

January 2019

A nice string of sunny days motivated me yesterday to shovel off the basketball slab in back and shoot for a while... I've always enjoyed time outside in the winter. Quoting one of our own [newsletters](#) on the topic of winter and childhood, "...the indoors was strictly a pit stop to sleep and eat."

Most of you know this. We lost our son David, our youngest, in May 2016. This was at the end of his second year at the University of Minnesota. David was missing for a week and then found in the river...

I was sitting next to Laurie when she answered the first phone call. I saw this strike her. Horrible. Through each of these thirty months, the smart, tough, Norwegian beauty that I married has kept stepping forward in grace and kindness.

Our middle son Carl was graduating from Saint Olaf at this time... He lived with us for some months and helped us regroup. Carl took additional training at Prime Digital Academy in Minneapolis and is now working as a UX research prototyper at Thomson Reuters, living in St. Paul. He's doing well and is the ongoing source of many good hugs for Mom and Dad.

Joe is in Hawaii, Chinese linguist. He's been home for the three funerals: David, Jack (Laurie's father) August 2016, and Faye (my mother) September 2018. Joe's been good at hanging out with me (us) during these visits. The short-form manual for how to help people who have lost a child is this: show up, sit down, and shut up. But, I really like talking to Joe so we had to tear up the third part of that manual... Joe was on the USS John McCain when it collided with a tanker, near Singapore, August 2017. (phone call to Laurie) Joe was hurt: broken ribs and thumb, his back punctured by debris, feet cut, scrapes and bruises. He had been sleeping. His berth was flooded, water and jet fuel. Dark. Ten sailors dead, crushed and drowned. Joe knew all of them; two were friends. It took dive teams a week to recover the bodies from the wreckage. Awful. When Joe got back he immediately, even though injured, tested for rescue-grade scuba diving certification. It's his hobby. I would have waited a while. Tough like his mother.

Laurie's brother Doug, bachelor city-kid-turned-farmer, loved by us, one of the first to be a helpful visitor in our early days after David's death, had a massive heart attack

in August during one of his frequent runs between Iowa and Wisconsin. He had the good sense to call 911 and then continue to a nearby grain elevator, a landmark where he could be found. Being close to Mason City and a hospital, help got to him in minutes. (phone call to Laurie) The timing of the double-stent procedure prevented the blockage from causing damage and death. Close. We were with him for a few days while he recovered and prepared for release. Seems like the nurses really liked him; just saying.

In these months we've attended some events for bereaved parents: a conference at a church in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and a small couples retreat in Oregon hosted by While We're Waiting. Quiet camaraderie. One event in the Twin Cities, by Survivor Resources, a service of remembrance, brings together people dealing with sudden death. There's a candle lighting ceremony with projected photos. Laurie (and I) went up twice. Thirty years ago, Laurie's mother Betty died from burns in a car accident. The burn unit communicated with Betty (unable to speak), and pieced together her last name. (phone call to Laurie)

Forgive me, but Who works this way? Discipline? Love? We pray. We go to church. We sit in the back now. We sing hymns. I sing loud, very loud. Some people thank me. Some turn and look.

What happened? I had it easy at the age of 20, a sophomore at the U. I commuted, car pooled with a group of high school friends, ate every night with my family, had my own room, slept in my own bed, got out of the city every day, felt loved in a very direct way every day, and got recharged. I know some wonder if David had ever dealt with depression or was hiding it. No. David was a small-community boy, solid, a good and caring kid, ambitious, a genuine giver, drained by people and a very hard semester... But, I don't know. There is no sense in this. Any explanation fails, so much so that David's death was ruled a drowning, manner unknown, no drugs or alcohol detected.

For another round of school, I ended up in Michigan. A second choice would have put me in Ithaca, NY. I remember the bridge stories that went along with Ithaca and the gorges there. I didn't like those stories.

The High Bridge in Saint Paul has been recently renovated to include suicide prevention barriers. The bridges in Ithaca now have barriers and nets. The Golden Gate Bridge now has nets. Research shows that barriers make a

difference and don't simply deflect people to another site or method. Just stop; wait. The U of MN and the city of Minneapolis hold on to an outdated understanding of this with their Washington Avenue Bridge, the pedestrian connection between the east and west banks of the campus. For a city that boasts of its progressiveness, primitive.

I have childhood memories of several intense interactions with Mom. One, at about age eight, after some problem with two neighborhood buddies, the three-way friendship temporarily broken, I took my troubles to her and said, "I wish I had never been born." Mom turned on that, a full-force rebuke by Faye, "How dare you think that..." We all should know the impact of suicide. It's wrong. Evil leads to it. We wish we had had a chance to confront this impulse (if what we assume to have happened did...).

Mom had a good, open, and sympathetic ear. One day, as an adult, I drove over there "wounded." During my single years, battle-worn from work, I felt defeated and out of sync in life for my age. I remember stumbling up the steps as I walked into their home. It helped me to talk... We wish we had had a chance that day to help David see a path forward.

You stayed. It's not easy to read this. Wish I had a light story to finish with. Yes, we are broken, every day. But we still laugh and appreciate Joe and Carl, the gift of life, and the promise of salvation. I retired in that May as planned. It's been good to keep in step with Laurie.

We miss David terribly, desperately.

We had weeks-old David baptized at a Confessional Lutheran church in Kennewick, WA. We were attending a Presbyterian church in Richland at the time but wanted a real infant baptism, a means of grace, no symbolism, God acting.

I have one story I want to share from the conference in Hot Springs: a man had lost his son to a water accident, drowning. When his next son was born, he arranged to have him baptized at the very spot where the other son had died. The man described this baptism as an act of violence against Satan, a sturdy swing to the jaw. I heard this story in the church sanctuary. In front of me sat another man, listening, and as this was told, we both reacted with emotion. God acts in baptism.

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Thank you for your cards, your texts and messages, e-mail, and your visits to Saint Peter. Take good care, and may you be blessed this new year.

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We've [posted](#): links to resources; the video and bulletin from David's memorial service; obituaries for David, Jack, and Faye; David's faith story from confirmation; and a scripture reading by David (voice recording) that was a Christmas gift to Laurie in 2013.

Here is a direct link to David's [obituary](#) (Laurie writing).

The photo of our boys is from November 2013. Joe was home, everyone in Saint Peter. At the time, we didn't think this was a great shot. But, this turned out to be our last one of them together. The coastline location, the background image, is a place they have been, but the photo is actually from our recent spring trip to Oregon. The close up of David, age 4, is from 2000. The shot of Joe and Carl is at our home in Saint Peter this last October 2018.

*Lament for a Son* (Nicholas Wolterstorff)

*A Grief Observed* (C. S. Lewis)

*A Grace Disguised* (Jerry Sittser)

[thelifeididntchoose](#) blog

[While We're Waiting](#) ministry for bereaved parents