

THE THREE AMIGOS

by Fred Hobbs

Old folks, seniors, the “aged”, whatever the designated label, people in their 70s, 80s and above must deal with the loss of multiple “loved ones.” When these losses involve a spouse or sometimes even a son or daughter whom the elder has outlived, the loss is particularly sad and difficult.

Commonly held expectations are that a wife will outlive her husband. The wife is most often younger. She also is frequently described as the “better” half, probably because she takes care of herself more wisely, is more nurturing, and in general better equipped to deal with whatever comes her way in life.

Working against the notion of female longevity, though, is the uncontrollable factor of deadly diseases, the most common of which recently are cancer and Alzheimer’s. Of course, either can strike men. But at least anecdotally, it seems that increasing numbers of women are affected specifically by Alzheimer’s or by the broader category, dementia.

My two older brothers and I each lost our wives in the last few years. In all three cases, dementia played the central role. A sister and one other brother had passed away several years ago. We share the grief and sorrow of the loss of all these beloved relatives.

Certainly our approach to dealing with the care of our wives and our ultimate losses were influenced by the lessons taught us in our upbringing by our Mother, who became a widow when we were ages 10 or younger. As a consequence, we stood by the pledge “to love and cherish ’til death do us part” as Alzheimer’s gradually erased memory, cognitive ability, and ultimately all physical functions of our life-long companions.

The three marriages lasted a cumulative 172 years. Although we raised our respective families in different parts of the country and our occupations, lifestyles, politics and religious preferences were diverse, the three of us united in the task and responsibility of taking special and devoted personal care of our afflicted spouses. Though many options are available for such care, all too many cases are documented of family members “parking” their loved ones in a sub-standard, so-called “senior care facility.” That approach was not in our DNA.

If anything positive can emerge from the grief and sorrow we shared in the loss of our beloved spouses and the challenges of their care, it came with our renewed “Bond of Brothers.” Recently we traveled together to view the places in the Colorado mountains where we lived as kids. And we returned to dine at our favorite spot, Denver’s oldest restaurant, the 120-year old Buckhorn Exchange. Sharing memories of our childhood days and the cherished moments with our respective “brides”, triggered by viewing some of the photos of those days, tempered the sadness of their passing.

We plan to meet again in the spring at the home in the Ozarks of the oldest brother in our trio, which one of the “youngsters” in the family has jokingly dubbed “The Three Amigos.”