

Holy Time, Holy Timing

by Jean M. Blomquist

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REQUIRED READING
SESSION #4

A Grand Canyon during our Easter break. After a two-day drive from our home in California, we scanned the flat Arizona horizon, dotted with scrubby evergreens, for signs of the canyon. The earth gave no clues as to what lay ahead. Then, shortly after passing through the park entrance on the afternoon of Holy Saturday, we pulled into the first scenic overlook and, as one person put it, the canyon was "very immediately there." Photographs, movies, and stories did not prepare me for this awesome sight. I stood in silence, trying to take in its eternal immensity and breathtaking beauty—the spectrum of oranges, réds, and russets; the massive walls and "temples" of layered red, creamy gold, tan, and gray; the turquoise sky that stretched across the horizon.

We camped on the South Rim, where temperatures dipped so low that water froze in our tent. We rose early on Easter morning and made our way through the bone-chilling darkness to the windy canyon rim. Along with several hundred other people, we celebrated the holy miracle of Easter as the sun rose above the canyon.

On Monday morning, we began a three-day backpack trip into the canyon. The climate of the upper rim is similar to that of southern Canada; at the bottom of the canyon, along the Colorado River, the climate is like the Sonoran Desert of northern Mexico. I was happy to leave the cold rim and venture into the warmer climes below. But entering the canyon took me far beyond different climate-zones. I confronted time itself: *chronos*, measurable, clock-like time, and *kairos*, time that can't be measured.¹ In the canyon, time is both terrible and wonder-full. Rock walls, looming thousands of feet high, and immense, sweeping spaces memorialize what time has taken away, as well as what time has left behind. Chronological time, the aeons represented in the layers of rock that create the canyon walls, stretches into timelessness, into time so vast that it is incomprehensible.

We began our hike at the South Kaibab trailhead (elev. 7,260

¹In English we have only one word for time. In Greek there are at least two: *chronos*, which means measurable, clocklike or calendar time, and *kairos*, which has a variety of meanings including the opportune or favorable time. It is often used in the New Testament to name a time of, or determined by, God. I use *kairos* here as time in its fullness, time made spacious and gracious by the presence of God.

WHERE THE LOOK, NAJAD Limestone, is geologically young—a mere 250 million years old. As the trail switchbacked downward, we passed through many strata of rock, including one that had once been the bottom of a sea. After hiking several knee-wrenching hours, we reached the bottom of the canyon (elev. 2,480 feet) and ran our grimy hands in wonder along the Vishnu schist, rock that is nearly two billion years old and that once was part of a mountain range higher than the Himalayas.

God existed before all this and was present in the earth's labored heaving and settling, the painstaking building up and the patient wearing down. And God, the Ancient of Days, very clearly was present now. I felt the Holy Presence keenly. My joy grew in this silent sacred place as I found myself within the very heart of God—the place where *chronos* and *kairos*, time and timelessness, meet. In the stillness of a moment, I found an eternity.

I carried much more than my 45-pound backpack and a lot of red dust out of the canyon. I carried that holy encounter of *chronos* and *kairos* with me. My experience in the canyon was the epitome of God's holy timing: the bringing of each *chronos* moment into a fullness so that it becomes *kairos*. In this fullness of time, moments brim with vibrancy, vitality, grace, and peace, so that they become time-less. All need to count and to measure drops away and we become "as a little child"; we become one with God and with all that is. Is it possible, I wondered, for each moment of my life to become a *kairos* moment?

TAMING OUR TIME

OUR CULTURE is obsessed with *chronos* time. We value punctuality, or "being on time." We strive to keep things "on schedule." On vacation, we want "to make the most of the time" we have, so we often pack so many activities in that we return exhausted. And we often lament that we just don't "have enough time." Powerful cultural mores (and in some cases, laws) establish timetables for our lives: when to start and finish school, establish a career, marry, buy a house, have children, retire, and so on. The feeling is often that once we are "on track"—if we ever get there in the first place—it is almost impossible, not to mention risky or reckless, to get "off track," regardless of whether society's timing is right for us per-

HOLY RESTING

sonally or not. I have wrestled with this concept of timing for many years, especially around the issues of career and family. How do I, in the midst of such strong societal pressures, remain open to God's timing, to *kairos*, to holy timing? And what does that mean each day as I try to balance the personal, professional, and spiritual aspects of my life?

I've discovered at least two things—neither of which I yet fully comprehend. First, there is a holy timing that deals with the larger order and rhythm of our life events. For example, I did not meet the man to whom I am now happily married until I had healed sufficiently from a painful divorce years before. Second, each moment, regardless of what we are doing, can be a *kairos* moment. The long stretch of holy timing and the immediate *chronos* moment link our lives with God. The challenge that continually confronts us as people of faith is to incorporate God's holy timing into our lives. We seek to discover the meeting place of *chronos* and *kairos* and to open our hearts to the holy within each *chronos* minute.

To discover holy timing, we must strive for a continuous, centered interaction with the Spirit, who gently and reliably—though often excruciatingly slowly for impatient people like me—reveals when it is time to plant or to reap, to wait or to act, to reckon or to ripen. This holy timing grows past personal and societal "shoulds" and "oughts." It delves into and grows out of our fullness of "heart," in the Hebraic sense of one's whole being: body, intellect, feeling, will, intuition, imagination, action.

The familiar cadence of Ecclesiastes 3, "a time to be born, a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted" (v. 2, RSV), reveals the tension of holy timing, the rhythmic pulse of living the seeming dichotomies, the contradictions, the counterpoints of day-to-day existence. But why and how does timing matter in the life of faith? Is there any relation between our work time and our leisure time? Can leisure be an important part of our spiritual journey, a crucial component of our spiritual plowing and planting?

THE RHYTHM OF WORKING and resting is God's pattern (Gen. 2:2-3). God blesses and hallows—makes holy—the seventh day, the day of rest. God later affirms again the sacredness of rest. At their lengthy tête-à-tête on Mt. Sinai, God says to Moses, "Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day [God] rested, and was refreshed" (Exod. 31:16-17, RSV). So this sabbath day, this resting, enfleshes the covenant God has with us and we have with God. The sabbath was created for us, as Jesus said (Mark 2:27). The day of rest, each moment of rest, is a "sign" of God's covenant with us.

The purpose of our resting is to refresh ourselves. It is a time for us once again to be made new, to become "fresh"—pure, strong, vivid, and, as Webster put it, to have our "original qualities unimpaired: as full of or renewed in vigor or readiness for action." In short, rest helps us become clearer, keener lovers of the covenant. Leisure can be a necessary fallow time that readies us for the next planting time. Rest fills us with vigor or readiness for action, for living out who we are as God's covenant people in our daily lives. This interval in the busy rhythm of our lives not only is good for us but also benefits others.

How do I remain open to God's timing?

I remain open to God's timing?

Our resting allows us to quiet ourselves so we can hear the Word—or words—of God. As our bodies and minds relax, our spirits quiet so we can hear God's still, small voice. When we rest, we are not only more receptive to God but to ourselves and others as well. We begin to know ourselves in a new way—untired, unhurried, unstressed, unmasked. Often when we are rested we deal more gently with ourselves and with others who are a part of our lives. We discover, and live, what really matters in life. Our minds, so carefully controlled and occupied most of the time, can wander freely and wonder at the marvels of the ordinary and the extraordinary: the deep orange and black of a Monarch butterfly floating in an azure autumn sky.

Why do we feel guilty when we are not working?

can expand our imagination and spawn new creative possibilities for living, working, and being in the world. Our resting reminds us of the continual benevolence of God, the wonder of life, and the magnitude of joy that is possible when our lives are in rhythm with God's holy timing.

RESISTING OUR REST

BUT, IF ALL THIS IS TRUE, why is it that we often fear or resist leisure? Why do we feel guilty when we are not working? Or, bringing the question uncomfortably close, why do I feel guilty when I am not working? Is it because I feel I am of value only when I am working? Is only my "doing," not my "being," worthwhile? Must I always be "productive"? Our drive to "produce" and to be "successful" may reveal our secret fears that we are inadequate, that we must "earn our keep" by "doing." Our rest time, our time of simply "being," reminds us of God's love for us: "You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you" (Isa. 43:4a, RSV).

The holy time of leisure confronts us with the uncomfortable possibility, even the unsettling reality, that we are loved for who we are—not for what we do. As we confront the reality of our value as human beings rather than as "human doings" (to use counselor-lecturer John Bradshaw's apt term), we are stretched beyond ourselves to knowing this is true of others as well. We are all precious; we are all loved for who we are. We are loved because we are.

So leisure, contrary to what we usually think, is not always comfortable. It is not always "easy living," but it is authentic living. It can be a prickly reminder that there is—as there always seems to be—one more thing to give over into the hands of God.

I remember a long-anticipated getaway with my husband that was quite a different experience than our time in the Grand Canyon. We ditched all the stress and obligations at work and home and drove north through the beautiful vineyards of Napa Valley to Calistoga, a little town nestled against the hills at the northern end of the valley. Calistoga is known for its mud and mineral baths. We splurged on "the works"—a mud bath followed by a whirlpool mineral bath, a cooling-down "blanket wrap"

down from the baths), and then a full-hour massage. It was wonderful! At the end, we were so relaxed we nearly had to be rolled back to our room, where we took a long, luxurious nap.

What we didn't anticipate, however, was the welling up of difficult feelings, fears, and issues that our normally tense and busy bodies held captive below the surface of consciousness. Why, we wondered, were we depressed when we were supposed to be having a good time? The relaxing of our bodies and the unburdening of our minds allowed us to hear the Spirit speaking to us. The leisure weekend became a spiritual retreat. I don't remember now the particular issues and challenges that confronted each of us, but our leisure time became prayer time. We had wanted to "escape" that weekend. Naively, we may have thought that we could avoid the tensions and stresses by leaving them behind—although this had rarely worked before. Instead we were offered a chance to move through them to a new place of understanding and insight; we were given an opportunity for deep peace instead of escape. Here, in quite a different way, *chronos* met—and became—*kairos*.

Kairos moments do not come only at "peak" times in our lives—the times of awe and wonder such as we experienced so powerfully in the Grand Canyon. Our Calistoga outing reminded us that even in our fear, blindness, ignorance, and times of feeling we don't "belong," God is present with us. Even the moments that feel devoid of God can be *kairos* moments that hold the seeds of courage, vision, and wisdom. In opening ourselves to the *kairos* of desolate, empty, lonely, or confusing times, we embrace the possibility of hope and new life rising within us, just as the welcome warmth of the morning sun spreads across the dark abyss of the Grand Canyon. The times we least expect are often fertile soil for the growth of the Spirit within us.

LEISURE'S INVITATION

OUR LEISURE INVITES US into the wholeness of life—into the joys and the sorrows, the delightful and the difficult. By stilling our minds, relaxing our bodies, and quieting our spirits, we can perhaps hear the words of God or the rustling of the Spirit in a new way. It is in this



deep listening—taking into account our intellect, imagination, and all the qualities of the Hebrew “heart”—that we begin to hear the quiet, persistent cadence of our own holy timing.

Leisure sharpens our ability to tune into God’s movement in every moment of our lives. When we listen without distractions, we become more aware of the Spirit’s movement and our responses to it: a sense of well-being when a right decision has been made, a tight stomach that signals “Wait a minute” or “Be careful,” or that scared but excited feeling when a new possibility opens up that we should pursue. This awareness and whole-being knowledge can be carried into our everyday lives, where we are often dulled by routine, frazzled by commitments, overwhelmed by stress. Listening to God in leisure can help us to recognize God in the complexity of the rest of our lives. It may also help us when the cadence of our lives as a whole shifts, when we face new personal and spiritual challenges and opportunities such as a new job, significant changes in our personal lives, or retirement.

Our resting is not passive. It is an active covenanting with God where life may be lived fully, where each *chronos* moment is a potential *kairos*. At each stage of our lives, we face the challenge of living our covenant with God in all that we are and in all that we do. Some of the specific challenges may vary as we move through the years of childhood and adolescence, of work and family building, of retirement. But some challenges remain consistent through time: to know that we are loved for who we are; that God is present always; that each and every moment is both *chronos* and *kairos*; that all we encounter through the years—the winding trails and circuitous routes, the canyons and the high plateaus—is part of God’s holy timing.

A little trail wisdom may help us all: Don’t try to do it all at once. Take breaks. Build leisure into your journey. Carry plenty of water and drink even when you don’t think you are thirsty, because, if neglected, the springs of life within us can dry up without our even knowing it. Eat some of your food now; you need the nourishment, and besides, your pack won’t be as heavy at journey’s end. Watch your step, but more important, stop often and enjoy the view. God is here. *Kairos* meets *chronos* now. Each moment is holy. All time is God’s.

4

Family Reaction to Death

MURRAY BOWEN

DIRECT THINKING ABOUT death, or indirect thinking about staying alive and avoiding death, occupies more of man's time than any other subject. Man is an instinctual animal with the same instinctual awareness of death as the lower forms of life. He follows the same predictable instinctual life pattern of all living things: He is born, he grows to maturity, he reproduces, his life force runs out, and he dies. In addition, he is a thinking animal with a brain that enables him to reason, reflect, and think abstractly. With his intellect he has devised philosophies and beliefs about the meaning of life and death that tend to deny his place in nature's plan. Each individual has to define his own place in the total scheme and accept the fact that he will die and be replaced by succeeding generations. His difficulty in finding a life plan for himself is complicated by the fact that his life is intimately interwoven with the lives about him. This presentation is directed to death as a part of the total family in which he lives.

There is no simple way to describe man as part of the relationship around him. Elsewhere (Bowen, 1978) I have presented my own way of conceiving of the human as an individual and, also, as part of the emotional-social amalgam in which he lives. According to my theory, a high percentage of human relationship behavior is directed more by automatic instinctual emo-

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tional forces than by intellect. Much intellectual activity goes to explain away and justify behavior being directed by the instinctual-emotion-feeling complex. Death is a biological event that terminates a life. No life event can stir more emotionally directed thinking in the individual and more emotional reactivity in those about him. I have chosen the concept of "open" and "closed" relationship systems as an effective way to describe death as a family phenomenon.

An "open" relationship system is one in which an individual is free to communicate a high percentage of inner thoughts, feelings, and fantasies to another who can reciprocate. No one ever has a completely open relationship with another, but it is a healthy state when a person can have one relationship in which a reasonable degree of openness is possible. A fair percentage of children have a reasonable version of this with a parent. The most open relationship most people have in their adult lives is in a courtship. After marriage, in the emotional interdependence of living together, each spouse becomes sensitive to subjects that upset the other. They instinctively avoid the sensitive subjects and the relationship shifts toward a more "closed" system. The closed communication system is an automatic emotional reflex to protect self from the anxiety in the other person, though most people say they avoid the taboo subjects to keep from upsetting the other person. If people could follow intellectual knowledge instead of the automatic reflex and gain some control over their own reactivity to anxiety in the other, they would be able to talk about taboo subjects in spite of the anxiety, and the relationship would move toward a more healthy openness. But people are human, the emotional reactivity operates like a reflex, and by the time the average person recognizes the problem it can be impossible for two spouses to reverse the process themselves. This is the point at which a trained professional can function as a third person to work the magic of family therapy toward opening a closed relationship.

Chief among all taboo subjects is death. A high percentage of people die alone, locked into their own thoughts, which they cannot communicate to others. There are at least two processes in operation. One is the intrapsychic process in self which always involves some denial of death. The other is the closed relationship system: People cannot communicate the thoughts they do have, lest they upset the family or others. There are usually at least three closed systems operating around the terminally ill person. One operates with the patient. From experience, every terminally ill patient has some awareness of impending death and a high percentage have an extensive amount of private knowledge they do not communicate to anyone. Another closed system is the family. The family gets its basic information from the physician, which is supplemented by bits of information from other sources and is then amplified, distorted, and reinterpreted in conversations at home. The

family has its own carefully planned and edited medical communique for the patient. It is based on the family interpretation of the reports and modified to avoid the patient's reactivity to anxiety. Other versions of the communique are whispered within the hearing of the patient when the family thinks the patient is sleeping or unconscious. Patients are often alert to whispered communications. The physician and the medical staff have another closed system of communication, supposedly based on medical facts, which is influenced by emotional reactivity to the family and within the staff. Physicians attempt to do factual reports to the family which are distorted by the medical emotionality and the effort to put the correct emphasis on the "bad news" or "good news." The more reactive the physician, the more likely he is to put in medical jargon the family does not hear or to become too simplistic in his efforts to communicate in lay language. The more anxious the physician, the more likely he is to do too much speechmaking and too little listening, and to end up with a vague and distorted message and little awareness of the family misperception of his message. The more anxious the physician, the more the family asks for specific details the physician cannot answer. Physicians commonly reply to specific questions with overgeneralizations that miss the point. The physician has another level of communication to the patient. Even the physician who agrees with the principle of telling the patient "facts" can communicate them with so much anxiety that the patient is responding to the physician instead of the content of what is being said. Problems occur when the closed communication system of medicine meets the age-old closed system between the patient and the family, and anxiety is heightened by the threat of terminal illness.

My clinical experience with death goes back some 30 years to detailed discussions about death with suicidal patients. They were eager to talk to an unbiased listener who did not have to correct their way of thinking. Then I discovered that all seriously ill people, and even those who are not sick, are grateful for an opportunity to talk about death. Over the years I have tried to do such discussions with seriously ill people in my practice, with friends and people I have known socially, and with members of my extended families. I have never seen a terminally ill person who was not strengthened by such a talk. This contradicts former beliefs about the ego being too fragile for this in certain situations. I have even done this with a spectrum of comatose patients. Terminally ill people often permit themselves to slip into coma. A fair percentage can pull themselves out of the coma for important communications. I have had such people come out long enough to talk and express their thanks for the help and immediately slip back.

Until the mid 1960s, a majority of physicians were opposed to telling patients they had a terminal illness. In the past decade the prevailing medical dictum about this has changed a great deal, but medical practice has not

kept pace with the changed attitude. The poor communications between the physician and the patient, between the physician and the family, and between the family and the patient are still very much as they were before. The basic problem is an emotional one, and a change in rules does not automatically change the emotional reactivity. The physician can believe he gave factual information to the patient, but in the emotion of the moment, the abruptness and vagueness in the communication, and the emotional process in the patient, the patient failed to "hear." The patient and the family can pretend they have dealt clearly with each other without either being heard through the emotionality. In my family therapy practice within a medical center, I am frequently in contact with both the patient and the family, and to a lesser extent with the physicians. The closed system between the patient and the family is great enough, at best. I believe the poor communication between the physician and the family and between the physician and the patient is the greatest problem. There have been repeated situations in which the physicians thought they were communicating clearly, but the family either misperceived or distorted the messages, and the family thinking would be working itself toward malpractice anger at the physician. In all of these, the surgical and medical procedures were adequate, and the family was reacting to terse, brief speeches by the physician who thought he was communicating adequately. In these, it is fairly easy to do simple interpretations of the physician's statements and avert the malpractice thinking.

I believe the trend toward telling patients about incurable illness is one of the healthy changes in medicine, but closed systems do not become open when the surgeon hurriedly blurts out tense speeches about the situation. Experience indicates that physicians and surgeons have either to learn the fundamentals of closed system emotionality in the physician-family-patient triangle, or they might avail themselves of professional expertise in family therapy if they lack the time and motivation to master this for themselves. A clinical example of closed system emotionality will be presented later.

FAMILY EMOTIONAL EQUILIBRIUM AND THE EMOTIONAL SHOCK WAVE

This section will deal with an order of events within the family that is not directly related to open and closed system communications. Death, or threatened death, is only one of many events that can disturb a family. A family unit is in functional equilibrium when it is calm and each member is functioning at reasonable efficiency for that period. The equilibrium of the unit is disturbed by either the addition of a new member or the loss of a member. The intensity of the emotional reaction is governed by the functioning level of emotional integration in the family at the time or by the functional importance of the one who is added to the family or lost to the

The Death of Roy Kuhn

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As I sit writing this, my father-in-law is 3 feet away, lying in bed in a coma, in his last hours of life. He is 81 years old and has widespread cancer. It was diagnosed less than a month ago, and less than 3½ weeks ago, he was still driving around in his car that he just made his last payment on. He was a crusty guy of German descent, a war-era man whose life was shaped by the Depression, by World War II in which he served in General Patton's tank corps, and then by years of factory work, keeping equipment operating in a large steel mill. He hung on through layoffs and stuck with his family. For 46 years he was married to Rita, a nurse, who died a quick and peaceful death of pneumonia, 5½ years ago. He has two children, both nurses, one of whom is my wife, Roxie. He has seven grandchildren.

Roy is now passing on right in front of my eyes. His spirit and self are in the process of leaving the house that is his earthly body, soon to inherit a heavenly body unencumbered by poor lungs, oxygen tubes, morphine drip pump, and Foley catheter. I am honored to be part of his passing and delivery into eternal life. Rarely do family members get to experience death with their loved ones these days. Many are afraid; many cannot let go; many do not know they can, or how rich and good and deep an experience it can be. But here is Roy in our house, in a room given up by one of my sons for his grandfather's last days, surrounded by pictures of his loved ones, and the real presence of his family.

Roy was characteristic of his time. Straightforward, even blunt, not full of self-examination, not touchy-feely. He was a worker who had great dedication and commitment to his wife and great pride (if not effusive praise) for his children. He gave acknowledgment to God but didn't make any big deal over religion.

Two days ago, I was talking to Roy as he lay in bed, eyes closed, and I asked him if he would do anything different if he could do it over, and he mumbled out, in

his midwestern way, "Well, sure!" I said, "Well, Dad, what would you do different?" He thought a minute and said, "Goldarn, you ask too many damn hard questions!" I smiled and backed off a little. "OK, what are you most proud of in your life?" I asked. He answered immediately, "My family," keeping his eyes closed. That was all. No pondering, no brain-racking. Just an expression of what had been the center and highest priority of his life. The answer most of us would want to give.

Roy was not a man who had great material success in life, nor someone of whom people would say, "He made a great mark in this world," but by the measure of his family relationships, he stayed the course. His main purpose for 46 years was Rita, and his last 5½ years of life were dedicated to his kids, his grandchildren, and his big-screen TV.

I was recently asked to write an article on child-rearing for the parents' section of our local Virginia newspaper. While reflecting on this and reviewing my own experience as a parent and my 13 years as a physician, I reaffirmed my belief that *healthy adult relationships* are the currency of successful child-rearing. Unfortunately, there is a pervasive sense in the work world that we are more responsible to our *tasks* than to our *people*, that our *jobs* take precedence over our *relationships*, and that our *achievements* rather than our *character* measure our worth.

The example of my father-in-law is in peaceful contrast to the tyranny of life's urgencies. His death in our house, while not acknowledged beyond a small circle, was a celebration of relationship. He was aided by a few friends, family members, medical professionals, and Hospice personnel. With pain, struggle, and success, it all fit together. When the hour of his death came, we were rewarded rather than shattered.

My wife felt anxious at her father's side as he breathed heavily. Although unconscious, he seemed to be laboring. She left the room for a while. Three of Roxie's best friends were in the room with me, helping us, supporting him, touching him. Roy suddenly opened his eyes wide. One of our friends let out a gasp, and we all had a sense of great awe and anticipation. There was a murmur

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"He sees something!" He was very peaceful. Even the perennial furrow was gone from his brow. I brought Roxie back to the room, and her tender heart opened wide, no longer anxious or afraid. Roxie spoke through tears as a loving daughter, "I know it's Mom you see, Dad . . . and Jesus is welcoming you . . . I love you . . . I love you . . . I'll be all right . . . I'll miss you. . . ." All of us in the room were sobbing with loss, joy, love, and hope. All in community with "the saints." Roy seemed to relax, and after a few minutes of speaking to him, Roxie quietly and firmly wiped her eyes, pulled out a song from her music book and began to sing in a strong, beautiful voice this song called "You Are Mine."*

*I will come to you in the silence,
I will lift you from all your fear.*

You will hear My voice,

I claim you as My choice; be still and know I am here.

I am hope for all who are hope-less,

I am eyes for all who long to see.

*In the shadows of the night, I will be your light, come and rest
in Me.*

(Refrain)

Do not be afraid, I am with you.

I have called you each by name.

Come and follow Me, I will bring you home;

I love you and you are Mine.

*I am strength for all the despairing,
healing for the ones who dwell in shame.
All the blind will see, the lame will all run free,
and all will know My Name.*

*I am the Word that leads all to freedom,
I am the peace the world cannot give.
I will call your name, embracing all your pain,
stand up, now walk, and live.*

(Refrain)

Do not be afraid, I am with you.

I have called you each by name.

Come and follow Me, I will bring you home;

I love you and you are Mine.

—David Haas

Jacob's ladder seemed to descend from the Heavens as the veil between the material and spiritual worlds parted in our presence. There was light in Roxie's song, and it was escorting Roy. We were in a holy place, and we all knew it. Roy's eyes gradually closed and his breathing slowed to a stop as he "walked home" into eternal life. He was gone from here; the shell of his body clearly no longer housed *him*. We all sobbed gently in sadness, in relief for him and in celebration of his life.

One of our close friends, Barb, a mother of three and now a nurse-in-training, looked over at me and, through bright sparkling wet eyes and tear-washed cheeks, whispered, "Look what Kevorkian is stealing from people. . . ." She spoke from the experience of losing one of her own children in infancy to a slowly progressive fatal illness.

We had all experienced something more than we could have ever planned for, yet we knew it was not unique. Roy's death, awfully wonderful, was a foreshadowing that all humans could experience. The elements that helped make this death such a deeply fulfilling human experience are available to everyone: faith, forgiveness, family, friends, and the help of professionals, especially Hospice.

These things didn't take away the real, daily details of pain, fear, loneliness, blocked bowels, sleepless nights, yelling out, bedpans, crying fits, fighting kids, medication, side effects, or exhaustion. But they did help make them manageable and meaningful, and they have the potential to make death a blessing rather than a curse. We had all experienced the blessing.

After he died, several of us took care of Roy's body respectfully. Tubes were removed, hair was combed, and the bed was arranged. The kids continued to run in and out of the house and play with neighbors in the yard. Our close friends ordered dinner, and four couples sat around our kitchen table, over Chinese food, sharing stories and feelings about Roy's life and death. He would have really liked that.

The funeral home helpers came, and, as we were all packed in the front hallway, moving Roy's body out to the hearse, my 12-year-old son said, "Do you guys *like* your job?" Yes, they did, and they, too, were good at helping.

The body was flown to Illinois and buried on a beautiful summer day, in a cemetery nestled between expansive cornfields. He was accorded military honors and a 21-gun salute. His body rests in the ground next to the body of his wife, Rita. His spirit is free to meet the Lord face to face, and his life here is carried on in us and in all those he touched. This is the way it was meant to be.