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*In Sickness and in Health*



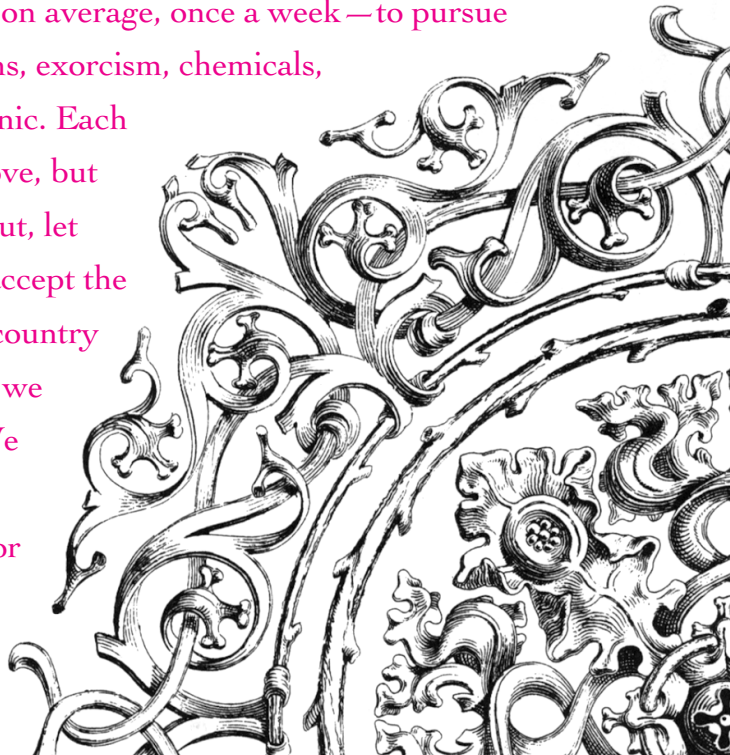
WE WERE VISITING FRIENDS IN FLORIDA THE SUMMER OF 1978 WHEN MURIEL, MY WIFE, STARTED TO REPEAT THE SAME STORY SHE had told us five minutes earlier. I reminded her that this was a rerun. She just laughed and continued. *Funny, I thought, that's never happened before.* But it happened again. Occasionally. She was fifty-five years old.

Three years later, when she was hospitalized to check out her heart, a young doctor called me to one side and said, "You may need to think about the possibility of Alzheimer's." I was incredulous. *These young doctors are so presumptuous. And insensitive.* Muriel could do almost anything she had ever done. True, we had stopped entertaining in our home — no small loss for the president of a thriving seminary and Bible college. Though she was a great cook and hostess, it had become increasingly difficult to plan a menu. But Alzheimer's? I had hardly heard the name. Still, a dread began to lurk around the fringes of my consciousness.

When her memory deteriorated further, we went to a neurologist friend who gave her the full battery of tests and, by elimination,

diagnosed her as having Alzheimer's. But there was some question in my mind since she had none of the typical physical deterioration. So we went to the Duke University Medical Center, believing we should get the best available second opinion. My heart sank as the doctor asked her to name the Gospels and she looked pleadingly at me for help. But she quickly bounced back and laughed at herself. A little nervous, perhaps, but nothing was going to get *her* down!

We were urged by friends—on average, once a week—to pursue every variety of treatment: vitamins, exorcism, chemicals, this guru, that healer, the other clinic. Each suggestion was an expression of love, but how could I even check them all out, let alone pursue them? We chose to accept the verdict and not chase around the country after every new miracle treatment we might hear about. Go standard. We would trust the Lord to work a miracle in Muriel if he so desired or work a miracle in me if he didn't.



## SO THIS IS IT

Multitudes in this fallen world bravely bear far greater burdens than mine.

Some of them are on my special prayer list—a dear friend whose daughter, with drug-numbed mind, is in and out of mental wards, in and out of bed with anyone and everyone. Year after dreadful year. Whose baby is she carrying now? Or the couple in deadly combat; the love they once knew, dead. Those with children who steadfastly refuse the knowledge of God. As I felt the pain of my friends, my own did not seem so severe. Still, there were moments. . . .



The radio-station manager, the program manager, and the producer of my wife's morning program, *Looking Up*, asked for an appointment. I knew that occasionally a program she produced was not used, but the response to her monologue of upbeat encouragement continued to be strong. In fact, though the program was designed for women, businessmen often told me how they arranged their morning affairs so they could listen too. As the appointment began, the three executives seemed

uneasy. After a few false starts, I caught the drift. They were reluctantly letting me know that an era was ending. Only months before, they had talked of national syndication.

“Are you meeting with me to let us know that Muriel cannot continue?” I asked, trying to help them out. They seemed relieved that their painful message was out and none of them had to say it. *So this is it*, I thought. *Her public ministry is over*. No more conferences, TV, radio. I should have guessed the time had come.

But she didn’t think so! She may have lost the radio program, but she insisted on accepting invitations to speak, even though invariably she would come home crushed and bewildered that her train of thought was lost and things did not go well. Gradually, reluctantly, she gave up public ministry.

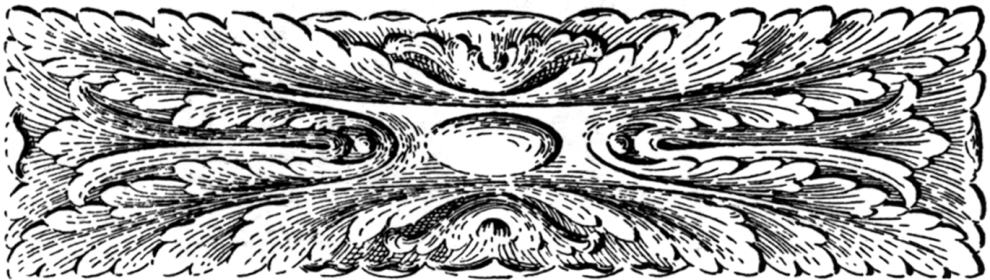
Still she could counsel the many young people who sought her out, she could drive and shop, write her children. The letters didn’t always



make good sense, but then, the children would say, “Mom always was a bit spacey.”

She volunteered to read textbooks for a blind graduate student. The plan was to put them on tape so that others could use them. I was puzzled that those responsible never used the tapes, till it began to dawn on me that reading and writing were following art and public speaking in slowly slipping out of reach. She was disappointed with each failure and frustration, but only momentarily. Then she would laugh and have another go at it.

Muriel never knew what was happening to her, though occasionally when there was a reference to Alzheimer’s on TV she would muse aloud, “I wonder if I’ll ever have that?” It didn’t







seem painful for her, but it was a slow dying for me to watch the vibrant, creative, articulate person I knew and loved gradually dimming out.

## SCARY BUSINESS

As I plowed full speed ahead in life and ministry, the first warning shot across the bow of my ship was a call on the pulpit phone in a church in distant Pennsylvania. (I had always wondered what those phones were for!) It was almost time for me to speak when the emergency call came through: Muriel feared she was having a heart attack. It turned out that there was nothing wrong with her heart, but something had gone very wrong with my leaving her alone. Muriel began to travel with me more often.

Memory loss is scary business. *Where am I? How can I get home? Where is my husband, my only security?* When traveling with me, Muriel never panicked. If we were separated, she'd strike out with her customary cheerful confidence and find her way out of the labyrinthine tangle of misperceptions.



In 1986 we were on a wide-ranging ministry tour and Muriel stayed close to me in our trek through Pakistan, the Philippines, and Taiwan, reveling in every exotic sight and experience.

“You’ve given me such an exciting life!” she often exulted.

Then came Tokyo, largest and most complicated of cities. I left her in our room while I ran a brief errand. On my return, Muriel was gone! My heart sank—how could I ever find her in the unending maze of narrow, winding streetlets? I ran—something an adult does not do in Japan—first down one street, then another. I asked at a police box, I asked shopkeepers, I asked passersby. She couldn’t have gone far in so short a time, and certainly not unnoticed.

When I finally arrived back at the mission headquarters where we were staying, a sense of panic had begun to rise. Lest it engulf my spirit, with only half-concealed desperation I asked the mission executives to pray with me. As we prayed we heard that familiar burst of laughter that often heralded Muriel’s arrival. Oblivious to the panic

she had set off, she bubbled over with an exciting story of adventure. She had gone to find me but instead had discovered a school yard full of delightful children to watch and “talk” to. Then a nice teacher called a taxi to bring her home. Home? How did the “nice taxi man” know where “home” was? Seems he stopped at the same police box I had alerted shortly before. . . .

I changed tactics once again, trying to keep pace with the ever-shifting boundaries of safety. A few months later, we found ourselves in a motel room on the lovely beach of Grand Cayman Island. I had learned my lesson in Tokyo—never let Muriel out of my sight. She played on the beach in front of our motel, building sand castles. I could see in her work evidences of the skilled artist that once was. From the desk where I was preparing my messages, I kept watch. She reminded me, sitting there in the sand, of one of our three-year-olds in an earlier, carefree day.

Then suddenly, incredibly, she was gone!

I ran down the beach one direction, realizing that with every step she could be getting farther down the beach the other way.

Finally, exhausted and helpless, I returned to our room — only to discover Muriel! Seems some “nice young man” had offered her a ride home. He drove down the beach highway till she spotted our motel. Spotted our motel? In that string of look-alikes even I had difficulty spotting ours. I believe in guardian angels. In younger days, our children claimed that “God hasn’t given Mom a guardian angel. He’s assigned a whole platoon to her!” Such was the delightful flitting butterfly I had captured for my own.

## RESTLESS FEET

Before long, Muriel began to wander away from our home on campus. A young woman named Sandi came to live with us and be a companion to Muriel. She didn’t last long. Muriel, such a self- starting, free-spirited, nonstop doer, became fearful and



agitated the moment I left home, felt trapped when she wasn't free to follow me, and "escaped" daily. Many times a day!

To help alleviate Muriel's fears and Sandi's frustrations, I called often from the office and daily when on the road. Except from Tanzania. There it took most of the day waiting at a dusty outpost, miles from the school at which I was speaking, to get through to South Carolina. When at last the connection was made, Sandi was beside herself. Muriel was incorrigible—I must come home immediately.

Though cooler heads prevailed and Sandi was finally persuaded to let me finish my assignment, she had had it.

The moment I arrived she resigned, and no amount of assurance that Muriel would henceforth accompany me on every out-of-town trip could dissuade her. Muriel, however, was delighted with the new plan to travel with me always.



A gifted artist, Muriel had long dreamed of going to London, the city she considered the art capital of the world. Britannia not only ruled the waves, it seems; Britannia also plundered the art

treasure troves of the world! So when I received an opportunity to minister in England, we stayed in London for over a week. But we were too late.

With high anticipation, I found the Tate gallery with the world's largest collection of Muriel's favorite artist, Turner. A great sadness swept over me as I watched her rush through the gallery with never a glance at the masterworks she had loved so long. So, keeping pace with those restless feet, we spent our time flitting about the great city, occasionally lighting for a moment to enjoy the grandeur. When we reached the Parliament, Muriel wanted to follow the crowd into the building. I knew she could never survive the long wait in that line, so we walked on, taking pictures of the antiquity that surrounded us.

I focused on a statue of some important personage, and when I turned to walk on, Muriel was not in sight. I dashed to a nearby bobby, standing imperturbably on guard.



On guard for what? Certainly not for a wandering gray-haired American woman! He was totally indifferent to my plight. Maybe she had joined the queue of Parliament wanna-bes, I thought. As I ran alongside the line of patiently waiting tourists, suddenly, from the door through which some of them periodically entered, emerged a uniformed young lady escorting gate-crasher Muriel. There was no exciting story of meeting the prime minister, though, just a subdued grumbling about this not-so-nice young lady who had stopped her midcourse.

