

HPK – A Son-in-Law Remembers

This address I am making today is in letter form – a letter which I've written to Harold and which I now share with you.

Dear Harold,

Let me begin by saying that I love you and that I truly miss your physical presence here today.

As your son-in-law, Marlene's life partner, my memories of events come from a different perspective – not as a blood relative, but as a relative by choice.

I've known you for approximately 12 years and I've watched your transition from a robust active senior, through the winding down and finally to the end of days.

You are my friend and in some ways an example of how I hope to live the rest of my life.

So I see you a bit differently, Harold, than your daughters and sons do. The physical changes and the lessening of abilities are noted, but don't have the same effect on me as did my own mother's and father's changes. My memories and experiences are on a different level.

So I can celebrate the small part of your life that I was witness to and I can also have a little fun while doing so because, if there is one thing that you enjoy, it is to laugh and to smile.

When I first met you I was living in Ottawa and once a month I would take the train to London. You would pick me up at the station and, usually, Dorothy would accompany you and together we would go out for dinner on the way home. (Dorothy and Harold, your kindness is once again remembered and appreciated.) After dinner, it would be dark and I would sit in the back seat and not pay much attention to your driving.

However, ...

On the way to my appointment on Monday morning I would be alone with you and would sit up front and that was, as you would say, "quite an eye-opener". It felt like I was on a motor boat ride and so completely out of control as we seemed to race through the city, taking wide turns on strange streets, avoiding

streets with stop signs, traffic lights, and railroad tracks, and stopping at the last minute. All with a turn signal flashing while we weren't planning to turn at all and we weren't even late!

But, I realize that you don't like to waste precious moments at traffic lights when you would rather be doing something useful. Still, I hate to think of how you would have reacted had I asked you to hurry!

Truth is, Harold, I think that the citizens of London and especially Dorothy were somewhat relieved when you traded in your wheels for a walker back in July.

Only your “mechanic confessor” and nephew Bob Erb could say how many minor fender benders you had over the years and Bob's not talking.

I love to watch you line dance, Harold. I myself am usually reluctant to participate in an activity if I haven't got a reasonable hope of success, so I tend not to line dance.

But you, on the other hand, plunge in and have this happy, amused look on your face as you try to keep up with and, at times, out of the way of that merciless horde.

You are an inspiration to all wall-flower types and I am encouraged by your child-like joyful example.

How you don't get frustrated is beyond me, but I will give it another try next chance I get. Well, maybe!

I have stood beside you many times, elsewhere and here with this Fellowship(the Unitarian Fellowship of London, Ont.) on Sunday mornings and I heard you sing.

Your voice is like mine – it isn't really bad, but it just has a life of its own and vacillates between bass, baritone and even tenor.

But where I tend to keep silent at times, you just carry on with gusto. So I said to myself “If Harold can do this, so can I.”

You will be happy to know that I have joined the new choir at the Ottawa Fellowship. This will be my third attempt at being a choir member. I have

learned to keep trying, Harold, and for that I am grateful, but sadly my voice is as unruly as ever.

Harold, are you laughing at me?

You are a very good listener and I remember the day that you had a little surprise for me.

We were sitting opposite each other in the family room and we were discussing a movie documentary I had recently seen on television. It implied that 17,000 years ago Europeans were the first visitors to Turtle Island. Fascinating stuff, I thought.

Then I noticed that your eyes were beginning to lose focus and then the lids came down. You were fast asleep!

At first I thought, "Am I that boring?" Then, "Should I leave and let you sleep? Should I be angry? Or, insulted?"

I decided to sit and wait. A few minutes later your eyes opened and you gave me your biggest smile. Then we picked up where we had left off.

Actually, Harold, you fell asleep at most of the meetings that I've attended with you, so I shouldn't have been surprised.

What does amaze me, though, is your willpower and determination. This inner strength that enabled you to continue your work for as long as you did, in spite of your illness.

You are awesome and I honour you.

Thank you for your patience and thank you, Harold, for saying "Where's Dan?" to Marlene when she visited you last week. I'm sorry that I wasn't there.

Let's keep in touch.

Love,

Dan