

James L. Holly, M.D.

By Your Bedside – Part II

By: James L. Holly, MD

(Author's Note: Life teaches us many lessons. For a physician, one of the best lessons of life is to experience what those whom he/she treats experience. The recent illness of my father has allowed me to gain insight as to how to process grief and anxiety about the condition and care of a loved one. This is the second of a three-part series, By Your Bedside, written to my father during his recent illness.)

Today, July 12, 2004, I must leave. Since Tuesday last, I have spent more time in your home than at any other one visit in the past 43 years. It has been strange to sit at your table and to sleep in your guest room without you in the house.

Your absence has been like an overwhelming silence whose dominating presence has drowned out all other sounds. Each time the door opened, or a foot fall was heard, I expected to see you turn the corner and to take your place at the head of the family.

When I first was notified of your illness and of its severity, I recalled the scene from *The Student Prince*. The Crown Prince of Karlsburg stood beside the bier upon which the mortal remains of his Grandfather, the King of Karlsburg, lay in state. In the best known production of this story, as the Crown Prince, now the King, stood, he mouthed the words sung by Mario Lanza:

“I'll walk with God, From This Day on His
helping hand I'll lean upon

This is my prayer, my humble plea, May
the Lord be ever with me _____

There is no death___tho' eyes grow dim,
There is no fear when I'm near to Him. I'll
lean on Him forever

And He'll forsake me never.

He will not fail me as long___as my faith is strong,
Whatever Road I may walk along;
I'll walk with God; I'll take His hand, I'll
talk with God, He'll understand; I'll pray
to Him, each day to Him, And He'll hear
the words that I say.

His Hand will guide my throne and rod;
And I'll never walk alone while I walk___with God!”

The loneliness, the longing, yet the loyalty to his grandfather's memory motivated the young Prince to set aside his personal desires, to pursue the course required by the relationship with his deceased mentor and predecessor. This is not unlike the transition which transpires every time one generation passes the mantle of leadership and responsibility to the next. It is a delight to know, as this is prepared that you are improving and that you will possibly totally recover, Daddy. My brother and I will not be called to your station in our family, yet.

It is so clear to me that although you have not been directly involved in most decisions of my past 40 years, that your presence in my life has provided a security and a certainty about those decisions. It is as if your life alone was enough to let me believe that if I were about to make a tragic mistake, you would not allow it. While that may have been more fantasy than fact and while it certainly was more subconscious than cognitive, it has been a part of my psyche for all of these years.

This past week has been a joy. Even with the long days at the hospital and even with the uncertainty about your course, just to be with you, to love you and to care for you has been a privilege. And, Daddy, you could not have been given better care. The doctors (Barnum, Pere, Ball, Harris, Ingram), the nurses and the staff have treated you with dignity, respect and expertise. I must admit that I have been surprised at the level of care offered in Natchitoches Parish Hospital. Except for the hospital not serving Eggbeaters in the cafeteria – the national concern over cholesterol, you know – and that the laboratory does not do prealbumins in house, I have found your care to be, as the British say, “up to scratch.” Our family is grateful to each person who has ministered to your needs. And, I understand that very shortly, the Intensive Care Unit will move into new quarters, where the technological support will be even more advanced.

None of us knows what the future holds for you, or for us, Daddy. I have tried to discern the future, knowing at the same time that only God knows for sure. However, I am certain of my hope and desire, and if I get only half of those, it will be a blessing.

Mother's and your friends have been generous with their time and efforts. It is a testimony to the kind of people the two of you are that so many have reached out to you. All of your children and grandchildren have stood by your bed to pray, to hope and to love you. Many of your nieces, and the children, now adults, to whom you gave your life and love for so many years, have traveled far to stand with you in your need.

I have heard repeatedly statements such as, “I don't know what I will do without Bill Holly,” or “I have just thought that Bill Holly will always be there.” As for me, Daddy, the thought of leaving while you are not totally recovered makes what I do every day seem less than important. I know that I will concentrate on my responsibilities – you have taught me that – but I will do it with my heart in another place. I can only imagine – with regret – what it will be like when finally and ultimately we lose you.

I have always imagined myself to be somewhat courageous. I have never shirked responsibilities nor shrank from conflict when principal or values were at issues. Yet, I now question whether my imaged bravery was only an extension of you and of how I knew you

would respond. I wonder now, whether your absence from my life someday will not result in my being less resolute than before. And, yet, as I play in my mind the words sung by Mario Lanza, I know that though I may then walk alone, without my father, I will walk with my Heavenly father.

Daddy in the 1997, tribute which I wrote of you, I said:

“When as a small child, I thought my father was omnipotent, I loved him; I feared him, and I felt very safe around him and through him. I loved the way he smelled. I loved the way he dressed. I loved the way he talked, walked, laughed and lived. I feared him with the awe and respect of one who looks up to a more powerful being. Many of my concepts of God were developed, as I saw in my earthly father the image of the One Whom I would come to know as my Heavenly Father.”

Now more than then do I realize how much of my ideal of God derives from your person. I learned of God’s nature from the Bible and from personal experience, but foundationally, it was you who prepared me to trust God and to know Him. Now as the time approaches when like the young Prince, I will stand alone before God in trust, I am grateful for your tutelage. No heritage or inheritance could exceed the value of that.

As I prepare to drive away today, with heavy heart, and mind filled with you, I am grateful and humbled that of all the possibilities God made me your son. That is your greatest gift to me.

God bless you, Daddy, and I pray He grants you many, many more years of life with us. And, if He does not, I shall ever live with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for having known you and for having been loved by you.