

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 20

WHEN HAS THE LIGHT CHANGED YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF SOMEONE OR SOME THING?

Body Blows

I have received two huge body blows of life.

When I was seven, my thirty-nine year-old father died suddenly. I was raised by my widowed mother. More recently my twenty-two-year-old grandson Griffin died from a rare heart issue.

God, why do loved ones die before they grow old? Two scriptures come to mind. Job 30:20, "I cry out to you, God, but you don't answer" and Ecclesiastes 1:14, "I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all its vanity and chasing after the wind." Not exactly what I expect from a benevolent and loving God. Could you not have waited to exercise your claim?

God's answers have come in various ways. I think that most church meetings can't really handle the problem of suffering. In my case it's different. Our

West Hills Friends community has poured out overwhelming love and grace that is beyond anything that I have ever experienced. The personal texts, letters, cards, phone calls, home visits, meals, and hugs of love help me to get up every day and continue. I'm emotional and crying but I know that each of you are praying and supporting our journey.

God speaks to me in silence. I can sit and listen to the quietness of our surroundings. I think that I hear Griffin, saying, "Grandpa, we're cool. We will always have those cherished moments."

There is this gift of hope that God is doing something about it. There is a fix in progress. Forgive me Lord. I see the heaven beyond this world. I see you and trust you.

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I know Griffin is here because sometimes I feel his spirit and see him clearly in images that appear when I'm awake. I guess these waking images are called "visions." It's rather complicated, but these experiences of Griffin's presence and the images of him tell me there's an eternity of consciousness, that the mind and consciousness never die.

"The inner world has its clouds and rains, but of a different kind. Its skies and suns are of a different kind. This is made apparent only to the refined ones: those who are not deceived by the seeming completeness of the ordinary world." Rumi, 12th-century mystic.

I know it will be good with Jesus. I will always remember and love Griffin. 

—Richard Evans

Minding the Light is a bimonthly collection of stories from the lives of members and attenders of West Hills Friends, a Quaker meeting in Portland, Oregon. Among Quakers, "minding the Light" means noticing, listening for and paying heed to the voice of our Teacher.

Early Quakers kept journals about their relationships with God and shared them with the community. For example, John Woolman's Journal has been continually in print for more than 200 years. By publishing stories from our community, we hope to continue the Quaker tradition of disclosing God's activity in our lives.

Each issue is organized around a specific query about minding the Light. Our writers speak from their own experience, not going beyond the measure of Light they've been given. We hope these stories will transform our way of seeing God and each other and that they will bring comfort to those who seek news of God's presence in the world.

Young Friend's Story

Query: *When has God helped you see someone differently (like a friend or a teacher or a family member)?*

I have a new boy in my class this year and he sits next to me. At first I thought he was annoying and I wished he wasn't in my class. He kept interrupting the teacher during math. If I looked over at his side of the table he would say that I was copying his work, but then he would copy my work.

One day, at lunch in the cafeteria, I was at the other end of the table from him and everybody around him was laughing because he was being funny. Then he changed seats to sit with my friends and me and started doing lots of funny stuff that made me laugh. The next week we worked together on a school project and we helped each other. I realized he was nice and funny. I also realized that since he just moved here he probably feels a little uncomfortable and needs friends.

Now I really like him and we are friends. We have fun together and sometimes play games. I help him with his

English and he helps me with my Spanish. I'm glad that God helped me see the new boy in a different way and I am glad that I have a new friend. 

—Beatrice, age 7

One Little Prayer

In 1999, doctors removed half my husband's liver and gall bladder to eliminate a tumor. Bill was expected home in ten days, but he survived 67 in ICU. His nurse John was polite and thorough, but I found him very irritating. He never laughed or smiled, wouldn't mention Bill had visitors, and worst of all, called me Ma'am! Arrgghh!

I tried to communicate with John. After sleeping at home, I would ask if anyone had visited and get only a yes or no. No names. No times. Not even the slightest smile. And the "ma'am" thing... I asked him to call me Jeanine, but all I heard was ma'am! He was from the South; it was a term of respect. I insisted "Jeanine" was all the respect I needed.

Meanwhile, Bill looked horrible. Day one, puffy, his kidneys stopped. Day two, on dialysis. Day three, still unconscious, his eyes rolled back. I don't know how I managed to teach all day and spend long nights in the hospital, but that's what I did, saving my leave for Bill's return home.

The fourth day, before leaving for the hospital, I said a prayer. "Lord, you know I want to see Bill, but I'm really having a hard time with John. Please, help me get through this."

On my way in, I learned OHSU nurses were on verge of a strike. Oh, wow. Our district had gotten close. Talk about stress. I decided to say something to John.

"I heard you're close to striking. As a teacher, I've been there, and I know how stressful it can be. I'm sorry."

"You teach? I have so much respect for teachers. It's such an important job."

That morning John cracked a little joke and gave a smile. What a relief! I placed a journal with a sign on the window ledge. John even pointed visitors to it. Now Bill's friends and family could leave messages. And John finally dropped the "ma'am!"

During Bill's 67 days in ICU, he had 33 nurses, John more than others. John became a mainstay of support. While Bill's nurses were admirable, Bill's kids and I came to know and trust John the most. We could ask tough questions: Have you seen patients recover when they're like this, sporadically conscious, with blood pressure down to 32/23? John's actions taught me compassion and honesty while facing hard times. He was gently supportive, especially the day I could not stop crying. He told me he'd never seen anyone so dedicated. (By then I'd gotten leave from work, often slept the night in the chair-turned-cot, and sought every way possible to comfort Bill and communicate friends' loving support.)

John seemed to take Bill's kids and I under a wing that covered the families of his patients, and he attended to us as we navigated this unexpected, challenging road.

After Bill died, I returned with symbolic gifts—full-spectrum lights—to thank the nurses for their sustaining Light. One nurse said enough for me to realize that, most likely, Bill almost died that first night. Probably those first few days were a real stretch to keep him alive. No wonder John wasn't smiling.

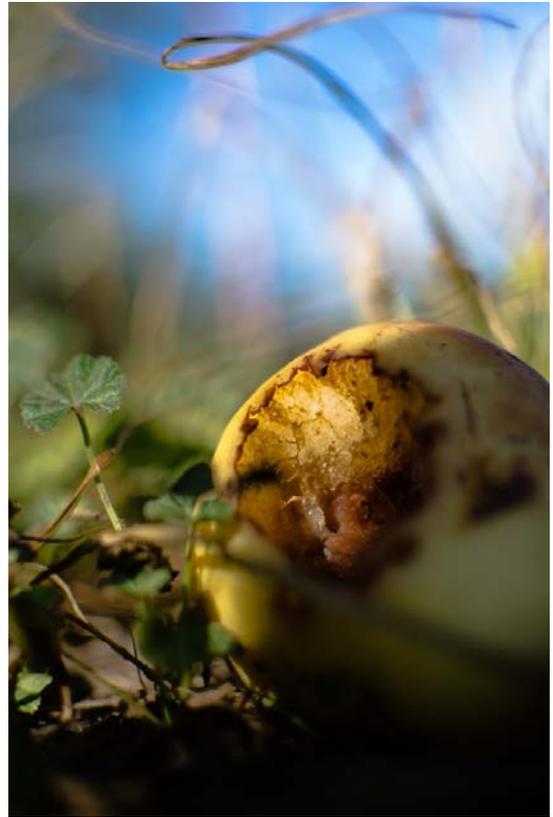
I'm thankful for Spirit's nudge to say that one little prayer, the prayer that opened me to receive such kind support when sorely needed. 

—Jeanine DuBois

Grace

These are the days of transformation
Days where wood smoke scents the air for the first time
Days where the light recedes and we grumble
about how the dinner, that filled the home with warmth and
the smell of cooked down onions, celery and carrots will be
eaten as the sun
sets
Nights where as you approach the bed and nudge the opened
window a bit closer to completely shut
you think about what you failed to do in preparation for these
days
Days of transformation
When the fields lay home to the unpicked fruit and the trails
you never
got to will be iced over,
soon enough.
And so the soul knows the promises we make ourselves
That maybe we will be different, perhaps wiser next time,
but always still full of
grace

—Mark Pratt-Russum



Rotting Fruit, photo by Mark Pratt-Russum

Filling the Void

The third time I got pregnant out of wedlock, I was 24 years old. This pattern developed because I didn't know how to make good decisions. My decisions were often based on doubts and fears. I always wanted to be a mother. I thought it showed respect to accept my circumstances and keep the children I had rather than wanting different circumstances or different children. I was afraid birth control would make me sick; afraid men would judge me for taking them; afraid I'd be taking them for years for no reason.

From where I stand now, I see that I was on the extreme end of the

spectrum, beyond "women who love too much." I was a woman who loved myself too little. I was oppressed by self-judgments arising from the negative words and attitudes toward women that surrounded me growing up; women's lack of intelligence, their subservient purpose in life, their need to stay in the home.

It was very cold that winter because I had no heat, and the windows didn't fit the frames. I was afraid to tell anyone of our plight because I was afraid my children would be taken away from me. I consoled myself by saying there have always been poor people just like me. They did nothing wrong. I had a chair and bed, and I tucked myself and two little ones into bed every night.

I had become a born-again Christian the previous Easter, and I read the Bible every night. One morning as I awoke during the cold winter, I heard distinctly the friendly words of part of a Bible verse: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee." (Jer. 1:5, KJV).

Months later, a Mennonite neighbor gave me a baby shower, and I was given a card at the shower with this same Bible verse. I was unable to murmur a syllable of how it felt for someone to share this Bible verse with me.

The experience felt so meaningful that it gave me hope.

—Eileen

The Wall Between Our Houses

We happily introduced ourselves to our new neighbors when they moved in several years ago. But they purchased the home for their future retirement, which means we rarely see them and have not developed much of a relationship. This summer my husband noticed the retaining wall between our houses was starting to crumble and was in need of an upgrade. He hired a contractor with a good price, but it's taking a long time and the project has required the use of our neighbor's driveway, which has not made them happy. In fact, they are often quite upset with us.

Last week my neighbor once again came over to tell me the contractor was not allowed to use her driveway to deliver supplies. I cringed and apologized. Later that day I went to Starbucks for a pumpkin spice latte as a reward to myself for getting my mammogram. I was told this was my lucky day and due to training a new employee I was getting three lattes for free. On my way home, I felt these urgings in my heart that God had given me all this coffee to use as a peace offering to my neighbor. I went to her door and asked, "Do you like vanilla, hazelnut, or pumpkin spice?" Her eyes lit up with instant delight.

Then I proceeded to give her my perspective on the wall. Yes, it's been a total pain to have our driveway completely torn up and a huge

hassle to all of us. But I have just had to let it go, because in the big scheme of things it's small. I told her about my fears during my recent surgery for melanoma, my deep sadness due to the unexpected and tragic death of my beloved nephew, and then the death of my dear friend's wife from cancer. She looked at me in utter shock and then gave me the biggest hug saying she was so sorry for all my troubles. She said she thought she had seen my nephew come over to visit our house in the past. She asked if I had people praying for me because that was the only way I could get through all of this. I told her about my wonderful West Hills community. She empathized with the pain I was experiencing, explaining that when her mother died it took her five years to heal and her children did not understand. She sent me home with tomatoes from her garden.

The Light gave me coffee and courage, and in return I was given a beautiful connection of human spirits and a new friend. 

-Mari Kay Evans Smith

- Light Brigade*
- Sally Gillette, Clerk
- Mike Huber, Recording Clerk
- Sarah Blanchard
- Carol Bosworth
- Peg Edera
- Pat Matthews
- Julie Peyton
- Cindy Stadel
- Britten Witherspoon
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Queries for Chapter 21

Our next Query: "When has the Light come to you in a time of darkness? Tell us a story about your experience in any publishable format: narratives, poetry, songs, art, other.

Please be encouraged to interpret/translate this query for young Friends or for yourself. For example, you might ask a young Friend, "When has God helped you through a hard time?"

Query for Young Friends (of any age)

"When has God helped you through a hard time?"

We encourage young Friends to participate, so please consider asking very young children in your life whether this query (or a related query in your own words) makes them think of a story. If it does, consider helping the child tell their story in words or images, or ask us for a Story Catcher.

Story Deadline:

January 18, 2015

Need a Story Catcher?

Please let us know if you have a story but don't consider yourself a writer, don't have time, don't feel well, are too young to know how to write stories, or any other reason. We would love to send a story catcher to record your story.

If you can't come to us, we would love to come to you :)

Acceptance and Navigating Grief

“Moses climbed from the Plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, the peak of Pisgah facing Jericho. God showed him all the land from Gilead to Dan, all Naphtali, Ephraim, and Manasseh; all Judah reaching to the Mediterranean Sea; the Negev and the plains which encircle Jericho, City of Palms, as far south as Zoar.

“Then and there God said to him, ‘This is the land I promised to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the words ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I’ve let you see it with your own eyes. There it is. But you’re not going to go in.”

“Moses died there in the land of Moab, Moses the servant of God, just as God said. God buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth Peor. No one knows his burial site to this very day.” Deut. 34.

Last January, Mike and I went to my grandparent’s beach house for Martin Luther King Day. We’ve done this for years. It is often unseasonably warm during that holiday, and we love taking advantage of a nice day at the coast.

Last January, this holiday was especially memorable for me. I woke up from a restful night anxious to tell Mike about my crazy dream. I have vivid wild dreams, but I’d never had one quite like this before. My dream involved my grandma Mary coming to me and giving me a message. I had never dreamed about someone who had died. It felt especially significant because

we were in her house. In my dream, my grandma came to me and said, “Oh, honey. You should read this article in Oprah magazine about Reese Witherspoon. It will help you.”

I thought, “Wow, that’s amazing that my grandma is reading Oprah magazine.”

I turned over the magazine to look at the address label, wondering if she might have one of my old copies. The address label said, “Jesus.” It wasn’t until morning that I realized I was reading it as Hay-zuse because of my students with that name, but actually, it was Jesus.

Jesus has a subscription to Oprah. As I told Mike, I laughed out loud and said I should google Reese Witherspoon and Oprah magazine sometime. I hadn’t seen a Reese Witherspoon movie in years and I wondered what sparked my subconscious to dream that dream. We both laughed and I forgot about it.

At my small group meeting, I mentioned my crazy dream to them and someone mentioned Reese Witherspoon was going to star in a movie about a book. I decided to get more proactive and Google Reese and Oprah. What happened next was amazing. I found out that Oprah had chosen the book “Wild” to be her first book club 2.0. As is turned out, Reese Witherspoon would be starring in a movie as the lead character of the book. Oprah had also done an interview with Cheryl Strayed, the author.

I mentioned this crazy story to my friend, Jenn, one day when I was visiting her in the hospital. She said, “I have that book! I read it. I will pass it on to you.” I thought, “great” and I let it go.

Time marched on and I kind of forgot about the book. I knew I would eventually read it and find out what grandma wanted me to know. I just went about reading other books from the library.

Months later, I decided to read the Oprah interview with Cheryl Strayed. The article said that “Wild” was about carrying the weight we cannot bear...how to bear what we cannot. Oprah ends the interview by saying this is what I got from the book. “No matter where you are in your climb in life, no matter what you’re doing, you have to keep getting up and doing what you have to do.” After reading the interview, I decided I just needed to get the book and read it. I was worrying about some people in my life and I thought, maybe this book was meant to help me understand what to do.

I got the book from the library and read it at the end of this summer. The book “Wild” is about a young woman, in her early twenties, who loses her mother to cancer. Only one month passes from diagnosis to her death. Cheryl’s life is torn apart and she begins a series of self-destructive behaviors in the wake of her grief. Her true healing begins when she decides to

leave everything behind and hike the Pacific Crest Trail alone. The book “Wild” is about acceptance. It’s about accepting what seems impossible to accept.

I love to hike and I thought the message of accepting hardships in our lives was helpful. I wondered if grandma knew about my friend with cancer or about my loved one that I was trying to help.

Believe it or not, I finished the book “Wild” about a week before Griffin died. Right after he died, I realized the significance of my grandma’s message to me. I believe she knew I was going to lose my dear son. She was reaching out trying to help me bear the unbearable...accept what felt beyond acceptance.

Late this summer, my friend Jenn gave me her copy of “Wild”. In the last couple weeks, I have reread “Wild” underlining passages, searching for some answer, message or sign of hope. Last night I underlined a quote from Cheryl’s brother. He says, “It’s reality. And reality is what we have to accept, like it or not.”

At the beginning of the story, Cheryl talks about being the woman with a hole in her heart. After being on the Pacific Crest Trail for more than a month, she writes...”It seemed like a long time and also it seemed like my trip had just begun, like I was now only digging into whatever it was I was out here to do. Like I was still the woman with the hole in her heart, but the hole had gotten ever so infinitesimally smaller.”

As I looked at Griffin one last time, lying in front of me under that white sheet, my mouth uttered sounds so grief stricken and painful. After the terrible sounds of grief, my mouth started uttering in waves of repetition, “He’s in heaven, he’s in heaven, he’s in heaven!” Then it changed to, “I believe, I believe, I believe!” What came out of me that day was out of my control. The sounds and words flowed without asking me first. I had an involuntary acceptance of what was lying in front of me, despite not wanting it to be true.

Every night and every morning, my mind goes to the place of remembering what has happened and trying to grasp the reality of the situation. I believe acceptance of this loss will take a lifetime and more, and yet, like Oprah said upon reflection on the book “Wild”, “No matter the obstacle in front of you, you just have to keep getting up and doing what you have to do.”

A few weeks after Griffin died, I headed up to Mt. Hood to hike the McNeil Point trail that we were going to do together. I hiked eleven miles that day. It was one of the most strenuous uphill hikes I’d ever done, and I did it alone. My mind was focused on the beauty, trying not to fall, and trying to keep up my

stamina to complete the trek. I thought about Cheryl Strayed’s trek alone on the Pacific Crest Trail. I thought about what Griffin and I would have talked about on the journey. At one

point on the trail, my body broke out in a run. I was going to make it to the top no matter what.



Perched on a boulder with a breathtaking view of Mt. Hood’s peak over my shoulder, I asked some folks to take my picture with a photo I had brought of Griffin. It was a moment of grief. It was a moment of accomplishment. It was a moment of acceptance. I knew I would head back down the mountain and he would still be gone. Nothing will change that. But for the moment, on that mountain, I was able to breathe deeply despite being at 7000 feet.

I don’t see myself taking three months away from my sweet family to hike the Pacific Crest Trail alone. I do realize that hiking has been a source of healing and I know I will continue to hike. People have handed us countless books on grief. One day, we got three different books. So far, they all just sit in a pile next to the enormous basket of cards. I know, someday, I will feel like I can look at them, but for now, I am unable. Somehow, this book “Wild” has given me some pieces of help.

MINDING THE LIGHT

CHAPTER 20: WHEN HAS THE LIGHT CHANGED YOUR PERCEPTION OF SOMEONE OR SOME THING?

Accepting the loss of Griffin is not a choice. It is reality. Somehow I'm forced to bear the unbearable.

Before Moses died, God takes him up a mountain so he can view all of the Promised Land...the land where he will never get to live. Somehow, after all that Moses had been through, he had to accept the fact that he would never get to go to the Promised Land. The land he had worked endlessly to get his people to...the land that was promised to him. Every day he got up and faced the obstacles in front of him and kept on moving forward doing what he had to do. It's amazing he didn't give up even with the knowledge of knowing he wouldn't get to go into the Promised Land. I wonder if it gave him some sense of peace to at least see it from a distance before he died.

Somehow, when faced with what seems unbearable, we have to figure out how to bear it and get up and keep moving forward. Everything around us marches forward: time, the seasons, our lives. Things didn't work out the way Moses planned and hoped. Somehow, life went on. He lived. He got a glimpse of the land before he died.

My story began on Martin Luther King Day. In his "I have a dream speech", he said,

"I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." "I've Been to the Mountaintop", April 3, 1968.

My life story is not the life story I dreamed I would have. Acceptance is not my choice, but it is my reality. 

—Erica Huber

[Erica brought this message at West Hills Friends on Sunday, Nov. 2 You can listen to the message at this Link on SoundCloud:
<http://tinyurl.com/lweay75>]

Connections

I suspect there are others of you who feel like I do. Many times, when I'm in a large group of people, I feel very alone. That may seem odd, but it's true. I may be surrounded by people, often people I know, but I feel very small and practically invisible. I don't really feel connected to anyone when I'm in a large group...but Minding the Light helps change that.

When my copy arrives in the mail I open it to see who has contributed this time, but then put it away for reading during my quiet, reflective time in the morning.

The next morning, when God and I have tea together, I start reading. I like the feel of the paper in my hand. It feels like a part of me, and the words on the paper are held, creating more of a connection between the writer and me. I pace myself so that I get to enjoy it longer. I slowly read the first two gifts, two per day, for they are indeed gifts from the people who've written. These are gifts of themselves, glimpses into who they are and what's contributed to their very beings.

When I read these gifts, I feel very connected to the people who've written. I hold their gift in my heart and when finished, say a prayer of thanks for them and for each writer's life. I often say to myself, "Wow! I've got to let them know how much this moves me", but then usually my day gets in the way and I forget to send an email.

But when I attend our Meeting and see the people who've written, I feel a special connection to each person who has shared his or her gift...an invisible, gossamer thread of connection. I've thought of Peg's coming to know God at 10 years old, of Mica's longing for God's presence, Greg's beautiful experiences in nature, KD's experience when a stranger unexpectedly handed her an umbrella during a Texas downpour, Margie's experiences in Haiti, God's joke to Mike upon finding empty clams, Carol's poems, Thea's pancake surprise, Annie's love for a little girl from Korea...the list goes on and on... Sally, Wilbur, Pat, Anne Marie, Jill, Derek, Adam, Sarah, Ryan, Mari Kay...more than I can name. Each person is treasured in my heart and thanked for sharing his or her gift.

So this is a thank you...both to the many contributors and to the marvelous group of people who make this happen. Thank you not only for the gift of Minding the Light and all it contains, but also for making possible a spiritual/emotional connection...a web of shimmering gossamer strands...that establish a sweet connection between the writers and me, one of just many readers blessed by their reflections and stories. 

—Anne A

Dazzled

My son Griffin dazzled me.
I couldn't look away.
Each moment of his life was aglow,
white-hot from the forge of living.

When Griffin died,
the forge of his life went dark.
His life no longer burns through the present.
All the moments of his life
are of equal brightness to me now.
Each moment is a memory:
Griffin made coffee with cinnamon,
he loved the long take in movies,
he read about dinosaurs,
he laughed around the plug of his pacifier.
It's all one chain now.
All these memories
are equally present.

Sometimes, a life is revealed by the Light.
Sometimes, it is revealed by darkness.
I have 22 years of memory.
I see every moment with heart-wrenching clarity,
because my eyes are no longer dazzled
by the present. 
—Mike Huber

I had many chances to encounter this man at church. He never missed a Sunday, a potluck or retreat. I tried to neutralize my reaction to his jive, and I almost succeeded.

Unfortunately, when he started teasing my kids, I was furious, not only with this man, but with God. Why weren't my prayers to love everyone in my community working? If I couldn't love this man, couldn't I at least feel neutral toward him?

I decided to do a Good Thing. My Nemesis had to follow a special diet for his heart condition. He asked the church for prayers for sticking to it, as he loved rich desserts. The next potluck, I took pains to bake a cheesecake I knew was delicious but healthier. I made a little sign for the cheesecake, listing the ingredients declaring it as heart-healthy. He joked that probably tasted like cardboard and refused to try it. As I watched him shovel fatty desserts onto his plate, I made an inward decision to stop trying with this guy.

Months later, he had the heart attack the doctor warned might occur. His only hope was an experimental heart surgery only given to people near death. Immediately, the Light led me to pray for him. I prayed, first tentative and awkward, and later as fervent as if he were my best friend. The Light led me to stop several times in my very busy day to pray for this man's heart. Without even wanting to, I began to care about him. While in prayer I visualized how precious he was to his family, who would be lost without him. It was as if my prayers for his heart were softening my own heart, which had begun to harden toward this man.

My compassion for him grew daily, prayer-by-prayer. In due time, he fully recovered from surgery, and soon was up to his old tricks. This didn't seem to hinder my acceptance of him or my new affection. Prayer changed me, not my nemesis. Perhaps the reason Jesus asked us to pray for our enemies is so we would no longer be able to see them as enemies, but as God sees them: with love and compassion. 
—Claire Nail

How I Lost My Nemesis

"...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
Matthew 5:44

I once attended church with a man who regularly joked about women, poor people, and those he felt were despised by God and hell-bent. If I expressed my feelings about these slurs, he'd drag me into a long-winded argument that tried my patience. He loved to argue, even more

if I responded to his bait. He labeled me as The Liberal, and said he felt sorry for my husband since I was such a Women's Libber.

This taunting would have been bad enough in a secular context, but he spiritualized his prejudices, insisting the Bible endorsed his views. Occasionally, I protested that the Jesus I knew was gentler than the one he championed. He would just laugh and roll his eyes.

The Big Wave

When my grandmother was 90 years old, she moved in with my mother in Chicago, and she lived with her another 20 years. Mom was miserable with her mother's criticism, so I wrote to her from Portland every week for the first year.

My grandmother passed away in 2005 and my mom and I planned a trip to New Orleans together. My mom had been there in August 1943 after graduating from high school, and she wanted to go back. We planned to go in August.

Two months after grandma died, my Mom had lab tests taken. I was with her when she was told it was lung cancer (4th stage). The trip to New Orleans was off.

When I returned to Portland, I could hear a melody in my head with the phrase "I'm walking on sunshine o-o-o-o." It was not very familiar to me.

My mother passed away in September 2005, and I went to Chicago for the memorial with my two daughters. On the drive from the memorial to the luncheon, the song I'd been hearing in my head came on the radio. I asked my daughters if they knew the name of the song, and one of them did. She said it was "Walking on Sunshine," and she had a recording if I wanted to hear it. I remembered that my Mom once told me that she related to the word 'sunshine' in songs. Later I discovered that the name of the group that recorded the song, "Walking on Sunshine" was Katrina and the Waves.

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 24, 2005, the month my mother and I would have gone to commemorate her visit after high school.

These connections felt meaningful to me, and I wondered if there was a message for me about life, death and fate. My grandmother loved holding babies, and it made me happy to think that she was brought to heaven in time to receive the babies that died in the storm. 

—Eileen

Dominos of Love

Choosing a single instance when following the light revolutionized my life seems impossible. Each time I have stopped and listened to my own inner voice something magical has happened. As a child, I recall setting up dominos in rows and mazes just for the pure joy of observing the chain reaction when they connected and came tumbling down, simply to be built again in another unique pattern. In a similar way, my actions of listening and acting have created a series of chain reactions. Each new "domino" brings something new. New freedom. New insight. New joy. New life.

Since coming to West Hills I've found myself placing Dominos closer together with profoundly transformative outcomes.

Last November, I requested a care committee. I couldn't define or explain precisely why. I just knew

I needed more joy in my life, and I was tired of always feeling alone. Last spring, I began EMDR therapy for post-traumatic stress. Soon afterward, I chose to leave a job I loved and risk trying something new. Over the summer, I celebrated every Friday at the beach with my children and friends as I waited for the right job to surface. In mid-August, I took a job in Pinedale, Wyoming.

I'll travel to Pinedale seven times this school year and work from home the rest of the time. This job has brought new energy. When home, I'm fully present with my children every afternoon and I have time for chores around the house that are meaningful to both Ryan and me. My commute to work takes 30 seconds as technology connects me with co-workers, children, and families far away, in interesting new ways that remind me why I love my job. Everything in Pinedale is new to me—climate, people, culture, nature. I have watched a moose cross a street, and I walk often near Pine Creek, a small river that runs through town.

But there is something else about Wyoming that has affected my ever constant transformation: I was there when I learned that Griffin died. That evening I sat near the river taking in all of the peace, hope, and love that this small body of running water had to offer. I'm glad I lingered there that night. This River is an anchor that holds the power to both embrace and calm a storm simultaneously.

In the wake of Griffin's death, I observed another anchor. One I have never had in my own life. Nonetheless I could see this man's light shining so brightly in the midst of his darkest grief. For weeks after Griffin's death love overcame me in floods. Love that others had experienced through Griffin. Love that had been poured into Griffin his entire life. Love that I had begun to experience myself but had not been able to name; for the first time in my life, I knew what a father's love looks and feels like.

As I think back on all of the life changing decisions that I've made, I now see that I acted out of love. Love for life. Love for others. Love for myself.

This is the beauty of following the light. Of listening. Of love. We may not always know how important our dominoes are when we put them down. A single domino can be profound. A lifetime of dominoes can leave a flame that never dies. 🔥

—Sarah Blanchard

Change in Perception

After reading this query I tried to think of a sudden insight that had changed my perception immediately and irrevocably, forever transforming me. I couldn't think of one. Instead I thought of the gradual change in my perception of my marriage.

I think of myself as a cat. Sleek and self-contained. Maybe a bit prissy. Definitely discriminating

and probably fastidious. I am assuredly self-possessed. I strive to be composed and poised and in control of every situation. I imagine myself sitting in a picture window, regally licking a paw and using it to groom my already perfect coat. I don't mind showing and receiving affection – but I prefer that it be moderated and proper.

I think of my husband, on the other hand, as a dog. Probably a Saint Bernard. Puppy. He is big and eager and clumsy.

Imagine me, sitting in my bay window, and, suddenly, the door to the room opens and in bounds this huge, ungainly puppy. He rushes over, licking me and almost knocking me down. He trips over my water, spilling most of it. He steps in my food and then slobbers on my favorite catnip stuffed toy. I am appalled. I don't know what this creature is or what he is doing in my room. He wants to be friends, to shower me with affection and to be showered with affection in return.

This is how I've seen our marriage. I am a cat and he is a dog. I spent a lot of years thinking that everything would be perfect if my husband could just learn to be a cat. If only he weren't so big and friendly and outgoing and eager and familiar and affectionate and affable and awkward. So puppy-like.

In short, I knew that being a cat was right and being a dog was wrong. Cats good. Dogs bad. I had lots of advice and ideas about

how my husband could stop being a dog and start being a cat. I thought this was an area where Divine Grace could really go to work on my husband.

Instead, Divine Grace went to work on me. Years of thinking about The Light and seeking The Light and striving to mind The Light slowly began to show me that it's all right to be a dog. That, in fact, dogs – even Saint Bernard puppies – are good. They are lovable, and loving, and perfect – just the way they are.

This change in perception has been hard to come by. And it is something that I have to keep reminding myself of. When I'm sitting in my bay window I am not always happy to see him rush into the room.

I sometimes have to keep myself from recoiling or bolting or swatting him with my paw. But more and more I am genuinely happy to see him bound in. I am more often able to share my food, to ask him to mop up the spilled water, to just pretend I didn't see him slobbering on my toy.

More and more, minding the Light brings me to an awareness that I am happy to be a cat, loving a dog, who loves a cat. 🔥

—Mica Coffin

No one knows his name—
a man who lives on the streets
and walks around in
rags.

Once I saw that man in a dream.
He and God were constructing
an extraordinary
temple.

—St Francis of Assisi