

Publisher's Commentary...

## Thanksgiving

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It was, I thought, just another phone call in the middle of the night from my mom, who had been suffering from Parkinson's disease for over 20 years. The disease was beginning to take a toll on her mentally, and dementia was becoming a more common occurrence. Mom was telling me that Karl (my 75-year old father) had a heart attack and had been taken to the hospital. After being unable to get my mom to hand over the phone to my father, I figured I better get over there and check it out. It was the Friday before Thanksgiving, 1999.

I pulled into their driveway to find an ambulance parked by the door. As the feeling of dread filled me, I went inside to find the ambulance personnel and my parent's neighbors consoling my mother. Dad really did have a heart attack, and required multiple resuscitations before they even got him into the ambulance. As it would turn out, my father would never regain consciousness.

The following Tuesday, I had to drive from Long Island to Albany to bring my son home from college for the Thanksgiving break. The day was rainy and foggy, and the drive home was long and tiresome. We arrived home around 8:30PM. At 8:45PM, a few of Eric's friends (who were also home from college) pulled in the driveway, and he decided to join them for a diner excursion. At 8:55PM, Donna left to pick up our daughter from a friend's house. A few minutes later, the phone rang – it was a frantic Donna, and she had just come across a terrible car crash down the road from us. Eric was in one of the cars.

There were pieces of wreckage strewn about the intersection. The small pickup truck that Eric was a passenger in had made a left hand turn in front of another vehicle that was traveling at least 50 MPH. Eric was not wearing a seat belt and was thrown into the windshield pillar, the structure that separates the windshield from the side window. I found him sitting on the curb with his two friends, all of whom were conscious. Eric had received a severe head trauma, and Donna and I were on the verge of panic. I struggled to maintain my composure, wondering what was next.

As we stayed with Eric in the emergency room that night, I thought of my dad up on the fourth floor, still unconscious. Somehow, life was looking drastically different than it had an hour before, and a few days before. On that Tuesday night before Thanksgiving of 1999, I sat in a hospital emergency room contemplating how life is so fragile, so uncertain.

The next day, 12-hours later at 9:00AM, we brought Eric home from the hospital. It was a miracle that the worst of his injuries was a fractured cheekbone and lacerations on his face. It was so good to have him home, even though his head had swollen and his face was purple. Eric was home with us, and he was alive.

At 11:30 AM, I once again met my sister at the hospital to see dad. The nurse had informed us that his condition had worsened over night, and that he was struggling to hang on. We told dad that it was OK to let go, that it was OK to move on. We promised we would do our best to care for mom, and that he should not worry about her. We left the hospital at 12:10. By the time I got home at 12:20, Donna had already gotten the call – dad was gone.

I arrived back at my parent's house a few minutes later. Walking in the door, my mother, sister and parent's neighbor were seated in the den. As I walked in and looked at them, I could find no words. It then occurred to me that I was the only one in the room who knew, I was the only one who gotten the call. In the silence that permeated the room, my mother looked up at me and said, "He's gone, isn't he?" Still unable to find the words, all I could do was gaze into my mother's eyes. At that moment in time, on the day before Thanksgiving in 1999, I watched my mother die too, the will to live fading from her eyes in quiet resignation. It would take 5 months for my mother to physically pass away.

Thanksgiving is a special time of year, a time to give thanks for all that is on the table, and to remember those who once sat around the table with us. Most importantly, it's a time to count one's blessings of health, family and friendship.

Best wishes to all of you.

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