

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
65

Dearest Grandchild,

Today's letter involves an article I wrote 50 years ago. I got a call from a friend in Illinois last week saying he had seen it reprinted recently in a church paper. The need for thanksgiving, as you know, is timeless.

The woman featured in this article was a member of the East Side Church in San Jose where our dear friend Warren Phelps was the preacher. We were together at the hospital when the following encounter took place. The following article was published in our church paper, and also included in the book "Personal Vignettes". This book, and many others are available on line, and can be downloaded at no cost via www.boycemouton.com

I'M SO THANKFUL FOR MY SHELL

"In 1954 a young missionary recruit to Alaska was stricken with a paralytic disease which left her bedfast for the last ten years of her life. Her name . . . Marie Napier. The first time I met Marie was in her home in Sunnyvale, California. As I stepped into the front room I immediately discerned the sickening pulsation of her breathing machine. It was a rocking bed . . . the first one I had ever seen. The bed, patient and all, was rocking back and forth in large gyrations . . . movements carefully designed to force air into paralyzed lungs. Marie was emaciated and pale. She had not moved in over five years. I awkwardly tried not to stare at her shriveled body. I clumsily looked at my feet to conceal the expression of shock which must inevitably have registered upon my countenance. I raised my eyes to concentrate upon her face and there I discerned a broad and understanding smile. Her flashing eyes darted back and forth, and I observed a small lateral movement of her head which consisted only of slightly rocking it from side to side.

Gradually I grew more comfortable in her presence and we began to talk. It was evident that even a simple conversation was a difficult task for Marie. She timed her words to coincide with the proper movement of the bed and spoke in short staccato sentences. When I left there that day I walked with an invigorated step. I had been exposed to a contagious mixture of warmth and courage which had blessed my life in a way too wonderful for words. I visited Marie on other occasions. . . . each time I inevitably found the same or similar emotion when I left. I had come to give . . . but I had left receiving. Each time there was the same smile . . . the same selfless concern over my problems, . . . the same valuable counsel to combat the stress and fatigue of our busy world. Marie Napier was a perennial fountain of praise to God and service to mankind.

The last time I saw Marie before her death was in the Santa Clara County Hospital in San Jose, California. A power failure had stopped the rhythm of her bed and by the time she arrived at the hospital the flame of her life was burning very low. I came the next day for Scripture and prayers. The pulsing collar of the iron lung had left her neck chaffed and raw. The doctor

therefore had granted a brief respite from the painful lung to a less efficient device that did not hurt her neck. It was a “breathing shell” which was placed across her torso. As I stepped to her side she looked up with tired eyes . . . a faint smile broke upon her face and she gasped . . . “I’m so thankful for my shell.”

Somehow I managed to hold back the tears of shame and regret that welled up within my eyes. I had looked upon this woman before with admiration and respect . . . but now in the finale of her life she had granted a majestic and magnificent memory which all but defied description. With life ebbing from her frail body she had risen above the maze of pain and confusion to cast another jewel into the treasure chest of memories which she bequeathed to mankind. Too weak and low for the sham of hypocrisy she bared her heart and exposed her secret thoughts. “I’m so thankful . . .” Thankful for her shell. At a time when many would have cursed God for the paralysis, the power failure, the pain, the thousands of heartaches associated with a decade of suffering. Marie Napier speaks from the grave a sermon in one sentence. “I’M SO THANKFUL FOR MY SHELL”.

*What a wonderful commentary on the verse: **“In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18).***

If Marie Napier could be thankful for her shell . . . God forgive us for complaining about anything.”

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce