

Diaspora

I have a wind-chime problem. Mine hang at the corner of our porch, softly tolling changes in the breezes eddying around our house. They are a gift from Tim and Jaimie, our son and his wife, whom we love very much. Tim, Jaimie, and their 5-yr old twins Eli and Elayna recently moved from their home 30 miles away to San Francisco, 3000 miles away. Whenever I hear the wind chimes I think of them, far, far away, too far to come over for Sunday dinner, no longer at their lake house on summer weekends, gone from our everyday lives. These quiet fall days the chimes whisper their reminder; I am not looking forward to the stormy days to come when their urgent clamor becomes painful.

I have a staircase problem. The Tim Green family picture hangs near the top step. Of the people in that picture, I have loved three of them all their lives, and loved Jaimie from the day I knew she loved my son. They are inexpressibly dear to me. I can't claim that every trip upstairs precipitates an emotional wipe-out, but it happens often enough so that I have to deliberately ignore their picture if I can't afford the time to stop, look at the picture, and launch blessings that God will have to deliver to far away California.

I have a dog problem. Wandering around our house – breaking every precedent for my toleration of dogs in the house – is a large, tan and black mostly hound dog named Rocket. He is the Tim Green family remnant we still have in our lives, victim of a two-dog limit in their interim housing. The rest of the family can't believe I let him past the kitchen door to nap away the late afternoon in the parlor, and even sleep on the couch while we watch evening TV. It helps that he is a *very good* dog, but the real story is that seeing him there comforts me, connects me, to his family, Tim's family, on the other coast.

I have a heart problem. My life over the past 49 years has been rich beyond measure and expectation in adoring my wife and loving my children: watching them grow into adults, rejoicing when they find love, and being overwhelmed by gratitude for grandchildren to love as well. I also learned a long time ago that my sons and daughters all have their own life-ways to travel, and that my job is to rejoice in and support their choices. But my heart holds all of their lives in the ark of my love, hopeful that we will survive the storms and terrors of the unknown, trusting in God's provision for my precious family, but so much more easily when we are together and can watch over each other. My heart is being stretched now, ultimately a good thing, but painful in the transition.

It was my lot and privilege to be the one to usher this cherished part of my family on their way. I drove them to the airport to board an early morning flight. Double-parked, Tim, Jaimie and I hurried to transfer their mountain of luggage, dog-carriers, 2 sets of car seats, and 2 small dogs in carry-on sacks to the luggage cart and available shoulders. Eli and Elayna did their part, each carrying one of their car seats that would be needed in the rental car at the other end. There are no long good-byes at the curb anymore – terrorists and the TSA have seen to that. Tim and Jaimie were focused on the ordeal ahead, and after a quick hug, I watched my family vanish through the “Departures” entrance. Elayna was the caboose of this train, and at the door she turned, gave me a big smile and a wave, and then resolutely trudged through the doorway, following Mom, Dad, and her brother to their new life.

I once wrote about Elayna when she was still very small with an uncertain future ahead. Her “Goodbye Grandpa” wave confirmed – anew – the miracle she has always been to me, and reminded me that her life, and that of her family, are ever in God's loving hands, wherever they may live. But I love them, and when they were gone, I cried.