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Dear Family,

By now most of you know that Dad / Grandpa / Great-Grandpa is at New Hanover hospital with some serious problems. He was admitted a week ago on Sunday because of internal bleeding caused by an accumulation of the blood thinner (coumadin) he takes to prevent strokes. His doctor believes the buildup may be the result of an adverse interaction with azithromycin, which he was taking the previous week for pneumonia. When admitted, in addition to the internal bleeding, he was also suffering a few other things like kidney failure, erratic blood sugar levels, and probably some brain hemorrhaging, although this last threat was just discovered yesterday (Monday). He was moved to the ICU and is scheduled for a relatively simple procedure sometime this morning to relieve the pressure and potentially reverse the decline in his mental capacities that has become evident over the weekend. In making the decision to allow this procedure, Sherrill and I decided to adopt the optimism of Dad's medical team, but we both know that Dad remains at high risk and today's outcome is not certain. So, once again, I am waiting, and thinking, and praying, keeping busy writing down some of the thoughts that are comforting me.

I have been spending a lot of time thinking about Heaven. Now, all of us have beliefs about heaven and it's a sure bet that in a family of nearly 40 thoughtful people, there are going to be 40 different beliefs about heaven. So, this is not about my beliefs or your beliefs about what heaven is like. I'm going to talk about Grandpa's Heaven. (Or Dad's heaven, or Great-Grandpa's heaven, if you prefer). I just like the sound of "Grandpa's Heaven". This is not to presume that I or anyone else can really know whether he envisions golden streets or mansions or mountain tops – or anything at all. I have talked to him about heaven, and I *think* he has a more or less traditional Christian concept, but who can ever really know the shape of someone else's thoughts? I do know that, whatever heaven is to him, he believes he is going there. But in thinking about it, for myself, and for you, I have realized that Grandpa's heaven is there for all of us to see, has been there all of my life, and all of your lives, if we care to look. Most importantly, Grandpa's heaven is true, true in the sense that it has been tested, lived, and proven. What does Grandpa really believe about heaven?

First of all, Heaven is, and forever will be, wherever Ruth [Grandma] is. This is an absolute fact: he would gladly trade any number of golden streets and crystal seas for the opportunity to sit silently holding her hand while she sleeps away the years. Less than a month ago, with the advice and counsel of his medical and social staff, he and I made the decision to give up his apartment at Champions and make his rehabilitative stay at CND permanent. I know that accepting the finality of this latest move was hard and somewhat discouraging for him, but it was tempered by the proposal that Mom be moved into his room. Covering all bases, Lisa, the social worker, asked him, "George, have you thought about how hard it might be to have Ruth with you all the time? When you visit her now, and she doesn't talk to you, or pushes you away, you can go back to your own room. If you don't feel up to a visit, you don't have to make one. And there's always the possibility that one morning you will wake up and she will be gone. Do you think you can handle that?"

Dad thought about it for a moment. Then he looked up at Lisa and said, "Well, we've been married 68 pretty-good years. The last 6 we've been apart...I've missed her, and I think she has missed me. I think we should try it - I can stand it." This was spoken by your 93-year old Grandfather, about his wife. Heaven is wherever Ruth is. He has *hopes* that in a future existence together there will be a restoration of the dialog of love that they enjoyed for 60 years, but we can already see the truth in which he lives: Dad found heaven loving Mom. That will never change.

Secondly, Heaven is where *we* are. We are all precious to him. He delights in our talents, applauds our successes (at times bragging about them, I'm afraid), and rejoices especially in marriages, births, and good decisions. Last Tuesday, at a particularly low moment, it occurred to me that his last smile in this life might well be his response to hearing about Mykah's math precocity [counting at 17 months!] He didn't open his eyes, but smiled and murmured, "She's a smart little one, isn't she?" - obviously well satisfied with his great-granddaughter. Since then, by the way, he has had occasion to smile hearing that Sherrill is on her way, and when I tell him "I love you a lot!". ("You do, huh? Well I kinda' like you too.") You can be sure, too, that He grieves for all our losses. I hate telling him bad news. His face falls, and he sighs. Then maybe he'll say, "that's too bad". He'll think about it for awhile and hours or days later he'll bring it up, regretting your loss or sorrow. In his heaven, you wouldn't have any grief or sorrow.

Probably equally important is that, to him, his family is the way Heaven is supposed to be. Heaven is where everyone is welcome, everyone is unique and beautiful to him, where people love, trust, and support each other, where the rule is to prefer one another, protect one another, and forgive one another. Last Thanksgiving he looked around at our diverse and eclectic mix and said, in classic George Green understatement, "This is a pretty good family". He loves seeing us together, loves the fact that we are a testimony to his and Mom's faith that love, justice, and mercy can and will triumph in this world. To paraphrase a movie dear to my heart, if a stranger wandered into one of our reunions and asked Dad, "Is this Heaven?" Dad would answer with perfect synthesis, "It's my family."

Thirdly, Heaven is where *you* are, or perhaps it's better stated as the compliment: if you're *not* there, it's not heaven. So, for Grandpa, heaven is with Ben in Baltimore, and Heather in Toronto, Amy in Virginia, and Justin in Peru. It's with all of you, wherever you are, even - and especially - with Henry Robert and Michael. Heaven is where each of you is safe and loved, and if you're *not* there, in Dad's book, heaven will be incomplete. How do we know this to be true? When any of us was lost, or in danger, or in great need, he would always come for you. One of my earliest memories is a fragment from when I could have been no older than 3 or 4. Dad had taken Sherrill and me to visit a friend near Rochester. We were in the car while he talked with his friend in the yard. Suddenly (possibly because I was playing with the gear shift?) the car started to roll towards an embankment. I have a picture of Dad racing across the yard while Sherrill (maybe 5 at the time?) futilely tried to step on the brake. Obviously, he caught us in time - but my memory is only of him racing to the rescue. In later years he would come to rescue me in times of sorrow, bad decisions, vehicle breakdowns, and great loss. Moreover, the solid fact that I have always known he *would* come has been sufficient to get me through.

One of the most powerful insights I have experienced in recent years is about the nature of the Grace of God. In it, I picture one of my loved ones (any of you) sitting forlorn, injured, and hopeless in whatever hell you might have constructed for yourselves or fallen into unawares, where rescue is impossible because the trip is one-way. But you can be sure I would come, because without you, there is no heaven. I would come because I know that soon someone would come for me, and then another, and another until miraculously what seemed like Hell becomes Heaven in fact. I have seen this happen, and I know it to be true, because I and all of you have been loved this way, and will be, forever.

Which brings me to the last: heaven is where Grandpa will live forever. I'm sorry if some of you can't yet sign up for this, because there is nothing more certain. All these things I have just written about are eternal, and that is only what we can see now. My experience is that reality is much greater than what I can see and understand - which should be a humbling but exciting thought for us all: so much that we don't know, but also so much we still can learn. If you don't have any better concept of Heaven at this point, you might want to try Grandpa's. At least it's real.

With much love,
Allan