



Happy Father's Day!

THE VINE

Growing Together In Christ

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 6

JUNE 2008

(This will be the last lead article that Pastor Dennis will be writing. It certainly sets the pace for us, in "New Beginnings." Hopefully, he will from time to time submit something that we can include in The Vine. Thank You, Dennis, for your years of service to our congregation!)

New Beginnings

From Pastor Dennis

Soon someone else will become the pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship. I thought it might be interesting to reflect on some of the words that I gave to you in my first sermon as your pastor on March 18, 2000, which was titled, New Beginnings.

"We who are Christians have been given new life in Jesus Christ. We have had a new beginning. We have become new creations in Jesus - 2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

"And now this congregation has a new beginning. We have a new location and we will have to relocate again in June. This is an opportunity to remind ourselves of a wonderful truth – the church of Jesus Christ is NOT a building. The church is a family of brothers and sisters who follow Jesus; a community of believers; a household of faith.

"You have been faithful through many church splits. And yet this is a congregation with great potential – we are multicultural, we are intergenerational – we have children, teens, singles, marrieds, senior citizens – and each of you is a unique and special part of the Body. We need each of you; we need all of you. Our church needs you; and this world needs the Gospel with which you have been entrusted, and the story you have to share.

"Many of our previous leaders are gone, but Jesus leads our church. He will provide new leadership among you sitting right here. You will have new opportunities to participate in our worship services – to read a scripture, to give a prayer, to tell a story, to sing on one of our praise teams.

You will be able to minister and serve in ways that may not have been available to you in the past; in ways that you haven't even imagined."

Do you know these words are just as true today as they were eight years ago? You were given new life and a new beginning in Jesus. This church belongs to Jesus; it is His body; a family that He builds and grows and resources. You belong to each other. You are still blessed to be multicultural and intergenerational. Your new pastor will give you fresh new leadership and new opportunities, and take you to new places you may have never imagined. Accept him wholeheartedly, respond eagerly to his lead, love him, and pray for him and be patient with him and take care of him as you have me. Jesus and his church at New Hope needs each and all of you. Jesus still has much for each of you to do as you reflect and share His love and grace.

In the same way, Lorraine and I will have a new beginning in Colorado Springs, with new opportunities to serve Jesus and all those He loves there. Even though this is a new beginning for all of us, the story we share is old and true, the same story that Christians have told for 2,000 years. In regard to his love, Jesus never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Tell me the old, old story of unseen things above, of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love. Tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and His love. (Words by A. Katherine Hankey, 1866).

His love. (Words by A. Katherine Hankey, 1866).

Lorraine and I love you dearly and will miss you, but are confident that you will continue to faithfully carry on the work of Jesus, the hope of the world.



My Brain On Paper

By Tammy Tkach

I've always been a list maker. I came across a long to-do list I made while in college. I marveled at how much I managed to do in just one week. It isn't much different now. I still make lists and rely on them to keep me going. I like to think of them as my brain on paper. Of course, I use my computer now and share the fear with many that if it were lost or stolen I'd be in big trouble. Sometimes it seems as if my brain is on my hard drive. I wish it were as easy to back up my brain as it is to back up my computer.

Inspired by a time-travel movie, I've started making notes to what I refer to as my future self, who will no doubt be more forgetful than my present self. The computer is great for that too, as I can access the calendar feature months and years in advance. If only my future self could give me some advice.

Our brains are wonderful – quick, powerful and with a lot of available memory. The only problem is retrieving things. I watch the game show Jeopardy and get frustrated when I can't recall an answer (or question for this game). I'm sure it's in there, but I just can't find it.

Sometimes when I can't find or remember something, I think, God knows, but he's not talking! Wouldn't it be great to have his recall ability? He never forgets unless he wants to. I forget when I don't want to. But we never have to worry he will forget about us. He remembers even when we don't. His faithfulness is constant. In Isaiah 49:15 he asks: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (NIV).

As we grow in our relationship with God, it's important to remember he is not like us. He doesn't think or act like us. We tend to humanize him, ascribing foibles and weaknesses to him that we see in ourselves or in others. One of my favorite passages in the Bible reminds us to be careful not to do this. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9, NIV).

This helps us keep our lives in perspective. Even the best virtues and noblest acts of humanity pale in comparison to the greatness of God. There really is no one like him.

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Romans 11:33-36, NIV).

How wonderful I can rely on his memory even when mine fails. I guess you could say he's my backup.



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Dad

(Author Unknown)

Contributed by Leslie Schmedes in honor
of Fathers Day

Long have our mothers dear been praised,
Thus making each heart glad,
But let's remember someone else –
Let's think of dear old dad.

While mothers rocked the cradle,
Did all the things that mothers do,
Dad toiled hard and labored long,
To make loves dream come true.

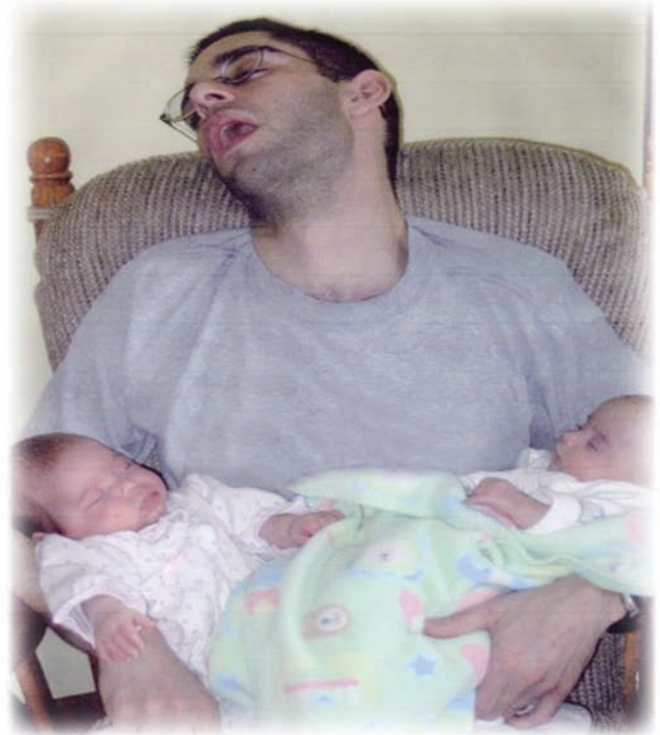
He neither grumbled or complained,
Tho' he felt good or bad,
But every morn went forth to toil
Just because he was Dad.

He'd never think about himself,
Or anything he'd need,
He labored with a single thought –
His family he must feed.

And thus it went year after year,
When you and I were young,
He spent himself, his life his all,
Well loved, but yet unsung.

But now that we have older grown,
And see life thru our eyes,
We notice all that Dad has done –
It makes us realize.

That we have cost him Oh so much,
That we can ne'er repay,
So, one and all, let's sing his praise,
On this – His Special Day!



Photos from Google Images

Missing My Missing Family

By Candace C. Gunzelman

It is not always that one has a good story to tell. But recently something happened in my life that made me feel that it's high time I shared my personal story, not with disinterested people who don't know me, but with my caring brothers and sisters in the church, the only family I have ever really known.

For, you see, I have had no family of origin I could call my own. I was separated from my mother, my father and my three older brothers at a young age and sent to live with people who did not know me. Though they may have had good intentions at first, life was not good for me and I wanted no part of being with them. I was still naively waiting for my father to come and get me...not to be given away to strangers!!! In the long run, they drove me out of their lives so that I was left alone to fend for myself. It all started when my mother met with a tragic car accident in which her head was smashed, causing massive brain damage... She had total amnesia and was permanently institutionalized for many years. The doctors recommended that we not see her anymore since she could no longer remember us and it traumatized her when we did. I was 6 years old at that time.

My father, having already remarried, took my three brothers to live with him, but threw me out of the family for reasons I never knew. I was shuffled around from one aunt to another, then to my elderly grandpa and was eventually adopted at the age of nine. I was raised by the K's, a childless couple that my father's new wife apparently knew and whom I did not want to live with, but had no choice. The K's completely cut me off from my entire family and I never heard from them again. I did, however, learn, through much digging, that I had three more half-siblings. I became a miserable, lonely, unloved, misunderstood, abandoned, physically abused child. This had a profound effect on me. I realized early in life how undesirable and utterly unimportant I was to everybody in the world.

The K's sent me away to a private boarding school because they were having problems with me and I did not want to be with them. After graduating from that school, I declined going to college because the K's made stipulations to going there that I did not agree with. They were unhappy with me and ended up disowning me. Not going to college was a dumb, stupid mistake on my part. I went out and went wild instead, drinking and partying too much, which left me with addictions and vague recollections during this period of time.

I have always grieved over the loss of my mother and my three brothers, whom I absolutely adored. I always wondered why my father did not want me and just wanted my brothers. I hated that he robbed me of my entire family by taking my beloved brothers from me.

The greatest dream of my entire existence was to be able to find my family. I've spent years and years and years looking, hoping and waiting to hear from one of them. Hope gradually died in my heart and I was resigned to live the rest of my life alone, never to see them again.

Then it happened!!! After almost 60 years, I finally heard from my eldest brother, Ron. Oh, the joy of hearing from him after decades and decades of silence! After retiring, he had taken up the hobby of tracing our genealogy, building our family tree, and finding our ancestors. He learned the computer and how to do a search and, voila', he finally found me!!! God, in His great mercy, had taken pity on me after all and finally granted me my heart's desire. Why had I ever doubted Him?

I have never been so happy in my whole life. I was delighted to learn that all six of my siblings were all still alive and well.

News quickly got to them that their long-lost sister had been found. Imagine the greetings, news and information that flowed back and forth in rapid succession between us. Although we are scattered in different places, plans of family reunions are being made. We have exchanged photos via email, but it would be very exciting to see and hug each other, and see how we look now that we are all in our senior years. The last time my brothers and I saw one another was when we were still children.

Life is strange. Just as I was enjoying the most thrilling days of my life, a scary monster reared up its ugly head and threatened to cut short my extreme happiness at having my family back. I was stunned when my brother Ron referred to me as his half-sister. What? I was totally shocked and appalled by his unexpected revelation that I was not my father's child! Oh, the pain of hearing that! It was like a dagger in my poor old heart.

Who, then, was my father? Who, then, was I? No one knew for sure who my father was, but, being born in the turmoil at the beginning of World War II, he had claimed it wasn't him. I was reeling and in shock at the realization that I may not belong to my father's family at all. This information was apparently not revealed and realized by anyone until the late 1990's before his death. This was because my brother Ron, writing his own memoirs', questioned my dad about why he had not taken me when we were kids and our mom became unable to care for us.

I had always thought that maybe the reason was because my father and his new wife had already had one baby girl by then and didn't want me around. Or maybe taking four kids into the family was just one too many kids. Or maybe I was too ugly, too stupid, too mean, too anything negative that one can think of...I didn't have a clue. It never ever occurred to me that it was because I was not his daughter. This also meant my three half-siblings weren't related to me at all!!!

Deep within me, my heart was in turmoil. My restless spirit could sense that something was wrong in my family that had to be righted. I instantly recognized it must be something about our relationship within the family. Doubts started to creep into my mind over the unknown-father allegation. Under the present circumstances, the only way to prove or disprove this allegation was to do a DNA test. So I arranged for and did sibling DNA testing and family reconstruction with my brothers, all of whom gladly volunteered their blood for testing.

Surprise of all surprises: Or actually, no surprise to any of us, really...the results of the DNA test proved that my three brothers and I all have the same father and mother! It was 99.97% positive that my father was indeed my father, and I do have six siblings. Too bad DNA testing was not available 65 years ago. I think my dad sincerely believed in his heart that I was not his child. He could not have done what he did to me otherwise. I had already, after becoming a Christian and wrestling with this issue, forgiven him for throwing me away. At least now I know his reason for doing so.

What a tremendous relief to have regained my rightful place in the family genealogy. I now have a bunch of brothers and sisters and their wives and husbands and kids and grandkids to get to know and enjoy. My sons have their aunts and uncles and oodles of cousins to have a family relationship with for the rest of their lives. I have a lifetime of love for them bottled up that I've reserved in my heart all these years. With the anticipation of a close and joyful relationship with them, I hope to off-set the bitter memories of my unhappy childhood and subsequent damaged life it caused and live the rest of my life thanking the Lord for all His unexpected blessings and surprises of a lifetime that He, in His mercy, has graciously bestowed upon me.



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Cranberry Juice

By David A. Leon

Cranberry juice. My dad loved cranberry juice. I liked it too, but every time I'd try to drink some my mom would come up and say "No, that's for your dad," so I'd put it back. But every so often when I'd get really mad at him I'd sneak into the kitchen and get that bottle of cranberry juice and pour me a cup. I'd think to myself, "I may have to do my homework and finish it before eleven o'clock, but I'm gonna' have some cranberry juice while I do."

I know we've all probably had those moments of, "I'm right and they're wrong," but when I think about it, my dad was only doing what a father should. He used to tell me stories about his childhood and how his father, my grandfather, would whip him into shape, make sure he had a good education, and taught him the life lessons that nobody really wants to learn. My dad has done the same for me. I know he's even here helping me out today. I look around and see all the people he knew and know that they're gathered here today because of him.

You know there's that saying, "You've got some big shoes to fill," well I'm actually wearing my dad's shoes today. When I was walking up here my heels would start to pop out of the back. And I don't know if I'll ever be able to fill these shoes, but at least I'll be able to walk in them.

A Hero

By Daniel A. Leon

A hero is a breeze that rustles the leaves on a tree. He is a fire that burns through a forest of hate. In the darkest hour, he shines through. I know someone who is my fire and my breeze that takes care of me, shining through for me and lighting my way. Throughout my life, my dad has led me the right way as my hero.

My dad is not my hero just because he is my father; He is my hero because he has devoted himself to making me a better person than he was. He went to work every day, no matter how much he did not want to, so he could provide an education for my brother, sister and me. All he wanted was to see his three children go to college and become independent. He would always tell my brother and me, "You guys are smarter than me!" even though we knew that was not true. When we told him otherwise, he would always bring up his childhood.

He would tell me stories of his childhood and explain how we can learn from them. When I would tell him a funny story from school, he would describe a similar time about when he experienced the same thing and what happened. We would all laugh and joke until he got to his point. After a long sequence of stories he would tell us to go out and do something new and adventurous to learn and make the most of every day. Most of the time he just talked about what we should do to make a difference, until one day he decided to take action. That was the day he decided he would run for Pasadena City Council.

That day our lives were invited to take part in history. As we walked street by street, knocking on doors and talking to people about the elections, my dad taught me communicating skills, manners, and perseverance. During that time, he inspired me to do anything I wanted to do in life. Even though he tried his best to influence as many people as he could, he did not win. Because of his loss I learned the most I could have possibly learned. He taught me how to go down with a fight, the value of loyal relationships, and how to lose with honor. I took away many loving, encouraging memories from that experience because of my father.

Throughout my life, the same cycles have taken place many times. But I never got tired of the stories he shared so freely. They did not grow old or boring because I loved them so much and they represented my father. He was an encourager, a lover, and a pioneer for me. He was exactly that up until his last days. His love to serve was instilled in me along with many other valuable traits. My dad is my hero because he cared when everyone else didn't have time.