

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 15

WHEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE LIGHT THROUGH A MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY?

I have often felt a motion of love to leave some hints in writing of my experience of the Goodness of *God*.

John Woolman

Finding the Light in Hospitality

My family has shown me the Light through their hospitality. When my grandparents were young adults, they hosted a weekly event at First Friends Meeting. It was called, "Friday Nights." I think this happened in the late 1930's. Grandpa would drive around the neighborhood and fill up his car with as many as 13 children. Other children walked to the meetinghouse. My grandma always provided snacks. My grandpa taught wood shop during the day, so his craft project usually had something to do with woodcraft.

My grandparents were not wealthy, but they were always incredibly generous. "Friday Nights" was just one of many ways they shared their Light with their community. For decades, my grandma provided food and treats for church events. She served others until the end of her life. When she was nearly ninety-two, she could be found setting up the chairs for the Vespers meeting at Friendsview Manor.

My folks continued to model this tradition of generosity. I can't even begin to cover all the many ways they have shown Light to me and their community. When I was a teenager, my dad helped other teenagers without a support system get into college. He would help them fill out applications, get scholarships and figure out where to go. To this day, these folks stop me in

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the store and tell me what an amazing thing my dad did for them. My mom led all kinds of groups for adults and kids. I watched her give love, support, energy and creativity to all her endeavors. We couldn't walk through the mall without stopping every ten feet. People wanted to express their gratitude for my mom's work as a teacher, campfire leader, Sunday school leader or friend.

When Mike and I started West Hills Friends, my folks left the meeting they had attended for decades to come and help us. They have provided leadership and hospitality throughout their twenty-five years at West Hills Friends.

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 relationship with God to share with the community. A well-known example is John Woolman's journal, which has been continually in print for more than 200 years. Quakers believe that the Light of Christ is in everyone and that God speaks to everyone, giving us all stories to tell. We hope to carry on the tradition of sharing stories about minding the Light by publishing them for our community and making them available to others on the web.

Each issue is organized around a 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.

Observing the gift of hospitality in my relatives has shaped who I am today. At age twenty-four, I drew on this foundation as Mike and I began West Hills Friends. Most of the time, we didn't know what we were doing; however, I was confident that a plate of cookies would somehow help the process along. Twenty-five years later, we often still feel like we don't know what we're doing, but sharing God's light through hospitality has remained a clear leading. 

– Erica Huber

Young Friend's Story, Untitled

Query: When did your family, or a neighbor, or a teacher help you see something special about yourself or the world around you?

My substitute teacher made me feel good about my birthday. She was really nice to us. She gave me a birthday pencil, she complimented my necklace, and she let everybody count the apples on my shirt and have a look at them.

You and daddy made me feel good about my birthday because you're taking me out to sushi. You're getting me a chocolate marshmallow cake, which makes me feel very special.

Ms. Hawes told me that in space there are eight planets and there used to be nine, but that Pluto is too small to be a planet. If scientists hadn't gone out there, then no one would know what's out there, and then we would be in big trouble if we went out to space.

My music teacher, she is the one who --not **told** me-- but her feeling just urged my voice to go out and all over the room. 

– F.V., age 6, as told to her mother

Next Query for Young Friends

We encourage the participation of young Friends (of any age), so please consider asking a child in your life whether this query 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.

Query for Young Friends (or older Friends who prefer this query):

When has it seemed like God helped you feel better?

Story Deadline: 11/24/13

Kate

"If you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."
Mt. 21:22

I have learned more from Kate about compassion and empathy than from all of the books, theology, teaching and wise counsel yet received. Kate is my 27-year-old niece who happens to have Downs Syndrome. With a ready smile, a twinkle in her eye and a good word for all, she is a walking sunbeam who radiates love and Light wherever she goes. This is just one in my collection of Kate stories.

After months of moving rocks, plowing the field, planting grass and flowers, the wedding site was beginning to look green,

lush, ready to welcome the couple and their guests for the long-awaited ceremony. June 30, according to the Farmer's Almanac, would be dry and sunny. Tents were erected, tables set, flowers arranged, as the dark clouds rolled over the back pasture. When the torrential rains began, Kate was standing under the barn's awning with the groom and another son-in-law who were discussing possibilities of a plan B. Their faces reflected dismay, disappointment and helplessness as we all witnessed months of well-intentioned plans flooding away. Our groom was worried, our bride was frantic, the father of the bride was pacing, while I, the mother, anxiously tried to navigate and appease the minefield of volatile emotions that swirled about me.

Kate abruptly turned her back to the young men, looked out at the mountains and with seemingly prophetic confidence, raised her hands and made her plea to God for the rains to stop for her cousin's wedding. A few minutes later she turned back to them and smiled with all of the assurance of a 'done deal'. Kate reassured the groom that it was all going to turn out fine (The groom confided in me later that at that point he knew that it would be alright). She then made her way up to the house where she told the bride and bridesmaids not to worry; God was going to stop the rain.

Rain continued to pour for the next couple of hours as guests began to pile into our living room wondering about our

plan B. In our myopia, we hadn't one. One hundred and twenty people in the living room would be mayhem...not a plan.

At 5:05 p.m. (five minutes past the appointed time), those rain clouds parted to make way for azure blue skies. With jubilant hearts, the wedding party assembled to parade onto the wedding site. Mud-covered high heels were kicked off, and a joyous, soggy, barefooted ceremony ensued with all of the freshness and life of the rain itself. As vows were exchanged, a double rainbow punctuated the awe that already pervaded the scene.

For the remainder of the evening and well into the morning hours, the weather held. Kate cheerfully embraced new friends. When dancing began, Kate was one of the first to the dance floor and danced the whole night.

I know that the "rain falls on the just and the unjust", but also believe that the simple prayers offered in faith by Kate carried immense force to move mountains that day, providing blessings of joy and relief for me and a host of others. 

– AW

"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."

Albert Schweitzer

Night Light

Our room was shaped like an L – my sister Kathy's bed at one end and mine at the other. Four years stretched between us. Sometimes it was a small stretch, like our room. At other times, those four years were like a continent. In the dark, when I was very young, it was both.

I often greeted "lights-out" with fear. It was such a lonely time, and my loneliness would become fear and my parents easily tired of my worry. But my sister Kathy did not. Into the pitch dark of our northwest-facing room, she would start telling me about Noodle, Strudel and Topple – three girls, always older than I yet younger than she, who lived on the teaching planet called Biff.

The full moon never shined into that room. Streetlights did not even exist on our road. Night time was dark time, and my bed was no longer a cradle. Yet somehow, my sister called in the

Light. Her voice, free floating in the dark, always drifting toward me, was the night-light that brought me comfort.

And those three sisters, Noodle, Strudel and Topple, always knew how to show me the next way to carry on, to cope, to survive, to get through to what was next no matter what. And yes, I know now, my sister was Noodle and she was Strudel and she was Topple, too. And so was I. 
– Peg Edera

Publication Guidelines

The Journal is a forum for sharing experiences of the Light. Thus, we distinguish between a story ("this is what happened to me") and an interpretation ("this is what my experience means"). We urge writers to keep the level of interpretation to a minimum, allowing each story to touch the reader as a work of art, rather than as a philosophical or theological argument.

Stories and other written responses must be 500 words or less, and written in the first person by a member or attender of West Hills Friends. Written responses should be submitted in text format in the body of an email.

Original paintings, photos, and other art can be submitted on paper or emailed in JPG format. Original music and videos should be submitted as links to safe websites such YouTube or Vimeo.

More information at:
www.mindingthelight.org

Query for Chapter 16

Our next Query: "When have you felt comforted by God? Tell us a story about a time when you felt comforted by the Light in the midst of fear, loneliness or another hard place in your life.

Your stories can be submitted in any publishable format: narratives, poetry, songs, art, other.

We publish stories as told to the extent that they fit within our guidelines.

Story Deadline: 11/24/13

Held

When I was growing up, my grandmother practiced a very different faith tradition than the one I was raised in. It seemed alien to me, and parts of it were even disturbing. She once told me a story, however, that very much informed my ideas about prayer and intercession and God "hearing" us. A few years ago I told her what an impact the story had made on me and she didn't even remember the experience. But for me, it has always been an affirmation of the Light.

She was on her way to church one Sunday, taking a shortcut through an alley behind a discount store, when she noticed a man sleeping in the alley. He looked as if he could use some help. She felt called to stop and give him some money, but she was a reader that morning and running late for the service. She continued on to church, but throughout the service she prayed for him and affirmed that God would care for him.

After church, she returned to the alley and, holding out a five dollar bill, approached the man, who was now awake. The man seemed stunned, and when she offered the money he said, in a tone of disbelief, "Keep your money, Lady. Look what happened while I was asleep." He opened up his shirt and showed her that while he was sleeping someone had stuffed his shirt full of money.

The way my grandmother held this man in her prayer, her concern, and her love remind me of the Quaker idea of holding

someone or something in the Light. I sometimes think of our prayers as hammocks we weave to hold and support each other. I imagine this stranger, cradled in that hammock, as my grandmother gently rocked it with her prayers. 

—Mica Coffin

Light Brigade*

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She Is My Light

I cried in the car recently. As everyone knows, cars have a no-crying-allowed rule.

My daughter has an ongoing tantrum problem, and we've been at wit's end trying to figure out how to stop them, or at least shorten them. So when Taylor told me she found something that helps her calm down, I was thrilled! She turned on the iPad, and played an Alicia Keys song called "Never Felt This Way." The song is about someone she loves, and how all she needs is that person in her life. Taylor told me the song reminds her that all she needs are her parents, and that keeps her calm.

I told her that I have a song that reminds me of her as well. I had the CD in the car at the time, so I played it for her. I figured she'd

like the song, but I hadn't expected her to ask me to explain why it reminds me of her. I told her I wasn't sure I could tell her without crying, but I'd give it a try:

"Taylor, for most people who believe in God, like you do, there are lots of reasons to have hope. People who believe in God usually believe that God is with them all the time and that someday, after they die, they'll get to meet God, and talk to God, and ask any kind of question they want to ask.

"People like me, we don't have that kind of hope, as nice as it sounds. And sometimes, it's hard to find reasons to stay happy about what's going on in life. If we're sad about something, we don't have that magical idea to hold onto, that someday it will all be ok. For me, when I really need it, the happiest idea I can turn to is you. You give me more hope, love, and encouragement than anyone or anything else in my life." 

—Ryan Blanchard

I Will Not Let Go
 by David Bazan

*When you get this message
 I'll be high above the Earth
 Thinking 'bout the promises that I keep
 When I touch down in Texas
 Land in Dallas/Fort Worth
 I will call you up, and wake you from
 your sleep.*

*I will not let go of you
 Who or what controls the fates of men
 I cannot say
 But I keep arriving safely home to you
 And I humbly acknowledge
 That I won't always get my way
 But darling, death will have to pry my
 fingers loose*

Against the Tide of Cruelty

At some point in our childhood the painting of the farmer and his wife giving thanks in a field of freshly dug potatoes was taken down from its place above the dining table, and replaced with a photo of an atomic bomb exploding at night over the Nevada desert.

My father worked for the Lawrence Radiation Laboratories in Livermore, California. For weeks on end he was away, joining engineers and scientists, testing nuclear bombs in the South Pacific and the American badlands. The unimaginable power of the split atom fascinated him, nearly obsessed him. Having aided the technologies that defeated Hitler and the Japanese in World War Two, he struggled with the tension between the good and the evil use of this new and unprecedented power. He made a good living. We were well provided and comfortable on our grandfather's 70-acre almond and walnut ranch in California's fertile Central Valley. It was the 50's. Life was sweet.

But with the 60's came Viet Nam and the draft, and the sudden irruption of a revolutionary collective consciousness in the minds of America's youth, his own children, now blossoming into young adults. He could no longer resolve the conflict. He could no longer tolerate his participation in the system that had killed and maimed so many, and was slouching steadily toward greater catastrophe. In addition to his work on nuclear

weapons he was also privy to technologies of surveillance the government was developing to invade the privacy of their own people.

Dad quit his job, openly disclosing his reasons, accepting no severance or pension. He did odd jobs, electronic repair, drafting, teaching. Dad devoted all his spare time to the cause of nuclear disarmament. We were no longer upper-middle class, and eventually, some years after grandfather died, we had to sell the remains of the ranch, which by then consisted of a bunch of dead trees surrounded by the influx of suburbia and strip malls.

But I remember one thing. In the days after my father quit his job, the photo of the bomb was taken down and the painting of the farmer and his wife praying in a field of potatoes was restored to its place above the dining room table.

Thank you, Dad. You did the right thing. 

Postscript: A few years ago, I was in a songwriting group and the assignment was to write a song about someone you admire. Immediately I thought of my father and his story, and I wrote a song called "Against the Tides of Cruelty." A YouTube video of that song can be found online at: <http://tinyurl.com/mbqt6m4>
—Jim Nail



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It's better to have a partner than go it alone.

*Share the work, share the wealth.
And if one falls down, the other helps,*

But if there's no one to help, tough!

*Two in a bed warm each other.
Alone, you shiver all night.*

*By yourself you're unprotected.
With a friend you can face the worst.*

*Can you round up a third?
A three-stranded rope isn't easily snapped*
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (The Message)

Are You There, Papa?

The web of Alzheimer's disease is a thief of the worst sort. Much like a spider, it sucks out bit by bit a loved one's mind and personality so that eventually only a barely functioning shell remains. The web reaches through the brain of the afflicted, tangling it with plaques so they can no longer think or communicate, and the person they once were disappears.

My father's dementia was well along in its inevitable progression, so much so that he could no longer communicate and rarely opened his eyes. He lay in bed, unable to move, unable to eat unless he was fed very slowly, unable to talk or communicate. The strong, competent, intellectually curious man was either hidden deep inside or completely gone. Bit by bit, month after month, there was less and less of the man who was my father, or so it seemed.

My father was never a religious person; actually he usually

scoffed at any outward show of religion or spirituality. But one time, at a particularly difficult time in his life, my neighbor told me that he'd asked her to say a prayer for him. Somewhere, I knew, my dad had some pull toward God and the Spirit...if only it was to ask someone else to intervene on his behalf.

At that time in my life, I was attending a conventional Christian church with traditional beliefs about what it took to be "saved." Mark was a person at that church whose thoughtful and contemplative approach to life I admired. I asked him to come with me to see my dad so that I could gain some clarity as to his future care. Mark obliged by taking time off from work at Intel to meet me at the nursing home.

At my dad's bedside, I introduced him to Mark. There was no response from dad – no blinking, no eye movement, nothing. Mark began to talk to him about the Spirit and about accepting Jesus into his heart. He told dad that he was going to ask him a question and if my dad wanted to reply he could do that, even if it was only in his mind or heart. He then asked dad if he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. My dad, though he couldn't talk, actually tried to talk! He tried his best to respond. I believe that somehow in the tangled mess of his mind, he heard and understood and tried his best to respond.

My dad died about half a year later, and my heart is at peace because I believe my father did,

as best he could, accept Jesus/Spirit into his heart.

Though I don't believe it's magic words that "get us into heaven," I do believe a loving heart that reaches out is met with love and acceptance in return. 

—Anne A

"We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own."
Ben Sweetland

My Sister, My Mother

One hot summer day about five years ago, I found my sister deceased in her apartment. I felt that her Spirit had definitely departed. Thankfully, she was with God, but it broke my heart at the time. Although 12 years apart, we were close as our mother suffered from severe bouts of depression. She took care of me.

Three years of difficult probate followed to get her affairs in order. Now, I'm glad my memories are focused on the good times we had together and how much we loved each other. I am still deeply moved to tears by her poetry which touches my Spirit with the knowledge that she lives on. I would like to share some of her poetry with you in loving memory

Nigh's Song: Nightingales

Nightingales, little birds who sing at night...and here am I, in this remote forest at the foot of the Cascades. And I sing for Him, songs from my heart at night...always at night.

The moon, the stars, and deep silence are my companions and I warble upon the bough of remoteness by the river in this great forest...but I am never really alone. He is always near, and when I finish one song, He sings to me in silence, and another song is given...always songs of love, sometimes joyous and delightful, sometimes of sadness and suffering, but always songs of love.

So these songs are my poems and I offer them to you with a surrendered and loving heart.

Beyond Illusion

Sometimes I look at all the people and countries, planets, galaxies and universes, expanding and contracting ... birthing and dying. And it seems I am a no - thing - just a tiny moth in darkness madly searching for the light.

And sometimes strange synchronicities happen...too many...unbelievable! Then I know my reality is only a flimsy painted curtain. Oh, to find a hidden corner of this divisive veil; look behind it and see Who or What is turning all the wheels.

The Unveiling

One, by one, by one, a light begins to bloom softly in the darkness. With each veil tossed back into the night,

It grows, and grows, and grows... then breaks forth in brilliant splendor... until she is revealed in all innocence - a glorious and enchanting beauty...My radiant essence... This divine flame...My true self...

A Thousand White Doves

A thousand white doves flew into my heart... Shattering it all asunder... Brilliant white light... Terrible piercing tenderness... Thousands of pure white wings... Fluttering... fluttering... fluttering.. fluttering.

Presence

...and in your life, let my remembrance linger as something not to trouble or disturb it, but to complete it – adding life to life...and if at times, beside your evening fire, you see my face among the other faces...let it not be regarded as a ghost that haunts your house, but as a guest that loves you.

Windows of Perception

Oh, fly with God, wild bright spirit! Bird of my heart, fly, fly with God! 

– Submitted by Margie Simmons
[Poetry by Galya, “Nigh”
Gunderson 1933-2008]

My Mentor

As a child, I listened to the story of Saul's conversion and transformation into Paul. The story made it sound easy; well, maybe a little scary too. Saul is on the road to Damascus and God comes to him. Paul's transformation overtakes him. He does not have to choose to be transformed.

Cancer is like that too. You don't choose to have cancer. It is something that happens to you. What I missed in the story about Saul is that he got to choose how he would respond to

his transforming experience. He could choose to accept his transforming experience or he could have fought against it and denied it.

I was given this story several weeks ago. A man has lost his right lower leg. Each day his therapists and doctors come to ask if he is ready to try on his prosthetic leg and learn to walk again. The man turned them away each day, sometimes in tears, sometimes in anger. "I just want my leg back." He cannot walk forward clinging to his demand to have "my leg back".

My sister, Margaret, was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 40 and died 4 years later. I witnessed her acceptance of this gift and how it transformed her. How do you explain to yourself that this may be the last day of your life? Is arguing with your significant other, cutting off another driver in traffic or fussing about an e-mail how you want to spend your last day? A diagnosis of cancer brings that question right up into your face.

Margaret set her priorities and I think that they were good ones. With her limited time and energy, she loved her children and husband, she reached out to her family and she looked for God.

Some of her decisions were unpleasant. Yes, she wanted to see me but if I came for a visit, I needed to leave my dog at home. She wanted my full attention. Nor could she take care of ME as I grieved over losing her. She had her own hard work to do.

I watched her strip away the unimportant things in her life. She simplified the questions of what was important. Will this question or decision matter in a day, a week or a year?

Shortly after Margaret died in 1993, I gave a First Word message about her life, death and transformation. I ruefully commented that I didn't want to get breast cancer in order to experience transformation in my life. Margaret has been my mentor for my own life with breast cancer. How will I spend this day, week or year that God has given me? 

– Rosalie Movius

Teach Your Parents Well

Sometimes Light comes to us as a gentle glow, other times a glaring searchlight. Raising kids is a crash course in blinding light and the afterglow. One event stands out among many.

My sister-in-law was fighting cancer in California. On a school night at dinnertime we received a phone call, alerting us that Chris had been hospitalized. No one knew the prognosis, but the doctors were running out of options. Despite the urgency, we couldn't quite see a way for all of us to visit her. Our car was broken-down and money was tight. Jim and I spent hours deliberating. The best option seemed to be for Jim to fly down alone. In our cloud of grief, we couldn't see a solution.

Around midnight, our youngest came to our room, his face grave

and tear-stained. “I want to go with Dad to California.”

Then, Jim asked him, “It isn’t because you want to fly on the airplane, too?” Our son loved (and still loves) to travel. “Not because you want to get out of school?”

Our ten-year-old shook his head, tears welling. “I want to see Aunt Chris...before she dies. I want to be with her. I want us all to be there – together! Saying good-bye....”

Somehow he sensed that Chris was dying. We had tried to keep our deliberations very vague, so the children wouldn’t be disturbed by the threatening loss, but he had picked up on the urgency, as children will do, somehow without appearing to be listening – while playing with his brother in another room.

Jim explained that he’d be spending the entire time in the hospital; this was not to be a pleasure trip. Our son didn’t care. He just wanted to be there with Chris – no matter how scary, how expensive, how sad. He was ready for what was to come.

Then the light dawned! How we’d minimized the depth of our children’s experience! We were right to be concerned for how the loss might impact them, but not right to exclude them from the difficult goodbyes. Birth, death, and loss are everybody’s business. Just like us, children want to express their love to dying family members. We would have to discern just how to do it right, but our boys

needed this experience as much as we did.

We bought four plane tickets on our over-used credit card. Renting a car at the airport, we rushed to Chris’s hospital bedside and spent one last day with her. She shared a journal of artwork she’d created to express her sorrow around dying and her concern for her husband and her two teenage daughters. We sang to her, and there were many hugs, kisses, and tears. We shared this grief as a family and as the commercials blithely state, the experience was priceless. It was not the first, nor was it the last time our children would teach us. They still do. 

– Claire Nail

One Shining Light

Editors’ note: This story may be a trigger for victims of abuse. Please make sure you are in a safe place when you read.

One night when I was ten, I woke up to an overwhelming presence. My 13 year old brother, M knelt beside my bed with his head down in shame. A pair of scissors lay by my side. My panties, my privacy, and my sense of safety had all been violated. I ran to my mother’s room. (My father worked graveyard). My “room” was an extended Hallway suite which connected to every other room in our tiny little house. I had no door, no closet, no privacy. All my family relationships changed that night. My parents took M to counseling. He needed help. I was left to cope alone.

Over the next decade I wrestled with many emotional memories. Mother’s first words were “Don’t tell anyone. They will take you away.” I was terrified. And this only reinforced a growing sense that I did not matter. My needs, my wants, who I was could only exist in secrecy and silence. That’s how I lived and that’s how I survived.

As I write, many painful experiences resurface – like how M told me I should be grateful because at least he didn’t rape me. Dad was absent and unavailable. In high School, I asked M for permission to share my story with others who had similar experiences because somehow his feelings mattered more than mine. Several times, when M cried huge suicidal tears, I was the one who listened and convinced him that life was worth living. Years later when I confronted my mother, she screamed “Why are you bringing up old dirt? We’ve already dealt with that,” and she huffed away.

Through all of this, I learned to live with people alone. But one question remained. This violation of privacy occurred two times exactly one year apart. Why only twice?

All those years I felt so alone wondering why I wasn’t protected. My family had abandoned and failed me. Yet through everything, there existed a silent protector whose life was impacted as deeply as mine. My oldest brother, L, had always protected, looked out for, loved, and believed in me. He always showed me the good in life.

I found out ten years later that, as I waded through all those feelings of rejection, L had been watching over me. To protect me, he had sacrificed his adolescence and created a new pattern of existence for his future. All those nights that I got to sleep untouched, he stayed up to make sure that M stayed in bed. L was the light in life that allowed us all to survive. He prevented M from participating in a shame inducing habit that might have driven him to suicide. He prevented our father's own cycles of childhood sibling abuse from continuing to another generation. He limited my trauma. L was my shining light. Throughout my childhood, he kept me safe and gave me everything I needed to survive until I could protect myself. 

– S.B.

My Mother's Gift

My mother, Louzelle, was the clearest and earliest manifestation of God for me. She was spiritually and physically present in her quiet, strong love, which never stopped even when our paths diverged. She taught me, by being herself, to see "unseen" things like intentions, the heart of a person, beauty, God's love.

Mom was the youngest of six children. Her father was a Welsh immigrant who became a County Judge in Oklahoma and traveled the "circuit," hearing cases. He was known for his fairness to Native Americans. Her mother

was known for her ability to stop a small herd of stampeding boys simply by glaring into their eyes. Some Cherokee women came to my grandmother's house to quilt and formed a circle of lasting friendships.

In 1934, mom graduated with a college degree in accounting and married my dad, who had just graduated from law school. Shortly after their second son was born, God "called" my dad to the ministry. I was born in Fort Worth, Texas, where my father was attending seminary.

Then dad (and God) decided to go to California, so mom and we three kids went along. It was here that I saw who my mom really was. Over time, I saw that mother was actually a minister herself in the sense that she brought her life, intelligence, heart, and abilities to the community.

Through my mom's way of being, I learned about God.

One of the oldest memories I have of my mother is seeing her when I got up in the early morning sitting at her desk with her Bible open reading or praying quietly. The "air" was so still and quiet and full. I could actually *feel* the prayer in the air.

Mom just brought herself to being present. For example, Margaret was a woman in our church who had severe cerebral palsy that affected her whole body and voice. People couldn't understand her, so they just said hello. My mom began greeting

her, then they began having conversations. I noticed and went to stand by mom. At first, I couldn't understand what Margaret was saying, but I was determined and continued to try. As I began to understand her speech, I realized that mom and Margaret were having deeply spiritual and emotional conversations, and this knowledge went deeply into my heart and mind. I realize it informs foundationally and spiritually my life work.

This led me as a 16-year-old to learn sign language from a woman in our church who interpreted for the deaf so they could understand and participate fully. She took me under her wing and generously taught me. This opened my body, mind and heart to how God communicates.

Also in our church, there was a Japanese "war bride" and her American husband. My mom had noticed the isolation of Japanese women in town and started a Sunday School class for them. The word went out, and soon there were 20-30 Japanese wives coming regularly. After a while, these quiet, shy women became the loudest class in the building.

I am so grateful to have had this mother who so humbly opened this awareness in me. My career as a therapist is directly related to what my mother taught me about listening deeply in myself and in others. 

– Patricia Timberlake

Left Behind

Lyrics from *Last Thing on My Mind* by Tom Paxton

*It's a lesson too late for the learnin'
made of sand, made of sand
In the wink of an eye my soul is turnin'
in your hand, in your hand. . .
Are you goin' away
with no word of farewell,
Will there be not a trace left behind?*

When I was 5 years old, my mother made one of those unfortunate mistakes that parents sometimes make with the best of intentions.

My mother, who was young and impressionable, had gotten involved in a church with lots of rules. Until she joined this church, she'd been a fun parent who laughed a lot and seemed to understand my point of view. Now she was strict, like her church; less playful, not so much fun.

My memory of that tiny-huge moment goes like this: *My mother is hanging clothes on the line, singing, "When the roll is called up Yonder, I'll be there." I ask, "What's the roll is called up yonder?" She tells me that someday soon, in the twinkling of an eye, God will take Christians up to Heaven and leave everyone else behind. I say, "I'll go, too!" She says without smiling, "I hope so."*

The world *does* change in the twinkling of an eye when your sense of safety is shattered by an unbearable threat. I *needed* my mother. I thought we were connected, but God could take her to Heaven without me. She

could disappear when I blinked my eyes.

I couldn't talk about the terror, but it was visible. I screamed when my mother was out of sight. I was afraid of things I hadn't noticed before; terrified of making mistakes.

Unfortunately, there was no opportunity for healing dialogue. About a year later, my mother went to Heaven without me.

*As I lie in my bed in the mornin'
without you, without you
Every song in my heart
dies a bornin'
without you, without you. . .*

As an adult, I coped with unresolved grief by seeing her as a bad mother. Later, working with a psychologist who was a spiritual director, I was able to understand and forgive, but my feelings for her didn't return.

On Christmas morning, 2002, Light came in a dream:

I'm sitting on the floor in the hallway trying to read a letter I've just found. It's to me, from my mother, and I'm having trouble understanding the words – odd, because the words are typed and very clear. I think I must need glasses. In a sea of fuzzy words, one word jumps out: "Alaska." No, wait . . . it says "always."

Suddenly, I'm intensely aware of a Presence beside me. I'm slightly afraid, but not much. I say, "Mommy?" There's no mistaking who it is. This isn't an intuition-

only impression; she is a live, energetic Presence.

This dream (and several others that followed) must have planted trust seeds in my heart because I now have a comforting sense about my mother that tells me: *she's very sorry that she hurt me so badly. God didn't take her away. She never left me. She has always been with me and always will be. I love her.* 
– Sally Gillette

Please Share Your Story

Query: *When have you felt comforted by God?*

We're looking for stories from your experiences about a time when you felt comforted by the Light in the midst of fear, loneliness or another hard place in your life.

We welcome stories in words, photos, art, music, video, or . . . ? We publish stories as told to the extent that they fit within our guidelines.

[Story Deadline: 11/24/13](#)

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 :)