

What would you say?

My sister-in-law, Claire, is an absolutely beautiful person both inside and out. She is the sister of my heart and I adore her. Each time I use words like “wonderful” or “beautiful,” I see her gentle smile and sparkling brown eyes. One can feel the sincerity that Claire expresses in anything she says. A strong, assertive, yet deeply loving woman, Claire says what she means and means what she says. I like that. I like that a lot.

Claire recently went through a second round of skin cancer on the end of her nose. Several years ago she had cancer removed and a skin graft. It healed beautifully.

In April, the cancer was found again and this time the surgery was more invasive and the grafting more extensive. Not one to hide with fear, Claire is bravely wearing her facial bandages and working at knowing that the final outcome will be cosmetically tolerable. Her attitude is, well, wonderful.

I asked Claire how people are reacting to her facial bandages and she sighed, “It’s interesting that you ask that question. I have noticed an incredible range of comments from people. Some people just stare and look uncomfortable and others act as if they see nothing. Other people blurt out ridiculous things.”

As one who is continually studying human behavior – just ask my husband, Claire’s brother – he will tell you I notice everything. I was curious to know how different comments made her feel.

Since she lives in New Jersey, I wondered if there would be an East coast difference. I asked, “Which ones bothered you and

which ones were OK?” I waited patiently as Claire thought about her response. “One woman looked at me and said jokingly, ‘What did ya do, run into a door?’ I had just come from the doctor’s office where he went over the extent of the tissue damage and I wasn’t feeling very good. I looked at her and replied, ‘I wish it

was something that simple.’ She really irritated me because I believe she thought that it was a cute remark and I actually felt like it disrespected all I have been going through.”

Claire was still for a quite awhile and I sat in silence with her on the phone. “This is difficult, isn’t it?” I asked her gently. “I know you are putting a brave face forward. Has anyone said something that you felt was a good thing to say?” I inquired.

“It’s interesting that you ask that because just this morning a woman in the grocery store looked at me and said quietly, ‘It’s obvious that you have been through something difficult and I would like to wish you well.’” Claire sighed again and whispered, “It was such a beautiful thing to say and it touched my heart.”

As Claire and I said our goodbyes, I thought about how difficult it is to know

what to say when someone is hurting. It does not matter if the injury is displayed for all to see or a wounded heart from some deep loss.

I suppose if we all remember to offer kind, thoughtful words of caring, without asking for personal details, Claire’s cancer ordeal will have served to better our world.

Knowing my sister, that will make her smile. ☺

