

In loving memory of William Tesch, my hero.

Prologue.

At times, there are events that make the stages of life vividly clear. In these moments, I believe one can understand the breadth and depth of life in ways that are genuinely unique and insightful. It is with this understanding that 'purpose for living' is enlightened and can be shared with greater clarity. One of these life events is the experience of death. This experience can sometimes trigger emotions that purify our understanding of life, even for a short time. When the experience of death covers days and not hours or minutes, the reflection on this new understanding meanders, traveling avenues of thought that may not ever be seen in the normal course of living. The events that follow in this group of letters are about my experience with the death of my hero. While I navigated these roads of his dying experience, I recorded some moments that, at the time, I hadn't recognized, as in and of themselves, all that important. But seen in their entirety I have found that there is greater meaning. I learned that the essence of living can be communicated better during the death experience rather than that of an after-thought with only memories serving as a reference to the actual event itself. At the least, I attempted to share the many sensations that I experienced during these days through my notes of the moments that occurred in the process to his loving friends and family through email letters at the end of each day. Though I know I've fallen short of the full bounty of love that existed during this time, I have attempted to share enough of them to communicate the moments so that they may open one's mind to the value of living, even for an instant.

My Dad was dying from a disease called Ideopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis. This disease attacks the lungs and there is no hope for cure that is known to modern science. He had been diagnosed with the disease for roughly three and a half years. After his diagnosis, he knew there was little hope for surviving a long time, but yet shared little of that knowledge to those he loved.

The following emails were written during his last 10 days of his life. They were meant to inform, share stories, and explain my love for the hero of my life. My hope is through these notes, you can see the value of love in living, through the example of this faithful man.

Lastly, in my family, there is plenty of life. The journey that I shared with my father, in his last days, began a process for me demanding attention, exhausting the reasoning of my personal beliefs, and delicately demonstrated the love that our family shared with each other.

In loving memory of my father, my hero.

Signed, his son.

May 8th, 2003

Everyone,

My Mom, my brother Joe and I met with Dad's doctor on Tuesday afternoon. The doctor told Dad that the prednazone isn't working by itself. As a result there are two different treatment paths...

The first path is getting a treatment called Gamma Interferon. In order to get Dad approved for this treatment there needs to be objective evidence that the disease has progressed with prednazone. In order to prove this, it requires Dad to have some further tests. That will occur this Friday. These tests have been taken last December when Dad was trying to determine the extent of the disease. Dad indicated that although he knew he needed to get these tests done, he did not want to know the results, rather simply get them done so that the approval for the treatment could occur. This is a treatment that, when combined with prednazone, does show in some instances that it can stabilize the continuation of his disease. To date, this doctor has yet to have any of his patients actually be treated with Gamma Interferon. He is not a young doctor, nor is he not well regarded in the Milwaukee area, so this is particularly interesting. His comments kind of hung in the air for a minute, when Dad replied to the doctor that he better get him on that treatment because he is still needed by his family. (side-note; the name 'William' my father's name, means 'determined protector'). His colors showed pretty strong as he instructed the doctor, much in the same way a sergeant instructs a private, to get his act together and get him through this. The funny thing is... Dad enjoyed saying it, smiling both before and after his comments to the doctor.

The second path is lung replacement. The doctor put Dad's name on a list for lung transplant. Dad asked him how long that would take. The answer was an abrupt two-year wait. Dad bobbed his head... then lifted it and said "Fine, then I'll have to make it two years." Mom had heard that for the lung replacement to go well, that there should be a heart replacement too. The doctor quickly remarked that the heart replacement was unnecessary. Dad was happy to hear this. He said, "I really like my heart, it's still got plenty of love in it. That's all I need." The doctor then told Dad that it may be unlikely that he would get a lung because of his age. I think Dad was relieved.

Joe and I asked to see the x-rays that were taken of Dad's lungs the weekend prior. We compared those to the ones taken in February. Bluntly speaking there was significant deterioration in the health in each of the lungs. Mom saw them too. To an untrained eye, it was an easy observation. Things have worsened significantly. Again, Dad did not want to see them nor hear of the progression. This was becoming a signature response to the condition of his health. ... bottom line... Doctor visit came and went without much good news.

After the doctor's appointment, we drove to the State motor vehicle department to get Dad's car emission checked and certified. Then we dropped Mom off at home and went to pick up his grandsons, 'little' Joe and Jack from school. Dad stayed in the car and I waited for them outside the school. They had always enjoyed seeing Dad picking them up from school. Dad got such a big smile seeing them. As we drove off discussion ensued about what they had done at school. Joe described how he had a project that required him to invent something. Without a moment passing, Dad said, "Joey, invent an artificial lung. Papa needs one." What can anyone say to that? ...indelibly burned in my head forever. The boys came over to Mom and Dad's house and played with the Nintendo. Their Mother, my sister, came over too. We ate pizza. The boys didn't want to leave to go home that night. Dad got lots of hugs and kisses and the boys left. Dad went to bed early. Long, tough day.

Yesterday (Wednesday) was the first day Dad actually stayed in his pajamas for an entire day. Mom did too. Mom has been making him breakfast every morning. To say Dad's enjoying this is an understatement. He's told her it's her penance. Thank god for the family humor.

Anyway, here's a cute story... When I had been gone earlier in the day, working at my company's office in Milwaukee, Mom made breakfast for Dad again. Unfortunately, Mom got a phone call... forgot about the food cooking and burned Dad's breakfast. With the oxygen at the house, any burning actually is not a good thing. It kind of makes for a hazardous / highly flammable environment. Apparently Dad hollered across the house to Mom while she was on the phone. Mom hung up and took care of the burning food. When I got home early in the afternoon, I heard the story. Dad's response... "Wouldn't you know it... Your mother wants to go with me. She thought she'd blow the both of us up." Again, thank god for the family humor.

Another cute story... Mom, Dad and I played canasta in the afternoon... of which Dad won. During the game Aunt Nancy called, Dad's sister. She told Dad that Uncle Tom, Dad's brother and her had discussed the fact that there were six brothers and sisters left and they had surmised that one of them could give Dad a lung. After hanging up the phone, he cried a bit then thanked God for having such a wonderful group of brothers and sisters that could think of doing something like that. As if to rise from the thought, a smile crossed his face and you could see the thought hit him... "Aha", he said. "I know what Jack (his oldest brother) can do for me..." More family humor...

As you should all know by know, Courtney, Dad's grand-daughter was to graduate from high school later that month. The party was scheduled for the last weekend in May. Dad wanted to know if the airlines will allow an oxygen tank on the plane, to see if Dad can fly over. I called the airlines and the told me that it's not allowed. Dad said this wasn't a problem, he'd rather drive over anyway. The graduation party was becoming a good goal to achieve for Dad. It wasn't what he said necessarily, but more how he said it, with determination, something to shoot for.

My wife and two daughters were coming over from Wisconsin that weekend to see Dad. I got his permission. I asked him if was OK if they came. First the qualifier... "You know, I don't have a foot in the grave, yet"... "Yeah, I know. They just want to see you."... "OK, then. Can't wait to see them."

Again, Liz came by last night... Brought over some Chinese food and watched "Everybody loves Raymond" on TV with Dad. He loves that show. Soon after, Dad went to sleep and I fell asleep by his side.

I woke up the next morning early. Dad had a pretty bad coughing fit. He explained that the coughing was getting worse. It takes longer for the hardened phlegm to be released when he coughs. He said that he knows he's getting worse. After the coughing was over he asked me to read the bible to him. I asked him what he wanted me to read. He said "Anything". I opened scripture to Psalm 23. He said, "Why did you pick that one?". I said, "Because it talks of strength and peace". He said, "That's the one they read at funerals, I'm not dead yet". Laughter... We talked for a bit how that passage really shouldn't be read at funerals because it really isn't talking about death, but rather life. He agreed and told me to read it. I did. He enjoyed it.

Then he said, "Pick another passage". I went to I Corinthians 13. He said, "That's my favorite. Why did you pick that one?"... "because I like it, Dad." I read that one too. When I was done, he said, "That's what I've always wanted to aspire to, Faith, Hope and Love. Remember me for that OK"?... "Not a problem, Dad." Then he said, "OK, I need some 'who begot who begot...', like maybe Numbers or something." Your Mom's going to have to change these wet pillows if you keep reading that kind of scripture to me." We laughed again. I grabbed a section of pages in scripture, flipped them, and said, "OK, here... How about I John 4?". Immediately, he said... "Verse 9 has always been another favorite of mine." Amazed at his knowledge, I read it. He asked me to read the whole chapter to him. I did. Near the end of the chapter, I got to a verse and commented... "Here's a powerful one, Dad." He said, "You must be on verse 19"... "Yep". he sniffled. A tear fell. "Read it." I did. Another tear fell. I finished reading the chapter. When I finished he said, "If an unbeliever was to read just that section of scripture, how could anyone not believe in God?"... "I don't know, Dad." He thanked me for reading to him, then said, "I need to rest for a while. I want to be ready for the day." ... "Alright Dad. Love you." ... "Love you too, Will."

.... that was just a few hours ago. Sometimes these moments, although precious to me, are selfishly kept, so I figured I'd write them down to share some more of the 'William' that you all know. He's pretty courageous and has lots of strength. I told him that too. After I said it, he told me that Jesus was on his shoulders and that's how he's doing it. So... All of your prayers are being heard. Jesus is helping Dad during this time of suffering. Thanks and keep the prayers coming.

I'll send another update soon.

- Will

May 9th, 2003

Everyone,

Dad had his tests today. Mom was there with him. According to Mom, he did well but the tests did tire him out. I talked to Dad on the phone, soon after he left the clinic. Dad shared with me that his condition was worse. He explained the situation to me like this...

"The normal person has a total lung capacity of 95% (meaning that 95% of the lung is used to breath in air). When I was diagnosed some two years ago, I was at 81%. This past November I was at 67%. Today, It was not quite 40% ... it was 39%. I guess this thing has sped up more than I thought. Will, you need to know that I'm not getting better."

Mom shared with me that his blood oxygen level dropped to 64% when he is not on oxygen. This is lower than what he was admitted into the hospital with last Friday (68%). This indicates that his lungs are not processing the oxygen as good as they were a week ago. The reason is based on the continued deterioration of the lung's alveoli which do this function.

He was also told today that he can no longer drive. This probably left a mark. ... bottom line... The recognition is sinking in. As he explained to Uncle Jack in a phone conversation yesterday "I don't have a foot in the grave, but I'm on the edge, standing on a banana peel". He jokes to soften the pain of leaving those that he loves. As you all know, he'd much prefer to see people laugh than cry.

On the topic of the lung transplant option. I need to share with everyone that this option, although possible, may very well not occur. For starters, even if he qualified to get a lung it would take a month at the earliest. I have been hesitant to estimate Dad's time left here, however, a month is a long time with Dad's condition steadily worsening. Additionally, the stress Dad's body has been under, as a result of the lack of sufficient oxygen up till now, means that his other body organs are probably damaged or rather 'not as strong' as they once were. It pains me to explain things with such a dark shadow, but these are all real facts about his condition. Mom did remind me today that... "God can still perform Miracles." Aside from the 'emotional' suffering, there is a radiance of confidence that he is in his father's arms. I think God is performing right now... Maybe the Miracle is that Dad is still here? To many of us, he has been God's finger working in our lives. Maybe that's what's happening right now...

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Per my last email, I shared with everyone and many others that the lung transplant option was 'an option'. What I should have clarified was the method of how the lung transplants work. 'Living Lungs' are not considered an option. All of his sisters and brothers... You

may all be the best choice, but Dad can't accept your lung. Doctors won't allow living donors to donate the lung due to the risk associated with the loss of health in both patients. Only in the instance of children with cystic fibrosis are portions of 'living lungs' used as transplants, and those that occur are from the parents of the children. This practice has just recently begun in Pittsburgh. So, this option won't be a possibility. If he gets a lung at all, it will be through the lung transplant network.

Many of you asked questions regarding Dad's willingness to consider this as an option. You all need to know that this demonstration of your love has already made Dad cry. In the past few days, he has repeatedly told me how special his sisters and brothers are to him. I can't express this point to you more... His heart aches for having to leave you. I can tell you from my heart that Dad would not, under any circumstance, accept one from any of you. He couldn't possibly imagine taking something like that. As a point of reference, while on the phone with Uncle Jack (not long after the banana peel remark) Uncle Jack offered his lung to Dad. Dad's response..."I wouldn't want it, its too old." ... priceless.

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One more thing... For purposes of planning his time, which is becoming ever more important to Dad. He has asked that his time be spent with family as best as is possible... To this extent, the following order of importance is his request; first his grand-children, then his immediate family, next his wife, then his brothers and sisters. After that, if he's able to see more people then he will try. Please recognize that as much as he would like to see everyone that have cared for him, or that he has cared for in his life, that at this point, he needs to establish priorities surrounding the time that he has left...

Joe, Liz and the boys, Rhonda, the girls and I will be with Dad all weekend. He is anxiously looking forward to our visit. There will be more planning this weekend as to how to coordinate visitors in the coming days. I will keep you all posted. Make no mistake, Dad's still running his command center, so to speak. I will merely pass along his requests. He loves you all...

For those of you who would like to pass this along to others in the family, that's fine.

As always, keep Dad in your prayers... and Mom too.

May 11th, 2003

Everyone...

Yesterday (5/10), Dad got up later in the morning reserving energy for the much anticipated visit of his grand children. Rhonda, Courtney, Brittney and I arrived here

about 1:00pm. Right on our heels was Aunt Nancy, who brought several goodies over and a beautiful arrangement of yellow tulips. Thank you Aunt Nancy.

Dad spent several minutes with each of his grandchildren alone. With Courtney and Brittney, Dad asked each to lay down next to Dad in his bed, he would hold one of their hands and just talk to them about stuff. Not sure exactly what kind of stuff, but every time I stuck my head in to determine the conditions, each of them had tears. I heard him say on more than one occasion, "It's OK, those are just tears of Love". He had some pretty wet eyes too. Afterwards, he asked me if maybe this / he was too tough on them. I told him no, which he wasn't. I can't imagine how he could've been more gentle.

Liz and the boys came over. Each of the boys just jumped next to Dad and enjoyed hearing his voice. Both Joe and Jack are pretty young but they know that something is going on. Dad told me that he was disappointed when Joe (Little Joe) didn't wake up Dad this morning. He always loved one of the boys waking him up, especially Joey. He said that "It made his day when his grandson would wake him up."

Joe (Big Joe) came over next. He brought a young lady over with him. This young lady met Joe at an Elmbrook Church 'singles group' meeting. Jesus is the center of her life. They appear to have created a friendship. She met Dad yesterday. According to Joe, she was impressed. How could she not be?

While the visitors were in the house with Dad, I walked outside to take a stretch. I noticed there was a landscaping man working the bushes and flower beds in front of the house. I introduced myself and the gentleman remarked how he had enjoyed while being employed on a part-time basis over the past 7 years. His name was Mike. He asked how Dad was doing and I said, that things could always be better. He offered his sympathies. All of the flower beds are now effectively 'preened'. No more weeds coming this summer. Dad can now sleep knowing his yard is weed-free... (Note... In the grander scheme of things, this was likely not real important to Dad.) On the way back up the hill to the house, I noticed a single morning dove resting on the peak of Mom and Dad's house. Just one. I didn't think much of it at the moment. Just thought it was unusual.

When I walked back in the house, there was a debate going on. It was between all of those gathered around Dad's bed. He wanted to walk into the basement. But in order to do that there needed to be a 50ft extension tube put on the oxygen. Not a problem, just cut Dad off for a second, make the patch, then hook him back up. No big deal. Some more discussion ensued. "The oxygen isn't a lifeline", Dad concluded. Whew, I thought. Thanks Dad. 5 seconds... done. "Now you can go downstairs, Pop." He did. Slowly, but he did. He used his new aluminum walker for the first time. Used it for 10 feet, looked at Joe and I, then tossed it aside. I could tell what he was thinking... "I don't want my boys looking at me like this." He took a break leaning on the kitchen counter then announced that he didn't need the walker yet. He then maved downstairs to prove to us that he could still be the tough guy. Aunt Nancy left.

He sat in a chair while his entire immediate family talked about ... well... a bunch of stuff. Dad didn't talk much. Just listened. Big smile, good color and beaming. After about an hour of talking, laughing and telling famous family stories Dad kind of halted discussions and announced... "Dawn (Joe's young lady friend), You haven't said much, why don't you talk for a while." Well, what to do, she thought. The pressure was on. So she tried. Ten seconds later she was drowned by the collective family yapping again. Nice try but a little timid. For the ten seconds she had the stage though, she earned a bunch of points in the family book. I guess we'll all have to see where that 'friendship' goes. Dad sat up in the chair and made it for about 2 more hours. Pretty good health-wise. Excellent for his emotional health. His wishes to have his grand-children and his children around was a number one priority and it was happening.

After a while, Dad walked up stairs. By himself, quite nicely demanding that nobody helped him. Stubborn German. He made it to the top just fine, aimed for the bedroom and took a break sitting on the edge of the bed. Where last week short distances were a bit longer, this was a pretty big effort too. With each passing day there appears to be a bit smaller distance or a little more recovery time needed. He rested for a while and the family left him alone, staying in the basement. Eventually, everyone went to bed.

I stayed with Dad. I was in bed with Dad watching TV. He tried to convince me that it wouldn't bother him if I slept next to him. I agreed to do that. We watched more TV. After five minutes, he said that he should probably get some rest. I told him I'd stay for a short while then maybe rest downstairs for the evening. He said, "That would probably be a good idea." He's becoming more strict about what is really important for his health and defining that specific line more objectively. The idea of sleeping next to him may not allow him to get the quality of 'physical rest' he really needed. This is difficult for Dad. As much as my presence would've comforted him, he needed the rest and the best 'quality' rest as possible.

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Throughout the day, his extended family was arranging to travel here to see Dad. Consistent with his request, he wanted to see his immediate family before he saw his extended brothers and sisters. That process has begun. The emotional challenge for Dad is that 'it is a process'... which means it begins, and it ends. The time left that Dad has is most certainly his to plan and to organize, but to Dad, it no longer can be felt as limitless. For a man who has throughout his life, not considered limits/restrictions a factor in showing his affections, he is now recognizing the importance, the preparedness, and the 'get the most out of the shortest time' aspects of all discussions. His good time is from about 1:00pm to 5:00pm, right now. That means his mobility, ability to have conversations is really best during those hours. With the time before and after focused on caring for his physical self so that he can be at his best for the next day's 1:00pm - 5:00pm discussions, doctor appointments or quality visitor time. Mom and I have talked to him about how he wants to manage this time. He has begun to share how that time would like to be spent. For purposes of who can or can't spend time with Dad, he has asked that Mom and I manage that. To this extent, he has asked to See Uncle Jack and

Aunt MaryAnne this coming week on Thursday. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are set aside as days for nurse preparation, doctor appointments and general rest. Recognize that there is no partiality here. In his heart, he wants to see everyone in their time, but he is also aware that seeing those he loves is another step toward the end of the process. For this reason, he wants to spread the visits and the visitors across days. As I coordinate with Dad his time, I will certainly be touching base with everyone. The best way of communication is via the cell phone. If I'm not able to talk or get to the phone, I will certainly get back with all of you sooner than later. As a preference, I'll be taking these types of calls this week. Mom has got to keep her attention focused on Dad. Please be patient with us as we manage this process. Personally, I have not a script for how to manage these days and will attempt to do so with my father's guidance.

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This morning (5/11) came later than usual. Likely because of the festivities of the previous day. Dad takes medication at 6:00am, 10:30am, 2:00pm, 6:00pm and again at 10:30pm. His 6:00am meds require him to get up. This involves him clearing his lungs with the mucus that builds up from sleeping. The 6:00am time is the worst part of the day for Dad. He coughs long and hard. After a while, his chest hurts. There is physical suffering when this coughing is prolonged. It can go 20-30 minutes of deep chest coughing. After the coughing lets up, he takes his meds and goes back to sleep till 10:30am when he gets up again, coughs for a shorter period then considers either sleeping again or showering. Today he showered. Dick Cobb, a dear friend of Dad's dropped off an aluminum chair a few days ago for Dad to sit on, in the shower. (Thanks Dick, Dad Loves You so much!) He has really appreciated the chair. He told me that he showered for a long time today. That's good. The hot water and the sensation of the water are soothing.

He also makes coffee for himself. He makes it early in the morning, like clockwork. He loves his coffee. No Starbucks for Dad. 'Yuban' or 'Folgers' straight from the metal can. He says the coffee soothes his throat after the coughing. He's not allowed to have Dairy products anymore because of the phlegm-inducing properties of these products, so no half & half for his coffee. He's using non-dairy coffeemate and it appears to be satisfactory.

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When I walked upstairs with Courtney before the rest of the house awoke, we both noticed a little yellow American goldfinch sitting on a branch directly in sight for us on the only path through the kitchen. The bird was fully pregnant perched on a branch of an almost flowered crabapple tree. The temperature outside was colder than normal and the winds were very intense. The bird was gripping the branch hard not in anyway planning on being blown off. There is a story about Courtney and an baby American goldfinch when she was about 18 months old, where without going into much detail, she innocently 'crushed' the bird with her little hands trying to play with it. We both looked at each other as we looked at the bird and smiled at how pretty it was. Goldfinches are not that

common, and it was especially interesting to see one with my daughter, on that branch, pregnant, and holding on for dear life as the wind blustered. We just laughed a little then went to see if Papa was awake. He was. Courtney saw Dad, kissed him, chatted for a few minutes then went back downstairs. I went out to get some bagels for the kids.

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When I got home, Mom told me to go out and get Dad some McDonald's egg McMuffins (double sausage). I got the food, came back and saw Dad. Dad told me to get a brush so that he could fix his hair. He felt like he had a "tornado go over his head". (sidenote; Dad was for nearly 40 years as bald as a cue ball). Dad's got a laundry list of 'bald guy' jokes. This was one of many. I got Dad a brush. He brushed his hair, licked one of his hands, ran it through his thick white locks. Two brush strokes, one hand stroke, he looked perfect. I went to get his food brought it in on a plate still wrapped. Mom took it from me and told me that she needed to prepare it. Sure... what was I thinking? What possibly does preparing the 'fast food' mean? I was to find out. I walked into the kitchen and saw Mom seated at the kitchen table where she was cutting up the McMuffin save for the muffin. Every bite Dad would take of this newly slaughtered entree was to be chewed easily. As she was sitting there cutting his food, over her shoulder, just outside the window, amidst the tempest of rain and high winds, was a hummingbird bobbing from one azalea flower to the next. I called the boys. "Look, guys there's a hummingbird." It fluttered in place from flower to flower getting its food. Mom finished preparing Dad's breakfast and brought it into him. I kept looking at the hummingbird and started to cry. Too many omens. As I watched it, I remembered seeing earlier in the week one of the sparrows with a twig in his mouth that he was bringing into Mom & Dad's deluxe birdhouse high atop a pole in the back yard. All the various bird images collided at once in my head. I remember my Gramps (My grandfather) enjoying watching the birds during his last days.

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While the kids were in with Papa, I sat with Mom for a while as she rested. Out of the blue, she mentioned that Dad told her yesterday that he wanted a bird feeder and that I should go get one. She told me to get good bird seed though, not the cheap stuff. Dick, a dear family friend, bought cheap bird seed and just got the ugly birds visiting. Hmm... Expensive seed, pretty birds. Cheap seed, bad birds. Didn't know Dad wanted a bird feeder. I need to get one. She told me right where he wants it. In the kitchen window so that he can watch them. I didn't tell Mom what I was thinking. Just a little startled that the whole conversation took place.

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Joe came over and got a Mother's day card for Dad to give to Mom. While Dad's children and grand-children were getting ready for the day in the basement, I sat with Dad and helped him out. Mom cleaned up his room. Dad asked me to grab a pen so that he could sign Mom's card. Mom giggled about getting a card from Dad. Dad asked

her to leave so that he could sign the card. The card was nice, it had a pink envelope. He asked me to read the card. I did. I turned around so that Dad could sign it in peace. He gave me the newly signed card and told me to put it in the envelope. Then he said, "You can read it if you want." "You sure?" "Yeah, go ahead."

Dear Sally,

Joey picked out the card for me. If I would've picked the card out, I would've gotten a mushier one! Happy Mother's Day.

Love, Bill.

Tough stuff. Of all the things to write on, very possibly, the last Mother's day card that Mom will get from Dad...

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The family and I left the house to head to Liz's. Dad needed some time alone to get showered and get some more rest. Mom needed some rest too. My girls and I returned roughly two hours later. Rhonda and the girls said their good-byes to Papa. I stayed. The girls drove back to Michigan. It was cold and rainy all of the way home. Didn't like sending all my girls home, on Mother's day, driving through Chicago, in the inclement weather, without me. But, I needed to be here for Dad. He's asked me to be here for him and for Mom. I'll get home some way or some how later this week.

Shortly after the girls left, Dick stopped over with a strawberry cake. Gloria (Dick's wife) had made it for Mother's Day. Beautiful presentation, great flavor. Dad loved it.

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About a half hour after Dick left, Dad asked me if I wanted to play some cards. We played canasta together at the kitchen table. I told him about the birds that I saw. He said with an attitude that was just calm and 'matter of fact' like... "They're God's creatures watching over me, Will. See, you're in awe, and I'm just sitting here thinking it's nothing special. I know God is watching over me. Right now, this is hallowed ground, Will. You don't see any ugly birds do you? Like crows or blackbirds. They wouldn't dare come near this place. You know, I feel almost arrogant saying that, but it's just so easy for me to understand. Last week your mom said that she saw the most beautiful bright red cardinal in the back yard. I wasn't able to see it though because I couldn't get there fast enough. But I know it was there. Right now, I feel God's presence all the time." I couldn't help it. I kind of busted down a bit. Again... "Will, don't feel bad about crying. Those are tears of Love." Wow...

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Mom saw us playing, got up and hustled into the kitchen just waiting to break into the next hand. She did. Then went on to humble both Dad and I. Liz came over with the boys and dinner. It was wonderful. Joey and Jack sat on each side of Dad. He loved it. We sang 'Happy Birthday' to Joey and pictures were taken. Liz left soon after and Dad went to rest. Mom got a call from Aunt Karla. (I'm so glad you called, Aunt Karla). Mom needs someone to talk to and she loves talking to you.

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Tomorrow, we'll be lining up Hospice, home nursing care for Dad. As the days come along, his condition will change further. I will be assisting Mom in some of these decisions.

Thanks for everyone's prayers. Dad is being blessed daily by all of your thoughts and prayers.

May 12th, 2003

Everyone...

Dad got up at 4:00am this morning to some pretty bad coughing. He got back to sleep just before 5:00am. I went to his room at 6:30am to see him still sleeping. I replaced his warm coke with a cold one, grabbed his meds and decided to take a nap in the chair next to the bed. About 5 minutes later, he said "Good Morning". He took his meds but after some more coughing. Dad grabbed some more sleep.

At 10:30am, Dad got up and got ready for Aunt Nancy to come. Aunt Nancy came. Mom left to run some errands and get her hair done. (Park Place salon... She said Dad gets his hair styled there too... Not sure I wanted to know that.) Dad made it to the kitchen and explained his illness and his status to Nancy, with the goal of sharing it once and not having to repeat it to all of his brothers and sisters. They spent some time together. I left to run some errands while Aunt Nancy spent time with Dad.

When I returned home, I arrived at the same time as the 'Homedic therapist'. His name was Neil. This was the first time he met Dad. The purpose of his visit was to report on the status of Dad's oxygen treatment, attempt giving Dad a smaller more portable oxygen tank, and determine general status as requested by Dad's primary doctor. He ran a few tests. The results weren't so good. He had Dad walk 50 ft attached to a Blood-oxygen measuring device to watch his blood-oxygen level. Dad had been running on 3 liter/minute (The unit maximizes at 10 ltm). Dad's resting blood-oxygen rate was 85%. After he did his walk with oxygen it dropped to 72%. This wasn't good. Mom returned from the salon. After some discussion with the four of us, the therapist increased the oxygen flow to 5 ltm and Dad's resting oxygen rose, which was good (92%) After

another walking test at 5 ltm, his blood-oxygen level dropped to 82% and rose to 92% after resting for a while. So Dad got some new settings today and was explained to that accepting the oxygen and a higher flow-rate was something Dad should consider. The smaller tank wouldn't work because it didn't push out oxygen faster than 4 ltm. Dad accepted this. The therapist left. The effects of the higher oxygenation (sp?) were very positive for the duration of the afternoon. His color improved, his spirits lifted and his mobility certainly made him feel better.

Just prior to the therapist leaving, I asked Neil if he was treating any other patients with Dad's disease. He said that he had four patients presently, but none in the progressive state that Dad was in. He offered the suggestion of Hospice care. Although Dad has not accepted the idea that he would need hospice care, he has not ruled out the visit of a nurse to give him pain medication when things worsen. To this extent, we are now referring to the hospice care as getting a nurse who is allowed to give medication and assistance as needed. Consistent with the results of the therapist's testing and Dad's primary doctors advice (as a result of the tests) Mom arranged for hospice care to begin this Wednesday. Their first visit will occur on Wednesday with a treatment plan being the goal of the visit.

I left to run another errand. Aunt Nancy left. Mom spent time with Dad. When I returned home, Dad was on the phone with people he knew from work. Joe stopped over. A florist friend, Jeff, stopped by with a beautiful arrangement of fresh flowers. Dad thought he'd call his brothers and sisters because he felt good. He did. After the calls, he said that he was glad that he was able to contact most of his brothers and sisters. Only Aunt MaryAnne was left and he would be seeing her on Thursday. Jeff left.

Mom, Dad, Joe and I chatted for a while. Mom tried to clean. Dad told her to sit with us for a while. Mom listened. We talked some more. With the oxygen level increased, Dad was really feeling pretty good. The word 'frisky' came up in the discussion. Dad kind of winked at Joe and I and we bolted for the door. We decided to go out for dinner together and meet Liz. We had dinner together and Mom and Dad had time alone.

When I returned home later, Mom apparently had just left from Dad's bed to fall asleep in her own. I didn't ask questions, but Dad was smiling and Mom woke me up later to tell of some of their discussion together. It was touching... enough said.

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As of today, Dad has been managing his calendar for his highly anticipated visits later this week. All of his brothers and sisters are arranging to come to see him. Dad has requested that he scatter the visits over a few days. So, technically speaking his weekend is booked up. He has found himself turning down visits with various people to save his energy for this weekend. This is not easy to do for Dad, but he is sticking to his guns.

.....

It was a good day.

May 13th, 2003

Everyone...

The new bird feeder had two goldfinches this morning. One female and one male. The female was pretty chunky too. Dad said that it would take a day before any birds would visit the feeder. He was right. One day of nothing, then today birds. Later in the morning other birds came. Later in the day there were more. The last one I remembered was a red finch. Never saw a red finch before. Amazing. No black birds or crows anywhere.

This morning was a better morning for Dad. His coughing wasn't as intense as other mornings. The increased oxygen last night must of helped. He was more active today than he has been this week so far. Again, the increased oxygen. As encouraging as this is, the oxygen at some point won't work anymore. Today, around mid-afternoon, it felt best at 10 ltr/minute. That is the highest the machine will go. Tomorrow the medical nurse will start her relationship with Dad. I'm unsure how that will be received. Sure hope it goes OK. This will be another point on that timeline marking another step toward the end of his days here on earth.

Dad and I had several conversations this morning. Many of them too personal to share. Let's just say they were very special. The one benefit in dying this way is that it has got to be the act of leaving the world and sharing the moment with loved ones. Passing on the thoughts, the views, the perspectives, the wisdom of years of learning. Some people don't have this opportunity with their parents, their heroes... They're taken quickly, sometimes unexpected, and often in agonizing pain. Dad's pain so far has been the pain of seeing sorrow on the faces of people he loves. This morning, he did have a moment where he teared up pretty good when he was talking about not being physically available for his grand-sons and grand-daughters. 'Papa' will soon be a memory to these young people. No longer a person to see, a voice to talk to on the phone, a place to travel to, or a face to meet during the holidays, birthdays, baby births, christenings, or other special life events. There have been these moments... He calls them the 'poor me' moments. ...Dad is human. On the tail end of these moments though, Dad concludes that he will be present in other ways, helping, protecting and giving strength from above. His relationship with God is utterly palpable.

Where it takes great strength, faith and confidence to experience one's last days, the grace of handling oneself in a manner that Dad is managing, is beautiful. To say that I haven't felt more human and more close to my savior during this process would be far from true. Like Dad, I feel as if I'm being cared for also. The energy here is amazing. As difficult as these recent days have been for my family, we have been absorbed by them. Liz and I talked about being glazed like ceramics. The heat of these moments will make

us more durable over time. Thank you to all who have prayed. Your prayers are being answered.... To those who haven't prayed yet... Save those for Dad. The toughest times are yet to come.

Some of my father's perspective this morning... During part of a philosophical discussion about the '1/2 full - 1/2 empty' theory of life, Dad had another form of this age old riddle that I thought was a neat spin... "Where some people have a 'The glass is 1/2 full outlook on life, some people say 'Don't enjoy life too much, it could get alot worse' view... ". Valid twist on an old line.

.....

Dad had to concede that he couldn't make it to Joey's soccer game tomorrow afternoon. He cried... a bunch. He wanted to be there. He asked me to be there in his place. I'll be going to see the game.

.....

Thanks to everyone who is sending cards, food and emails. I print out the emails daily. Dad eats much of the food that's been coming. (Your cookie basket was great, Miss...) The flowers are all set out too. Dad asked for fudge today. Wanted some fudge... Anyone have any ideas?

.....

Today was another good day. I pray that tomorrow goes OK as well. It will likely be a tough one.

Love ~ Will.

May 14th, 2003

Everyone,

The day started out a bit rough. Dad had a tough morning. The deep coughing, in the morning, continues to be the biggest physical obstacle. He has described this experience as a sort of suffocation, not of air but of the heart. When the heart isn't getting the oxygen, it races. That causes him to try to clear his lungs which are mucus-ed up from the nights sleep. This initiates the coughing which encourages the cycle again. There is nothing anyone can really do other than allow Dad to calm himself, manage his breathing and allows the mucus to loosen. This morning he coughed for a long time. I think he got scared today.

The oxygen has been running pretty high lately 8-10 ltr/m. This has drained the single canister of oxygen rather quickly. This morning, surprisingly, the oxygen container was

at a critically low level. A quick phone call and people came to charge the primary oxygen tank. This will allow approximate 2 days with the oxygen before requiring refilling, at these new higher levels of output. The oxygen continues to help. Along with the oxygen tank being refilled, an oxygen mask was brought by the service company. This is different than the tubes and is less convenient. It will be Dad's choice as to whether he wants to use it or not. At present, he's chosen to hold off on the mask.

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As I mentioned yesterday, this morning the hospice people came to evaluate Dad. Despite efforts to conceal the 'hospice' nature of the medical personnel, Dad asked them immediately at the start of the interview if they were from the hospice. He was on it. Yes, they answered. We're here to help you. The introductions went well. Joining the primary care giver (Suzanne), was a chaplain (Fletch). They introduced themselves, gave Dad their work history, their philosophy about hospice care, their objectives for the day, and then their religious affiliations. Suzanne is Lutheran, Fletch is Methodist. Dad shared with them that he wasn't too particular about the religious affiliations, because he was pretty sure St. Peter was going to ask him about his personal relationship with Jesus Christ not his 'religion'. Everyone agreed Dad was right. There was a sense of relief on the chaplain's face after this discussion. Fletch would later share that he did not have the good fortune to meet many people in Dad's position that were so confident that they were going to heaven. He talked about how he could use different parts of scripture with Dad, that he didn't get to reference as much as he'd like. He was anxious to get started. Dad mentioned that he may not need Fletch's help because of some other people who may be interested in doing that. I'd have to let him know. Fletch gave me his number and email address. Dad gave me the instructions to carry-out this task.

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Suzanne explained the treatment plans to Dad. He was going to be prescribed some morphine (mouth soluble) for the mornings. He should take two pills before getting up to counteract the chest pain that he experiences. The goal is to keep Dad from straining his body and his heart from over-acting. Dad understood this. He was comforted that there may be something to counteract these morning episodes.

Then the legal paperwork. They finished that first with Dad insisting that he needed to read every document. After witnessing this, I am pretty sure Suzanne never had a patient read every page of the paperwork. Dad did. Still signed them all. No contract changes. whew....

Suzanne made several recommendations. Mom and Dad agreed to all of them. Several hours later Homedic came with the wheelchair, the bathroom supports, a tilting bedside table and another oxygen canister. Dad actually has two oxygen containers now that allows us to not worry so much about the oxygen running out.

She contacted Dad's primary care doctor to share the results of the visit and then shared with us Dad's condition. She wasn't all that hopeful, but she did appeal to Mom's adamance about ensuring Dad's last few days to be as painless as possible. Suzanne assured us that she would do everything in her power to make this a pain-free or rather a less-painful departure if at all possible. Mom felt comforted with this understanding. Mom and Dad were given stickers for each of their phones with the numbers of the hospice care people when emergencies arose.

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Throughout the visit from Suzanne and Fletch, Dad interrupted the discussions on several occasions. Not obnoxious-like, but more of a 'Hello, I'm the patient and you should listen to me' kind of approach. After a while, the sturdy German (Suzanne) got a little frustrated with the repeated interruptions. Dad just held her hand and looked at her. She pretty much just stopped and listened again. No problems. Dad's interruptions included the following questions...

"What are the side effects of Morphine?" Answer: There are several small side effects, but we would all be watching Dad's response to see if we needed to modify the medications;

"What are their nationalities"; Answer: Both were German. (good answer);

"If Suzanne was married"; Answer: yes. Upon meeting her, Dad gave her a smooch on the hand, and told her that he expected to get close to her during the next few weeks;

"If Suzanne would travel to Michigan to attend his grand-daughters graduation party?" Answer: Sure, Suzanne wouldn't mind traveling.

"How long hospice care can last." Answer: From two days to two years.... To which he replied with another question,...

"What is your average time for people for people with Hospice care?" Dad explained that he's a businessman and prefers numbers. Answer: "With patients that have pulmonary fibrosis, I don't have any idea". Not knowing was OK to Dad.

All in all the visit lasted about two hours. Just as Suzanne and Fletch were walking out the front door, Dad told me to go get Suzanne because he had another question. Suzanne kind of ran back to Dad's bedroom. Dad grabbed Suzanne's hand and asked smugly... "Suzanne, So now that I have hospice care, Do I have to die?"... After a chuckle, Suzanne went on to say that she has signed people off of hospice care. A ray of hope.

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After Suzanne and Fletch left, Mom and Dad enjoyed some time together while I ran out to pick up the prescription for Morphine from Dad's primary care physician. Just as I

was leaving both Mom and Dad, reclining in Dad's bed, told me to bring the garbage cans up the driveway. "Garbage, Garbage, Garbage!". With this unilateral command from both of them, upon leaving, I was to retrieve the garbage cans which were now resting empty at the base of the driveway. They both described their 'unique' method of returning the garbage cans to their starting positions. Apparently, I've been a little forgetful with a few things, so they were pretty adamant about me getting this done right. Interesting I thought. It had been a long time since I had listened to them argue with each other about doing something so menial. How therapeutic. I could feel both of them healing.

As I drove out of the garage, I got a phone call, got distracted, steered the car around the garbage cans at the base of the driveway and sped off to the doctor's office. On the phone was Uncle Jack. When Fletch was talking to Dad, he had asked Dad if he could be his chaplain in the last days. As nice as Fletch was, he wasn't a replacement for his brother Jack and Jack's best friend, Dick. (Dad and Jack, consistent with their legendary sibling rivalry, often joke about Dick being each of their best friend). So, Dad asked that I talk to Jack and Dick to see if they would be interested in doing this duty first before answering to Fletch. Jack accepted. I have to call Jack's best friend today to see if he would partner up with his brother.

Ten minutes later as I hung up the phone while driving into the wrong hospital parking lot, I remembered... 'Garbage'. Shoot. I've got to race back and move those before they notice. I got the prescription, said thank you to the Dad's doctor and raced over to Walgreens to get the prescription filled. At Walgreens, I was told it would take an hour to put twenty pills in a bottle, so I raced home just in time to see that the garbage cans hadn't moved. Whew. I parked the car and dragged the garbage cans up the hill neatly placing them back where they belong. Now, did they notice I forgot? I walked inside to see my mother at the kitchen table paying some bills. She looked up... "Did you get the garbage?" "Yep". "Good", she said. I was in the clear... "Mom, you didn't even say 'Hi'?" oh... "Hi".

Spent a few minutes with Dad, then drove back to Walgreens to pick up Dad's script. Upon leaving the store, an attractive blonde pharmacist, asked if I was the son of William and Sally. I proudly announced that I was. She asked how Dad was. I told him he could have been better. She asked what was wrong. I shared with her his disease. She was shocked. She had just joked with him a week or two before when he had stopped in the store. She had handed me the morphine just a few minutes earlier and now appeared to have rationalized Dad's condition rather quickly. I'm sorry she said. Tell your Dad "Hi" for me. I did. Dad's remark to me upon sharing this news sometime later... "Which one was it, the attractive blonde?". "Yes, Dad". He smiled.

As I pulled into the garage, I got a phone call from Dad. He asked where I was. I said, I just pulled in. He said... "Good, see you in a few." I walked inside to a stressful situation. Dad apparently had a bad coughing spell. Until now, he hadn't had the bad ones any time in the day other than the morning. He was laying down in bed, carefully conserving his energy. I opened the bag and Mom gave Dad a pill which he placed under

his tongue. Well, it wasn't quite like that... Mom kind of forced Dad's mouth open and drove a pill under his tongue. Dad grimaced... but the struggle, he enjoyed. The morphine, although a small dosage, relaxes Dad and softens the chest pain.

After they calmed a bit, Dad suggested that I run to get him a 'cow' bell. He needed something to ring to let Mom know that he was in distress. His only way of informing Mom something was wrong was by raising the volume on the TV or by raising his voice. Those tactics aren't working so well anymore. Mom wasn't so sure about the cow bell until Dad explained his reasoning. He left out the part about the name. After a few minutes Mom picked up on it and exclaimed, "Now I know why you want a 'cow' bell". Dad smirked. Busted. I told them I'd go find something, a cowbell, tambourines, something. I went shopping. Returned a few hours later with 'Grizzly' bells. I bought them at REI, an outdoors equipment store. They're used to scare away Grizzly bears when you hike in the backcountry like Joe, Courtney and I have done in the past. Mom liked this name better. Dad thought it fit too.

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Soon after I returned home, Joe stopped over. He jumped in bed with Dad. Dad loved it. Aunt Mary Ann, Uncle Jack and Aunt Bonnie stopped over. Hugs everywhere. No tears, just bunches of laughter. Dad was loving it. The goal was for them to stop over shortly then go to Liz's for dinner which started at 7:00pm. Plans worked well. Dad didn't necessarily want them to leave, but it was going to be a prelude for tomorrow, Thursday, when they would stay for a while. Dad could let them go this time. Privately, with big teary eyes, he told me how much he loved seeing his brothers and sisters. "They didn't need to see me cry", he said. Be back soon, Dad. Joe stayed with Mom and Dad until I returned. I was to return at 8:00pm. Aunt MaryAnne and I drove to Liz's. She talked about her brother. Fun stories. She had just seen Dad a month ago in Tucson on a trip with Joe where he appeared in pretty fit shape. Amazing how fast things can change.

We all had dinner at Liz's. Great dinner. Little Joe and Jack drank several glasses of Milk. I've been able to convince Joe that he needs to drink a lot of milk to grow tall. It's working. While they left to enjoy an ice cream cone at Kopps, I noticed the time and left.

Promptly at 8:30pm I showed up to trade-off with Joe. Forgot about the time. When I walked in Dad's bedroom, Joe had successfully modified the digital picture of me reclining in the chair next to Dad's bed which he had taken a few hours earlier. It was on the computer. He had been able to add warts to my feet, blackened a few of my not-so-pearly whites and gave me a lit cigar that puffed rings of smoke. Joe has always been the jokester. Dad had been cautiously laughing, conserving his energy. Mom wasn't breathing. She was laughing so hard that I was concerned. Joe continued to add improvements. Hair on the warts... Cute, Joe.

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Joe left. Mom went to Bed. Dad went to sleep. I slept in the chair next to Dad and started typing.

What was supposed to be a tough day, worked out pretty well. Dad has accepted Hospice care. He's further aware of his position. Let's hope the morphine works to calm the coughing.

~ Will

May 15th, 2003

Everyone,

This morning was a good morning. Dad arose from sleep about 5:45am and took the two pills of morphine he was to take before moving around. He coughed, but not nearly as bad as this yesterday morning. He was grateful that his coughing wasn't as severe. He sat on the edge of the bed, full of dignity and said a prayer thanking Jesus for helping him this morning. He layed down. I layed next to him.

With tears in his eyes he told me how much he loved his grandchildren. He said, "Will, it's a different kind of love. It's kind of hard to explain. I just treasure those children. I want to be around for those boys, so much. I suppose its the 'poor-Me(s)' coming out right now, but I'm going to miss the boys." We had discussed this a few days earlier. I said, "Dad, you'll be around. You told me you would be. You may not be breathing, but you'd be there, remember?"

"That's right, I will be." He reached over to touch me then said, "When you feel a cold spot on your shoulder, that will be me there, with you. I'll be there for all my children and grand-children." He smiled with wet eyes. He paused... Then as if to sieze the moment, he said softly, "When you and Rhonda need some private time, You can shush me away." He smiled a little bigger. This comment was in reference to a remark Rhonda had made the previous weekend. She told Dad that we would have to be more cautious about our intimate moments when Dad is gone. He'll be able to peek in whenever he wants to, was the reasoning. Dad had enjoyed that remark. He promised then that he wouldn't be too noseey.

I laid next to Dad and ran my fingers gently up and down his arm. A few minutes passed. He said, "Tell the boys, I love them." "Ok, Dad.". "You need to go and get Liz that coffee we talked about yesterday." "Ok, I'll be back." "I'll get some sleep", he said. I left.

I drove to the Starbucks near Liz. I bought a venti-sized hazelnut latte with skim for Liz, a venti-sized yukon blend with heavy cream for myself, and two coffee cakes for the boys, Liz and I to share.. As I was paying for everything, I thought, I should buy some ground coffee for Dad. Then quickly dismissed the idea, because, despite my

efforts to convince him that Starbucks was better, he liked the coffee out of the can. Interestingly enough, later this morning he would tell me to mix the Folgers (from a different older can) in with the Yuban, so that he wouldn't waste the older Folgers. The epitome of my father. Giving up flavor so that he wouldn't waste the coffee.

I arrived at Liz's. I peeked through the door. Saw Joey zipping down the stairs. I knocked. He spun, saw me and yelled behind his back to his mother in the kitchen, "Uncle Willie's here." There was a rebuttal from his mother. I heard him say, "Yes, he is." as he pulled the door open. I bent over, with the goodies in my hands and gave Joey a hug. "Hey, Joe." "Hi, Uncle Willie." Jack shot around the hallway corner and he got a hug too. I said, "Boys, that's from Papa. He told me to tell you that he loves you." The excitement in the house rose a bit. Liz, came next, with her robe on, hair done and smiled. "Oh, you brought coffee." "Yep, I did." She was happy. Liz and I love our Starbucks. I guess we're spoiled. Dad would've thought we paid too much.

As we walked into the kitchen, the boys were preparing to eat. We had about fifteen minutes till school for Joey and about an hour and fifteen for Jack. I would take Joe then come back to watch Jack for a while before I took him. As excited as Joe was that I was taking him to school, Jack wanted to go to Joey B's house. Disappointed, I agreed. Oh well... I still got to take Joey to school and that I enjoyed. I shared with the boys another 'Uncle Willie and Uncle Joe' story. They love these stories. This one was a recent one about how Uncle Joe changed a picture on the computer and gave Uncle Willie hairy warts. They loved it... "Uncle Joe is the funniest one", they said. They continued laughing. Dad loves to hear them laugh. They have great laughs. Joey was needing to get to school, so we left. Hugs and kisses...

When I arrived at Joey's school, it was pretty close to the bell. Joey got out, said goodbye to me, then turned away. I rolled down the window and yelled "Love you Joey boy." He yelled back "Love you too." Wonderful nephew, I thought. He waited on the corner for Jack, an older gentleman who works as the intersection crossing guard, to let him cross. Now mind you, he was running pretty close to the bell and he was still adhering to crossing guard etiquette. I thought to myself, would I have done that at his age? I don't think so. When Jack the crossing guard spun his 'stop' sign around to 'caution', Joey ran across the intersection and yelled "Good Morning Jack". How kind, I thought. I'll bet there wasn't another kid in his class that would've said Hi to that crossing guard. How proud I was that he was my nephew. I remembered last week when Dad and I had picked up the boys, Dad had called from his car "Hey Audrey" to another retired lady crossing guard at the other main intersection of the school. At the time, he couldn't leave the car but he knew her by her first name. Dad was clearly rubbing off on Joey. I started to cry, thinking of how Dad's influence on the boys may not be as available anymore. Dad is such an inspiration. Joey continued down the sidewalk racing to school. I'm sure one of the stories for the day would be how his Uncle Joe gave his Uncle Will hairy warts. Uncle Joe has got some serious payback coming...

I drove home to see Dad asleep. Mom too. That was good, they needed it. I went into Dad's room and finished recording yesterday's events and started recording this

morning's. Typed in Dad's chair till he arose. Dad woke up feeling pretty good. Excitement was in the air. He was going to enjoy today, his brother and sisters were coming. Dad got up and prepared for the day. He decided to use his walker for the first time. He reasoned that it would give him more energy when his brother and sisters arrived. Getting ready didn't take quite as long either. Just as he was finishing Mom made him a wonderful sausage and cheese omelet with jalapeno peppers. But this time, Dad would eat it in bed, not at the table as he did normally. Dad loved it. He went on to say how much he enjoyed having her care for him.

Later in the morning a friend arrived, Bob Melan. Dad enjoyed seeing him. Bob gave Dad a card. Bob found the Lord Jesus Christ because of Dad's ministry to him. Bob sure loves my Dad. I think he's been pretty choked up about Dad's condition. While Bob was with Dad, the excitement of the moment got to Dad a bit. He took his meds mid-conversation with Bob and the medicine went down the wrong way. Dad coughed. Bad cough. Hurting cough. Bob talked to Mom and asked if there was anything he could do. Mom asked Bob to run an errand. Dad needed some more 'Lemon' Diet Coke in a bottle, not a can, because the bottle would allow the soda to last longer. I thought to myself, and he calls me picky...

Family arrived, his sisters, Aunt MaryAnne, Aunt Bonnie and his brother, Uncle Jack. I asked Uncle Jack to turn the laughter dial down for today. Thinking he could control the laughter was an ideal thought, but highly impractical. Later we would find out that Dad was the catalyst and thanks to Dad, Jack would get blamed as the culprit. Dad was in peak performance today. He talked and laughed as if he was doing just fine. Unless one would know his condition, anyone would've thought he was in great shape, save for the oxygen that he was connected to.

After some time visiting, Suzanne, now called Sue, the Hospice nurse arrived. She was going to run Dad through some drills today. So, in order for this to happen, there would need to be some exclusive time for Dad and Sue. I walked the family downstairs for a while and gave Sue some time with Dad. Sue asked a lot of questions and Dad cooperated. He's starting to learn, I thought. Well, a half hour later, I would learn that although Dad was in control, his emotions were certainly demanding his sense of reason. Dad sort of demanded that the family play a game of dominoes. So we did.

The game would be 'Mexican train'. This version of a domino game had never been known to Dad's brother or sisters. So we explained how the game was played, with the preface that 'little Jack' could even play the game. This is a true fascination to the whole family. Jack, in what appears to be a random fashion, places his dominoes down and regularly wins rounds without any guidance whatsoever. This could be considered a fluke if it had occurred a time or two, but the pattern is pretty consistent. It didn't take long for everyone to learn the game.

Bob returned some three hours later with 24 bottles of the soda Dad liked. Apparently it took him three different stores before he found exactly what Dad needed. Dad was really grateful for the added effort.

Meanwhile the domino game was getting interesting. The lead was changing each round and there was plenty of laughter. 'Double-clicking' is a key tactical move in the game of 'Mexican Train'. The 'Double click' is the act of a player announcing his intentions of winning the round on his/her next turn by tapping twice on the table with his last domino. If the person forgets to tap twice, he/she is required to pick another domino up causing that person to be delayed in their attempt to win and thus lose the opportunity to win on the next round. Uncle Jack didn't 'Double click' on several occasions. Dad, who sat next to him, reveled in his miscues. Everyone enjoyed it.

At one point during one of the rounds, I had to stand up and take a stretch. I walked into the family room where Mom was talking to her close friend Gloria, Dick's wife. They were amazed at the level of laughing that was going on in the kitchen. Maybe 'shocked' is a better word to describe their thoughts at the moment. Mom went on to say, "It doesn't sound like mourning in that room". How could I argue? It sounded like a classic family gathering. In Dad's family there were eight children. From the stories I've heard over the years, the children kind of enjoyed their family moments in much the same way as the kitchen now sounded. In light of Dad's condition in the previous days, I think Gloria thought we'd all jumped on the 'crazy train'. Ah, but Dad, he was having the time of his life, so to speak.

The game continued for five rounds. On the fifth round, Dad informed everyone that he was getting tired and probably needed to rest. Considering we had been playing roughly an hour and the excitement was pretty high, Dad knew he needed to slow things down a bit. He needed his rest. As of five rounds, Dad had the best score. He won.

While Dad stayed seated, his family walked up to him and said their good-byes. Dad was full of tears when he saw them leave. He desperately loves his brothers and sisters. I left with them to join them for Dinner. Liz stayed at home with Dad. Liz was able to spend some time with Dad. I'm sure she would enjoy it.

True to form, upon returning from dinner, Liz and Dad were mid-laughter with "Everybody loves Raymond" on the TV. The laughter was deep and hearty. It was a good episode. A while later, Liz went down stairs to go to bed. I stayed with Dad, gave him his meds and layed next to him. We talked for a few minutes about the day. Dad thoroughly loved spending time with his family but did confess that he may have over did it. No kidding, I thought. Hospice care wasn't a party, but Dad was sure turning the tables on how it would work. I stayed up to write some more notes that occurred for the day. There were a lot of notes. I was tired, so I figured I would finish them tomorrow.

5/16/03

Woke up earlier than Dad today. Listened to his breathing. It was calmer, less rapid. Enjoyed listening to his breathing. Started typing.

At 5:25am, Mom walked in. Dad awoke too. Right on time, Dad, I thought. They're senses are intertwined right now. Mom seems to know when she's needed. No bells are really necessary for either of them. Mom walked over and leaned down. Dad leaned up just a bit and turned his head toward hers. She reached around his back and steadied Dad. Mom kissed Dad. Dad didn't just receive this morning. Mom rubbed his back for a few seconds, put her head down and kissed his arm. "You're warm today." She stayed there a little longer than just a passing thought. She rubbed his back lightly again and stepped out of the bedroom and into the kitchen. They're really beautiful together.

Dad took his medicine. Continued to lay for five or ten minutes then sat on the edge of the bed. He waited for another five minutes then grabbed the walker. He's accepted it now. He's using it and not concerned about the pride so much any more. It helps him. Dad walked to the bathroom. He coughed when he got there. Not real hearty coughs, but still hurting. Mom and I will step in as the coughing continues to see if Dad needs the help. He's still very independent. He needs the unobstructed time to manage his breathing. It's getting more difficult though. Not as much lung capacity. I can tell.

Mom walked into the bedroom, where I am typing and asked if I think one of the bells should be put in the bathroom. I said that was a good idea. Transition made. She went back to the laundry room to continue folding the clothes.

She walked out a few minutes later, with a stack of slightly discolored yellow shirts and asked me to go get Dad some white T-Shirts. "Willie, why don't you go get some white shirts for your Dad. He probably won't wear them, but he needs some so bad." "Ok, Mom." "Where will you go to get them?" "Probably Kohls." "OK". Just yesterday, Mom had laughed with Dad when he selected the T-Shirt for the day. 'Cingular wireless'. Another one of Dad's free T-shirts he had gotten. This one he received upon the activation of Mom's cell phone some time back. Originally, when he got it, it was white. It is still one of the whiter 'free' t-shirts in the drawer, so he selected it.

Dad is still coughing. It's going on an hour now. He's a fighter. Stubborn too. Mom has called the hospice again this morning. They will visit again today. I just told Mom how strong she is. She is remarkable right now. Managing the spaces between mourning, directing and intimacy very well. Dad is in good hands. Dad's visitor time will be limited today.

Dad made it back to his bedroom. Not easily though. Upon arrival, the first question of the day came... "Will, how long today? an hour?" "No, Dad going on an hour and ten minutes." "That's not good", he says. Inside his mind he's managing the time like he knows how to do so well. Where in the project are we? How many more days till x? Should I adjust my resources to do the job better? A real project manager.

Mom suggests that he will need more morphine to combat the body's desire to drive harder and harder to correct his illness, despite the failing nature of his body. She's correct. I guess I'm stuck on the thought that my father, the consummate instructor, is still going to give all of the orders. Mom, strong person that she is, recognizes the line of listening to his instructions and accepting his orders. She's stepped in at the right time. She may not accept all his orders today. She'll need to negotiate.

Dad got some rest.

A little while later I walked into Dad's room. Mom was by the bedside. They were talking. Quietly. Dad said something that made Mom laugh. Mom laughed. He smiled. Don't know what it was. But they enjoyed it.

Liz came over. Liz is staying by Dad's bedside. He let me know that there isn't a problem with anyone staying by his bedside, ever. Liz is there.

Sue from the Hospice stopped over. Talked to us about his condition. "He's his own worst enemy, right now." Tell us something we don't know, I thought. Knowing Dad will have his way with things is simply the way it will be. At his pace. Sue walked in to see Dad. Did the basic tests. Checked the fingernails to see how his circulation is, checked his breathing with a stethoscope, checked his blood pressure, checked his pulse. At this point, these simple tests serve as the measuring stick for status. All signs appeared OK. In front of Dad, she announced his breathing improved. I think the unspoken understanding that the morphine was starting to work was understood by both the nurse and the patient.

Dad said he needed the bathroom. The trip took ten minutes. Sue said that despite the work it took, that it was a good sign. She had seen people take much longer to go that distance. Total distance, thirty feet. Dad started coughing when he got there. Sue offered to help, but Dad still has some pride left when it comes to having ladies in his bathroom. He let Mom know on more than one occasion that she shouldn't be peeking. After some time, the instructions were given... wet the hairbrush, get the linen pants (he wore yesterday), get his medication, get the 'lemon' Diet Coke, then "give me a few minutes." "no problem, Dad." Mom walked up to the door, opened it and handed me a blue-checked shirt. Dad looked up, stuck his hand out and waved it underhand-like. Didn't say a word but he didn't need to. Mom scowled, looked at me and I just smiled. Dad didn't want her peeking again... I stepped out for a few minutes to give Dad the time he asked for. The coughing continued.

The door bell rang. I went to the door and invited Dad's lifetime boss in the house, Ned. We were told by Ned's assistant Annie (another age-old family friend), that Ned really doesn't visit people in the condition Dad is in, but Dad and Ned go way back. Maybe Annie was trying to be nice to signify the importance of Dad to Ned. I don't think so. Dad touched so many people. I had heard stories about the early days of Dad's career

when he worked side-by-side with Ned. They both worked for Ned's Father. My Dad was always liked by Ned's father.

Dad didn't exit the bathroom until he felt ready. I walked in to see him and he was still catching his breath. I gave him his medicines. I keep telling myself that these are supposed to help. See, Dad never liked medications. He liked vitamins and herbs though. Had plenty in his drawer, Vitamin C, Vitamin E, Saw Palmetto, Hawthorne Berries, Multi-vitamins and others I never heard of. He just never liked medications though. Now, he was needing them to sustain the quality of life while the disease raptured his body.

Dad asked for his socks. They didn't match. It was a rare occasion that Dad had matching socks. He would never throw away the singles when he'd lose one. "Sally, get me a pair that match", he yelled. Mom walked in and Dad flung the socks across the bathroom. Whoa... I'm in the middle of these two and neither are going to take this too well. "I don't believe you." she huffed. She picked up the socks and went to retrieve a new pair. I'm sure she had to dig for them. Dad looked at me and had a naughty smile on his face. He just wanted to see Mom work for him. I could see he had plenty of practice at being naughty for Mom. He was a natural. Mom got a new pair for Dad. He said, "Thank You, Dear". She looked at him, squinted and scrunched her face like she had lost her patience. Mom's move complete. Dad was in check. The game would continue...

Dad asked for his shirt, I handed it to him. He caught his breath again. He put it on after a few minutes. He grabbed the comb, brushed his curly locks then asked me how his hair looked. I said "its out of control, Dad". He smiled. "Good". "Will, get me my pants". "Same ones as yesterday, the linens?" "Sure." He took some more time. After some more time to get dressed, he was ready to go. He needed to make it to the same chair he sat in yesterday when he played dominoes with his brother and sisters. It took him some time to get there. He knows he's gotten weaker from yesterday.

Dad talked to Ned. It was a good discussion. Ned and Dad shared some old times. They laughed, but Dad wasn't suppose to. Ned knew this. Ned asked Dad if Annie could come. Dad said, "Sure, of course." Annie is going to come over. Annie called a little while after and asked to come to the house on Saturday. Plans were set.

Mom and Liz decided to leave for a while, we needed some groceries. They left. Dad decided he should get some sleep. He grabbed the walker when I wasn't looking and walked to the bedroom. He rolled over in bed and took a nap. A little while later Dick and Uncle Jack came over. The goal... to discuss the funeral and memorial plans.

While Dad slept, we talked for a while in the kitchen. We went over scripture passages that Dad would like. I mentioned to them that Dad and I had read scripture together a few days ago and we needed to weave into the services the passages we read together. Psalm 23 might be read, but it was pretty common at other funerals. Dad liked it though. I Corinthians 13 should be the theme because that was one of Dad's favorite passages and it fit. I John chapter 4 verses 9 and 19 needed to be shared at the memorial somehow.

Thanks to Dick and Uncle Jack with their years of pastoral service, there's little question that they knew what to do. I asked both of them if they had the opportunity to ever work with someone who was dying, their funeral plans. They both agreed that it was very rare and I didn't gather that they had ever done this process with anyone. The sheer idea of discussing one's funeral plans with someone who was dying would normally be a hard job to do, if even possible. Also, it has the appearance of being a depressing, an almost upsetting act. But in Dad's case, the process of asking was logical. I thought, what other test of courage could a man be asked to take than to discuss his funeral days before he would die?

As we were talking Uncle Jack picked up one of the Music CDs that they brought over. It slipped from his hands and bounced on the kitchen table. A nice plastic clink sound. We had been whispering to allow Dad to sleep. I walked into Dad's room and he was waking up. Hmm... Could've been Uncle Jack's slick move, I figured. Coming out of sleep, noticing Dick's car out the window, Dad whispered, "Is Richard here?". "Yep". "Give me five minutes to catch my breath." "OK, Dad."

Soon after, we walked in to Dad's room. Almost on cue, Dad mentioned to them that it wasn't a bad idea to start talking about funeral arrangements. He set the tone, yet again. We all talked and Dick and I took notes. Dad wanted to send a message at his funeral service. He talked about pall-bearers and the service specifics, the message he wanted conveyed. He suggested the church and listened to advice about all the other important features of a successful funeral service. He talked of the songs he wanted in the service. And lastly, he again said to Dick and Jack that he trusted their recommendations with one caveat, he didn't want either of them to outperform the other. This was met with hefty laughter.

Mom and Liz returned with the fresh groceries. Liz made some turkey sandwiches for Dad first then some for the rest of us. They were delicious. Dad didn't feel like eating too much, though. After a short time, they left. Dad fell back to sleep. This time though, to a pretty deep sleep.

I ran an errand for Mom and Liz stayed with Dad. When I returned home, Mom was resting and Liz and Dad were watching their favorite TV show "Everybody loves Raymond". They were laughing. A little less for Dad though. After the show, Dad's hunting buddy Dr. Jim stopped up. Dad and Jim talked for a while. When Jim went to leave, I left with him to use his high-speed internet access connection at this house. About an hour later, I returned home and discovered that Dad wasn't doing so well. He had taken a turn for the worse. Mom took control and called the Hospice. We were given our orders. It was pretty rough now.

We called Dick and Jack to come over again. We called Joe. Mom and I administered some medications. Dick arrived first, Jack second and Joe third. We all prayed over Dad. We prayed for strength and peace. It appeared to us that Dad was suffering. This was going to be the last walk.

I suppose we'd all been preparing for this moment, but its still a struggle when it comes. We talked of how incredibly brave Dad was. How courageous he was as he managed each breath. Still, things worsened. Dad wasn't responding to much of our efforts. He would raise his eyes from time to time, but he didn't appear to be responding to touch or voice. When Joe got there, he jumped in bed and grabbed Dad's hand. Dad responded. He grabbed Joe's hand. I called the Hospice again. After sharing Dad's condition to them over the phone, they said they would stop over.

Sharon, the nice young lady we talked to on the phone, arrived shortly after midnight. After spending some time with Dad, she talked to us about his condition. She explained that being in the condition he was, having such a strong heart, may work against him now. I thought to myself, that can't be. She explained to us that he was in a deep sleep and not to worry. He wasn't actually in pain and suffering. She left shortly after and gave us the instructions to care for Dad throughout the night. In order to have strength for the coming hours we organized ourselves to get some sleep. Mom would get some rest in her room, Liz would rest at the foot of Dad's bed, Joe would rest next to Dad in his bed, Jack would rest downstairs and I would stay up, keep watch and give Dad his medications. The plan was underway. We all went to our places.

I went to the chair next to Dad's bed and started typing.

I didn't know that today would be the day he went to heaven.

.....

Love ~ Will

5/17/03

Everyone...

For starters, know that this update was written in the early morning of 5/19/03. I had just sent you the last two update days of Dad's status (which I simply had not finished during those days) and was needing to give an update for the last day. The purpose of this last update is to add finality to the process of which I had started. I originally intended to share Dad's physical status only to his family and extended family. During the activities of keeping you all up-to-date, I didn't realize that I was recording family history until I was a few days into the process. Nor did I realize the potential importance of these moments to the future generations of our family, or other people for that matter, that held my father so dear. To this extent, I must share with you that the moments that I captured in his final ten days, don't even count for a fraction of my father's life relative to time. They don't scratch the scope of humor, intelligence, or capacity to care that he expressed throughout his life. And, these moments don't speak to the importance of living every

day so fully as my father attempted to teach us by how he acted every day. What these words were meant to show though were the undeniable love of life and lack of fear for death that my father possessed in his last days. I hope you have been able to find comfort in this understanding as it was shared with you.

Dad went to see Jesus at 8:25am on May 17th, 2003. He died on earth, but he was born in heaven to a new life which I know he is loving again.

In summary, There are other moments, notes, comments and thoughts that were missed in the emails that were sent the last 10 days of my Dad's life. Over the coming weeks, I will recall moments, will discover notes or will be reminded of comments that I will include in an abridged version of these emails in a single document. At the least, this piece of history will be a therapeutic resolution for my own personal loss. If this document lives on beyond that and can deliver value to present or future generations of people, then the labors of writing these notes were that much more worthwhile. My Dad was a testament to many people how we should live our lives. In some small way, if his story in all its factual glory can be retold, then my Dad's legacy may last that much longer.

Thank you for all of your positive and supportive responses to the emails sent in the weeks past. My father and family are grateful for all of your prayers. Rest assured, they were all felt.

..... the Last day.....

Everyone,

As the night went on, Dad's deep sleep consisted of a breathing that I will never forget. Historically, when we slept together in the same room, Dad and I could make the windows shake with our snoring. This night was no different, except it was Dad and Dad alone. Liz and Joe were sleeping sound in the room. Later, Mom would tell me that she slept well in her room across the house listening to Dad's breathing. The rhythm and cadence of Dad's breathing, albeit difficult at times, was warming to his loved ones.

Every hour on the hour, Dad would receive a small amount of medication to calm his breathing so that the constricting lungs wouldn't reflex or be so painful when they did. I recorded the breathes per minute on the hour as well, writing these notes in a notebook we had quickly devised during the most recent hospice visit just hours earlier. Other pieces of information were written in the notebook too, as it is important to know what exactly has been done, if something positive is occurring, it should be re-done. The breathes per minute dropped slowly as morning came. At around 3:30am, I noticed Dad and Joe were still holding each others hands. How appropriate, I thought. He was clutching Joe's hand. Dad always drew great strength from Joe.

At 5:00am, Dad's breathing slowed again and I thought it wise to get Mom, Liz and Joe up so that we could be there for Dad's final moments. I continued to journal the activities

underway caring for Dad and the small medications that we were instructed to administer with the goal of being on task and accurate.

At around 6:30am, Jack returned to the room and I decided to rest in Mom's bed. Dad could likely keep the pace he had for hours so I figured I'd get some sleep. According to Mom, Liz, Joe and Jack, they prayed with Dad, sang for Dad, and Jack told stories that included Dad. Where Dad was not very responsive throughout the night, he responded now by smiling when he felt like it. Whenever, Jesus's name was mentioned, Dad would smile. When the humor of one of Jack's stories was peaked, Dad would smile. Not an expansive smile, but sort of a grin that told then that he understood. His breathing steadily slowed until 8:25am.

At 8:25am, May 17th, 2003, in his home, in his bed, by his family, without pain, without suffering, he took one last breathe and Dad's hard-working heart stopped one last time.

I was awakened by my Uncle Jack and he shared with me that Dad was likely passing away at that moment. I returned to see my family weeping as he had just left this world. The weeping didn't last long. Dad had allowed us to grieve with him for several hours now, respecting the time we needed to let him go. Always the careful person in delicate situations, he parted peacefully, with a smile on his face... literally.

When asked later that day how my father left this world, I described it as 'beautiful'. "If death could be described as beautiful, My father did it." I'm not sure I can describe it any different than that. On earth, there were no trumpets blaring and there were no choirs singing... but it was early morning and there were birds chirping. We opened a window in Dad's room and the patio doors in the back to hear them. God's creatures were rejoicing, I thought. Just like Dad said.

Love ~ Will.

Epilogue

This was my father's testimony as best as his children understood it. This was printed in his funeral service pamphlet given to those attending this celebration of his life.

Dad's Testimony

The day before Dad went to heaven he asked his co-chaplains, Dick and Uncle Jack to join him in defining his own funeral. Although Dad's condition was worsening, his goal of personalizing his funeral was important. He selected the music, the verses, the readings, the pallbearers, the people who would say the remembrances, and the message for the service. He wanted the primary focus of his funeral to be the message of Jesus Christ. A special part of this message was to be Dad's testimony in writing. My father and I agreed that we would do this together that evening. To both of our surprise, Jesus took him home before I captured his words and put them to paper. In many respects that makes perfect sense to me. How can words in life, confined to one page, express the entirety of what my father wanted to share as parting thoughts? Quite frankly, it's impossible. So, to resolve this dilemma, I have copied some notes I believe were important to Dad. These expressions guided his life and in some way held meaning for him. Each of these speaks to Dad's lifelong philosophy of 'Actions always speak louder than words.'

"Dear Jesus, help me spread your fragrance everywhere. Flood my soul with your spirit and your life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may be only a radiance of yours. Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus." ~ Cardinal Newman (This saying was printed on a piece of paper which was Dad's bible bookmark.)

"To believe in Christ's rising and death's dying is also to live with the power and the challenge to rise up now from all our dark graves of suffering love. If sympathy for the world's wounds is not enlarged by our anguish, if love for those around us is not expanded, if gratitude for what is good does not flame up, if insight is not deepened, if commitment to what is important is not strengthened, if aching for a new day is not intensified, if hope is weakened and faith diminished, if from the experience of death comes nothing good, then death has won." ~ Nicholas Wolterstorff (These reflect my Dad's view of his core beliefs.)

1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us." (While reading scripture, Dad had this passage memorized and shared with me that this too was one of his favorite sections of scripture).

In summary, my father, your brother, your relative, your co-worker, your friend, was a man greater than a few simple words. His life was one to aspire to. Please remember

him first and foremost for his belief in Jesus Christ as his personal savior. For that reason, he was everything he was when he was on earth.

- Written by his children.