

# Letter to Uncle Cal on the Occasion of His Funeral Service: “Under a Wing”

Dearest Uncle Cal,

I am not sure where you are exactly, as I am not sure *where* Heaven is. I am not sure if you are “up there” or sleeping until the final events of this earth are completed, or nearby as a part of the “great cloud of witnesses” who are mentioned in the book of Hebrews. In any case, I believe with all my heart you are safe in the arms of Jesus, and after 94 years on this earth that is a blessing beyond anything I or we can imagine. It is called “The Blessed Hope.”

Wherever you are, I am choosing to honor you before others for your faithfulness to me as a niece and friend. I go back with you so to speak, to the time you changed my diapers and babysat while my mom and dad (along with you and Nanna and Paul) worked to get Good News Publishers off the ground in an office building in downtown Chicago. All of you were fresh from Minneapolis, launching what has become a world wide ministry, now called Good News/Crossway. I was six weeks old in 1940, and you were only 15 back then.

I remember your courtship of the beautiful Georgina (Tootie) Lange, your ever-present self in our home, our kitchen, our yard. I remember that you had had polio, and I heard adults

talk about how you survived nearly unscathed except for occasionally falling forward when running. I remember services at Evanston Gospel Chapel with my mom and dad, you and Nanna and Paul. I remember you in your Air Force uniform. I recall a picture of you and me in the snow outside the chapel, me in a velvet coat, leggings, and fur muff, and you in your uniform, so handsome, snow piled around us, and the tiny red brick chapel in the background. And I remember being a flower girl at your wedding to Tootie in 1948, tossing petals on the long white walkway, flowers in my hair, and you and Tootie looking heartbreakingly young, kids in love. I remember singing around the piano at my house on Dempster street in Evanston. Every one was singing hymns — *Grace Greater than All Our Sins*, *The Stranger of Galilee*, *Wonderful Grace of Jesus*, with Tootie rippling over the keys, as my mom and dad, Paul and Beth, you and Tootie, and little me, sang at the top of our lungs and in sweet harmony those precious words.

You and Tootie moved to Southern California with us in 1953 and bought property there in Rolling Hills. You and my parents built homes that even today would be as beautiful and desirable as they were then in all their mid-century design. That was the era in which I attended Wheaton Academy in Illinois as a boarding high school student home only for vacations. Since I didn't attend school in California, I was a lonely teenager with few connections except for our church youth group in Long Beach. California sunshine is legendary, and many youth group outings consisted of all day and into the evening beach parties, replete with body surfing,

laying out, and finishing the day by roasting hot dogs and marshmallows in the light of the moon. You and Tootie were youth group supporters, if not formally elected leaders, and I travelled with you to many a beach for these outings in the rumble seat of your Model T Ford convertible. The wind would be whipping my hair as we took off on any given Saturday to So Cal beaches, from Manhattan to Hermosa to Redondo to Corona del Mar, all the way to New Port. In many ways you were the truest friends I had.

When I married Bob, my high school sweetheart and the love of my life, you loved him for me, but you loved him for who he was, no questions asked. In our visits out to California and your visits back to the Chicago area, we were able to develop as couples an even deeper understanding of marriage, love, and commitment. Bob understood my lifelong loyalty to people who had raised me, understood the challenges my parents faced in my mother's grave illnesses and near death, and in my father's early death at age 48 when I was 21, my brothers only 16 and 18. My husband shared my love for you deeply. In fact, it was you Cal, who called me in Wheaton from UCLA Medical Center a snowy early morning on February 14, 1962, to tell me my father had died. I will never forget your words, your own broken heart, and the steadfast presence you and Tootie maintained by my dad and mother's side during the last four years of my father's life as he fought to live.

In Chicago I remember many years later when my mother's life hung in the balance, post aneurysm surgery, you and

Tootie, needing to get back to California, headed for the airport. My brothers and I had felt your calming presence, and though we understood, we were sad to see you go. And then, not so many hours later, you two appeared in her room at the hospital! You had simply changed your minds, came back, and saw us through until she died not long afterward. I remember the incredible relief and gratitude I felt for your presence.

I could enumerate many more memories; indeed it is difficult for me to parse out just a few. Briefly here are some more: I remember how you prayed. You never really knew your earthly father, and your prayers to your heavenly Father were so familiar and real and intimate, I knew He was a breath away. I remember how you studied scripture, loving the Word and using your fine mind to extrapolate all that you could grasp. I remember how you loved Tootie and your kids, Joy and Jon, and your grandkids, Cameron and Ian. It was like being “under a wing” of sorts to be in your presence. And now, dear Uncle Cal, you are as the old song says, “Under *His Wings*” you are *safely abiding*, Home, safe, whole.

Until we meet again, I remain your loving and thankful niece,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'April', written in black ink.