

Perspective

Vol. 4, No. 4

Growing Edges

October, 1994

Tragedy comes in many sizes and shapes. We find it in the macrocosm of human history. Team member Marti Ensign graphically takes us into this in her moving first-hand report, "Rwanda Revisited." And Kigali only makes us think of Sarajevo and Soweto and Belfast and Auschwitz.

Tragedy also strikes us in the microcosm of our own personal histories. On Saturday, August 13, 1994, at 12:30 a.m. (PDT) my brother, Jerry, passed into eternity. Just seven weeks earlier I had been with Jerry and his fiancée, Melinda. They were showing Nicky (Melinda's mother—a delightful lady) and me where they hoped to build a home. It was just bare dirt overlooking bare hills, but the two of them saw so much more. Jerry had been through so much difficulty and sadness through the years that I was delighted to see their playful excitement. They were planning to marry on August 26.

Then in July a long latent cancer struck with a vengeance, and the prognosis was grim. Jerry, hating hospitals, asked to go home, and dear Melinda (I cannot say enough good about her) watched over him virtually day and night.

Lee, my younger brother, and I flew out to be with Jerry. Those few days together are among the most precious of my life. I will always treasure them. Jerry was completely lucid throughout. We cried. We laughed. We retold old stories and filled in long forgotten details. Melinda and I held each other as Jerry shared the prognosis with his son, Jay. We prayed together. I anointed Jerry with consecrated oil. Then we said goodbye, and as we did Jerry whispered to me, for his voice was now down to a whisper, "Have a good life!" A long standing pastor/friend, Eugene Coffin, and I conducted the memorial service August 17.

How I am doing through all this? The most dominate sensation is emptiness. Because both Mom and Dad were seriously ill and died during our growing up years, Jerry was not only an older brother but something of a parent figure to us two younger brothers. And so, at first, I kept thinking, "How dare the world go on without Jerry!" But then I realized that for me, in one sense, the world is not going on. Something of real substance in my life is gone, really and truly gone. And there is an empty space. Jerry, I know, has passed from this life into greater life, but the empty space is there nonetheless.

Then, too, I feel sadness, bone weary sadness. I am not one who cries easily, but I find my eyes moist a lot these days. I don't feel strong right now. I am needing to be weak and vulnerable and to depend upon others. I hug Carolyn a lot. I do feel some guilt at being absorbed by personal loss when huge tragedies are engulfing the world. But great tragedies at a distance do not diminish personal tragedies close at hand. I am learning to disregard this feeling.

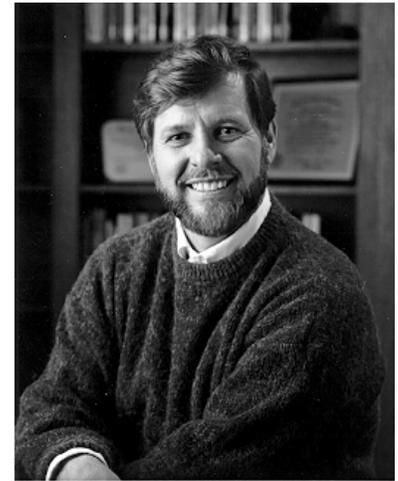
Where is God in all this? A very present help in time of trouble. But not in any dramatic way. The grief process is something I must walk through, and it is enough to know that God is walking through it with me. And so I am doing the tasks at hand—the duty of the present moment—and in the doing I find myself praying often the prayer of Lady Julian, "God, of your goodness give me yourself, for you are enough for me. And only in you do I have everything. Amen."

And may I conclude with those words which Lady Julian says God, in tender love, speaks over all who are in pain, "But all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

Grace and mercy,



Richard J. Foster



Growing Together

Based upon a much-loved African-American spiritual, the following devotion is taken from a new RENOVARÉ Resource for Spiritual Renewal that will be published by HarperSanFrancisco in 1995. A copy of "Down by the Riverside" will be needed.

"DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE"

Scripture Reading - Isaiah 2:1-4

In this Scripture we see a great vision of peoples from every nation streaming to Zion, the mountain of God. It is a wonderful description of reconciliation and justice between the nations. Instead of differences being settled by bloody battle, the Lord judges between the nations. Swords are beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks—what a glorious, hope-filled vision!

Scripture Meditation - Isaiah 2:4b

Begin your meditation by singing the first verse of this well-known spiritual. Allow the refrain to become a personal affirmation and confession; "I ain't going' study war no more." Now, memorize the text:

**they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.**

Allow prayers to rise from your heart for the fulfillment of this vision. Pray for the nations. Pray for the collapse of hostilities between peoples. Pray for the peace of the cities. Imagine swords and shields and B1 bombers and Trident missile systems all melted down and turned into plowshares and pruning hooks and medical technology and recreation equipment.

Reflecting in Song

The spiritual is an original African-American contribution to music. Born as it was out of terrible anguish and bondage, it reaches into our heart and soul in unexplainable ways. No other form of music touches those longings that lie buried deep within us all.

One of the most powerful characteristic of the spiritual is the "wandering refrains" which allow for considerable improvisation. Words can be freely changed and added as the singer is taken up into the message of the song.

Personally, I will always remember the use of this particular song in a gathering of young Quakers from across North America. We had been struggling with the hard issues of war and peace, earnestly trying to cut through the Gordian knot of the conflict in Southeast Asia. Then in the midst of our debate and our struggle, someone began singing, "Gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside . . ." The song began

to move throughout the group, first in a quiet, almost tentative way, then with greater and greater conviction. Time seemed to stand still as dozens upon dozens of verses were improvised. ("Gonna lay down my napalm bomb . . .") Our resolve grew and deepened. In those days we were a few lonely voices crying in the wilderness, but in time the conscience of an entire nation was aroused and a tumultuous cry went forth (accompanied by many unsavory influences) that could not be ignored.

Perhaps you will want to reflect on any contemporary issues to which this song can speak a prophetic word. Then sing with that situation and issue as a backdrop. This may even draw you into improvising appropriate verses.

The backdrop to the "riverside" imagery is the "crossing over Jordan" and entering the Promised Land. This metaphor is used to refer to both our living in the fullness of the kingdom of God now and our transition from this life into the greater life of heaven. With this in mind consider first what burdens you are carrying that you need to lay down. Try to identify specific burdens. Then, as you sing, let go of each one. Make up verses which name the burdens.

Next, consider your death. (It will come, you know, and it is best to come to terms with this reality of human existence.) Notice how many of the verses in this song view "crossing over Jordan" as a reunion, a meeting of those who have gone on before. Recently I had a brother die, and as we were saying goodbye to each other, I asked him to be sure to greet our parents and the baby sister who died at birth for me. This is one of the great hopes of heaven. Death, which takes away our friends and loved ones, will one day restore to us what it took away for we, too, will "cross over Jordan." Sing this spiritual thinking of— even naming— those you hope to meet someday soon. Not only family, but those in the larger family of faith. Such is the hope of the resurrection— because he lives, we too shall live.

Questions of Examen and Exercises of Devotion

1. Are there aspects of Isaiah's great vision of reconciliation that I dislike?
2. Am I afraid to deal with the topic of death?
3. Assuming that you made a conscious choice to "study war no more," jot down a list of things you might study instead.
4. Go to a literal riverside and use it as a visual backdrop to the singing of this spiritual.

The Prayer of the Heart

Lord, laying things down is not my style. I like to pick things up— be in charge, to accomplish. Help me to know what to lay down and what to pick up so that I may ever live in harmony with your ways. Amen.

Richard J. Foster

Marti Ensign, a member of our Board of Trustees, was in Central Africa in April when the airplane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down. Representing Missionary Aviation Fellowship, she crossed the border just as animosities between the Tutsis and Hutus climaxed and the bloodshed started. With her husband, Len, Marti spent years in that region as a medical missionary. Following is a partial account of what she saw, felt, and experienced on her visit there again in July.

Rwanda Revisited

The refugee camp and orphanage are set on a ridge in the mountains of Rwanda, just inside the border with Uganda. It is reached by a road that Westerners would label "impassable," but our ancient Landrover did an able job of transporting us although bone-bruised by the time we descended down out of her filthy interiors. Dry season had coated the road with an inch or two of talcum powder dust that now covered everything.

As we tried to walk toward the makeshift building that served as the "orphanage," we were surrounded by hundreds of ragged children—all of whom wanted either to be picked up or at least to hold our hand. African children are used to being held when they are small. If they are not on their mother's back, they are generally being carried around by brothers, sisters, aunties, or cousins in the large extended family rugo.

I could see that the worn-out workers had been doing their best, but the number are just too overwhelming. Warned of our coming, they had tried to clean things up, but you can imagine! Water is scarce; diapers are unknown, and dysentery is rampant.

The few children we did manage to pick up whimpered so pathetically when we put them down that it became unbearable even to try. I angrily asked the doctor in charge of the orphanage why the various African Aide workers I saw sitting around on the edge of the cots just staring off into space were not actively holding and caring for these little ones.

"Well, Marti," he said, "these girls are all from the camp. They have just been bereaved of almost everyone and everything they've ever loved. They actually need someone to hold and comfort them in their grief." "Yes," I thought, "and me, too."

I'd listened to reports of our hospital being ransacked and looted, our nurses, and even one of our Rwandaise doctors being killed, and thought how much effort, how much money it took to get

one of these nationals trained to that level. I'd heard the story of our cook whom we had hired as a young garden boy and later trained to cook, how he and his wife and his elderly parents, and the children who were still living in his home, had been killed. I, too, was bereaved, and I should understand.

It's awful enough to hear the statistics and see the media pictures, but to have lived years among these good people, to have performed their weddings and delivered their children, and to have felt that they were indeed members of our family, made the grief almost incapacitating.

What we could actually do seemed so small and insignificant in the scope of the need. The doctor on our team saw some patients, and we asked questions to try to ascertain how we could best get help after we came home, then we left, sobbing.

It was genuinely traumatic to drive through the trashed and deserted streets of the once proud city of Kigali. Four years ago when we were there, it was a clean and bustling marketplace. Because of a program call "muganda" every citizen was obliged to give one-half day a week to the country. From the president and his cabinet, the bishops and pastors, to the school children six years and above; everyone gave their half day. City streets were cleaned up, hillsides terraced to stop erosion, roads repaired. The Rwandaise were justly proud of their efforts, and both national spirit and the economy was at an all-time high. Then the invasion from Uganda by Tutsi refugees began to destabilize the country in 1991. The results are so widely known that almost any educated person in the world knows about the Rwanda tragedy, the scope of which has never been seen before.

Now we drove around wrecked and burned vehicles left in the streets, nearly every glass window in cars and buildings broken out. I thought how difficult it had been to get one box of window glass or one vehicle transported into this tiny, land-locked country. Now everything seemed destroyed. Even the United Nations headquarters had no running

water, no electricity, no telephones. Any NGO (non-governmental organization) workers who come into the city to help must bring their own food and drinking water, all bedding and toiletries with them.

We went to one mansion abandoned in the first days of trouble by the ex-patriot owners and now used as housing by one of the NGOs. Boxes of bottled drinking water and scant food supplies sat about on the floor. When we walked to the end of the garden near its wall, we saw the mass grave of those who had tried to find refuge in this place. The two scrawny and tick infested German shepherds had dug some of the human bones up and they lay scattered nearby. None of us could swallow lunch.

We desperately cried out to God, "what can we do?" The danger is to let what we can't do prevent us from doing what we can. As we spoke to African church leaders, aide and government workers, the one word that reoccurred over and over was "hopeless."

One doctor broke down completely. He had worked two days with very little sleep and very little to eat, sewing up machete wounds, setting broken bones, and performing amputations. And just when he thought the crises was over, soldiers came in and shot and killed every one of his patients. No wonder his despair!!

To comfort us, the Lord sent many to tell of miraculous escapes; of the preservation of entire families. They told of Hutus who protected and hid their Tutsi friends at the peril of their own lives and Tutsis who hid Hutus.

As we sought the Lord, two things became clear. One, that a loving Heavenly Father who knows more

in detail and depth than we do, grieves over the suffering of this nation and most particularly his Body, the Church, in this place. The second is that if Jesus himself said that "no small sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's notice and care," then there is not one Rwanda orphan, not one grieving parent or spouse, not one missionary who has lost every earthly possession, that is beyond his tender love and care.

Maybe there is a third thing that emerges as a deep conviction. We must do something. Pray, most certainly, but we must also give out of our abundance. We must really care and we must go out and help if it is at all possible.



Marti and Len live in Olympia, Washington. She is Director of the Department of Women in Medicine and Dentistry for the Christian Medical/Dental Society.

Going Deeper

From the writings of ancient civilizations and reports from within our own cultures we learn and see that differences in customs, skin color, and any number of things are viewed with suspicion and animosity. Tragically, the world continues to groan under the weight of bigotry which plays itself out in senseless wars and truncated relationships. We hope our featured items help all of us gain more understanding and empathy for those who face discrimination daily.

Crossing the Danger Water

This 769 page book introduces readers to long-neglected and relatively unknown writings by African-Americans. It includes an extensive selection of poetry, prose, speeches, songs, documents, and letters dating from the pre-Colonial era through the twentieth century's best and most well-known writers including W. E. B. DuBois and Alice Walker.

Under the one cover of this anthology we find rousing letters of anonymous slave rebels and the petition for freedom from a group of Bostonian slaves to the governor of their colony written almost a century before the Civil War. This one volume covers every major figure, every era, every aspect of the Black written and oral tradition—from proverbs, spirituals, and folktales to manifestos, poetry, autobiography, oration, and contemporary fiction.

More Than Equals

Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice (staff members of the John M. Perkins Foundation for Reconciliation and Development) set out a bold, practical plan for racial reconciliation. Though from radially different backgrounds—Spencer from the South; Chris from "Vermont Yankee stock"—they are not only friends, but yokefellows.

Partners for a decade in the ministry of racial reconciliation, Spencer and Chris insist there is hope for America's race problem. Their hope, presented here in detail, is radically Christian. "The cause of racial reconciliation needs yokefellows . . . not solely for the sake of racial harmony—even though it will lead to that—but for the witness of the gospel."

"Urban Hope"

Donn Thomas (a RENOVARÉ Board of Trustees member) and some of his close friends recorded this compact disc in 1992. Performed by musician/pastors as a response to the Los Angeles riots, it was produced and then released by Integrity Music.

The music style is urban contemporary worship, and the text was an important factor in selecting specific songs. Subtitled "The right message . . . the right time," the disc contains songs that speak of the hope that we find when we know Jesus Christ and live out of that Center.

Chosen mainly from Integrity's Hosanna! and Praise! collections, the disc includes "We Praise Your Holy Name," "Every Generation," "Forgive," "The Best in Life," and "Standing Together" plus five other selections

The Souls of Black Folk

To everyone who buys all three featured items—Crossing the Danger Water, More Than Equals, and "Urban Hope"—we will send a complimentary copy of The Souls of Black Folk.

A classic, this book by W. E. B. DuBois established him as "the voice of the twentieth-century civil rights movement." This book "is a moving and magnificently textured portrait of a dispossessed people in search of themselves in an alien world" (Boston Transcript).

Growing Pains

We have a permanent address—**8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO 80112-5609** and telephone number—**303-792-0152**.