On the evening of August 17th I sat holding the hand of my uncle Tyrone (Ty) and my aunt Mary as we watched the breath and life slip away from the only man who I had ever really known as a father figure in my life. You see, for just a short month we watched a terrible and sudden brain disease take him further from us each day. For many days I held vigil in his nursing home room where I did school work and wrote sermons, asking him for his opinions and thoughts on things even though I knew he did not have the capacity to answer.

You see, my uncle was a man of few words when it came to us girls as he did not really know what to talk about. He was a quick witted man with much strength of build and of heart. He cared deeply for our farm, and fiercely for his family and friends, though he would never tell you that. Some days I sat in his room unsure of what I should say to him, not knowing if he actually knew who I was or what I was even talking about.

But the thing is my friends, the thing is, I never took the time to say to him what was on my heart. In those first few days of the rapidly progressing disease I did not say how thankful I was for every situation he saved me from, his endless advice, the great care he took of my car because he wanted me to be safe, how he taught me what it was to be strong, that he modeled for me what it was to be immensely loyal, the way I learned how to treasure and nurture friendships because of how he did, that he was the greatest man that had ever been in my life.

I did not say those things.

I did not say those things because even at our core, even when faced with death, we are still scared because we are vulnerable. What if my vulnerability was unheard? Would I be able to live with the silence of his inability to respond? Love does that to us, love instills fear because love requires vulnerability.

Shortly into this disease he lost his ability to communicate clearly with us, but because the brain is a funny and unpredictable organ every once in a while he would say something clear as a bell. One day when I said “I love you” to him before I left his room for the afternoon, he said to me “I love you too.” Even though I did not say those things to him, that I did not share all that was on my heart, I know that in his last days of life he was able to tell me he loved me, and that is enough.

I am thankful to have many friends, family, and colleagues who are supporting me through this difficult and sad time in life, their support has been generous and freely given. So each time I have the chance to say the thing, I tell them I love them because sometimes saying “I love you” is enough.

My hope for you is that you WILL say the thing, that you will become vulnerable in this scary and uncertain life, that you will give of your love freely to those who are in need of it because you never know when you will lose the chance to say “I love you.”