

100 DAYS

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# Dying to Tell His Story

Nancy Herzog Walker

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From  
**The Herzog Family**

WITH DEEP APPRECIATION TO

**Hospice of the Chesapeake**  
for their compassion and loving care of  
Rev. Robert D. Herzog

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

**Rev. Robert D. Herzog**  
September 20, 1933 – May 31, 2008

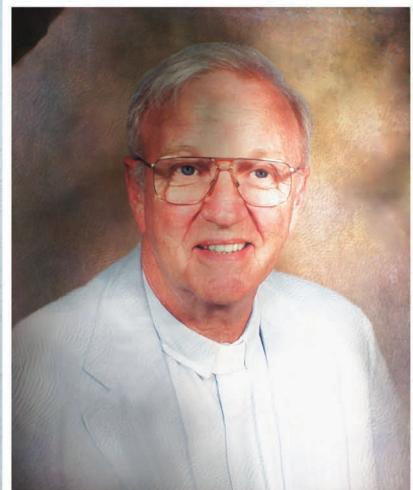
Robert was a man who heard God's call and committed his life to Christ. Through his remarkable faith he showed his family and many others that were fortunate to know him, that God's love is stronger than death. We will be forever grateful for the testimony of his life and legacy he left.

A priest of the Episcopal Church for 44 years, Robert was married to his wife Pat, for 50 years. He had one son, three daughters and nine grandchildren. Before entering the priesthood, he attended the University of Maryland and Virginia Theological Seminary, served in the army, sculpted at the National Cathedral and taught middle schoolers.

He then served as a chaplain at Arlington Cemetery and as a priest in several parishes in the dioceses of Washington and Maryland, most notably the Rector of Saint James, Mt. Airy. He also pursued a career in county government, first as Director of Community Relations for the City of Rockville, and then as Deputy Director of Human Resources for Montgomery County. He also served as a chaplain with Hospice of Northern Virginia and was a co-founder of the Willian Wendt Center for Loss and Healing.

Robert and Pat retired in Severna Park, Maryland, where they continued to enjoy a full life attending St. Martins in-the-Field and St. Anne's, Annapolis, relishing family, friends, and the abundance of God.

If you would like to donate *100 Days* books in memory of a loved one, contact [Nancy@NancyHerzogWalker.com](mailto:Nancy@NancyHerzogWalker.com)



100 DAYS

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100 Days | Dying to Tell His Story

by Nancy Herzog Walker

[www.nancyherzogwalker.com](http://www.nancyherzogwalker.com)

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For my family

the memory of my grandmother

JANE MENEFEE SCHUTT

*who, with my father, heard God's call*

my mother

PATRICIA SCHUTT HERZOG POFFEL

*whose life and love enables ours*

my sisters

DEBORAH HERZOG ALEXANDER

*who is the echo of our father's spirit*

REBECCA HERZOG LAYMAN

*who is the light of our father's love*

the memory of my brother

ROBERT DUNCAN HERZOG, JR.

*who, with our father, lives eternal*

my husband

RONALD ELIJAH WALKER

*who walks beside me in Christ*

my daughter

SAVANNAH MARIE WALKER

*who is the future of her grandfather's faith*



### A Prayer attributed to St. Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union;  
where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

# Meant to be shared

During my father's last days, he was still trying to give away his materials, sermons, and teachings on death and dying.

Unbeknownst to my family at the time, he gave a final manila folder that contained his favorite materials to one of his hospice nurses. She took it home and tucked it away. Almost ten years later, the package showed up in my mailbox as I was finishing this book. As I opened the folder, my father's familiar handwriting was scrawled across a Post-It note:

*Thank you for your willingness to accept this packet—materials, journals, etc. with death & dying theme.  
Please feel free to use, accept, or whatever—as God chooses. With his blessing!*

If you are reading this, the materials have found you.

I invite you to join me in Dad's dying quest to share the Good News.

Passed on with love to:

---

NAME

DATE



On an ordinary day in 2001, I stood up from my desk at work and walked toward the phone. In that instant something deep inside awakened me to a sudden certainty about something I didn't understand. It was a short but arresting sensation like none other—a profound knowing that I would write a book about heaven. And that was the only understanding I was given. It came from nowhere, or so I thought, and nothing about it made sense.

I stood in the silence of my office and I wondered what had just happened to me. How could such a strong thought about something that had no connection to anything in my life interrupt me so blatantly?

That day continued in the usual way but the experience was so mysterious that I continued to ponder its meaning. The gnawing thoughts moved me to buy books on publishing and to comb through articles on the topic of death. But every effort to advance what seemed undeniable was awkward and fruitless, and it was not long before my efforts and the memory of the incident faded.

Seven years later, in 2008, my father died. As I struggled to understand all that I had witnessed during my father's dying days, the memory of the phenomenon I had experienced years before returned to me.

And I began to write.

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*For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.  
A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:1–2 NIV

# Introduction

As we are born unto this life, each of us will surely die. We learn this early on, but our Western culture's fixation on the body at the end of life does little to prepare and nourish our souls. Not unlike others, I had experienced the death of grandparents and acquaintances early in life. I'd endured the feelings of sadness and grief but was able to return to the normalcy of living and to leave the darkness of death behind. Dad's death was different for me—my father was also an Episcopal priest.

Prior to Dad's death, I could separate his role as my parent from his occupation, but his dying blurred boundaries for me and took me where I did not want to go. And so began the season of Dad leading me through death as he had life, by the grace of God, who makes all things new.

In 2008, the melanoma the doctors had removed two and a half years earlier had silently metastasized throughout his body. It was exactly 100 days from when we first found out Dad was dying to the day when God took him home. Afterward, as my family and I worked to pick up the pieces of our lives, pieces of Dad's life remained. Sorting through the scraps, I came across the medical journal my mother had started on the day of that first doctor's appointment, which then led to Dad's terminal prognosis. What began as a place to record symptoms and physician's names and orders quickly grew to include a daily rhythm of calls and visits, meals dropped off, and things to do as we prepared for the end of my father's life.

As I read through the pages, the 100 days flashed before me. Here was the honesty of everyday life that lived alongside the unwritten sacredness of death. And I yearned to tell the story.

As weeks passed, a list of vibrant memories turned into a hunger to understand more fully all that my family and I had witnessed. I wanted to connect the dots of my father's life, from his call to the priesthood, to his passion for death and dying, to his steadfast faith as he bravely surrendered his life to God.

On the five-year anniversary of his death, I began to write. The journey to portray my father's legacy would prove to be as mysterious and arduous as the topic of death itself. It would take another five years to process the ache "out loud" that has been embedded in my being.

This compilation of 100 stories includes my own recollections, interviews with family and friends, and insights gained as I combed through Dad's personal archives. Many of the stories are my two sisters' or my mom's memories, as told to me. Dad's death also opened new revelations for me that came in the form of strangers, divine inspiration, and personal grief transformed. Those stories are included as well. I found answers to questions as I searched the Bible for truths that my father was no longer around to provide. Scripture passages accompany each story just as Scripture guided my father's life. Similarly, artwork provided by my sister Deb and photos that

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Opposite | My father, Rev. Robert Duncan Herzog

I selected accompany the themes of the stories. Credit for all previously published work that has been reproduced here is provided on p. 217. Otherwise, all illustrations belong to me or my family.

Each story also features snippets from Mom's journal for the days on which she wrote an entry. They do not correlate with the accompanying story but are representative of the 100-day progression, in chronological order, and reflect the juxtaposition of daily life and preparations for dying. On a few of the 100 actual days, Mom didn't record in the journal, and the entries on those pages are intentionally left blank.

The order of the stories, as in life, is messy. Every other one represents a memory of Dad's last 100 days, painting the picture of this transformative time in our lives. The stories in between are flashbacks to an earlier time in my father's life or mine that led me to a greater understanding of his final days. And at some point, the interspersed stories change to experiences I had after Dad's death that provided meaning, relevance, or the gift of new life.

This collection of thoughts and reflections would not be possible without the love, support, and perspective of my family. My mother, Patricia, and my father, Reverend Robert D. Herzog, lived in Severna Park, Maryland, in a house they had built for enjoying their final years together. It was in this house that we had gathered as a family for holidays, where our traditions continued, and which the grandchildren came to adore as the magical house in the woods. It was idyllic in every way and was the place where Dad had chosen to die. My sister Rebecca

(whom I affectionately call Bip) and my brother, Robert (Rob), also lived in Maryland and were able to share the load of caregiving during the 100 days. My older sister, Deborah (Deb), lived in Wisconsin, and I lived in Florida, and we both filled in the gaps as our schedules allowed. Each of my family participated in Dad's death and contributed to this memoir in ways that use our gifts and honor our deep love for each other. It was an experience knit together by God's grace as Dad engraved his final sermon on our hearts.

No two deaths are alike just as no two lives are alike. None of us can predict the hour or manner that we will leave this earthly home. My father's death was not his choice, but he had spent much of his life preparing for it. He claimed it before it claimed him, in the name and presence of Christ, the One who died so that we might live. It was Dad's final gift to us.

Dad taught me that we are all connected in both this life and the next ... that the very nature of every living thing follows this rhythm of birth, life, death ... and in surprising and mysterious ways ... new life again.

My father's profound death created a well that fed a thirst I did not know I had, and I believe this thirst lives deep within us all. It is my prayer that these stories awaken for you the promise of greater love that is abundantly there for those who suffer loss.

— Nancy Herzog Walker  
Tampa, Florida  
May 2018

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Opposite | Pages from my mother's journal

March 14

meds:

3:20 am - 1 steroid  
10:20 am 1 steroid  
1 fungus

9:45 apt with Jeff at  
Dr Young's office  
• make march - CT scan

Pick up papers at Dr Burke's  
office - Surgeon  
Apt. Wed - March 19 - 8:30 am  
Ken part of team for Bob

Telephone calls:

Tom Ella

E-mails - Missy  
Nancy & Ken (re: Andrew)  
Nancy (Savannah made  
team!)  
Lynn team!)

Karen / Steve Mitchell

Everyday Gourmet  
Chicken Pepperoni  
with Pasta

Beautiful sky  
Ann Keier

March 15

meds:

Bob Lanes Pat:

8:08  
10:25  
4:15

Dinner ✓

Ellen Hayes - s  
salad - Brew

Bill -

410-507-



KATHLEEN

BSN

H

Treg. n.

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web: www.hospicechesapeake.org

FEBRUARY 22, 2008

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*6:30 pm—Bob taken to Anne Arundel Medical Center*

*Symptoms: great pain in lower back and upper legs, unable to have conversation, confusion, loss of memory*



Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power  
and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

JEREMIAH 32:17 NIV

## Something's not right

*"Pat, I just can't go on like this," Dad told Mom. She didn't know what he meant but, reflecting back, she wonders if he knew more. There was the trip to Florida just days before, in preparation for which the only clothes he packed were a pair of shorts. Then, wanting to surprise her on Valentine's Day, he mistakenly made dinner reservations for February 13th.*

Married for fifty years, Mom knew Dad. And she knew when the doctor gave his initial prognosis, "I think he has the flu," that this was no flu. In seemingly good health, Dad had been volunteering at Baltimore-Washington International Airport and enjoying active retirement. But the past few days, he had complained that he didn't feel well and that the draft from the airport's automatic doors opening over and over had made him quite uncomfortable.

In fact, his constant reference to it seemed odd in itself. Little bothered Dad. He had grown seasoned and ripe like the beautiful, thick-skinned melon he once grew in his garden. So when my sister Becky called and told me that Mom had taken Dad to the hospital, I assumed he would weather the rough spot. "Keep me posted, Bip," I replied somewhat anxiously. But as my mind wandered along after I finished dinner, darkness and fear crept in, and I wished to be back home in Maryland.

Later that evening, after further tests, the doctor held Dad's X-ray and said to Mom, "I want to show you.... These are spots on his brain."

There was a stranger in the room, and it was becoming louder. We would come to know this day as the beginning of the end.



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Opposite | A favorite photo of Mom and Dad during an early time in their 50-year marriage

FEBRUARY 23, 2008

Doctors—Not a stroke, great concern about spots in lung and head, some kind of cancer, possibly lung or melanoma  
Becky and Robert came to hospital

6:30 pm—Bob moved to Room 635, placed on liquid diet, more tests ordered, placed on steroid and Percocet for pain



But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles;  
they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

ISAIAH 40:31 KJV

# An Eagle Scout

*I can picture Dad growing up as a small boy in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Pennsylvania. His mother, Ida Mae, was a beautician who shampooed, cut, and styled her clients' hair right from her home. Dad's father, Leroy, whom everyone called Buck, was a furniture salesman and also ran his business from a home office.*

Born in 1933, Dad spent much of his boyhood listening to stories of the War and running around with boys his age. During that era, the Boy Scouts held some of the few programmed activities that were standard fare. Dad often shared memories of himself and his close friends with us, and I could picture him running out the door across their deep front porch, down the hill, and off exploring the nooks and crannies of the Blue Ridge Summit.

A stellar accomplishment at that time in Dad's life was becoming an Eagle Scout, the highest rank of the program and an honor attained only by a few young men. I like to think of this achievement as a cornerstone of

Dad's life. Maybe it's because he showed us over and over what it meant to be a servant. What it meant to be a leader. And what it meant to be committed to a cause. But fittingly, deeper at the core of being a Scout lies the motto that was unshakably Dad: "Be prepared."

Dad was gifted and capable in many ways. As I think of him now after his death, his gifts and goodness have grown even greater. He showed my siblings and me over and over again how to get ready and that getting ready for something was as natural and important as the something itself. Whether it was packing for vacation, interviewing for a job, or planning for marriage, Dad taught us how to be prepared.

When Dad found out he was dying, it was revealed to us that his life's work had prepared him beautifully. It was as if God had said to him that he had worked his whole life getting ready to die, and it was now time to give his greatest sermon ever.




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**Opposite** | Dad achieved the highest rank of Eagle Scout certification in the Boy Scouts of America organization in 1949 at age 16. This honor, with the skills, knowledge, and experience required in order to attain it, were an early influence in his life of service.

FEBRUARY 24, 2008

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*Met numerous doctors—Dr. Burke, neurosurgeon; Dr. Lee-Llacer, internal medicine; Dr. Mary Young, radiation oncology*

*9:30 am—biopsy of tissue from lung lesion*

*2:00 pm—PET scan*



Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

PSALM 23:4 NIV

## The call at Publix

*As I sit here waiting in the ER with my daughter, Savannah, after what we believe may be an appendicitis attack, I am struck by the irony of the timing.* This day's story of Dad, which occurred years ago, is the one I want to remember the least. It is the most painful "where-were-you-when\_\_\_" moment in my life, and I pray that I will be given the memory and words to share it. And as God so often does, he brings in props.

It is after midnight, and as Savannah and I wait for the results of her CT scan and lab work, I close my eyes to rest. Behind the thin curtain that shields us from others who wait in the balance of their lives, I hear a baby crying down the hall. I overhear, in the room next door, a daughter share with a nurse that her Mom is nauseated, and she is scared. And I am transported back to the same anxious waiting years ago.



*I was in the checkout line at Publix, and my mind was shrouded in fog as I waited for my sister's call to tell me of*

*Dad's prognosis. A loaf of bread was scanned and slid across the metal countertop as my eyes mechanically skimmed the magazine titles. And I was thankful to be ushered along like a cow, pinned in by shopping carts that steered the way.*

*It was the kind of waiting where you move about robotically while your subconscious starts to numb itself, preparing for shock. You are somewhere between reality and Neverland and clearly have no control. You know not when it is coming, or what it will be, but the thick dark clouds are rolling in.*

*I don't remember hearing the phone ring or anything after the words my sister Becky shared: "Nan, Daddy is filled with cancer. It's in his brain, his lungs, his other organs...." Nothing had prepared me for the pain I could now hardly bear.*



"False alarm," we are told by the nurse after Savannah's tests reveal that she does not have appendicitis. She is going to be okay. But years ago I had found out my father was dying, and there was no cell in my body that could fathom how we were going to survive.




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**Opposite |** Life-changing moments can take place anywhere and at any time. That moment for me occurred when I was in the checkout line at Publix grocery store on Anna Maria Island in Florida. I will never forget it.

FEBRUARY 25, 2008

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*Home 6:00 pm*

*Supper—scrambled eggs, English muffin, pie and tea*

*Medication—Dexamethasone 4 mg, take with food or milk every six hours*

*Visitors—Kip (Senior Warden) from St Martin's in-the-Field*



*“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen.”*

ISAIAH 43:10 ESV

# Dachau

*There is a manila envelope among Dad's things, and I open it and find several 8" x 10" black-and-white photographs that Dad took in Germany during the time he was in the army. On the back of one, in his handwriting, I read, "Dachau —1956 Grave of Thousands Unknown, Jewish." It is the first time I see tangible evidence that Dad was there.*

Also in the envelope is a letter from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum thanking my father for his donation of these photos to their photo archives. As I flip through other brochures and an internet reference he saved, I hear the echo of my sister Deb telling me that Dad's visit to this place and his understanding of the horrific events that occurred there greatly influenced his call to the priesthood. Another piece of the puzzle has appeared as I begin to share Dad's story.

Death, big and bold, en masse, and unrelenting. I can't begin to know what must have gone through the coffers

of Dad's mind, knowing that the Nazi assault began around the time he was born. How growing up with the unfolding of the news of this incomprehensible period could have imprinted him. How, as a soldier, he would come to visit Dachau and learn firsthand from survivors in and around the area.

But as the daughter of a priest, I was able to witness Dad's understanding of the fragility of life. He had enormous compassion for those who suffered and grieved. And as part of his understanding and acceptance of the human condition, he received comfort from talking about it.

The Holocaust was a watershed event in human history. Six million Jews were murdered by the Nazi regime and their collaborators.

Dad's soul would be one that wouldn't forget.




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**Opposite |** During my father's time in the army, while he was stationed in Germany, Dad visited with Father Gorman at St. Ulrich's, Augsburg, Germany, and learned more about Dachau from a priest's perspective.

FEBRUARY 26, 2008

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*Received call from Dr. Bhandari—the CANCER is melanoma!!?*

*Calls—Dot, Meg, Nancy McCorkle, Ellen Van Valkenburgh, Nancy, Debbie, Becky, Bishop Rabb, Doris, Andrea ...*

*Supper—Alice Tignor arrived with dinner—DELICIOUS meat/gravy, rice, broccoli, pound cake*



*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

**ISAIAH 41:10 NIV**

## Ruach

In the Hebrew Bible the word *ruach* (roo'-akh) occurs nearly 400 times. Its base meaning is “moving air”—whether in the form of a breath, a breeze, or a violent windstorm. My dad liked to talk about *ruach* as God’s Holy Spirit. Early on, when I first heard him pronounce the word, I laughed because, when spoken, the last sound created a slight thrust of air in my mouth. I would come to revere the pronunciation, as it reminds me of the magnitude of God’s Spirit. His breath conveys his presence when he comes invisibly near.

*And so it was on this day years ago. Savannah and I drove home from Publix in silence. She remembers me staring out the window and the feeling that she didn’t know how to reach me. At age eleven, she couldn’t grasp the enormity of the news we had just received of her Pop-Pop’s illness. As I pulled into the sandy brick driveway of our beach house, she jumped out of the car to go tell her father.*

*“I’m so sorry,” Ron said, as I rolled down the car window. “Do you want to be alone?” he asked after a long pause. I nodded my head yes and watched as he turned back to go*

*inside. All I wanted was God’s comfort. For him to take away the “NO, NO, NO” that kept hammering in my mind, as if the internal scream would somehow push out the truth.*

*I headed for the beach to wrap myself in a blanket of solitude. It was there I always found peace. I felt sure its perfect rhythm would order my thoughts and show me the way.*

*But peace I did not feel, and comfort was nowhere in sight. Rather, a raging wind enveloped me. As I sat on the worn wooden bench I had come to know as my own, it felt strangely crooked and hard. Was this a big joke? Salt in the wound? Where was my God?*

*Nothing about this sanctuary was quiet and still. Certainly not my mind, which was now filled with anger and fear. I wanted to be free of the strangle within me and all around. But the unceasing gusts of wind continued, and finally, resigning myself to the chaos, I walked home.*

Like so many things ahead, if only I had the eyes to see.... Where was God when I needed him? Weeping with me.




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**Opposite** | The view from my bench on 72nd St., where we owned a beach house on Anna Maria Island. The weather, strangely, mirrored my mind on the day of the news of my father’s prognosis.

FEBRUARY 27, 2008

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*Medication—1 steroid 10:30 am; 1 steroid 4:30 pm*

*George arrived with new space heater—GREAT! Placed by Bob's chair*

*4 dozen roses were delivered, "Are we not our father's children? My peace I give you—We love you"*

*Sandy Anderson—Chocolate cake*



*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.*

PROVERBS 3:5 ESV

## Packing the parachute

In Dad's home office there is a small collection of photos, plaques, and souvenirs hanging on the wall that have been there since I was young. They've seasoned with age like a worn-out shoe, to the point that I don't notice them any longer. But during one of the few times I was home with Dad as he was dying, I went up to his office just to be near his things. As I scanned the wall, these mementos became larger than life.

*One of the framed images is a photo of my father seemingly suspended in air. And the story I remember him telling me when I was a little girl, about being a paratrooper, was not about what it was like to free-fall or how it felt to land, but who packed his parachute. I was amazed as he told me*

*that the chute he would jump with was not his own but one packed by a fellow paratrooper. He said, "You see, you packed for another person, but at any given time that soldier could refuse to jump with your chute, and you would have to jump with it." It seemed huge to me that each person was accountable for both his life and the life of someone else. It was a double whammy, a "make-it-or-break-it" with no in-between.*

As I read about my father's division, the 11th Airborne, I am struck by the memory of the saying: "It has nothing to do with hope and everything to do with trust." And in this moment, I can see my dying father's eyes more fixed on God and more assured of his promise.

I thank God that in the days ahead Dad will once again show us with utmost faith that we have nothing to fear. And he will hold our hands as we jump.



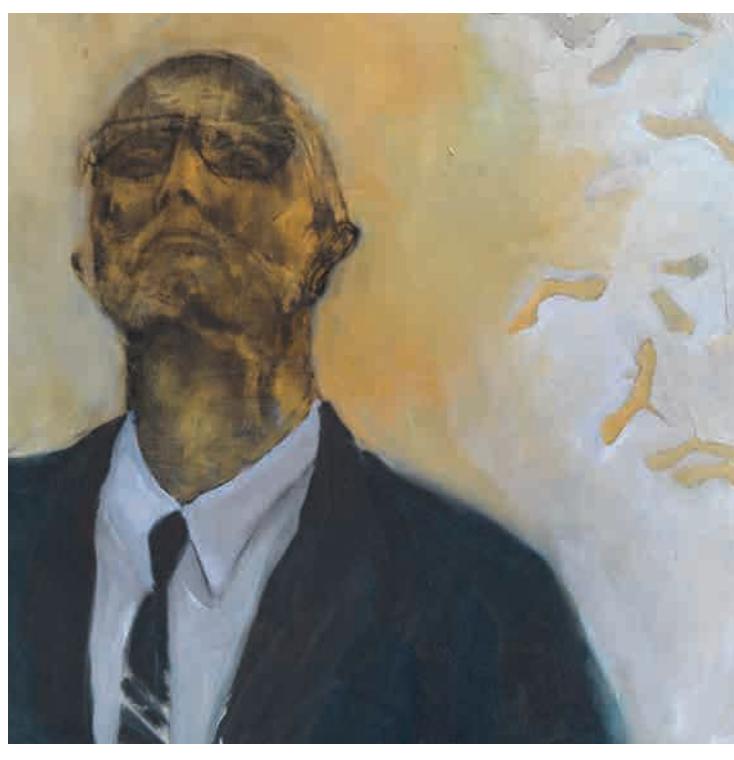

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Opposite | In 1958, Dad was a paratrooper in the 11th Airborne Division of the Army and jumped while stationed in Augsburg, Germany.

FEBRUARY 28, 2008

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*Medication—4:30 am, 1 steroid; 10:34 am, 1 steroid; 4:35 pm, 1 steroid  
Mail arrived with painting from Savannah—memories of the beach visit  
Ellen Van Valkenburgh—fruit basket, brownies, pumpkin bread, rolls, ham, soup*



After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light.

MATTHEW 17:1–2 NIV

## “I’m going to be glowing soon”

*Although there were many friends, parishioners, and relatives we had nurtured when they were sick, our own family had always been relatively healthy.* One of the only times Dad didn’t feel well was when he broke his leg. So the news of CANCER and all the accoutrements that came with it were not the kind of thing that happened to us. Nevertheless, after a long day of morbid news from doctors, Dad had just been admitted and moved upstairs to a room.

It was after 9:00 p.m., and everyone was exhausted. The news was sinking in, and my sister Becky wondered, “What’s going to happen to us? What is it going to be like? What is he going to go through?” Chemo, radiation, and those medical terms were about to enter our home. There would be a flurry of unknown things and complications, and anxiety would become our new norm.

As visiting hours ended, the hallway sounds were quiet, and the heaviness of it all thickened the air. The nurse tucked Dad in as Mom and Becky stood watching. The dim fluorescent light shone along the wall behind him. Becky realized Dad had been quiet. “Where is he in all this?” she wondered. The news was so big, and she just wanted to comfort him.

She moved closer and put her hand on the cold metal bed rail that separated her from our father. “Daddy, are you scared?” she asked softly.

And he turned to look at her and said, “No.... I’m going to be glowing soon.”

It was to be his hallmark. She expected the cliché “Somehow we’ll make it; everything’s going to be alright.” But our dad had openly prepared his whole life for this, and in our moment of blindness, he took us right up to the mountaintop.




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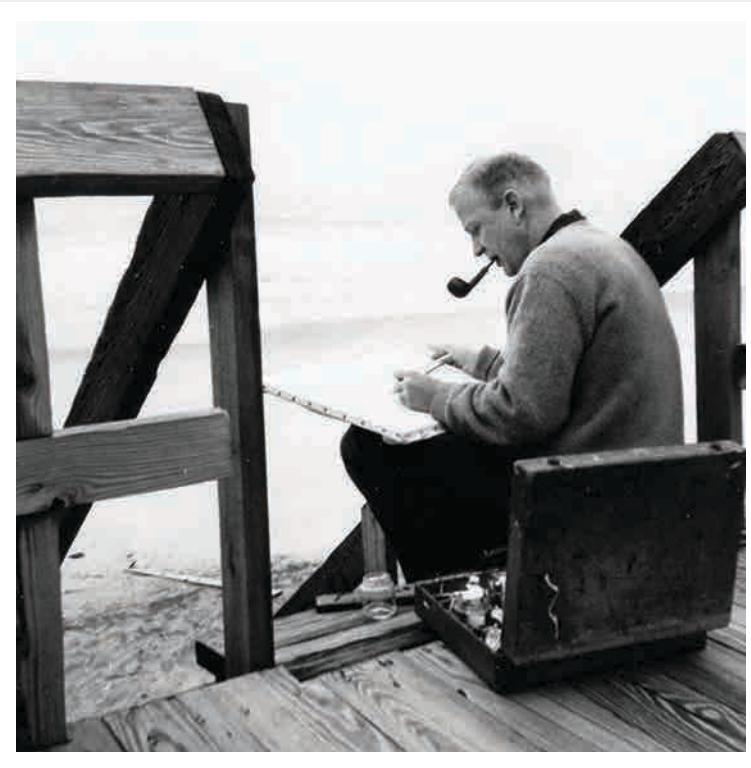
Opposite | Deborah Herzog Alexander, *Coming Glory*, 2008, charcoal, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

My sister Deb created a painting of our father during the time he is dying. His gaze is fixed above as he seemingly appears in bronze. Maple tree “helicopter seeds” fall in the background. The beginning is very near the end.

FEBRUARY 29, 2008

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*Medication—4:30 am, 1 steroid; 10:31 am, 1 steroid; 4:30 pm, 1 steroid  
Computer school—chat with Tampa office crew, new Care Page messages  
Deb—8 Kringles arrive!!!  
Phoebe—potato soup—DELICIOUS, Bob loved it*



So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was doing work at the potter's wheel.  
But the vessel he was working on with the clay was ruined in the potter's hand.  
So he remade it into another vessel that seemed appropriate to him.

JEREMIAH 18:3–6 ISV

## A middle school art teacher

*On the wall in my office hangs this photograph of my father painting in Ocean City, Maryland, when I was six. I can feel Dad's enthusiasm as he begins to create; it is very familiar to me. With his crusty paint box beside him, a white nubby canvas beneath his hands, and the wide expanse of possibility ahead, he was in his element.*

Dad had just graduated with a bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Maryland when his friend Charles shared that a teacher had died at Greenbelt Middle School, and they wanted Dad to step in. With diploma fresh in hand, Dad was excited. But the kids he was to teach were challenged and troubled, and with only broken support at home they needed so much more. Between lessons of color and painting, he found himself counseling them as well. Frustrated because they had not

yet been taught what he believed were important life skills, he wanted to move beyond the limits of the middle school curriculum. In exposing them to art in other areas and to the community outside the classroom, he saw great opportunity. But Dad's vision was met by the administration's chagrin.

"He felt the church was calling him," Mom remembers as she recounts the restless stir in Dad at that time. "I can do more for these kids from that place," he told her. And as I hear my mother's words, I can see how, for all of us, God makes our paths known.

Although formerly trained with an art degree and possessed of a natural creative gift at birth, Dad began to see the pulpit as his podium. And in this calling, he would soon discover that his medium was expanding beyond paint.



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**Opposite |** Dad was curious and saw possibility in everything. He loved to create and painted what he saw.

MARCH 1, 2008

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*Medication—4:30 am, 1 steroid; 10:30 am, 1 steroid; 5:00 pm, 1 steroid  
Calls with Jim Seale (to visit March 14), John Hatcher, Dr. Bhandari's office  
Aunt Nancy, Uncle Ken—Byrd Cookie Co. package arrives—nuts pretzels, cookies, etc.  
Audra made lasagna salad—DELICIOUS!*



Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever.  
They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

PSALM 112:6–7 NIV

## “Everyone should have an experience like this!”

*“I can see me standing in that hospital room, and we had found out he had two lesions in his lung, five spots in his brain, a spot on his liver.... By that point, we knew,”* Mom shares with me as I hear about the time when they learned of Dad’s diagnosis.

“I was overwhelmed, and I thought, ‘I need to do everything I can,’” she recalls with a conviction in her voice that’s so familiar to me. “Then I became uptight because the oncologist two years before told us, ‘We got it all—he doesn’t need any treatment,’” she continued, reflecting on the melanoma they had removed from his scalp.

“So, I called that doctor and left the message, ‘I need for you to call me.’ When he called back that night, I said, ‘My husband has five spots on his brain, lesions in his lung,’ and that’s when he informed me, ‘He has two to four months to live.’”

And in the hustle and confusion and weight of that day, my father proclaims from the hospital bed, “This has been quite an experience. Everyone should have an experience like this!”

Mom was dumbstruck, but it was just like Dad to provide the comic relief we all needed. He was fully alive and taking it all in. And beneath his patent grin, he was also telling us: it’s going to be okay.

As my sister Deb and I reminisce, we realize the irony of it all. We *will* all have an experience, one way or another. We will all die.

Dad would continue to show us that, if we are open to see God’s grace and receive his everlasting love, then beauty and fullness—even in a life that seems shattered—is ours.




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**Opposite** | Dad had an uncanny ability to hold things in balance. He understood the paradox of life and reminded us that light lives alongside darkness. As cancer stole his energy, he rested on the porch with one of Mom’s quilts and gave me a smile.

MARCH 2, 2008

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*Medication—4:30 am, 1 steroid; 8:30 am, 1 Advil; 10:30 am, 1 steroid*

*Calls—Wallie Joe, John Schutt*

*The children all were home—today was a wonderful day for sharing and loving. Bob has wanted to write a lot of things:  
messages to the children, funeral plans, lists of thing he wants to do*



*And as you go, preach, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

MATTHEW 10:7 NASB

# Ordained a priest

## *The word priest for me is complex.*

My father is ordained to the priesthood after graduating from Virginia Theological Seminary in the year I am four. *But he is my dad and helps me move into my dorm.*

I watch him put on vestments and kiss a stole before draping it over his neck. *But he is my dad and teaches me to tie my shoes.*

He wakes up early, retreats to his office, and writes sermons he will preach. *But he is my dad, and we build a snowman, and I will learn to sled.*

He takes calls late at night, and I hear him comfort someone in pain. *But he is my dad, and we take trips to discover new things.*

He shares the Good News, the cup of life, and the bread of heaven. *But he is my dad and teaches me to save money to buy my first car.*

He meets with parents, holds their babies, and marks them as Christ's own forever. *But he is my dad and helps me move into my dorm.*

He organizes groups seeking reconciliation and peace, and tells them of God's mercy and grace. *But he is my dad and walks me down the aisle.*

An ordinary man hears God's call to follow. He "puts down his net" and goes. He meets many other ordinary people on his journey, and they grow to know an extraordinary kingdom. This kingdom becomes our home, and his heavenly Father becomes our Lord. And through this love, we are changed forever.

For many years, I thought my dad happened to be a priest. But I would come to see more clearly that he was God's child all along, who just happened to be my dad.




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**Opposite** | Standing next to my father, I enjoyed Sunday School at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., during an early time in his ministry.

MARCH 3, 2008

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*Medication—4:30 am, 1 steroid; 10:30 am, 1 steroid; 4:30 am, 1 steroid*

*Call Mary Wendt, (home phone on desk)*

*Deb, Maddie, Michelle, and Bob drove to St. James and Burnside's Bridge at Antietam Battlefield*



But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

MATTHEW 13:23 NIV

## Planning the garden

*This morning as I go outside in the dark to pick up the paper, I am immediately struck by the smell of wet dirt. It is one of those smells that you love—less because of what it smells like and more because of the sweet memory it provides.*

Dad used to say enthusiastically, “Nancy Karen, can you taste the dirt?” as we sat around the dinner table eating fresh radishes, pole beans, or tomatoes we’d grown in our garden out back. I don’t remember a time we didn’t have a garden in our yard, and my sister Deb likes to share that she doesn’t remember a time we didn’t have to weed. It was standard fare as penitence in our home, growing up, when we’d taken a wrong turn or stayed out past curfew. But she will also tell you, times in the garden with Dad were some of our most favored times with him. Out in the garden, stories were told, dreams were spoken, and

the certain pattern of life and death played out with every spring planting and fall harvest.

So it was fitting that on Dad’s first day home from the hospital, as we were all “in another world” with our adjustment to the news, Dad woke up and proclaimed, “I’m going to plan our 2008 garden!”

He would use this beautiful, familiar metaphor and his current condition to remind us of the circle of life: That each day gives us a new beginning with a perfect end. That each seed bears fruit before it withers. And that this season of uncertainty just born before us will also blossom.

As we had learned alongside Dad so many times before, if we were willing to dig in, to weed, to get dirt under our nails, to be patient and wait—God’s natural order would be delicious.




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**Opposite** | Dad in one of the many vegetable gardens he and our family planted and cared for throughout his life. They were a constant reminder of the circle of life and God’s natural order of things.

MARCH 4, 2008

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*Medication—4:30 am, 1 steroid; 4:30 pm, 1 steroid*

*Calls—Ellen Van Faulkenbergh, sending love and prayers; Gid Mountjoy, call to arrange a time when he can come over for tea to visit  
St. Martin's brought dinner—Chicken pot pie and cookies*



If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord.  
So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

ROMANS 14:8 NIV

## Funerals at Arlington

*From Mt. Airy News President's Day 1991:*

Commissioned as a chaplain in the Army reserves during the Vietnam War, Rev. Robert Herzog spent three summers conducting funerals at Arlington National Cemetery. "JFK (President John F. Kennedy) had just been buried there and Arlington National Cemetery was very much in demand, ironically speaking. Everyone wanted to be buried next to the president," Herzog relayed.

"Since I was new on the job, I was responsible for funerals," Herzog said. And funerals he did! One an hour, seven hours a day, five days a week.

Precise military funerals too. Everyone from generals to privates; every military tradition from

"blackjack, the riderless horse," to military bands and the National Honor Guard.

"It was my job to present the flag to the family on behalf of a grateful nation. And it never got any easier ... just a variation of the same thing, watching and seeing grief; grief is a natural, normal phenomenon."

In a sermon of Dad's that I found, he wrote, "Death has something to do with life. It is difficult and a bit fearful to become mindful of death: to face it squarely, determine its place in life and our place in regard to it. Death is not the end of a man's service to God or to history; rather, in reflecting on the death of Christ, we realize that it was indeed not the end for him but the beginning."




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**Opposite** | Dad was immensely proud of his military service and was honored to participate in many funerals as chaplain at Arlington National Cemetery.

MARCH 5, 2008

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*Medication—4:00 am*

*'94 Lexus brake repair*

*Blix Winston visit—conversation, refreshments (coffee), walk in the woods, prayers, book/tape gift; Judith from St. Anne's, prayers*

*Gerda Bommelje from hospice—initial visit*



*When you pass through the water, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

|ISAIAH 43:2 NIV

## “Can’t go around it, have to go through it”

*“I remember sitting out in the living room with social worker from hospice early on, when we first met her, maybe after the first week or two,”* my sister Becky recalls. “She was very honest with Mom, and Mom kept saying, ‘I’m okay.’

“And she said to Mom, ‘This is going to be your hell.’”

As I hear these words, they immediately take me back to my father’s counsel so many times before, when the challenges of life got in my way. “You can’t go around it, you have to go through it,” he would say to me with empathy and deep understanding. This was code for “Yes, it will hurt, and we won’t like it, but it’s going to be okay, and in the end we will see that we not only got through it, but God turned it into good.” These talks with

Dad and watching him weather the storms of life himself had served me well.

So here we were. *The ultimate yuck.* Our dad was dying, and it was as if we were all saying inside our heads, “No, I don’t want to go,” and yet we already knew too well, not only that we were all going to go, but that we would go with eyes wide open. That in this deep sadness, God would reveal in new and beautiful ways his promise not to forsake us but to raise us up. That the well deep inside would not be dry but would flow more abundantly than we had imagined. We would do this together, one day at a time, and watch and listen and be present. We would show Dad that we were ready because he was.

*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.*




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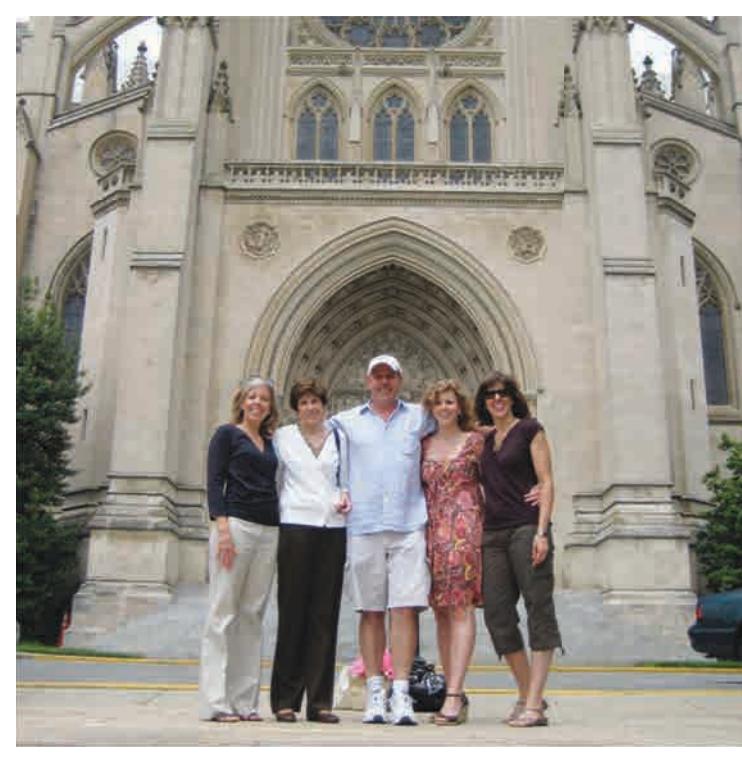
**Opposite** | One of my favorite places to spend time was on the finger pier where Dad docked his boat behind my parents’ house on Cattail Creek. Each day seemed to present a different persona. On this day nature was starkly shrouded in fog.

MARCH 6, 2008

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*Medication—4:00 am, 1 steroid; 10:30 am, 1 steroid; 6:00 pm, 1 steroid*

*Dr. Mary Young—exploring options is very reasonable, hear them, see if it fits, Sharfman at Hopkins knows what is available in current trials, also NCI [National Cancer Institute], we may not feel comfortable, the brain activity may exclude Dad  
Donna Farrow brought dinner—Salmon, green beans, potatoes, cake, bread*



*For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.*

MATTHEW 18:20 NIV

# The Washington National Cathedral

*Each time I fly into Reagan National Airport and the plane descends over the Potomac River, I crane my neck to see out the window, and there she is. The highest point in all of Washington D.C.—the National Cathedral. It's the church I have always known, and like a warm bear hug it welcomes me with open arms.*

Not only was Dad ordained at the National Cathedral, he and my mother worked alongside many bishops and priests who would mentor him throughout his life. As my family moved around the diocese, there were many churches and homes I would come to know, but the constant was the “mother ship,” the glorious Cathedral. It was where we went to be renewed, to worship, to celebrate, and to be in community with God and his people.

Dad first worked there after school with the sculptors at the carvers’ shed. He chaired for many years the Youth Rally, worked with Malcolm Boyd on *Plays on Race*, attended untold services, and would come to know every inch of that immense place. I vividly remember, as a child,

walking up the 333 steps with my father to stand under the mighty bells in the central tower and look out over the city as though from heaven. There is an awe and majesty that is indescribable as you enter its gate. It has a way of course-correcting your life for a moment as its reverence engulfs you.

When I was younger, I may not have understood the magnitude of my father’s profession, but I understood *big*. The Cathedral was enormous to me in every way, and it would become a tangible icon of my father’s ministry. Now, seeing the mass of stone again, I can feel the magnetism he felt regarding community. Listening to the heavenly song of the choir, I can hear his call to serve. Feeling the silent echo of prayer, I am reminded of his assurance of God’s covenant. And it continues today to speak louder than words.

It is known the world over as the National House of Prayer, and it calls out and welcomes people everywhere. Come. Sit. Listen. And, as my dad would so beautifully do, fall in love.




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**Opposite |** At 301' tall, the National Cathedral towers over Washington, D.C. It was, and still is, a beloved symbol of my father’s life and ministry. It was here that my family gathered on the one-year anniversary of my father’s death.

MARCH 7, 2008

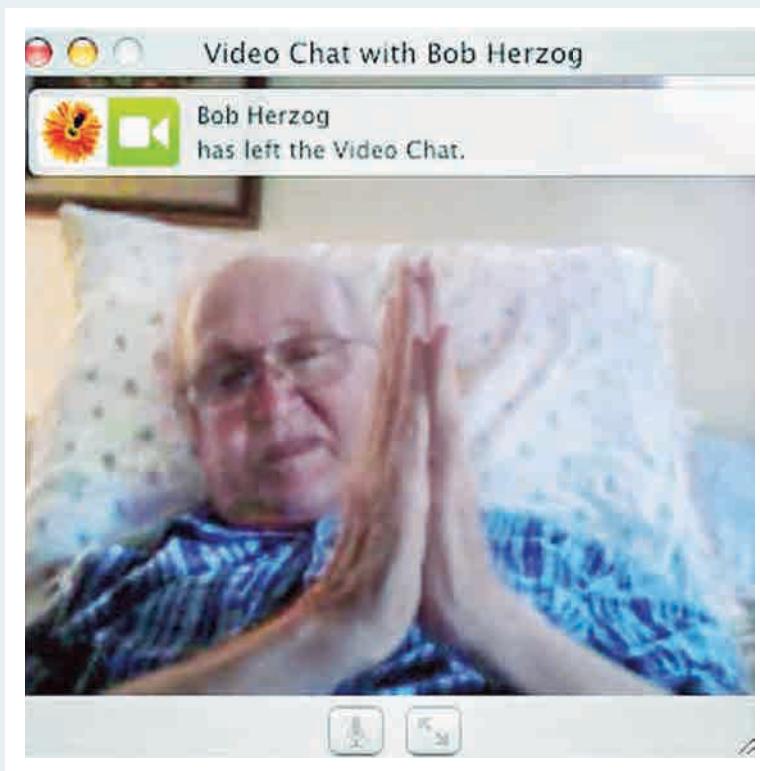
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*Medication—10:30 am, 1 steroid*

*10:30 am—Appt. Dr. O'Keefe, suggests possible immune trial at Johns Hopkins*

*1:00 pm Gerda (hospice) recommends we get a second opinion*

*Chicken pot pie meal—Dawn's mother*



*Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer  
use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.*

JOHN 16:25 NIV

# The laptop

*"Be there as much as you can," my friend Holly advised when I shared that my father was dying. I had watched her lose her dad the year before, and I was intrigued, as the experience seemed to awaken her to a new place of understanding about many things. I didn't want to miss this once-in-a-lifetime, life-changing time with my father.*

But life is complicated, and I wasn't able to "check out" of my world to be physically present in Dad's. So with the help of a laptop and iChat, a new lifeline between us was born.

Dad would marvel, "I'll be darned!" at its ease when I delivered the computer to him that first weekend my siblings and I all gathered at my parents' home in Maryland after hearing Dad's prognosis. After a reassuring couple of days filled with family bonding, love, and tutorials, my anxiety eased slightly as I headed back to Tampa.

Like dessert after dinner, the highlight of my days for the next few months became seeing my parents' faces on

the computer screen every night. There were the warm *hellos* followed by the daily litany of news—visitors, calls, weather, and meds—and then the chats would move to what felt like a beautiful movie playing out in front of me. At some point, Mom would wander off to tend to the dishes or to answer the phone, and Dad would continue to share whatever was on his mind. There were days he'd tell me a story or describe what he was thinking from what seemed like a faraway place. I became amazed at his ability to move in and out of the now, the past, and what I was sure was the evermore. Sometimes there was a fullness to his quiet, in which there was no chat at all; but in every moment, Dad clearly had something to say.

Each day I'd follow his familiar gestures and seemingly feel his old terry robe, but there was a cascading newness to Dad that was surprisingly okay. I don't know if I heard it or saw it take hold, but while Dad was slipping away, something bigger and strangely familiar was there that pixels just couldn't portray.




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**Opposite** | I will be forever thankful that technology opened a "window" in Florida through which to talk to my father in Maryland each night during the time that he was dying. I was afforded a front-row view of his transformation, which enabled so much of mine.

MARCH 8, 2008

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*Dr. Sharfman—Clinical trial currently running; 4 Antibody, HLA Class II Typed; Annapolis Oncology Center—Dr. Jason Taksey  
Gid Mountjoy, Assistant at St. Anne's—wants to come by Saturday afternoon*

*Lonnie, Severna Park Automobile—Caliper take off, bleed brakes \$290*

*Donna Farrow—Grilled Salmon; Karen Royer, tennis friend—wants to bring dinner today, tomorrow or Saturday*



Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.  
Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

JOHN 14:27 NIV

## The march at Selma

*There's a March 19, 1965, issue of Life magazine that still bears the mailing label with my father's name and address from when I was five. Some years ago, it was given to my sister Deb by my dad. In one of the photos, Dad is kneeling in prayer in a field of clergymen who have flown in from all over the country to be in solidarity with and rally behind Dr. Martin Luther King. Deb points out two things to me in the photo. One is the telephone pole that seems to symbolize Christ's omnipotence poignantly, and the other is the minister directly behind Dad who was killed in the riots when he left the group to make a phone call.*

There's a powerful feeling I have, looking at Dad. He's at the intersection of the cross—God on his right and the billy club of a man to his left. The promise of life is ahead, while the reality of death kneels behind.

Dad was a young, new priest at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church in northwest Washington, D.C., at the time of the march. One of the parishioners, Mrs. Gumbel, felt strongly about going. She had a private plane and offered to fly six parishioners with her. The vestry decided it was too dangerous for the rector, Tom Bowers, to go, and Dad eagerly stepped forward to support Dr. King in any way he could.

The civil rights movement had been all around him and Mom. It was a very real part of their lives. "There was no question in Dad's mind; there was no fear," Mom shares as I ask her what it was like at that time.

My father was a peacemaker and believed in justice for all. In the midst of hatred and crime, Dad used his weapon of choice: prayer and God's love for humankind.




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**Opposite** | As troopers grip their nightsticks, the marchers drop to their knees to pray. My father, pictured in the center, was among hundreds of clergymen who flew in from all over the US to rally behind Dr. King in Selma, Alabama.

MARCH 9, 2008

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*Medication—12:30 am, 1 steroid; 7:27 am, 1 steroid; 1:00 pm, 1 steroid*

*Visit to Kathy (Costco) to check on hearing aids, Book on tape arrived, The Pillars of the Earth—gift of Suzanne & Wallie*

*Calls—Tom Bowers, Ed and Barbara Hook*

*Breakfast with Robert at Breakfast Shop*



*Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*

MARK 10:15 NIV

## “I won’t need my clothes”

*It was the first weekend after learning of Dad’s impending death. We all convened in the thick of the news. And in the middle of all the activity that normally goes on during a family reunion, this visit held an extra layer. We all wanted to be near Dad.*

At some point, Dad wandered up to his office and, as in “The Pied Piper,” the grandkids did too. As they milled about, curiously studying the assortment of items on his desk, Andrew asked, “Pop-Pop, what will you do with your clothes?” and I remember thinking, “Oh, this is going to be good! If anyone can answer this question, it will be Dad.”

“I won’t need my clothes where I’m going. God will give me new clothes!” he exclaimed with a hint of excitement in his voice. It was the perfect opening to a wonderful dialog.

“What will you do with your rake?” Andrew asked next, followed by, “What will you do with your Christmas presents?” And Dad so beautifully met them where they were. Telling them about the kingdom of heaven and the universal promise of life without end, in perfect child-like prose. Letting them hear what unshakable faith sounds like, and helping them know the unknown. He knew where he was going, and he was glad to share from his heart.

And then, regarding the elephant in the room, Andrew asked, “And how will you get there?” As Dad paused, I braced myself for the human response to the question of the big exit.

But it was classic Dad, and the perfect answer. “First class!” he proclaimed, as he summed it all up with a smile.




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**Opposite** | In a wonderful, spontaneous conversation with his grandchildren, Dad welcomed and answered their questions about heaven. My siblings and I are immensely grateful that our children were also imprinted by our father’s faith.

MARCH 10, 2008

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*Medication—1:00 am, 1 steroid; 7:00 am, 1 steroid*

*Bob and I went to early service at St. Martin's (feeling weak!)*

*Calls—Myra and Bob Wormald, want to come see us*

*Visit from Arliss Cinnelli, Garden Club—French bread, homemade soup, cookies, salad*



The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic.

PSALM 29:3–4 NIV

## Thunderstorms on the porch

*I remember it like it was yesterday, and yet I was six. Dad had answered the call to be rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Brighton, Maryland, and we moved into the rectory, the house beside the church. The little church, built in 1870, and the house were on five acres of land that bordered a farm, the woods, and wonderful rural roads. When you live in the country, God's uninterrupted blanket of creation is all around, and life seems larger in every way.*

And so it was on this day, when the heavens split open, the rain poured like the proverbial cats and dogs, and visibility was reduced to zero. The winds whipped, the thunder cracked, and it was one of those horrific storms that shakes you to bone. I was scared to death. And it would be the first of many times in my life that my father would help me face my fears. In the explosion of weather, Dad took my hand, opened the kitchen door, and we sat huddled on the stoop, where the only thing between us and the storm was the waffling thin gray screen.

While I squeezed Dad's hand tight and pressed my head against his arm, he told me a story about God's might. Counting the seconds between the flash of lightning and the clap of thunder, he spoke of God's perfect timing. Watching the lightning turn black sky into a white brighter than white, he talked about God's ability to transform the darkness of a terrible situation and make it better than we had hoped. And feeling the refuge of the roof over our head, he talked about God's protection and love when the world seems to "take us by storm."

We sat in silence for a long time on that porch and just watched the performance before us. As Dad's words sunk in, my fear turned to excitement, then awe.

When the storm passed, the grass was greener, the air was clearer, and the sounds of crickets returned. Dad took a storm and turned it into a powerful story. And in the end, the only thing blown away was me.




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**Opposite** | During a visit to the house in Brighton, Maryland, on the one-year anniversary of Dad's death, I shared a memory with family of being with Dad out on our porch during a thunderstorm. As we stood in the yard, with clear blue sky all around, a single boom of thunder unexpectedly (but affectionately) interrupts my story.

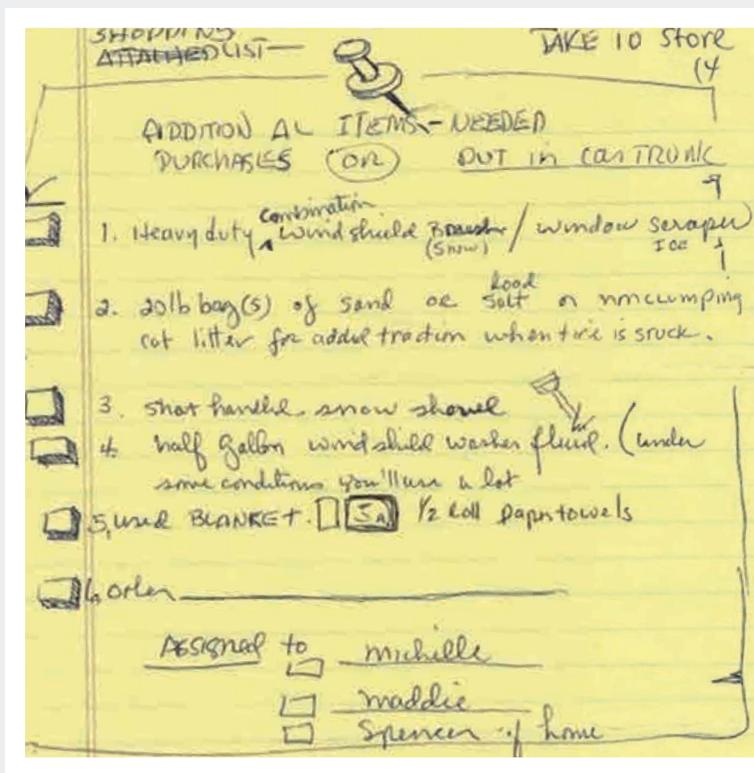
MARCH 11, 2008

Medication—1:00 am, 1 steroid; 7:00 am, 1 steroid, 1:20 pm, 1 steroid

Visit to Dr. Jason Taksey, Oncologist—8:30 am

Calls—Audra, John Weyrick, Jim Seale (wants to visit)

Alice Tignor—left a box of beautiful pansies



However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

## Making lists

*Dad thought and processed in list mode. Where to go, what to pack, steps to get things done—Dad loved to dream and plan things out. We would find these hand-rendered lists all over the place, and after my siblings and I grew and left home, he'd mail us lists too!*

So it was only natural that in the reality of Dad's numbered days he would draft a final list of things he wanted to do.

I can still see the white piece of paper atop a book on his lap, pen in his hand, and that left-handed scribble across the page. Some wishes were simple, some simply "to do," but his desire to "take Pat to see the Grand Canyon" simply seemed out of reach. Dad loved to travel and always had the next trip on his mind, but this was not the time for us to take anything away from him.

We wanted nothing more than for him to enjoy that dream in whatever measure he could. So my sister Deb sent a DVD of the Grand Canyon for him and Mom to "visit" while sitting together on the couch. And we continued to support him as best we could to complete the life he had planned to live.

As the weeks ticked by, another vision became bigger and was taking its hold. Dad stopped planning and let life simply unfold. He was present to the mystery at the end of his road and took time to learn and share as the world around him came near. We were saddened by the plans unfinished, the bulleted list unwritten.

But Dad was one step ahead, and in the end it was clear. While we're busy planning life, God sometimes has other plans. The list that really mattered was the one Dad had lived, and would soon finish, for God.




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**Opposite** | A sample of one of Dad's handwritten lists from years past. After reading the Green Bay weather report one day in December (my sister Deb lived in Green Bay), Dad sent Deb an assortment of emergency accessories for her car along with a list of things he wanted her to add.

MARCH 12, 2008

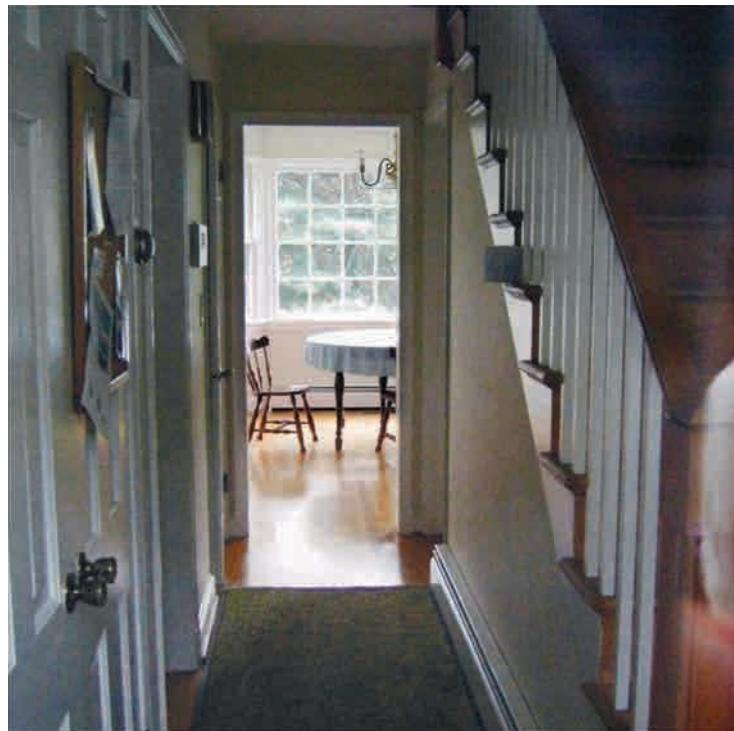
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*Medication—1:15 am, 1 steroid; 8:26 am, 1 steroid, 1 fungus pill; 3:13 pm, 1 steroid*

*Awoke at 4 am—wrote letter to Savannah, painted some Burnside's Bridge, Sinapoles came by to say “goodbye”*

*Jim Seale visit—2 pm, Dr. Taksey—will call Dr. Mary Young to set up appointment*

*Mary Bourdon—rose plant; Joan Hamilton—meatloaf, baked potato, asparagus*



Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

MATTHEW 22:37–39 NIV

## Under the dining room table

*As a little girl I was introduced to my dad's profession at church. But when he became rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church when I was six years old and we lived in the house next door, I began to understand my father's job more fully.*

The church was literally our next-door neighbor in every sense of the phrase. Not only would Dad work next door, but the congregation was often in our home as Sunday school classes were held in our basement. When church was over, Dad would come home, but it wasn't unusual for several parishioners to follow. Mom was quick to offer tea and cookies, and at times the dining room became Grand Central. Often, after supper, the phone would ring, and Dad would take a call. I would see the phone cord stretched from the kitchen across the

hallway to the dining room, and I'd hear him counsel a family or discuss a church matter. Sometimes I'd slip downstairs and listen from the steps or hide under the table waiting and listening to my father. And it was in those one-sided conversations that I came to learn the deeper meaning of ministry.

Dad had a way with words and made you feel that you could tell him anything. He'd stop whatever he was doing to help someone—to listen, to laugh, and to pray.

Jesus tells us to love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds. And to love our neighbor as ourselves. And living in that little house, I "got it." It was hard to know where our home stopped and church started. Where family, parishioners, friends, neighbors, and even strangers separated from us. Dad never saw the line.




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**Opposite |** Peeking through the glass windowpane of the front door to the house where we lived when I was young, I saw a dining room table and chair behind the stairwell. This scene took me back to the many conversations I overheard when Dad was caring for the church families and neighbors who also called that community home.

MARCH 13, 2008

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*Medication—3:15 am, 1 steroid; 9:15 am, 1 steroid; 7:45 pm, 1 fungus pill*

*8:30 am—Dr. Young's office called; 2:15 pm appointment, fill out paperwork*

*9:20 am Dr. Taksey called—Talked to Dr. Mary Young, wants me to pick up prescription for Temedar; Radiation starts next week*

*Calls—Bob Olsen is available to help; spoke with Becky and Rob, 12:00 pm—Phoebe arrived with chili, Bob heated it right away.*



*Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it  
may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.*

2 CORINTHIANS 8:11 NIV

## Final paintings

*One of my favorite pastimes was hanging out with Dad when he was busy in his workshop down in the basement. I loved to watch him organize his tools on the pegboard, sweep up the sawdust, and help him find a home for each little washer and nail. Dad could fix just about anything and delighted in saving odds and ends he just might need someday. But his real love was building things from scratch.*

On one of my visits home, I asked Dad if I could shoot a video of him telling me about his workshop so I'd always have the memory. Digging around, we stumbled upon a stack of unfinished paintings he had begun throughout the years but never completed. As Dad described each one, he'd exclaim, "I should finish that!" and I saw that familiar creative, life-giving spark in him. It was as though they were waiting to be rediscovered and for him to find them.

In no time, the paintings became his new project. Dad was not only determined to finish them but to give each one away, and he worked diligently as his energy and schedule allowed. Mom shared progress reports and his occasional frustration that he was no longer able to translate what he saw in his mind to the canvas. But Dad reconciled with his disability and somehow managed to finish each one.

On his last trip to Florida, Dad gave my husband, Ron, the painting of *Burnside's Bridge* at Antietam National Battlefield. They both loved that sacred place and the battle now frozen in time. The trees were unmistakably barren and the perspective intriguingly skewed but, painted while Dad was dying, it's strangely and more beautifully real.

As my family and I were resigning to life diminishing in Dad, God had awakened his gift to create. And in these finished paintings, we received a reminder of how much more there is when there's less.




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**Opposite** | It wasn't until after Dad had died that I discovered the camouflaged eyes he had painted into the landscape under the bridge in the painting that my husband, Ron, is holding in this photo. They are clearly his eyes, and I love the reminder that he still "sees" me as I "see" and feel him.

MARCH 14, 2008

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*Medication—3:13 am, 1 steroid; 9:13 am, 1 steroid; 9:25 am, 1 fungus pill*

*3:15 am—Dr. Young apt, CT to map out area, immobilize head, radiation comes out of the machine, total treatment 10 minutes;*

*short-term side effects, tumors can swell, they get mad; do the radiation followed up by MRI in 6 weeks*

*Calls—Nancy, Becky, Deb; Mailed Bob's book to Blue Ridge Summit, Nancy But, Librarian; Lisa Hale brought dinner*



The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.  
Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

MARK 1:5 NIV

# Baptizing

*When you look closely, there are clues. The pages are wrinkled from being wet. The edges are tanned where Dad's thumb held the pages. And the penciled-in names have all been softly added. Flipping through Dad's prayer book, it is evident how he spent his time: baptizing.*

Each one a new member, each one unique. Whether he used a watering can, a shell, a font, or a pond, Dad loved to welcome new members into the body of Christ.

I remember the time Dad baptized our friend Ann Marie in the ocean at the Outer Banks of North Carolina one summer at sunrise. She was just nine years old and very ill with leukemia, and she wanted to be baptized before she died. Dad spoke to her about Jesus and the promise of eternal life. As we gathered with her family on the shore with God's glory all around, Dad held Ann

Marie's hand, read the Ministration of Holy Baptism, poured water over her head, and anointed her with oil. And in that powerful moment and place we were all transformed.

No matter what means or implements Dad used, the words were always the same. Dad met people where they were and brought them to Christ. It was quite simple to Dad: an outward and visible sign with water of an inward and spiritual grace. Dad knew this script by heart and believed it with all his soul.

"You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen." The bond that God establishes in baptism is indissoluble. Dad understood from the very beginning that it was everlasting, without end.

And in his wonderfully worn prayer book, Dad had enthusiastically circled in red: "Alleluia!"




---

**Opposite** | It was classic "Dad" to bring people to Christ from wherever they were. Pictured here, he welcomes the newly baptized from a pond on the parishioners' farm, when Dad was rector at St. James Episcopal Church in Mt. Airy, Maryland.

MARCH 15, 2008

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*Medication—3:20 am, 1 steroid; 11:20 am, 1 steroid, 1 fungus pill*

*9:45 am—appointment with Jeff at Dr. Young's office—make mask, CT scan; pick up papers at Dr. Burke's office, neurosurgeon*

*Calls—Ella, Missy, Nancy & Ken, Nancy (Savannah made tennis team)*

*Karen & Steve Mitchell—Delivered Everyday Gourmet, chicken pepperoni with pasta*



And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying,  
“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

LUKE 22:19 NIV

# The Last Supper

*I can't help but think about what the disciples must have thought. Here their beloved Jesus was getting ready to ride a donkey into Jerusalem and die.* It's soon and it's really going to happen. And he's in an upper room somewhere with them having a meal, eating bread, drinking wine. They are all around the table, some listening, most self-absorbed, and he's telling them things that are going to change the world.

It's the last morning of the first weekend we are all home with Dad, and it's Sunday. We've had a few days of typical, full-house family fun with a layer of sobering reality mixed in. But it's winding down, and we will all depart soon. And what does Dad want to do? He asks us for a loaf of bread from the kitchen, a goblet with wine, and for us all to gather on the porch. We find ourselves filling the chairs in a crowded oval, grandkids and all. In the chill of the morning, Dad's scarf looks like a familiar stole around his neck, and the words he speaks slip out of his mouth like butter. And I find myself between two worlds.

As Leonardo da Vinci portrays in his iconic painting *The Last Supper*, I have envisioned this setting almost all my life, and in an instant I find it oddly playing out in front of me. Grandkids are squirming; Mom's emotionally somewhere else; Deb is focused on the prayer book; and Dad is reading the script. Except he's not going to Jerusalem, and we're not completely in the dark.

We've watched and listened to him our whole lives, and we're waiting for something new. What does Dad tell us about his own death? What does he want us to know? He takes us out on the porch, back 2,000 years, and says, "Take, eat, drink.... This is my body given for you.... This is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for you."

And like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, we want to ask, "How do I get back home?" We look at Dad and, like Glinda, the Good Witch, he shows us—that we've known it all along.




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**Opposite** | It was a privilege like no other to have our father minister to us in the intimacy of our home as he was dying. No trappings were needed. "Take ... eat ... remember...." In many ways his dying seemed surreal, but Dad reminded us that everything was really quite familiar and clear.

MARCH 16, 2008

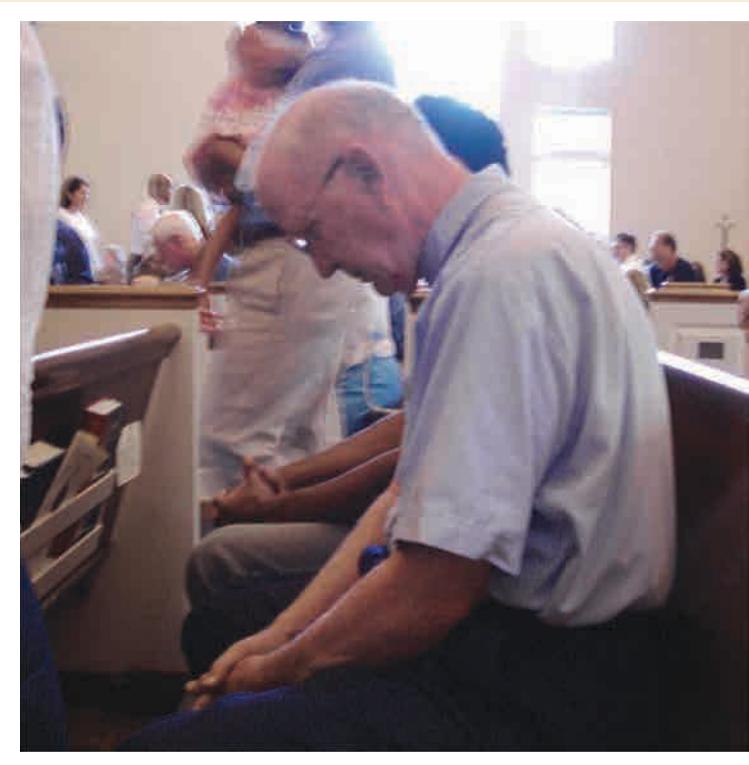
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*Palm Sunday*

*Medication—4:20 am, 1 steroid; 8:08 am, 1 fungus pill; 10:25 am, 1 steroid*

*Bob Loves Pat! Bunches! [written in my father's handwriting in Mom's journal]*

*Beautiful shawl for Bob—Ann Keiser; Ellen Hayes brought dinner—Chicken with noodles, salad, brownies*



Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,  
according to the power at work within us,

EPHESIANS 3:20 NIV

## “Yes, no, and not now”

*One of the things I loved about Dad was that he tended to show us a different way to look at things. He welcomed a deep conversation or chewing on a challenging thought. It was easy to go to Dad with questions, and I did so throughout my life. I'd call him up from college or, later, when struggling with a job. I remember a time when I felt conflicted about commitments at church, and Dad shared that life isn't about doing more. He would say, "Honey, God answers prayer in three ways: Yes, no, and not now." I would come to rely on "not now" often. So many times in struggling with a decision in life, I found great comfort and assurance in waiting. To hang in the balance between my limited wisdom and my boundless emotion and hope, and to let God's order unfold. Dad's words would help me see the power of partnership with God in all things, most often after the fact.*

When my husband and I found ourselves, after many years, wanting a child, Ron and I knew to turn it over to

God. Despite our emotional toil and confusion, God's perfect timing with our daughter, Savannah, would prevail.

So, as Dad's life was ending before us, we knew the answer to our question about his death. Dad had shown us while living that he'd accepted his dying, and we would now see at the end of his journey his response to God's "yes."

It was as though the three simple answers were never that simple at all. Dad took the covenant with God so seriously, he would die the same beautiful way that he lived. Sharing with friends and family, reflecting God's love above, praying, eating ice cream and singing, and surrendering to life fading away.

What we learned watching Dad was an answer that was louder than all of the rest. When we want to discern God's plan with certainty, we have to hear him say, "Trust."




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**Opposite** | I lovingly watched my father in prayer, no longer at the pulpit but now in the pew, knowing he would soon be with his Lord. In the intimacy of the moment, I snapped a photo with my phone so I would always have the moment with me.

MARCH 17, 2008

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*Bob experienced a difficult time 12:39 am; 3:40 am noisy breathing, difficulty clearing his throat, I propped him up on several pillows, gave him splash to drink—good sleep after 4:10 am*

*Medication—4:09 am, 1 steroid; 10:10 am, 1 steroid, 1 fungus pill*

*Drive to Severna Inn for Brunch—decided to do pizza at Romilo's instead, Nancy Nolan brought by a pot of tulips*



For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God,  
a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

## “Death and dying are not strange to me”

*Pieces of Dad's story are all around. As I go through his books and run my thumb over where the book press has embossed his name, I feel him. When I go through the family photos that he scrapbooked while dying, I see him. And when I read the words my sister Deb journaled on a piece of paper during a conversation between him and Dr. Bhandari, I know him.*

*A Conversation, Tuesday, 3/4/08*

**Dad:** Where has the metastasized cancer gone?

**Dr. B:** In your brain, the lung, the liver, and it will keep going at a random rate.

**Dad:** Death and dying are not strange to me. I have been to cancer conferences, I have been a clergy for over forty years, I am coming home. A good death is one accepted by the dying person.

**Dr. B:** I agree.

**Dad:** My mother-in-law had a beautiful dying experience at our home. I do not want any treatment. No follow-up appointments.

**Dr. B:** Comfort, care, and hospice when the time comes. I will check on hospice criteria and Medicare, whether to start down that road. You will remain under my care until I call back in a couple of days.

And in a video my mother took while Dad was lying on the bed talking on the phone to Rev. Tom Bowers, a dear friend and mentor, *I hear him.*

**Dad:** When I got this diagnosis, it was like going home. Over the years I had a dual ministry: secular and sacred. I was able to be the chaplain at hospice in northern Virginia. I started the St. Francis Burial Society, coffins as plain boxes, nothing fancy. I was concerned because the church didn't attack the funeral industry, and I think they should have.... I am anxious, but I am not worried, of course.

God is there and he will come to me and we'll meet, and I will send regards... [laughing]. Yes....

*I miss him.*




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**Opposite** | Dad and I on the bench at the dock by his boat, one last time enjoying the peace and beauty all around. The air had an early spring chill, but the sun's warmth matched the love between us.

MARCH 18, 2008

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*Medication—4:15 am, 1 steroid; 8:13 am, 1 steroid, 1 fungus pill*

*Knitting circle of Christ Church—Shawl “It is our prayer that this shawl will be a blessing to you. Wrap it around you when you feel down, when you pray, when you sleep. Whenever you feel a need for love and support. It was woven with prayers for God’s love and support.”*  
*Donna—soup, dessert (meringue and cherries)*



*Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.*

PROVERBS 19:21 ESV

## “God reminds us who’s really in charge”

*I don’t remember the exact date, but it was definitely during one of those teenage years when going out with my friends was not only paramount in my life but much more important than anything going on at home. I was always excited to explore the neighborhood on bike, foot, or by car. We’d walk miles to school, cut through the woods, even sneak out back and down along the creek to hang out at the local community college—we thought we were so cool. Those were the days, and we were in charge of our world. Or so we thought.*

It was on one such weekend when everything had been planned—who to get together with, what to wear—and all we had to do was get up and go. So when I stumbled up the stairs from my bedroom that Saturday morning, I couldn’t believe my eyes. The weather forecast had been all wrong. What was to be a dusting of snow had turned our whole world white. We couldn’t even get the front door open. As we tried to push the storm door out,

the drift of snow onto our porch was several feet high, and it wouldn’t even budge. All I could think about were my plans gone astray and a day held captive to shoveling the snow.

And in the midst of my utter despair, Dad was filled with Godly awe: “Isn’t it wonderful how every once in a while God reminds us who’s really in charge?” he proclaimed with delight, and I stopped dead in my tracks. I had never thought of it that way, and I don’t know if I was more amazed at the reminder of the storm’s author or Dad’s appreciation of God’s might.

It was an *aha!* moment for me, as was the rest of the day. What seemed like an unwanted gift was the perfect ingredient for making forts, snow angels, and a ski slope out of our little side-yard hill. Spontaneous family fun had never been better.

My father always found the blessing in life events, and his words then still echo today. When God hands you lemons—make hot chocolate.




---

**Opposite** | Forty years later I can still hear the sound of the shovel scraping the sidewalk and the snow crunching beneath our boots. Dad paused to pose that white winter morning when we found ourselves entrenched in snow.

MARCH 19, 2008

*Medication—4:10 am, 1 steroid; 4:00 pm, 1 steroid*

*Rock Creek Cemetery, Cynthia—3-day notice, interment fee \$500, outer burial liner \$300, granite marker \$1,000,  
cremains urn dimensions 14" x 14" x 14"*

*Dr. Burke—looked up X-rays, 1 in cyst, several others, movable beam, main risk: too much radiation, tomorrow will look at mask*



Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants.

PSALM 116:15 NIV

# The program

*We had talked about it off and on for years and I knew, as each of my siblings knew, what our specific assignments would be to fulfill Dad's wishes at the end of his life.*

For me, I'd had practice. It started with the death of my mother's best friend, Jean Van Dyke. Mom wanted Jean's friends and family to have a printed memorial piece on Jean at her funeral that showed her beautiful smile, reflected the colors she loved, and featured her family and the sayings that were *so Jean*. We took a photo of a quilt, which became the background, and the pieces of her story were laid on top. We tied it with a bright pink ribbon, and it brought us all some joy.

I'd continued to make these keepsake programs for several family members' funerals, and I knew I'd also do this for Dad, as he'd requested in his written wishes. But this time, I would be able to create it with the one who was dying. And what a powerful experience it was.

My family and I all reminisced and brainstormed about what to include. Dad wanted his military patches scanned,

and he was very clear about the Scripture to add. We picked out photos we loved, and my sister Deb selected some favorite quotations. Mom found a poem on the patchwork of a family, and I knew we'd lay it all on the backdrop of a photo of the sea that Dad adored.

I'd format the piece back in Tampa and email Dad proofs to review. He gave me his feedback, but it was the collaboration between us, and with the other family members, that he loved. He was most excited when our family was all together and sharing, which was never more true than now.

At some point the program was nearly complete, and the only thing left to add was the date he would die. We put it aside to relish the remaining days God would give us with Dad.

As I reflect back, the irony is that one of the best parts of Dad's story was missing from that little keepsake. Dad intentionally and willingly helped us to process and live through his death. It was his lasting gift to us.




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**Opposite** | Activities such as making a funeral program with Dad as he was dying gave us a format for hearing what was important to him. It was one of the many ways we found ourselves facing death with him, and in doing so we became less afraid.

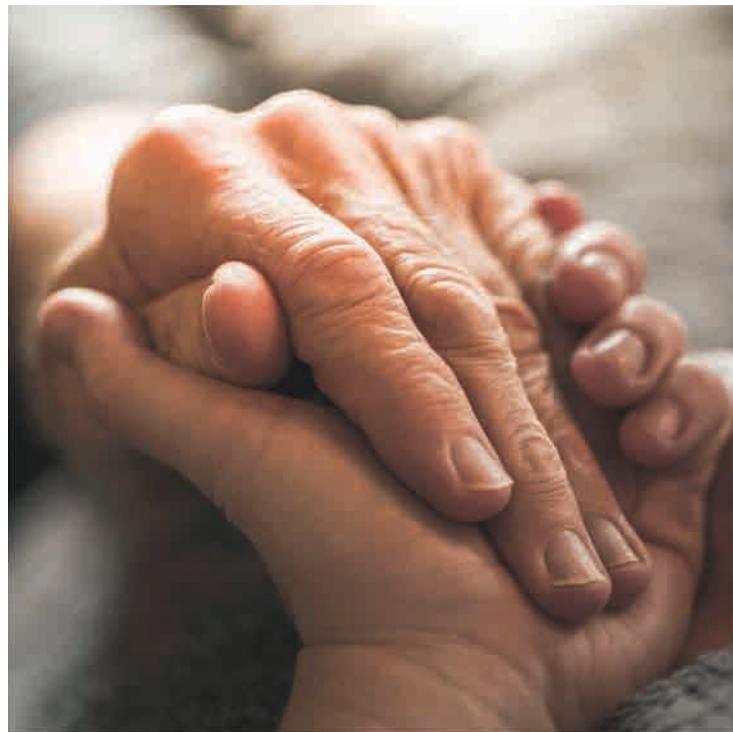
MARCH 20, 2008

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*Medication—4:00 am, 1 steroid; 8:00 am, 1 fungus; 5:00 pm—1 steroid*

*Dr. Taksey—98 temperature, 163 weight, 144/85 blood pressure, 61 pulse*

*Nausea before Temodar, daily prescription, Statin for swishing, Seizures—prescription*



*For our present troubles are small and won't last very long.*

*Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17 NLT

## Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

*When I was a teenager, death was still strange to me. I found it to be a topic that was like a big black hole; I could go there, but it scared me because every aspect seemed unknown, yet it was completely inevitable.*

My father started to speak with me about it more often during that time, and I vividly remember him telling me about the now-famous five stages of grief defined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying*: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Even though I had not yet lost a loved one to death, I understood the stages on a level of the teenage sort—breaking up with a boyfriend, the end of a beloved sports season, or losing a good friend who had moved away.

Kübler-Ross “changed the landscape” regarding the denial of death in America, and her candid and unabashed conversations on the rights of the dying paved the way

for the birth of the hospice movement, which greatly influenced Dad. It was as though she was singing his song. She opened the door to a generational shift in the care of the dying, and Dad walked others through this door over and over again in his ministry.

As I learned more about Kübler-Ross’s studies and listened to her interviews with patients, I could picture her walking down the hospital halls, wanting to talk to the dying. And I felt my father’s call to be present, to listen, to dignify and embrace this precious aspect of our humanity. And to be ready for it.

Like peeling back an onion, this changed way of thinking is gradually revealed until we reach the obvious physical end in death. Kübler-Ross wanted to shine a light on the inner lives of the dying patients. Dad saw it as a time when the light already within each of us can transform us beyond what we could ever hope.




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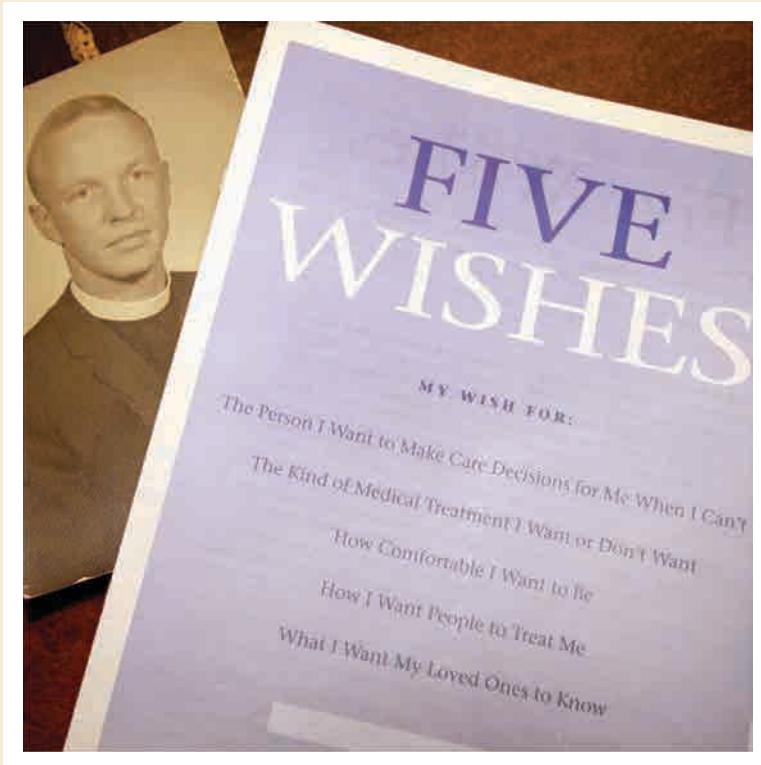
**Opposite** | Elisabeth Kübler-Ross gave so much of herself to so many who were dying. During an interview when she herself was dying, she says she doesn’t understand why she is still alive. The person interviewing her says, “Maybe it’s because it is your turn to receive.” I love that.

MARCH 21, 2008

*Good Friday*

*Medication—5:00 am, 1 steroid; 11:30 am, 1 steroid; 1:50 pm, 1 fungus*

*Mailed BWI [Baltimore-Washington International Airport] Pathfinder Volunteer things back—Dad's badge, car ID, note of thanks  
Dad called Betsy Wendt, told 3 stories, gave address, will mention William Wendt Center for Loss and Healing in his obituary*



If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask  
whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

JOHN 15:7 NIV

## Five Wishes

*Dad was always working on a project. Sometimes it was an item he wanted to build, sometimes it was planning a trip, and sometimes it was just gathering information he wanted to remember.* But there was one project he worked on that he wanted all of us to remember. The distinct blue pamphlet named *Five Wishes* was a document we first learned about twenty years before Dad died, and we would come to know it well.

It took a long time for me to grasp, understand, and eventually appreciate Dad's great interest in the end of life. To me, it wasn't the kind of thing we needed to be concerned about "now." He would talk about it often, and learning about *Five Wishes* was the first time Dad shared very specific plans about his own end of life. But Dad didn't just want to talk about it; he wanted all of us to play a part. And it was detailed in this eight-page brochure.

Years later, as the inevitable death of Dad was at our doorstep, this thin document that seemed strange during

our younger years would now feel like a warm, good friend. When we gathered together as a family after Dad's prognosis, the conversations had become welcome.

"The whole weekend was so surreal," my sister Becky recounted, "but there was comfort in pulling out the familiar *Five Wishes*. We'd heard Dad talk about it for so long, and I can only assume it was comforting for him now too, that he had already given thought to these things, and he was confirming them with us again: 'Do not resuscitate; I want to be with my family, to be at home; to have my favorite music playing, to be kept clean, no pain, to be read devotionals, to have keepsakes created; specific Scripture and hymns at my funeral service; cremation.'"

Dad's wishes were already known. And it was clear to us now how beautiful and important these thoughts of his were—that he would not only make these decisions for us and share them, but in doing so, he would show us a better way.




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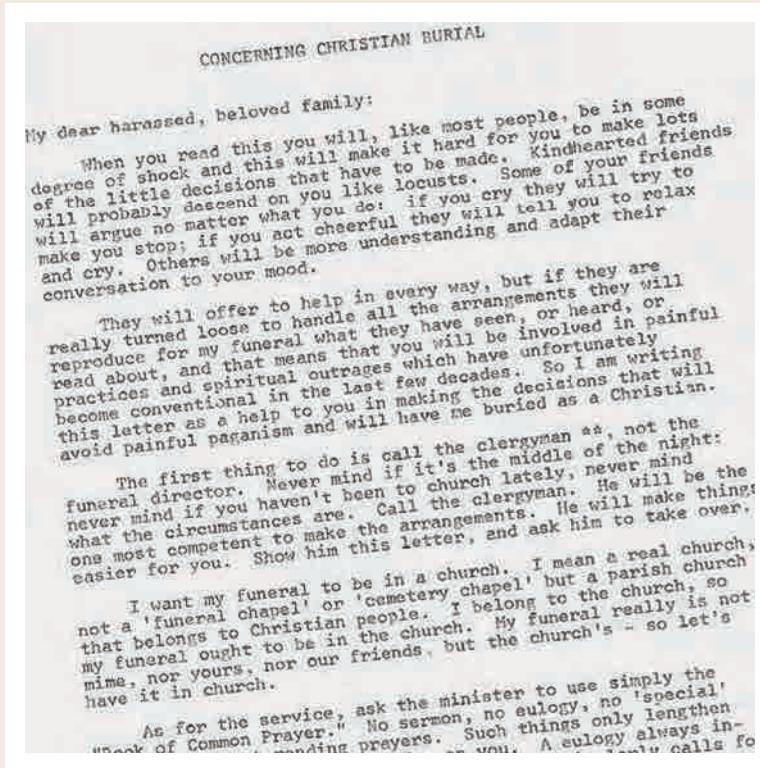
**Opposite** | Resources such as *Five Wishes* help to start the conversation on a topic that's uncomfortable to discuss. It was easy for Dad to fill out and easy for us to read. It takes an idea that is abstract and turns it into a tangible, helpful tool.

MARCH 22, 2008

Calls—Meg, Bill Davis from BWI Pathfinders, lunch next Tuesday

St. John's—How many copies of death certificate do we need? Can direct cremation be guaranteed? Within 24 hours, least expensive temporary container, does this include transport of the ashes to our home?

Alice and Warren Tignor—dropped off plate of hot cross buns; Lisa Halk dropped off dinner—tacos, blueberry pie, Easter cookies



He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee.

LUKE 24:6 NIV

## Concerning Christian burial

*To write history is to deal with evidence. Some is right before our eyes, and some is buried like hidden treasure. Some nuggets are passed down orally, and other artifacts are hidden pearls waiting to be discovered.*

This was the case with a three-page, typed letter titled "Concerning Christian Burial" that my sister Deb uncovered in one of Dad's stacks in his office after he died. And it was shiny. The letter was not signed, and although some of the wording indicated that my father was not the author, we recognized the premise with affection.

When you read this you will, like most people, be in some degree of shock.... I am writing to help you have me buried as a Christian.... The first thing to do is call a clergyman, not the funeral director.... I want my funeral in a real church.... To

put proportion into what's going on music should combine death with the crowning hope of Easter.... I do not want my body on display any time after I no longer need it. What counts is the soul. When you bury my body, you are not burying me.... I want the simplest, cheapest casket you can find.... There is a better way of showing love than by spending money on funerals.... At the cemetery I want the simplest unobtrusive marking. If I did any good while I was here it will still be good whether my name is connected to it or not.... When you have a quiet minute, think of me, not that bundle of ashes I used to drive around.

It's a wonderful, candid love letter that puts the end of life into beautiful perspective, complete with the perfect punch line: "As the angel said to the woman at the tomb of Jesus, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead?'"




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**Opposite** | With humor and stunning candor, this three-page, anonymous letter seems to me to say what so many people feel about how they'd like to be buried, but they don't know how to say it.

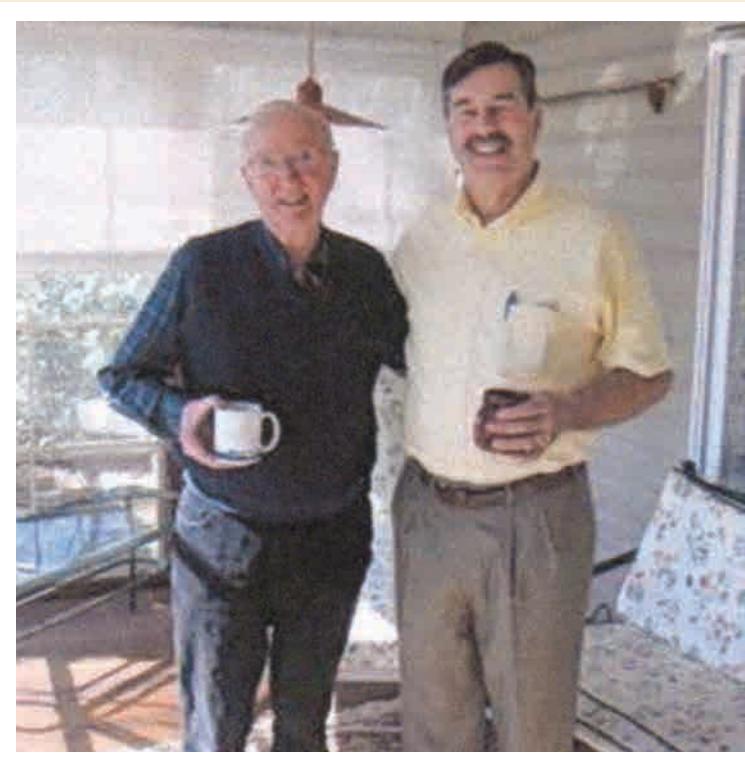
MARCH 23, 2008

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*Easter*

*Meal (15)—Mom, Dad, Deb, Michelle & Maddie, Nancy, Rob, Audra, Courtney & Jacob, Bip, Hannah, Andrew, Caroline & George  
in time for coffee and dessert*

*Before Laymans & Herzogs went home, met in bedroom to finalize funeral service (Scripture, hymns, trumpets, depart to serve the Lord)*



*So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11 NLT

## Goodbye, my friend

*As with any trip, when you know where you are going, it's easier to say good-bye. And this was the case with Dad. During his lifetime, he knew and loved many parishioners, neighbors, friends, and colleagues, and his last 100 days were filled with people reaching out to him and Mom. There was a steady stream of visitors and calls, and the thoughts and conversations were as rich and diverse as the people themselves. Some flew across the country to see him, and others came or called multiple times. And as his strength allowed, Dad enjoyed them all.*

A pastor and storyteller, Dad had a natural ability to endear people to him. But when the family was home visiting, he reserved that time for us. So I was later eager to reconnect with Blix Winston, a dear friend of Dad's who came to see him several times during his final days. I wanted to know from a good friend's perspective what Dad shared and how those last times together were for him.

Blix told me that his visits with Dad at the end were peaceful, "that death is not particularly important, but what is important is what will last," he shared. "In Christ we live and move and have our being, and that being orients everything."

Blix and Dad shared a deep love of Christ that Dad affectionately called "Christian love," which often included great stories and a cup of coffee. What did they talk about? What did Dad share?

Blix smiled when I asked and said that he and Dad, like they always did, "just hung out."

As one friend and fellow-clergy wrote in a note to Dad, "May the way, the truth, and the life that grasped us all long ago be with you now and forevermore."

So as I think of how those many special and intimate good-byes must have gone for Dad, it was surely less "good-bye" and more "I'll see you on the other side."




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**Opposite** | In the word *goodbye*, we find its origin, "God be with ye." Dad's dear friend Blix enjoyed his last several visits but, like Dad, he didn't focus on the end. After a walk in the woods, the two settled on the porch and shared the wonderful Christian love between them.

MARCH 24, 2008

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*Dropped off Maddie & Michelle at BWI to return to Wisconsin*

*Urn—Rob building of mahogany, nothing special, no added crosses*

*Calls—Gid Mountjoy, Blix called too!*

*Bob & Judy Olsen would love to come over today, could this work? Ellen Hays dropped off chocolate dessert, daffodils, and card*



*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

ECCLESIASTES 12:7 KJV

## The coffin in the garage

*“Death is really the stimulus for a better way of living. Knowing we are going to die enables us to have a real concern for the way we live our lives,”* said Rev. William Wendt, who founded the St. Francis Burial Society with Dad in 1975.

It was one thing for Dad to talk about this dying matter and quite another thing for him to start making coffins that showed up at our house as prototypes. It wasn’t the sort of thing that I at fifteen years of age wanted my first boyfriend to see when I brought him home to meet the parents. But that is exactly what happened and what Scott Lehr would affectionately share from his memory of my father some thirty-three years later when he learned of Dad’s death.

The Society was a unique program that offered \$99 pine coffins as an alternative to the more costly practices of the unregulated funeral industry at that time. Dad and Fr. Wendt offered them not only to the dying but to the

living who wanted to plan for their own deaths. And in doing this, they enabled people to emphasize the here and now and life everlasting with God.

Suggested uses for the simple pine box before its ultimate use included a blanket chest, coffee table, wine rack, or toy chest! And Dad took these suggestions to heart, because the coffin in our house ended up as a trunk that held rakes and shovels in the garage and greeted me each time I returned home to visit Mom and Dad years later.

It was an unconventional idea for an unconventional time. What began as a “dumpster dive” to collect scraps of pine from Saul’s Furniture down the street from my childhood home continues today as the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing. And regarding the families and loved ones who found solace in a simple pine box, I like to imagine that they rest eternally in community with God—which as a final resting place surely surpasses pine and is also a glory beyond all human understanding.




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**Opposite** | As we brainstormed ways to continue Dad’s legacy, my sister Deb had a local handyman use the original blueprint for the \$99 coffin to make a new prototype. She enjoys it today in her home in Chicago as a beloved storage chest.

MARCH 25, 2008

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*Washington Post Death Notices—\$9.25 per line of text, (Mon-Sat), \$10 per line (Sun)*

*At the Cancer Center—143/77 blood pressure, moisturize skin, Temodar, Dexamethasone for fungus, only real symptom  
is hoarseness of voice*

*Calls—Rhonda Campbell wants to come over today, Judy Olsen called to check in; Michelle Cummings—Bowtie pasta & chicken*



I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you.  
And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

JOHN 17:21 NLT

## “You will know me in each other”

*One of the privileges of being a preacher’s kid was that I felt as though I had a human biblical encyclopedia around me at all times. Sometimes it was a good thing, such as when I had a big, deep question, and sometimes I received a sermon whether I wanted one or not.*

As Dad was dying and we watched him begin to turn inward, his actions spoke louder than words. There was a fullness in his quiet, and we knew something sacred was going on, both in Dad and in all who were present during that time in his life. We had a lot of questions; some we asked, some we discussed among ourselves, and some we just held and pondered in our hearts. We knew we would miss Dad immensely, and we began to play out in our minds what life would be like with the huge hole that would become our new companion. What would Mom do? Whom would we call now when we wanted to share our lives or when we had a burning question?

At some point, one of us asked, “Daddy, how will we know you when you are gone?” We had all found ourselves occasionally wondering if the butterfly was our

grandmother’s spirit hovering near or whether an apparent coincidence was a familiar sign from a deceased loved one. But this was our father, and we knew he’d tell us the truth.

“You will know me in each other,” he simply said.

My sister Deb compares it to Philip, the disciple, when he asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the father and that will be enough for us.”

And Jesus said, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?”

At first I thought, *Of course, Daddy is in each of us—we are his DNA. We will see him and feel him and know him by means of those who loved him most.* But like the disciples who didn’t understand until after the resurrection, I think now that Dad was on a higher plane. He wanted our gaze to be focused on the Lord. Through him we are all connected, and in that profound wellspring we are all one. So I will trust Jesus’s words, “Whoever drinketh of the water that I give him shall never thirst.”

But what I wouldn’t do to have that old familiar encyclopedia still around.




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**Opposite** | Less than a year before Dad died, my family all gathered to celebrate Mom and Dad’s 50th wedding anniversary. We are held together not only by the supremacy of Christ but by a shared faith passed down through generations.

MARCH 26, 2008

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9:00 am—Doris Johnson will come to the house to finalize bulletin for the funeral

Dr. Chala—Proximal muscles get weak from steroids, keep taking Protonix to coat stomach, swish and swallow with Nystatin,

radiation on skin is minimal, weight loss is part of process, make appointment in 4 weeks to see Dr. Young

Quilt Bee—they made a prayer shawl for Bob, Liz gave it to me



And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church,  
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

MATTHEW 16:18 ESV

## “You don’t have to go to church anymore”

*My dad was great at changing the paradigm. Not so much because he wanted to be a game changer, but because he knew there were different ways to arrive at the same place. And this was the case during my high school years, when my siblings and I were questioning and rebelling, as teenagers often do.*

Church had become an obligation, and to be able to sleep in on Sunday mornings was secretly “just way more attractive.” Dad had met many people who thought church wasn’t a great place to be. Inviting conversation, he would ask them where they thought *church* was. It was an engaging foray into getting beyond the pews and liturgy and into the real topic at hand.

Dad knew it was all personal, this relationship with God, and that my siblings and I were entering into a time when we needed to be able to make some important decisions on our own. He had shown us the way, and sensing our restlessness he announced during dinner one day, “You don’t have to go to church anymore.” I remember freezing

and thinking, *Okay, what’s up?* How could something so precious and central to our lives suddenly become optional? But we were overcome by the freedom, and none of us went to church the following Sunday. Thus began a more profound and sometimes bumpy ... but very personal journey between Christ and me.

It would be many years later that Dad’s words would come back to me while I was standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, in front of the rock that commemorates where Jesus is said to have proclaimed to his disciple Peter, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” Reading the Scripture, we see that Peter portrays the church as a living spiritual house, with Christ as the foundation and each believer a stone.

I appreciated with awe the symbolism and Dad’s long-ago “waiver” as a rite of passage for us children. Dad knew the real church was already in us ... living, breathing, growing ... part of a community built on a rock of solid love.




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**Opposite** | The Church of the Primacy of St. Peter in Tabgha, Israel, was one of the many stops on a pilgrimage my sister Deb and I took the year after Dad died. Seeing the actual holy sites brought so much of the Bible to life for me.

MARCH 27, 2008

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9:00 am—Doris Johnson came over, went over funeral service plans and gave her box of material on "death and dying" that Bob wanted her to have

Call—Lucy Winston will call back to see when treatment is Friday, possible visit



As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.

|ISAIAH 66:13 NIV

## The call to hospice

*Less than two weeks after learning that Dad's illness was terminal, we would begin to explore Hospice.*

"The call to Hospice had become a template for us," my sister Deb recalls. "We knew that's what Dad wanted, and he knew it as well. But even with Dad's experience as a chaplain for Hospice earlier in his career, the whole room became tense when Gerda Bommelje showed up for the initial visit. On one hand we wanted it so badly and on the other hand we didn't."

Gerda was a beautiful woman with a pretty silk scarf around her neck and a heavy accent when she spoke. When Mom offered her a seat in the family room, she gracefully filled the chair. She talked about her daughter whom she had just returned from seeing in Amsterdam. "She was just trying to put us all at ease," said Deb.

And when Dad spoke, it was as though he was there for someone else, as though he was the clergy reading the script that he not only had come to know so well but also completely believed.

Mom was quiet and softly cried as she told Gerda that she wasn't pleased with the oncologist. "Maybe we shouldn't ask you about this," said Mom, but Gerda replied with an invitation: "Just ask me. I'm old. I will tell you." She listened to the story and asked, "How did this

happen? When was the diagnosis?" Even though she knew, she wanted to hear it from Mom and Dad. Gerda listened and watched. And later, while Mom continued, Gerda perceptively picked up on silence from Dad.

After a while, Gerda turned to them and said, "It may be too soon.... The time for hospice may not be yet.... You may want a second opinion." And that gave permission to Dad, Mom, and my sister Deb, who represented the rest of us, to know that this was Dad's story, not someone else's. As my family thanked and hugged her, she said, "I'll be back. You call me any time." And then she was gone.

"We could breathe again," remembers Deb. The Spirit filled the room, and it was decided they'd seek a second opinion to confirm the diagnosis.

It was the beginning of a beautiful relationship. What Dad knew as a universal movement that he adored, fostered, and played an active role in during his ministry was now a critical, life-giving part of his own journey.

Gerda did return again, and the hospice team grew to include additional social workers, nurses, home health aides, equipment, and medication that entered our hearts and home, while allowing Dad and God to remain in charge.

It was a blessing that bestowed the fullness and dignity of life while dying.




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**Opposite** | A statue of the Virgin Mary on the grounds of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, Israel, showed her outstretched arms and reminded me of the universal care and compassion that hospice gives to so many.

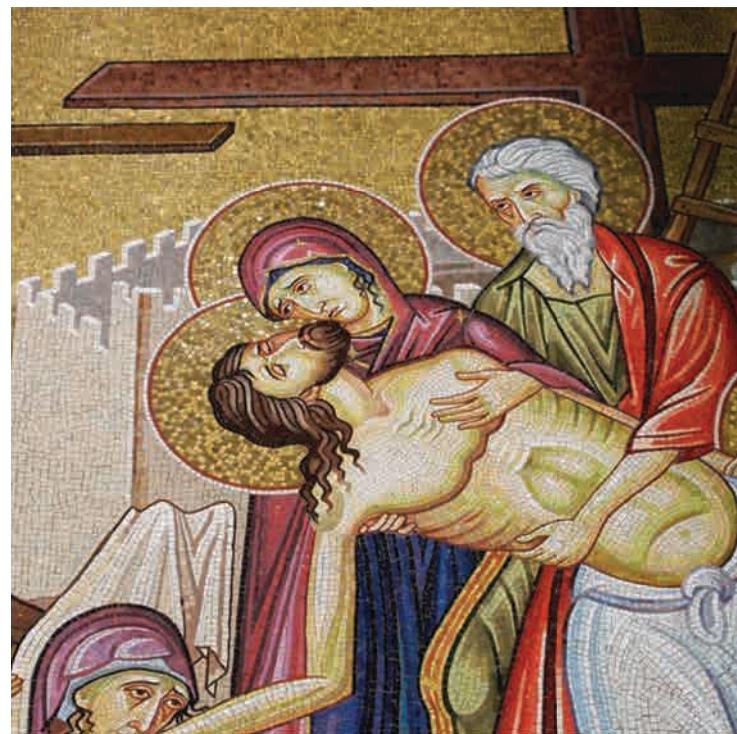
MARCH 28, 2008

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*Blix came to visit—Basket of ivy, Almond Roca bites, Ghirardelli candy bars, bear of love, jar of honey*

*Deb left for airport 7:20 am*

*Calls—Bonnie Wilson, Deb, Robert, Becky*



For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,  
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

JOHN 3:16 KJV

## “Bingo!”

*Long ago, Dad and I were in his white Lexus driving on Ridge Road and had just approached the Interstate 70 overpass in Mt. Airy, Maryland. I don’t remember exactly where we were headed, but I remember the moment I heard him exclaim, loudly and boldly, “Bingo!” It was a word Dad used to convey *Exactly, right-on, absolutely, you got it!* It was always a thrill when he said it, because it was delivered enthusiastically and included a slice of his pride that you felt in your core.*

The topic of our conversation was one I had pondered and wrestled with many times before and was now transparently pondering out loud with my father. “Dad, I still just don’t understand. Why did Jesus have to die?” I asked. Although I felt that I understood this on one level, I didn’t feel that I understood as deeply I should. It bothered me that something so very central to our faith was still muddy in my mind. Love of the most glorious kind delivered through death. It just didn’t make sense to me.

I can still feel Dad’s elation. Here was his second-born child, hungry like a little bird in its nest waiting for the

“mamma bird” to feed it, and Dad had a worm in his mouth. He carefully fed it to me. “All of us have sinned against God. God is infinitely holy and righteous. He must punish the sinner; if he didn’t, then his law is not *law*. The punishment for breaking the law is death—separation from God. We need a way to escape God’s judgment, since we are all sinners and cannot keep the law. The only one who could do this is God himself.... That is why Jesus is God in flesh; his sacrifice on our behalf is infinitely sufficient to cleanse us. God’s perfect son fulfilled the perfect requirement of God’s perfect law. It’s perfectly brilliant in its perfect simplicity.”

And after a long pause and finally feeling what I had heard, I said, “So it’s because he loved us so very much?” To which Dad replied a resounding “BINGO!”

It was a beautiful conversation about a father’s ultimate love for his children, delivered by a father to his child. And for the first time I understood that death really meant life.




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Opposite | It is the ultimate paradox that Christ’s death means life as an act of love.

MARCH 29, 2008

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*My birthday—a quiet day!! Three beautiful bouquets arrived from SP Florist: Layman children; "For the love of my life always and forever, Love, Bob"; "Can't wait to see you, we love you, Nancy & Ken"*

*Calls from—Nancy M, Nancy & Ronny, Rob, Becky, Blix "we have a new Bishop!" Eugene Sutton, Washington Cathedral, Bob's choice!! Meg—a willow tree, garden angel*



Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

JOHN 20:29 NIV

## The waiting room

After the initial shock of Dad's illness and the first full family gathering when we were all home, my siblings and I settled into a rhythm of taking turns being with Mom and Dad. Sometimes we went alone, sometimes we brought our children, and other times we showed up in pairs, balancing the commitments of life against the deep hunger to be with our parents.

I anxiously awaited a debriefing from my siblings on the many days I was not able to be present. Their words and stories comforted me greatly, and I found strength in our shared pain and grief, a beauty in our ministry to one another.

Although Dad did not want to pursue any heroic measures to try and save his life, he decided to undergo four "zaps" of radiation to break up the tumor in his brain. The aim was to lessen the chance of it hitting his brain stem and killing him instantly, thus giving him a little more time.

Both my brother, Rob, and my sister Deb were with Mom and Dad on the day of the first procedure. It was my sister who not only shared by calling me that night but, through the lens of her memory, captured the moment in a profound painting. She was finishing a fine arts

degree during this time and, in addition to the paintings she was required to do in order to graduate, she painted what was on her heart.

Deb shares the story with me:

I was sitting across from Mom and Dad in the waiting room.... As with so many older couples, they look the same, they dress the same, they both had their legs crossed. They are so different as human beings, yet they are one. There was such a peace about Dad. He wasn't anxious; he was doing this for us. As I looked around, all these people were in the waiting room.... There was no literature, no cross, nothing about a church service, so in many ways it felt devoid of God. But seeing Mom and Dad, I envisioned Christ hanging over them.

When I first see this painting after my sister tells me about it, it is in an email attachment that fills my screen, and I am gripped by what is before me.

My sister has "written" with candor the headline for the whole experience, and it invites all of us to see. My father is dying, my mother is holding on, and we are watching. Where is God in all of this? He is right here.




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**Opposite |** Deborah Herzog Alexander, 2008, *In the Midst, Matthew 18:20*, oil on canvas, 20" x 25"  
With death at Dad's doorstep, Deb painted what our faith sees. By Christ's wounds we have been healed, and we will live eternally with him.

MARCH 30, 2008

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*I grocery shopped at 7:15 am*

*Bob slept until 9 am and ate a good breakfast*

*Painting in the "studio" Rhododendrons—music playing, Sandie lying nearby!!*

*Cleaning day for Pat!, Soups from Mike & Veronica Garabedian*



He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

LUKE 5:3 NIV

# The Spritzer

*There are three kinds of love in New Testament Greek: eros love (erotic love), philos love (between friends), and agape love (unconditional, selfless love).* But Dad would show me there was a fourth kind of love—boat love.

The boat came into our lives when I was younger. It was a used O'Day 22 sailboat, nothing fancy, but to Dad, it was his mountaintop. Docked out back on the little finger pier, it afforded him a retreat for joy, refuge, and I'm sure, conversation with God. Dad loved the thrill of wind, water, and sailcloth in harmony.

Each year he was eager to get the boat ready, which would give him as much pleasure as sailing the boat itself. There was the scraping and painting of the bottom, taking it over to the marina by trailer, and the first annual sail back over to dock on Cattail Creek. There he could affectionately gaze at it along with the weather each day from the second-story window of his study. Mom and Dad entertained many friends on that boat. My brother, Rob, and Dad had some of their best father-son times sailing out on the open bay, and to the grandkids it was the best place for playing house.

We didn't speak about this at first, but we all knew the boat was a piece of Dad that would be hard to reckon with after he was gone. We watched and listened to Mom prepare to put it in the water after Dad died, but we knew it would never be the same.

On the one-year anniversary of his death, we all gathered as a family to remember and just be together. It seemed a fitting tribute to Dad to take the boat out for a sail, and eight of us claimed a seat on the voyage.

From the moment we boarded, we felt unbalanced and awkward. Mom had her own way of sailing the boat with Dad, as did Rob, and each of them now wrestled with steering, putting up the sails, tacking, telling each other how to do it, and tripping over each other in the process.

Nothing went right. The wind was strong, we bounced back and forth, and eventually we hit a channel marker. And although the boat wasn't damaged, our hearts were wounded. The sails came down, and not a word was spoken as we motored back up the creek to our pier. It was to be the last time we were on that boat.

Mom went on to find a suitable home for Dad's pride and joy. We knew it was inevitable, but it was hard on her and hard on all of us to watch her go through the motions of selling it. It was another struggle to hold onto the souvenirs of Dad's life.

But we would come to know that we only needed to feel the wind, or hear the clanking of metal against the masts, or see simple white silhouettes across the water to recall the man and his beloved vessel. And for just a moment, to let it fill us with boat love.




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**Opposite |** The modest, used sailboat, which Dad bought when I was a teenager, was a sparkle in his life. He named her *Spritzer* after the wine-and-soda-water drink Mom enjoyed.

MARCH 31, 2008

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*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

JOHN 14:6 NIV

## The road map

*It's the question "Where are we going?" that we wonder about throughout our lives for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes there are clues, sometimes we know outright, and other times we are lost and unsure.*

And it was for my sister Deb what she felt in the back-seat of the car when she, Mom, and Dad were on their way to visit Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C. Deb had never been to the cemetery, and it was important to Dad to give her a tour of his grave site before he died.

Like many married couples, Mom and Dad had a different rhythm, and in the congestion of the city that day, Mom questioned the route. Dad did what he naturally did: he pulled out a map from the glove box.

"Dad wasn't a stranger to D.C., but things were starting to change for him," my sister recalls. "His perception was declining, and as Mom was trying to pull out of a driveway

to turn around, Dad was turning the unfolded map to find the orientation, and it blocked the rearview mirror." In that second, time stopped for Deb. From her vantage point, the age-old question appeared along with the irony of it all: *We're on our way, feeling unsure; there is anxiety, and Dad is looking at the map. And yet he is calm and is the only one who knows exactly where he is going.*

Her painting poignantly and beautifully portrays the "thinning of the veil." As Dad is slipping away, God is in him and growing larger.

As they arrive at the cemetery, Dad goes into the office to pick up some literature and a map, which he loved to do wherever he went. As he tells the receptionist at the information desk that they are there to visit a grave site, she asks for the name of the deceased. To which Dad, in his oh-so-wonderful-Dad way, excitedly replies, "Me!"




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**Opposite |** Deborah Herzog Alexander, 2008, *What Happened on the Way ... the Road to Emmaus*, oil on canvas, 45" x 39" While Dad was dying, he seemed guided and to be following something larger than life. Deb painted a moment when this was poignantly evident for her and shared the symbolism with us.

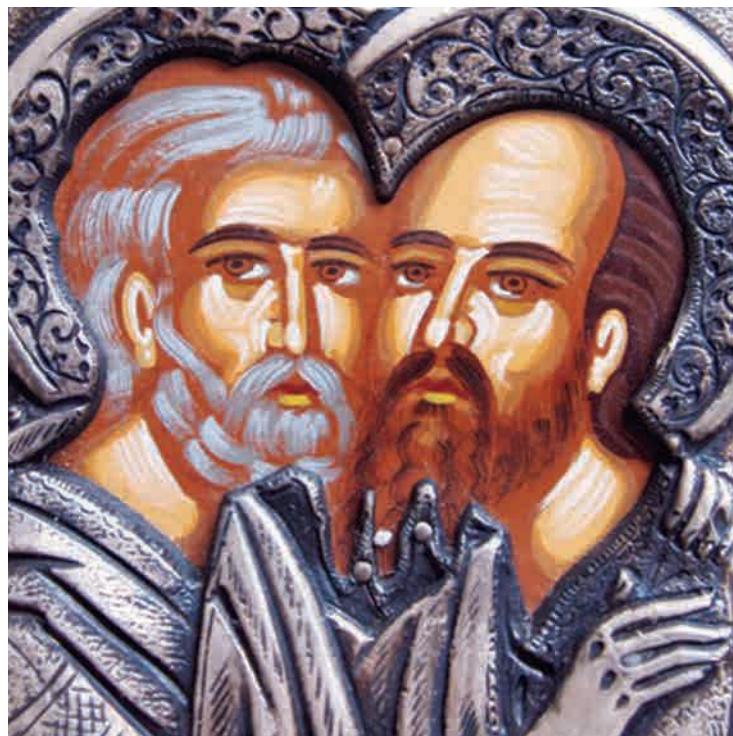
APRIL 1, 2008

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*Dr. Taksey apt.—weight 156 lbs., temperature 97.8, blood pressure 152/91, pulse 69, Where is the cancer?—Right hip (may grow), lung (enough disease, shortness of breath), in brain (treated, greatest risk), it will grow in all areas, become weaker*

*Stronger dose of Temodar, can delay things growing; or do nothing, treat symptoms, talk about as a family*

*Supper—Deb Fitzgerald—lasagna, garlic bread, salad, chocolate chip cookies*



I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

GALATIANS 1:11–12 NIV

## “Jesus is alive!”

*After 32 years of ministry, my father was given the opportunity to take a sabbatical, which included an 18-day tour of Greece and Turkey to follow “in the footsteps of St. Paul.” The trip was being made possible by St. James Episcopal Church, Mt. Airy, Maryland, where Dad was rector, and it was his last church before retiring from full-time ministry.*

Dad was overjoyed, and in a newsletter to the parishioners he noted, “I thank the current vestry and congregation for their care and most generous support, making real my dream of exploring the apostolic age of the first-century Christian community. It truly will be a blessing to behold!”

Like any scholar, Dad knew the Bible intimately, and it was hard to imagine that he hadn’t yet visited biblical sites, considering all the years he had studied and preached the Word. When Dad told you stories about the Bible, you believed him because he knew it and believed it with all his heart.

Dad would now not only visit these historic sites but be among a group of clergy traveling together, led by one of Dad’s mentors, Rev. Terry Fullam. In the itinerary, Terry describes the tour: “We will be visiting many of the places where St. Paul ministered, and to which he wrote letters.

The *Acts of the Apostles*, the *Epistles of St. Paul*, and *The Revelation* will be our guidebooks. I believe this trip will enrich your reading of the New Testament for the rest of your life.” It was almost too good to be true. We were delighted for Dad, eagerly anticipated the adventure with him, and couldn’t wait to hear all about it upon his return.

As it turned out, I was in Maryland on business the day Dad arrived home, and I was scheduled to head back to Florida right after his arrival. Our flight times only allowed for a 15-minute visit before I had to leave. There would be plenty of time to hear the details later, but I wanted Dad to cut right to the highlights. After a big hug, I asked him what was his favorite part of the trip. My father looked into my eyes and paused. And, as never-before-seen tears began to roll down his face, he softly said, “Jesus is alive.” It wasn’t at all what I expected, but nothing else needed to be said.

It wasn’t until many years later that I came to grasp more fully Dad’s profound response, when I visited biblical sites myself. The Dean of St. George’s College said to the group I was with upon our arrival in Israel, “Welcome to the Holy Lands. If you are here, it is not because you found Jerusalem, but rather because Jerusalem found you.” I would discover, as Dad did, that it was way beyond a history lesson. It was an encounter with the living God.




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**Opposite** | Two of my father’s favorites, the disciples Peter and Paul, shown on a plaque Dad bought in the Holy Lands. It hung for years in his office, until he was dying, when he gave it to me.

APRIL 2, 2008

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*Nancy and Ken arrive  
Robert spent the night*



He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

MATTHEW 13:31–32 NIV

## Planting seeds for spring

*When our family lived in Rockville, Maryland, during many years of my childhood, Dad had a cold frame on the edge of his garden. It gave him a head start on gardening, while a chill was still in the air, and the exposed ground was not quite ready to receive seeds. We marveled each year when the little greenhouse would produce spring's firstfruits. And it was always a hint at things to come.*

When Dad learned that his illness was terminal, he wanted a cold frame built so he could plant seeds for Mom. So, when the Sinopoles (good family friends) came to visit, Patrick was put to work. In no time, scraps of wood from the basement emerged, cut and formed into a base. An old window and some hinges were found too and, with some elbow grease, it was complete.

My sister Deb carefully helped Dad down the slope of the yard to fetch a can of green paint from the shed, but the terrain was difficult for Dad to maneuver and he was shaky. She remembers thinking it would be one of the last times he would venture down that hill.

"Dad tried to kneel next to the cold frame, but it was very painful for him, so he lay on his side on the ground," she recalled. Grandson Andrew wanted to help, so he painted the right side, and Deb painted the left. "Dad just loved planting seeds ... drawing the straight rows with his fingers, pushing the seeds into the depth, covering them up.... it was a ritual he knew so well," she comments. "We filled the cold frame with radishes, wildflowers, early spring lettuce, and sunflowers. When the planting was complete, Dad tried to get up but had no strength to do so." So my sister Becky came out, and both she and Deb helped him stand.

Today, after church, I am out on my porch, and I see soil-filled pots bearing the evidence of a good rain the day before. The sun is bright, and as I push my finger into the soil I feel the warmth of the soil beckoning a seed. I open a seed pack of lavender and study the infancy of new life. I think to myself, *How in the world can that teeny tiny seed possibly turn into something?*

Then, I pause to think of the harvest of Dad's life. And smile at the banquet he left us.




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**Opposite** | The homemade cold frame that Dad, friends, and family made during the spring he was dying. I found myself wanting to be near "everything Dad" when I arrived home the day he died and his body was no longer around. I took this photo that day.

APRIL 3, 2008

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*Robert gave Bob the urn he made for him—video of this*

*Robert made calls to Nancy, Debbie, and Becky and planned to stay another night*

*Took Nancy and Ken to Kenwood to see Cherry Blossoms*

*Admitted to hospice 4 pm—starter kit; Supper—Martha Fidler brought chicken casserole, salad, cheesecake pie with cherries*



For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

ISAIAH 41:13 NIV

## “Let go and let God”

*When I was young, I remember standing on the metal rungs of the ladder of the monkey bars and grabbing the rings above. In order to grasp the next ring, I had to extend beyond my reach, and in doing so, let my feet off the ladder. There was a moment when I had to move from fear to belief in order to let go. It was like that when life’s challenges would sometimes grip me with fear, and Dad would say to me, “Honey, you need to let go and let God.” I knew it was all about being able to release. Dad knew that in order to surrender, I needed to understand the strength of the one who was catching me.*

Among the books on Dad’s bookshelf in his office was a little navy blue, linen-covered book that was titled *Your God Is Too Small*. He gave it to me once when I was struggling, and it helped me better to understand God’s might by explaining what God was not—mainly the restrictive, human-scale God viewed as a “resident policeman” or “grand old man.” I loved it when Dad stretched my

horizon. He wanted us to know God way beyond our ability to grasp his greatness, and he encouraged us not to limit God’s love. Just when I thought I was finally starting to grasp it, Dad swooped in and pushed me further, to new heights of understanding. And this continued as he was dying.

As I watched my father during his final months, he confirmed that he was at peace with the mystery. Approaching death was not so much about knowing what life eternal would hold but knowing that God, through our Lord Jesus, had conquered death. Dad wasn’t afraid, and he didn’t want others to be. I would learn that letting go was not about a choice we make separate from God but about God in us and his ability to help us do so.

A poignant photograph that my sister Deb took of Dad’s hands as he sat in his wheelchair says it all. I recall the comforting words of the childhood song: “They are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me!”




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**Opposite** | Like Dad, Deb often saw the most beautiful things in the ordinary. While Dad rested in his wheelchair, Deb noticed Dad’s hands and took a photograph of his feeble limbs while something stronger within him held on.

APRIL 4, 2008

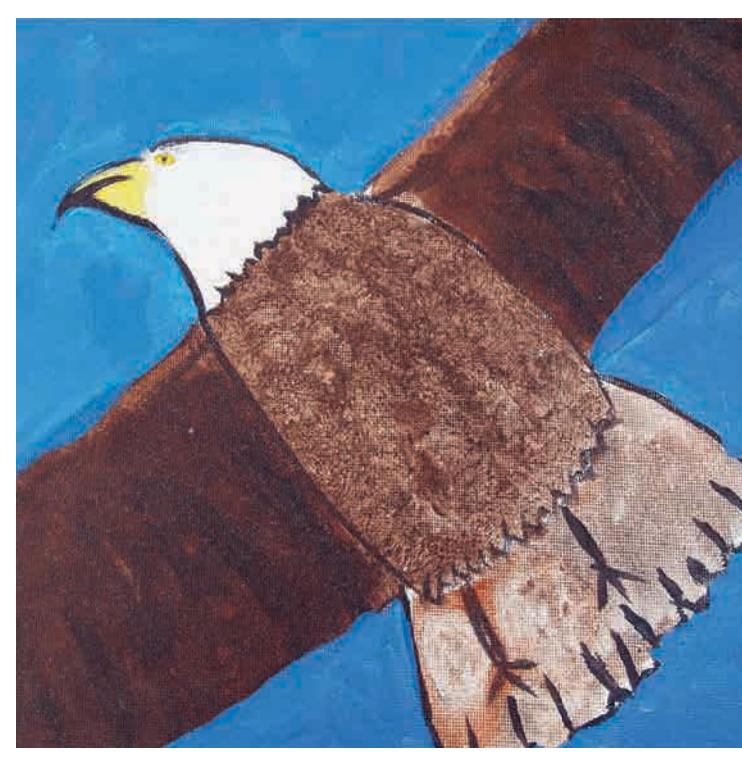
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*Good breakfast—orange juice (1/2 glass), cereal, banana (ate all)*

*3:30 pm—Nurse Kathleen Kaplan arrived from hospice; Colace stool softener; let her know about pain or anxiety*

*Elizabeth Rogers—Social worker*

*Book—Ira Byock, Dying Well*



*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on  
eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*

EXODUS 19:4 NIV

## An eagle Christian

*As a boy, Dad saw eagles in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where he grew up. He was fascinated by their size and unique personality, and he would later study them further through Scripture. Throughout the Bible, God likens himself and his children to eagles: he protects, feeds, and teaches his children as an eagle does its eaglets.*

Always the storyteller, Dad loved to describe the characteristics of the mighty eagle as a way to teach us Christian virtues. And when Dad's friend and colleague Rev. Terry Fullam wrote a sermon titled "Life on Wings," Dad ordered it on cassette tape. He'd listen to it often, and then he passed it on to my siblings and me to hear as well. That powerful sermon became the foray into talking about eagles in our family, and we would come to think of the incredible creature as a symbol of our father.

Just before I flew to Maryland to visit Dad for the last time before he died, I paused to make sure I wasn't forgetting anything from home before I headed to the airport. And as divine providence would have it, I remembered that I still had that little cassette tape from twenty-five years earlier and ran upstairs to retrieve it from my closet. I knew it would be significant to share with Dad again.

Sitting next to the hospital bed in my parents' bedroom, where Dad was now confined, I told him I had a surprise. With my mom and siblings around, we listened to that sermon again, and Terry's voice and message came back in full glory:

Eagle Christians don't flap around like other birds doing lots of tiring good works; they soar when they follow the Spirit's leading.... And you'll need to understand something about the way God will rear you: he's out to mature you. You're made to soar, to move, to live by the power of God's Holy Spirit—that is, your breath—to be so sensitive, so yielded, so in tune with the Spirit that you can sense his movements and can go with him.... When an eagle is about to die, it leaves its nest and goes to a great rock or ledge. It fastens its talons on the edge of the rock facing into the rising or setting sun and then dies. It always faces the sun.... When life is over, it's God's intention that we move directly into his presence—feet on the rock, eyes on the Son of Righteousness.

Tears rolled down Dad's cheeks as we listened to Terry's words again. Dad was an eagle Christian of the finest kind. And he was getting ready to soar.

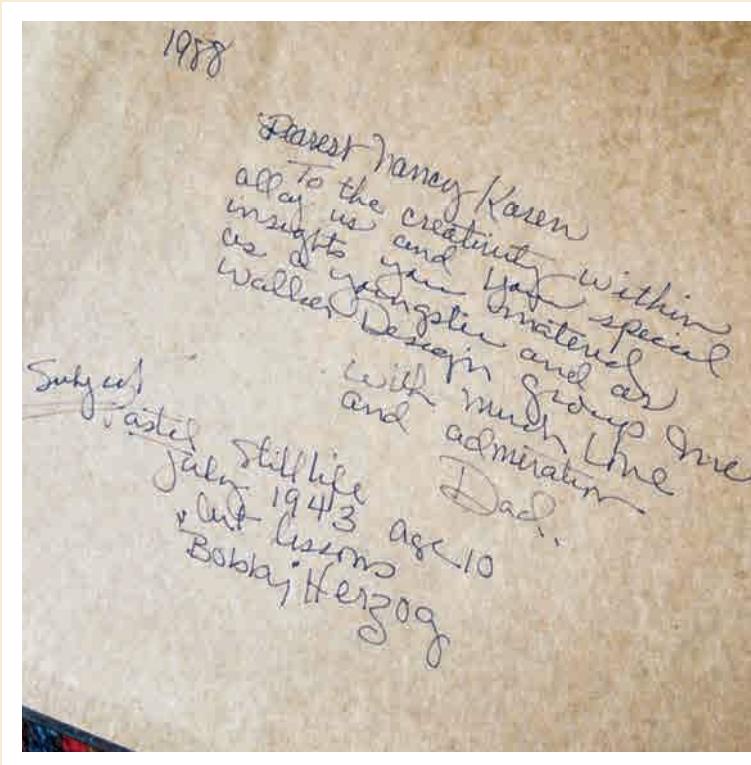



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Opposite | My daughter, Savannah, painted this eagle at age eleven, after Dad died, as she fondly remembered her Pop-Pop.

APRIL 5, 2008

Picked up hearing aid  
Bob helped with mulch and rode the scooter!  
Went for a ride, bought flowers  
Calls—Nancy, Becky, Chris Werth



One generation commends your work to another; they tell of your mighty acts.

PSALM 145:4 NIV

## On the back of the painting

*I grew up in a family of six. Almost as often as new things came into our house, old things were tossed out. Mom was always organizing, spring cleaning, or redecorating. And it became a tradition in our family that, if you wanted something, you claimed it. Dad was always in on the game and so, when he decided you could have something after he was gone, he'd write a note on the back of the item to validate it. My siblings and I would joke about it, telling each other that Dad had promised something to one of us only to turn it over and find his promissory note to another one of us.*

Among the items we coveted of my father's were the things most meaningful to him. My older sister, Deb, would get Dad's crucifix, and my brother, Rob, would inherit his collection of plumb bobs. My younger sister, Becky, would receive Dad's olivewood cross with a mustard seed in the center, and I would inherit a thick, orange remnant-piece of stained glass from the Washington National Cathedral that sat on his desk as a paperweight.

Dad enjoyed conversations with us about these mementos, not just for the storytelling it allowed, but also for our time together. And because Dad was comfortable with the cycle of life, he found ways to share and to

encourage our acceptance of it as well. Now that he's gone, those keepsakes and conversations are more meaningful than ever.

As is traditional in many families, I find myself writing notes on things for my daughter, Savannah, and telling her often that I want her to know a certain fact, so she'll have that knowledge when I'm gone. Sometimes I think she's half listening, and I see in her a once-younger girl who did the same.

Today, I climbed up on a chair in my kitchen to take my father's watermelon painting off the wall. He and my mom gave it to me many years ago when they had moved from my childhood home. I couldn't remember if he had written me a note on the back and, because of writing this story, I wanted to check.

Sure enough, there was a note tucked in between the frame and the canvas, but to my surprise, it was not from my father. Rather, my daughter, Savannah, at age eleven had written down the memory that she had heard me recount about its hanging in my family's kitchen when I was a little girl and the fact that it was now a treasured piece of her grandfather.

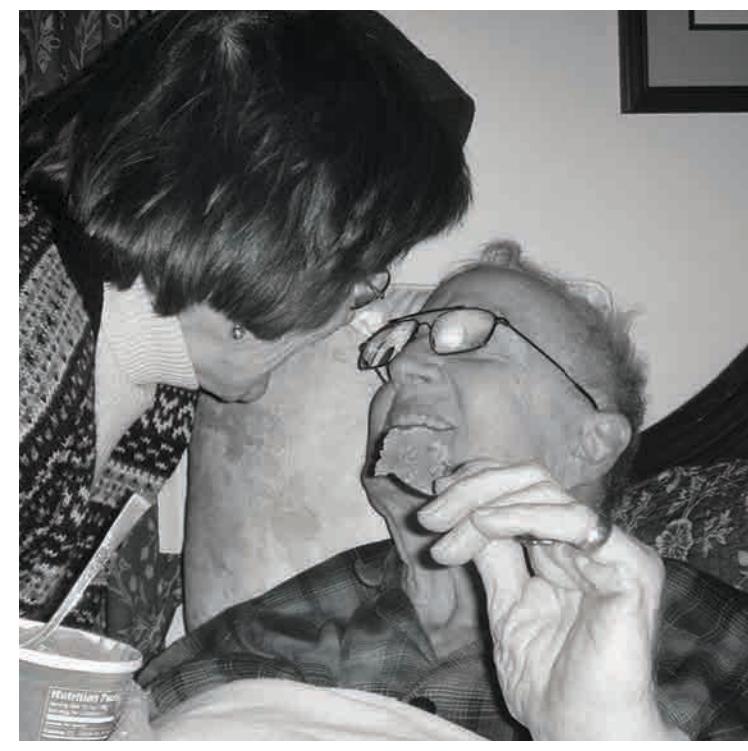



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**Opposite** | A note from my father to me on the back of a framed oil pastel still life that he created when he was ten years old. Today his messages are as important as the gifts themselves.

APRIL 6, 2008

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*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!*

PSALM 98:4 NIV

## Planning the service

*As with many things discussed in our family when I was growing up, talking with Dad about his funeral service was done over a good scoop of ice cream as we all gathered on Mom and Dad's bed after dinner one night. This was hardly a foreign topic for a man who spent a good deal of his career presiding over funerals, and it was important to us that his funeral be just as he wished. This was not going to be one of the things we'd try and figure out after he was gone. He had taught us otherwise.*

It was a joyous conversation. We went through the *Book of Common Prayer*. Dad was clear: he wanted the commendation "Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant Robert ..." moved to the beginning, to acknowledge that pain and sorrow are no more, and that the rest of the service was to be reserved for joy and celebration of the supremacy of Christ.

Dad had selected four Scripture passages, one for each of my siblings and me to read. More than part of the service, these portions of the living Bible were carefully chosen as his parting words, and we received them like manna, eager to proclaim them from the pulpit in honor of our father.

Then it was on to the music. We had all sung in the choir and knew the hymns well. Favorites such as "I Am the Bread of Life," "On Eagle's Wings," and "He Is Risen!" were chosen and, as lyrics filled our hearts, we savored the ice cream and hummed along. Dad wanted a Spirit-filled celebration, trumpets and all!

Following the service, there was to be a nice reception in the parish hall—jazz music, greenery, chairs, sharing with one another—and then we'd "depart in peace to go and serve the Lord."

We experienced the full gamut of emotions during this family gathering on the bed. The plan was wrought with intimacy and the satisfaction of completing these important plans with our father but also with the deep sadness of knowing that the family foundational rock of church-experienced-with-him was coming to an end. We would miss our dad in the sanctuary, but as he had taught us, our longing would be overshadowed by the resurrection: "*He is risen, He is risen! He hath opened heaven's gate; we are free from sin's dark prison, risen to a holier state; and a brighter Easter beam on our longing eyes shall stream.*"

And as a consolation, there'd always be ice cream.




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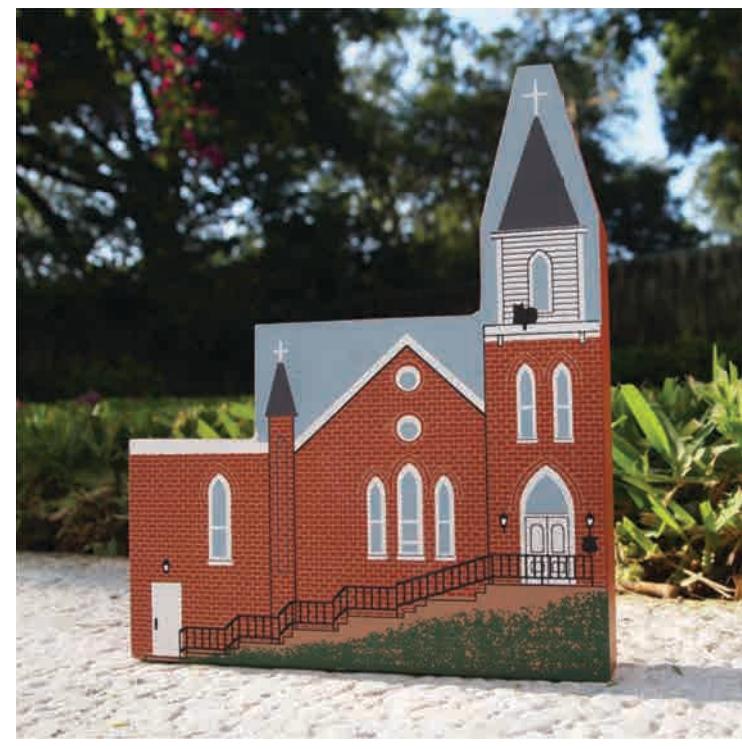
**Opposite** | Mom and Dad look into each other's eyes lovingly. As children sometimes do, my siblings and I observed adoring gazes between our parents throughout their marriage. I captured this one in my lens on the night we planned his funeral service together.

APRIL 7, 2008

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11:00 am—Elizabeth Rogers, hospice social worker

Made reservations to go to Tampa



Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

MATTHEW 10:40 NIV

## He left the church doors open

*As a teenager during World War II, Dad lived in Blue Ridge Summit, Maryland, one mile away from Fort Richie, an army intelligence center. Since the base was filled to capacity, Dad's family took military personnel into their home to live with them. It was just the thing to do.*

So it was not unusual that Dad would make the church accessible to all, 24 hours a day, during the Persian Gulf War in 1991. "The idea is to provide a place for people to come to pray quietly, reflect quietly, ... read the Bible, read prayers, and talk to each other," Dad said in an article in the *Mt. Airy News*. "The church should be available to the people. In Latin the word *parish* means 'alternative living space.'"

The article went on to say,

On January 16, St. James held a prayer vigil designed to run from midnight in Baghdad until midnight at the Pentagon. Many area residents took advantage of that interval to reflect on the possibility of war. "For whatever reason, we're in it now," Herzog declared. "So the church is

focusing its attention on prayer and support for the public and for the troops."... Increasingly, members and friends are knowing men and women who are in the Persian Gulf or who are being called to active duty. "It seems we all have a story to tell or share," according to the rector, the Rev. Robert D. Herzog.

"We just want to be together ourselves and be ready to be a friend for others of the community who may wish to talk about the war, their families, or offer prayers for loved ones," Rev. Herzog said. "And there will be a coffee pot on."

In the Gulf War, Herzog feels there is a religious factor to this war since "one out of five people on this planet is Moslem.... We need to understand more about different faiths. Perhaps a by-product of war will be that as we understand more about each other, we will also learn to live in peace together," Herzog said thoughtfully.

Dad knew that a little conversation and prayer went a long way toward healing fear. Thus, he unlocked the church and welcomed hearts to do the same.




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**Opposite** | I remebered the conversation when my mother told me Dad was boldly keeping the church unlocked and had invited anyone to come in. I was proud of my father for using the church in this way. This miniature wooden building block of the historic St. James church in Mt. Airy reminds me of that time.

APRIL 8, 2008

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*Bob painted—still life*

*Kathleen paid a visit*

*Calls—Phoebe will drive us to airport on the 18th; Debbie called on her way to Bible study; Phil Smith called—a good conversation*



The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”

MATTHEW 28:5–6 NIV

## The last Easter

*I learned through Dad's dying that some things are too big to put into words, and the experience of being with Dad on his last Easter was one of them.*

It began like so many other Easters before. We had all come home to be together and were up early. Dad wanted to go to church, and I wasn't going to miss being there with him. As I came down the stairs, Dad was dressed and quietly sitting in his recliner. He looked incredible. Despite the fact that he could barely stand, he had dressed in a white oxford shirt and a favorite regimental striped tie, and as I hugged him, the unforgettable sweet aroma of his aftershave filled me.

Studying his face, I wondered how the Easter message would penetrate him this morning. He'd read it a million times and knew the story intimately. It was the good news on which all of his beliefs hinged. But this morning, he would not be preaching. Too weak to stand for hymns or kneel for prayers, he would be sitting in the pew. And as he was dying, he'd hear the message again.

What was Dad feeling as he heard about the empty tomb that morning? Although I never asked him, I remember thinking that whatever he was thinking was more than enough.

Reflecting back on that day, I looked through Dad's things and found a clue. In an Eastertide newsletter to his congregation years before, he had written:

If death was to be truly defeated, it was only by dying himself that Jesus believed he could defeat it. If he was to reach the hearts and spirits of us, it was only by suffering his own heart and spirit to be broken on our behalf that he believed he could reach us. Wasn't it enough to heal the sick, restore sight to the blind, to preach good news to the poor, give nourishment to the hungry and liberty to the captives; teaching in his homeland? All this had not worked because it was not enough. There had to be more. "He set his face to go to Jerusalem," the Gospel says, and it was a journey from which Jesus seems to have known he would both never return and yet always return. It is God's will that Jesus Christ would not be held by death and always return in raising us from death unto life—even unto the end of time and beyond.... We are a people of the Resurrection!

It was, ironically, the last time Dad would be in church. And the Easter message held the perfect parting words: "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."




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**Opposite** | It was a journey to understand my father's life calling as a priest. On this last Sunday, as he stood ready for church, I felt immeasurable gratitude for his life. That God would afford my father an Easter service while he was dying—not as a minister but as a man being ministered to—was a blessing from heaven.

APRIL 9, 2008

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9:30 am—car washed; Knopp's Green Houses—plants for pots

Lunch with Steve and Bonnie—crab soup, bread, hard-boiled eggs, salad, cookies

Visit from Kay Nelson—2 jars chicken noodle soup

Calls—Nancy M, John Price, John S, David Mallory



For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present,  
nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8:38–39 NASB

## Mi-Mi dies

*It was the spring of 1988, and the call came in the middle of the night. I remember thinking, “Oh my gosh, it’s Easter morning and my father has just learned that his mom has died. In a few hours he’ll be preaching to hundreds on the holiest day of the Christian year. How will he possibly be able to get through it?”*

Dad’s mom, Ida Mae, whom my siblings and I affectionately called Mi-Mi, was his last surviving relative. One of three Duncan girls—Ida Mae, Elva, and Othalene—she was a zesty woman to say the least. As her only child, Dad was the sole person left to finalize her affairs. In addition to being her son and executor, he would now also be her priest.

Two days after the news, Dad held a small funeral service at our family church in Rockville. Afterward, we drove to Maryland’s Eastern Shore to gather with a few distant relatives at the cemetery where his mom would be laid to rest in the last-remaining site of the family plot.

Adorned with a stole around his neck and prayer book in hand, my father stood next to the open grave and read the rites of burial, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” And then picking up some Maryland soil with

his hand, he tossed it onto the casket. After a pause, he extended his hand, touched the lid, and simply said, “Good-bye, Mom.”

It felt so final, and I wistfully thought he should just be able to be a son today. Dad had shared that even though her death was expected there was a sting to receiving the news, and as he buried her, it struck him that her life here was now finished in terms of the pain. Dad would continue to show us that the way to know and bear the loss of death is through Easter.

As he read the liturgy for the dead, we were reminded that it is an Easter liturgy and finds all of its meaning in the resurrection of Christ. So even though there is sorrow and grief, there also is joy in our inheritance of a kingdom in which there is no death.

As Herzogs, we would share in that joy by remembering our grandmother over good Maryland crab cakes and Bloody Marys at a wonderful little Eastern Shore restaurant before heading back to Rockville.

Looking back, the timing seems beautifully evident. It couldn’t have been a better day for Dad to learn that his mother had taken God’s hand. We are an Easter people.

Thanks be to God.




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**Opposite** | This photo of my grandmother Ida Mae captured what I remembered of her personality. I would find out after Dad died that he did not feel as loved or validated by his parents as he would have hoped, and I wondered how it had influenced his call to give so lovingly to others.

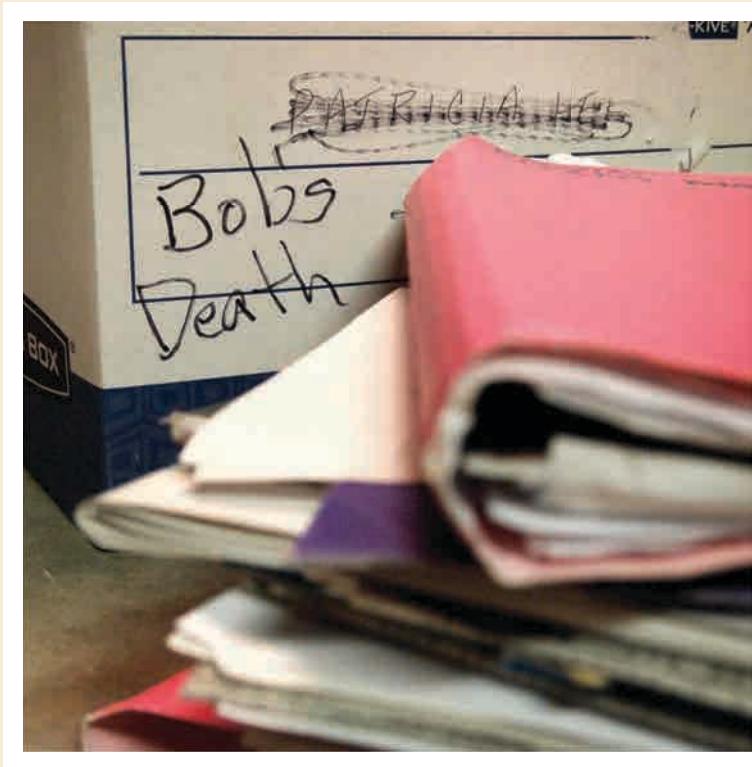
APRIL 10, 2008

*Bob experiencing some "jerking" on his arm at night*

*John Price came by for visit—had prayers*

*Robert took Dad to see his father's grave at Lorraine Cemetery (Rob said Dad's hands had tremors)*

*Ann (Garden Club) brought dinner—ziti, broccoli, salad, cookies*



*That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born,  
That they may arise and tell them to their children.*

PSALM 78:6 NASB

## Without end

*It started like any other project. There was interest, followed by a collection of things, followed by activities, then study, and then somewhere along the way, we realized it was a calling. And then, as with so many things, life got in the way. There were changes, then complications, and then death. And it was this way for Dad in terms of his passion for understanding death and dying. Or so it seemed.*

We had observed Dad our whole lives. We'd heard this topic in his sermons from the pulpit, read it in his notes, and felt it as he shared about being bedside with those near death. He cared deeply about the concept of *end of life*, but not because it was about an end—rather, because it was about that which never ends. Dad saw the paralysis and fear that gripped humankind because of physical death, and he believed the only way out was a deeper understanding of the promise of eternal life. For Dad, it was a time rich with possibility and God's blessings, and he didn't want people to miss it.

A few years after Dad had died, my sister Deb and I were talking about Dad's last weeks. I asked her to tell me about the time she was home helping Dad sort through his materials on dying. It was important to him to gather the information before he died and to distribute it to

organizations that could make it available to others. Deb found boxes and started making copies of things he'd written and collected: a manuscript he wrote, articles, pamphlets, and even comics on the subject. As Dad made calls to churches and organizations he wanted to pass the information to, he found that many weren't interested. His materials were too old, they said. They weren't in an electronic format. The organization didn't have the means to distribute them.

As she tells me this, I picture my father in his frail physical state receiving rejection about his life's passion.

"Deb, that's so sad," I said as my eyes welled with tears.

"I know," she solemnly agreed.

Although we did not focus on it at the time, looking back, we all felt it. Even my sister Becky and I found ourselves, hours before Dad died, saying, "Daddy, we get it. We hear you. We understand: 'Tag, we're IT.'" We knew we would go on and each, somehow, further his ministry.

I also recall these familiar words in the Anglican doxology: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." We are all part of the master plan.




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**Opposite** | While working on these stories, I visited Mom's new home and asked her about some of Dad's remaining belongings. There was one last cardboard box in the basement, where I found a few treasured nuggets among the material scraps that were left. And I was thankful.

APRIL 11, 2008

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*Kathleen came to check on Bob—some pain in hip and leg when moving; trouble with urine leaking; Kathleen will check with Dr. on steroid amount (now on 2-a-day)*

*Called again for wheelchair and potty*

*Bob ate well today, we planted flowers on the deck this afternoon*



He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit.

The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life.

## Dead leaves

*One of the hardest things about moving to Florida was the absence of what anyone from up North would fondly know as fall. It's that time of year when there's a chill in the air, turtlenecks come out of the closet, and the green-tree canopies turn a vibrant hue before shedding their coats for winter.*

In our family, fall meant raking leaves, and to this day raking leaves is a multisensory memory impressed on my mind. So familiar is the rhythmic sound of the rake across the ground followed by blisters where the worn wood handle left its mark. After what seemed like hours of hypnotic raking, we'd break to jump into the piles and enjoy the deceiving fluff. As our butts hit the ground, the aroma of dead leaves would envelop us. Dad always encouraged an element of fun and exploration when we did chores, and after my siblings and I were grown, he'd continue the tradition with his grandchildren.

After I moved to Florida and pined for the seemingly lost season of fall, Dad surprised me with a transcendent

gift from home. The first time the big brown box arrived, it was so light, I couldn't imagine what was inside. Filled to the brim was a freshly raked pile, and I laughed and buried my face in the treasure, where the undeniable smell of dead leaves lingered. It was *token Dad*, and I honored the remnants of the season by displaying them in a large crystal bowl on our conference-room table at work for all to enjoy. A big, brown, lightweight box would arrive in many subsequent years, and it became a tradition in our office to gather, laugh, and smell the dead leaves.

After Dad's death, sitting on the grassy slope of the cemetery on his September birthday, I admired the fallen leaves framed by my father's headstone. It occurred to me that these leaves were a perfect symbol of new life in death. We never focused on the fact that their life on the tree was over, but instead we were captivated by our relationship with them on the ground.

If we are open to the fullness of God's creation, we will find that death is truly not an end if only we are willing to change our frame of reference to see it.




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**Above |** The single fallen leaf that lay on Dad's gravestone on my first visit to the cemetery after his death. It made me smile and I picked it up and brought it home. **Opposite |** Raking leaves with Dad is a favorite memory. Hannah Grace enjoyed the autumn ritual with her grandfather, which always included an element of fun.

APRIL 12, 2008

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Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

MATTHEW 7:24-25 NLT

## The house blessing

*It was one of the perks of being a preacher's kid.  
When we needed a little extra assurance or had  
made a big decision, we'd ask Dad for a blessing.*

My sister Becky and her husband, George, had decided to move to downtown Frederick, Maryland, and put their house on the market around the time that Dad became ill. Becky had been a bit apprehensive about leaving the comfort of a new sprawling suburban neighborhood with three young kids, but she and George had bought this small fixer-upper next to the bowling alley. Although it was half the size of their existing home, they felt a move to this house was the best decision for their family under the circumstances of an uncertain economy.

Despite Dad's declining health and stamina, Becky asked if he'd be willing to bless the house, and he agreed. Dad took the privilege seriously and felt it was an honor to do as Scripture tells us—begin everything with prayer. And so they did, setting out to begin a new life in that little brick house on West College Terrace.

Becky shared with me, "The whole family gathered at the house one morning, and Dad read the liturgy on

'Celebration for a Home' from *The Book of Occasional Services*. Dad asked for a candle to be lit and, after he placed it on the mantle in the empty house, it brought immediate warmth to the room. George read Scripture from Matthew, and Dad offered prayers and blessed each room. Dad's voice was quiet, and he was focused on the task at hand, moving weakly from room to room in prayer. The entry, the living room, the kitchen, the bathroom, the children's room, the backyard ... wall to wall, it was sanctified."

Mom had the foresight to videotape the occasion, and as I watched and listened to Dad, there seemed to be a duality to his prayer, inward and external. And I thought then, as I did when he was dying, *How did this man of God use his last weeks of breath to minister to us, and in calling on his faith, minister to himself at the same time?*

As I listened to Dad read the prayer for the family room, *"Give your blessing, Lord, to all who share this room, that they may be knit together in fellowship here on earth, and joined with the communion of your saints in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen,"* I admiringly thought of all the ways he continues to minister to us now.




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Opposite | Dad surrounded by love in the family room of my sister Becky's new house on the day of their house blessing.

APRIL 13, 2008

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*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.*

PSALM 127:3 ESV

# Upon birth

*Like any new parent, I remember it in a blur, this bringing of our first and only child into the world. I remember thinking, “I don’t know how I’ll do it, but women have been bringing babies into the world ever since the beginning of time so I will just have to trust that the same magic will be with me that makes all of this happen.”*

Of course, we come to know that creation is one of the things that God does best, and it is through this mystery that magic of the best kind is manifest. I also discovered that this mystery has a life of its own, because my water broke three weeks early. It was the first indication that I was absolutely not in control.

While I was focused on this strange new bundle that had itty-bitty fingernails, a small mop of fine black hair, and ice-blue eyes that melted my heart, my father took the occasion (with red magic marker on a small piece of construction paper) to pen this note:

*Upon Birth!*

*Hello Miss Savannah—*

*Welcome from the silence of eternity to your earthly home. Share with your loving and somewhat befuddled parents—their new reality and adventure. They’ve paid*

*their dues of anticipation, awe, and wonder. Share also and impress upon them, your mom and dad, that quality that grants your return and entrance into the kingdom of God—your genuine and absolute trust that their love, care, comfort and consideration we call grace will be available at all hours.... They’ll be sleep deprived, but none-the-less persevering: exhausted, but not tired!!!*

*Know that your heavenly Father has afforded a bit of his Spirit, breath, air, upon your arrival and will be with you through His Christ and your adult guarantor the Holy Spirit.*

*With love,*

*“Pop-Pop”*

Although I don’t remember receiving it, after Dad died I found this note folded up in a box of childhood things I had saved, along with a little sterling silver spoon, Savannah’s first baby teeth, and a well-loved pink rag doll named “Betsy.” As I read his words, I was just as astounded as when I first saw Savannah. I saw her as a stranger, but Dad knew that she came from God, was lent by God to Ron and me, and would return fully to God. And while she was here, she would show us God.

Magic? No, quite the opposite. It is the absolute and transcendent real deal.




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**Opposite** | My daughter, Savannah Marie, moments after arriving from what Dad would call “the silence of eternity.” Dad’s reminder that she is not really ours but is “on loan” from God above both helps me with parenting and instills in me profound gratitude for the blessing of her life in ours.

APRIL 14, 2008

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Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

HEBREWS 11:1 ESV

# Faith

*Faith was a familiar word to my family. It was a concept we revered, even if we didn't always think we had it. And it was so central to our Christianity that, like oxygen, we would grasp for it again and again. I wondered how to get this thing called "faith" when I was younger. Like something you could pull out of your back pocket and paste across your forehead, I hoped I could somehow make it stick. We had come to know that life without the oxygen of Christ was no life at all, because not having it was torturous.*

Dad was a walking example of what faith looked like, and he made it seem effortless. He showed us that faith had two inseparable components: belief and trust. Belief and acceptance of the true Word of God and then trust as acting on the belief. Dad simply lived it. He believed in what Christ said and acted on his belief.

As Dad absorbed the reality of his pending death, he had faith that it was already in God's hands, and his action was the peace he showed to everyone during that time. He wanted quality of life for whatever time on earth he

had left, so he made the decision to have four treatments of radiation and no more. "Dad made it almost seem like an adventure each step of the way versus something he dreaded or was fearful of," Mom said, reflecting on that time.

My sister Deb captured the memory beautifully through her painting of the hospital waiting room on that first appointment. She shows Dad turning back and waving to them after taking a couple of steps with the nurse toward the hallway, as if to say, "It's all going to be okay," in his slightly silly, adorable way that we'd come to know and love. In that instant Deb saw Dad's affirmation, the poignant exit sign, and the cross that is formed by the mullions in the windowpane.

The best part? "When the nurse came in to get Dad, she called out, 'Mr. Herzog?' and we all looked up," my sister shared. "As Dad stood up to go with her, we asked her what her name was."

"My name is Faith," she replied, at which we laughed and said, "Of course it is."




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**Opposite |** Deborah Herzog Alexander, 2008, *Man of the Cloth*, oil on canvas, 20" x 25"

Deb's stories as told through her paintings captured treasured moments. I am in awe that she was able to commemorate Dad on canvas during his 100-day journey as it unfolded before our eyes. This one makes me smile every time I look at it.

APRIL 15, 2008

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*Calls—Barbara Jackson, Kathleen*

*Tim Grayson, Robert Ford, St. James Baltimore—came to visit and took home death and dying material*

*Bob with me to mail Ronny's painting, Goodwill*

*Chinese take-out for dinner*



Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.  
And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

MATTHEW 28:19 ESV

## Initiation through baptism

As an Episcopal priest, Dad found joy in baptizing and welcoming new Christians to eternal life with God. A letter he wrote after baptizing one of his grandchildren says it best:

*Dear Hannah Grace Layman,*

*I doubt that you will remember July 15, 2001, which was a very special day in your life. That was the day we celebrated your baptism. Baptism means you were set apart as God's child. It means that you became a part of the Body of Christ in the church of Jesus Christ Himself. You have been given privileges and responsibilities that are for all Christians.*

*You now have the privilege of knowing that you are loved by God and His Son no matter what you do or become.... You will grow up physically and mentally each day. You will also grow spiritually in the knowledge and love of God as you are fed at the Holy Communion table. You also have a faith community who promised on that day that they will support you in your life in Christ....*

*You have the responsibility to pass on God's unconditional love to others as you discover it. In doing so you will be asked to do your share in the faith community's life and work within the household of faith and the world beyond. We asked that you help us confess the faith of the crucified Christ, proclaim His Resurrection and share with us in his Eternal Priesthood.*

*As you grow older, you'll discover that life is not easily shared or received. There will be times of sorrow or pain. But as a baptized Christian you should remember that for every difficulty there is God's grace, for every sin there is forgiveness, for every hurt a healing, for every cross an Easter, for every death a resurrection, and for every grief an Alleluia.*

*What you inherited from your parents at birth will some day end. The life which you received at your Holy Baptism is an assurance of life beyond life—a life with God that is eternal. May you always rejoice in the truth.*

*Yours in His service,*

*(The Rev.) Robert D. Herzog*

*"Pop-Pop"*




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**Opposite** | Several of Dad's grandchildren were fortunate to be baptized by him. Shown here, Dad held Caroline Page Layman, his youngest grandchild, on the day he welcomed her into the kingdom of Christ.

APRIL 16, 2008

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*Email from Missy Warfield*

*Lunch—Sally & Dutch at Gary's Grill*

*Calls—Nancy McCorkle*



*A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart, the spirit is crushed.*

PROVERBS 15:13 ESV

## A glad heart

You get away with talking quite a lot about a pretty serious subject when you know how to make it lighthearted. Not only was Dad born with an ability to comprehend and communicate deeply and seriously, but he also knew how to lighten it up. I think Dad inherited this from his dad, Buck.

When Dad's mother died, I found in my great-grandmother's Bible silly poems tucked inside that Dad's father had written. It was an early sign for me that light and serious could live side by side.

Dad was famous for taking the ordinary and giving it a twist of fun, injecting humor into just about anything. It was part of what made him so adorable. He would slip into character using a puppet, pretend in a high-pitched voice to be the secretary to the Tooth Fairy for his grandchildren, and only Dad could rationalize buying your coffin early so you could keep your rakes and shovels in it until you needed it. He exuded an authentic love, and for Dad, love sat side by side with laughter.

My daughter, Savannah, wrote a letter to Dad when he was dying: "I will miss you so much because I feel so close

to you. I feel that we could play pirates and then be on a catwalk with Beyoncé. We can go anywhere together and I hope we can still and always do that."

Dad's sense of humor was felt by everyone who knew him, and we all have a favorite memory of his silly side.

When Kathleen, the hospice nurse, first met Dad, Mom remembers she was a bit intimidated about taking care of a priest. Dad asked, "Kathleen, where'd you get your drugs, on the black market?" It was just the icebreaker that was needed, and they became fast friends.

And, when my sister Deb was going through Dad's materials on death and dying to copy and distribute them for him, she found comics he had saved and tucked in. Our favorite: the one about the frog that croaked.

In Luke 6:21 Jesus tells us that "though we weep now, we shall laugh" on the day when all our sorrows melt away into the new reality of the resurrection and the advent of the kingdom.

Dad knew that God would be replacing all our fears and tears with joy and laughter for all eternity. And he spent his life warming up.




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Opposite | My daughter, Savannah, at age eight with her Pop-Pop on a visit to Florida two years before he died. They adored each other.

APRIL 17, 2008

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*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

PSALM 119:105 ESV

## I do

*"I just wanted to get married to George," my sister Becky tells me when I ask her what she remembers that Dad told her about marriage. And I knew something of what she was saying, as I felt that same enamored way years before, when I married my husband, Ron.*

But as a priest who was about to see his fourth and last child marry, Dad had some specific thoughts to share. In addition to seeing the obvious union of husband and wife and all the promise that went with it, Dad also saw marriage as an important transition in our lives. Like all transitions, there is a beginning of something that is connected to the ending of something else.

After witnessing, counseling, and consecrating many marriages, Dad understood that much of our emotional lives are influenced by our relationships with our parents, brothers, and sisters. In a newsletter he wrote in 1995 to his congregation reflecting on the pending marriage of my sister, he shared:

As I ponder what it means to leave family and home, I believe that the Lord has a lot of work for families involved. It's about a process of unhooking

ourselves from the emotional bonds that prevent youngsters from following their deepest selves and vocations. It's about a long process of forgiving parents and for not loving them as we could have. It is about our inability to help others, especially those we love so much. It also has to do with forgiveness that is given and received across generations. Forgiveness or letting go is what gives each generation new freedom and life. It is about the same things that our fathers and mothers gave us and our brothers and sisters helped us live. And this process enables gratitude and joy that abounds across generations

Dad flew higher than most and saw everything intertwined. He understood how complex the transitions in life are but believed that through Christ all things are possible. Dad would counsel those entering marriage that "until death do us part" was not just an expression of commitment, but it was also affirmation that there is a certain end to everything here on earth. All of it calls us to be more dependent on God and his new covenant of life everlasting through the resurrection of Jesus.

"How do we start anew?" Dad would say. "By letting go."




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**Opposite** | Dad and my sister Becky enjoyed a father-daughter dance on her wedding day. He would choose and we would honor his wish to be our father and not our priest on the day we each married.

APRIL 18, 2008

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*To Florida with Becky to see Walkers*



*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights,  
who does not change like the shifting shadows.*

JAMES 1:17 NIV

## The urn

*Like my father, my brother, Rob, had a workshop down in his basement. As you entered, you were immersed in a complex but well-orchestrated visual presentation. Rows of screwdrivers, wrenches, and drill bits were artfully arranged on a floor-to-ceiling pegboard. Bins of nails, cans of paint, and rolls of tape lined the walls. And a well-worn workbench anchored shelves of power tools and extension cords. Every inch was evidence of Rob's God-given talent, which was not only his vocation and hobby but the language of his love.*

Rob was always working on a project, and you were a beneficiary if you were in his path. From fixing a neighbor's washing machine to working in the boiler room at the retirement home where he was employed to building a swing set for his two children—Rob could do anything with his hands.

So when my father asked his only son to make the urn that would hold his ashes, we knew it would be significant on many levels. Here was my brother, who could make anything he wanted. And though none of us wanted Dad to die, we were each willing to do whatever we could to show our love for our father in whatever manner was

pleasing to him. Dad wasn't interested in anything but real life now. He wanted us to be open and present to God's blessings at the end of life, and he would be open along with us.

As Rob worked on the urn, he shared with my sisters and me that it was the hardest thing he'd ever made. Overcome by the magnitude of the reality that he was creating the vessel that would hold his father's remains, he found himself having to walk away from it at times. When finished, it couldn't have been more perfect and was covered with his love.

When Rob crouched down and handed Dad the simple wooden box, Dad rubbed his fingers across the smooth, routed edges. Rob described the three types of wood and shared that he used our grandfather's drill bits to make the holes for the screws in the lid. Dad cradled the container in his arm and reached for a tissue as he fixed his gaze on my brother. As I watched, I could only imagine the unspoken feelings between them.

After a moment Mom asked Dad if he wanted to bless it, but no prayers were needed. Dad was speechless, Rob was present, and God filled the space between them.

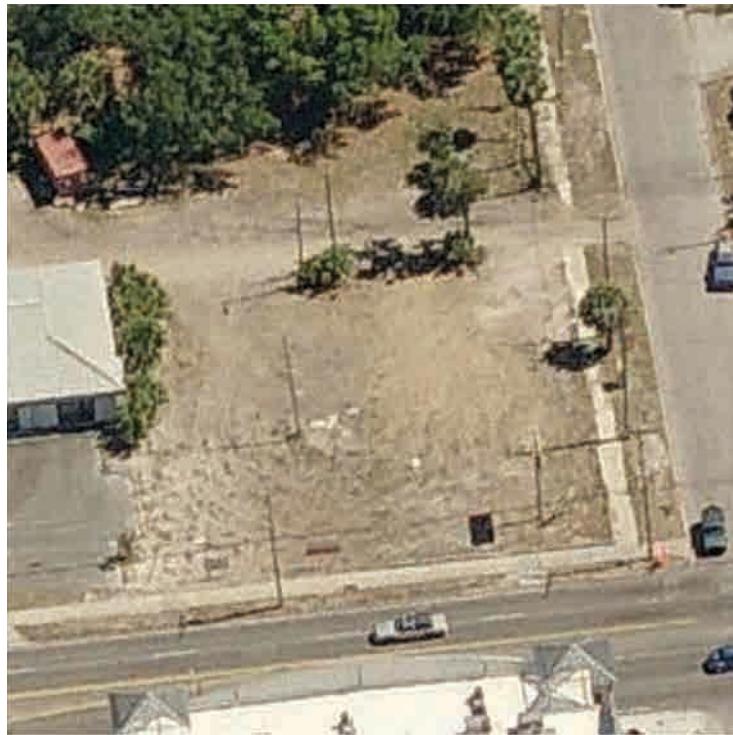



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**Opposite** | The handmade urn my brother, Rob, made for our father's ashes sat on the table at the cemetery before it was put in the ground. Brother-in-Law George, two years later, used Rob's measurements and notes to make Rob's own urn after his unexpected death at age 49. In both cases, these urns were beautiful gifts of love.

APRIL 19, 2008

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*The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to.  
The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.*

DEUTERONOMY 28:8 NIV

## Better than donuts

*Whether it was bait to get us out of bed or just a good family tradition, Sundays when we were growing up not only included church but also a trip to the donut shop afterward. We'd eagerly await the end of the service, when we'd all pile into the car and minutes later be rewarded with powdered sugar, sticky fingers, and that great sugar high. It left such an imprint on me that, even as an adult, I anticipate a treat after church.*

So when Mom and Dad came down to Tampa for a visit in 2007, my treat after church that Sunday was to show them the land Ron and I had just purchased and have Dad bless it. We had outgrown the little English Tudor house where we ran our branding firm and had decided to build a new office building on Kennedy Boulevard, the main east-west drag through town. It was a really big step and, like most big steps in our lives, we called on our resident preacher for prayers.

After pulling our car into the alley and surveying the lot, Dad asked us each to go stand where one of the four corners of the building would be. So in high heels and church clothes we paced out the footprint of the building

and looked at each other. And then so we all could hear (as well as anyone else along Kennedy Boulevard), Dad cried out with a wonderful, booming voice, "THE LORD BE WITH YOU," to which we loudly boomed back, "AND WITH THY SPIRIT," and he continued, "LET US PRAY!" I don't exactly remember the rest of the prayer, but it was a beautiful love offering from a father's heart to his Lord, asking him to look down upon his daughter and son-in-law and everyone who would come in contact with the building upon this land, ... that God would protect it and use all of the creativity that would spring forth to God's glory.

As I stood there looking across the barren land at each of my family while this intimate prayer was being offered at the top of my father's voice, I thought to myself, *It doesn't get much better than this. Here we are, out in the open, as Dad cries out to God over his land, asking His children to help make his goodness known.* As cars zoomed by and the dusty humid breeze rustled my skirt, the world stopped for a moment.

No sugar was needed that morning. I was filled with the promise of tomorrow.

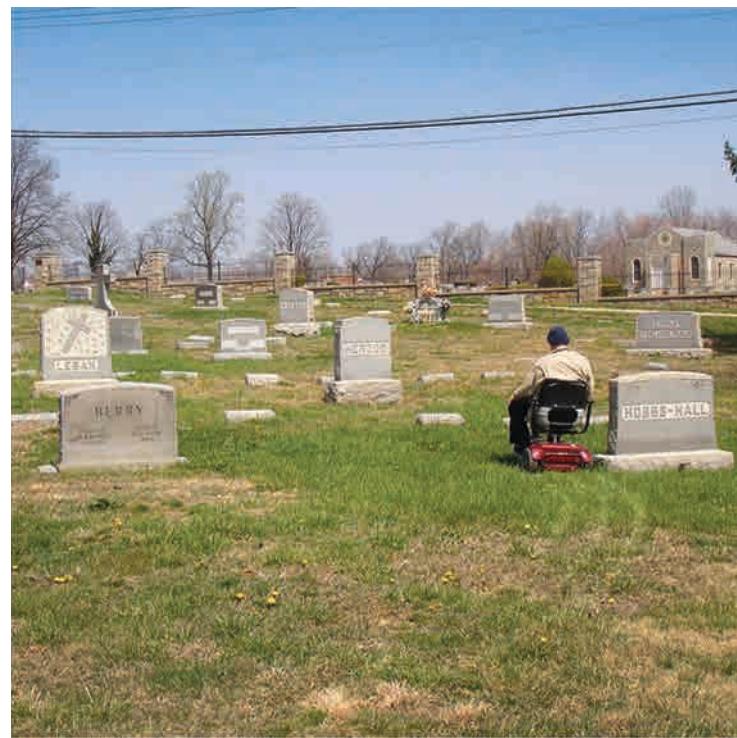



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**Opposite** | There have been many times throughout the years that something happened in the building that was built on the land Dad blessed; I sensed from a unique place within that it was answered prayer.

APRIL 20, 2008

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*In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you  
that I am going there to prepare a place for you?*

JOHN 14:2 ESV

## Father's Day

*His name was Jay Leroy Herzog, but they called him Buck. His thick bushy eyebrows, dark eyes, and slicked-back white hair were foreign to me because my father inherited his mother's fair-skinned Scottish looks. This was my recollection from a single portrait photo of my grandfather, whom I never met. But as I look through the family photo album Dad stitched together before he died, there are fragments of a story from another time, and I imagine their relationship.*

Because he passed away a few years before I was born, I knew little of my grandfather except for some token stories Dad had shared. Although my mother included my grandmother in Sunday meals and holidays, their relationship was not cordial. And Mom would later share that Dad had felt a sense of abandonment by his parents.

It was interesting but not surprising that Dad would visit the grave of his father about six weeks before his own death, as I don't remember him ever going before. He asked my brother, Rob, to take him out to the cemetery in Baltimore, not far from where my parents lived in Severna Park. Rob was excited to have some quality time with Dad away from the regular stream of calls and visitors that now graced my parents' home.

Rob made sure he had the directions and an electric wheelchair to maneuver Dad out on the lawn. As I look at the photo my brother took of Dad facing the timeless granite marker with both our grandfather's and Dad's names, I think of my brother looking at the marker bearing his own name as well. Three generations of Herzogs, lined in succession, with two of them facing their mortality head-on. For Dad, the dress rehearsal was over, and he was prepared for the mystery before him. He was thirsty to see his father.

I can only imagine the fullness of conversation and thoughts that day, not only between Dad and my grandfather, but also between my brother and Dad. That this day was even made possible in the story of my father's final days seems heaven-sent.

Sadly, three short years after Dad's death, Rob too would pass away and take his place with our heavenly Father and the Herzogs before him. No one who was there that April day when they visited the cemetery is still around to fill in the blanks. But reflecting on the fragments, I will always think of it as Father's Day.




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**Opposite** | Many thoughts went through my mind as we learned after Dad died of his visit to see his own father's grave. I had never known him to go before. It was one more way that my father seemingly faced his own death.

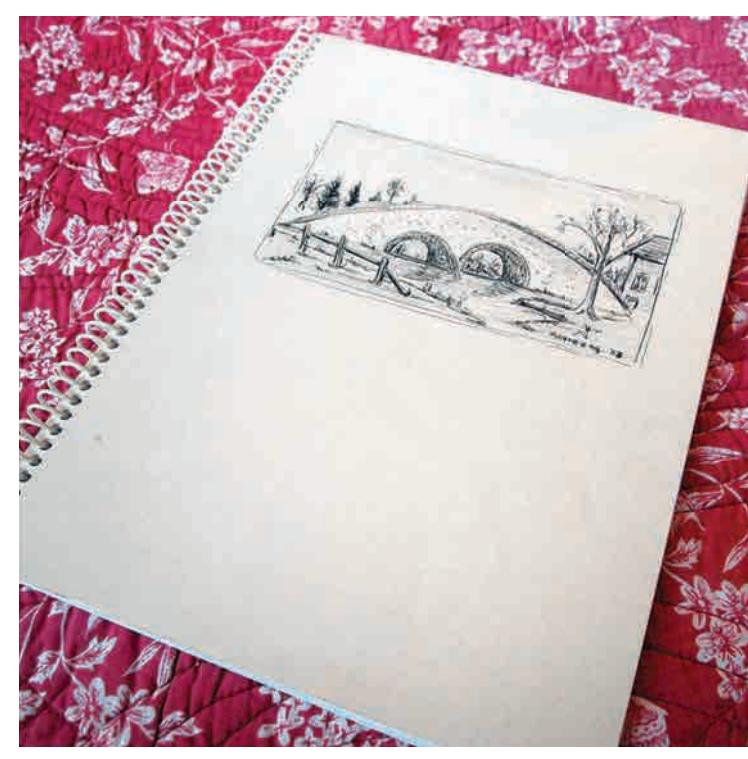
APRIL 21, 2008

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9:30 am—Picked up Sandie

10:00 am—Breakfast, scrambled eggs, bacon, bagel, orange juice, Bob ate well!

Pills—1 steroid, 1 Protonix



Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

JOEL 1:3 NIV

## His 70th birthday gift

*Less than five years before he died, Dad gave my siblings and me a spiral-bound, typed booklet complete with stories, photos, captions, and sketches* that portrayed a period of his childhood. There was a little 3" x 5" index card with a handwritten note attached that said it was his 70th birthday gift to us. It was so *Dad*. He was always giving us things on *his* birthday. Even after receiving it, I don't remember having a great deal of conversation with him about it. I was more interested in what was currently going on in his life. But it was important to him to put on paper what he wanted to share.

In the foreword he wrote,

Memories come easily as we grow older. It was exciting to me to randomly rummage through the attic of my mind and recall my childhood. I chose a period of fourteen years from 1937 to 1951 between my fourth and my sixteenth birthdays. As I wrote, I became overwhelmed by the power of remembrance. How easily I could flow from season to season, inside to outdoors, from grade school recesses to teenage adventures and back again.... These stories of my childhood have taught me that I am my past and to deny my past is to deny myself. In his book *First You Have to Row a Little Boat*, author Richard Bode wrote, "My life is not in

me; it is in what I remember and I do not possess what I remember so much as it possesses me."

As I reread Dad's stories, I see them in a whole new light now that he is no longer here, and I am transported to another place in time through a lens of love. It amazes me how differently things speak to us at different times depending on what is going on in our lives. What it is that gives us this burning need to tell our story, and who really cares?

In *Listening for God*, Peter Hawkins writes about author Frederick Buechner:

He tells his story so that readers will recognize in it something of their own; he writes so that we will all see that it is precisely in such stories as these that God is made known to each of us "most powerfully and personally." He shares his life, finally, in the conviction that the same God of history, who brought Israel out of Egypt and Christ out of the tomb, is even now working in the private histories of each and every one of us.... To lose touch with one's own story is to run the risk of losing touch with God.

It was Dad's birthday gift to us, but I see now that it was also a gift from God, the greatest Storyteller of all.




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**Opposite** | As I go back and read through Dad's childhood stories, years after he is gone, I hear them differently and see him differently, because I, too, am different now.

APRIL 22, 2008

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*Steroid—3x a day*

*Oral Balance, Depends, Ducolace—2x a day*

*Morphine (pain)—5 mg*

*Book—Hard Choices for Loving People*



Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.

PSALM 25:4 NIV

## The building tour

*“Bob, are there any dreams you have that you still want to fulfill?” Elizabeth Rogers, the hospice social worker asked Dad as she sensed the declining window of opportunity for him. When Dad responded that he wanted to go see his daughter’s new building in Tampa, Elizabeth looked at Mom and said, “You’d better go book the tickets.”*

He was my best cheerleader. Dad loved creativity, building things, and his children, and the creation of our new office building was one project in which all three came together. From the sketches of the building elevation and floor plans to the design of the kinetic mobile and themed bathrooms, Dad had enjoyed following the progress of this pinnacle project for our firm. But as we were gearing up, Dad’s life was winding down, and it was due to divine intervention, as he would write in a note he left on my desk, that the trip to see the new space was even possible.

When I picked up Mom, Dad, and my sister Becky at the airport, I asked Dad if he wanted to rest, but he said, “No, I want to go to the building.” So off to the building we went. As we walked in, it was one of those slow-motion, “I’ll-never-forget-\_\_\_\_” moments. My business partner, Joy, had Dad’s favorite music playing over the speakers, a slide show of photos throughout his life was projected on

the wall, and refreshments were laid out ready to enjoy. Dad lit up like a Christmas tree.

As we wheeled him around, he “inhaled” the stories about every space. He rubbed his hands across the smooth quartz kitchen-island countertop, delighted at the C-54 airplane-wing conference table, and marveled at the finished creation.

It was bittersweet. Dad was in the period of his life when so many firsts were also his lasts. The building represented so much of what I had inherited from my father. He had taught me to be creative, take risks, dream, and follow through. And each time I wanted to step out, I’d talk about it with Dad. Occurring only weeks before he died, this special visit would be the last time I felt the mutual joy that came from sharing my creative achievements with the man who had influenced me the most.

As we ended the tour in my office, we wheeled Dad over to my desk. There was a picture of him beside my computer, and he paused to look at it. It was a photo I had taken of him walking toward his boat dock after a snowstorm: his back toward the camera, his familiar silhouette all that appears against a sea of white. As I watched Dad stroke the photo with his finger, I was reminded he will soon be gone. But as the image portrays, I know that he will always be just ahead. And, as he’s taught me, I will follow.




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Opposite | Giving Dad a tour of our newly built office building weeks before he died was magical.

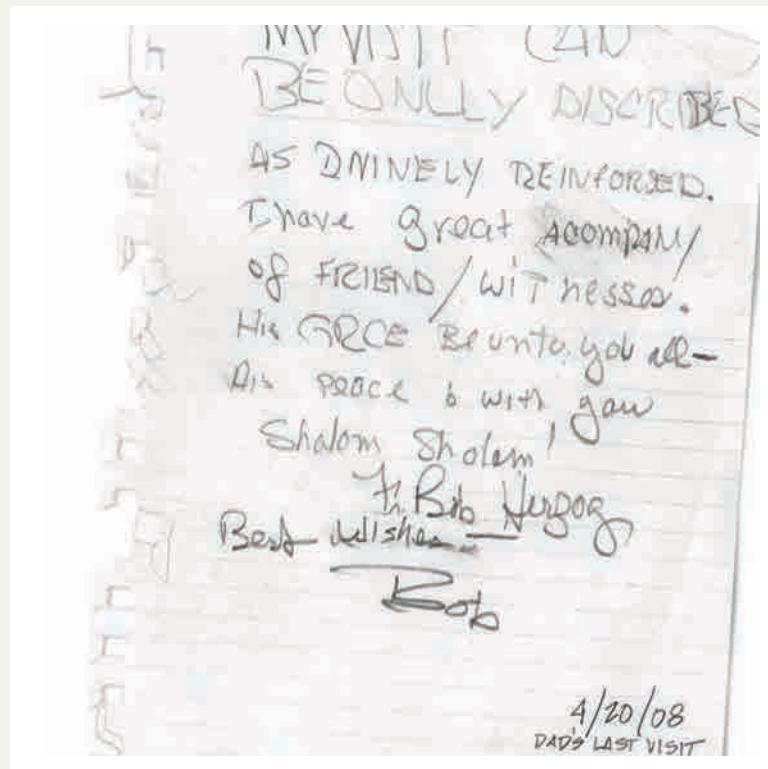
APRIL 23, 2008

Bob complained (mentioned) could not see well out of left eye, more pain in left hip, down left leg

Restless night—difficulty arousing, wet bed

Better rest 5 am, sleeping more

Mouth dry—used oral rinse



Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.  
Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

JOHN 14:27 KJV

## “Shalom Shalom”

We didn't talk about it much. It was just the way he signed off: “Shalom.” Dad loved the word and shared it frequently as his valediction. I had seen the word in his handwriting often and loved reading it. Like a warm embrace, it was the word he bestowed before signing his name, “Fr. Bob Herzog, Bob, or Dad.” And, on occasion, he'd note the word twice: “Shalom Shalom!” to accentuate the endearment. So we took notice, and it came to be synonymous with his love.

In Hebrew, *shalom* is the word for “peace.” Biblically, *shalom shalom* has been translated “perfect peace.” When God called a person or a city's name twice, the occasion was elevated to great biblical importance. You can find “Abraham! Abraham!” when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, or “Jacob, Jacob,” when Israel was moving to Egypt, and from the burning bush Moses heard, “Moses! Moses!” In each instance, it seems God used the double salutation to get the recipient's attention because he had something significant to say. And his son, Jesus, would mirror the repeated address, including calling out

to God himself, “Eloi, Eloi,” moments before his last breath on the cross.

As I pondered all this, I came across the note my father wrote and left on my desk in my office before dying. There, the words appear again, “Shalom Shalom!” But this time, I also realize these were Dad's final words written to me. *Shalom*. It's a noun, an adjective, and a verb. It is profound. And Dad wanted us to hear it.

*Peace, quietness, rest, safety, completeness, hope of wholeness, harmony, joy and total peace, happiness, health, prosperity, soundness, fullness, make good, restore, well-being be upon you, peace be unto you, aloha, good evening, Namaste, bye....*

There is only one way to find true *shalom*, and that is in receiving it from God, who created and put all things into place.

As Dad ended each letter and as he left us in life, he left us this word. Whatever we entrust to the world will only last a moment. But if we trust in the Lord, we will have peace. It was a wonderful parting blessing.




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Opposite | Dad penned his thoughts on paper and left this note at my office the last time he visited me in Florida.

APRIL 24, 2008

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*Eating less—cereal, juice for breakfast, some soup and Splash for lunch  
Very tired—listening to Fullam tapes*



The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns,  
where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.

PSALM 65:8 NIV

## The last sunset

*I had envisioned a quiet evening to watch one more sunset at the beach with Dad during his last night in Florida. So it was music to my ears when the manager of the Don Cesar Hotel said he'd be glad to help my father, who was now confined to a wheelchair, move from the car to the beach.*

As we made our way toward the beachfront deck, we passed a pool bar and decided strawberry daiquiris were the perfect refreshment for the show. As families clustered on lounge chairs around us and children splashed in the pool, I looked at my father now wrapped in a quilt and remembered summers gone by. It was at the Outer Banks, summer after summer, where he'd taught us to ride the waves, fly a kite, and build sandcastles. And in the process we'd all fallen in love with the beach.

As we settled in at the edge of the deck, a wedding party complete with lace, bare feet, and bouquets came bounding through the pool area. One of the groomsmen noticed my father and, followed by the others in the wedding party, came over to say hello. My sister Becky, Mom, and I broke out in laughter watching my father enjoy the spontaneity of a stranger's kindness, and photos were taken with Dad at the center of crowd.

Shortly thereafter, the manager appeared and commented that it was the hotel's tradition for a guest to ceremonially strike the gong at sunset, and he asked if Dad would do the honors. Going along with the program, Dad agreed and was wheeled over to the gong to perform the evening ritual. As we waited for the sun to set, a woman standing nearby struck up a conversation with us, and we learned she was visiting but lived in the same Maryland neighborhood as my parents, and the laughter continued.

Looking around, I noticed everyone enjoying each other but also facing the sun, more keenly aware of its pending departure. I felt the parallel to our lives as Dad's final days were approaching, and I wrapped my arm around his shoulder.

As the sun slipped away, Dad leaned over and struck the gong with his dying might. The deep vibrating chime against the silence of the sun's disappearance was powerful, and applause from bystanders erupted.

I was so proud of my father for all that he was, even as cancer was ravaging his body. It wasn't the sunset I'd remember from that night but God's love and light that were all around.




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Opposite | We expected a solemn last sunset at the beach as dad was dying, but God showed us a night of celebrations.

APRIL 25, 2008

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[The Lord] satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the “eagle’s.”

PSALM 103:5 NRSV

## Song for Bob

We had just arrived back at my parents' home after the funeral service for Dad. The hundreds of people surrounding us were gone, and an assorted mix of family from all over the country remained. Foil-covered dishes were stacked in the kitchen, purses were strewn across the furniture, and we were all lying around like rag dolls. It felt like the first chance to exhale after holding our breath, except that it was hard to imagine ever being filled back up with air. What was next? We hadn't had time to think about it, and there was no script.

And breaking the silence, Uncle John, Mom's younger brother, asked if we wanted to hear a song. And I thought, "A song? Yes, that would be lovely about now." John sat down at the piano and my brother, Rob, slid in next to him. We all gathered around as John began to play and sing:

*My friend Bob is a storyteller,  
He tells stories, he makes us smile.  
My friend Bob likes to tell of eagles,  
Majestic eagles, he watched them fly.  
"Eagles," he would say, "don't fly.  
They Soar!"  
Eagles climb the clouds almost to heaven.  
They rise without effort, so gracefully...  
At one with nature, at one with their maker,*

*They tell their story for you and me.  
And Bob would tell us all, "Don't fly,  
Like an eagle, soar!"  
My friend Bob is going on a journey,  
He's going to travel across the veil.  
One more journey in a life of journeys,  
A life so precious, and lived so well.  
And my friend Bob, he will not fly...  
He will soar!  
He will soar!  
He will soar!  
And meet his Lord....*

—John Schutt

It was just the encore we needed. As we all wondered how we'd possibly go forward, Uncle John would beautifully remind us that Dad would say, "Don't flap—just soar."

When your time comes to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with the fear of death, so when their time comes they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over again in a different way. Sing your death song, and die like a hero going home.

—Chief Aupaumut, Mohican, 1725




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**Opposite** | As we arrived back at my parents' house after Dad's funeral, my Uncle John gifts our family with "A Song for Bob," which he composed in honor of my father.

APRIL 26, 2008

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*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

MATTHEW 28:20 KJV

## "I see Jesus and his disciples"

I remember the phone call with my sister Becky as she described her visit with Dad that day in early May. "He said what?" I exclaimed in a moment of disbelief when she told me.

Dad increasingly appeared to have a one-foot-in, one-foot-out awareness as the cancer deteriorated his earthly body. We would see him staring off and knew he was somewhere else. In those moments, we wanted desperately to pull him back into our reality but also found ourselves hesitant to interrupt what was seemingly his private inner world.

Each passing day reminded us we were closer to life without Dad but also that he was accelerating toward his life in heaven. Without a doubt, we knew where he was going. He had taught my siblings and me early on about eternal life with God, which was followed by our own personal belief in the resurrection by faith. We rejoiced that Dad would soon meet and be acknowledged by Jesus before God.

"What do you see, Daddy?" Becky asked, after studying his gaze for some time.

"I see Jesus and his disciples," he softly replied without surprise, "but Andrew isn't there."

It was all I wanted to believe yet hard to imagine as I listened to my sister's words: Jesus with his disciples in a heavenly realm and Dad being given a glimpse of the divine in spite of, or because of, his debility. It was a surreal and sacred thin space that gave us all continued affirmation of Dad's faith and God's grace. And it was absolutely a gift of his dying.

It would be a year later that I would find myself face to face with Jesus. But my vision was afforded to me by a life-sized, brilliant yellow-and-black Andy Warhol reimagining of Leonardo da Vinci's famous *Last Supper*. It was during a visit to the Baltimore Museum of Art, and I felt an indescribable envelope of love as I imagined myself sitting across the table from my Lord and his friends. As I studied the enormity of the gathering, each disciple profiled a slice of humanity, with all of us focused on Christ, and I remembered Dad's words to my sister, "I see Jesus."

The message was electric, and I thrilled at the thought of the homecoming.

As he did for Dad, and he does for us all, Jesus meets us where we are.




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**Opposite** | Andy Warhol, 1986, *The Last Supper*, synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas, 78" x 306". Reproduced courtesy of the Baltimore Museum of Art.

Between the vibrant yellow hue, the life-sized depiction, and the memory of my father, I was transported to a meeting with Jesus at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

APRIL 27, 2008

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So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42–44 NIV

## Get close to death

*As with many deaths, there was the unexpected news, the gathering, the long goodbye, and then the burial. And shortly thereafter was the return to the routine of life before death. But for me, after Dad died, life before death could not be found.*

I missed my father beyond measure, and I ached over my mother's new reality; but there was also a strange longing that I felt every day "to be back there"—not at Mom and Dad's house but at the place where I had been fed like never before. I would wake up and go through the motions of everyday activities, but I hungered to be in that space again where we were stripped down to the core of truth. It was like a drug I craved, but I couldn't rationalize the pull because it seemed so contrary to much of the world surrounding me.

Through a friend at church, I was introduced to the author Richard Rohr. I was intrigued about this Franciscan's sensibility and wanted to know more about him. Turning to Google, I found a YouTube segment called ONE, in which he answers the question "If you could get the entire world's attention for one minute, what would you say?" And I found the affirmation of my yearning in his answer:

It would have something to do with vulnerability, because that's the only space in which transformation takes place. As long as we are hardened, as long as there's a brick wall here, nothing's going to change.... I'd want to call people to allowing the pain of other people to get inside of them.... Allow the world's suffering to influence you ... as a Christian, that's what I believe is what the cross is saying.... To watch someone pass over to whom you are bonded is the ultimate religious experience.... The veil gets very thin in those last weeks. And people say things, see things, they know things. You see this transformation in the last two weeks. That ... get close to it ... it's enough to change you; it's all you need to change you. You can never live inside of the isolated self again.

Dad had set the stage for us long ago. We knew death was not wrong, but as we embraced it with the dying one himself, the divine mystery of transformation changed us all. God used the very thing that would seem to destroy us to enlighten us. We gained an understanding that, by surrendering to a Larger Power, we are all participating in the constant pattern of growth and change. And that through Christ, we all come out on the other side.




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Opposite | Deborah Herzog Alexander, 2008, *He Built An Altar*, charcoal on paper, 8" x 11"  
My sister Deb captured in charcoal our feelings, as siblings, upholding our father, as he lay dying.

APRIL 28, 2008

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*In bed all day, eats little  
Asleep 8:45 pm*



The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

JOHN 1:5 NLT

## “If you could see what I see”

*“It was between the time of his coming to Florida and his dying,” my sister Becky remembers of Dad’s last month. “There was a home health aide from hospice, named Terrae. She was a large black woman who would come and clean Dad. She would shave him, put lotion on him, and I would say things to him like, ‘Dad, doesn’t that feel good to get cleaned?’”*

We wanted so badly to give to him in every way we could. But it was getting down to the most basic human interactions: being present and trying to see and feel what this looked like through Dad’s eyes as the days slipped through our fingers like sand.

“She would take hypoallergenic cleanser ... she was so gentle, and she would wash him off,” Becky recalled. “She didn’t say much, but Dad would talk to her and she would just listen. And when she spoke to him, she would call him Father: ‘Father, I’m going to roll you over now.’

“One time, Mom had left to run an errand and I was in the room with Dad. This same hospice aide, while she was cleaning him, rolled him onto his side.” My sister paused before continuing. “Dad was praying to Jesus and as she rolled him over, he clutched the railing of the

hospital bed, and he looked up at me and his eyes were filled with tears. And he said, ‘If you could see what I see you would not be afraid!’ And then he said, ‘It is very bright.’”

As my sister said these words to me, they hung in air between us. And we were both filled.

What does “bright” look like on the other side? How does God author something that we can see but that is also absent of color and image? And what about that absence is so powerful?

Dad was clearly being informed. And to have witnessed this divine appointment further substantiated our father’s faith and trust in God, strengthening our own faith and calming our fears.

Dad often shared throughout our lives that he didn’t have all the answers and that there was much to the mystery of God above. But Dad was certain God would provide us with all that we needed, and we were being shown this in new ways.

As life was leaving Dad and he was leaving us, God was moving in. We would inevitably see the color of death, which is darkness, but it would be overshadowed by the color of brightness, which is love.




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**Opposite** | During a pilgrimage to the Holy Lands, I was astounded at the thought of being in the presence of the marble slab where Jesus is supposed to have been laid, now inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City of Jerusalem. It was a breathtaking moment, further enhanced only by the light from the dome of the rotunda above.

APRIL 29, 2008

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3:00 am—Woke up, wanted to go to the bathroom; 6:30 am—Sleeping soundly  
9:00 am—Woke, washed, asked “What day is it? Sunday?” Tried to go to the bathroom, hurt, gave morphine  
Bob told me, “Pop [my father] said, ‘You have enough,’” and “Don’t be afraid....”  
Bob and Joyce Lee—Meatloaf, carrots, mashed potatoes, salad, cookies



“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him just as he told you.’”

MARK 16:6–7 NIV

## Through Joy's eyes

*Things were happening pretty quickly at the end of Dad's life. There were decisions to make, visits to coordinate, and information to share with many different people. Anyone who has experienced a loved one going through an active dying phase understands that it's hard enough to move through it, let alone capture memories along the way.*

But my friend Joy is a storyteller. When I mentioned to her the experiences we were having as a family during that time, she'd say, "You have to write that down." So I did. And when Joy was with us, she was observing and lovingly interacting through the lens of her camera. She'd ask nieces and nephews what they thought, know just the right time to walk into the room, and with ease see something we needed not to forget. And when my mom and sister Becky brought Dad down to Florida as one of his last wishes, Joy captured that special time as well.

We were all emotionally depleted at the loss of our father, so the elation we later felt in receiving these reincarnated moments as video was a beautiful gift. Joy added music, simple graphics, and editing genius that brought our stories back to life.

Mom was deeply comforted watching Dad again as she began the arduous work of journeying through her grief. The videos gave us a way to memorialize those events and to continue to share and remember that sacred season as a family. They showed us that time as it was, and they continue to show us the passage of time today. Both are life-giving.

What we learned from our father was that all of death is important. It all teaches us, feeds us, and ultimately brings us closer to our maker. We see and hear things we would not have seen or known before, and in this sense we are more alive. It doesn't take away our grief, but it allows us to know death as part of a larger relationship—one that never ends.

Where would we be if Jesus's first disciples were not storytellers?

We thank Joy for the gift of her stories and for showing us that our stories are hers as well. It is through our collective stories that we come to know that we are all one.




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**Opposite |** Here, pictured with my sister Deb, my dear friend Joy videotaped our prayers and remembrances during the gravesite visit on the one-year anniversary of Dad's death.

APRIL 30, 2008

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Visits—Elizabeth Rogers, Meg

Haircut—see Barb

Alice Tignor—Chicken pot pie, blueberry cream cheese dessert



He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

MATTHEW 26:37–38 NIV

## “Rob’s coming”

*My brother, Rob, could fix anything. He’d been like that since we were young. He would analyze something, see what needed to be done, make a plan, and fix it. And you could count on him. When Rob said he was going to take care of something, he didn’t rest until it was finished.*

So when my sister Deb told me that Dad said, “Rob’s coming,” when she asked him who he wanted to have with him when he died, I was not entirely surprised. Robert was the only son of Mom and Dad, and he was also affectionately and deservedly their #1 son. He and Dad had both served in the military, and they shared a thrill for adventure, but, at their core, they both were also committed to family above all else.

None of us knew the hour that Dad would slip away. “God’s time,” he would say. Throughout Dad’s ministry and interest in end-of-life issues, he had encouraged us to talk about death and not to be afraid. Now that he was dying before us, we sought his assurance and drew on those teachings and conversations.

What does it mean to be with someone in the hour of death? It is a profound place. Whether there is illness, an accident, whether the dying person is old or young—to some extent, the moment is the same. At one point, the one who is dying is still connected to his or her body and the world we know and share. And in the next moment, the person is gone. It is a deep and mysterious part of life, and no two endings are alike. We may be present with a loved one as he dies, yet in some ways we couldn’t be further from all that is happening. It’s a time of grievous emptiness, and, for Christians, a moment of pivotal truth.

For my family, seeing it openly with Dad—even in the depth of our sadness—there was a strange underlying joy. It was as though the love and faith that were being tested were binding us together, transcending the here and now.

In the end, as Dad had foretold, my brother was present with Mom as Dad left them. And in unison with our father, he fixed all his faith on God.

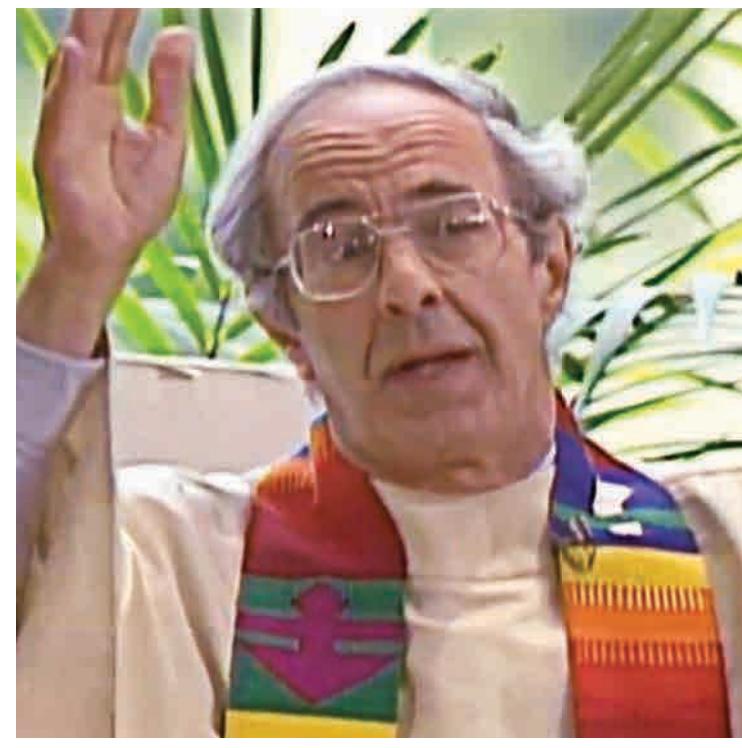



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**Opposite** | My brother, Rob, with our father, reminisced, as they look through a scrapbook during one of our weekends home when Dad was dying. They were “two peas in a pod” in life and are now, as well, in heaven.

MAY 1, 2008

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*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,  
it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

JOHN 12:24 ESV

## Henri Nouwen

*I would first come to know Henri Nouwen, one of the best-loved spiritual writers of our time, through my grandmother, Jane Schutt. She was a prolific reader of all things Christian, and she was always sending her favorite books to those she loved.*

Henri Nouwen's books were a staple in our house, and I'd frequently see his name on the spines across my father's bookshelves. Mom would occasionally have a Nouwen new release near her family-room chair, where she read her daily devotionals. And when Dad died, it was Henri Nouwen's words in *Turn My Mourning into Dancing* that initially soothed my deep sadness.

Henri Nouwen speaks of death, not as something we should try to escape; rather, by embracing it, we can come to know it as a reality that inhabits all aspects of our lives. He teaches that we can either see it as a way to darkness or a way to light.

It was in reading Nouwen's words that I would see death not just as something that happens to us. In our dying we are able to give to those we love. In *Our Greatest Gift*, he even goes so far as to say that death is the greatest gift we give to those we love. I remember reading this

and thinking I would love to be able to grasp this truth. To know that my father's memory was not just a consolation prize, that his love would continue to bear fruit in our lives—this was an exciting concept!

My father's death was the end of his career, the end of his parenting, the end of his friendship with so many, but it was not the end of his love or of the impact he would continue to have on the lives of those who loved him dearly. To the contrary, I was beginning to see that it was in his dying and through the spirit of Jesus that these additional blessings were afforded to us. And, in the years that have followed, I have continued to see these truths in many unforeseen ways.

Nouwen says, "The great paradox of our lives is that we are often concerned about what we do or still can do, but we are most likely to be remembered for who we were." And when you know this, you begin to see your life differently.

In Dad's dying, we all surrendered and went where we did not want to go. But God has shown us that Dad's love, like my grandmother's and Henri Nouwen's, is not only stronger than death but also mysteriously alive.




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**Opposite** | In the many books he wrote, the words of Henri Nouwen soothed my soul after Dad died. Here he is shown delivering his "Disciples of the Beloved" sermon, published 2009, YouTube.

MAY 2, 2008

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*Rob & Audra's 16th Wedding Anniversary*

*Visitors—Tom and Pam Bowers, Meg*

*Kathleen—Relieved Bob's constipation*



*Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*

PROVERBS 62:8 NIV

## “You have to trust!”

*The reality of death has a way of stripping life down to the basics. And for humans, nothing is more basic than our feelings of love and fear.* On these two emotions hang every other emotion we feel. Love is light, fear is darkness. Where one is present, the other cannot be. Most of the time we choose one or the other based on what we've learned. It is a choice we make in every situation and at every moment.

Loving Dad was easy. He had so much love for people, and his love was infectious. It was easy to choose love. He had taught and showed us how.

But at the end of Dad's life, there was sadness and fear that we would be alone without his love and that he would not be here to love us back. The (now-certain) disappearance of the physical embodiment of his love would leave a huge hole in all our hearts.

At one point, my sister Deb was sitting with Mom and Dad on the screened porch at home. It was a beautiful, little outdoor room with the woods all around, and it overlooked Cattail Creek, where Dad docked his boat. But this

spring the boat would remain under the blue tarp on its trailer in the yard. The captain was dying.

As the three of them were discussing Dad's final affairs, the paperwork soberly reinforced his end in black and white. Whether Dad sensed the increased fear around him or was just ready to tell it like it was, he became quite firm. He wanted Mom to hear what he had to say. He wanted to take what he was thinking and “put it on the table.” Even though he had talked about it all before, things were becoming razor sharp—we knew the end was near.

“You have to trust!” Dad insisted from his wheelchair as he felt mom's silent cry, *Will it be okay?* Dad knew the only way to overcome our fear was to trust that God's love was enough.

Love heals, fear hurts. Love accepts, fear rejects. Love enjoys, fear suffers. Love is patient, fear is nervous. Love is strong, fear is darkness. Love frees, fear imprisons. Love is brave, fear is afraid. God is love.

Dad was dying to be heard, and his message was loud and clear. Trust love.




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**Opposite** | It was the one time while Dad was dying that he became emphatic. Dad told Mom, “You have to trust!” Mom trusted Dad, and Dad trusted God. We all increased our faith through Dad as he was dying.

MAY 3, 2008

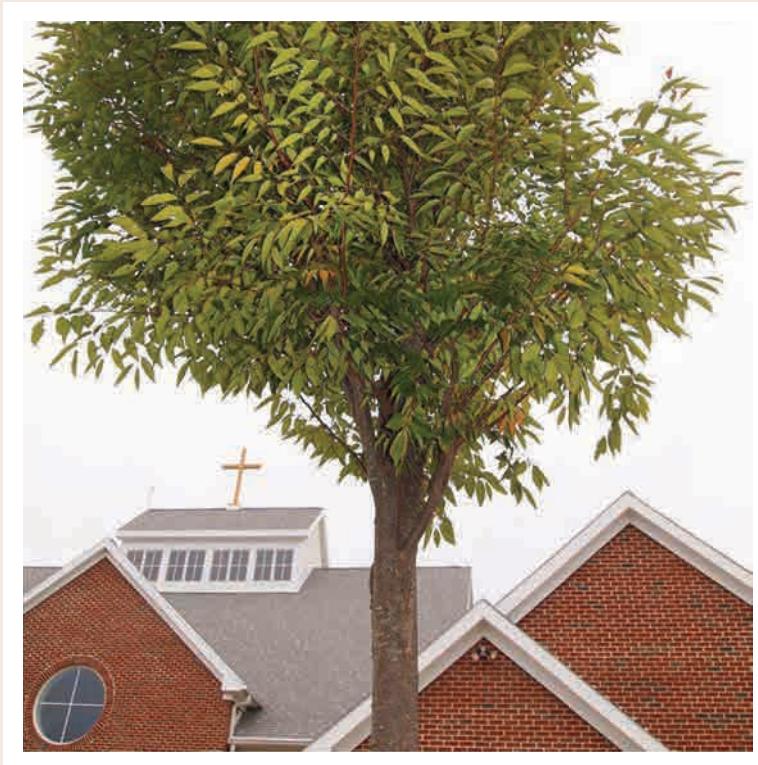
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*Time in the wheelchair on the patio*

*Successful BM!!*

*Becky and Caroline down, Robert returns*

*Laptop chat with Nancy—their 22nd Anniversary*



*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you,  
you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

JOHN 15:5 NIV

## The tree

*During the time that Dad was no longer with us and we were all trying to get back to whatever life was supposed to be like now that he was gone, Mom called to say she wanted to have a tree planted in front of the new church building that Dad had helped plan for before retiring from St. James Church in Mt. Airy, Maryland. My siblings and I agreed to help fund the memorial, and a tree was planted in honor of Dad's ministry.*

When I visited Mom the following year, she and I decided to stop by and see the building that my father had so proudly spoken of during his final years in leading the St. James parish. As we drove up, I was taken aback by the simple, contemporary style of the building. The small original church where my father had preached was more than 100 years old, and I'd grown quite fond of its traditional charm.

As we walked inside the new church, a parishioner with her teenage son greeted us. She and Mom expressed pleasantries as Mom introduced me, and she acknowledged with a smile that Dad had baptized her son when he was just a baby.

I looked around the large open sanctuary, and nothing was familiar. It was a reminder that the years when Dad walked down the aisle in his vestments, shared God's

word from the pulpit, and welcomed strangers at the door were over.

As we left the building, Mom and I walked over to the tree. Although it was no longer a seedling, it was far from being the sweeping canopied statement I had envisioned. It was one more indication that seeing my father would take new eyes.

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared on the road to Emmaus and joined a conversation between believers about their sadness and confusion that he was gone. Jesus said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25 NASB). Those two disciples missed the significance of history's greatest event because they were too focused on their disappointment. In fact, they didn't recognize Jesus as he was walking beside them. And in this Scripture, I saw myself.

I went looking for my father at the pulpit, but God showed me a baptized baby. I longed for a familiar church but found a multipurpose building large enough to hold a growing congregation. And I expected a majestic oak but found a young tree with an abundance of new leaves.

It was just as life was supposed to be with Dad gone. And in Jesus's name, it was bearing fruit.




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Opposite | The young tree in the center of the roundabout in front of the church stands as a tribute to my father.

MAY 4, 2008

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*Bob awake at 3:15 am—Robert helped change wet clothes  
Some food—egg, juice  
Slept most of the morning  
Becky returns 8 pm*



“Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation.  
I will be honored throughout the world.”

PSALM 46:10 NLT

## “I’m thinking about my lasts”

*“There were five days in the middle of May when I was there,” my sister Deb recalled of her time with Dad and Mom. She would try and come during the week to fill in the gaps when Becky and Rob couldn’t be there.*

“It was a beautiful day,” she continued. “Dad was in a wheelchair because he couldn’t walk, so I wheeled him outside. He was dressed warmly, and we sat by the hot tub on the deck listening to the birds. Everything was in bloom. We just looked at each other, and then he looked off and he was gone (mentally). He left me; he wasn’t there. And I just sat while he was away. I was trying to take in how he looked at that time ... his face..., and I reached over and stroked his arm. Looking at those little wisps of blond hair, those few strands standing on the top of his head, his ears.... His face had changed because of the medication, because of the cancer.... He had lost the definition of his neck, his chin had slightly doubled, but his eyes were the same.”

Deb paused. “What was significant to me was that we were sitting there in silence for 45 minutes like an old married couple that doesn’t need to talk. And when I saw in his eyes that he had come back, I said, ‘Dad, what are

you thinking?’ And he said, ‘I’m thinking about all my lasts ... my last birthday, my last Christmas, my last Easter,’ and then he looked at me and said, ‘the last time I will see you.’”

Tears rolled down my sister’s cheek as she told me this story. “What did you think when he said this?” I asked, hanging onto her words.

“That it was the last time I’d see him,” she answered grievously, feeling the finality again. “During that time of silence, two weeks before Dad died, so many things he shared were so profound, I didn’t want to dismiss it. So I sat there and realized it was quite literal.” As my sister said this, we both were quiet and took it all in.

One of my father’s favorite theologians, Frederick Buechner, at the end of a PBS interview at the Washington National Cathedral said, “What’s lost is nothing to what’s found and all the death that ever was set next to life would scarcely fill a cup.” And then he said, “I have a feeling we have talked enough, that we need silence. Not much—three minutes not saying a damn thing. Are we brave enough to do that?”

In the present, there is the past, which gives the present meaning. And in the uncertainty of death, there is a certain fullness of life. Can we be still and know it?



Opposite | Deborah Herzog Alexander, 2008, *Reflected Reflection*, oil on canvas, 3' x 5'

My sister Deb’s painting of our father’s reflection on the sliding glass door on the back of my parents’ house. It is quietly loud.

MAY 5, 2008

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*Did not wake during night*

*Bed and PJs wet*

*Marilyn Mulhern brought dinner—pork roast, brown rice, salad*

*Bonnie Wilson—tray of fruit*



*Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance  
of his holy people in the kingdom of light.*

COLOSSIANS 1:12 NIV

## The Pop-Pop doll

*She was eleven when my father died. And the week following his funeral, my daughter, Savannah, would make the annual trek to Merrie-Woode in North Carolina for summer camp. I was sad to lose her too, even though her time away would only be a few weeks. Dad's passing was her first real experience of death, and it was the death of a man she knew and loved completely. It would affect her time at camp.*

They were cut from the same cloth, my dad and my daughter. They both loved to explore and sensed God's abundance in nature. Inheriting his artistic genes, she, too, delighted in making things from scrap. I knew that the majesty of Old Bald Mountain across the lake at the foot of her cabin and the forest of towering pines would cushion her sadness. Dad's spirit would be alive for her there.

We taped a photo of her grandfather to the inside of her trunk, and I made sure to tuck in a few extra postcards and stamps. Offering solace, I encouraged her to lean on friends and to be open to new experiences, which had delighted her in years past.

At home, I filled the weeks by keeping busy and looked for the smile on my daughter's face each night as camp photos were posted online. I read sympathy cards and

tried to wrap my arms around the magnitude of my father's absence.

In no time, Savannah arrived home with the signature trunk full of dirty clothes, a loose arrow from archery, and some souvenir rocks from the woods she loved.

"Look what I made, Mom," I heard her say as she handed me the soft knitted doll. Not knowing she could knit, I exclaimed how excited I was to see the creation.

"It's Pop-Pop," she said, as I took in the details of the newly formed likeness. With scraps of yarn and imagination, she had knitted what she loved. He was dressed in his favorite blue argyle sweater and the green cap that hid where the melanoma once was. A stamp-sized piece of cardboard with *Holy Bible* in her handwriting was glued to his hand, and around his neck a loose board-game piece in the shape of a plus sign formed the crucifix he wore.

She had only known him eleven years, but I could see his influence would last a lifetime. As she showed me the red heart she had knitted on his chest, I heard my father's words again, "You will know me in each other."

In that moment I realized she had also inherited the best part of him.




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**Opposite |** Savannah holds her creation of her grandfather's likeness that she knitted at camp. When my mother saw it, she wanted it, so Savannah gave it to her. Missing her grandfather, and the doll, she came home and made herself another one. It was very dear.

MAY 6, 2008

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*Bob ate oatmeal and juice, sat in living room all morning*

*John Price came by for visit at 1 pm—prayers*

*Bob to bed at 1:30 pm*

*Becky left, Robert returned*



*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*

LUKE 9:51 NIV

## Dying at home

*As a priest, Dad had visited countless patients in the hospital. It was part of what being a priest was all about. He had come to know and respect what the medical community could do to heal the body, but this matter of dying was for the soul. With his deep faith and conviction regarding life everlasting, Dad was able to accept that his earthly body would only take him so far. Once he learned that his illness was terminal, Dad chose minimal radiation and resolved to live his remaining days at home.*

It was a pivotal decision. And in some ways one of the most important of his life. It was one thing to prepare for the ultimate surrender but quite another to literally let go. But as Dad shared his decision, I saw in his face and heard in his voice that it was all going to be okay. With the medical conversations behind us, we followed Dad's lead in taking the opportunity every day simply to be present, to watch where God would lead us.

At home, sounds of a nurses' station down the hall were replaced with the faint serenade of grandkids playing

out back. Restrictive visiting hours gave way to sitting in our PJs alongside Dad in his PJs. In lieu of a cafeteria, we had a family room where friends stopped by with pound cake, soup, a prayer, and a hug.

We laughed with Dad, prayed with him, and were vulnerable in our own unique ways as we shared the everyday familiar with the once-in-a-lifetime unknown. As the days ticked on, God's grace moved in, replacing Dad's physical abilities with glimpses of an eternal knowing.

It was not an easy time for our family, but we were never more connected to one another, and the backdrop of my parents' home gave us a comforting shelter as we moved from a perceived tragedy to an experience of sacred love.

Where we had gathered so many times before, Dad would now show us how we gather to die. There, near the deck that he built out back, the table where he'd blessed our meals, and the chair where he loved to nap, Dad's soul would return to its maker. And, as we would learn, it couldn't have been more natural.




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**Opposite** | It was a great blessing to all of us that Dad was able to die at home in the hospital bed that hospice set up next to the bed he had shared with Mom for fifty years. It couldn't have been more comforting.

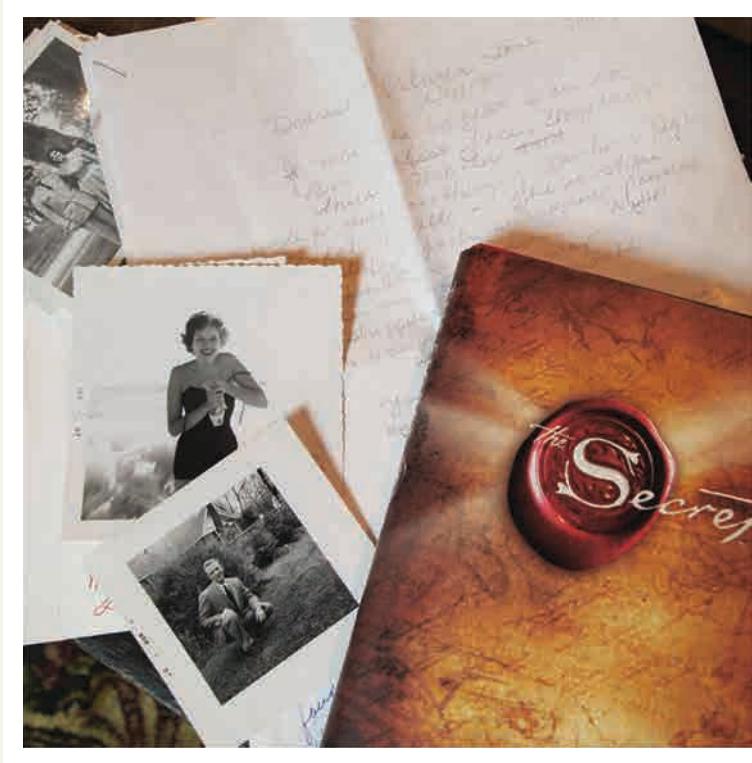
MAY 7, 2008

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*Bob got bathed*

*Clean air*

*Lois Blair—chicken salad, green salad, raspberry dressing, baguette, pie*



For all that is secret will eventually be brought into the open,  
and everything that is concealed will be brought to light and made known to all.

LUKE 8:17 NLT

## The secret

*The day that Mom found Dad's note would have been their 51st wedding anniversary. She was up in her sewing room, reminiscing, as she had done so many times during the three months since he'd died. Here in the room over the garage was her sanctuary of sorts. She found solace in the colorful bundles of fabric, her collection of quilts, and an assortment of favorite photos and cards thoughtfully arranged near her sewing machine.*

On a little bench next to the pullout couch where visiting grandchildren often slept, a book entitled *The Secret* that I had given her years ago caught her eye. Picking it up, she noticed a brown envelope tucked inside labeled "Love you!" in Dad's familiar handwriting.

As Mom unfolded the note inside, photos spilled out. Old black and whites of their wedding day, a favorite beach vacation, and the two of them in front of their first house in Washington, D.C., with Dad proudly displaying his military dress. Marred by his illness, the scrawled pencil message was faint, but decades of typing his sermons had trained her eye to discern his words.

"Dearest Patricia Jane Schutt Herzog, For more than 60 years you have been my best friend, companion, lover, mother, wonderful..." Dad recounted. It was a short note with highlights of his adoration for a woman who gave herself completely to him, their family, and his ministry.

As I read the note, it was easy to scan in my mind all the years I'd enjoyed the beauty of their relationship. I could see now that their life was a call to serve the Lord. That the salt and pepper of their personalities balanced each other and brought them back to center, allowing them to answer the call again and again. She was his other half, glued to my father by their combined faith and commitment to God above all.

"You have always been there for me, by my side, and I will always love you in the Lord God." That was Dad. Through Him, with Him, and in Him, he lived his life and loved his wife. It wasn't a secret at all.

And with God's help, on this special day, she knew and felt it again.




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**Opposite** | Dad's note and a few favorite photos he had tucked in a book in Mom's sewing room as he was dying. She would find it on the date of their next wedding anniversary. What a gift!

MAY 8, 2008

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*Slept all night!*

8 am—Meds

9:00 am—Breakfast—juice, egg, bacon

5:30 pm—Kathleen from hospice



May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,  
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:13 NIV

## The dress rehearsal

*"What time is the funeral?" my father kept asking during those foggy days at the end of his life, to which Mom, pausing with disbelief, would reassuringly respond, "... in God's time."* Dad was ready. He had prepared for countless funerals during his career as a priest and was honored each time to gather with friends and family to give thanks and celebrate the departed one before God. He would carefully institute, in some personal way, aspects of each life as he asked God to receive his or her spirit into everlasting peace.

Even though Dad would not be there to officiate his own funeral, his requests had been made known for years. But we would be afforded one more loving review—a dress rehearsal of sorts—one evening over chocolate ice cream, as we sat together on the bed with our dying father.

Dad had assigned each of my siblings and me a specific Scripture to read, and we took turns with his Bible, proudly

sharing the sacred words. He then asked to see the dress that Mom would wear, and we encouraged her to bring it out from their bedroom closet to show him. We softly sang the songs from the hymnal that Dad had selected to be sung, and I thought to myself, this is what vulnerability wrapped in faith looks like.

We listened as Dad shared that his service would be reordered with interment (acknowledgment of the death of the body) at the beginning instead of its traditional place at the end. He wanted us all to leave celebrating the promise of eternal life, as we sang the Easter hymn "He Is Risen!" from our hearts with trumpets triumphantly accompanying us all. We hung onto his every word as our love was exhaled back toward him. It was a final gift to our father to be able to show him the trust and faith he had always shown us.

We were ready to honor and celebrate Dad's life before God. And although this time we wouldn't see him at the altar, he'd be with us from the best seat of all.




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**Opposite** | Sitting on Mom and Dad's bed, we planned Dad's funeral service with him. Angelique, a folk art cloth doll that my friend Sandy gave me, hung overhead while we enjoyed ice cream and the love of Christ between us.

MAY 9, 2008

---

*Alice came by  
Terrae came at 10:30 am  
Phoebe sat with Bob—I played tennis  
Up in wheelchair during afternoon*



*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God  
and are called according to his purpose for them.*

ROMANS 8:28 NLT

## A sidewalk art show

*An interesting thing about death is that it shows you what really is, and people tend to respond to it in ways that show you who they really are.*

My daughter, Savannah, wrestled with the loss of her grandfather. Patterning my father, I talked with her about it quite a bit. But like her own father, she was more comfortable processing her feelings inwardly and through her actions.

One day, to my surprise, she declared, "I'm going to sell my paintings, Mom, and give money to help cure cancer."

I remember thinking that this would be much more complicated than a lemonade stand. But I also knew to get out of her way.

From an early age, Savannah expressed herself through art and painted whatever was on her mind. Science class inspired a painting of a galaxy, a toothache turned into an interesting image of the inside of her mouth, and a peace sign on a babysitter's necklace influenced a canvas of colorful symbols. It delighted and astonished me what she shared unfiltered at the innocent age of eleven through her creations.

After conceiving the idea, she painted feverishly for weeks, and when her inventory reached 50 paintings, she

began to organize the show. Flyers were hand delivered throughout the neighborhood, and a price sheet was made to provide the title and cost of each:

*Crazy Backyard*—\$12  
*A Place beyond the Clouds*—\$20  
*Beauty on the Inside*—\$15  
*The Question of Life*—\$8

On the morning of the event, Savannah transformed oak trees that lined our street into easels as she tied paintings around their trunks with yarn. It was a beautiful sight as neighbors, dogs, and children in wagons made their way down the sidewalk. Savannah hustled about and beamed with delight as she answered the many questions about her work and the grandfather she loved and missed.

Hours later, the tree trunks were again bare and the pickle jar full as the last painting was sold.

I was filled with the joy that I knew would have been my father's. Even more, I was amazed at how the darkness of grief sparked an unrealized passion that, with God's blessing, ignited into a flaming body of creative work.




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**Opposite** | Savannah getting ready for her Sidewalk Art Show, with stacks of paintings that she tied to the trees. Her grandfather would have been extremely proud.

MAY 10, 2008

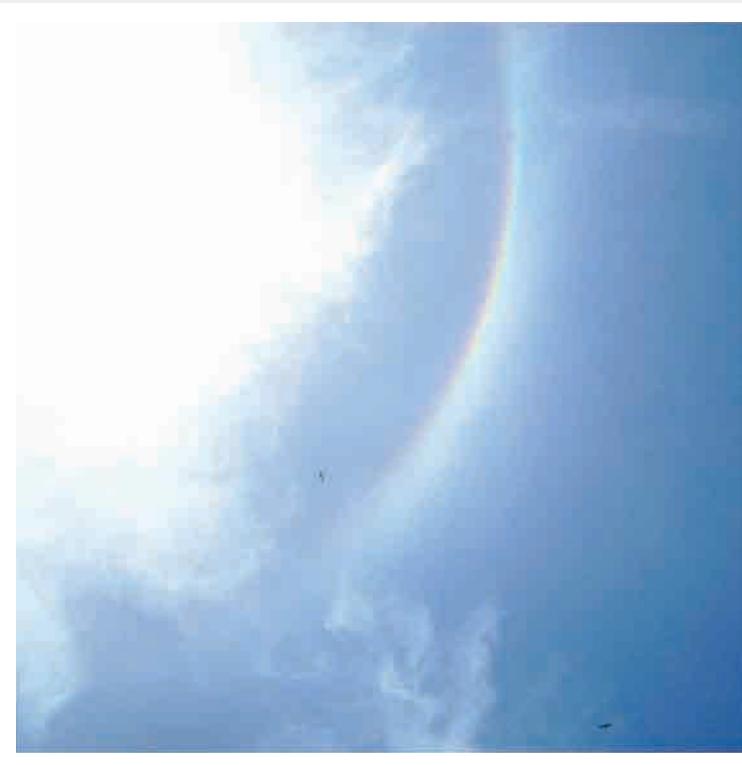
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*6:00 am—wanted to get up, went back to sleep; 7:30—changed Depends; breakfast—juice, egg, biscuit*

*Angry, wants to walk, up to wheelchair; watching military channel*

*Arnold and Lil Taylor called—offered love and prayers*

*Becky and Caroline arrived—Bob in great spirits!!*



*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

MATTHEW 5:8 ESV

## “People are more than they think”

*In the beginning, we didn't think about what we would learn. We were just overwhelmed by the magnitude of this uninvited guest called Death. Yet each day, Dad continued to teach us about God and ourselves through his dying. And as the day drew nearer, he would share glimpses from a place beyond.*

One day, Dad and I had this conversation via Skype:

“Dad, Becky told me you saw Jesus and his friends.”

*Yes, the disciples were there, but Andrew was not; I didn't realize how far away they were until I had a chance to watch.*

“He wasn't? Andrew wasn't there?”

*No. All the stories were there—they were coming into play.*

“What were the stories, Dad?”

*I saw all the Gospels, but I don't remember the details. It's not empty, that's for sure. A lot of busyness. God acts in his own will and things just occur.*

*It's bright and it's beautiful. The spirit is very agile, and I am very impressed with how agile it is. It comes and goes. The light. It is very white. It is clean beyond infinity. The whole place is different. I am seeing things differently; things are tied together like never before.*

*It's been a wonderful day. Fresh, clear. Nothing I can do or want for. Such a wonderful six weeks. If I had to do it all over again, I would.*

*People are more than they think they are.*

*God is in charge.*

In Dad's weakness, God's strength was revealed. His glory shone through. And it left us astounded.




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**Opposite** | On the beach one day after Dad had died, I was thinking about all that had taken place. I layed back on my beach towel and noticed a rainbow wrapped around the sun.

MAY 11, 2008

Awoke at 7 am—changed wet pants

In chair in living room; Breakfast—juice, egg, bacon, coffee

Children arrived early afternoon

Dinner at 6 pm—6:30 pm Bob complained of stomach/chest pain “Take me to the ER!” gave 5 mg morphine; 8:37 pm comfortable



All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I said to you.

JOHN 14:25–26 NIV

## A tribute to Betsey

*One of the groups I was involved with during the time of my father's death was the Contemporary Women's Bible Study at St. John's Episcopal Church, where I had been a member for more than twenty years. A group of us would gather weekly for nourishment from Scripture, warm fellowship, and light breakfast fare. Between crumbs and conversation, we grew to a greater understanding of the Word and the work of Christ's love among us.*

Each Tuesday, I looked forward to the exuberant smile of Betsey Marlowe as I walked through the door. Betsey had welcomed me with open arms when I first joined the group, and I'd feel her endearment again and again as one of the blessings of that assembly.

As much as we felt that we'd come to know each other, I was to be reminded at one gathering how much we still did not. Without warning, our beloved Betsey took God's hand and left our earthly home. As we women met the next morning, heartbroken and shocked, we also felt lost because Betsey had been scheduled to lead us that day. Tears and stories of Betsey's influence on our lives began to be shared, and I was moved to scribe the spontaneous eulogy being formed.

Personal imprints were recounted one by one. We could feel Betsey skipping between us, calling us not only to reveal memories of her words and actions but to be vulnerable enough to unwrap layers of ourselves as well.

Helping a friend through chemo, comforting a forlorn struggler of addiction, offering profound encouragement to a janitor while making coffee..., in these ways, Betsey was a beautiful vessel for God's work, freely offering compassion, enabled by her own transformation through suffering.

When the hour was up, I was amazed that this sudden loss had revealed each of us in new ways, and thankful that God was using her death to remind us that, when we are weak, we are strong.

The stories continued after that morning, as did poems, special prayers, and messages, which I compiled into a booklet for each member of our group and for Betsey's children, as a testimony to her undying spirit.

Betsey's chair was vacant that Tuesday morning, but she led us to a deeper understanding that life through Christ's Spirit produces results far beyond our short, confined existence.



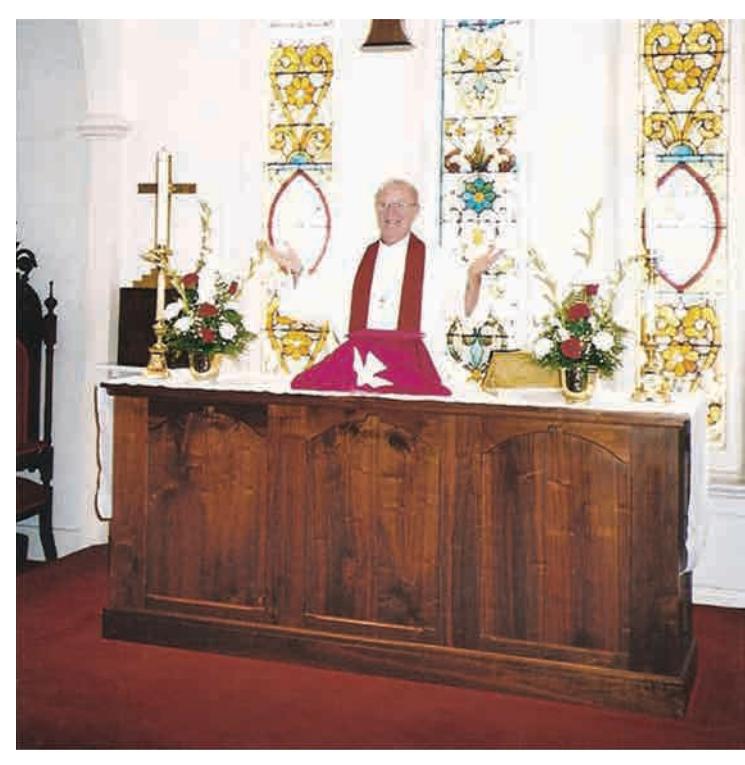

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Opposite | The cover of the tribute to Betsey that the Bible study group and I created for her children.

MAY 12, 2008

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*Up every two hours to check on Bob—some coughing and moaning  
8:05 am—power outage, Bob still sleeping  
10:20 am—Kathleen called, will see us this afternoon  
10:50 am—Hospice called (Gloria), no healthcare aide today; 11:00 am—gave Bob meds*



So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,  
you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day.”

JOHN 6:53–54 NLT

## “The Lord be with you”

*It was my last visit home to see Dad, six days before he died. I was sitting next to his bedside on a chair pulled up as close as I could get. Time with my father was waning, so I had my laptop out, ready to type. Dad was at the end of his life, and every word he uttered was a treasured morsel. I wanted to be able to remember whatever he wanted to share.*

“I need to run to the store,” Mom said as she stopped by the bedroom on her way out. “Will you be okay alone with Dad for just a bit?” she asked.

“Sure, you go on,” I encouraged her, as though being alone with my father would somehow increase the intimacy between us that I was craving right then.

Shortly after she left, Dad became agitated. He strained to raise his feeble body and tried to lift his leg to get out of the bed. My efforts to calm him did nothing to allay his disorientation, and I became anxious. *Prayers, I thought. We need to pray!*

I ran to his office and grabbed the well-worn *Book of Common Prayer* off the top of his desk. During that few seconds, Dad slithered down off his pillow, his leg dangling off the edge of the bed before his energy gave out.

Pulling on the purple ribbon that marked a page, I quickly opened the book and began to read.

“The Lord be with you,” I began.

“And with thy spirit,” my father responded, and with those words his entire body relaxed, and his eyes softly closed.

“Lift up your hearts,” I continued.

“We lift them up unto the Lord,” we said together as one.

I continued aloud as my father whispered with me every remaining, memorized word of the service of Holy Communion, and a powerful peace washed over him. Reading to my father the words he’d read to me a thousand times before, I was struck by the magnitude of this Christian summation and truth.

Tucking Dad’s leg back under the blanket, I admired his frail, silent frame and tried to imagine how much I’d miss him in my life. As my heart ached, I heard my father’s echo of Jesus’s words to his disciples, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

In my final days with Dad, I was hoping for crumbs, but as in life, through Christ, he gave me a feast.




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**Opposite** | One of a few photos taken of my father in church. Here at the altar at St. James Episcopal Church, he shared his faith and proclaimed the Good News.

MAY 13, 2008

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*Breakfast at 8:30 am—juice, egg, bacon, bagel, coffee; awake all morning, watching military channel*

*Lunch—bowl of fruit, yogurt; nap*

*Elizabeth Rogers visit 3 pm; Meg helped on to potty, then back to bed*

*Bob in wheelchair on porch, listening to Taizé music; Debbie arrived 8 pm*



Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice.

And the God of peace will be with you.

PHILIPPIANS 4:9 NIV

## And then there were two

*I couldn't decide if she was laughing or crying when I heard my mother's voice on the phone that morning. It was an unfamiliar expression to me.* And then I heard the words "Your brother is dead." I knew in that moment it wasn't laughing or crying but a mother's voice in sheer agony, delivering the unexpected news that she had received only moments before. A heart attack had taken him during the night.

Less than two years after Dad had died, we found ourselves back in a thick fog. But this time, though it was a different kind of loss, we were empowered with the tools and experiences our father had given us. We knew how to be vulnerable together and that, no matter how suddenly or "too soon" Rob had left us, we'd somehow be okay. As we endured our pain, a familiar assurance surrounded us that we recognized as the Lord God Almighty and the guiding spirit of our father.

A flurry of unscripted decisions and activities followed, but we were galvanized to look beyond the obvious gaping hole in our hearts to seek and bear witness to the grace before us.

As we huddled around the kitchen table with Audra, our brother's wife, the unfiltered conversation between my family startled the cremation representative. We knew the options for disposing of Rob's body were simply

transactions—that the real work had already been done between God and my brother.

The next morning, Mom found a story as she was reading John Claypool's *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, in which Claypool, following the loss of his daughter, presents gratitude as an alternative to grief, and we tucked a copy inside each funeral pamphlet I'd made. Wanting to honor Rob's love of music and his guitar, my sister Becky found a friend who played "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" at the altar, one of Rob's favorites. And Deb, my other sister, commemorated Rob's laughter and kindness with hundreds of peanut M&M's® packs that nieces and nephews handed out to everyone in the standing-room-only crowd at his funeral service. They were Rob's ubiquitous treat.

Assured by the big picture of life everlasting, we were liberated to celebrate our brother's life and God's boundless love in true Herzog fashion.

We continue to miss Rob—his ability to make us laugh, his unquenchable thirst to serve, and his steadfast love of family. But the week we were gathered brimmed with a fullness that cannot be described.

Although Rob's 49-year life was much too short, the gifts we acquired during Dad's final days and during the commemoration of our brother's life revealed a second mystery: the bounty continues, abundant and available.




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Opposite | An early photo of father and son, as they enjoyed one of their favorite pastimes together out on the Magothy River.

MAY 14, 2008

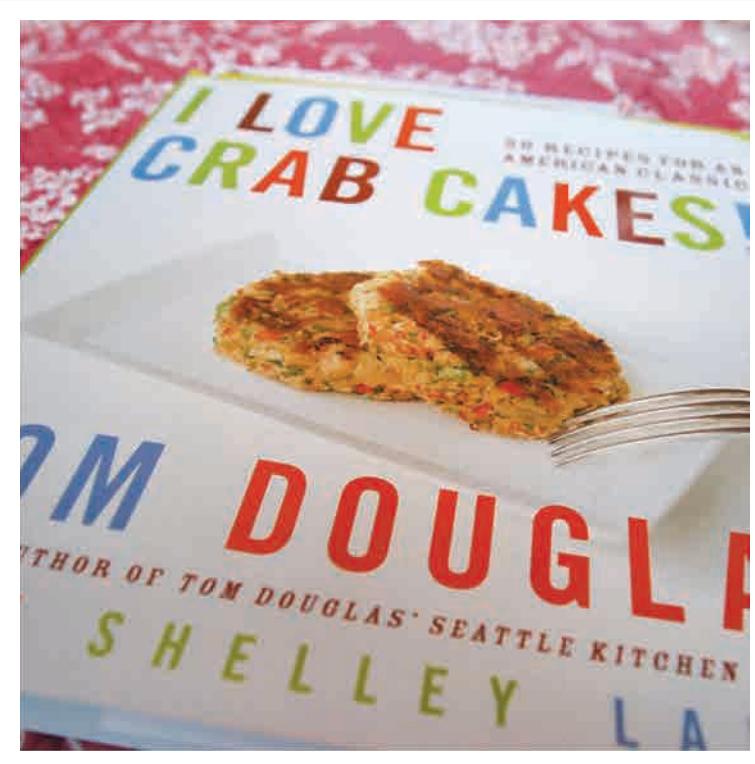
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*Meds at 8:30 am*

*Breakfast—eggs, apple juice*

*Terrae came at 9 am for bath, shave, clean linens*

*Asleep 11 am*



These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full.

This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

JOHN 15:11–12 ESV

## Crab cakes

*We were not unlike other people for whom food is central to the nourishment of the family. Mom grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, and like many southern women she learned early on that food was love. She was greatly influenced by Villa Rea, the wonderful housemaid who not only cooked and cleaned their childhood home but also taught my mother and her siblings much about life as she made her remarkable banana pudding and famous fried chicken for their large extended family.*

When Mom married Dad they settled and raised my siblings and me in Maryland, and in short order our “fried chicken” became crab cakes. It was partly Dad’s love of sailing, partly the Chesapeake Bay, and partly Mom’s love of cooking that influenced this family specialty. Mom could make a crab cake from jumbo lump meat and her secret recipe, which consisted of almost nothing else. Like Mom’s chocolate chip cookies that everyone in the Herzog house loved almost as much as air, we looked forward to crab cakes every time we all gathered.

Dad adored Mom’s cooking, and I often thought he purposely “couldn’t cook,” which enabled her all the

more. He was famous for snooping around the kitchen when he got hungry, and she’d kick him out and whip up a snack or favorite meal. It was a beautiful ping-pong between them: he’d be hungry, she’d cook, he’d sing her praises, and she’d cook some more.

And so it was on the last weekend before Dad’s life ended, when I was home one last time to see him. Life at my parents’ was now reduced to the most basic of interactions and traditions. Holding hands, staring in silent adoration into each other’s eyes, and just letting love without words flow between us.

But because it was ingrained in the DNA of their bond, Mom asked Dad again that Saturday evening, “Are you hungry?” And even though it was clear that Dad no longer desired food, he looked up at her from the hospital bed that was positioned next to the bed they’d shared for 50 years and slowly nodded his head, Yes.

It was one more way Dad showed us what love looked like, as Mom served him a tiny bite of crab cake. No filler was needed. As with all the others she’d made before, it was bound with love.




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**Opposite |** My sister Deb was traveling after Dad died and noticed this book in the airport bookstore. She couldn’t help but think of Dad and bought a copy for everyone in the family.

MAY 15, 2008

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*Awake 5:40 am—shaking railing on bed; 7:45 am—Deb helped clean up bed and Dad  
On porch for breakfast—egg, bacon, juice, bagel  
2 pm—sleeping, Nancy called from the computer  
Dad weepy—in bed by 9 pm*



So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen  
is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18 NIV

# Chapters

*I sat in church one Sunday after Dad died, and the tears kept rolling down my cheeks. When the service ended I saw my neighbor Sharon Stoll across the aisle and made my way toward her as the congregation filed out. Noticing I was upset, she asked me to sit with her, and I told her I couldn't stop thinking of hospice and I was heartbroken. Sharon had been a long-time volunteer with hospice, and as I shared what was on my heart, she said to me, "God is speaking to you, Nancy. Listen to him."*

A few weeks later I was sitting at a restaurant with Kathy Fernandez, the CEO of the local hospice chapter. Although I thought we'd be talking about the many opportunities to volunteer, I quickly learned that lunch was about assistance needed to help rebrand the growing organization.

In no time, the branding firm I owned found itself deeply immersed in the hospice business. From listening to board members, staff, and patients to going through volunteer training myself, I soon realized that God was providing a way to increase my understanding of end-of-life issues from a global perspective. Listening to an interview with hospice pioneer Elisabeth Kübler-Ross at

the end of her own life, I was gripped by the resemblance to my father's lifework.

Beyond the paperwork, medication, and schedules, there was a ministry at hand as human beings met human beings to do God's work. I saw how the end of life was life-giving; how those on their final journeys were revered and unconditionally loved. And I heard testimony from a population called by a force beyond themselves to support the hard work of dying.

How does a movement grow so large with such a quiet demeanor? How does something that appears so dark leave a light that cannot be extinguished?

It's easy to get ready for birth. The world shows us how. But the guidebook for dying? Two thousand years ago, Jesus was nailed to a cross and left this earthly home. He spent his life preparing for it. And with every act and spoken word, he would show humankind that this dark and tragic event was not only necessary but was also filled with the promise of tomorrow. Why would we not open our eyes more widely and be drawn to the mystery before us?

Get ready. It's certain. Make your last chapter your best.




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Opposite | Sunsets, like death, remind me that the end of life can be beautiful.

MAY 16, 2008

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12:30 pm—Tammy visit, checked vitals, all good, gave enema, very painful

1:30 pm—Bob sleeping

2:20 pm—pain in leg, rectum, belly, gave 10 mg morphine, pain continues

2:37 pm—gave 5 mg, called hospice—put towel in dryer to get warm, place on belly



We love because he first loved us.

1 JOHN 4:19 NIV

## Just five words

*There was so much about the end of Dad's life that was not ours. But in the midst of our unfamiliarity and the uncertainty around us, there were powerful glimpses of the only thing that was certain. All three visits I made to Maryland to see Dad after we found out he was dying were special. Each visit had a different story to tell. Anticipating the visits, I would run through my mind the things I wanted to ask Dad, what I wanted to share. I'd imagine what I would experience over the weekend: Mom's cooking, the wonderful morning light that streamed through the tall trees leading down to the finger piers, time just to be around Dad's things, the smell of sawdust down in his workshop....*

But on one of those visits, my thoughts also focused on a desire to have private time with Dad to share, heart to heart, the most poignant thing. It became crystal clear to me what I wanted to say, and I prayed that God would provide the window to do so.

There were countless times Dad had cut straight to my heart when I was growing up. He was a natural storyteller and had a way of getting his point across without our knowing where he was going. Whether it was a lesson I needed to learn or a suggestion he wanted to make

or a joke he wanted to tell, Dad knew how to set it up and drive it home.

On Sunday, the last day of my final visit, Dad was ready to nap. Mom and I helped him out of the hospital bed and into the wheelchair and made our way out to the screened-in porch. We lifted him from the wheelchair onto the chaise lounge, and I was eager to help make him comfortable. I pulled out one of Mom's quilts to cover him. And, like a baby, as I leaned over him, he softly closed his eyes.

"Dad," I said, as tears welled in my eyes and my throat tightened, "I want you to know that you were the best dad ever ... and that when you meet God above, I know he will say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant' because, Dad, you gave me the one gift that mattered most: you taught me who Jesus is."

And gently opening his eyes, he looked up at me and whispered, "Only God loves you more." And like a curtain falling after an encore, he closed his eyes again. They were just five words, but they would engulf and summarize so many conversations before. God, above all.

My father got it. And on that little porch on that Sunday, he gave it to me.




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**Opposite** | While Dad posed for a photo from his wheelchair on the porch during the last weekend I was home with him, I couldn't seem to love on him enough, knowing that he would soon be gone.

MAY 17, 2008

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*Up at 6:30 am—everything wet, changed Bob and bed, very restless during night, trying to get up phlegm, taking blankets on and off  
7 am—wanted to go out on porch, very chilly, talked about England, spoke with accent, gave directions—down the hill and to the right  
Dad saw white boxes, lots of hand holding*

*Sally called and wanted to come this afternoon, Becky and kids coming after 1 pm; Bob ate dinner with all on the porch*



Now go; I will help you speak and teach you what to say.

EXODUS 4:12 NIV

## 11.11.11

*What is it that creates a feeling in us that moves us forward before our mind fully comprehends the significance? When we just act on what seems impulse but we don't always understand why? At least at first. "I'm going to take November 11th off," Joy told me one day at the office, "and attend a writer's conference." She had always been my right hand in business, perfectly complementing the visual language I gravitate to, while starting and finishing all my sentences with the necessary words. She is gifted in this way and has the uncanny ability of knowing just what to say, and more importantly, when not to say anything. I was excited for her, as she had long contemplated writing a book but wasn't quite sure how to begin the endeavor.*

When the day arrived, I was busy at work without Joy when the unexpected text came through, "OMG, OMG, amazing session, involves you and your dad; come meet me at 4 p.m. This is big. And this is good," she wrote. As I stared at the words on my phone, excitement and anticipation engulfed me.

Sitting with Joy by the waterfront later that day, I listened in awe as the sequence of events that she'd participated in came pouring out of her in words. She had gone for inspiration for her own pursuit but was filled with the overwhelming conviction that she was to help me with the story of my father. The signs were evident to her and continued throughout the day as she opened herself up to receive whatever it was that she was to know.

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**Opposite |** Joy encouraged me to begin the work of telling Dad's story. "Tell me what you remember," Joy said, as she typed the memories, while I began to list them on the wall.

From the unexpected emotion that overcame her, causing tears to stream down her face before the conference started, to the person in the audience who stood up and asked about the importance of accepting death and dying, Joy knew that the unusual string of instances was not just a coincidence. The conference had nothing to do with the topic of end of life.

It had been more than three years since Dad had passed away and, although ideas had swirled within me, I had struggled to know how I could possibly share all that I had witnessed. But looking over the notes Joy had scribbled down and listening to her fervent certainty, I was elated that the journey to honor my father was about to begin. And I trusted that Joy and the gift of divine intervention would be the catalysts.

"We're doing this," she said. And so began a series of Saturdays when we'd meet at the office and, as we had done with clients so many times, we'd unravel the story. She posted paper on the wall and said, "Just start. What do you remember?" As I began to list the memories, she asked questions and typed what she heard. Like my father, who gave me a guiding push on my bike when the training wheels came off, Joy gave me the ignition I needed.

As someone who was always starting my sentences, Joy knew from a place within that it was time to grant me the gift of beginning my own.



MAY 18, 2008

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*4:00 am–5:30 am, Bob was awake; 7:00 am, Bob up—on potty, dry Depends*

*On porch for breakfast—chilly temperature! Back to bed at 10:30 am*

*6:00 pm—dinner at table in dining room, ate Chinese (stir fry and tea)*

*Bob Sennor called (St. James—Parkinsons)*



*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.*

*This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

JOHN 6:15 NIV

## Doris brings communion

*There's a saying, "You matter until your last breath." Watching Dad and listening to my siblings describe what they were experiencing during our father's final week were in some ways like learning a new language. We were studying his facial expressions, watching him breathe and, after he stopped speaking, hanging onto his every subtle move.*

My sister Becky remembers that he seemed to be in another realm. "He was still with us, but his gaze was somewhere else. He started moving his hands—cupping one of them and, with the other, pretending to pick something out of his hand and put it into another's. He was mouthing words."

These motions were embedded in her memory from decades of receiving the sacrament; she knew what they were: "*Bread of heaven ... take and eat this...*" Then he loosely gripped his hands and moved them forward, as if tipping something carefully: "*Cup of salvation ... in remembrance of me.*"

As I listened to Becky, I was struck by how profound Dad's gestures were in his final days. Things could not have been more basic. Breathing. An occasional opening of his eyes to steal one more adoring gaze at his wife. And then he was moved to demonstrate with the minimal faculties he had left one of the most fundamental sacraments of priesthood—the source and summit of Christian life.

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*Jesus knows he is on his way to Calvary, where he will take his dying breath. He gathers his disciples around, and with bread and wine he feeds them and leaves them with the message, "Do this in remembrance of me."*

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At this point, Mom decided to call Doris Johnson, a dear family friend and priest, and told her about Dad's movements. "Let me come right over," Doris said. And as is the privilege of every priest, she celebrated communion with my father. My sister and her children and my mother were bedside. All disciples of Christ. All witnesses to a ritual that we have heard and said and watched over and over. And it was always the same. Until then.

Dad was dying. My family and I were experiencing so many acute feelings. We were recounting our faith. We were feeling lifted. And we were each in our own way saddened at the looming despair. But we were called to witness the basic gestures to feed: "Bread of heaven ... cup of salvation."

Dad lived his life for the Lord. He chose to serve. He baptized, prayed, forgave, confessed, witnessed, taught; he loved. We asked him on several occasions, "Dad, do you have anything else you want to say to us?" And he showed us what we already knew.




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**Opposite** | Dad's traveling communion kit. Mom donated it to St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Annapolis after Dad died so that it can continue to provide the bread of life.

MAY 19, 2008

3:30 am, Bob awake, very wet—Deb helped change him

Awake at 8:00 am, some congestion, med; breakfast—eggs, bacon, juice, coffee

Terrae at 9:15 am, Kathleen at 11:30 am

In wheelchair in the afternoon—Deb left at 6:30 pm



The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.

ISAIAH 58:11 NLT

## 26 days

*My siblings and I had all talked about it. What would we do with the gift of Dad's death? We spoke often, long-distance, about all that we had witnessed, recounting the blessings, and trying to make sense of the longing within us to share our journey.*

My sister Becky used the natural storytelling ability she had inherited from Dad for spontaneously witnessing to those suffering from grief within the school and church to which she belonged. My brother, Rob, was asked to speak at the retirement community where he worked, bringing good news to those suffering from old age and loneliness. My sister Deb brought Dad's dying to life in the many paintings that were required for her to complete her MFA degree during Dad's illness. And I had begun writing stories of Dad's life and death as I processed the memories in a compilation of Scripture, images, and narrative.

Almost a year after Dad died, my sister Deb and I decided to venture out on this project to see where the collaboration might take us. Use of a time-share in Florida enabled us to be close together geographically during a 26-day break in her schedule.

Deb arrived and set up a studio in the upstairs wing of my office building. She filled the walls with notes and

ideas as we retraced the 100 days of the end of our father's life. We prayed, read through Dad's favorite books, and welcomed a string of visitors who were curious about the props and mementos that staged the sacred space. Each asked questions, and personal stories poured out as we welcomed the visitors to share their own experiences on this topic that seems so taboo in public. It was a laboratory of love, and the experiment moved forward.

As the days ticked by, Deb and I worked tirelessly to define possible rituals, projects, and experiences that would encourage others to process death beyond the commercialized traditions that have become widespread. We held a focus group, developed prototypes, and let the Spirit lead the way.

We had "gone out on a limb" and were given a glimpse of the possibilities. It was a time filled with vulnerability, tethered by an assurance that deep within were the answers we were seeking. And through this laboratory of love, our lives were changed.

When you ask, listen. When it's dark, be the light. When you're afraid, step out and risk loving. When you're out on a limb by faith, stay there by faith. When you are empty, be filled.




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**Opposite |** The gifts of death are as personal as the individuals who have left us. Each death offers birth in many ways to those who loved and live on.

MAY 20, 2008

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9:20 am—Gave Bob Methadone; 10:20 am—Tom Bowers called, checking up on Bob, had a prayer

10:45 am—Bob woke, very wet, changed pad, pants

11:00 am—Breakfast, juice, egg, bacon, bagel, juice, coffee

Elizabeth Rogers, Blix called; Phyllis—dinner, chicken, veg casserole, salad, pecan pie dessert



He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart;  
yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

ECCLESIASTES 3:11 NIV

## "I don't expect to be back tomorrow"

We knew the end was near (and had known ever since first hearing the prognosis: "He has two to four months to live"). Yet, oddly, we were relatively unconcerned with when the end would actually be, because Dad had proclaimed early on, "... in God's time." When we heard him say that, we all just went with him: living in the moment, taking it all in, and letting Dad's dying transform us in our own individual ways.

But Dad had stopped talking and gesturing, and we were down to watching him breathe. Arriving home from work, I turned on my laptop for the now-daily Skype visit with my father. My sister Becky was there with him, bedside, and she filled me in on the news of the day as my brother and mom kept busy with the subtle details of vigil.

"Kathleen from hospice got here late—we were her last stop for the day," Becky said.

As my sister traced the veins in Dad's hand, she noticed his pulse was rapid. "Once it gets up to 140, it is close," Kathleen had shared.

Becky continued, "Kathleen just sat there with us. She talked to Mom. Mom told her about things going on, and we talked about Kathleen and her life. You have just been an incredible family. It will be soon ... and when it is, you make the phone call, and whoever is on call will arrive, but I don't expect it to be me."

The lifeline of hospice was about to end, and we knew we would soon move into the realm of being alone with Dad. All that seemed present now was his still body, the sound of his deep melodic breathing, and a restless exhaustion that seemed insignificant compared with our hunger for the man himself.

Dad had done the hard work. He was ready. And he had prepared us to surrender with him and trust the undying promise that something much greater was waiting. Nothing we could give his physical being mattered anymore.

But we knew we were now being asked to join him in the fullness of our faith, to trust that God's perfect love was on call. And in the perfect time, this perfect love would be more than enough to take him home.




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Opposite | The quiet and stillness of the last night gave us all a chance to be quiet and to pray. It was a mysterious and sacred time.

MAY 21, 2008

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*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*

REVELATION 21:4 ESV

# The pillow project

*My siblings and I had inherited from our parents both the gift of creativity and a lifetime of examples of their use of that gift to glorify God. It was my sister Deb who years before received Mom's old black Singer sewing machine when Mom bought a new, fancy, computerized machine to advance her talent for quilting. Deb would go on to sew creations for her children and others in her own unique way.*

After Dad died, Deb helped Mom make decisions on which of Dad's things to keep, which to pass on, and which to give away. As they boxed up his clothes, Deb kept a few favorite pieces that had a special place in her heart, including one of his old plaid flannel shirts and a well-worn pair of navy-blue corduroy pants that were so *Dad* to all who knew him well.

Being part of a family of artists had its benefits. We often found ourselves using mediums such as paint,

wood, music, fabric, and thread to express our thoughts when words weren't enough. Deb sewed Dad's shirt and cords into beautiful soft pillows ready to hug. And she gave them a crowning touch, burnishing his name and a favorite quotation into buttery-leather labels with her project name, Without-end, in honor of his memory and the promise of rebirth that awaits us all.

For Deb and all who came to commission her for their own soft sculptures, the process was life-giving. Neckties, favorite football jerseys, graphic tees, heirloom wedding dresses, and even pet-bed coverings were recreated into memorials, as loved ones told about memories that were etched on their hearts.

God uses all of us and all things for good. Death, sadness, and the scraps of life are transformed and made new. It is his promise to us, and it is worth remembering.

"As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

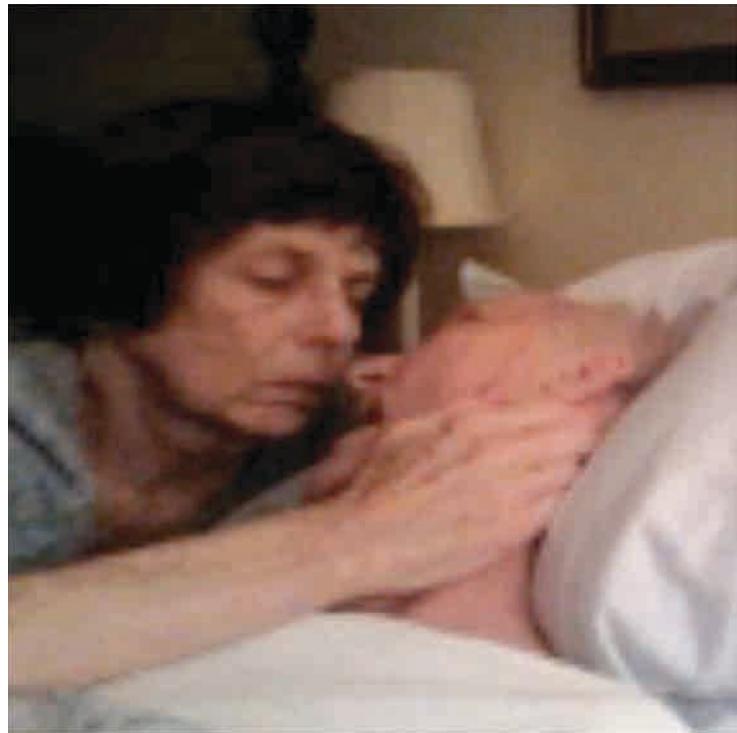



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**Opposite** | My sister Deb started Without-end.com, offering to create custom memorials from a loved-one's clothing—articles that are transformed into memorials providing comfort and a way to begin a conversation.

MAY 22, 2008

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*Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last.*

MARK 15:37 NLT

## The last night

*"Dad, it's time to soar like an eagle," my sister Becky said when the light of day was long gone but the wind still rustled around the house in the woods on Cattail Creek. My family was settling in for one more watchful night as they gathered around the hospital bed that held our dying father.*

*"You taught us so many things, Dad, and we will continue to give testimony to all that we have witnessed,"* Becky assured him as her children, Caroline and Andrew, nestled alongside Dad's almost lifeless body and softly stroked his arm. *"Feel all these loving touches, Dad? This is your DNA, and we know love because you've showed us God's love. We are so honored to be with you on this final journey. Soar with God, Dad, on the rock of Jesus."*

And then in unison, as we'd done so many times before, my family and I closed the day with the Lord's Prayer as we gazed beyond affection at the body of a man who was seemingly still with us but clearly almost gone. There were no more words. We had come to the end. We would simply and faithfully let go—with Dad.

As my sister Deb hung up the phone to pray, my mother buried her head on my father's shoulder, releasing the

weight of a grief-filled love I had not seen before. Here were my parents, brought into this world by God, brought together by God, and made one flesh by Him through marriage. Through Skype, I snapped screenshots on my laptop of a union I'd been deeply privileged to know and which I never wanted to forget.

"Get some sleep; I'll take the first shift," my brother, Rob, said, urging both Mom and our sister to get some much needed rest.

As Mom lay in her bed, Rob kept watch from our grandmother's well-worn chair, and my father lay between, flanked by love. As Dad had foreshadowed, Rob, their only son, would be there when God took our father home.

"Mom, it's soon," Rob said when, three hours later, something suddenly woke her from sleep. Mom got up, laid her head on my father's chest, and he took his last breath. And the wind in the woods went silent.

*There will come a time when you believe everything is finished; that will be the beginning.*

—Louis L'Amour



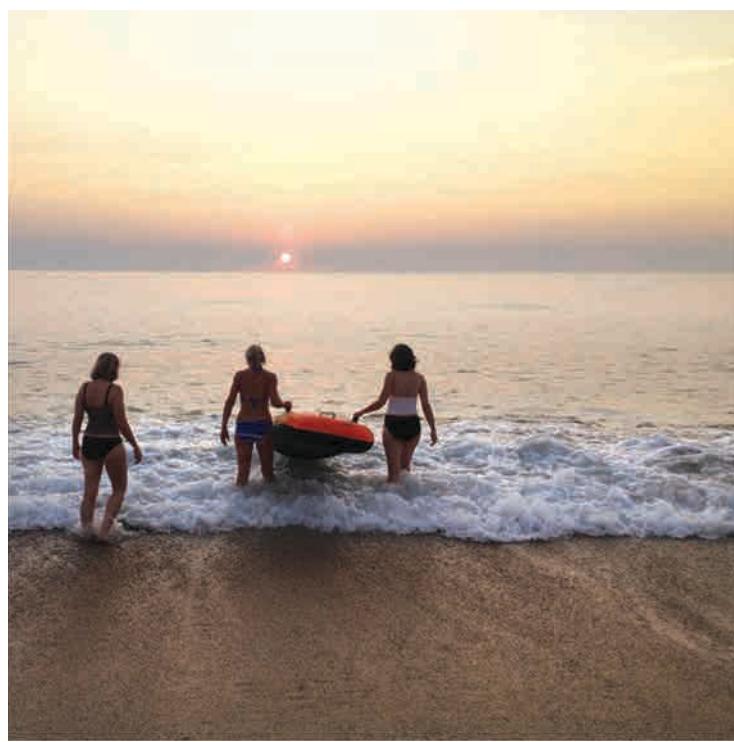

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Opposite | No words.

MAY 23, 2008

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*Becky, Caroline and Andrew arrived at 9:30 am; Bob Stone called  
Ate ice-cream—lunch, biscuit—dinner, chip beef*



*... because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.*

LUKE 1:78–79 NIV

## Rob's ashes

"God of life, you sent Jesus our Redeemer to your people so that we might be led triumphant through death's overwhelming flood into your radiant presence. In the waters of baptism you marked Rob as your own forever. Hold him now with mighty hand and outstretched arm as he knows everlasting life."



It was a fitting place to relinquish our brother Rob's physical remains—into the depths of God's magnificent creation. It was here on the shores of the Outer Banks of North Carolina that our birth family had spent countless summers together—to rest, play, and be nourished by God's bounty surrounding us. When Rob was grown, he went on to spend six years of his life on the navel aircraft carrier *USS Nimitz*, floating on the vast ocean, before he also began returning with his family, summer after summer. We had all become attached to this place that allowed us to reclaim an intimacy with our God and with each other.

At the break of day on a warm July 4th, my family and I returned to the shore once more with Dad's prayer book

in hand, our sister Deb's heart-penned program, and solemn thoughts of a man we loved.

As the sun broke over the horizon, we placed a few cherished mementos atop a cooler as our makeshift altar, shared stories and prayers, and listened as Courtney, Rob's thirteen-year-old daughter, read a poem she wrote to her Dad.

Rob's wife, Audra, poured his tiny white ashes onto the soft yellow rose petals that lined a small wicker basket, and we entered the surf with a raft that held the dust of our brother. Watching the ashes flutter down into the sea as the light of day illuminated them, God's peace enveloped us. Rob was now one with every grain of sand and every drop of water; he was back with his Maker; he was forever in our hearts. We closed the celebration by breaking bread in the form of sugar-glazed donuts—a touch of sweetness in honor of Rob's presence in our lives.

Dad had taught us that we are inextricably linked between this life and the next by God's amazing grace. As the sun sets each day on the vast horizon, darkness blankets the earth. But God is sovereign over all. He spins the planets, light returns, and in each of us a new day is born.




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Opposite | God's natural beauty provided the perfect stage and grave to release our brother's ashes.

MAY 24, 2008

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*4 am—awoke, very wet, changed; breakfast—Cheerios, banana  
Savannah and I played tennis, took Center Stage tickets to Betty Schweitzer  
Afternoon visiting—copying video recordings to VCR  
Sandy Anderson brought dinner—Salad, almonds, blue cheese, fruit, and ice-cream*



But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

LUKE 18:16–17 NIV

## “I can see you; do you see me?”

*In the darkness of early morning, the van had come and taken the earthly body of our father away. It was the final blunt reality that the physical time we'd shared with Dad was over. The focus of all our thoughts during the past 100 days had been on Dad's dying. We would now begin to prepare for the celebration of his life before God, honoring our faith, mixed with the salt of our sorrow.*

As morning broke, Andrew descended the carpeted stairs of my parents' home and looked in the room where his grandfather had lain the night before. “Where's Pop-Pop?” he asked my sister Becky as she led him by the hand to the love seat nearby.

“Pop-Pop's gone now, but remember, we can see him now because Pop-Pop is everywhere; he's with God,” my sister gently said.

To that, Andrew got up, ran out the front door, and waving his arms in the air, he shouted, “Pop-Pop, it's Andrew! I can see you now; do you see me?!” Then he ran back through the house, out the back door, and exuberantly repeated the same.

As he came back into the house, Andrew silently pondered the magnitude of the morning's news. Then he curled up next to his Gran on the couch and cried.

Strengthened by all that we had witnessed, it was time to give testimony to a life and death that had been consecrated by an everlasting love. And on that morning, the faith of a five-year-old would simply show us how: to proclaim that our hope and our sorrow, that our dad—and all our tomorrows—are held by our God in the palm of his hand.




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**Opposite** | On the one-year anniversary of Dad's death, we all gathered at Mom and Dad's house to remember. As Andrew played in the yard, we recalled him seeking his grandfather there.

MAY 25, 2008

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*Busy day with Nancy asking Dad lots of questions*

*11:30 am—Robert, Audra and kids came; Savannah and I shopped at Trader Joe's*

*5:30 pm—Rob took Nan and Savannah to airport*



Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.

|ISAIAH 7:11 NIV

## Some kind of sign

I would first meet spiritual author Pat Livingston at the Franciscan Center during a presentation she gave on All Saints Day called “Our Beloved Dead: Blessing as They Go.” It was by divine appointment that I was present that evening, I thought, as I listened to Pat speak about her own father and her sister Peggy, who had both passed away, and their impact on her life’s ministry. At the end of her presentation, I asked for her email address and the next day found the courage to tell her that I was gripped with the similarity of our passion and with her ability to see God at work in everything.

In my email to her, I poured out my thoughts about telling my father’s story and asked if she’d be willing to meet me. What followed was a beautiful short time together over coffee, filled with Christian love. Pat listened and encouraged me to keep going when I needed to hear it the most. I left filled with possibility and gratitude that God provided a perfect stranger, who would meet me where I was, not knowing the impact she would have on me at that point in my life.

As I left the coffee shop that day, I was so elated and filled with gladness that I looked up to the sky and said out loud, “Thank you, God!” and asked my dad to affirm his presence with us. In that moment my eye caught sight of a truck in front of me with a sign on top that read, “What the People Need is some kind of Sign! ... and that is where we step in.” I laughed out loud, remembering conversations with my dad when he was still alive about what kind of sign he would send me from heaven. I later wrote Pat that it was a “you-know-when-you-just-know” gift from above.

Over the course of the next couple of years, Pat and I met for coffee several more times, with email exchanges in between, and each time she encouraged me. I am certain she was a messenger from God.

Death is not the end. It is a new beginning, not only for entering life eternal, but also for possibilities to join with God in the great mystery of life and love which connects us all.

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Opposite | I asked and Dad gave me a sign. Literally.



MAY 26, 2008

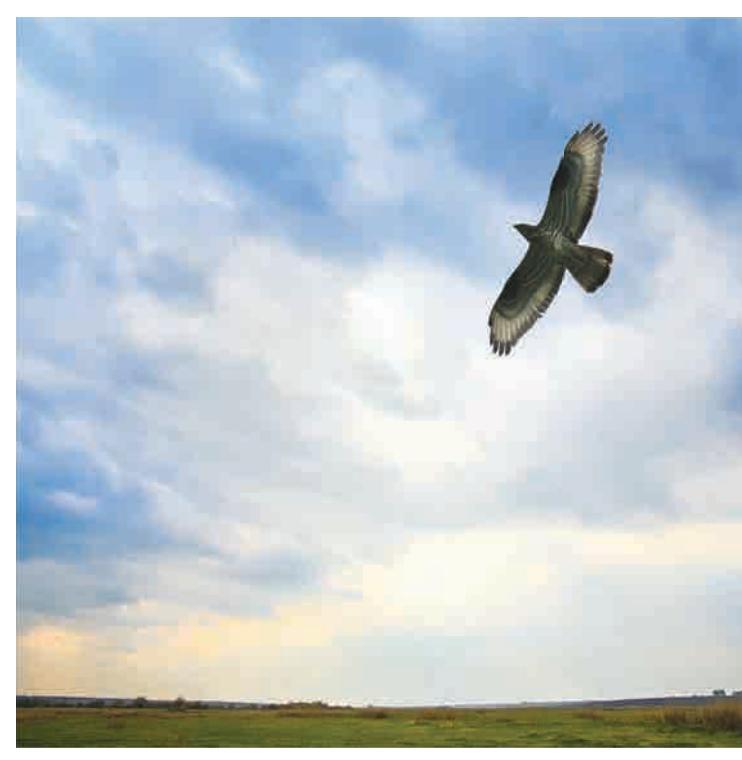
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*Memorial Day*

*Bob had restless night, lots of coughing*

*Awake little, slept most of day; liquid diet—juice, water, Jell-O—more coughing*

*Dinner—Susie brought grilled salmon, steak, asparagus, potatoes, rolls*



Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and  
the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord,  
is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

## The funeral service

*We gathered at St. Martin's in-the-Field Episcopal Church in Severna Park, Maryland, ceremoniously to give our father's spirit back to God. The church was filled with friends, family, parishioners, and other clergy who came in solidarity to show their respect.*

As the prelude from the pipe organ subsided, my mind wandered. It would be the last public gathering and influence my father's life would have on anyone. I yearned for it to be all that it could—not for my family, who already knew the message of Dad's life and his love for Christ now embedded in our hearts—but for the friends in the pews who had traveled far to be with us and who might not know of or even be comfortable with the liturgy and tradition of the Episcopal church. I wondered how the kneeling, and then standing, and then kneeling again would make them feel. And whether the Scripture we were so proud to read and the sacraments we would so gratefully receive would have any meaning for those not familiar with the sacred gifts freely given.

Like a wedding that seems to be over too soon, the service was a blur to me. All the anticipation, the planning, and the rehearsal had not prepared me for how quickly our time together would pass. In the end, I felt empty. "That's it?" I thought. I was heartbroken that the impact of Dad's life in Christ seemed to be over.

It was not until a few years later that I was given new insight about Dad's service when my sister Becky and I were comparing our memories about all that had taken place. I was amazed at the difference between our two perspectives. At the end of our conversation, she added almost as a postscript that Rick, the husband of her long-time friend Colin, had been so moved by the service that a week later he was baptized.

God uses everything. Nothing is wasted. And I pictured my dad smiling down.




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Opposite | Like the mighty eagle, I pictured Dad's spirit soaring on the day of his funeral.

MAY 27, 2008

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*Coughed all night—I was up trying to get congestion up*

*8:30 am—Meds*

*5:00 pm—Kathleen, catheter, patch*



So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

ROMANS 11:5 NIV

## The remnant

*Searching the internet one Saturday morning for those who knew my father, I came across the name and phone number of John Tiffany, the author of a website called *Life on Wings*, named after a riveting sermon about life and death in Christ. John had created the site to preserve the ministry of Rev. Terry Fullam, one of my father's mentors, and I found the courage to call him.*

After we exchanged information on how we both had come to know Terry, John said, "I want to tell you a story. I was in the critical care unit with an 85-year-old longtime friend who was dying. Although I had attempted many times to talk to him about God's desire for him to come into a relationship with the living Lord, sadly, he rebuffed every effort. As my friend became aware of his pending death, he wanted something to comfort him at the end of his life's journey. Although my friend was no longer able to speak, I discerned that it was the sports section of the *Miami Herald* he longed for. When I gave it to him he pulled the paper to his chest clutching it across his bosom. It was a profound experience, and I hope I never have to witness the death of another person who

does not know the presence of the living Lord. It was hopelessness at its worst."

Like my father, John had heard Rev. Fullam preach and marveled at his ability to relate God's Word in an unforgettable way. John's friendship with Terry grew, and before Terry's death, John felt a call to preserve all 553 of Rev. Fullam's teachings so that his ministry would not perish with him but live on as a testimony to God's call to each of us.

Listening, I felt a kinship in our desire to make known the lifework of God's servants. "John, we have been given the gift of the remnants," I said, remembering the teachings of the prophet Isaiah and the Word alive in me.

Life is a series of losses, but we cannot lose something unless we first possess it. And often, the fact that we know that what we lost was worth having is in itself what remains. I was beginning to see that everything I loved in my father was God himself.

God uses all of life and death to bring us closer to him. And it is God who transforms loss to life everlasting through Christ—the greatest remainder of all.




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Opposite | Colorful patchwork quilts hung from a shop in the Old City of Jerusalem during my pilgrimage there.

MAY 28, 2008

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*4 am—awake, delirious—gibbering*

*5 pm—Doris brought communion*

*Becky and Robert here for the night*

*Carole brought dinner—grilled chicken, potato and egg salad, slaw; Alice dropped off sweet rolls and coffee*



*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

JOHN 11:25–26 NIV

## The stoles

*It was a relief to be in the stillness of Rock Creek Cemetery with my family and the ashes of my father. All of the events of his dying were behind us. His death had occurred, family had arrived, and the fog of the funeral service at the church was over.*

As we prepared to gather at his grave site that morning, the list of what we would take with us was simple but significant. The handmade urn that held Dad's remains, his beloved and well-worn prayer book, and the five stoles he had worn throughout his ministry. While dying, Dad had lovingly passed down one of each of his stoles to my siblings, my mother, and me. And we humbly received them as a symbol of his life's commitment to Christ, a heritage imprinted on our hearts as a reminder to do the same.

We lined up facing our children and extended family, who were seated in the wooden chairs before us, as my father had done so many times for others.

As the birds chirped from the trees above and cars hummed on the city streets alongside the grassy slope, we committed the remains of Dad's body to the ground. "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," we proclaimed.

It is the final ritual of death, burying a loved one, and it presents the big mystery to us again. As we professed the solemn promise of Jesus's victory over death and asked God's favor to receive our father's spirit into everlasting light, we silently asked ourselves again, "Do you believe this?"

With the reverence of Dad's stole draped around my neck, I swelled with gratitude at the intimate and living example of my father's faith. And I could hear him saying to each of us, "Tag, you're it." It was our turn to carry on his legacy in our own personal ways.

What we were left with at the grave that day was, ultimately, what each of us is left with at death: the choice to believe that life on earth is all there is or to know, through faith, that something much greater awaits.

As I looked one last time at the tiny wooden box that held my father's remains, it was clear to me that what God has given to each of us cannot be contained.

"Yes, Lord, I believe," I whispered. "And I will go forth and spread the word."




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**Opposite** | Rev. Doris Johnson regretted, as she arrived at the grave site, that she had forgotten to bring her stole for the service. We all smiled through our tears—Dad had already provided.

MAY 29, 2008

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*2:30 am—awake, constant flinging of arms—gibberish*

*Becky came back at 10 pm*



I thank God every time I remember you.

PHILIPPIANS 1:3 NIV

## The rosemary

*Sitting at my desk at work throughout the months after Dad had died, I would often look off my computer screen and out the window, thinking of him and the fullness of his life which I could now see. Just below the windowsill, a small bed of monkey grass struggled to live. I had replanted the dead sections year after year, but nothing seemed to grow.*

My sister Deb was making a Without-end pillow for my neighbor Becky at that time. While Becky was relating her memories of the friend who had once owned the lace that would now become a new creation, she mentioned that rosemary was the plant of remembrance.

A few weeks after hearing this, my business partner, Joy, and I replaced the dying grass outside my office window with rosemary, in honor of my father. Surprisingly, it grew to hedge-like proportions, tall and thick, like a wall of mature boxwoods. The rosemary greeted me each morning with its billowing stalks and camphor bouquet as a sweet reminder of the man I never wanted to forget. Often, visitors passing by would catch a whiff of its fragrance and comment on the unusual abundance, and I delighted in telling the story of my father.

Years later, I sold my office building. In addition to renovating the building, the new owner tore out the rosemary,

replacing it with ground cover that now struggles to live. I affectionately remember the rosemary memorial every time I pass the entrance. Even though it too is now gone, the memory of its season remains evergreen for me. It became another reminder that life goes on in new and often surprising ways.

My thirst for meaning in my father's death has not only kept his memory alive but given me a deeper understanding that God, our Creator, makes all things new. In Jesus, God shows us that the pattern of everything is death and resurrection. He reminds us again and again with every breath and with every death.

In remembering, I have found that, what I thought was being subtracted, paradoxically adds, bringing me closer and closer to truth and to my Lord and Savior. Jesus said, "Follow me." In doing so, I am asked to live, to love, to remember, and to be born again.

We can bury our memories with the dead, the loss too painful to share, or we can allow our suffering to transform us with the fullness that God intended. In remembering my father, I do not hold onto him but, by believing that love is stronger than death, I let him go.




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**Opposite** | Rosemary has been known as the plant of remembrance. Joy and I planted dozens of the tiny plants in the bed alongside our office building in memory of Dad. They grew into thick fragrant hedges that greeted me each day.

MAY 30, 2008

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*I was awake—2:30 am sat by his bed  
5:30 am—Terrae came to clean him up*



*Lord, make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days; let me know how transient I am.*

PSALM 39:4 NASB

## Lunch on the Severn, my treat!

We were Herzogs. And this heritage included gathering together around the dinner table at the end of each day, where we were nourished by Mom's home-cooked meal and the love between us. Dad knew it would be hard work to get through his funeral, and he made sure that his final wishes included plans for us to share a meal afterward: "And then when it's all over, I want you all to enjoy a nice meal at the Severn. My treat!" he exclaimed as he discussed his dying wishes when we were all still together.

As the inner circle of our family concluded the sobering interment of Dad's ashes at Rock Creek Cemetery, we headed to the water's edge. The familiar expanse of clear blue outside the large windows that framed the dining room was the perfect backdrop for our collective, big exhale, after the most gut-wrenching and transformative experience of our lives.

After ordering a round of Bloody Marys and famous crab cakes, we each silently pondered, *Now what?*

The answer for me would come in the familiar meal-time ritual we said together as the food arrived, "Bless, O Lord, this food to our use and us to thy service." In that simple prayer, I heard the 74 years of my father's life. God had abundantly blessed him, and then he went out and served the Lord.

It was now our turn—my mother, my siblings, and me—to honor the blessings of Dad's life and our time with him, and to go forth and spread the word, each in our own way, in our own time, and with God's great mercy and grace.

As I looked at Dad's grandchildren across the table, I couldn't help but feel that they too had been powerfully imprinted by words and experiences that they could not fully comprehend. Together we would take the journey through grief, mixed with the hope and promise of life everlasting.

And we'd tell the story of a man who lived, and loved, like he was dying.

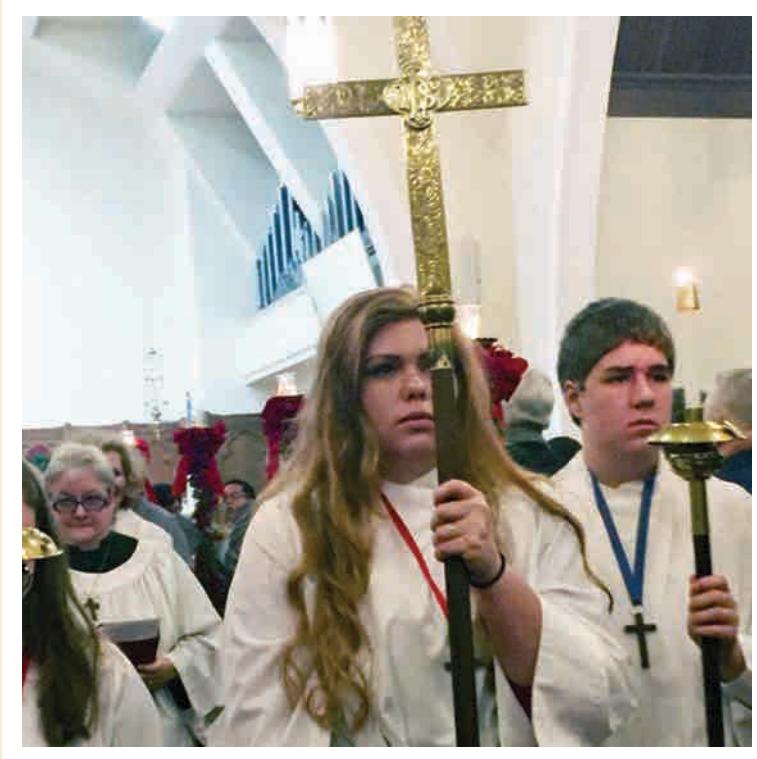



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**Opposite** | Granddaughters Savannah, Courtney, and Hannah enjoyed the family gathering at the celebratory meal after Dad's burial. It was a fitting end and a treat that Dad had planned for us.

MAY 31, 2008

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He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”  
Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

REVELATION 21:5 NIV

## The beginning

*I didn't know where to begin, because I loved the end so much. Like a good book, I wanted to hang onto all I felt at the end of my father's life.*

My sister Deb told me when I began writing these stories that, even though I thought I was writing a book about our father, I would come to realize I was writing about myself. At first this disheartened me, because the admiration I had for Dad was all that I wanted to shout about—his life, his love of God, his understanding and belief about the big picture, even though in so many ways it seemed counterintuitive. It was the enormous gift he left me.

Yet, Dad's story is my story, as it is for each of us. Not that he was born an only child, or that he was gifted artistically, or that he baptized babies and buried the dead. But that he was a child of God put on this earth to come to know and love the Lord, to follow him, to share the good news, and to return home again.

Sitting out back on the patio as I began to write this story, I paused to pray that God would give me the words to end the story of my father that I never want to end.

As I scanned the plants in bloom in my flowerbeds I noticed a little bird was perched on the feeder looking for a seed, and I was filled with hope and promise. And at that moment, as I sought the answer to my prayer, church bells down the street began to ring out Dad's favorite hymn:

Lift high the cross  
The love of Christ proclaim,  
Till all the world  
Adore His sacred name.

—William Kitchin (1887)




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Opposite | My niece Courtney Lynn Herzog lead the procession as Crucifer at the midnight service on Christmas Eve at Christ Church, Rockville, Maryland.

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- Story 82.** John R. Claypool. *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler: Living and Growing through Grief.* New Orleans: Insight Press, 1995.
- Story 83.** Tom Douglas. *I Love Crab Cakes!* New York: HarperCollins, 2006. Cover design by Robin Layton.
- Story 90.** *Without-end.* [www.without-end.com](http://www.without-end.com).
- Story 92.** Quotation is taken from the Episcopal Church, The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. *Enriching Our Worship 2: Ministry with the Sick or Dying, Burial of a Child.* New York: Church Pub., 2000.
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# Acknowledgments

When I first started to write this book I didn't want to do it alone. So I asked the Holy Spirit to accompany me on this journey and to be my guide. I wrote a prayer and inserted it on the first page of my manuscript. Every time I sat down to write, I began with prayer. It is the companionship of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for which I am most grateful.

This memoir of my father would not have been possible without my family. I am most thankful to my mother, who selflessly loved and accompanied my father on his Christian walk and ministry. She encouraged us to tell this personal story about our family; she had the foresight to journal the 100 days and jot down the notes that appear in this book. I am indebted to her for her enduring love and her willingness, over and over again, to relive the 100 days with me and contribute her perspective.

I am also deeply thankful to my sisters, Deb and Becky, whose minds and hearts fill these pages with the memories of our father and of our shared love of Christ. I am grateful for their solidarity with me in believing that this story should be told and their witness to carry it forward.

I acknowledge my sister Deb's beautiful talent and am grateful for the divine grace that enabled her to represent our father's journey in paintings while he was dying. They are included in this book. I am honored and privileged to have used her creative expression in places where words were not enough.

My husband, Ron, and my daughter, Savannah, gave me emotional space to write and remained "on call"

throughout the many years while I labored to put my feelings on paper. I'm grateful to them for providing answers to my questions and for empathetic silence as I pondered all this in my heart. Their love and support reside in all the spaces between the words.

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I am thankful to my namesake, Nancy McCorkle, who showed me that writing is life-giving and who has always been one of the threads holding our family together.

The hard work of dying is made a little more bearable by those who show up and extend their love. I was amazed and grateful for the outpouring of fellowship and compassion that church and family friends, neighbors, and strangers gave to my family throughout my father's dying days. Many of them are mentioned in my mother's journal entries. They gave light to those dark days and reminded me throughout the writing of this book that each knock on the door, phone call, pound cake, and prayer nourished us in ways they will never know.

I am also indebted to those who serve the sick and dying and represent the blessing called hospice. They are angels in disguise. For Gerda Bommelje, Elizabeth Rogers, Kathleen Kappler, Terraе Mackell, and all the others

within this organization who gave to my family when we had nothing left to give and who sustained me in many ways after my father's death: your imprint is on my heart.

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I also acknowledge the special talents of Beverly McCoy, my editor, and give thanks for her prayer, which led me to her; and for Joni Godlove, my book designer and new friend in Christ.

Last, but not least, I am grateful for *you*; that you have shared in this journey with me.

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*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

ROMANS 15:13 ESV

100 DAYS

# Dying to Tell His Story

Nancy Herzog Walker

How do we learn to face and find meaning in death beyond loss and grief? To not only have conversation about it but prepare more purposefully for the reality that connects us all.

It took the death of her father, Rev. Robert Herzog, and his dying days for Nancy Walker to comprehend that this universal experience was more fertile than she could have imagined. That what was most painful would also produce a banquet that would feed her family during this sacred time and transform their lives forever.

Through 100 stories Walker portrays her family's personal journey through candid narrative, journal entries, images, and Scripture. Together, they offer an engaging patchwork of the human life/death experience while at the same time, its mystery.

*100 Days | Dying to Tell His Story* is a book about the power of loss and the greater power of love. It offers comfort, hope, and glimpses of life's teacher hiding in plain sight. Whether you or someone you know is experiencing loss or contemplating its meaning, you will find encouragement in this family's pilgrimage and immeasurable gifts to share.



**Nancy Herzog Walker** is a lifelong Episcopalian who has enjoyed the somewhat bumpy but beautiful road of being a preacher's kid. She is the founder of a branding firm that provides strategic communications services and lives in Tampa, Florida, with her husband.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

PROVERBS 3:5 ESV

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RELIGION / CHRISTIAN LIFE  
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