

"Bless this place where a life was made
Bless this place where two worked and dreamed
and loved.

~Bless this place and the life left behind,
this emptiness that is not empty,
this emptiness that is not void.

~Bless this place that knows full well what was
made here,
that wears the mark of it always,
imprinted forever by what passed by
in its intricate, astonishing grace."

The Cure for Sorrow,
By Jan Richardson



Christmas, 2018

Dear Family and Friends:

My husband's favorite carol was "Oh Holy Night". This morning I sit propped in bed, glad for the comfort and respite of a Saturday with no immediate demands. I have extra hot coffee at my finger tips, a good read on my night stand. I've googled Christmas classical music on my iPhone. The first piano and orchestral number is serendipitously Bob's favorite. The one in which he would sing along softly in his mellow (but slightly off-key) baritone, emphasizing each beat with his right hand, a conductor in his own world, lyrics moving him to tears. "Fall on your knees and hear the angel voices..." He loved that line! Outside the sliding glass door this morning is a full-on snowstorm! The world beyond the deck an Ansel Adams masterpiece in black and white, oaks, bark, branches, twigs mounding thickly. The kind of snowstorm that brings back memories of Christmases past.

I'm a child at home in Evanston. My parents and the aunts and uncles are singing carols around the piano. Snow flurries outside our "picture window". Lake Michigan roars at the end of our street just a half block away. But I am safe in a clutch of people who love me and whose sweet voices soar in harmony.

I am a mother with two little girls and one little boy. Bob and I are young and we love Christmas. We live in a snug red brick house. We don't have a fireplace yet, so we hang stockings on the door knobs of our children's bedrooms. We fill the stockings while snow drifts silently, while small forms dream away and carols sing from our stereo.

Now I'm remembering a time we DO have a fireplace and our little ones are grown with eleven children among them. We sit by a robust fire which spits and crackles and glimmers. Our own two stockings hang loose waiting to be filled. We are sweetly tired from hauling in the huge tree that stands waiting for decorations, from securing a fresh wreath high on the barn siding above the mantle, one of us holding the jiggling ladder while the other reaches up and up. We're trying not to laugh, to lose control of our precarious task. The room is fragrant with pine.

Today I am approaching the third Christmas since Bob died. On a Saturday morning like this he would be sitting facing me coffee in hand, a cozy throw across his knees. He would have brought *me* a perfect cup and a bowl of fresh raspberries lightly adorned with raw sugar. We would be hair-mussed and rumpled, watching snow accumulate, perhaps discussing Saturday chores, gifts to consider, Christmas tasks to accomplish. In earlier years cross country skiing might be on our agenda.

I love thinking these thoughts, writing memories on a snow-fraught Saturday pre-Christmas. I write with pain and I write with joy. I write with gratitude and I write with longing. I do not wish or even expect that three Christmases out from losing my best friend I would be free of that longing, that pain. I am glad it is mine to hold to my heart. He is among the angels now, singing with the voice he always wanted here on earth, a golden-noted, perfect-pitched baritone who harmonizes easily. He, along with the angels can fall on his knees without hurting, healed, able to worship Jesus, the incarnated Christ of Christmas, and relish all of Heaven's glories. How could I wish him back?



The snow fall is picking up intensity! I'll get dressed and take an Ansel Adams lesser iPhone version of this beauty. I'll go out and get more greens for the mantle. I will not mind that there is no fresh wreath to worry about hanging, that the tree I purchase will be small and manageable. I will sing aloud "Oh Holy night" in my car perhaps, or in our house which is still home to me. In my earth-bound way I will choose Hope, Joy and Peace. I will metaphorically fall on my knees, thankful for all that I had and all that will be.

With love and grace to each of you this Christmas,

