

James L. Holly, M.D.

By Your Bedside – Part III

By: James L. Holly, MD

(Author's note: How do health care professionals process grief and anxiety about the health and illnesses of those they love? This is the third in a series of how I have responded to my father's recent illness. He has recovered from the acute illness but is on a downward course, which I cannot stop. Through this time, I have discovered anew my love, respect and admiration for my father. There is no one to blame for his deterioration. And, rather than bitterness and anger at others who cannot stop the processes of time, I have found joy peace and hope.)

Out of ICU! Graduation day came today and home may come on Friday. As the day awakens on July 20th, we look forward to more progress. As we learn new things about one another, Daddy, I have been intrigued by new things which have been shared with me. Men who worked with you at Louisiana Power and Light (LP&L), men who call you their "hero," have told me things I did not know.

Wayne North, who filled your shoes when you retired from LP&L, confirmed my belief that you are a "legend" in that company. Wayne, it seems, was called into his boss' office twenty years ago and was told, "North, I'm sending you on an adventure today. Do you know where Natchitoches is?" His boss continued, "When you get there, you're going to find the dirtiest, beat up Dodge truck you have ever seen. It'll have an LP&L sign on its side, but don't be misled; it belongs to 'Holly Power and Light.' I'm sending you to work with Bill Holly."

Since 1948, when you moved to Natchitoches and became the embodiment of LP&P, Daddy, you had faithfully supported your family, your employer and your community with an unerring sense of right and wrong. You steadfastly refused advancement which would put you in a suit and in an office. You loved the field operations of LP&L. You were the first to have a heavy-duty wench attached to the re-enforced front bumper of your company truck. Oh, how I came to love those yellow and green trucks. The wench enabled you to get your truck into places you needed to go and out of others where you had gone.

The "legend" of Bill Holly lives in more than my mind, Daddy. In 1999, when the ice storm had disrupted my brother's power supply, you went to Pineville to "fix it." Because it required climbing, which at 78, you didn't need to be doing and more importantly because you didn't have the equipment, you both waited for CLECO to arrive. When the crew of five showed up and after my brother had introduced you, they said, "Are you THE Bill Holly. We thought they just made all those stories up, kind of like Paul Bunyan."

The Bible declares that "children's children are the glory of old men and the glory of the child is the father." (Proverbs 17:6) My brother and I, and all of our children and their children, glory in you, Daddy. As a father, grandfather and great grandfather, you have given

us all cause for such glory. You are to us and to many larger than life. I understood that more when a 58 year man, who still works for LP&P, stood at your bedside this week and told me, "This man is my hero."

The "legend" is multi-dimensional. When a very prominent Natchitoches Parish resident shot your dog because he thought the dog had killed one of his animals, you took the dead dog and put it on this man's desk in his office. Who would have thought of such a thing, other than you; who would have done such a thing, other than you, and who would have gotten away with such a thing other than you?

Men came and went in LP&L during your forty years. Some of them called themselves your boss. One did so so frequently, you told him, "I know you're my boss; you know you're my boss and you know that I know that you're my boss, but you don't have to keep bragging about it." Another young man, who became "your boss", chided you once. A problem had developed; you solved it and it was done. "Your boss" called you and told you never to solve such a problem again without asking him and/or telling him about it and getting his permission. You chaffed under that for a while and the following morning called him at 3:00 AM and said, "I've got to go to the bathroom; is that OK?" "Your boss" and you never had that conversation again.

I grew up knowing that men dealt with crises and that they did what they must. Daddy, you would disappear for days and sometimes for more than a week after a storm, or a hurricane, or whenever there was a need. Sometimes this was related to power outages, sometimes it was due to floods, or tragedy, but always it had to do with the fact that men of "grit" were needed. That is when you were always called upon. One time, after a particularly long absence, a Louisiana State Trooper found you by the roadside with your muddy clothes and mud caked face and hands leaning against your truck's front tire, asleep. Even Bill Holly had a limit, however far beyond ordinary men that limit might be, there came a time when you had to lay down as well.

It may seem that I believe you are perfect, Daddy. Actually, I am keenly aware of your imperfections. However, it is in the context of your frailties that I stand in awe of whom and what you are. You, like all men of honor and noble character, are not defined by your weaknesses but by your steadfastness and strength which are set in relief to your humanity.

Daddy, these past two weeks have clarified to me what I love most about you. I love your smile. I love the quick and impish grin which is accompanied by that twinkle in your eye. I love the boyish mischief which is just beneath the surface, ready to break through and make us all laugh with delight. I love the way you love and care for all of us.

I remember how you have extended yourself to others and particularly to those who could not benefit you at all. I remember when you stopped on Cane River Road and called to a man in the field. He walked over and you said, "I thought you were going to be by the house on Friday?" He responded, "One of the kids got sick; I'll be there this Friday." When we drove away, I asked what that was all about. "He couldn't pay his light bill, so I paid it for him," you

answered.

In a thousand acts of kindness you evidence a character which I admire and have always wanted to emulate. In the climactic moment of the movie, *Man in an Iron Mask*, the hero, Captain D'Artagne, is mortally wounded by the evil king, Louis XIV. As D'Artagne dies, the young Musketeer, Lieutenant Andre, holding the evil king at bay, declares, "All I have ever wanted to be is that man." I think, Daddy, that all I ever wanted to be is you.

Welcome home, Daddy. It was not home without you.