

Bless Me

“How was I going to get through this? Now I needed a story not of survival but of transformation. ... a map of the unlighted journey I was about to take.

– Michael Chorost (2005), *Rebuilt: How becoming a computer made me more human*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Hearing the doctor say to Skip, “It’s stage 4 of 4, and the cure rate is zip” dumped me into the rapids of the river that would take me too quickly to the end of our years together. How was I going to get through this? In those first moments, as we drove home, it was Skip who said quietly to me, “*We have been broken open, my love, and your job is to say, ‘yes.’*” What else could I do? I had to find a way to live into that “yes.”

In the meantime, while we waited for his children to come to the house, he called several friends and shared the news, straight up. To one, he added: “*I don’t want you standing at my coffin telling someone else you thought I was a nice guy! If you’ve got something to say, get over here!*” That made me laugh.

We went on together to face those who responded to his invitation. I moved easy chairs from the den into the bedroom so the friends and family who often came together in clumps could be comfortable. And when we ran out of seats, I told the last one coming through the door to get into the bed next to Skip. That made everybody laugh.

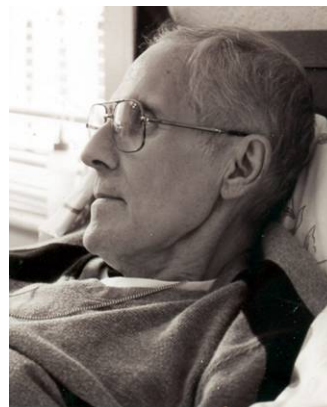
And so, our life went on for a while. I began wearing my athletic shoes because putting them on in the morning made me feel more sure-footed. Often during the day, one of the laces would come untied and I had to go down on one knee to tie up the loose end. I started saying to myself while I was down there, “*Thank you, God, for one more day with Skip.*”

I did that in front of Skip one day, and he asked me what I was doing on my knees. When I told him, he touched my hair, “*You’ll have to write a book about all this, so you can pass on the blessing!*” I still carry the smile.

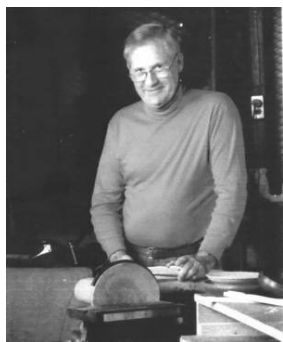
Significant Lesson: “Compassion lives in the here and now,” Beth Witrogen McLeod (2000) says, “and faces outward.” Pass it on.

A Picture Speaks a Thousand Words

As my husband Skip moved into the last stages of pancreatic cancer, his appearance changed dramatically. I myself never saw the change, but I saw the effect of those changes on the faces of the people who treated him. I wanted to remind the professional caregivers who assisted us of the person Skipper continued to be, even in his physical decline.



I took my favorite picture of Skip in his workshop to a copy shop. I asked someone there to enlarge it and print it on a plain, regular-sized sheet of paper. In my office, I found a 3-ring binder with plastic pockets large enough to accommodate a sheet of paper on the outside covers. I put Skip's picture on the outside front, and slid a list of contact numbers (see "House Calls").



That's what I carried into medical appointments: the binder hugged to my chest, Skip's twinkling eyes facing outward. I loved the smiles the picture evoked when people noticed, and Skip loved the conversations it started about his woodworking.

Significant Lesson: *Let the moment symbolized by a favorite snapshot stand up for you when you need it.*