

Nine years after my husband, Dale Cherry, passed away, I met the second love of my life John Shuler. After dating for six years, John and I decided to get married. As many of you know John died suddenly on June 29 from an undiagnosed heart condition, six weeks before our wedding day. He was only 59.

In the years I knew him, John often mused about his relationships with family, friends, and work colleagues at the University of Illinois/Chicago library. For the most part, he thought that there were very few people in the world who cared about him. He felt that his library colleagues considered him a Cassandra, a Greek mythological prophet whose observations and predictions were not taken seriously. He had little contact with his relatives, other than his mother. And although he was part of a group of guys who watched Monday night football together, he wondered if his friends would stay in touch with him when he moved from Oak Park to Evanston last December. No one came to see his new condo, and since it wasn't football season, he rarely saw his Oak Park buddies.

And yet the same four guys spoke at John's funeral, two of them in tears. They talked about how much they had loved John. His siblings and their spouses, with whom he hardly ever communicated, were devastated by his death. His colleagues at work wrote long tributes about him on the Chicago Jewish Funerals and Tribune web sites. The university library and faculty union sponsored a memorial for him on October 5. There were many speakers, including the university chancellor. They talked of John's keen intellect, his kindness, his loyalty and dedication, his creative problem-solving skills, and

especially, his dogged determination to create a union that would improve working conditions for UIC employees.

Unfortunately, John will never hear their words—and that is why I am standing at this microphone. I want to urge you to express the positive feelings you have for others WHEN YOU HAVE THEM, not after the people die. I am not just talking about telling your spouse or children that you love them, which you probably do already. If a friend is special to you, let that person know, and include the reason. If a colleague at work has been a mentor to you, then say so to his or her face.

This advice applies to people who aren't in your inner circle as well as to those who are. There is a nurse at my doctor's office who has always been especially attentive to me. I tell her how much I appreciate her on a regular basis. You can never give too much positive feedback—to your plumber, to the grocery store clerk who remembers to put rubber bands around your berries before bagging them, to the guy at your auto repair shop who saves you a barrel of money by telling you it really isn't necessary to get the new tires you were sure you needed.

I think that sometimes, people don't talk about their positive feelings because they are afraid they will be misinterpreted. They don't want to seem like they have an ulterior motive—like they are “coming on” to someone or “sucking up” to the boss. In addition, some of us assume that the other person already knows how much we care about him or her, so we don't need to express what we are feeling.

But you never know when someone is going to die. Don't wait for that to happen to let the positive out.