

December 21, 2006

Dear Family,

I am writing this sitting with Mom in her room in Wilmington listening to Christmas carols together. On her windowsill is a Christmas poinsettia, and above it I have hung the "Joy" banner Dad used to bring out each Christmas. I don't have any idea when it became part of their Christmas, but its message stands in curious contrast to its circumstances. "Joy!" it proclaims, hanging in our mother's window this first Christmas without Dad. "Joy!" even though she is almost certainly unaware of the season and the decorations. "Joy!" although she is at best peripherally aware of the carols, or for that matter, me. Whose joy, then, is it proclaiming?

I choose to believe that it is her joy, joy that we proclaim in her name because she cannot. It is the joy of countless Christmases shared with Dad at Post Avenue, Pinnacle Road, Lafayette Ave, Granville Rd., Murrells Inlet, Blue Heron Drive, and now, at the end, here at CND. It is the joy of her childhood, waiting for her father to arrive home on Christmas Eve, the magic of getting up on Christmas morning to see the tree up, trimmed, and even a present for her under it. It is the Christmases she made for all of us, those Christmas mornings when we waited on the stairs while Mom and Dad lit the tree. It is dinner at Grandpa and Aunt Ella's, and singing, and cookies. So many Christmases, a life of joy, now distilled to a simple banner in her window. If we had eyes to see, I believe it would outshine the tree in Rockefeller center.

It is also Dad's joy that I proclaim because he cannot this year. In whatever sense he lives - and if I am sure of anything, it is that he does - it is his message to Mom, to us, to all who visit her room, still a place for joy. Last Christmas he declined our invitation to spend the day in Hillsborough with us, choosing instead to sit quietly with her as I am doing now, listening to the music they both loved. He was always reluctant to be anywhere else at Christmas, fearing that he might miss his last Christmas with Mom, as he had with his mother so long ago. And he didn't. "Joy!" Dad announced each year, because I am spending Christmas with my beloved again, "Joy!" because he will do the same this year.

And surprisingly, it is my joy too. Here amid the spent, broken, and discarded who, for the most part, are just waiting this life's end I also am able to experience a legacy of joy. I am humbled by the sure knowledge that this joy is God's gift, fashioned and nurtured by this silent woman sitting across from me, preserved and protected by the father who loved her and all of us, a gift which has taken root in my heart and each of our hearts. "Joy!" I say, for Christ is born. "Joy!" I say, because my mother is loved. "Joy!" I say, because every Christmas of my life I have known my father's love for me, and this year I know it still.

As do we all.

Much love, with Joy,
Allan.