

## A Beautiful Life

Dear Family,

Lately I seem to be spending a lot of time in hospital waiting areas, holding vigil for someone I love whose immediate and future fate is in the hands of God and a trusted medical cadre. It is a time for prayer, for reflection, for cherished memories, important resolutions – all of which are littered with the miscellaneous and mundane needs for occasional meals, trips to the bathroom, and the unwelcome intrusion of anxious fears that lurk unbidden just below the surface. But mostly, one waits.

This afternoon I am praying for Dad's life, of course: that he will survive the surgery and recovery period, both immediate and out-patient, and that it will be less painful and shorter than average. But as I have been praying, I am discovering a deep knowledge that God's joy in our Dad is very much like that of an author about to reveal the last chapters of a masterpiece. I do not know what is written in that last chapter or chapters, but I see the smile on the author's face: this story is going to have a beautiful conclusion. When, I don't know. How, I will find out. I am hoping for a prolonged and quiet last act – I like happy endings. But God already knows the details, and He is rejoicing over Dad with singing.

As I wait, I am grateful that our father has not left us with regrets. So many fathers and mothers do. We children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren can turn the pages knowing that we have been loved as completely as a mother and father could love, that we have been faithful in respecting, acknowledging, and returning that love. Our lives are their laurel crowns, our children and grandchildren more precious than the crown jewels of earthly kings. We have all been able to say all the things we needed to say, and both, *both* our parents are at peace. I believe this is very rare. I am waiting with several families who cannot say the same. They are, variously, angry with absent family, guilty over unforgiven and undiscussed offenses, fearful of the future, indignant at the treatment here, and most commonly, grief-stricken. While I admit the possibility of grief, Dad and I parted earlier this morning in the certainty of joy.

One family here is agonizing over their mother's living will. In the event of complications this afternoon, she will not be resuscitated. Thankfully, Dad suspended his before the surgery, but more importantly, I find that he and Mom created a Living Trust in all our names. In their generosity, they wanted us to share in our inheritance during their lifetime. I have been making a partial tally this afternoon, and amazingly, this trust has been funded so generously that it will extend for generations, and if we are careful stewards, perhaps indefinitely. My inventory is far from complete, but so far, in our portfolio I have found:

**Honesty** – in our knowledge of ourselves and our relationships with each other;

**Courage** – to do what is hard or unpopular or frightening or costly;

**Faithfulness** – in small things and large, good times and bad, for a day or a lifetime;

**Beauty** – a deep heartfelt wonder when seeing the Grand Tetons, hearing Rhapsody in Blue, encountering someone cherished;

**Faith** – the substance of hoped-for truth, order, justice, and love in this universe, and the evidence that these are realities;

**Hope** – the working expectation that tomorrow will bring new blessings, new treasures, new joys;

**Love** – the certainty that this life we live is founded in, expressed through, and sustained by love: undeserved, unexplainable, and immeasurable, but most amazingly, unstoppable.

**Joy** – a deep well of gladness, peace, and contentment with all that life has brought to our family.

Drawing on this inheritance, I look forward to the next hours, days, and weeks. I do not know what will happen, but I rejoice in the beautiful life that our father has lived. I am very grateful.