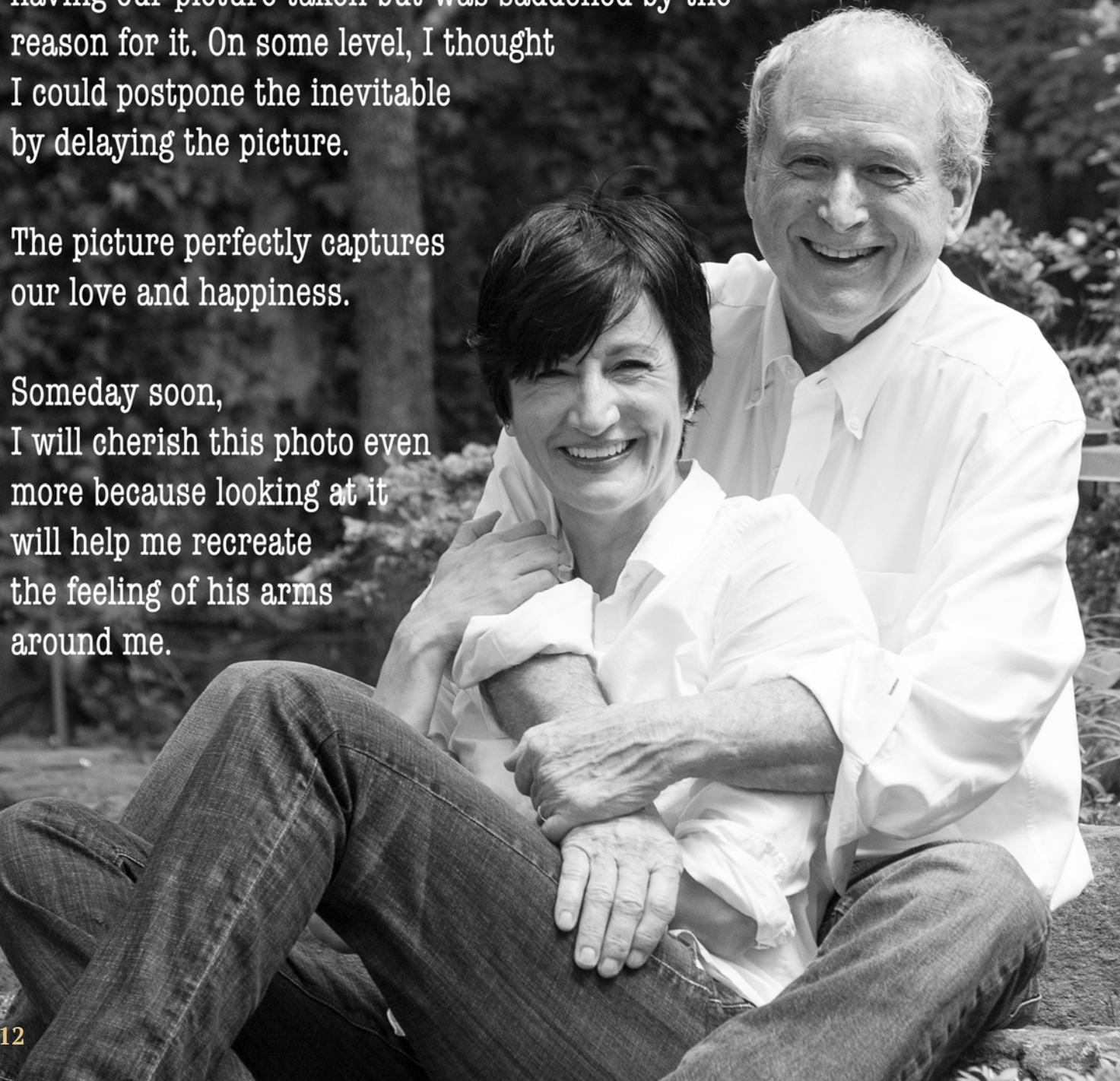
I liked it when he was the healthy physician
and other families were in OUR prayers.
Why can't it be like that again?
I think to myself, as I smile
a grateful, quiet smile
and swallow the lump
in my throat.

This is us. My husband, who hates having his picture taken, said after receiving the diagnosis, "If you want a good picture of me, we need to take it soon." Luckily, I mentioned it to a photographer I met, who followed up with me a few days later.

I am so grateful for that follow up because I am not sure I would have taken the initiative. I was in a state of denial . . . I had thought about having our picture taken but was saddened by the reason for it. On some level, I thought I could postpone the inevitable by delaying the picture.

The picture perfectly captures our love and happiness.

Someday soon, I will cherish this photo even more because looking at it will help me recreate the feeling of his arms around me.



Anticipatory Grief: grieving before your loved one actually dies. It's real. It can be HUGE.

In one study, 40% of widows reported Anticipatory Grief as worse than the grief after the death.



I am suffering from Anticipatory Grief.

The key is honoring my Anticipatory Grief while not allowing it to spoil the time we have left together.