

10 Years, 1 Year

December 18 marks two anniversaries of immense personal loss – 10 years ago today, my father-in-law passed away from ALS. Though some memories are still painful, a decade of time has numbed the pain of his loss a little, and it's easier to focus on the good times we shared and the countless wonderful things he did for people during his lifetime. Albeit selfishly, I sometimes wish that Vince was here to meet his 7 wonderful grandchildren, to realize our family's growing relationship with God and our spiritual journey, and to see how far his son has come in life. I think he would be so proud. [More about December 18, 2000 was written here.](#)

December 18, 2009 – Last year, on the day that was 9 years to the day after Vince's passing, our family dog Charity passed away unexpectedly. She was almost 12 years old but in seemingly good health. She was fine in the morning, gone by dinnertime. Not enough time has passed to heal the pain of her loss since she was like a child to us, but there is no reason to dwell on such melancholy topics here in the blog.

I'm thankful that I have a busy December 18 this year, that it's on a Saturday and that I don't have to spend it alone. I'm writing this ahead of time and scheduling it to post itself on December 18 automatically in hopes of maybe not realizing this day of personal infamy until it's over. Will the entire day pass without me thinking about Vince or Charity? Probably not, they and other loved ones lost hold a special place in my heart, and I think about them most every day, especially in December. But December 18 this year will have joy of its own as family comes from far away to celebrate the season. I look forward to making happy memories for December, especially for the 18th, which just happens to be exactly one week before Christmas, a day I'm really looking forward to celebrating this year more than ever. Losing Charity last year was an awful thing to happen just before

Christmas time, just as it was even more terrible to lose a parent / grandparent in our family just before Christmas 10 years ago. But when I lost Charity, and I realized that I was more curious about God's plan for me than I was looking to be angry with Him, I knew that I was on my way to having a wonderful spiritual relationship with Him.

For that, I am very thankful, and it makes me want to celebrate this Christmas season for what it truly is: a celebration of the birth of Jesus and an acknowledgment of the glorious love that God has for us.

Goodbye To Ron Santo

People who don't pay much attention to baseball and the MLB, particularly the Chicago Cubs, might not realize who Ron Santo is or that he is gone.



Ron Santo, legendary Chicago Cubs supporter, has passed away at the age of 70. Gaining popularity first as a player then as an outspoken sportscaster, Ron Santo became the voice and face of the Chicago Cubs in recent years. Always saying what was on his mind, Santo's gravelly voice was the easiest way to find that Cubs game on WGN radio 720 in a hurry. As a Cubs

fan, I will miss it.

Sadly, Ron Santo did not live to see himself inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, nor did he see his beloved Cubs win the World Series. If you'd like to read more about Ron Santo or about his crusade against juvenile diabetes, [here is an article](#) in the suburban Chicago newspaper, The Daily Herald.

Condolences and prayers to the Santo family.

A tale of two gatherings...

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... (Sorry Mr. Dickens)

But then again it was. This weekend families gathered to mark similar yet different events.

On Saturday, my nephew celebrated his birthday. He has reached his teen years, and is more interested in the presents, food and television than the actual gathering. I do believe he 'suffered' through the gathering just to make sure he got his presents. Nothing really wrong with that, I'm sure most young people of his age do exactly the same thing. The gatherings, unless totally oriented toward the youth, are for the adults. We ate, talked, laughed and remembered many of these events during the day. This is what, through the ages, kept families together. We share common bonds and we celebrate those bonds. Be they birthdays, anniversaries, or holidays, times with family and friends keep our bonds alive.

On Sunday, another gathering was held. This was a memorial of the birth and death day of my grandson. He received no physical presents, and he won't be living into his teen years

to complain about the attention he is or isn't getting. This was a day to support those who will miss his presence in the world. It was a time for family and friends to gather and support one another. We ate, talked, laughed and remember many events, but we also shared a tear or two. Coming together in the hard times is another thing that keeps families together. Death, sickness and other troubles are also something we all share. Another common bond. Another way to show support and love.

While on the surface, I wish that all we ever had to do was share the happy occasions, I realize that it is the difficult situations that are the true measure of what we mean to each other. These hard times can show the best humanity has to offer.

So this weekend was the best of times and the worst of times, with the best of times far outshining the worst. Those closest to the sadness may not feel this for quite some time, but in looking back they will eventually remember "The Best of Times."

Grief, a state of mind

In early March of 2004, I was introduced to the terminology 'grief monster'. This was a term used by other widows and widowers to indicate their feelings after loss. Using the words grief monster seemed to indicate a battle needed to be fought with grief. I didn't think that was the case then and I don't think it is the case now.

With a new loss, feelings of grief are again merging with my life. I think that the feelings of grief are there for a reason. Grief is a coping mechanism. While grief isn't a

comfortable feeling, it should be welcomed. We need time to deal with sadness and loss.

The intensity and duration of our feelings of grief indicate where we are in our grief journey. Since people are different, the length and duration of our journeys are also different. The only way we know how far we've come is to look at how we feel grief.

In these difficult times of loss, I've seen grief as a friend. Not always a friend I want around, but as a needed friend. Tears, anger, frustration are all tools to handle our loss. To fight these feelings, as if fighting a monster, would be counterproductive to help they can bring.

Grief can and will come at unexpected times. These times may be inconvenient or embarrassing, but they need to be accepted. As an adult male, I have been taught to harness my feelings. I found that after my wife's death, I no longer do this. If tears are needed, tears will be shed. I no longer shy away from my emotions. It has helped with my healing.

There has been new loss in my life. Another grief journey has begun. The road is the same, but different. It is a journey not taken alone, but with the help of others.

A journey begins with one step; a good journey begins with one step reaching for another's hand.

What next?

This may be a difficult post to read. It was certainly hard to write.

No happy or witty sayings in this post. This is a story of life, death, mourning and maybe life again.

At the beginning of this year many wonderful things were in the making. My 3rd daughter had her wedding scheduled for June. My fourth daughter was to graduate High School. Those two events happened as planned.

Also occurring early in the year, my two oldest daughters told me they were expecting new arrivals. The oldest was due in September, my second daughter due in November. Expanding of family going full force this year. I was really looking forward to visiting my new grandchildren.

The first bad news came when my 2nd daughter had a miscarriage. I was unable to fly down to Florida and be with her. I am very glad she has a wonderful network of support with her. At that time, I had a countdown to the impending birth on my blog. I quietly removed that and all other mention of that news from my blog. This was news I didn't feel like sharing with the rest of the world. Stick with the good news. Too much bad news news in the world.

Last Thursday brought news that my oldest daughter lost her baby too. Much farther along, she had only a month before the due date. I quietly removed the countdown that that impending birth, and wrote a quick cryptic post. The mind was not working well enough to post anything else. I could write about the cause, but I will let [this site](#) handle that. I just needed to get these words out.

I spent the past few days with my oldest, at the hospital and her house. There were many tears flowing. Hugs given and received. While the words were not initially spoken, we were worried about my oldest daughter's life too. She had a serious medical condition that could have take her as well. In this we were fortunate. Physically she is recovering well. The emotional and spiritual recovery will take more time for all

of us.

I did say something about life again didn't I. There is a little bright spot in all of this. I've written a few posts about my daughter's friends. These are people I consider to be my friends also. Our ages and backgrounds vary widely, but they are true friends. People who will be there for my daughter and son-in-law. My children came home to a clean house, because someone thought this would be a good thing to do. They didn't ask, they acted. The bedroom for the newborn was in the final stages of finishing, but the door was off the hinges. It was put back in place and closed. Friends and family will supply food, companionship, or solitude when needed or wanted. Can we ever ask for more?

Through all of this, I've had many old wounds opened again. I keep wondering if each new death will bring back the memories of others. Faces I've not seen in years, faces I never saw, came into my thoughts and dreams. The past and future molds into one. The laugh of a child not heard may be one of the saddest moments in life.

A sobering Tuesday



On Tuesday I was on my way to a job and had to choose a route to take. One of the routes, the one I didn't pick, was blocked with police tape and vehicles, which I found out when I passed it taking the other route. Like accidents and such I pass from time to time, I wondered if I would see it in the paper tomorrow whatever it was. I found out much more quickly than that. When I arrived at the school, I signed in and took note of an article someone had laid out, printed from the

local paper's website. A fire had claimed the lives of a mother and a fifth-grade boy that very morning. The dad, who is said to have set the fire due to financial problems, would die in the hospital a day later. Being closer to the school I was at than any other school in the district I figured I would be dealing with more than teaching today because guess what- I was subbing for fifth grade. As it turned out, while this school was closer the main road was a dividing line so in fact he went to a different school. I guess they didn't want kids to have to cross the busy road. For me that meant not having kids who needed to be consoled, but now the ones at the other school would be the ones involved in the crisis counseling. The fire wasn't even mentioned where I was, but I can bet today this school had some counselors on hand since after all, the family lived only about a half-mile away. There were two surviving children. I pray that they get the help they need to be able to move forward. I am not sure if I ever subbed in the fifth-grader's class. His name isn't familiar, but I think I may recognize him, but maybe not- I have been with hundreds of different kids after all. One thing is for sure though, I will never be subbing in his class again.

May God comfort those two kids who are now parentless and minus one sibling. Peace to them. Typically I don't identify the districts I sub in, but this news deserves a couple of links:

[Officials look to cause of fire that killed members of 'perfect family'](#)

[Police: Kevin Finnerty left suicide note, started fire](#)

Thoughts on a new day

Today had a rough start. I knew that in advance, so I did little things to prepare for it. One was taking an entire day of vacation, instead of just a partial day. Another was to go with the flow of the day.

I went to the funeral of a young man I barely knew. I do know his parents. I know his father very well. We've worked together for that past 16+ years.

Funerals something I generally try to avoid. I've been that way all my life, but for the past 5+ years I've really developed an immense dislike for them. I will go to them when people I know need support I might be able to give. It was still a rough morning.

As to going with the flow... Well after the funeral I thought it would be nice to spend some time with friends. A little time not thinking about the final aspect of life. It was a good choice. Lunch with good friends made the difference in the day.

Just thought I would share.

Just when you thought...

Tonight was an evening of celebration. I had a wonderful time with a bunch of friends celebrating a very special occasion. I'm sure someone else's blog will give a complete rundown of the events, so I won't here. But I did enjoy myself. This post is not about that joy and celebration, but more a feeling of loss, when later events happened.

For the past few years, I've always had a few bittersweet feelings at wedding and anniversary celebrations. These were events that would remind me of what I lost. This was the very first such event in the past five years that I did not have the deep feeling of loss. Two of my daughters were married and those events nearly knocked me flat emotionally.

It has been over 5 years since I last held my wife in my arms. 5 years when the wedding vows were fulfilled. You never really think about that clause "until death do us part". At least not until it happens. Today at the celebration, I did not think about the loss I had, only the joy being shared. A good evening.

But then it happened. I was waiting for my youngest daughter to finish up a game, so I did some shopping at the 24 hour place. I ran into a man who I knew and, I haven't seen him in over 5 years. He did not know of my wife's death. The question "How is your wife?" blew me out of the water. I wasn't expecting to have to tell that to anyone in this area. I live in a small community, I really thought everyone knew.

The comfortable day took a drastic turn with one short question. Emotions filled my every thought. I hesitated on the answer. It was like a punch in the gut. We then shared a few memories and parted. Slowly, the flood of feelings calmed. This is the way of life and death. The memories of our past can warm us as well as send chills down our spines. Those we loved live on through us, and in the stories we tell. In that I found some peace

All this and something more

Did you every have a day you thought would have turned out differently? Did you ever expect one thing, and have something else happen? To answer those questions, yes, I did. Yesterday was one of those days.

It was decided earlier that my daughters and I would go to the Zoo to see the Christmas Light display before it closed for the season. As a family we've always enjoyed visiting the light display. As a family we were members since 1984. The Lights before Christmas started in 1986 and has been our family tradition since that date. We took our small children in strollers, pushed grandfathers (due to health or injury) on wheelchairs. We took relatives from warmer climates on very cold evenings. We even went on cold rainy nights. It was a winter escape. As a family we enjoyed the evenings together.

Since 2003, we have not been able to attend as a complete family. My wife was too ill to take the cold weather in her final month, and I stayed with her. She hasn't been there since that year of course. The years following one daughter or another has not been there as we toured the lights. This year my daughter in Florida was not in Ohio to attend. I am very sorry she missed it again.

So three of my daughters, my son-in-law, some friends when to the lights, on the 5th anniversary of my dear wife's death. I thought a melancholy day was in order. I forgot who much I enjoy the company of my family and friends. I also forgot the magic of seeing hundreds of colorful lights. A day of memories and togetherness. Not really a sad memory last night at all.

After the evening of lights, we went to my eldest daughter's house and shared a glass of wine and bit of dinner. A toast to her memory and more conversation. A wonderful night. I needed that. It was another healing effect on my life. Family is

wonderful.

5 years ago... Final chapter ??

I don't know that I will have much time to blog in the next few days and I wanted to get this down. 5 years ago this weekend, I spent as much of the weekend (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) with my wife. The two youngest were spending time at Grandma's house (with Mom), so The oldest and I were back and forth taking care of the multitude of animals.

I really don't remember anymore what we did on Friday or Saturday. Those days were lost in the many days traveling back and forth from home to Toledo. But the final Sunday I remember very well indeed.

I took my oldest in to visit (Again, I don't know what day), and that Sunday my in-laws took my youngest 3 out for the day. I spent Sunday the 28th with my wife. We didn't do a lot. She sat and did some word search puzzles and a crossword or two. I was reading various magazines and books. A nice quiet time. Around lunchtime I found out that the movie [The Incredible Mr. Limpet](#). Sarah and I both liked that movie, so we watched it while eating. We had Campbell's Vegetable soup and some crackers. I drank coffee, she had some hot tea. She dozed on and off while watching the movie. When it was over she said she was very tired and wanted to get some rest.

She leaned on me walking down the hall, so she wouldn't lose her balance. I tucked her in gave her a hug and kiss. She slept the rest of the afternoon and into the evening. The rest of the family came back. I took my 2nd daughter back home that evening. Late in the evening my wife went to the emergency room with breathing problems. Shortly after that she was

transferred back up to the Ann Arbor Hospital.

That Monday I found out that the cancer had grown back to more than the original size. She had developed pneumonia. She had very little time. That night (early morning really) at 3:55 she passed away. That will be 5 years this Tuesday morning.

For the first few months, I would wake up every morning at 3:55. Then it was every Tuesday at 3:55. Then it was the 30th of each month at 3:55. Finally it was only on the 30th of December. I'm not sure what will happen this Tuesday, it doesn't matter really. The memories are different this year. The anniversaries are more introspective than really sad and depressing.

Many things have helped over the years. Wonderful family, good friends, theater therapy and many other things. I've been lucky and blessed.

There is one other thing to mention. The night after Sarah's death my three youngest were at home. We tried to welcome in the new year. Not a joyful evening, but one of shock. The thing I remember of that night is seeing all the girls in their mother's Eeyore sweats. Bittersweet, yes, but again I remember feeling blessed with my daughters.

So this is the final entry of what happened 5 years ago. Starting the 31st it is the 6th year of being a widower, I have no idea where that journey will lead.