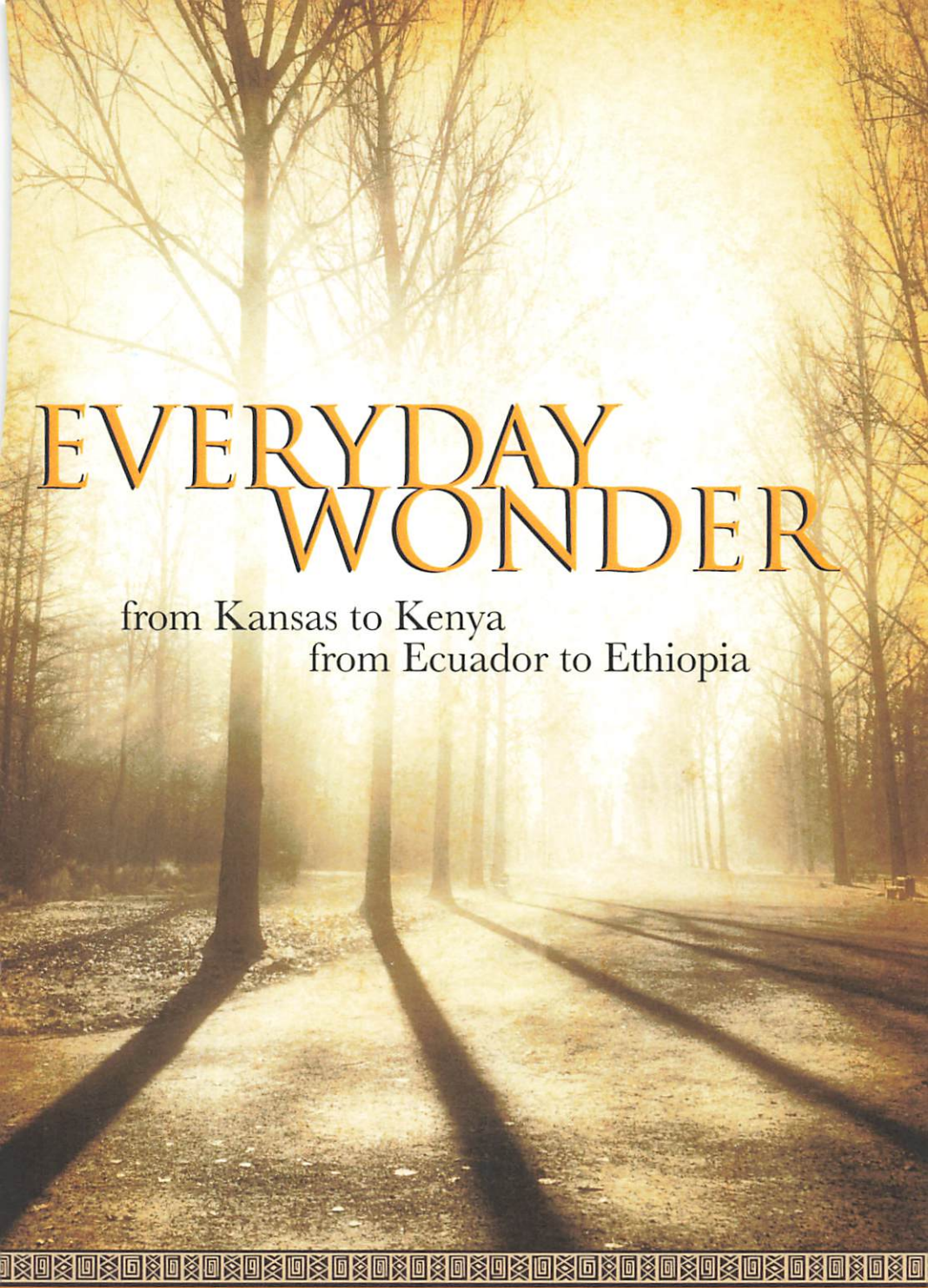

EVERYDAY WONDER

from Kansas to Kenya
from Ecuador to Ethiopia

KAZE GADWAY *and*
PRISCILLA H. WILSON

EVERYDAY WONDER

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EVERYDAY WONDER...AFFIRMATIONS

"Through one amazing experience after another, Priscilla Wilson and Kaze Gadway have learned to discern the presence of the sacred. Whether working on the rough streets of Chicago, teaching youth in Kenya or watching a husband die in an intensive care unit, they are open to what is holy. In turn, their stories will help readers learn to be mindful and in touch with the eternal."

—Bill Tammeus, author and former Faith columnist for *The Kansas City Star*

"This unique assortment of spiritual travel stories takes us on an exploration of the outer and inner world. As we journey with the authors, their passion for understanding and helping others deepens us. Many of these personal essays deal head-on with tough issues and show us the complexities of participating in other cultures. We travel from urban Chicago to rural Kenya, from an Indian reservation in Arizona to a busy market in Mumbai, India. Each story informs and enriches, offering us a chance to learn, grow and change without even leaving home. But of course, when you're done reading, you'll be aching to jump out of your chair, find a philanthropic group and go out into the world to create your own story of change."

—Deborah Shouse, author of *Love in the Land of Dementia*

"*Every Day Wonder from Kansas to Kenya, from Ecuador to Ethiopia* by Priscilla Wilson and Kaze Gadway is not only the journal of two people deeply engaged in service to others; it is also the chronicle of two extraordinary spirit journeys. The stories in this book present encounters that shake foundations and occasion profound insights. Adventures describing culture shock, physical danger, unanticipated hospitality, and death all appear with vivid detail that provides the reader with vicarious experience of the situations. The authors' reflections on those experiences offer the opportunity to see them as occasions of spiritual wonder."

—John Epps, author of *The Theology of Surprise: Exploring Life's Mysteries*

"Our two colleagues write of their profound journeys and their missions of care around the world ... in awe, awareness, and gratitude. See through their eyes the extraordinariness in life. They call us to remember our significant journeys and our vision for the Earth community."

—John and Lynda Cock, authors of *Our Universal Spirit Journey* and *The Transparent Event*

"I feel as if I am right next to each of you in your stories. Waves of raw emotions course through my body as I visualize and feel the stories of the people. I love that the stories on Australia and Tonga speaks volumes to all indigenous people in the world."

—Dorothy Saucedo, Native American Tribal Elder and Episcopal Deacon (Dine' Nation)

"Each of these lively and inviting stories is enchanting and inviting. The perceptive reader will soon realize that Gadway and Wilson are modeling what it means to discern awe and wonder in the midst of very everyday joyful and painful happenings. The more you read these stories the more you realize that these women demonstrate for each of us how we too might begin to feel the same wonder and mystery as we reflect on our very own everyday occurrences."

—R. Bruce Williams, author of *36 Tools for Building Spirit in Learning Communities*

"This book shares with its readers a memoir of what can happen to one's life by paying attention, listening, and building relationships. Asking questions aids all three practices. So much wisdom gets shared in this slim volume, it leaves me wanting more at its end—but it is enough.

Some people think that to change the world one must do something grand, invent some new never-before-thought-of gadget, or negotiate a breakthrough deal or international accord. Kaze Gadway and Priscilla H. Wilson show us that one can, indeed, change the world one community at a time."

—Rev. Timothy Dombek, Canon for Stewardship and Planned Giving at Episcopal Diocese of Arizona

"This book is easy to get into and hard to put down. Priscilla Wilson and Kaze Gadway, who are interesting, gifted and committed to making the world a better place, employ the power of personal narrative to reflect on deep truths. Encounters with people, the world, and the holy shine through it all. A good choice for personal or group reflection."

—Cynthia Holder Rich, MDiv, PhD, Executive Pastor for Ministry, Village Presbyterian Church

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my stories in this book to Rodney Wilson, my friend since the 1960's. "Where is Rodney now?" I would ask. The common response is "He's talking to the men in the garbage truck," or "He's with the cooks in the kitchen." Rodney loved people who work with their hands. They were his heroes. His enthusiasm carried me through the times I needed support. We talked about everything from death to water. Yes, water—wells, gabions, drip irrigation. He wanted safe and clean water in every village. If I crafted a statue, Rodney would be wearing a baseball cap with one hand stretched out to greet someone and the other hand holding a bowl with water dripping down the side. Rodney, the saint of Welcoming and Water.

Kaze Gadway

TRIBUTE

By Priscilla H. Wilson

RODNEY EUGENE WILSON

1926-2011

My soul mate and companion
(for over sixty years)
A gentleman of care, practicality and humor
Affirmed life is a mystery to be lived
Not a problem to be solved

Claimed by loyalty to family, friends, church,
Rotary, Santa Fe, EI/ICA
Welcomed, honored, treasured each person
Discovered what was worth being busy about
Worked with villagers, saw all people with new eyes
Called to service beyond his own life
Reimagined the world as it could be

Received Rotary International Awards
- Citation for Meritorious Service
- Service Above Self
- Distinguished Service Award
- A 75th Year Candle

INTRODUCTION

"Sometimes the briefest moments capture us, force us to take them in, and demand that we live the rest of our lives in reference to them."

—Lucy Greely, *Autobiography of a Face*

WE MET MANY YEARS AGO on the west side of Chicago in the community of Fifth City. Kaze, a recent college grad, looked for a teaching path and joined the Ecumenical Institute. Priscilla, a young suburban mother, arrived as a volunteer searching for ways to serve the needs of the urban.

When did we begin to sense the sacred? When did we recognize how often holy ground appears to us in ordinary moments?

During those years, the two of us reflected on things we could not name; times when life turned us up and down. We pondered phrases like "a god thing happened," or "I was on holy ground." Sometimes we called each other just to say, "Something strange just happened."

As our relationship continued, more than one door to the sacred opened, though not often couched in religious terms. We called this a God event.

As we reach our fifth decade of friendship, we have looked at events that have transformed us. This book continues an historical tradition of sharing stories about everyday events. Telling stories has been a mode of

building relationships since humans first gathered around the community fire.

Our stories reflect our experiences of the sacred in ordinary situations. Holiness happens when the eternal breaks into our time and everything is altered. This is like another world of wonder in the midst of this one.

As you read, you will meet many of the people who shaped us. You will travel from Kansas to Kenya and span nearly fifty years.

Five patterns emerged as we explored the spirit aspect in our lives. In each of the patterns we have written first a mutual story of a time when we are together. Then individual stories follow from each of us. These may be moments in which we are pushed and pulled; or perhaps a fleeting glance that the ground has shifted beneath us; or verification that change may be coming our way. These are rarely a once only happening.

Section 1 BEING AWAKENED
We are shaken into a new level of consciousness.

Section 2 BEING BLESSED
We are radically and unconditionally cherished.

Section 3 BEING DRIVEN
Care propels us to respond to need.

Section 4 BEING ENFOLDED
We are bathed in the promise of goodness.

Section 5 BEING NAMED
We are claimed by something eternal and profound.

We paint times the sacred touches our lives, times when the air thins between heaven and earth. We imagine a new plane of existence, another path.

Afterwards we see life bathed in holiness; glimpse something fundamentally true, something eternal and profound. We may never be quite the same.

Dread and fascination indicate an experience of the holy. As we searched our memories, we had "a-ha" moments and felt compelled to share. We invite you to enjoy these memories as reflections of the profound deeps and refreshing relationships. We hope that you, the reader, discover new ways to respond to the happenings in your life and will recall times when the holy has encountered you.

"Suddenly some ancient mist had lifted from my sight and the ultimate significance of all things was laid bare. Immediately the world is bathed in a wonderful radiance with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side and no person or thing in the world seemed to me trivial or unpleasing."

—Rabindranath Tagore, a Hindu philosopher

Section 1

BEING AWAKENED

Sometimes we are awakened when exposed to an understanding beyond the superficial.
We may be going about daily routines when the foundation beneath us shifts.
Startling and unexpected words of possibility unsettle us.
Or a sight of misery shifts some core values.
An event astonishes.
This awakening is an upheaval that confronts and confounds. Being awakened is a sacred moment.
Our unconscious is challenged by something holy and shaken out of a deep sleep.
We are awakened.

ROCKET SHIP

Chicago, 1965

Kaze Gadway

AN ELDERLY WOMAN SHRIEKS at her grandson as she drags him in the preschool door, "You better not do anything bad again, you little n***** boy or I'll beat you when you get home."

I shrink from the raw suffering and shame. I had only read about this in my college books. Heartbroken and outraged I can barely compose my face.

I arrive in Chicago as a naive twenty five year old with a secondary teacher certificate. Nothing in my training has primed me to teach little children who feel defeated before they begin.

My friend Priscilla, a volunteer suburban housewife in her thirties, looks at me in the hallway with a bewildered gesture. We mutter something inane. Later we admit that we came to this Chicago black ghetto as do-gooders with only a superficial understanding of the resignation and frustration of the impoverished.

We meet each other in this program. We do not have the same backgrounds. Differences drop off quickly as we interact with a survival culture. Neither of us understand that here poverty means only one set of clothes, few or no toys and inadequate food.

We name this program a preschool as few parents have heard of the newly established Head Start program. We focus on a structured approach

to combat the chaos in these children's lives. We soon discover several basic gaps, such as saying "please" and "thank you" and sitting down at a table.

Priscilla asks them to sit in their chairs. As the standing children look at us with fixed stares, we realize that we have to show them how these scaled down chairs function. We soon learn to explain everything, "This is a spoon, a book, a truck, or play blocks." Many of the children spent their first three years sitting on the floor watching TV with chips and soda.

Lunch becomes the highlight of the day. Eyes frequently stray toward the lunch table. A tug on my skirt means the question, "When do we eat?"

We create a protocol to establish some manners and the importance of doing something as a group. The first struggle consists of the children standing at the table waiting until all receive a plate of lunch. Then we all recite the ritual with appropriate gestures.

This is the day we have.
This is the day we have.
We can live this day
or throw it away.
This is the day we have.
Please sit down and put your napkin in your lap.

Hunger disappears for the moment as they consume lunch in a gobbled frenzy. We watch carefully so they don't choke or forget to use a spoon. Within moments their plates are empty.

One child casually mentions this is the only meal he gets besides bread and sometimes peas.

Hunger is not the only indicator of this impoverished community. If you believe that you are trash, the environment and even toys become objects to be treated with the same disdain. Weekly, Priscilla loads broken toys into her station wagon. Her husband, Rodney, repairs and salvages so two broken trikes become one workable vehicle. He accuses us of running a demolition derby instead of a preschool. We hope that somehow the children can make the connection. If school stuff is valued, they can see themselves as valued.

We can't understand why they don't just believe us when we tell them they are great. We look for one central issue that we can tackle. "Is it the poverty, the drinking, the violence, the racism, the frustration, what?"

Slowly we realize that "We're no good" pervades every act of apathy or insolence. It's not just the children; powerlessness saturates the entire community. Anticipation is based on what will go wrong and how we will fail. This deep-seated victim image has to shift among all ages if they are going to believe that they are in the driver's seat.

The solution comes sideways. We receive a Headstart grant for the purchase of equipment and supplies. One of our colleagues demands that we spend half of the funds for a Rocket Ship playground slide. Even though America has recently entered the space age and anticipates a trip to the moon, spending that much money on a playground toy seems excessive. He wins us by talking about envisioning the kids into the future.

As the red rocket ship slide rises slowly above the preschool fence, people from the community start to gather and chatter excitedly. "Does any other school have one of these?" "Are we the first?" "This is the biggest thing I have ever seen."

The children watch from a safe distance. "We are going to slide down that?" whispers a four year old. "I'll go first."

It doesn't take long to finish. Local citizens pour the concrete. Mothers distribute wood chips for a soft landing.

Finally the slide is complete. The children line up to try it out. A teacher goes first and then one brave young boy. Soon everyone is swishing down the rocket slide at fast speeds then running back up to try again. We have to stop the parents from sliding. Everyone wants to be a part of it. After the children return to their classroom, we see some parents trying it out with cheerful cries of "Look at me." One of the women tells me, "This is like all the fun things we didn't get to do when we were growing up."

Rocket ship themes dominate our teaching. We tie it in when trying new things. Children stand on steps and jump off yelling, "I'm an astronaut." A volunteer art teacher outlines a rocket ship in tape on the floor. It becomes the gathering space before an adventure. Just sitting in the rocket ship outline excites kids. We create songs to sing on the playground while sliding down the rocket slide.

Tune: Baa, Baa Black Sheep

Voom, Voom, Astronaut! Are you having fun?
With the moon and the stars and a very large sun?
Do you like it being all alone?
Or would you rather be back home?
Voom, voom, Astronaut! Are you having fun?
With the moon and the stars and a very large sun?

The rocket ship transforms ordinary space into sacred space. When a community resident brings over visitors to show them the rocket ship we realize it is a symbol of enlarged expectations. "This is what we have done," the ship proclaims. "We have something no one else has."

The giant red rocket towers over the fence. We hear community leaders point to it saying "Yes, that's ours," somehow taking themselves seriously in a new way. Children pick up the broken glass in the play yard. Parents volunteer for school events. Two community women, Lela and Ruth begin representing the project at other community organization meetings. They step up to become the leaders of the project.

Instead of feeling they have no choices people choose to get involved. The neighborhood awakes to the world beyond broken dreams. Fractured images of "I'm no good" and "We will fail" lose power. Instead the people of the ghetto community look at this massive symbol and say "We put it there and it is still standing." As one of the leaders says at a community gathering, "We are as tall as that rocket ship. We are somebody."

Priscilla and I entered this school to change children's images but our own images changed. We assumed the innovative curriculum and our positive words would improve lives. Instead the rocket ship fuels the change—local citizens wake up to incredible inward power. A community of image-makers emerges.

UNWELCOME INTRUSION

Chicago, 1965

Priscilla H. Wilson

THAT WINTER MORNING my neighbor's car isn't parked on the street; I know immediately something awful has happened.

I call Ken's wife and learn he drove to Chicago's south side Friday evening to take a law case deposition. He got caught in a sudden ice storm on the Kennedy Expressway. His car slid off the pavement. He catapulted through the windshield and died instantly. One of my best friends is now gone.

Though Ken and I rarely agreed on anything, we were close. We taught a teen's Sunday school class together and often differed in our interpretation and approach.

I am stunned by this sudden loss. Although I want to grieve, his family needs something besides tears.

His wife, Roberta, is stunned in grief. I pitch in to help her with practical issues, notifying people, planning a service, cleaning up the house. I struggle to let my caring side take charge. Agony shatters my soul as I stumble into my self-assigned tasks.

I tackle the dining room first. She had prepared pieces of fur to sew a jacket by stretching cut pieces and nailing them on large sheets of plywood. These cover the dining room table. The chairs hold other pieces of sewing equipment. In a daze, I move all the sewing apparatus into drawers and closets. Many visitors will descend on them in the next few days; Roberta needs to feel at ease in her own space.

A couple of friends put a calling chain in place. I notify our minister and check the availability of Roberta's sister to deal with personal family issues.

I struggle to concentrate only on necessary details and refuse to let my mind go to what Ken experienced. The permanence of this death is so real. No more fun arguments about our beliefs. Roberta has lost a husband and the father of her three children. I understand this is harder than losing a friend.

I feel pushed to complete tasks. I don't know how I can put one foot in front of the other; all I want to do is hide in a closet.

Did God do this? It is one thing to think about a benevolent, loving God. But it is quite another to face the sudden senseless loss of a good friend. "Why? Why?" "Why is he gone?" "Why so young?"

I pray that I can embrace what life has dealt; that I can say "yes" and think of others and not myself.

As I struggle I feel an almost physical sensation of spirit straightening my back.

A few days later, Roberta asks, "Will you take Ken's clothes to the Indian Center down town and give them all away?"

My resolve nearly breaks at the thought of emptying his dresser. Roberta takes me to the bedroom, points to the closet; then leaves. I have not been in their bedroom before and this feels like an invasion of privacy. I've never handled a dead person's clothes and tremble as I pray for strength. I vow not to cry, but fear slides up and down my spine.

I am swamped by the mundane tasks, but realize how important it is to be the friend Roberta needs now.

Somehow I make it through this time of loss and confusion. I feel shockingly fragile, but others depend on me to be strong. I want to cry, but try to remember the good times.

I remember Ken leaning over the fence watching the kids paint the playhouse in our yard. His infectious smile and joking laughter eased the work.

Ken's death is like having a straight pin stuck through my side. This is the first friend to die in Rodney's and my young marriage. The thought of our mortality permeates my mind in new and frightening ways. This could happen to me. Death is no longer a stranger. Death invades me and uncovers a layer of resistance that I don't expect. I want to scream "No!"

Through this all, I summon the courage to be as helpful as possible.

I become aware that it is possible to put my own grief on hold when others need calm support instead of wailing.

As I struggle to do what is needed, I discover a tranquility flowing through me.

COLORS ON THE JOURNEY

Peru, 1968

Kaze Gadway

"WHOA! IS THAT A CHILD holding a machine gun?" someone in our group asks. "He can't be older than twelve." We all look at the young men guarding every street corner. There had been some violence the day before we arrive and everyone is on edge.

Five of us from the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago travel throughout Latin America for three months seeking entry points for village projects. From our experience in one Chicago ghetto project, we feel that we know how to fix problems.

That confidence quickly disappears. In one village, a man does the work of a donkey as he pulls a plow through a rocky field. The entire family hauls rocks and spreads manure. They don't look up as we pass. They work in silence, each one knowing what to do. It doesn't take long to realize that I know nothing about how families in poverty function. Humility engulfs me as we approach villages that are still thriving after a thousand years. They should not be able to sustain themselves yet they are still here.

More romantic assumptions disappear as the intertwining of violence and natural beauty smack me in the face. I watch a man beating a mule who is not moving fast enough. The mule's cart is covered with an amazing variety of colorful flowers. I am not prepared for such incongruity.

We begin traveling through Mexico and Guatemala. These same scenes keep appearing. Young kids holding assault weapons on streets are

mixed with smells of flowers. Contrasting colors in clothes, houses, flowers and paintings clash with my feelings. I feel such sorrow seeing armed youth angrily pushing people aside and such wonder at seeing such vibrant colors in every space.

Our team studies Nikos Kazantzakis as we explore our internal spirit journey. Daily I write his stimulating words in my journal. "We struggle to make Spirit visible, to give it a face, to encase it in words, in allegories and thoughts and incantations, that it may not escape us. But it cannot be contained." This study stirs my interior. I want so much to point to this or that and say, "There is the holy. That is sacred." But I remain mute. Words aren't enough.

We travel on to Peru to the ancient city of Machu Picchu. As I step out of the train to view these spectacular ruins, my throat closes. The morning mist outlines the steps to the top and I am captured by something dreamlike and otherworldly. As we silently climb the steps, primordial images fill my brain. This must be the presence of the holy—the silence, the beauty, the sheer awesomeness. I feel transported through time and space. My world has deepened.

A team member mutters, "All those ancient people climbing these steps to worship. I expect to hear Inca monks chanting. I feel like I should be asking permission to enter such a holy space."

I also see those who in ancient time came to walk in the sacred. I can hear their solemn murmurs. The mystic mountains enclose a message but I can't get the meaning. I want to find answers and there aren't even questions. I want my thoughts to fit what I am feeling. And they don't.

Later in the nearby town of Cusco I take a walk to clear my head. I

see a blind man playing a flute. The melody is haunting. He sits with his legs crossed on a colorful blanket. No one is around him. The old man is isolated and yet he isn't. He is leaning against a stone wall playing a tune that curls inside my brain. I stumble over words to express what is turning my insides upside down, "That spine-chilling music says it all. No, the hazy clouds over the mountains hold the meaning. No, the uncanny atmosphere expresses my feelings." But I cannot contain it in words; it is too magnificent for me.

Then I notice small children carrying heavy loads of wood, worn down with jobs beyond their strength. Their bones look too small to hold the weight of their bundles. An adult curses them when they stumble and my heart breaks.

On this trip I discover the deep disconnect between the wonder of blessings and the appalling injustice of poverty and violence. I am torn between anger at seeing a child with open sores and protruding ribs and peace in the breathtaking beauty of the jungle and mountains.

"Beauty, beauty, beauty, Misery, misery, misery." These words ricochet throughout my body. I feel they are imprinted on my skin.

Is my life being drawn to righting injustices or being a mystic, dwelling in wonder? Can I do both? Am I being called to a life of prayer and a life of action? Yes, yes, and yes. "We struggle to make Spirit visible, to give it a face... But it cannot be contained..."

My journey deepens. I'm going on a long road of beauty in the midst of ordinary days. The sacred awakens both in the face of a child in pain and in the awe of walking on holy ground.

SEEING THE WORLD ANEW

Chicago, 1968

Priscilla H. Wilson

A RED BALLOON and dirty children changed me.

"What are we seeing today?" The kids know it is a movie day; the bulky projector sits on a table in the middle of the room.

Rowdy, giggling pre-teens stream into fellowship hall. Twenty-five junior high kids meet with me in our church basement every Wednesday afternoon. They consume juice and cookies or popcorn while they chatter. Slowly their energy calms and they sit in a circle.

Our church leadership decided to provide these youth time to learn about the Christian life. I assume I am smart enough to do this job, so I volunteer.

After refreshments, more serious conversation is possible. As they relax and feel safe, talk can revolve around their ideas. I ask questions about a picture, story or song to help them share. "What is one thing you see/hear?" "What was exciting or surprising?" As they feel comfortable talking the questions can involve them more directly, "What is important for us?" "Where have you seen something like this?"

It is the late 1960's and DVDs are unheard of. Periodically I rent a 16mm film. We watch diverse films so the youth can step outside their lives and talk about what they see on the screen.

"Red Balloon," a film about a young boy's friendship, is one of their

favorites. A balloon plays the role of the boy's only friend; we can examine the issue of bullying.

After the film, I ask questions: "What is a scene you remember?" "Who are the characters?" I work to reconstruct the film and then ask, "What did you like?" "What upset you?" "Where have you seen bullying?" "What can we do about it?" Slowly they talk about things affecting their lives. I pay attention to jokes said to lighten the mood or someone squirming. "Those boys are trying to destroy Pascal's balloon," one of the boys exclaims. It becomes important to talk about why and what difference that makes.

Our comfortable middle-class Chicago neighborhood doesn't provide much first hand knowledge of abject poverty. We are all naive about the world, if we think about it at all. How can imagination be expanded?

Another week I choose a film about life in the refugee camps in Palestine. We all cringe at the dirt and poverty in the living conditions. Crying children with ragged clothes, runny noses and extended tummies listlessly walk through each scene. I can practically smell dust rising between rows and rows of tents.

First, we review the different scenes, people and colors we've seen. I hear some cracking of knuckles, edgy laughter and noisy breathing. "How can they live like that?" several kids protest.

How much can the kids understand about a refugee camp? How much can I? I see disbelief and skepticism on faces as they ask, "Why is it like that?" "What have people done to have to live like that?" I ask myself similar questions. The kids voice their disbelief for the living conditions in other parts of the world.

My job is to open windows in their minds to a broader vista. I haven't

thought much about shifts in my own thinking. The scenes we've seen and the kid's responses sear reality of refugee life into my soul.

Shaken to my roots, I know those images will never leave me. How can I even perceive these living conditions? We struggle to picture what life must be like for refugees. We focus on a little boy and girl sitting in the dirt and wonder what their lives will be like when they become adults.

My comfortable life shields me from many nitty-gritty realities. A glimpse of these dirty, ragged children hurls me into new territory. I suddenly see more than the question of nationhood. I sense the need for respect of others. Where does empathy and respect find an avenue?

I watch mothers caught in the crossfire of continuous war. I wonder, "What does it mean to live on a planet in comfort while the fabric of being human is shattered for others?"

Who knows where opening a door can lead. Did those sessions in a church basement so long ago help shape lives? Is it possible one is now an environmentalist striving to save the rain forests, or discovering a cure for cancer to lessen suffering? Perhaps even one is tackling the politics of a world that ignores and perpetrates bullying; or working with their children's school to stop bullying. What holy ground are they treading?

I cracked open doors for the kids in order to illuminate many realities of life. As I worked with these young people I fervently prayed they find avenues to channel their energies.

I intended to challenge some teen-agers. I unexpectedly challenged myself to break out of my parochial world.

ESCAPE ARTIST

Chicago, 1973

Priscilla H. Wilson

DUKE SAILS into the next yard as I write a check to Sears for the fence to keep this dog in the yard.

A puppy of mixed breeds from a litter across the street has joined our family. Patches of black, tan and white show the mixed ancestry of this medium size mutt. This gives him his name. Duke means hodge-podge, a bunch of stuff that produced a pipe tobacco brand, Duke's Mixture, after the Civil War.

We live in a quiet community on the northwest side of Chicago. There are no leash laws, but we are responsible citizens; we try to keep our dog in the yard.

We fasten one end of a wire to the garage by the alley. The other end we attach to a large maple tree near the house. A long leash hooks Duke to the wire. He can run the length of the back yard.

We watch in dismay as he suddenly chases a squirrel. Both he and the squirrel speed as a board comes flying off the side of the garage. We give up. The idea of confinement is impossible. We think we are the smart ones in our family, but soon realize that Duke is smarter than we are.

Soon we hear stories about Duke being seen all over northwest Chicago. Tales about look alike offspring begin to spread.

Duke is seven-years old when our nine-month old adopted daughter

Mary arrives. We are delighted as Duke demonstrates a keen savvy about loving and caring for a baby girl. Soon they are inseparable. He follows her constantly as she learns to crawl and walk. He sits at attention when Mary pulls dog food from the bowl in the kitchen. She acts like his personal server and hand feeds him bite after bite.

One spring day Duke disappears for several days. He returns home in a sorry state; one ear is badly torn and a front leg is covered with blood from an ugly puncture wound. A period of care and sleep are on his agenda now. We don't know the story of his escapade.

Duke's tail wags non-stop as we begin packing the camper and camping supplies.

A camping trip to Expo '67, Montreal World's Fair, turns into a two-week wonder. Mary spends her days in fabulous childcare. Her two brothers cover as much of the fair with mom and dad as possible. Duke stretches out each day in the camper's shade waiting patiently for our return.

Duke remains an accomplished escape artist throughout his life. He, however, seems to know when obeying his family would obviously be the intelligent thing to do. One of the smartest dogs of all time, he knows what works and what doesn't.

For many years anyone in our urban community of Norwood Park knows where to find me. Look for Duke on someone's front porch and there I am. Whether I move around the community walking, biking or by auto, Duke follows and stands watch. When I go further afield he somehow understands he is not to follow me.

Duke turns eleven when we move north of Chicago to the beautiful

community of Lake Forest. Filled with ravines, trees and vegetation this community presents many new possibilities for roving. Duke often disappears for hours exploring his new geographic turf.

By the time Duke approaches eighteen his arthritic legs and dimming eyesight keep him closer to home. We watch anxiously to determine the extent of his increasing pain. We know that his days are numbered, and try to be sensitive to the needs of this dear old friend.

Surprise! Duke has one more escape act. One night he asks to go out. Only in retrospect do we realize he didn't ask to go out the usual door.

The next morning Duke has not returned. At first we feel no alarm. After all he may be acting out a late puppy-hood of exploration, even with painful legs.

The next day we experience alarm. I drive around the neighborhood whistling and calling his name, and then launch a full-scale hunt.

Lake Forest neighborhoods have millions of places to hide – if hide is what you want to do. With all those ravines, if a dog doesn't want to be found, finding him is impossible.

We call both the police and animal control. They hunt and can't find him. No one finds a sign of him anywhere.

The time had come to take Duke to the vet for his final shot. We know this, but more importantly, we are fairly sure that he knew it. Duke has acted out his final escape plan.

Light shines through a thick fog as I see how Duke's final act of love has saved his beloved family a severe pain. Did he know the pain we would suffer if we had to hold him in our arms as he died? As I grieve, I realize

Duke loved us unconditionally and knew what he was doing. I wasn't in charge, he was.

His last act was a sacred gift. Not only a gift of care, but a reminder that I didn't have power over the future.

FORGET THE RULES

Kenya, 1975

Kaze Gadway

A RAGGED, grinning young boy chases the goats trotting from the thorn bush. "Habari" he calls out in welcome. They skirt around the newly built community center and almost stumble against the tin water supply container. In this iron rich village the classrooms and dormitories materialize as dull red unfinished buildings in a dusty fog. Red dust covers us all.

In the 70's I train Kenyan older youth from nearby villages in social and economic programs. Our Kamwaleni training school slowly rises with pre-fab walls and a lot of "do-overs." This first African training school for development project leaders by the Institute of Cultural Affairs takes shape. The oldest leader has turned twenty this month. At thirty-five I feel old.

It is a delight to watch these kids eagerly soak up leadership training. They guard their pencils and papers like treasures. I respond to their readiness by spending long hours trying to find answers for seemingly impossible situations. "How are they going to listen to us?" is the most common question. "The elders rule the village."

The students and I live in rough dorms, and spend time each day gathering firewood, cooking and hauling water. As the students teach me how to start our cooking fire, they react with ready laughter. In classrooms with simple chairs and a single blackboard these young people are eager to find alternatives to their poverty and hopelessness. I hide the chalk daily so students will not carry it away.

"When do we actually learn how to lead?" they ask. So, we switch the focus to leadership roles. I'm worried. Elders expect to lead, not to listen to young people. "Your leadership must honor your tradition and those who are already in charge. Your style will be as important as your development skills."

As their eyes light up, I begin the arduous task of imparting my wisdom.

"One of the problems in Africa is training women for leadership positions and then they become pregnant and drop out of programs. We have a limited budget and anyone who gets pregnant will have to leave." After saying these words, I notice people shifting their eyes to one corner of the room. I feel the unease and hear murmurings but I let it go unexamined.

No one speaks to me after the session. I go to bed tired and unreflective. About 2 a.m. two young men race into my room. Sweating with urgency they tell me, "She is really sick and needs help." I run into her dorm. Her bed is covered with blood; I take her hand. A sick horror pours into me. After frantically trying to stop the bleeding with clean shirts, I blurt out, "How did you abort yourself?" "With a coat hanger," said her boyfriend trembling. My wits seem to dissolve as I remember the meeting when I threaten dismissal for pregnant women. I am nauseated at my own rigidness. Still I keep pushing away my blame.

Her boyfriend and I, with two other men, put her on a straight back chair and hurriedly cover her with sheets and any other material we can find. We hike up and down the hills for twenty-eight kilometers to get to the nearest field hospital. As I walk, I can't think coherently so I pray, "Please, don't let her die. I was so stupid. Don't let her die. I didn't mean for her to kill her child so she could keep her job. Please God, don't let her die."

The red dust of the road coats everything, and I keep wiping her eyes and mouth so she can breathe. We struggle to keep her from falling off as we trudge uphill over boulders and through rivers. My knees hurt from bumping the chair legs. I stumble over rocks as I try to keep my attention from straying. The only thing that counts is getting her to town. I keep praying senselessly, "Please God, don't let her die."

We make it. She lives. The baby dies. The girl and her boyfriend both leave the program.

I have lived with this sorrow and shame for forty years. There are so many ways I could have phrased my words. So many ways that I could have reached with compassion and explained that if someone was already pregnant, we could work things out. But I presented this "rule" with no mitigating circumstances.

I changed. I had to. I could not bear thinking I killed that child and destroyed the future of these two young people. Students came to me to ask about them. In my shame I could barely look at them. One of my Kenyan staff members came to me when I was preparing coffee on an outside campfire. "You can't keep blaming yourself," he says. "Our students need you back."

"What did I do wrong?" I ask.

"Why not ask the students?" he suggests.

My insides shrivel up. I don't like people confronting me. My lifetime mode of ignoring conflict suits me fine. Yet I agree to do this.

At the meeting, I grit my teeth as I hear "You judge us," "You don't listen," "You don't notice." Finally, one of the students says "You are a good teacher but you don't treat us as people."

That did it. Something breaks through and I realize they are right. My arrogance shatters. The holy opens my mind and I begin to see a new doorway. Pain comes and goes while hope slowly emerges.

"What do you want to see differently," I ask?

I work at following their suggestions. I still mess up but I do ask for opinions and different perspectives. I begin talking to each student and finding out something personal.

My previous mode of closing out others erodes. Good ideas are not enough in teaching. I want to see the sacred wisdom in others and awake to what others bring to our relationship. Painfully, I allow people to change me.

DOESN'T WORK OUT

Arizona, 2006

Kaze Gadway

"IF HE HITS ME AGAIN, I will kill him," the woman whimpers. She continues, "Although probably I'll just go back to him. He says he will never do it again and he loves me." Most of the group snorts.

For six months I have a part time job as a domestic abuse counselor in Arizona. Twice a week, I work with battered women who have been assigned by the court to attend these classes. If they drop out they are required to start the classes from the beginning.

The door opens and a repeat offender tries to enter unobserved. "Back again," are the jeers of those already seated. I look around at those with defeated eyes and slumped shoulders who call themselves "rejects." Together we keep trying to sort through all the past and present garbage that keeps them reacting violently to violence.

A teen talks. "I thought that having a baby would give me someone who loves me. It just ties me down to the house. My mother calls me a slut and "ho" whenever I am with him. When I had the baby, she sneered, 'I told you so.' I hate her for that." A moment of silence passes. "But," she sighs, "she is right."

The group is quiet and I decide to deliver a small illuminating lecture. "Research has shown that pathways of familiar responses etch a groove in our brain. When we respond, it is much easier to react in the same

old way than it does to respond in a way that our logical brains tell us is more appropriate." Silence coats the room.

"What?" the women murmur.

I search for new words, "When someone hits you, you hit back or run or drop to the floor because it is easier to do what you always do rather than find a new way to act when you see his fist coming." Now they nod and straighten up.

"Tell me what your family did when you were a child?" I ask.

Nothing prepares me for the avalanche of the fetid bitterness and shame that follows. "I remember being made to stand at attention until I soiled myself. Then I would get beaten by my dad for not obeying him," says an older native woman with moist eyes.

A young girl states, "My father makes me clean the toilet over and over until he thinks it is perfect. And if I say no, he burns me with a match on my arm until I just give up. If I run away, he catches my hair and drags me through the house. As soon as I am eighteen, I'm out of there."

"Is it still going on?" I ask. I strive for a controlled neutral tone in spite of my rage at this abuse.

"Of course," she snaps. "And if I call the police they believe him when he says I'm on drugs or threatened to hit him." Others shrug sympathetically and look quickly away from her.

Another young one says, "I used to have a good life when I was real little. Then my dad lost his job because of his drinking. Before that my grandma died because we couldn't buy the operation she needed. Grandpa and my dad would buy beer and sit up all night complaining and drink-

ing. Dad blamed Mom for not keeping the kids quiet. He yelled at her. Mom blamed Dad because he drank and then we didn't have money for food. We ate a lot of bread. Dad tried to get another job but they were all temporary. Every night my dad drank he would smack me around. And when I was fifteen I had to protect my sisters and brothers. Sometimes he would get to them before I figured out what he was up to. Mom started working nights and left us alone with him. Then Mom quit her job so we wouldn't be alone with Dad when he was drinking. We moved around a lot, like seven times. I didn't see anything wrong with my family. I thought everyone was like that. Everyone drinks and drugs. I figured that everyone is getting hit at home."

After this story, all the women want to talk. A heavy-set woman averts her face and says, "Dad would go on binges for days. Then he would fight with the people he drank with. They were crazy when they fought and loud. Even now, my stomach hurts when I hear loud voices."

Another grey haired lady says, "I got pregnant at fourteen. Dad wouldn't speak to me except when he cussed at me and hit me. There was nothing to be done. He's my Dad. I wanted to get my baby out of there. I was scared that he would hurt him bad when he got drunk. Nothing changed but I always thought that it would get better. By the time I finally wake up I have two more kids. I move out when I am eighteen but my husband drank a lot too and quit on me. He had no ambition. He would work for a couple months and quit. I was home with three babies and no money. Well, that didn't work out. And when I saw my mom, she yelled at me, 'You are nothing. You are a drunk just like your father. You don't have a chance. Nothing is ever going to work out for you.' I think she is right."

Again silence settles in the group. I wonder what I am doing here. "Is this place of brutality where I want to direct my energy? Are these women doomed to repeat their pattern of self-loathing and destructive behavior?" Then I remember. No one forces me to be here; I chose to work part time in a community-counseling center.

I had falsely assumed that being in the States meant less brutality than in the developing countries where I lived for twenty-five years.

Tentatively I offer a suggestion, "We have to choose and practice some response to violence that does include self defense and does not escalate the danger. I want us to walk out of here saying, 'I am going to make it work out this time.'"

They clap. Then a seventeen-year-old girl protests, "This isn't going to work. I have been trying for years to change and I can't."

Silence locks up the room. No one seems to be breathing. My stomach tightens. I don't have an answer.

Finally, one of the grandmothers says, "We have never tried it together before."

Heads rise. Breathing starts up again. They look at each other shyly almost afraid to show hope. The grandmother writes her cell phone number on the board. Others slowly do the same.

"We are going to do this," says another woman. "We've got a chance if others have our back."

A strange confidence creeps into their faces. The noise level increases. I become invisible as they take charge.

An ordinary group of women sitting in a circle becomes a movement. One person says yes and others gain courage.

I realize I have witnessed an awakening, a holy moment when one woman steps outside her own fear and emboldens others

The courage of this woman sprinkles holiness over us all.

As these women move into a new landscape, even the air in the room smells sweet.

Section 2

BEING BLESSED

Sometimes we are blessed by being
restored to wholeness.
A child sits on our lap unbidden and we feel sanctified.
Raindrops fall gently on us and it is like our
grandparent's touch on our heads.
We are not searching; we are not asking; we are not
reaching for anything.
We receive a blessing of approval, permission, and
even absolution.
Being blessed like this is a sacred moment.
We are beyond negativity and can live reverently,
deliberately and fully in the moment.
We are blessed.

WALKING A SACRED PATH

1986, Spain

Kaze Gadway

"A HORSE COULD FIT in that nest," Priscilla gasps as we stare at the enormous storks descending into a queen size nest of sticks and green moss.

I live in Spain in 1986 and the Wilsons are attending a conference in Bilbao, Spain. Visiting them for a day, I gush, "You have to see Avila. I breathe history every time I go. It's where Saint Teresa lived. She walked there. You can see her shoes."

Rodney asks, "Why would we want to see her shoes?"

Priscilla and I respond in the same tone of exasperation, "Oh Rodney."

We decide that we want to go on a pilgrimage and see something that is reported to be holy. After the conference, they pick me up in Madrid and we hop the train to journey into another century.

Priscilla, Rodney and I stroll on the wall of the ancient city of Avila. Avila's eleventh century walls are some of the best preserved in Europe. They bristle with bastions, towers and battlements. I take a deep breath when I see the walls and can hardly restrain myself from tugging on my friends to say, "Look at that. Look over there. Just look."

"It looks like a movie set. Am I in a time warp?" Priscilla asks.

This is a transition time for us. We have known each other for twenty-two years since our beginning with the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago. I have reestablished ties with the Anglican Church. The Wilsons moved to

Kansas City five years ago and dropped anchor in the neighborhood Presbyterian Church.

We have spent time in many locations doing community work and the empowerment of women. We discuss endlessly on making decisions that encompass global history and culture. Our mantra, "history long, worldwide" undergirds our priorities.

We plunge into this historical setting and absorb the stillness and calm while sitting on ancient stones that seeps into our bones. As we listen to these old walls we hear centuries of people and carts rumbling through the streets. We walk through the town, keeping in contact with the stone that surrounds us.

Walking on uneven narrow cobblestone streets keeps us off balance. No teaching, digging a well or meeting with people fills this day. We submerge ourselves in the ancient with no work to accomplish. We are open to the extraordinary.

We read about St. Teresa and how she faked being a pious nun until she was forty. Something uncommon happened and she turned to fire. Everything took on new meaning and she began walking across Spain, infusing others with her vision. She created a new religious order called the Shoeless (Discalced) Carmelites and emphasized the need to give up material things. We are in our forties and fifties as well and feel connected with her.

Something mystifying seeps into our bones as we walk the same paths as Teresa. We watch our balance as we wind our way through meandering streets to the Cathedral which is built into the defensive walls. We touch the worn stones and kneel in pews used in her time. We speak in whispers about what we see. We suspend rational thinking and just experience the historical atmosphere.

We ramble through twists and turns and locate her Convent. Peering through a large glass window, a sign informs us St. Teresa and her colleague St. John of the Cross used to talk here. Here they levitated.

Rodney whispers, "Do you really think they levitated?" We can only guess, but we ourselves feel light.

In another room we peer into her cell through a small grill. In one corner lies her narrow wooden bed with a wood block pillow. In another corner sits her wooden kneeler for prayers. Nothing looks like a comfortable place to relax after a hard day.

I mutter, "Does it have to be this hard to know God?"

We laugh as we look at the sole of one of her tiny sandals. Priscilla asks, "How did she walk all over Spain with those little feet? I'm tired just walking these cobblestone streets."

We go into the bookstore and buy copies of Teresa's prayer.

Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things pass away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. He who has God finds he lacks nothing. God alone is enough.

In the midst of our transition, this prayer catches us. Something happens to us that we can't explain. It never leaves us even decades later. Avila is a permanent swirl of rough stones, heavy walls, baking bread, storks and mysterious air.

We are stunned by our experience. Gratitude overwhelms us. We are blessed, not by words or a particular event but by cherishing life as a gift. Blessing seeps into our bones and settles over us like a transparent mantle.

AT LAST, A GIRL

Chicago, 1964

Priscilla H. Wilson

IT IS 1962 and Rodney and I are watching the news. We have two sons but yearn for a daughter. I long for another female in our family. The news highlights Chinese refugees streaming into Hong Kong. We suddenly express the same thought, "Why not adopt a little girl who has no family?"

As I turn the news off, I stammer, "I hadn't thought about adoption before. I think that is the only way we can have a daughter."

Rodney laughs, "Let's find out what we need to do."

The State of Illinois Department of Children and Family Services is our avenue for adopting a child from another country. Our assigned caseworker explains, "Our meetings will help me determine if your family is special enough for me to search for a little girl."

When we learn that international adoptions require travel to China, we realize an international adoption is beyond our reach financially.

Several weeks later the caseworker asks, "Must this be an international adoption?"

"We just want a girl," I reply.

After several more weeks she calls, "Can you come to my office, to see a picture of a little girl?"

We gaze at a picture of a nine-month old with bright brown eyes peaking out from a frame of thick dark hair. We are captivated.

Our caseworker explains, "Native American tribes recently changed

their restrictions concerning adoption. Previously they kept their children with the tribe. However, the Nevada State Department of Health and Welfare suggested this little girl for you. Born in Reno, Nevada on September 10, 1963, she is known as Baby Girl Downs."

She continues, "The birth parents signed a release. Her ancestry is a mix of Shoshone, Paiute and Caucasian. She has lived with foster parents, an older couple in their fifties, since she was six days old."

Rodney and I know this is our daughter. We ask no questions of health or history. We instantly say, "Yes."

The caseworker talks with our boys, Ben, ten years old and Tim, eight and they both agree, "Having a baby sister will be fun."

On June 24, 1964, our eagerness rises to a fevered pitch as we drive to the airport. We wait at Chicago's O'Hare Airport for the United flight from Reno. We drink root beer floats for our anesthetic.

We can't wait to greet Mary Helyn Wilson, named Mary for my mother and Helyn for Rodney's mother. At last, the airplane, a modern baby-carrying stork, gives birth to an eighteen-pound, nine-month old baby girl in a pink playsuit. I ache to hold her.

When they hand Mary to me, euphoria settles over me like a cloud. I momentarily forget everything else, barely listening to the "new parent" advice I am receiving. I force myself to sit still, holding this precious child on my lap. Ben and Tim make giggling noises as they reach to touch her, while Rodney's face beams delight.

The caseworkers share parting remarks, "We won't go home with you. You need a restful weekend to welcome this baby girl into your home."

Trembling, I carry our daughter to the parking garage. My thoughts

scatter, too excited to think straight. It is hard to believe she is real.

The community buzzes when word of the baby girl's arrival spreads. During the weekend twelve neighbors drop by to meet Mary.

The real kick is teen-agers from the church youth group, who can't wait to meet the new wonder in our midst. For ten years I have worked with the youth group, and they are well nigh as electrified as we are. A baby shower a couple of weeks earlier introduced the high school boys to diapers, little blankets, tiny shirts and shoes.

A stimulating, though not particularly restful time, greets this new baby.

The next day, Mary surveys the neighborhood from my bicycle strapped into a new baby seat. What a magical time as I wave at neighbors up and down the block.

Duke loves her immediately. She squeals with glee when he comes into view. She greets all with a big grin as we attend a boy-scout picnic Saturday afternoon.

Mary seems wary of conking off. Fear of our disappearance if she sleeps floats in the air. Once asleep, she is content. She has shared her first nine months with another baby girl in the foster parents' home. Alone is a new experience.

She loves being in the playpen, but shows distress at being left on the floor alone. Who are we to argue? We purchased the playpen for use in the yard, but we bring it into the living room and she loves it. She jabbers happily when eight-year old Tim climbs into the playpen also. Her happiness quotient rises in proportion to the number of people around.

Her two brothers chatter in baby talk and play with her fingers and toes. Mary coos and giggles.

The boys take turns holding her, feeding her and even changing her diaper as long as it is only wet. They beg to take this new sister to school for "show and tell." Tim wheels her as far as the corner in her new red stroller. Neighborhood kids gather round.

Tim stands back against the fence eyeing all the admiration, and later confesses, "I wasn't too sure before she came, but I sure do like her now."

The next year and a half flies by with social worker visits and finally a court date. The red-letter day is April 7, 1966 when a stern looking judge signs the Certificate of Adoption.

Mary is thirty-one when she phones to share the news of her first pregnancy. I burst into tears when I hear, "It's a girl."

We have watched for many years as our little girl grew into womanhood. A daughter fulfills many dreams. Gratefulness fills me as I ponder the many blessings inspired by a long ago news program. What prompted that decision? Blessings appear unexpectedly.

THIS LAND IS NOT EMPTY

Golburn Island, Australia, 1969

Kaze Gadway

I AM NOT ON THE LIST. Being in my twenties makes me an unlikely candidate for fieldwork.

Everyone at the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago wants to go work in the not-yet-created Australian Aborigine project in Darwin. Two staff members are given this assignment and have left Chicago to get visas and visit parents.

At work someone asks me to make a fund raising presentation to the Institute members for our international village projects. "Be whimsical," he suggests. I decide on the metaphor of angels.

I use the poetry of D.H. Lawrence:

"What is the knocking at the door in the night? It is somebody wants to do us harm. No, no it is the three strange angels. Admit them. Admit them"

The response amazes me.

After the presentation, the Dean of the Institute meets with his council, cancels the flight of those on their way to Australia and calls for Russell (our hippie local song writer) and me to come into the office. "We have decided that the Aborigine assignment needs to be filled by those who work in images and music. Both of you know how to create something so the Aborigines can take pride in their heritage. Your plane leaves in twenty-four hours."

This is only the first of several strange angels. Never have I been given

such a bizarre task with so little direction. And in twenty-four hours, after giving away everything in my room that couldn't be packed, we leave for San Francisco to get visas to Australia.

We land in Sydney, then get into an eight passenger plane and fly to Arnhem Land in Northern Territory. A vast empty land rolls beneath us. We stop frequently at small landing sites on roads and fields. There are so few people and so many flies. It's not what I expected for my new adventure.

Then we land. Nothing prepares me for my first encounter with this ancient and profound people. A lone dark hued statue-like man stands on the airport tarmac. Aborigine Elder George Winungug strides forth to greet us. I stare. I am unprepared to meet anyone who stands so still in his soul and body and so confident of whom he is among his people. Silence scares me. I blurt out how empty the land is in Northern Territory. With sad eyes, he tells me that is what the Europeans said as they forced the Aborigines off their ancestral lands so they could start cattle ranches. "*This land is not empty,*" he states. "*It is filled with our ancestors from the Dreamtime.*" Another angel appears, framing Winungug with its wings.

Russell and I stand motionless. Neither of us can respond to something that so touches us. Later on, we construct an Aboriginal heritage program with input from Winungug and Wilabuma (a younger Aborigine). Traditionally, the Aborigines dance and mime their story or listen to an oral history from one of their elders. We work with different villages and recruit young men to help us with the story and dance.

Our dream is that the Aborigines could use this in their villages. The title we choose is "*This Land is Not Empty.*"

Finally, we are asked to present our artistic offering to the Aboriginal

community on Goulburn Island. Winungug asks me to read the history with a native translator. My stomach roils in fear and fascination. I cannot imagine how this can be received or how I can get through it.

To my surprise, every family is present on the beach. The dusk approaches, the voice of God (the didgeridoo) begins playing and the mime dancing begins. Awe seeps into the space as each fire is lit beside families. Russell, the main creator of the dance, is watching every step as if all of creation will collapse without his attention.

The translator stands and gives a long context that this story and mime can be passed on to the children. By that time, it is dark. Small fires dot the beach. There is no fire by me so I cannot read the script. Breathing deeply and hoping I remember it all, I speak the story in the cadence I have been taught by the elders. The interpreter tells me to shout it with pride so everyone can hear and know we are not ashamed.

I shout out the words that I had written with such confidence. Now I am not so sure. The mime dancing begins again. The dark skinned interpreter copies my every gesture and intonation as though we are twins. *"80,000 years ago Aborigines came to this land. On the rainbow snake, we came. The snake brought us across the sea. This is our land now. We came running into the rising sun. We walked the dreamtime. Our ancestors told us how to eat. On the rainbow snake we traveled to a land of no salt. Our handprints claimed this land. We are the people of the rising sun, of the rock that does not move, of the fire that cleans, of the green ant that heals..."*

At the end, the fires are extinguished and the people, suddenly visible in the moonlight, walk away silently. I am drained, slumped over with exhaustion. No one says anything. Did anyone understand? Is my effort wasted?

I feel like the creator of all people has used me as a voice, going through me, without me in the way. I am empty.

That night we can hear the didgeridoo and the sticks throughout the village all night long. Winungug explains we are hearing uncles repeat the hour-long poem (word perfect) to each other. And the people are adding extra details. Young men mime the dance in front of their houses and are creating new steps. It is a community recreation of their own story. Angels are everywhere.

The next day, Russell and I are invited to be adopted. We are each given a sacred task and name. Mine is Galinawa, the one who rises with the sun and carries the light. We go on a journey quest where we fast and find a place for a day and night to receive our spirit guide.

Afterwards they take us to the caves to see the ancient handprints painted and chipped into the rock—the handprints directed by their ancestors to claim the land.

That experience shapes me. I see every new culture through the lens of how native people connect to the holy through their ancient stories. That week I am marked with a handprint that now has companion handprints from Ethiopia, India, Hong Kong, Peru and Kenya. And I expect when I die, that angels will sing, *"This Land is not empty."*

MOVING SHADOWS

Ethiopia, 1971

Kaze Gadway

THE CLOCKS AREN'T THE SAME. The calendar is different. Eating raw meat does not endear me to the culture. Having food placed into my mouth by the host is outside my comfort zone. This Christian culture dates back to a continuous line of saints and events recorded in the Bible since King Solomon and the Queen of Sheeba. There are more Christian holy days that require fasting than non-holy days when you can eat normally.

Nothing cushions me for living in Ethiopia. Certainly there is no preparation for this one-religion country. I have just moved from India with its multiple gods and diverse languages. Patriarch Theophilus of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church sponsors us as the Ecumenical Institute, to train young people in religious and social issues in 1971. With a watch guard over us and all our teaching papers scrutinized by the Patriarch, our team treads carefully.

We teach in St. Paul's Ethiopian Orthodox School for eight weeks. The entire school has one chair and that is for the headmaster. We borrow chairs and tables from a Presbyterian minister who is close to the Emperor Haile Selassie. The Emperor's exalted title is "*Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.*" The eunuch teachers in the school move out so we can live in their rooms. Fleas hide in every possible crevice causing us to rush to Addis Ababa weekly for a steam bath. Our students consist of young men who have been screened

and allowed to participate in the free training. Even some Sudanese students manage to get permission to attend.

The students delight me. When asked to give a lecture or lead a seminar, they jump to it, without the slightest idea how to proceed. Then they step back to learn how else it can be done. They feel they can do the impossible by determination alone.

In addition to teaching, I become the health officer handing out head and stomachache pills. No one ever asks for aspirin. My first patient asks for medicine for his syphilis. Most come for pills for stomach internal worms from eating raw meat. The doctor tells me that I have to make a crucial decision. The medicine causes stomach cancer so I can choose whether they die of the worms or the medicine. I am not really ready for this role.

Many things jar me in this culture. One of our team members loses a watch and mentions it to the Headmaster. The Headmaster has the most likely culprit beaten in spite of our protests. To our chagrin, the watch is found later in our team member's pocket. My spirit erodes at the casual brutality.

I ask to observe Ethiopian teaching methods. I am taken to a classroom of young boys who all face the wall with no materials. The teacher, with a whip, walks up and down the row of boys asking them to recite from memory (the only way they learn). Anytime a child makes a mistake, the whip comes down on the back. Up and down the teacher walks and if a boy flinches before he is hit, he receives two lashes. My spirit splinters. There is nowhere I can look. My insides shrivel.

Part of me knows that protest can cost me my life. And part of me is ready to die to protect these children. "Why, Oh God is this done in Your

name? What can I do? Is there any way out for those living under such oppression?"

We talk with the students quietly after they begin to trust us. Some whisper to us that change has to come soon or they will die. They show me the prison outside the school. When prisoners are let out into the yard, our students softly tread near the fence like moving shadows. They converse through mime with their families and friends across the wire. The longing and agony on the faces of the prisoners and the students is heart shattering.

Before Ethiopia, I believed that I was prepared for violence and coercion. Now, the weight of oppression, the regimentation of every aspect of living and the assumption that brutality is the only response to rebellion becomes an unbearable burden.

Yet the beauty of the land, the richness of the ancient religious heritage, the wonder of the majestic churches and finely detailed icons are enriching. How can I reconcile this terrible tyranny with my absorption with Ethiopia? Surely, any change will be better than the present situation.

The last week of our stay, I sit on the bench of an ancient stone church. The sacred seeps through the ground and melts through my shoes. I want to shout, "This is what it is all about. We are all one creation, the stones, birds, and trees. The icons, the bells, the towers are all absorbed in sanctity."

Then I see soldiers pushing a crowd of people away from a limousine. Someone important is inside and the crowd is begging for something. Maybe food, or money or mercy. I don't know. The soldiers raise their batons and the people cringe. Slowly the occupants of the vehicle come out of the car. They ignore the crowd and enter the Church.

I whisper, "This is what it is all about. Religion has turned rigid. The

division between those of influence and those who live outside the walls is too great. Where is holiness in this?"

Disturbing incidents of violence erupt and we leave the country. The revolution comes in 1974 and many who supported our presence die in violence. The Ethiopian priest who was a part of our training joined us in Chicago for a short visit. His country never allowed him to return and he remains in Chicago. Instead of positive change, the people are now just barely surviving the continuous famines. We had such hopes for change.

I try to pull together the pieces to find some sense in the experiences. I feel defeated by the collapse of Ethiopia, thrown off my platform of what is essentially decent.

The power of Ethiopia's magnificent people and land still calls to me. I want to return and talk again to those walking people of history who enjoy laughing and telling stories. I want to be among those young people who desperately want to immerse themselves in positive change and capture the meaningful events that enrich them. I want to kneel in ancient places.

I long for a world where inhumanity is swept away by holiness. A road of holiness prevails, but as a thin thread below the surface of appalling events. The road of inhumanity is more obvious. They go together, in the intertwining of generosity and greed, in the faces of starving people. Profound nourishment appears fleetingly in acts of kindness and smiles of encouragement, even in abysmal times. I find it in Ethiopia. I also find it in myself.

THE EYES OF TEXAS

Texas, 1994

Priscilla H. Wilson

MOTHER LIES DYING.

Scenes of the red earth, green and gray shrubs, trails, peaks and valleys and the chasm in the flat land of the Texas Panhandle flash through my mind.

Mother's father managed the JA ranch in the Palo Duro Canyon from 1915 until his death in 1935; the family loved journeying to this ranch from their home in Pampa. The land, the parties, the horseback riding, fills their memories and stories. Mother tells stories of the JA Ranch until her death at ninety-two.

The canyon is the most spectacular and scenic landscape in the Panhandle. Its size and geological features, including the multicolored layers of rock and steep mesa walls, are formed by the headwaters of the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River.

Mother frequently told a story of one ride with her sister, "One afternoon down at the ranch, Laura and I were riding bareback to Battle Creek. I was riding Pacer and Laura was on Johnnie and we discovered the creek in almost flood stage. We wanted to ride across, but we sure didn't want to get our clothes wet. So we just took them off. Holding our clothes high above our heads, we rode carefully across the swollen creek. Only when we reached the other side did we look up and see a lone cowboy watching us from the top of the cliff. Here we were – no clothes on – we were really surprised."

When Mother marries our father in 1927 they make their home in Arkansas City, Kansas, where horseback riding opportunities are few. She nearly didn't marry our father because he couldn't ride a horse.

After twenty-seven years of marriage, they build a home out east of town. This move prolongs their lives by several years. She can look out her picture window and at least see a few Hereford cows. This is the closest to ranch land she ever got. A local farmer's cattle graze on their fifty-two acres.

In 1994, Rodney and I drive to Arkansas City for the July Fourth weekend. We understand the fragility of Mother's life. Creeping dementia prevents her from living alone after our father dies. So her caregiver, Jean now lives with her. We bless Jean many times.

That weekend, little of Mother's strength remains. She sits in the living room part of the time. She even manages to go to the piano and play *The Eyes of Texas.* Throughout her life, any emotion: happiness, joy, excitement, sorrow or anger calls forth this beloved music. Now, she starts and tries to play *The Eyes of Texas.* Finding the right notes is difficult, but the song is still recognizable.

Rodney and I return to Kansas City on Sunday evening. Joel, my business partner, and I have a Monday morning appointment with a hospital's education director.

In the middle of the conversation, Joel comments that my mother is dying.

The Education Director turns to me and sharply asks, "What are you doing here?" Her question jars me. I mutter something about keeping our appointment.

When I get home Rodney and I repack our bags and drive south again.

Jean tells us, "Your Mom is losing the ability to swallow. I'm putting ice chips on her tongue several times a day."

Her comment soaks into my brain.

Mother had frequently said, "If you ever hook me up to a bunch of tubes, I'll come back and haunt you forever."

A trip to the hospital and inserting a feeding tube could prolong her life for several months. Torn between her wishes and a desire to hang on to her a while longer, I call my sister and we struggle with our decision. We obey Mother's wishes even though she is beyond voicing them.

When she murmurs, "I see Jesus," I know death is approaching. I sit with her all afternoon and night. I alternate holding her hands to touching her forehead and softly squeezing her shoulder. By nightfall I begin singing Amazing Grace over and over and keep murmuring, "It's alright, Mother you can go. We'll be ok." My twelve-hour vigil with Mother as she is dying is a blessing. I endeavor to give her comfort, but whether she was conscious or not, she comforts me.

At dawn, Jean prepares a sponge bath and lays out Mother's pink satin pajamas. As Jean prepares the bath, she feels mother's feet. They are ice-cold.

Jean explains. "She will be gone soon. Death seems to creep up from the toes. Just keep singing to her."

About 7:30 a.m., mother gives a soft gasp and is gone. Her eyes are shut, but her jaw drops open. I hold it closed for some time, but it keeps dropping open. After a while, I decide that isn't important. She always liked to talk...I will just leave her jaw open. I am grateful that she has slipped away so peacefully.

Jean calls mother's Hospice nurse who lives fifty miles away in Wel-

lington. I didn't realize that the nurse has to come, pronounce death and only then can we call Rindt-Erdman Funeral Home. It seems like hours of waiting. The nurse is as frustrated as I am when she finally arrives. Two flat tires on the way to Ark City consumed most of her morning.

Finally, we call the funeral home. Two men come and shift mother to the gurney. After covering her with a sheet, they carefully roll her out of her bedroom and down the hall towards the front door.

As the gurney rolls across the threshold, a picture of mother and daddy that stands on the coffee table in the far end of the room falls over on its face. There is no breeze and I wonder why the picture fell. Is it sheer accident or some force at work that I don't understand? Is it Mother saying a final good-bye?

Even after sixty-five years of life as a Kansan, Texas never left the soul of Mary Hobart Hutchinson.

She lived a long and safe life yet I keep wishing she was still here.

The day of Mother's Memorial Service, the organist offers a gift to us as she moves to the piano. No one is surprised as *The Eyes of Texas* pronounces the final "Amen." My tears flow as *The Eyes of Texas* salutes my Mother one last time.

IT IS FINISHED

California, 2008

Kaze Gadway

"MY STOMACH HURTS. There's a hard knot right there." Slightly curled up against the car window as though he could hide, the young man's voice cracks on the word "hurt." Sliding into a neutral tone, I tentatively ask my standard question, "What's up? Do you need anything?"

I glance at him from the driver's seat on our way to San Diego. His back scrunches up as though he is trying to protect his insides.

"I can't stop thinking about her. It's wrong. It won't go away. Why won't it stop?" he whispers the last question.

I am driving six Native young men from Arizona to San Diego, California to an Episcopal leadership training program. We had just buried his mother on the Reservation in Arizona ten days ago. She died from cirrhosis of the liver as a result of her life-long drinking bouts. We spoke Native and Christian prayers at her burial site. His father provided the eagle feather with sage for blessings.

The old women in the family wore all their turquoise jewelry over their velveteen purple blouses and long skirts. The men had their turquoise to honor the dead on their hat brims and belt buckles. There were no smiles or small talk, just a pervading shadow of shame.

Dying as a drunk is shameful to Natives. It means that the person gave up being a Native, gave up self control, gave up being a warrior, gave up family, and gave up. Now there is nothing to pass on to your children.

Grieving is hard for a culture that can't mention the name of the dead for fear of evil walking among them. There is no place to remember the good times or the warm moments. Often there is a spoken or unspoken divide between the Christian and Navajo tradition of honoring the dead. Surrounded by a Native culture, I am cautious about honoring both traditions.

When asked by the family to give a blessing over her grave, I prepare several prayers that might be appropriate. She has not been strong in her traditional beliefs or any kind of religion. I pick my way carefully through the Episcopal ritual to find words that can comfort but would not cross the traditional beliefs. I speak ancient words, *"We give our mother and sister into thy hands, oh God. Receive her into your heavenly kingdom. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes. From dust thou art and to dust thou shall return."*

Now as we drive across the desert, the son finally and cautiously opens the dialogue. The five other youth in the van are listening to our conversation. I silently pray "God, help me out here."

"Would you like to talk about your mother?" I ask. A violent negative shake of black hair answers me. "Can you remember the things she taught you and the memories you want to keep?" This time, he looks straight ahead with a stoic face and tears begin creeping down his cheeks. We all stay totally silent for the next twenty minutes. Silence like this is most unusual.

Finally, he murmurs "Thank you." No one says anything until we stop for gas. Then we slowly resume normal conversation.

That night, one of the older Native youth casually paces himself with my step and starts talking without making eye contact. "You know that he is not alright. He is still hurting over his mother."

Relieved that he brings this to the open, I ask, "What can we do?" We walk a little in silence. Finally he haltingly speaks "Maybe we can have a ceremony." Words spill out of him. "But we can't name her. That is forbidden."

My brain is speedily turning over and rejecting alternatives. We are staying at an outdoor camp in thick woods. I have bragged that there is something comforting about ritual. Now I have to validate that.

There had been three deaths of relatives and friends in the past four months. Not being able to talk through and openly grieve leaves lumps of unresolved heartaches in all of us.

I talk it over with some of the older youth and we prepare a sand bucket and candles for the following evening. We walk to the tree that is used for traditional story telling. The lower branches are easy to climb. Soon, everyone has a comfortable seat on one of the thick branches.

I recount the story of the crucifixion and the two thieves with Jesus. I stumble over details as I explain, "Jesus accepts the shame and disgrace of not only his death but welcomes the thief beside him to be with him in paradise. In Christ, shame is erased. In the end, he lets go of it all with the words 'It is finished.' We in the tree can also give it over to God."

I give a candle to each one in the tree and suggest that each think of someone they loved who is now walking in the Spirit world. "When you are ready, light the candle and put it in the sand bucket at the bottom of the tree with the words 'It is finished.'" Echoing in my mind is the end of the Navajo prayer, "In beauty, it is finished."

We sit in the branches a long time. Finally, one after another, we drop down from a branch, light our candle and declare, "It is finished." The grieving son is the last. More than one of us has tears.

The final benediction permeates the tree. *"Oh Thou, whose presence is everywhere, and whose mercy never fails, receive the spirits of those who have died."*

It begins to mist. No one speaks. One of the teens pats the tree trunk. The old oak becomes our cathedral. Gratitude mixed with grieving has somehow allowed the holy to come in. As we file back to camp, the wind through the trees follows us like a diffuse blessing.

MAGIC IN THE AIR

Kenya, 2009

Priscilla H. Wilson

MY GRANDDAUGHTER NORA'S FALL

from a horse nearly cancels the whole trip. The doctor prescribes crutches and caution for the damaged hip. One day later, Nora, her brother Warren, her mother Mary and Nani (me) leave for a Kenyan photography safari. On the plane I let my mind wander through scenes they will see: animal beauty and killings and life totally different from anything they have ever known.

The Giraffe Centre just outside Nairobi is our first stop. A research station designed to protect the endangered Rothschild Giraffe provides education programs for school children. Warren is the first to go up on the raised observation platform. A giraffe approaches and Warren grips a pellet in his teeth. I gasp as I watch the giraffe's long, gray rough tongue whip out and take it from him. A moment of panic rumbles in my stomach.

Next we visit the Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage and watch the youngest orphans slip and slide in the muddy water puddles. Several orphans drink from large bottles of milk formula and practically hug their keepers with their trunks. One of the keepers explains their care and says, "The number of orphans is increasing because poaching has more than doubled recently." I turn away in frustrated anger at poaching that can't be stopped.

Our home for the next three nights is the Ol Tukai Lodge in Amboseli National Reserve on the Kenya, Tanzania border. Amboseli means a place of

water in Masai. We shoot pictures of Mount Kilimanjaro when the clouds blow away from her peak. We encounter elephants, giraffes and Eastern wildebeests wading and munching through the swamps. An elephant is shaking water from her greens like a housewife shakes lettuce. Our laughter erupts.

Drought has produced stark contrast between the lush swamps and the dusty short brown grass the zebras and Thomson's gazelles nibble.

We decide to visit a nearby village, Ngong'u Narok, Maasailand in Amboseli. The villagers graciously welcome us although we weren't expected.

Peter and Stephen, the village teachers, greet us. The villagers sing and dance while parading out to meet us. Their red, blue, and purple plaids, stripes, or print shukas brighten the dusty vista. Several of the women invite the children to join the singing/dance line. I glow with grandmotherly pride at my grandchildren's gracious response to the Masai charm.

A bramble wall of dried thorn-tree branches encircles the village and we are invited to sit on low wooden stools. Several young men demonstrate how to start a fire rubbing two sticks of wood in dried dung. The puff of smoke and yellow blaze sends a whiff of burning wood my direction. Peter explains, "This is the way we always build our fires to cook. We never use matches."

We enter the enkang, an inner round enclosure made of sharp thorn bushes; this is protection for the small square huts. Women build the huts of sticks and grasses then cover all with a mixture of cow dung and mud known as wattle. Nora easily moves through the village on crutches, handling them like a pro.

How can the tall slender Masai live in such low structures? We have to bend low to enter Stephen's hut. The central room is for cooking and eating

and two additional tiny rooms are for sleeping (parents in one, children in the other). We strain to see in the dark room; the walls are closing in on me.

These proud, dignified Masai next escort us to a long open area where they display crafts on colorful cloths. Women, many with small children, beckon us to buy their beautiful wares. "Did they prepare this display just for us?" Warren asks.

"Yes," I respond.

"We need to purchase a bunch of stuff," he says.

Warren and I move down one side and Mary and Nora the other. Wood carvings of animals and people, beaded jewelry, and bowls of all sizes look perfect for Christmas gifts. The explosion of color and beads captures the magic of the Masai. As we leave Mary says, "I'd like to get to know these people, not just buy handicrafts from them. I wish we could sit down and have a cup of tea with some of the women."

As our small plane leaves Amboseli we talk about the warm friendliness and graciousness of the Masai staff.

We land on a narrow strip of runway that cuts through the golden grasses on the plains of the Masai Mara.

Wildebeests and zebras are following the scent of rain and growth of new grass from the Serengeti in Tanzania to Kenya's Mara, the world's greatest animal migration. Nora starts imitating the noises of the wildebeasts.

One wildebeest stops and stares at our vehicle; does he think those sounds are coming from a brother? The kids giggle as they "talk" with the animals and videotape the exchange to show grumpa. "You know the wildebeasts are grumpa's (grandfather) favorite animal."

Our guide and friend, Dave is greeted by Governor's Camp staff like

a brother and a friend. The next day, mist slowly dissipates as we leave camp for our early morning game drive. The sun breaks through to highlight the lustrous grasses. Soon Dave spots a pride of lionesses. Four satiated beasts are sprawled in the grass with legs and tails slung in all directions. One lioness sits still as a statue with glaring eyes searching the plains as her tail swishes the tops of the grass. Her eyes of translucent gold stop our world.

Mid-morning we decide to return to camp for breakfast. Robert spots a cheetah and her grown cub on the alert watching a herd of impalas on the rise in front of us. No breakfast is important enough to miss cheetah action so we stop to watch, staying at a respectful distance.

Suddenly two birds begin circling the area calling a loud metallic "tink, tink." "The plovers are sounding an alarm for the impalas; I've not seen that before." Dave says. "They got their name, blacksmith plover, from that weird call that sounds like hammering metal. Breakfast can wait; let's watch this,"

We patiently wait for the action. Finally after creeping steadily closer to the impalas, the earth's fastest land animal bursts toward her victim.

Robert moves us to the right spot to watch an incredible bit of training on how to kill for food. Momma demonstrates how to finish the kill by clamping her teeth on the impala's throat. Junior is an impatient student and starts to dig into his breakfast while the impala is still kicking. Nora and Warren struggle to watch as the young cheetah's fur turns red around his mouth. They turn away and then gaze again in fascination.

We are admonished, again, to never get out of the vehicle on a game drive. This is the real stuff. Danger is present where grasses have grown tall in a subtle mix of green and brownish-yellow even where wildebeests have chomped the grasses lower.

The next morning we watch wildebeests and zebras splash across the Mara River in both directions. "The grass is always greener on the other side," Mary says. We stare at a baby wildebeest caught by a rock near the riverbank. We encourage him from a distance as he struggles to be free. We turn away as a large croc slides quietly into the river aiming in that direction. Nora and Warren both turn away saying, "I can't look. Tell us what happens."

"He struggled free and swam toward the bank," I report as we all sigh with relief.

The gift of opening doors beyond their own immediate world for my grandchildren magnifies the magic in the air of Africa.

I see people, animals and scenery through their eyes in ways I have missed on previous safaris. The beauty of the land fills me with awe. Magic comes in contrasts: life and death, peace and pain, color and dust. All we have seen swirls through my mind. Animals are in charge; we are visitors.

Blessings shower me as I watch my family absorbing life different from their own. I purr like one of the great cats when I see the strangeness of Kenya with its diversity of animals, its dignified, beautiful people, and know the joy of traveling with family. The softness in the air washes over me with peacefulness. Every moment overflows with tranquility.

Section 3

BEING DRIVEN

Sometimes we are driven to care.
Strangers reflect back a basic goodness.
Things of the earth and sky become an essential
part of our identity.
It is like greeting new members of a family:
"Mother Earth, Father Sky, Brother Bird, Sister Tree,
Cousin Frog, Friend Rain."
We feel the sorrow and the joy of being an integral
part of all that we meet.
Being driven from isolation to compassion is sacred.
All ground is holy, every moment is wonder-filled,
and we are related in a timeless energy.
We are driven.

WEAVING A NEW STORY

Portugal, 1987

Priscilla H. Wilson

WE TRAVEL BACK IN TIME. The Montemuro Mountains display rocky, jagged heights overlooking hazy valleys. Bright yellow broom and purple heather bring the mountains alive. The stone villages are clusters of red tiled roofs nestled into the side of the mountains.

Rodney coordinates a Rotary International Work Team for Portugal's Montemuro Mountain villages. Twenty-one Rotarians plus their wives arrive from Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Scotland and the USA. Kaze and I assist the team with logistics.

It is 1987. The 20th century is soon ending, but everything we see is centuries old.

Each day we experience the 17th century as we see a woman pounding clothes against a stone and a man herding pigs with a stick into a stone enclosure. In Mezio village, a 500-year-old building houses the project coordinators, the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA). The staff is American, Portuguese, Indian and Brazilian.

Farmers raise animals and vegetables much the way their ancestors did a thousand years ago. The ox-drawn carts are picturesque, but hard work for the villagers. Young children drive small herds of goats and sheep. As I walk the roads, I dodge reddish-brown oxen with their heavy padded yokes pulling carts full of Scotch broom. The constant jingle of bells on the leather straps around the oxen necks resound with the ever-present church bells.

When the visiting Rotarians step foot in Mezio, one Rotarian murmurs, "Culture shock, city man." Kaze and I are stunned at the rigors of rural living, yet enchanted with the hospitality of the villagers and the vivacity of the ICA team.

We realize that this is an eye-opening experience for many of the Rotarians. Part of our task is to watch for honest collaboration between the visitors and villagers.

As the various cultures get acquainted, frustrations surface. All are anxious to get to work but it is not easy to plan how to proceed, find the right tools, or get material to each team.

Rodney, as team coordinator struggles to keep everyone happily and effectively busy. He sometimes loses his patience as he tears up innumerable plans to keep up with the fluid situation. Many evenings the three of us spend time on one of Lamego's park benches pondering how to keep all engaged.

One of the international volunteers had ordered a portable wooden spinning wheel from the Netherlands. The women are ecstatic when they are shown how it works and amazed that these volunteers thought about them before coming to Portugal.

We discover the seven women in the Sewing Co-op in the village of Relva work in a tiny dark room with one dim light bulb hanging from the ceiling. The room's black painted walls and rounded ceiling barely accommodate the women and their materials.

One older woman, wearing traditional black, moves close to me as though she will understand more if we are touching. They chatter in high voices with each other in their eagerness to learn the basics of modern spinning and weaving. The three young women bounce up and down on their

toes. "How does this work? Our flax will spin such fine yarn. We can sell so much more," they exclaim. They talk faster and faster to each other about which products they can sell at Lamego's weekly market.

The village women seem to never experience an idle moment. Two of the women talk with us in the street; I am surprised that one continues to knit and the other to crochet as we talk. Most villagers over forty don't know how to read and write. However, the sparkle and future in the eyes of the young gives us courage and hope.

Helping the women of the cooperative transform babysitting for their children into a constructive pre-school program is the challenge for Kaze. The men help expand the pre-school portion of their building, level a play yard for the children and design playground equipment out of easily available materials.

The construction team builds what they declare is, "the world's best built water catchment tank on the Montemuro in Mezio." This team of Rotarians and local farmers skip meals to pour cement.

The Rotary volunteer from Scotland, an artist, takes on the work of "bringing color" into the lives of the villagers. He creates a bright mural for the wall of the pre-school, and teaches basic drawing skills to local members of the ICA staff. Art is not offered in regular schooling.

Our most joyous times happen as we go to each work site providing transport, supplies and encouragement.

We arrive at the preschool as several people are putting up ladders to paint the top of the wall. We shout, "What a great job. White paint looks so much better than the drab building it was. Here are the brushes you wanted."

One afternoon Kaze and I host a tea for seven of the local Rotary wives and the visiting wives at the Sao Paulo Hotel in Lamego. What a privilege to share our thoughts as women from five nations talk about the roles of women. I am astonished to discover the similarity of our dreams as we talk about education for our children and care of elderly parents.

Toward the end of the month I drive to the Municipal Mercado in Castro Daire, the town about thirty-five kilometers south of Lamego. My task is to purchase cabbage, carrots and fruit. It is a festival weekend brimming with crowds; the women in the market are eager to help when they discover I do not know Portuguese.

At the end of the month, eyes shine bright with much laughter as the Rotarians and villagers reflect on their accomplishments. The key to this kind of team, besides all the coordination, is the actual expertise and experience of the team members. The two civil engineers are worth their weight in gold as they talk with local officials about water catchment possibilities in other villages.

Kaze and I reflect on how different this project is from many we've known in the past. Kaze says thoughtfully, "It's more about relationships now. Twenty years ago I assumed I had the skills and my role was to teach that to others. Can you imagine how much we have learned from these women? We've gotten smarter. This was a real interchange between equals."

Our month as a Rotary work camp ends with a barbecue. Sixty-five of us gather in Mezio for a dinner celebration. Our Missouri Rotarian constructs an authentic barbeque pit. The local villagers are scandalized by the bizarre application of a red sauce to good meat. An Indian colleague creates a

marvelous salad. Another volunteer spends two days making a Danish orange dessert. Farofa, fixed by the Brazilian staff, fascinates everyone with its toasted cassava flour mixture with raisins, nuts and finely chopped apples.

All of the Mezio construction crew and their wives come dressed in their Sunday church clothes. They pronounce the mysterious meat a success. Just as the Portuguese port is poured the music reaches a crescendo. An unforgettable evening of feasting, sharing stories and laughter exhilarates us all, from ages two to seventy-five years.

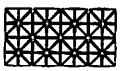
Kaze and I enjoy watching the job and camaraderie that has evolved.

Diamantino, a fifty-six-year-old farmer from Mezio, the foreman of the water tank crew, embodies the gentleness, dignity, and hardworking care of the Montemuro people. His name means, "diamond," and the work team see him as a sign of the Montemuro villagers.

As we leave, I notice a wayward red flower peaking out of a bit of dirt at the base of one of the stone houses. I have seen it many times and marvel at how it thrives in such an impossible spot.

Working with a common purpose binds us together, and drives us to care for villages across the globe. As we realize that we are not all that different, we become more than friends; we are family.

These villagers may be poor by the world's standards, but they are enduringly rich in relationships and resolve. We are driven to the sacred in the face of those who were strangers.



THE HOLY SARI

India, 1970

Kaze Gadway

I WANT TO QUIT. My life with the Australian Aborigines last year consisted of island villages and stalwart people I admired. Now I am thirty and surrounded with beggars and homeless people.

Looking out at the Byculla Bridge through the dusty window of the Ecumenical Institute in Bombay never fails to intrigue and disgust me. Today I watch familiar scenes: the dead being hauled away in the streets; the beggars taking their accustomed place; and the man who blindfolds himself.

Daily this man takes off his clothes, hides them in a niche, puts on the blindfold and walks into the frenetic traffic. People scream at him, cars swerve aside and greater frenzy erupts until someone stops and throws him some clothes. He carefully dresses and retreats to the sidewalk. My antipathy deepens as he starts again with the undress, the blindfold, and throwing himself into the street. I can never watch for long. The depths of degradation that this man and others exhibit to survive are unendurable.

Poverty in India unnerves me. I hold my breath while stepping over bodies that sleep on our stairways. Some are dead. Others are ill and moaning. All wear thin worn saris or faded men's dhotes. Many people sleep in whatever space they can find. There is no money for housing and too few places for rent.

I don't know how to handle it so I pray. I pray for compassion that I might not close my eyes. My prayers change constantly. "Give them hope,

peace, jobs, healing, your presence, change, give them anything." Wall to wall people begging and holding on to our legs as we go down the street make me want to cry "enough."

I've been told to not go out alone. I ignore this. I can't stand being confined in the building and I am more than capable to maneuver Bombay streets. I walk to the market. By accident, I tread on the boney old woman in front of me. Instantly, she turns on me screeching. An ugly crowd surrounds me, threatening me for hurting the woman. Finally, I am pushed against a market stall and can go no further. I can smell my fear and the crowd's fury mixed together in a sour stench. Suddenly a storekeeper reaches out for my arm, pulls me around the stall and leads me down an alley, all the while yelling at the crowd. Somehow, he frees me from the press of bodies and shoves me into another street. He tells me in English to go away. Shaken, I do.

It happened so fast. What am I thinking? Why did that man save my life? How did so much violence erupt so quickly? How can I stay in this environment? I am terrified and ashamed.

I return to the office brooding on how uncomfortable I am in this country. I admit defeat. I don't have what it takes to live here.

Later that evening I look out the window. A man puts his family to bed under the Byculla Bridge. He is wearing a simple, faded dhote. He gently motions his wife to lie down on the sidewalk and tenderly tells his three children to lie beside her. Then he carefully places an old, washed out sari on top of his family and lies down beside them. I am crying.

Never have I seen such an act of compassion. Yet I have seen families just like this sleeping in the open. How did I block it out? Why am I seeing it

now? Just an ordinary human scene repeated many times over in India and I am inexplicably changed.

My heart opens to see these people as something more than unsightly. That which is ugly becomes beautiful and that which is frightening becomes blessed. This setting stays with me as I encounter those who are different or challenging. My unconscious soul is permanently enlarged. I don't understand the mechanics. A poor cotton sari becomes a holy object. In a strange way, I am driven to care.

WATER WELL

Kenya, 1978

Kaze Gadway

A STATELY PROCESSION of Kenyan women climbs the red dirt hill toward the village. Each woman balances a different sized water jug on her head. Every woman wears two yards of colorful cloth that is both a skirt and a carry-all that hold an emaciated infant at breast.

There is nothing picturesque about women walking twenty kilometers with heavy jugs to bring water home. Even the back of my eyes ache to see them drag in and carefully deposit every drop of water into a larger container.

The project director and I sit in the dust with tribal elders. We eat our ugi (greens and congealed corn mush) while conducting an interview. This dusty village in Machakos District, Kenya, is being considered as a community development project with the Institute of Cultural Affairs. We are gathering preliminary information. The criteria for being chosen: need, feasibility, common village issues, wide scale impact and determination to succeed by villagers. The village council agrees to send ten young people to the community development training school in Kamweleni Village if they are chosen.

I walk over to talk with the women who are now sitting in front of their mud wattle huts watching us. I squat down on my heels and ask, "What happened to your water source?"

One middle-aged woman wearily says, "It turned bad. We lost forty eight children to the water last year. Now we walk. There is good water over

there." She gestures the general direction with her lip. As if the quivering lip is a signal, the women begin undulating wails. The rise and fall of the sounds sends waves of grief and bitterness washing over the village. Men start complaining, children cry, dogs bark, chickens scatter and goats trot away.

Sometimes, a decision unveils itself. The urgent need of water trumps any further deliberation. We choose this village. We announce to the council and the waiting people, "We are going to build a new well."

Women slowly emerge out of the huts to form small groups. They glance at me and then at the men. Children sense something and run to their mothers' sides, clutching multicolored skirts. A humming ripples through the separate groups.

The young people go from group to group, asking questions. Their steps become lighter and faster as they hear that they might be sent to the training program in another village and something, undefined, is going to happen in their own village.

A misty blanket of hope begins permeating the ground and floating upward. Soon grins appear on isolated faces until everyone is unexplainably beaming.

"When do we start?" asks one of the elders. No one asks "if" it can be done or "how" it can be done. My logical brain is screaming protest at the speed in which the villagers are mobilized by their own hope. Surely, we need to carefully outline the details and construct an implementation plan.

People are gathering their tools and organizing themselves. We drive to the nearest local town to get cement while the women scoop sand from the dried riverbed. The men collect the stones.

A local water finder walks in circles until his wand bends to the earth.

By evening, a large hole is dug. Old women sit patiently waiting their turn with the pickaxe. Little children bring mud and stones as big as their heads. Old men direct the placement of the white and gray stones for the well wall.

My doubts vanish. I watch local people solve their own problems and am filled with an abundance of joy and peace.

As the water level of the well seeps to the surface, the villagers begin to sing. "Sisi Ulutya, Sisi Ulutya." (We the people of Ulutya, we the people of Ulutya). A local dog tests the water. When he does not get sick, adults drink. When a day passes and everyone is still alive, children are allowed to taste this new miracle in their village.

Then the Head Man turns to me with a mouth filled with haphazard and scattered teeth. "We're in his hands, God is holding us in his hands," he declares in great happiness. Surprised at my emotion, I feel the holy in the rising of the water.

I imagine God as a pair of wrinkled, brown skinned hands swinging side to side. In his palms is a village with water overflowing to the dirt beneath. I laugh out loud and the villagers laugh with me. Is there anything more sacred than joyful laughter?

I am reminded that I just have to get out of the way to let things happen.

THE JOURNEY TO TONGA

Kingdom of Tonga, 1983

Priscilla H. Wilson

SEASICKNESS incapacitates me and I want to die.

150 miles of open ocean are between me and the island of Vava'u in the Kingdom of Tonga. As the ferryboat, Olavaha tosses and pitches, I concentrate on keeping my stomach calm for the next eighteen-hours.

My destination is the Pacific Training School, a community leadership school at Siu'lkutapa College on Vava'u. I am one of the non-Tongans who will work with the local staff to share methods of community development.

I missed the Tonga Air flight from the main island of Tongatapu to the northern island of Vava'u, so the turbulent ocean is my only alternative. The open deck is packed with men, women and children sprawled on their bundles. A few benches crowded with the elderly leave little space for an American who doesn't want to be on the ocean.

Finally, we sail into the Port of Refuge Harbor. The coral reefs and crystal-clear waters astound me with their unsurpassed beauty. I draw a deep breath and go ashore.

That night we have a welcome ceremony for the human development school. "The Pacific Way" is the theme. The hosts of the school Methodist District Superintendent and his wife, Kakala welcome guests, school participants and staff. The Governor of Vava'u praises the participants who are primarily older residents from the island villages. They have come to plan

for their villages' future. Tongan singing electrifies the room and the close harmonies captivate me.

The men wear the traditional wrap-around tupenus, a skirt-like cloth that indicate this is a formal occasion. The village women wear colorful blouses and long tupenus that reach to their ankles. Their belts made of strands of pandanus leaves add a touch of gracious femininity.

Though they speak in Tongan, I discern an under-current of tension. The older-rural participants frown at the western school clothes of the younger Tongan staff.

Later that evening as the staff debriefs in English, I pay attention as the Tongan college kids wrestle with how to honor the elders. Traditionally, elders are the honored members of Tongan society. The western dress seems disrespectful to them.

The next morning to signify respect the Tongan staff wears traditional Tongan garb and they dress in traditional clothes throughout the school. I ponder their response to their rich heritage. How might I have reacted in such a situation?

Each day, the school sessions explore theological and practical community development issues. After an opening presentation, all meet in small groups that result in walls covered with sheets of butcher paper sharing the villagers' dreams. Primarily we focus on how-to methods for holding meetings and starting educational, health and agricultural programs in their villages.

Twenty Tongan staff creatively facilitate as the village participants envision the future. The non-Tongans assist, always working with a translator. Non-Tongans working with the school are from Australia, Indonesia, Japan,

New Guinea, Philippines, Taiwan, and U.S.A. It is my first experience working with translation and I often feel inadequate and unsure. Questions about what I might have said bounce around in my head when I pause for translation.

Training the participants to lead their village meetings is the central task. I work with a small group to create a leadership methods manual. Encouraging input from the Tongan team members is part of the training process. We discuss why the different steps are important and why soliciting the villager's ideas is crucial.

One of the Tongan staff men, Paula, and I work as a team. He translates the work so the Methods Manual is written in both languages. The manual outlines how to conduct a village meeting with a conversation, a talk, and a participatory workshop.

Mid-point in the training, we set up village meetings. Teams of three or four villagers with a couple of staff members will go to Vava'u's thirty-seven villages. Early on Friday, we hand out assignments for the meetings on Saturday. The participants seem nervous as they realize they are responsible for leading these meetings. They want to talk about transport issues rather than how to lead a meeting.

All is finally sorted out about who is going where with whom. Preparation evolves in the slow, conversational Tongan way. Learning patience is key for me. Paula writes in my notebook, "Oua-te-ke-Tokanga-ki-ai" (don't worry!!).

Most of the teams travel in small open boats to their villages. Kakala takes our team in her red pick-up truck to a village not far from the school.

Our team of six meets with fifteen villagers in the headman's living

room. We sit on the floor around the periphery of the room on a large, finely woven mat; we discuss education, health, agriculture, transportation, and decision-making. Most of the villagers have never been asked what they hope for their future and their excitement is contagious. The headman's eleven-year-old daughter whispers translation in my ear so I keep track of what is being said.

The non-Tongans presence is a symbol that the rest of the world cares for this corner of the globe.

Many Tongans hoped the Pacific Training School would supply projects and extra money, but they soon realize that projects unfold through local efforts. The villagers experience being honored for being asked their opinions. Dreams catch fire as they start to imagine what can happen. Within the next few weeks, village preschools pop up all over Vava'u. Only four preschools had been in session before the village meetings. With no bureaucracy slowing the process, villagers easily move ahead to set up the schools.

Kakala and I transcribe the villagers' plans when we return to the school. This gives the villagers and staff a printed record of the plans made during the meeting.

At the end of each day, I walk the roads near the college and listen to the singing pouring from the truckloads of agricultural workers returning from the fields. Sacredness pervades the air as music floats down the street. I imagine that Tongans emerge from their mother's womb singing lustily in harmony.

At the school's completion, we celebrate with a traditional buffet dinner for participants and staff. The room is decorated beautifully with tapa cloths on all the tables, mats on the floor, and flowers everywhere. Singing and dancing ensure a great evening. Vegetables, fruits and fish provide mountains

of food. As the participants receive their school certificates, their wide smiles and erect postures express their pride.

The next day the staff celebrates at one of the island's beaches. Delicious fish and vegetables wrapped in pandan leaves prepared by the Tongan men simmer on a wood fire in the underground 'umu' pit in the sand. Snorkeling and relaxed beach walks provide fun and deepens new friendships. Our time together is capped with singing and story telling.

The next day the guys load the ferry with the supplies, furniture, bags and people for the return trip to Nukualofa, the capitol on the island of Tongatapu. With relief, I fly back on Air Tonga.

During the six weeks, the staff cultivated deepening relationships across nationalities as we worked together. Kato and I led a seminar on care and enjoyed sharing stories to make sense of what it means to care for others. I connected like a sister with the two older Tongan women on the staff, Tuifua and Kakala. When we part, my heart aches. Tearful hugs accompany our goodbyes.

Back in Nuku'olofa, after worship on Sunday morning, the school staff and church leadership attend a Tongan feast spread on colorful mats on the grass. Families in the congregation entertain us; speeches of appreciation for the future of Tonga pour forth after an incredible consumption of food.

Before leaving Tonga, Muli a rural development officer for the government drives several of us to witness the spectacular blowholes along the terraced coastline of southwest Tongatapu. The power of the sea saturates the air with an overwhelming sense of mystery. Hundreds of blowholes along a four-mile stretch of wild windswept coastline roar and whish as the water pounds the cliffs and rises through holes in the rock. I gasp in wonder as I

witness the sights and sounds of seawater being thrown 100 feet into the air.

This month of grace-filled moments thunders through me like the blowholes. Awe spills over my being just as the seawater showers high above the rocks.

I cry as the plane leaves that tiny island nation. The Pacific Training School has been a two-way street. Rural villagers and Tongan staff grasp new levels of confidence and possibility. I perceive a deep-seated power of care that I will carry with me the rest of my life.

How did Tonga, that tiny island nation, confront me so profoundly? The Tongans taking charge in their own traditional ways, the inter-generational dialogue of honor and respect, or local people having unbelievable wisdom? I don't know. But as I fly home across the Pacific Ocean, I know wonder has touched me. Time and again I have been jolted out of my comfortableness. A new depth of care for isolated people has penetrated my being.

HURTS TOO MUCH

Arizona, 2007

Kaze Gadway

"SO WHY DID YOU CALL ME if your problem is not alcohol?" I inquire impatiently.

We are seated in a counseling community hall on two folding chairs.

Although I primarily work with teenagers in an Episcopal youth program, sometimes I get calls to help other Natives. Since I'm sixty-seven with white hair, Native women often look on me as an elder and open up.

Her face is averted and her shoulders slumped. As I lean over to hear her, she whispers, "I'm so ashamed. I was drinking with two white men in Winslow and they suggested we buy some bottles and park out on the Rez. They became rough with me. When I told them to stop, they wouldn't. I cried and tried to push them away but one held me down while the other one tore off my clothes. They were cussing and making fun of my body while they raped me. They sat on my face while they pulled my legs apart. I was crying which made them laugh more. Then they dumped me out of the car with no clothes or shoes and drove off. Several cars passed me by when they saw me. After I collapsed on the road a man and wife stopped and gave me a ride. She handed me a shirt to wear. The police said that since I was drinking and I couldn't identify the men, there is little they can do. My family doesn't want me back. What can I do?"

I try not to let my rage and sadness show as I ask, "Have you talked to anyone about this?"

"No," she moans, "It hurts too much to talk about it."

Sadly, in these reservation border towns, this is a common story, Native American women picked up by men outside the reservation who take them across the border. On the reservation there is limited and confused jurisdiction among tribal, state and federal authorities. Often Native Americans say with scorn, "Crimes against women never go on the books or if they are reported, prosecution disappears into a desk drawer. No one cares about the Natives or believes that anything can be done."

I deal with this domestic violence issue often. One Sunday, we pass a broken down van with no wheels where one of the girls lives with her boyfriend. As we pass, she leaps out of the van screaming. I slow and we haul her inside then accelerate to get out of there. Her neck pulses with fresh bruises. We don't have enough seats in the van so one of the boys sits crunched on the floor. She is surrounded by others holding her and murmuring encouraging words. None of us ask questions. We all know that her boyfriend beats her and she won't turn him in. Later I make my obligatory call to Child Protective Services in Phoenix with clenched teeth, anticipating my usual frustration. They take notes. Nothing happens. Nothing ever happens.

In 2007, only twenty-five out of 300 reported cases of domestic violence in our area end in arrest. Too few police and too little interest. On the Reservation domestic violence does not register as a violent crime.

One night a telephone call wakes me. "Can you take us to the hospital? My grandson has a broken arm."

"What happened?" I wearily ask.

"My daughter's husband doesn't like the older step kids because they don't obey him. He starts hitting when he is drunk. Everything is fine because

no one hits him back. But when his stepfather starts kicking his sister, my grandson breaks his nose to stop him. The stepfather goes berserk, throws him against the wall and breaks his arm. He then starts beating the girls with a belt. The neighbors call the police who take him away."

While the grandson is being treated, I talk to the mother and grandmother about the constant beatings. "What are you going to do about the stepfather? You tell me that he is not going to stop."

"We are sending the boy to live with his grandparents in another town," the mother confides. "That way he stays away from my husband."

"And what about the girls?" I am impressed that they have a plan.

"He's my husband so we'll just get rid of the girls," she says nonchalantly. Stunned, I stutter, "What do you mean?"

The mother speaks cheerfully, "Well, girls aren't that important; we will find someone on the reservation who will take them. They can always help around their house."

I stare at the women. I am speechless with rage, unable to express a coherent sentence.

Another Sunday, a girl in the youth group puts on her acolyte robe. My stomach turns over when I see fresh cuts up and down her arm. I seem to be speaking down a long tube as I ask, "How long have you been cutting yourself?"

"For about two years but I cover it up and no one notices," she says causally. "I used to use a piece of glass but my boyfriend gave me his knife and it is much sharper."

After church we sit down to sort it out. "I just feel good when I cut myself. It's like cutting a part of you that is ugly and it goes away," she says.

I try to keep a clear head. Gently I ask questions that might give me a clue about her self-mutilation. She tells me what stresses her. I feel tired listening to her.

Her list goes on and on. "I really get stressed out when they call me loser, when they hit me, when there is no food in the house, when they yell at us and each other, when they get drunk, when I get drunk, when I am ashamed to bring my friends into my house, when there are no clean clothes."

Silently I shout at her "run, hide, escape, and survive." We talk of other ways besides cutting to combat stress. Later I enlist the help of other girls in the youth group and we talk through this type of hurting that has become common.

Teen suicide, child molestation, child pregnancy, truancy, spotty educational opportunities, self abuse, physical beatings, neglect, etc. The list goes on. The youth I work with still believe they are not worth anything as human beings and are not expected to contribute much.

Inevitably, hungry souls and reaching hands demand much from me. I am numbed by this relentless litany of unimaginable terror and assault among the female youth. The scope of brutality becomes too large. Just as I think that I cannot take in even one more life being put into jeopardy, I am given a ride to the church by a young mother with her four year old daughter.

The mother casually tells me "I really didn't want her. She was such an inconvenience. If only she could have been a boy. At least he could get a job or help me when he is older. But I was stuck with a girl so I'm making the best of it." Horrified, I look at the pitifully small daughter. She shrivels up in the seat, her face stony, and her eyes distant.

It is as though I am walking through history with demeaning phrases reverberating "not wanted, not wanted, not wanted, not good enough, get rid of her, not as good as a boy, no use, stay out of my way, not wanted, not wanted, not wanted."

I remember those words said to me as a child. They are still said to many females worldwide. What is a path out for each of these women?

Hope pops us in simple ways. I am put in contact with a woman in a small Arizona town who goes out winter nights to contact homeless women huddled in alleyways or under bridges.

I go with her one night. "Hey there," she calls out, startling a woman clutching a thin blanket around her. "I can offer you a place to sleep tonight and a meal."

The woman climbs in the car with a shy smile. We find two more women and then drive toward her home. She directs them to the garage which has been supplied with three cots and sleeping bags. She shows them where to shower in her small home and we prepare soup, sandwiches and ice tea. They sit in the living room watching TV while each one showers.

As we eat together, one of the women thanks her and asks, "Why are you doing this?"

"We women have to stick together," she says. In that moment I see the holy shine through her face.

Chagrin fills me as I think how often I am uncomfortable talking to someone who is hurt. Yet this ordinary housewife, in caring for only three women a day, turns me around. I am goaded into thinking about what I can do.

Faces of courageous women float before my eyes. I see my grandmother feeding hobos in the 30's; nurses on battlefields tending a wounded soldier; women marching for civil and equal rights. Can it be that I am being entertained by angels? I don't know.

I do know that my energy to care surges unbidden and I am ready to reenter the fray.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF MOTHERHOOD

Kansas, 2008

Priscilla H. Wilson

A CUP OF COFFEE and a perfect May morning. What more can I want?

I glance out the kitchen window to check on Tomahawk Road's traffic. What a shock to discover a mother with twelve off spring marching across our driveway. "Quick! Where is my camera?"

Our suburban street is a dangerous place during rush hour for a family so short. I'm positive that Mama Mallard is headed for the creek four blocks away. Who knows where she has birthed this crew or how far they have journeyed already. I rush out to escort the family parade through the neighborhood perils.

Cars often round the curves on our street at illegal speeds; Mama can't know this as she strides forward. All twelve ducklings waddle obediently behind her.

Twice I wave for cars to slow down. I'm a white-haired woman in bedroom slippers directing morning traffic and lugging a 400mm lens camera.

A police officer pulls up, "Animal Control is on the way."

"I'm just seeing them to the creek," I say and he takes off.

The roads entering this area can sometimes confuse drivers. Not Mama Mallard. She crosses to the south side of our street where another road enters, and keeps advancing. One of the morning commuter cars screeches to a stop

and waits. Mama hops up on the grass, but comes back down when she realizes her babies can't maneuver the curb. Two or three ducklings have tried to hop up. They almost surmount the curb, but back they tumble into the street.

Two more cars slow as the duckling parade turns and crosses the intersecting street. Lower curbs now let Mama lead her young family through a block of grass nearly as tall as her babies. All thirteen parade on and safely get across the next street.

Now the going is risky. Mama's GPS isn't working. She guides her brood up a sidewalk to a neighbor's front porch. Up the steps Mama goes, with exhausting difficulty the tiny ducklings attempt the heights also.

All this time I keep my distance. Animal Control arrives and explains, "The law doesn't allow us to help them."

"I'm only guarding them from outside interference – cars, cats, dogs, hawks," I explain.

Mama finally figures out that she has to go around this house not through it. She sets off in the grass and shrubs, through the back yard and finally down the hill.

Rodney, worried about my safety, has followed in his car. I calculate where Mama will arrive at the creek as she heads down the hill through the yard. I'm relieved that the family is now away from automobile dangers. I join Rodney.

"Please drive around to the church's south parking lot by the creek. I think she will come out there," I suggest. I am right. After a bit of a wait, the duck family approaches the edge of the creek near the bridge behind the church.

When Mama reaches the rocks by the water she turns and "counts" her babies; she is calling all the time. She counts again. *Only eleven have made it.* Mama paces back and forth quacking vainly. Coming down the hill, somewhere in the brush, one baby has given up, been caught by a predator or overcome by sheer exhaustion.

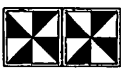
Mama quacks again, then turns toward the creek and moves on. After all, she has a family to raise. She slides into the creek, turns and urges her eleven babies to join her.

They toddle to the edge of the rock. They reverse. They quack, turn, look at each other and again at Mama ... all in search of an easy entry. Back and forth they go. After several minutes of hesitation, they awkwardly slide into the water one by one in response to Mama's continued calls.

As Mama and her youngsters swim south in the creek, a male Mallard (can it be Papa?) joins them. But Mama knows her work has just begun. She will need to teach her ducklings how to be successful Mallard Ducks.

Mama has her children safely in the creek ready for school (all except one duckling). And me? I have ninety-eight captured moments in my camera.

I hadn't planned to spend time with a family of ducks. I know that I can't interfere with wild life, but delight fills me as I provide protection. This vulnerable family has inspired me to record their journey with care.



SINGING MY FAITH

Priscilla H. Wilson

I SANG MY WAY TO FAITH.

Robed in short white cassocks, we seven-year-olds resemble angels in our sanctuary's balcony. Our choir director, Mary invites us to join the Adult Chancel Choir in singing the last verse of "Beautiful Savior." Maybe it is singing with those mature voices, or listening to the solo verse. Maybe it is simply our adoration of Mary who treats each one as a real human being.

Every Sunday the church choirs from first graders through adults fill the U shaped balcony. I show up, put on a choir robe, unearth the right piece of music and parade up the curved narrow stairway to the balcony with the other children for Sunday worship.

The magic of those early choir moments sets me on a path of sustaining faith.

Now, decades later, singing "Once to Every Man and Nation" sends my mind whirling back over the sacred music that has shaped my life. *"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide."*

Once? Every man? That word "man" must mean "human being." But what about the word "once?" I encounter life decisions over and over again.

The harmonies and words in song become my prayer. While listening or singing, I let the Spirit do the praying in me.

Would I be a Christian without the words and music that reinforce my faith?

When singing I remember we are to love each other as we wish to

be loved; to give our lives to have life; to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, comfort the poor. These things give meaning to my life.

During my young adulthood our church's minister of music organizes a class that expands my world. As we learn to sing both the Brahms and Verdi Requiems, I am filled with wonder. What suffering, majesty, wonder and pain in life have I ignored?

In the early 60s, I spend a week with 5,000 women in Purdue at the National Presbyterian Women's Conference. I listen to music and speakers throughout the conference. The Civil Rights music raises new questions about injustices.

As I listen to talks about women's move toward salary and political equity as well as struggles against abuse I know my life has to count for something. Music strikes my heart as we sing, *"I'm gonna live so God can use me."*

In 2005 our church choir learns Bach's music and impossible German words in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. It is so demanding, I nearly drop out. But I remember, "Research says learning is good for my aging brain" so I stay with it. Three weeks before the concert I begin to rehearse a new story, "If I'm going to spend time on this, I want to truly sing it well." (My puritan upbringing perhaps.)

And what happens? A guest conductor from Westminster Choir College arrives. His first question to the chorus staggers me, "What is Bach saying? How can you convey the agitation (humbleness or other emotion) Bach is calling for?"

I hadn't thought about the meaning of the words. Pronouncing the words and singing them on the right pitch – was there more to think about?

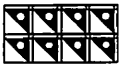
As we work on the meaning of the text the sound transforms those "impossible" German words.

Now, months after my husband's death, our choir is preparing Brahms Requiem in English to sing on Palm Sunday. Twice before I've had the privilege of singing this incredible work. I've not paid much attention to the words before. As I journey with the text Brahms chose for this Requiem – through grief and mourning to hope and joy my nearly fifty-nine years with Rodney swirls through my being.

Singing has always been a joy, but now every word comes with a sacred message.

Each rehearsal and performance is a time of standing in the holy. This music is driving me to not give up, but to relate to others who are grieving. My care can encourage others.

Gratitude for this amazing experience fills my soul. The poetry in music throws open the door of wonder for me over and over again. Singing is an act of memory; it reminds me of what life is about.



Section 4

BEING ENFOLDED

Sometimes we are enfolded in a mysterious firmness
while the ground shakes beneath us.
We may be surrounded by the profound and
immersed in hope.
Maybe it is the darkest night of our bleakest times
as we struggle to believe that there will be a dawn.
Unexpectedly we experience new confidence in
reshaping tomorrow.
Inexplicable mystery fills us.
This is a sacred moment. It feels like being cherished in
unearned love at even a microscopic level.
We are enfolded in deep peace and recognize
uncertainty as a gift to be embraced.
We are enfolded.

THE IMPROBABLE HIKE

Arizona, 1996

Priscilla H. Wilson

JUST AS WE'RE ABOUT to board the helicopter for the short flight to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, the pilot says, "Today is the last flight of the helicopter down to the village."

I stop and stare at him, "What's wrong?"

"The regular helicopter crashed yesterday. No one is hurt, but this is the last flight to Supai for an indeterminate time. The regular pilot refuses to fly any more; he crashed a couple of times in Viet Nam, and he has had enough."

My husband, Rodney and I look at each other. A wave of panic sweeps over me, but I push it away. We're here to celebrate Rodney's 70th birthday and that is what is important.

We both gaze over the edge toward the village we can't see eight miles below. I gulp and Rodney says, "Let's not think about this now. Kaze will know what to do."

We've driven to the Havasupai Tribal Lands about fifty miles west of the National Park South Rim. I have been anticipating what we will see on the flight down.

The flight goes by too fast. I try to look every direction at once, but it is a blur of colors and impressions. In three-minutes we land in a cloud of dust.

Our friend, Kaze is standing at the bottom with her faithful black lab, Kuja Hapa. After landing in the village, we walk the path of powdery dirt to her small house. She serves the Havasupai Tribe as tribal planner. She was

hired to write grants to fund programs for the tribe, but has also become letter writer and confidant for many in the village.

Each day we venture forth to feast our eyes on jagged rocks, steep cliffs, and breathtaking colors. The banks of the Cataract River open up to numerous side canyons. They beckon us to explore unknown wonders. The isolated community spreads out on both sides of the river. We rarely see residents during our walks. Many are working in the tribal offices, school or the store while others are farming in the fields.

Peace descends on us after a three-mile hike to the base of the Havasupai Waterfall. Kaze explains, "Havasupai means people of the blue-green waters and these waters are sacred to the tribe." We watch clouds of mist rise from the water as it falls from a great height into the blue green pools. Profound silence settles over us like a cloak.

Toward the end of the week Rodney asks, "How we are going to leave the canyon?" I push his question out of my mind and say, "When the canyon walls encircle us I feel like we are in a giant Eagle's nest."

We then celebrate his birthday with ice cream, cake and conversation about the gorgeous sights we've seen all week.

After celebrating Rodney's birthday, Kaze finally says what we've all been thinking about, "To leave the Canyon, I think our options boil down to four. You can just stay in the canyon, which isn't very practical. You can ride horses to the top, charter a helicopter, or hike out."

"We don't want to spend money on a private helicopter," I say.

"I've hiked up many times," Kaze says. "It is an eight-mile trail to the canyon rim. I need to go out to do some business for the tribe, so I can climb with you. Do you two think you can do that?"

The hike makes the most sense to us. Our ages, seventy, sixty-five and fifty-six don't enter the conversation. "We'll have to prepare carefully," Kaze reminds us.

Rodney and I haven't used walking sticks to hike before, but this seems like the time to try one. We each test several sticks and choose one that fits us. We pack easy-to-carry bags with bottles of water, a small, but nourishing lunch, and pairs of socks. We send our suitcases (like mail) on the mule-train to the canyon rim.

Very early in the morning we set out on our nine-hour, eight-mile journey from the valley floor to the rim. The cliffs keep changing shape and colors. One minute they rise so steeply overhead it feels like we're walking through a tunnel. The next minute they flatten out like a giant stepped on them. The shifting scenes override our tiredness.

About noon we climb onto a big flat rock for a mid-day rest. Slowly we eat our sandwiches and fruit. We drink lots of water and change to a dry pair of socks. Kuja Hapa has followed us closely and sits in Rodney's shadow. We laugh as the postal mule train with our suitcases goes by on the trail we just climbed.

After lunch, we continue our hike. Billowing white clouds cap the scenes like daubs of whipped cream. I delight in the many colors that range from pale golden-yellow to deep reddish brown and every shade in-between with a plethora of greens in the scrubby vegetation. Shadows in the striated canyon walls play tricks on my eyes as the colors change. Several times when the high cliffs close in on a narrow passage we have to duck to walk through. At other moments when the walls open up we see broad panoramas of contrast. We would never see these sights flying in the helicopter.

Tiredness creeps in as the last portion of the trail shifts to steep switchbacks. As we climb up, up, up and back and forth sweat runs down my face. The sharp incline triggers a lot of huffing and puffing.

Rodney and I both gasp a sigh of relief as we walk the last switchback and turn into the parking lot. I am astonished to see our suitcases sitting all alone on the rim at the edge of the parking lot. We collapse by our bags in sheer gratitude and laughter.

Rodney hollers at some hikers who are just starting toward the trail, "I just turned seventy and I made it."

Our gratefulness overcomes the aches, thirst and dust. We tackled this tough climb and made it to the top. For unexplainable reasons it never occurred to us that we couldn't hike out. This improbable day has been a joyous gift.

The camaraderie of the day and the beauty of the canyon sustained us in a difficult, but breathtaking journey. Kaze laughingly quotes St. John of the Cross, "I am not made or unmade by the things which happen to me but by my reactions to them. That is all God cares about."

I am not sure why some adventures cause fear or discomfort. Why did the thought of this eight-mile hike or our energy level not generate stress? As we talk about the day during dinner that evening we realize that being surrounded by peaceful beauty enveloped us in a state of calm. We supported each other with laughter and care and quietly soaked ourselves in peace for the necessary climb.

TREES AND MEMORIES

Kansas, Illinois, Peru

Priscilla H. Wilson

TREES HAVE BEEN MY FRIENDS through the years. Trees are special friends. Their wide spread branches surround and embrace me. They evoke memories and connect me to what really matters.

In my childhood the Lombardy poplar tree in our front yard stood as an ambiguous friend. Its slender poplar branches reached to the heavens as they marked the entrance to our driveway. They guided our bicycles to the right turn. The tree also supplied the switches that our father applied to bare legs.

That reminder of our transgressions usually kept my sister and I on the straight and narrow path. Switches across our legs never hurt anything but our pride.

Many years later, the picture-perfect white oak in the middle of our back yard in Lake Forest, Illinois is a dear friend. Each day I step out on the back deck and silently greet that magnificent tree. One day I gasp as I look up through the dense, bluish-green foliage. Our nine-year-old daughter waves from the top. My heart stops and I manage to say, "Mary, what are you doing up there?" I hold my breath and my anger until she is safely on the ground.

When Mary is a high school freshman, she and I spend a month in the village of Azpitia, southeast of Lima, Peru working with a medical team training village women to be health-care workers.

An olive tree hanging over the outhouse becomes my friend. It is a feeding station for a flock of warblers. Every day as I watch the birds fly in and out of that tree, I anticipate them singing in our yard in Illinois during spring migration. Each visit to the outhouse includes a conversation with that olive tree about the care of those warblers.

Later the children and grandchildren of those warblers come flying through our yard in Evanston. A huge old burr oak provides shade, inchworms for migrating birds and nourishment for me. Every day, from my second floor window I watch the warblers enjoy that burr oak. During May (the month of migration), I spend many hours in communion with that tree and its visitors.

When we transfer to Kansas City, trees play a vital role in our house search. In the first view of our new home a light snow is drifting across the back yard. As I open the sun porch door, five male cardinals pop in and out of the tall linden tree in the back corner of the yard. "This is it," I announce. The trees in the back yard sell me. Only then do I go inside to look at the rooms.

One night lightening strikes the maple tree that welcomes all who come up our driveway. Red-bellied woodpeckers have a nest in a hole in that tree. Even so, a tree expert persuades me the tree must come down. "It isn't safe," he explains. So with great sorrow, I bid farewell to that friend.

Five fast-growing river birches replace the maple. They are a constant reminder that my life's journey is moving much too quickly.

Now, a major factor in my choice for my last home in a retirement community is the profusion of trees surrounding the building. Who knows which particular tree will furnish the deep calm that sustains me? As I get

older and my energy diminishes, which tree will be the friend through the last stage of my life's journey, the mighty blue spruce by the parking lot, or the white pine by the gazebo?

My relationships with trees gives me deep peace and I am embraced in caring arms.

BOW WITH RESPECT

Hong Kong, 1974

Kaze Gadway

"THAT ONE," I point to a pressed duck on a crowded rack and then gesture to myself with one finger. The chef with a dirty rag tied to his forehead and a sleeveless shirt hanging on to his emaciated body, chops the duck, rice and vegetables, cooks it on an open grill and hands it to me within minutes. I love eating lunch in Hong Kong.

Walking down the street and spotting the variety of vegetables and choice poultry or fish energizes me. Every day I choose a different food stall and watch them cook my selections. Rarely have I eaten such delicious food for so little money. Each choice awakens my taste buds.

It doesn't seem right to define this culture by food but it is tempting.

I am thirty-four years old working with people who work harder, faster and longer than I do. My job with the Institute of Cultural Affairs consists of coordinating efforts of local communities throughout Asia who want a development project. Our area office is located in Hong Kong and I have just arrived from Japan.

On my days off I explore this city that has so many faces. Some days I ride the Star Ferry for five cents just to go to the Kaoloon side and back to look at the closed borders of China.

"Did you hear what I just said?" a Chinese friend says over the noise of construction. Bamboo towers rise daily in the city, with men swarming over the slender scaffolds. Movement is constant. Something is always being

made, sold or handled. To survive, you expand your circle of influence by running to the next place to meet, to negotiate, or to contact a person who might be able to help you. Without Chinese help I could never have discovered where and who to see when. "Watch out," my friend calls when I quickly sidestep to avoid a messenger weaving in and out of the crowds. Where, I wonder is the stillness in their lives?

Looking out in the morning I see men and women scurrying to work. Yet sometimes I watch men taking their birds in cages to the park and placing them carefully on tree branches. When they finish their Tai Chi Exercises, they pick up their birdcage, bow to each other and return home. I work at understanding how this culture reconciles its hurry with its slow down time.

Once I am stuck in an elevator filled with Chinese speaking nonstop. To my western ears, the speech reminds me of a catfight. The constant clatter sounds like I could be shredded momentarily. When the elevator finally jerks open we all bow to each other and walk away. I feel wonder and trepidation in being in a place that is entirely different, where I cannot possibly fit in. Yet I am pulled toward the serenity of the bow.

It seems sacrilegious to think about bringing Western expertise into this land. Yet, our skill in strategic planning is requested. Chinese colleagues take us to places of crushing poverty and crowded conditions. Many of the poor live with people stacked like cordwood. Mud closes up the gaps in the thinly constructed walls. We see small children plastering their roof with mud to keep out the wind. Everyone works on the house.

I have a rudimentary knowledge of the importance of face. What I don't expect is that children understand the complexity of behavior. When there is little spatial privacy, it is imperative to have strict rules about relationships.

"Say it softly," I hear mothers whisper to their children."Do not disturb the harmony of the person next to you." How their ancestors cultivated the importance of allowing each other to retain dignity remains miraculous. Many times a young child apologizes to me if his playing intrudes on my space.

If I ask a person if he or she knows direction, the response is always "yes," even when they don't have a clue. So that I will not be humiliated by having asked a foolish question, the "yes" means only that the question is heard, not that the information is available. To preserve self-respect, I learn to not ask questions unless I know the data is known and can be revealed. The intricacy of relationships demands that you stay aware of what the other person needs to retain poise. If the other person loses face, you lose even more face.

Thankfully, my colleagues point out my many insensitive blunders. They explain the importance of "face" and the bow. Everything is about honor. The beginning and end of any conversation is marked with a bow. No matter how loud or rude the interaction, there is a pause before moving on. How wonderful to be a people who stop the world with a bow.

My last week in China, I see a pitifully small child with delicate bones creep to a doorway entrance and look out. Spying some left over garbage in the street, she darts out to pick it up. She spots me, looks down and then with reserved dignity, respectfully bows. I return the bow with reverence.

At first I think the child is affirming her self respect. Then I realize that she sees that I am embarrassed to see her picking up garbage. She bows to put me at ease. Her concern is that I not lose face. I am humbled to be embraced with such honor. Our bow to each other is an acknowledgement that there is sacredness in our relationship.

It is not about the food, the hurrying, or the difference. The Asian bow holds a promise. "Expect honor," it declares. "Look at others through the lens of inherent dignity." "Give value." What a simple gesture of being enfolded by stillness.

SLIVER OF HOPE

India, 1977

Kaze Gadway

AS SOON AS I ALIGHT from the train in Sevegram, India I see a young beggar boy start following me. I turn sideways so as not to signal full-face confrontation and I tell him, "I carry no money on me." In exquisite English he assures me, "Memsahib, I am only waiting for whatever you throw away."

Tashi, who looks about ten with the dark eyes of an old man, explains, "I can only collect rags. I will give candy wrappers or discarded paper to my brother who is allowed paper rights. Please, Memsahib, I am so hungry."

Throughout India there is a custom to pay a powerful protector who designates garbage rights for a fee. Within a trash site, each type of waste product is assigned to a beggar. By threat of violence, the beggar can only pick that one specific type of rubbish: rags, glass, cans, paper, etc. to give to the protector for resell. Tashi continues, "I am so lucky. My brother and I wash the rags and paper and the overseers pay us a fee. He sells them to restaurant owners. It's a steady job." As we continue walking, he confides that they are saving money for a rickshaw so he and his brother can make enough money to buy brides. I rummage around in my backpack and find some paper to give him. As he stuffs the paper in his sack he smiles, wearing his pride above the stink of the sidewalk.

This is my second chance to live in India. This time I am involved with a "New Skills Training" program for villagers to learn basic business skills.

It is a six-month intensive training program to provide an entry point for employment. There are more applicants than we can enroll. And, as usual, I am learning more than I am teaching. I still find it difficult to be open to what seems to be a prison of systematic poverty and suffering.

The training takes place in the village of Sevegram, alongside one of Gandhi's ashrams. We are about a four hour drive from Bombay. The ashram followers continue the non-violence and humanitarian guidelines of Gandhi in meditation and communal life. Although primarily a Hindu community, a Buddhist village exists on the edge of the boundary line. The ashram has daily prayers for all faiths and encourages discussions among Muslims, Christians, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, or whosoever shows up.

As I walk around the village of Sevegram, Tashi's dream stays with me and I smile. Before me on a muddy path, dark-skinned boys herd pigs. I am certain that pigs are forbidden in a Hindu/Buddhist village so the scene puzzles me. No one can eat meat here and pigs are unclean in these religions. "What is going on here?" I ask one of my Indian colleagues.

"They are herded and eaten by the unscheduled tribes," he says. He explains that the caste system in India locks in a designated role for each person in the Hindu faith. Each role is honored at its own level, including the "untouchables" who tend the necessary but unsightly parts of living. Gandhi fought to have the "untouchables" appreciated as an integral part of Hindu society and no longer outcasts.

Suspicious that my question is not answered. I ask again, "How do the 'unscheduled tribes' fit in this scheme?"

My colleague speaks regretfully, "They don't. They are outside the caste system and cannot be recognized or acknowledged."

I struggle to sort out my words. "I can see them. They aren't invisible. Do you go around them? How is this possible?" Other staff members join our conversation and assure me that the unscheduled are ignored and you eventually learn not to see them.

This is a powerful blow to my befuddled spirit. How much injustice can exist? Everywhere I live, another layer of brutal exploitation and misuse of humans emerges.

As our conversation ends, I hear an explosion of jeers outside our window. We rush out. A herd of camels with brightly colored harnesses go down the street. The men, women and children on the camels wear a motley assortment of colorful garments and jewelry. The children are carelessly clinging to ropes and camel hair. I gawk at the ingenious and distinctive flavor of the scene. I turn for an explanation.

"They're gypsies," a teacher explains. "They migrate across borders all the time. Mothers are afraid that they will steal their children and sell them to slavers. We keep close watch when they are around."

I look closely at the frightened faces of the gypsy children and the angry looks of the crowd. I don't want to hear anymore about slaves today.

This day of injustice leaves me unsettled. Inside my brain I hear endless voices, "Outcasts, don't belong, garbage pickers, slavers, ignored, no future." I am ready to quit. But just as I think I can't stand any more misery, Tashi comes back to me.

He and his brother dream of a different future. Their dream keeps me going even in raw and demoralizing circumstances. A ten-year-old boy in squalor sees a sliver of change and I am immersed in hope.

CAN'T SEE

Zambia, 1979

Kaze Gadway

I HEAR THEIR SCOLDING in the trees before I see the monkeys. They are my only companions as I wait at the empty Lusaka airport. After four hours I accept that no one is meeting me.

I sent the telegram last week announcing my arrival. Then it occurs to me mystthat sending a telegram only works if someone from the distant village of Kapini goes to the telegraph office in Lusaka to check. I am here for a trouble-shooting situation but no one is aware that I am coming. I call our Brussels office at the airport's public phone booth.

One of the Belgium staff with the Institute of Cultural Affairs informs me that they don't know how to contact anyone in the village of Kapini except by telegram. He explains, "No, I don't have directions to get there or a contact person in Lusaka. No, I don't know how they know to check for a telegram." I sigh as my frustration bubbles inside.

I have spent twenty years with the Institute serving in villages and I know the routine. I walk to the market and start asking if anyone knows Kapini village and if there is any kind of transport. No luck. I check into the hotel and call our office in Nairobi to see if any Kenyans have been to the project. Finally, someone gives me general directions and suggests that I hitchhike.

The next morning, I begin to hitchhike toward the copper mines. I find the crowded market square where trucks and old buses wait to pick up

goods, animals and people. "Does anyone know Kapini?" I ask. "It is around the copper mines." A Zambian driving a truck full of goats says he is going in that general direction. I jump in the back and reconcile myself to smelling like a goat. Every time we stop, I hop off to drink some water to get the dust out of my throat and ask other truck drivers if they know about Kapini. After changing trucks twice (the second one filled with cabbages) I am lucky. I find a crowded bus going to Kapini. Four hours and thirty new acquaintances later, I arrive at the project village. "Oh, all the leaders are meeting in Lusaka," the villagers tell me. "We don't know when they are returning."

I think about my aching feet and how I would love to just sit down and take a breath. Someone shows me the washbasin and water pitcher. I quickly splash water on my face and go back to the road to hitchhike back to Lusaka. It is easier because everyone knows where the city is. On arrival, I start checking at the hotels and cafes until I find the project staff. Two white faces and six brown faces look up with astonishment. They are not pleased to see me, especially when I tell them why I have come.

I call the two directors of the program aside and explain that I am to negotiate a peace between the American and Zambian staff.

It takes about four hours to sort out the complaints on both sides. Finally we make some hard decisions about leadership and respect.

The next day we return and the local villagers and area office ask me to stay and teach the leadership training modules. Thrilled, I stay. I have only visited Zambia twice before when living in Kenya and I want to remain longer.

Having been in Belgium a few years, I am delighted to be back on the African continent. Seeing copious colorful flowers, wild animals in my

backyard and African families working together to build a road or a well enriches all my senses. I drink in the familiar sights of my beloved Africa and sing songs in Kiswahili under my breath "Watu wote, oh Africa."

One night, those of us living in Kapini watch the nightly show of the fiery red copper slag cascading down the hills. My spirit rises as I laugh and listen to stories about the team effort of creating an irrigation system while keeping the goats away from the fields. But soon the grueling work wears me down.

The rains begin and mud is tracked everywhere. Creepy crawly things come inside. Laundry doesn't dry. Fires are hard to start in the pelting rain. Cooking outside is difficult in a downpour. The decision to run for the latrine is carefully calculated.

"I'm not staying," screams a young volunteer from New England as she runs past me into the rain. I check out what is happening. One of the cooks says, "Perhaps she is afraid of the snake in the kitchen."

I rush in with a hoe to drag it outside. "Where is it? I don't see anything." Esther points with her spoon, "Right there."

I still can't see it. "Show me exactly where it is. We need to get it out before it scares anyone else." My tone is a model of reasonableness. With a matching tone, Esther points out the head, the body and the tail. Then I see it. The snake fills the entire length of the kitchen; it is monstrous.

"Good Lord. Let's call in some more people to help." I am thinking about calling the whole village and maybe the next one for rescue. Finally, six of us warily direct the green and gray reptile outside with hoes and machetes.

Why didn't I see it? The phenomenon is known well. Our preconceptions blind us to see what is there. But how can I have missed this giant?

I get back to work in the training modules. It is easy to teach what to do in the village. It is not so easy to explain why it is important to follow certain procedures for safety and maximum village participation. A high point comes when we show how to affirm people's insights without having to necessarily agree to implement them. After a difficult session, one of the young men jumps up, "I get it. I see it now" And he proceeds to explain it to the other students.

Vitality surges through me. Someone gets it. This moment is the fresh air that blows away my frustrations. But it doesn't last.

I get bogged down in details. "Explain this; write a grant, clean up the mud, go find someone, etc." It's not enough to get me up in the morning.

Then friends invite me to see Victoria Falls. Maybe a trip for the weekend will help to regain my balance. We arrange a car and local driver.

On our way to the Falls, our driver stops by the side of a river and says, "Look."

Once again, I can't see anything. My friends keep saying, "Look at the river." Remembering the snake, I stop looking for small things and stretch my eyes to see the whole river. I can't believe it. In plain sight are two large elephants crossing the river toward us. Their flapping ears and long gray trunks are right in front of me and I had not seen them. We laugh nervously as our driver slowly backs up to allow them the whole road.

I do not see and then I do. Isn't that a perfect description of the holy visiting us?

We continue on and finally reach the falls. No one ever told me that you couldn't see the entire falls at a glance; you can only see it in sections. The mist covers me with fine spray. Walking across the swinging bridge, wonder

settles on me. For a long time I just sit on a rock at the top of the falls, engrossed in the pounding water. Someone plops a raincoat over my shoulders while I am held spellbound by the water rushing down.

I walk to the bottom of the falls and find another rock to sit on. Now I am enthralled with the water as it bounces off the river and tries to climb back up. Suddenly, sleek black otters swoop in and out of the water. It's a ballet in their watery element. They lunge in and out effortlessly while avoiding being sucked under by the force of the water. Entranced, I breathe it all in without words or reflections. It is unfathomable and enchanting. The otters pop up again in front of me and I laugh. This colossal force of water and the total disregard of the otters mystify me. I find myself in a different space, just taking it in and not worried about what to do with it. At last, I can see. Wonder soaks me thoroughly.

STOPPING THE WORLD

Texas, 2009

Priscilla H. Wilson

THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY is synonymous with bird watching. Rolling hills and wooded valleys vibrate with both native and migratory birds. I have stolen away from family for a morning of solitary enjoyment. As I enter Lost Maples State Park, I anticipate a spring dawn awakening with a staggering variety of melodies and flitting colors. I'm lugging six pounds of camera with a 400mm lens, National Geographic Bird Guide, binoculars and essential water bottle. I am determined to capture stunning bird pictures in my new digital camera.

But after trudging up and down paths, I collapse on a bench to rest. I've listened to songs of at least a dozen species and seen nary a feather. I pause in a lovely glade to contemplate the enormous variety of foliage and bird song. My seventy-nine years slow me and I can't go the pace I would like. I catch my breath, I look at the foliage and soak in the bird song.

The rest of the world vanishes. Nothing is real except the path I am on with its gently flowing streams and rustling green leaves. I watch the mist roll in and evaporate with the rising sun. The song lulls me like a lullaby.

Birds are proclaiming the day. If I knew bird songs, not seeing that scrub jay or black crested titmouse might not be so frustrating. Even if I name the birds by sound, I long to observe the flit of wings, the splash of yellow, the bright beady black eyes hunting for an insect.

By 10:00 a.m. I acknowledge I am a tired great-grandma; I decide to

return to the trailhead. The black-crested titmouse on a birdfeeder is my prize for the day. I capture the antics of this bird in my camera.

The next day I drive alone further north up highway 10 toward South Llano River State Park. It is the weekend and the park is filled with groups of hikers and young families. Talking and laughter echo everywhere; any bird will be scared into hiding.

I turn into the adjacent Walter Buck State Wildlife Management Area. As I get out of the car I breathe in the silence; no traffic noise, no people noise, only a few birds are twittering in the tree tops.

I stroll up the gravel path and inwardly rejoice in the sunny, calm quiet that is perfect for searching for tiny elusive birds. The thought of seeing golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo lure me down the trails. These endangered birds live only in the Hill Country and I am resolved to find one or both of these rare species.

Since birdcalls are not my talent, I'm reduced to relying on a sighting. The golden-cheek warbler is a distinctive black and white bird with a full golden cheek and a black eye-stripe extending from his bill through his eye to the back of his head. All species of warblers are small, have distinctive coloring and flit from leaf to leaf eating their hearts out.

Neither the warbler nor vireo migrate so I have to find them on their home turf. I dutifully listened to the calls of both on the internet before we left home. I strain to hear the faintest hint of either song as I walk through the woods.

Suddenly I hear a string of varied, twittering three note phrases coming from a low, brambly thicket. I'm sure I am onto a black-capped vireo. I follow the sound down the row of bushes, frantic for a glimpse of this bird. Finally,

I catch a glimpse of a pale yellow wing-bar about three feet from the ground. Silently I bend low and move toward this small wonder. At last, one quick look at a distinctive black head with broad white spectacles surrounding a large red eye. He is there, now he is not – vanishing deeper into the brambles.

I embrace this moment in my memory. Perhaps this transcends any image in the camera.

The joys of bird watching happen unexpectedly. One captivating peek at God's creation and nothing else matters. I applaud the awe that sweeps over me, the forest of trees, the shining silver lake, the rolling waves and the hunt for a bird.

Time in the Hill Country is soul stirring; spirit surrounds me. I stoop and smell the wild flowers by the side of the path. The bird has eluded my camera but a sacred memory has been etched on my brain.

VIEWING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Ecuador, 2009

Priscilla H. Wilson

THE BUS LEAVES at 4:45 a.m. on the western slopes of the Ecuadoran Andes. We arrive in the dark and fog at the Paz Antpitta Reserve. Angel Paz and his brother, Rodrigo, lead fourteen birders and three guides down the most difficult path I have ever trudged. In the darkness, an early morning mist swirls through the vegetation. I whisper gratitude for my climber's headlamp, walking stick and son's supporting arm.

The path of uneven rock, mud and log steps have a heavy rope strung between trees along some of the steepest places. We clutch the rope to keep from sliding down in the mud.

Angel and his brother farm a few acres on a steep mountainside. Like many local farmers, they often cut down parts of the cloud forest to create more farming area.

When the brothers searched for more responsible ways to make a living, Angel attended one of the Mindo Cloud Forest Foundation's workshops. He learned of eco-tourism possibilities and realized that tourists might pay to see the Cock of the Rock, a spectacular bright red-orange bird. Briefly at dawn each day these males strut their glory by wildly dancing in elaborate display rituals while shrieking wildly.

But Angel recognized that tourists wouldn't pay to stomp through thick foliage down steep cliffs to the lek, the traditional area for the bird's courting displays.

Over time Angel built a rough wooden platform near the Cock-of-the-Rock lek. This allowed visitors to see the birds and also restrained them from wandering into the bird's area of display.

As dawn breaks on our trudging, we reach the platform by the lek. We strain to see these stunning, chunky birds mock fight as we peer through thick foliage to glimpse the male's black wings, white rump, and red-orange plumage of their pompadour crest.

These normally quiet, shy birds make so much racket and commotion dancing and squawking that the leaves shake. Females, a darker orange-brown are summoned from afar to watch and choose a mate.

As dawn turns to day, the activity on the lek dies down. The Cock-of-the-Rock resumes daytime quiet, and disappears into the cloud forest.

Angel made an astonishing discovery while digging the steps to the lek. When he threw dirt out of the path, he noticed that antpittas came out of the forest to gulp down the giant earthworms. These elusive, rarely seen birds gradually approached him for this treat. He suspected this treasure would excite birders. Now, every day people from many nations pay him for the privilege of struggling up and down his paths.

Robert Ridgely, an American ornithologist, specializing in the neotropics wrote, "What Angel Paz has managed with the antpittas is impossible, it's amazing, it's incredible."

These secretive, shy creatures lure birders from all over the world to South America. Notoriously difficult to see, they disappear from sight on the forest floor; their feathers of brown, rufous and gray hide them in the fallen leaves. Frustrating, unsuccessful failure is the prize for most birders who come to the tropics to search for antpittas.

To view the "impossible," we labor on down another slope to the magical site. A semi-circular bench in a clearing provides a welcome relief as we sit. Angel moves about fifteen yards away and indicates the need for quiet. He calls softly, "Manual, venga, venga!" (come, come). We wait breathlessly; Angel calls again.

Wonder of wonders, Manual, a giant antpitta walks quietly out of the dense undergrowth. He looks like a tilted football on toothpicks. His striking rufous forehead grades into a gray crown and nape that contrasts with his dark olive brown back and wings. His face and entire belly are a rich rufous-orange with narrow wavy black barring.

As he strolls toward Angel, cameras click frantically; we use no flash as Angel requested.

Manual takes the worms from Angel's hand as he offers them. Angel then distributes some worms on a tree stump about fifteen inches high. Manual hops up on the stump, struts around and consumes the worms. Hopping back down, he disappears into the forest.

Angel softly calls again, "Maria, venga, venga." Another giant antpitta strolls out of the dense undergrowth to receive her feast of worms. She repeats the performance, walking to Angel, hopping up on the stump, eating and disappearing.

Angel invites us to descend a much steeper trail down to the river to watch him call out Willi, a yellow-breasted antpitta. Afraid to tackle this climb, I wait on the bench with several others.

Suddenly I gasp. Maria has returned to clean up any left over worms. It is hard to believe that we are sitting alone in the forest, receiving such a gift.

I click my camera in a wild succession of shots, my hands shaking from excitement.

When the others rejoin us, I am still speechless.

On the difficult climb to Angel's house, we pause on another incline. Angel calls into a dark, cave-like spot. Lurking out of sight is Susana, an antpitta with a distinct white moustache, a tiny white necklace and a yellowish belly marked with small white vertical spots. We quietly watch in wonderment as Angel calls and Susana comes toward him for her worms.

By now I am sure we have seen everything there is to see as we struggle upward, around another curve. No! There ... on a relatively flat area is a string of hummingbird feeders. I find a log and sink in grateful rest.

Now we witness a spectacular humming and buzzing show of about twenty species. Do I just watch and enjoy or try to catch the hummers with my camera? I decide to relax and relish the swooping colors.

By now it is mid-morning. Mixed flocks of tanagers, becards, fruit eaters, and wrens are flitting in the tops of trees. We catch quick sights of bright-colors as these tropical birds hop from leaf to leaf searching for bug treats. Our binoculars and cameras swing from side to side.

Back at our point of departure, daylight reveals a breathtaking vista of green hills studded with red flowering shrubs. A thatched roofed platform with picnic tables offers opportunities to share our experiences.

Angel's wife serves bolón de verde (fried green plantain dumplings); empanadas (fried pastry shells stuffed with sweet or savory filling), fruit salad and steaming hot café. This is part of the wonder every day for those who enjoy the Paz Antpitta Reserve.

The breakfast refreshes me and I murmur a prayer of thankfulness for Angel and his family.

This local farmer let his imagination and ingenuity loose and fashioned a way to support his family without destroying more rain forest.

The rainforest is magnificently beautiful, and urgently necessary if we want to continue to breathe. I am grateful for all those who are saving this precious resource. Who would imagine a rain forest might be saved with worms and tourist dollars?

When I experience the grace of Angel's reverence for nature's beauty, I am enfolded in seas of deep peace.

Section 5

BEING NAMED

Sometimes we are pointed and pushed to a new identity.
We are marked with a different role to play.
In ancient times our naming day held this happening.
We have a significant place in history,
even if we never stray far from our doorstep.
Being named is a sacred moment
when we are called to affirm life as a gift.
We are complete.
We are named.

NO DO-OVER'S

New Mexico, 2010

Priscilla H. Wilson

OUR WEEKLONG WRITING SEMINAR, *Death and Its Mysteries*, kicks off amid the red rocks, cliffs and dry desert air of the Ghost Ranch Conference Center in New Mexico. The changing light during the day offers different perspectives. We overflow with a sense of calm as we struggle to write about death.

"Why doesn't my cell phone work?" someone asks. Another responds, "I think we are supposed to be in isolation while writing."

Kaze, Rodney and I came to Bill Tammeus's seminar expecting to improve our writing skills. Previous years, without paying too much attention to the theme, writing skills engaged the group. Now all ten in the seminar think, talk and write about the death of a friend, relative, pet or stranger. Improving our writing becomes less important.

Mid-week a field trip takes us to a Funeral Home & Crematory in Espanola, New Mexico. The Funeral Director escorts us to the chapel; we sit on the edge of pews like recalcitrant children, not sure we want to be there. He explains the process and the type of questions families ask. "The first thing you should do when death happens is take a deep breath and collect your thoughts," he says. He details the respect and care they show the body.

"What's that?" one of the group points toward something that looks like a walk-in freezer. The funeral director says in a low tone, "That is a refrigerator where we store the dead until they can be cremated. We have a young

man who was brought in yesterday." We are already quiet but the silence deepens.

We expected some abstract learning, but now the experience becomes deeply personal. Nothing can keep us from reflecting on this business devoted to the day of the funeral. This visit is an "in your face" look at others caring for loved ones behind the scenes.

After the director explains the many steps involved, we tour the dressing room, embalming room, casket "selection" room, room with refrigerator units for waiting bodies and the crematory. In the casket selection room we gape at the types and varieties available.

Kaze asks, "Is that short casket for a child?"

"That is a sample for any size casket needed. We don't keep children's caskets on display. It is too emotional for parents," he explains. Somehow, we breathe easier knowing that this day we don't have to confront the dead body of a child.

In the crematory we converse just inches from the enclosed fire of a body being cremated. The crematory technician explains how a stainless steel identification tag goes through the cremation process with the body. "It's important to keep identification straight for family members," he says. "This tag is included with the ashes in case questions are raised later."

A curtain of silence engulfs us as we journey back to Ghost Ranch. We are all lost in thought as we ponder the care and respect we have witnessed. Strange as it seems, the day reaffirms who we understand we are, even in death. We all know that everyone dies. This visit fills in the blanks. There is no "do-over." We all complete our lives with death.

We return to the Ranch to write our personal stories about death and

about our faith. The stories we share are not about achievements but about relationships and profound experiences. I write about my Mother's death. Kaze chooses an experience of death with the Native American youth.

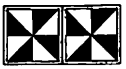
Rodney writes about the need for closure at his death. It is as if he is saying," I want the closure of my life to be as important as the living of it."

We talk about wanting a "good death." We crave a death in which we face this last stage of our journey with courage and dignity.

There is no more to our lives than the way we respond to whatever is given us. We don't know what happens after we die. But we can reflect up to the time of death that we belong to the Life-giver.

Thinking about death, we are each reminded that we are called by a specific name. Maybe it is at baptism or even a nickname that captures who we are. For others it is an understanding that we are named as the children of God.

We are also named at death. It could be a tag in the furnace, an obituary list, a tombstone or a monument to the Unknown Soldier. We are not just invisible motes drifting in space. We lived and someone noticed. We are named.



RENAMED

Kenya, 1980

Kaze Gadway

I DON'T WANT TO ASK. I look around and slow my voice. "Which programs have you started in your village?" My voice slides up and cracks.

No one looks at me directly as the students respond, "We are having some trouble starting programs." Inwardly groaning, the Kenyans and I resume a much-repeated conversation on the ways to bring vitality back into the village.

It is 1980 in the village of Kamweleni, Kenya, at the training center of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. For twelve months I have been conducting eight-week intensive work-study programs on leadership skills for eighteen and nineteen year old youth. After each training, we send them back to their village to implement the economic and social programs. The training finished six months ago. Test scores were high. Motivation soared. Later I check on the progress of the detailed action plan. Nothing seems to work as planned.

I am fuming. My internal discourse accelerates. "Everyone ought to be able to easily start these programs. What are they missing? What am I not teaching? Why can't they do it? What did I do wrong?"

Three times a year, forty men and women learn how to lead their villages in self-sustaining projects in agriculture, retail management, literacy and other village enterprises. They create plans to involve villagers in imple-

menting basic steps. It is a marvelous program and outstanding curriculum. It just does not work.

The training staff hammers out another next-step to jump-start these villages. Some of us travel to the different development projects and hold additional on-site training activities to unlock a program crucial to move forward.

My assignment as Training Director is to travel to the Rift Valley. This location is a place of beauty known for pink flamingos rising to blend into the clouds.

I have come to unclog infant care health procedures. The local women carefully create a sling, find a common store scale and create baby-weighing equipment to keep track of the weight of growing infants. I show them how to use a common Coke bottle to mix nutritional supplements and to mash local fruits and vegetables for optimum weight.

I love training women leaders who will train other women in that district. To watch caring women keep babies alive fills me with excitement.

The first day is invigorating. A gleeful clamor resonates as the women chatter about keeping children alive. We take turns weighing different babies and concocting new recipes based on local foods. By the evening of the first day, my energy level could have carried me to the Indian Ocean. That night, I put my mat on the floor, wrap a mosquito net around me and sleep deeply.

By morning, my whole body aches and my stomach is queasy. Stoically, I continue the training. I have never been sick in the years I have lived in developing countries and I wait for the symptoms to go away.

But they get worse. By the fifth day my body is so stiff that I can barely move. My balance is shaky and I sit to teach. I still refuse to believe that

illness can touch me. Finally, I collapse. My Kenyan colleagues put me on a chair and four men carry me five kilometers to a waiting transport center. Transport in the remote villages is by "matatus," a kind of mini bus with a cab and a covered flat bed with benches that seat eight people comfortably. They usually carry fifty or more. As many people hang on to the outside as are crammed into the interior.

I am stuffed inside with one Kenyan colleague at my side. My eyes hurt and I wander in and out of consciousness. Many helping hands of gentle strangers murmuring encouraging words hold me up. We arrive at the field hospital and I am carried inside for an examination. Field hospitals isolate the sick until a doctor can see you or you can travel to a hospital in a city. I am lucky enough to be put into a single cot with only one other patient who had miscarried the night before. There are about eighty women in forty cots in the room with another twenty on the floor. Everyone shares a bed or sleeps on the floor. Most cannot make it to the latrine so the floor is covered with what is politely known as "bodily wastes." I ache so much that I can barely move or think clearly about my environment.

A doctor sees me briefly. A few hours later I am told that all doctors in Kenya are going on strike and are leaving the field hospital immediately. The phones do not work. Everything is isolated. I think about dying. Maybe it is not so bad if it makes the pain go away.

Fortunately, the eighteen-year-old Kenyan project director contacts a cousin on the railroad that has a separate telephone system and calls our Nairobi office. A friend arrives and takes me straight to Nairobi Hospital. After treating the symptoms, I feel well and leave for Kawangware, our Village development office in one of Nairobi's slum areas.

After I fall out of my bunk bed that night unable to move, I am taken back to the hospital for further examination. Pain attacks different parts of my body. I complain of my feet one day, my hands the next and so on. The doctors diagnose several possibilities but none seem to fit. As they give me heavier and heavier pain medication, I have a seizure and go into a coma.

Another good friend angrily insists that I be transferred to the Aga Khan hospital which has outstanding medical care. I am conveyed by ambulance. I am later told that he refused to let anyone stand in his way or even give another opinion.

A family member flies to Nairobi to take me to a Houston hospital that specializes in tropical diseases. The Center for Disease Control in Atlanta becomes involved. I am given ice baths to bring the fever down. After a spinal tap and other medical procedures they discover that I have a mutated form of cerebral malaria that does not respond to the usual medication. They switch me to old fashion quinine and I am up in a week.

It takes a year of home therapy to regain my complete balance. A continuing residue is my caution in walking down stairs, and the reversal of some letters in my writing.

A few years later I return to Africa. I am working in Zambia and several of us visit Victoria Falls. One of the Kenyan colleagues relates this story of my illness. "You were unconscious and we were afraid that your spirit may not come back. We gathered around your hospital bed for several days calling you back. Each of us held on to your arm or hand as we softly said 'Kaye Hayes, come back.'" As he tells this story my memory floats back to waking up in 1980. They pronounce Kaye Hayes slurred as one word so it sounds like "Kaze." Sitting by the waterfall it dawns on me that Kaze, not

Kaye, is the way everyone calls me. It remains my name to this day. These young Kenyans not only kept me connected, they renamed me.

Since cerebral malaria usually kills within twenty-four to seventy-two hours of non-treatment, people keep reminding me, "You almost died, you know." Yes, I do know that. Each time I am reminded, my brain goes back to those events in which I can see faces, hear voices and feel being carried and held.

Signal events have claimed my life but nothing as important as being brought back to consciousness by the hands of others. It has always been hard to let others care for me. It is easier to give than to be cared for. These students who failed to complete their program goals are the ones who by love and determination kept me alive.

This "you almost died, you know" event holds a special place in my journey. Not only was I named, I was touched. Being carried, hand held, supported by arms and cherished when totally vulnerable saturated my bones. Kindness is paramount in qualities I appreciate in others. Love beyond words has been integrated into my being. No other name besides "Kaze" can convey the depth of love I was given. When someone says to me "You almost died, you know," secretly I murmur, "But I was named and comforted."

DO IT NOW

Priscilla H. Wilson

"RODNEY WILSON had twenty minutes to live when he arrived at the hospital," the doctor tells me. It is 1973 and a massive hemorrhage struck him aboard his commuter train.

After he recovers and my heart quits drumming in fear, he tells me, "I left the office quite early that day, I felt ill – thought it was the flu. I walked across downtown Chicago to the North Western Station and boarded a train, just as I had done hundreds of times before. The next thing I knew, I woke up in a pool of my blood."

Rodney hospitalized for three weeks gives us both time to think about not postponing things that are important to us. We promise ourselves that we will not wait until retirement to do all the things we want to do. We may not be around by then.

Our family motto after that death scare becomes, "Do it now." "Yes" is our standard reply when opportunity appears. I am suddenly more open to unexpected things like trips, excursions or new projects.

One Tuesday evening Rodney answers the phone. After some chit-chat, our friend George at the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) says, "Incidentally, can you go with us to Oombulgurri for a village planning conference? It is the Aboriginal community just west of Darwin in Australia."

"When are you going?"

"We leave tomorrow afternoon at 5:00."

Rodney catches his breath and mumbles, "Sure."

When he tells me, I gulp, hesitate, and straighten my shoulders to say, "Why not."

Rodney travels for the Santa Fe and is used to throwing clothes at his suitcase. He takes his suitcase to work the next morning.

At work, Rodney asks if he can take some vacation time and go to Australia...that afternoon. His boss gulps and replies, "Yes, I guess so. Priscilla will enjoy that."

"Oh, Priscilla isn't going."

Rodney travels a lot during his years with the Santa Fe, so I know how to be alone. We spend many weeks apart with work or service projects. We always check in, consult with each other, and report the ups and downs of whatever is going on. I laugh in later years saying, "he has his things, I have my things, and we have our things." I know how to be independent. Yet many times when one of us comes home we swear we will do the next thing together. Yet the next call for help comes and off one of us goes.

When Rodney returns from Oomulgurri we spend hours talking about his experience, "It is an Aboriginal village in the northwest section of Australia. After you have gone as far as you think you can possibly go, you still have forty miles of river to travel to get to Oombulgurri."

In Oomulgurri, Rodney learned it is possible to talk with, listen to and plan for the future with people in the remotest corners of the world. He bolsters my courage to say "yes" when ICA asks me to be on the children's camp staff, run a print shop, or teach in the village development school in Tonga for six weeks.

Another time for me to gulp a "yes" occurs when the Santa Fe assigns Rodney to their Kansas City office in 1982. I had assumed we were in the Chicago area for life.

New avenues of service open when Rodney joins a Rotary Club. Neither of us have any idea how much this will shape our lives.

Suddenly, it is more than Rodney attending a weekly Rotary meeting. I listen to a couple of colleagues wondering about ways to connect ICA with Rotary International projects. I glimpse the possibility that these two paths can be connected in our family.

My imagination runs wild when I hear about the tradition of hosting one or two Rotarians during the 76th Rotary International Convention in Kansas City. It is 1985. We hatch a plan to broaden the concept of "home hospitality" beyond just one or two couples.

I send telexes to ICA offices in fifteen countries requesting names of Rotarians who plan to attend the Convention. Telexes return with lots of names. After all arrive in Kansas City we hand deliver invitations to their hotels.

With two rented white vans we pick up the Rotarians who have responded, "yes." A catered buffet ensures a delightful May evening on our patio. Tulips, daffodils, and flowering crabs waft fragrance across the crowd of thirty-six Rotarians and their wives. All their local Rotary Clubs are involved in one way or another with the ICA.

My heart swells with pride as I watch Rodney move among our guests in conversation. I savor the stories swirling around the patio as experiences are shared.

A year later, Rotary International in Evanston learns that Rodney and I will attend the ICA's International Conference in Bilbao, Spain that summer.

They ask Rodney to leave the conference for a few days and go to Portugal to evaluate the ICA and Lamego Rotary Club's request for a 3H (Health, Hunger & Humanity) Grant. Again, I gulp and say, "Go for it. The Conference activities will keep me busy."

Rodney drives to northern Portugal's Montemuro Mountains with Rotary's checklist of what to look for in a local community project. During his three days of visits, he meets with Lamego Rotarians, villagers and ICA staff to evaluate their plans for development in the mountain villages. He stays in the home of the local priest's mother in Mezio village. Every thirty minutes, day and night, the chimes in the church next-door sing out. "I decided the chimes were calling me to pay attention to the people in the village," he says. "I couldn't sleep a wink with those chimes ringing."

After Rodney's retirement in 1986, a new vocation for fifteen "retirement" years consumes much of our time and energy. Rodney coordinates Rotary Work Projects in Portugal, Jamaica, Mexico and Ghana. Working together becomes a process of learning. He determines what local Rotarians in each project want to have happen. My brain buzzes with how to make things happen, i.e. call Rotary International and ask them to find another doctor for the team.

Through the years I have listened to tales of the Santa Fe, but have not been a part of them. We have been partners in matters of children, our household and neighborhood; but otherwise we walked different paths. His path leads to people relationships and working with his hands. My path leads to teaching, facilitating and organizing comprehensive pictures into implementation steps.

About the time Rodney retires, I create a training and consulting

business with a couple of colleagues. Fortunately Rodney and I have separate offices. When he asks for help with a Rotary project I leave my upstairs office, descend to his office, spread papers out on his big double desk and dig into the business at hand.

Sometimes leaving my work, I have to push my frustration aside. I hide my feelings, knowing that I can get back to my work. But other times a "talk it through" session helps us both figure out the best ways to collaborate.

The Rotary projects open new doors of cooperation. We celebrate together when our working as partners make the work successful.

Even when work teams have their ups and downs, Rodney is undaunted. He says, "If I am going to lead successfully, I need to remember how I operated all those years at the Santa Fe. His values during his forty years with the railroad make sense to me:

- You can never have too many contacts
- Avoid burning bridges
- It is easier to apologize than to get permission
- Be responsible for your own decisions and actions
- Make heroes of the team members."

We both apply this philosophy.

Word spreads across Rotary District 5710 to pay attention to international service. Rotary members from across the world volunteer to join these efforts. For three years, (1987, '88, and '89) Rodney is the team leader for international teams joining Portugal's Rotarian-village partnership. I love being a cog in the wheel on these trips whether I'm shopping in Lamego for paint and nails or driving Rotarians across the mountains to another village

to check out water sources. For both of us, reflecting on the day each evening in a garden in downtown Lamego is the best part.

Too often retirement is seen as the final frontier, a time to stop work and take it easy. I hear women complain about having the retired husband under foot, but Rodney has found a new vocation. He finds a way to do what he has been doing all his life, connecting those without resources to the larger community. As a couple we discover another way for two to become one. We know how to give support to each other with encouragement, time and resources. We are called to service beyond our own circle of relationships.

Rabindranath Tagore's poetry speaks to us.

"I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was service.
I acted and behold, service was joy."

BLUE GREEN WATERS

Arizona, 1995

Kaze Gadway

KUJA HAPA, my black Lab, dives in to drag me to land whenever I disappear under the waterfall. I can never break him of that habit. The Havasupai people laugh uncontrollably from the bank at my frustrated attempts. I want desperately to explore the space behind Navajo Falls. They watch me come up sputtering time and again with my shirt in the dog's teeth.

The three years I spend with the Havasupai Tribe in Arizona as the Tribal Planner spin my cultural values around and upturn me till I am cross-eyed. Not since my life with the Australia Aborigines have I experienced such connection and contradiction for the land and its people. Helicopter, horse or feet are the only ways to enter their village at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. As I walk, the dirt under my feet matters. It connects me to something ancient.

Three years earlier at age fifty-five I apply to work in this dream location of waterfalls, canyons and isolation. The tribal chairman tells me to drive to Hualapai Hilltop, park, and mount the horse at the beginning of the trail. Since vehicles have no access to the Supai village, I am glad to hear that there is a parking lot. I am a little uncertain that there will be an anonymous horse waiting for me. To my delight, horses are there for all five people applying for the job. We all mount and ride the eight mile trail down to the village. Later I find out that if we can't ride we are eliminated from consideration. Horses are the main source of employment and the main transport to the world at the top of the canyon. Horses matter.

When we reach Supai village, the community has gathered in a tribal meeting to meet the candidates. We face many hard questions about our qualifications. They then ask the only question that matters "What do you think the tribe should do?"

Everyone else details his or her plans for the development of the tribe. Having just spent three years with the San Juan Paiute Tribe, I know the response they want. They want their opinion considered, especially when it concerns their own governance. Confidently I say, "Whatever the tribe decides." The job is mine.

In my first three months as a part of my job, I investigate the river, rocks, canyons, waterfalls, mines, petroglyphs, burial sites and trails. Walking, hiking, climbing, swimming, crawling, rope swinging and horseback riding are my modes of transport around the village. To have a job where I can be outside for half of each day is blissful. Several times a helicopter flies me to the Grand Canyon National Park to work on memorandums of agreement. My outlook differs from the tourists who come to see a wilderness or swim in the three waterfalls. I am not an outside observer; I plunge into the land.

Office work consists primarily of writing grants and government reports. However, soon villagers come to my office for help in writing letters, calling lawyers or government agencies, and making sense of tribal documents. After I earn respect by keeping conversations confidential people come to me with hesitant voices and delicate issues: "I'm being harassed." "They are asking for my credit card on the phone." "Some tourist asked me about my religion and I walked away rudely." "This letter in the mail says I've won $100,000 if I fill in this card." "The car company tells me I can have a new car for $100 a month if I just sign this paper." I become their personal

"google" for discerning scams and dispensing information. In return, they take me to view their ancient pictographs and other sacred sites.

I love this land, the people, and the challenge. At first, I cannot get enough. But then it becomes too much. I start falling asleep at my desk. Exhaustion replaces bliss. Living in the isolated village puts me on call 24/7. Although I am not behind a desk all day, I am constantly involved with village issues. I am immersed in a land richly blessed yet I have to de-stress daily. Eventually, my body overloads with continual doing and I yearn for a break in routine that will help me refocus and trim back my work hours.

A co-worker walks into my office and says, "You look like death. Let's take the weekend off and take that hike we have talked about."

"I can't. I have too much work," I say. "I will never get it all done."

She just stares at me. Then she gives a lecture on work efficiency and taking care of myself. I know I need to take a break but I don't want to admit it. I begin to make more detailed excuses when she walks out of the room.

Sighing, I remember a time when I fell asleep at the wheel and drifted into the side lane. There was no injury but I knew I had to take some days off. It has been a struggle ever since to take the time to revive my inner self.

I shake off my despondency and my friend and I pack for the long planned Reservation hike. We choose to take the eight mile trail down the river to Beaver Falls where the blue green water of Cataract Canyon meets the grey of the Colorado River.

After a mile, we stop to soak in the travertine pools. When we see the remains of an old burial site uprooted by the flood, we carefully sprinkle dirt over it as we have been instructed in order to disguise it from the tourists. Strangely even though I am knocking branches out of the way and climbing

over boulders, each mile away from work lightens my steps.

The difficult part of the trail begins three miles beyond the tourist campsite in the third waterfall area. The first obstacle is a simple matter of climbing backward on the cliff to the bottom of Moony Falls with the aid of a chain. From there it becomes more difficult. We are told to follow the path which switches from side to side of the river. Translated, that means that we cross the river twelve times, sometimes swimming and sometimes walking on rocks submerged in the river. Often a convenient rope has been left by a previous hiker. Sometimes, we claw our way through bushes and overhangs. "Are we supposed to jump over that crevice?" my friend asks in a trembling voice. Matching her uneven tone, I say, "I don't see another way." We jump.

By the time we reach Beaver Falls, we discover we have yet another three miles before the two rivers converge. Collapsing on the wet ground, we save that delight for morning. We curl up in our blankets and gaze at the massive display of luminous stars.

That last three miles reveals enchanting specimens of fossils, rocks, vegetation, birds and unidentified animals. To our astonishment, it is quite an easy passage. We take in the sights and with carefree hearts prepare for our journey home. After all, we know what to expect.

But nothing happens as we foresee. More crevices, more rivers, more rocks to climb down, more barriers and to top it all, we get lost. We just wander around until we find a trail and follow it until it runs out. Then, in frustration, we try another. Finally, the sight of the 200 foot Moony Falls looms like the entrance to the Promised Land. We are exhausted, disheveled, and encrusted with sticky things.

Climbing is all that is left. On our last small cliff, pulling myself up

using the chain, I whimper. Half way up, I can go no further. The next ledge is higher than my head and my leg cannot reach that far. All I have to do is to pull my body up to the shelf with the strength of my arms. I can't do it. Crouching on a narrow outcrop holding on to a rusty chain, I think wistfully about spending the night there suspended.

What can I say? My friend calls below me and I have already thrown my backpack to the higher protuberance. Never before have I understood the call for sheer courage. I am scared to pull myself up. I am afraid of falling back down the rocks. The gorge below is fearsome. Somewhere a voice within says, "You know that you have to do this." The smell of fear rolls off my skin. Inch by inch my mind focuses on nothing but pulling myself up without slipping. After I make it to the top and pull my friend up, we sprawl like pudding on a rock.

In the midst of this place of incredible beauty, I experience incredible fear. Literally at the end of the rope with all avenues cut off, I find myself open to the unfathomable. It is a holy moment of fear and determination in a mix I never want to replicate.

After this experience I find myself walking differently. In my years of adventure, I cannot believe that anyone achieved more than I did in those last five minutes.

Several times I have jumped into a dangerous situation to protect someone else. But this time I had to rescue myself. In those few moments I passed a rite of passage and heard "You too are valuable."

DEAD DEAD

Arizona, 2002

Kaze Gadway

"YEAH, HE DROVE DRUNK on the wrong side of the road and hit an eighteen wheeler smack on. He was trashed." his cousin speaks, shifting from one foot to another at the accident site. Soon he is vomiting by the side of the road. I get him a bottle of water from the van. He is spitting out the vomit as though he could wash the death out. How many times with the Native youth group have I heard someone cry to me that another youth has died?

The police had contacted me "Four youth are dead. One has your card."

I'm used to calls at night. I'm a youth minister in the Episcopal Church working with at-risk Native children in northern Arizona. Everyone has my cell number and I am often called to take youth to the emergency room, talk to them in juvenile detention or when they have been kicked out of their homes or schools. I am in my sixties so I have the advantage of having the traditional trust of being a white haired grandmother. I momentarily wish I didn't when someone dies and I'm asked to respond.

I quickly collect family and youth in our youth program and drive out to I-40. We arrive to see a tangled mess of bodies and metal. I don't know the other three boys. Reverently I make the sign of the cross and pray for mercy. I don't know what else to do.

These deaths leave me feeling useless. No words work. No actions count. I wish for someone to blame. I wonder if I can do better next time.

Futile promises spill out of me. "I will be kinder to him next time. No, I will talk hard core about his drinking. No, I'll take him on more trips so he can see alternatives. No, I'll turn him into the police. No, he's dead. I can't do anything."

I can't shut out the voices that cry "Why? Why did he have to die? Where was I when he needed me? What was he thinking? Why him? Why now?" I shrivel inside. Another child is gone.

An aunt with a crippled gait walks up to me on the roadside. I mouth something. A cousin is yelling, "It hurts so much. Even my skin hurts. I hate you God."

Then the flinty grandmother sees me and stalks forth before I can turn away. I don't want to hear her accusations or witness her pain. The youth gather around with shoulders touching and empty eyes, like wounded puppy dogs. Somehow, their need gives me the energy to move. My words have no great magnitude. Being there and feeling sorrow is all I can authentically offer. We pray. All I can do is to repeat incessantly that we will get through it.

"He wouldn't have died if he could have come more to the youth group. If he had gone with us on the mission trip he would have belonged to us. He would have been somebody," wails a youth. "Why didn't we make him come? Why didn't you make him, Kaze?"

Healing appears in shattered pieces. I try to remember the miraculous in this child's life, those moments when his face lit up and laughter spilled out of his mouth. He made some hard choices that seemed to redirect his steps. I want to see the big picture of his life. But I don't know how it would have ended if he lived to be eighty. I can only remember glimpses of glory when he said yes to whatever life offered and a future opened. Or when he

gave up horrifying baggage that weighed him down, like being told by his father that he would always be a loser. He was fully in the hands of God in those moments and it is not up to me to say that he could have lived more fully if he had lived longer.

Still there is something about death that stops all conversations. To speak and limit myself from using the present and future tense cripples me. He was with us yesterday at the store. He is not. He will not be doing something later. No more chances. That is irrevocable.

I don't want to feel this deeply. And I don't want to just make it through. Resignation without healing drags me down. The picture of those bodies keep me awake.

Healing only takes place when I can turn it loose and accept what I cannot deny. I've said that many times but just as words. That segment of I-40 has now become sacred ground, where life and death intertwines. Death is real here. His life is over.

As I try to cope with grief, I remember the Old Testament story of Jacob who doesn't quite know what he is doing when he wrestles with an angel. Turning pain and anger over to God is like that. It is hanging on to that angel fighting, gritting your teeth, shouting, "I will not let you go until you bless me."

Continuing to cry on the road, I manage to whisper, "I name you complete. I let you go."

THE BEGINNING AND THE END

Kansas, 1946 and 2011

Priscilla H. Wilson

"I'M NOT GOING TO DATE one of the 'big boys."

I'd heard a rumor that Rodney Wilson planned to ask me for a date. I am only a junior in high school; his return from the Navy qualifies him as one of the "big boys."

Walking home one day, I see Rodney and his friends in a parked car. His friend, Cutch pushes him out of the car and he approaches me. "Oh dear, what now?" I think.

Shyly he asks, "Hi, can you go out with me for a hamburger after operetta rehearsal Wednesday night?"

What a relief! I don't even have to think. "I'm sorry, I can't. My parents won't let me go out on a school night."

That conversation resounds in my brain sixty-four years later when Rodney dies suddenly.

We begin dating. I discover I like him a lot; he is attentive, polite to my parents and good looking. But best of all, he has a wonderful sense of humor. He often repeats one of his grandmother's sayings, "A bushel of love is the most love in the world." About the time he declares, "I love you bushels," I am hooked.

By my sophomore year at Oklahoma University, we make some decisions. One night returning from a date I enter my folk's bedroom. Sitting on

the end of my Daddy's bed I announce, "I am going to drop out of school so Rodney and I can get married."

My father sits straight up and announces, "Oh no you are not." He proves to be right. I do not drop out. Back in 1950, "Father Knows Best" is the theme in our home.

I do manage to graduate a year early. I doubt I learned anything in my three years, two summer school sessions and one semester of correspondence. Our wedding takes place on October 26, 1952.

After a honeymoon in Tennessee's Smoky Mountains, we drive to Chicago in a new Plymouth, our source of pride and joy. Rodney's job with the Santa Fe Railroad as secretary for the Superintendent of Transportation is in the Railway Exchange Building on Michigan Avenue.

He had warned me that Chicago apartments are impossible to find right now. He has spent months looking for one. But I am a young, naïve bride so I don't hear a word he is saying. When he opens the door to our apartment at 72nd Street and South Shore Drive I almost turn around and run. All I see is a dingy couch with springs hanging out the bottom.

A tiny dining area, a small dirty kitchen and a miniscule bathroom complete the space. "Where do we sleep?"

A Murphy bed pulls down out of a closet door into the living room. So every night, our bed fills the living room space, barely leaving enough room to walk to the bathroom. After my first stunned reactions, I decide the space is livable. Being in love helps a lot of things.

Thus begins fifty-nine years of marriage.

Fifty-eight years, eight months and twenty-one days from that first, "I do" Rodney drops to the floor with a "catastrophic brain hemorrhage."

Our daughter, Mary had purchased a suite at the Kauffman Stadium for the Royals June 4th baseball game with the Minnesota Braves.

At the last minute Rodney decides to stay home and watch the game on TV saying, "I don't want to walk that far in the parking lot." He kisses Mary and me goodbye and admonishes us with his usual advice, "Watch out driving home. Remember all those guys have been drinking beer all evening."

These are his last words.

Mid-point in the game I try to call him. He loves to have me check in when I am out anywhere. No answer, but this isn't too odd. He may be on the phone, or just can't hear it. Later in the evening, I phone again. No answer. Worst-case scenarios creep into my mind and I ask Mary to come in with me when she takes me home.

We arrive home. The lights and TV are on in the den. The chair is empty.

We find Rodney's body on the floor by his desk. Irrationality takes over my mind and body as scenes of him asleep rustle through the air. I scramble to the floor begging him to wake up. I refuse to see the odd angles his arms and hands are twisted. I try to wake him, call his name. Mary calls 911. I go into shock and stay disconnected from reality. I age twenty years in those few minutes.

Six or seven medics fill the room. They check all the signs their training requires. There is no response from Rodney. They place him on a gurney, strap him down and head for the door. I obey one of the medics and ride in the ambulance; Mary follows to KU Med Center, the closest trauma center.

A CT scan of Rodney's brain is the first move. The picture shows white blood filling about 95% of his brain. I scramble for any excuse in disbelief of

what I can see. The night duty neuro-surgeon states, "Given Rodney's age and the extent of the bleeding, there isn't anything to be done."

A breathing tube is inserted in an attempt to "keep him alive" until his sons arrive.

My thinking is irrational, but I continue to move through my numbness.

About midnight Mary and I follow Rodney's gurney to the sixth floor to the TEVA Neuroscience wing of Intensive Care. Complete irony! The suite she purchased at the ballgame was for the TEVA Neuroscience auction.

Mary finally goes home to her kids and I spend a wild, sleepless night in a lounge chair in his room.

In a shaky, disbelieving voice I tell him over and over that I love him as I touch him and check the monitors. Never a flicker of response, only little involuntary twitches.

Morning finally comes. Minnesota son Ben is on his way. My sister arrives. I talk to folks at the church. The nurses tippy-toe around us. Their conversation remains cautious even after they get the idea that we know how to spell the word "death."

While I am in no way prepared for the reality of Rodney's death, several things are keeping me from total collapse. The previous summer the two of us and Kaze spent a week at Ghost Ranch, NM. Death and Its Mysteries, the theme for the week, triggered much conversation. The writing and talking about death are like an iron brace holding me upright.

Ben arrives about noon and I snort in dismissive laughter over the crazy story of the hospital's naming of trauma patients who come into ER. Each trauma patient is assigned a country name. Rodney is listed as

"O.J. Taiwan." Of course I gave his real name many times to many people, but visitors have trouble finding him because the computer doesn't list a Rodney Wilson.

We spend the day talking to Rodney, without knowing if he can hear. No sign of "life" other than the involuntary twitches and the numbers shifting on his monitors.

The nurse tells us that about mid-afternoon she expects his heart rate and blood pressure to spike and then plummet. This doesn't register in my mind so I am shocked at how rapidly it happens. We ask for the removal of the breathing tube and monitors so my daughter's two kids can come and say a final good-bye.

My nephew brings Nora and Warren to Rodney's room. They sob their quick, painful goodbyes.

When Rodney's heart stops, his flesh color oozes away. I check the clock, 8:33pm. The doctor arrives and declares the death at 8:45pm. I don't argue. I present a forcibly calm demeanor.

Hospital protocol takes over, the Cremation Center is called, and Rodney is taken away. I am numb and in shock.

The story that Rodney wrote at a writing seminar in Ghost Ranch: "Closure of the Day" becomes a tribute to him. He ended the story, "When my time comes I'm going to ask my friend Wayne to play taps at the end of my Memorial Service." As grandson, Jeff walks to the pulpit and reads this story I scarcely breathe. No one has a dry eye while Wayne plays Taps.

Gratitude mixes with my denial. We lived a wonderful life with more adventures than most folks ever experience. Rodney didn't suffer a long protracted illness ... in the hospital less than twenty-four hours. I have

unbelievable support from family, friends and church community.

If we hadn't talked about death, I couldn't imagine any of this. For a long time we planned for our ashes (cremation was always part of the equation) to be in the cemetery in Arkansas City with my parents. But all the plastic flowers in that cemetery bothered us. We decided our ashes were to go in the Memorial Garden at Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village with a simple stone stating names and dates. That seemed right when we made the decision and certainly seems right now.

Before his death, we made all the necessary arrangements...wills, conversation with the Cremation Center, told the kids where things are, planned to move to a retirement apartment, began to get rid of "stuff."

What we left out was conversation about what we expect for ourselves if we are the one left. We did laugh and say Rodney shouldn't be the one left behind... he would starve to death. You can only live so long on peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwiches.

Now that he is gone, so much has changed. I knew my identity. I was Mrs. Rodney Wilson, happily married, member of a team. That identity is gone.

Without my life-long partner I am shaping a new identity and a new name; I am now Priscilla H. Wilson, mother, grandmother, great grandmother and I live alone.

HEALING LAUGHTER

Kansas, 2011

Priscilla H. Wilson

"LET'S HELP with Granddad's clothes," Phaedra suggests. Son, Ben and Phaedra, granddaughter in-law, move to my bedroom.

My heart aches. We held Rodney's Memorial Service yesterday.

Grief weights my body down as I move in a thick fog towards my bedroom where I flop against the bed cushions. Fourteen family members slowly fill the room. Cautious laughter trickles out as Ben holds up a pair of pants explaining, "We have small, medium and large in khaki pants."

It is as if I am watching from afar. Phaedra deposits three-year old great granddaughter Izzy in the middle of my bed. When she swings her legs across my lap, wiggling and squirming I try to connect with the present.

Soon an undercurrent of merriment sounds like it may put grief on hold. Laughter slowly bubbles as family members acquire items from the closet. I am still dazed and don't really comprehend what is happening. Laughter strikes me as foolish in my grief.

In spite of a pervasive sadness, even I laugh as Ben plucks a Big Eight tie out of the closet. No one in the family loves basketball more than my nephew, Mike. His face is radiant as he ties this treasure around his neck exclaiming, "Perfect for our March Madness parties."

I inspect the troops from my throne on the bed. I relish the hugs and utterances of endearment I've received during the last few days. I know the room is filled with those who love me.

One after the other we put our thoughts into words, "Rodney would love this party." "Too bad he is missing this." "I wish he could see us," exclaims first one and then another. I sense his presence as each item is held up.

Izzy stretches her arms and legs. Squirming around she drifts off to sleep again. Periodically she pops up to see what is happening, mutters something unintelligible, looks around and flops down again. Her presence is healing.

I realize that too many miraculous moments are going unrecorded. "Someone, please go find my camera."

I digitally capture some of the love and care. Then Ben takes pictures of the trio on the bed, Izzy, son Tim and me.

The camera freezes moments of affection on each face. I gaze at Izzy as she sleeps. The truth slowly sinks in that Rodney won't see this baby grow up.

I collapse back against my pillows; gratefully relinquishing control over Rodney's possessions. When an item is presented that I want to keep, I speak up and they return it to the dresser or closet.

Rodney recently gravitated to a love of orange and yellow. Ben hands me the yellow shirt with two pockets that Rodney loved, and I immediately put it on.

Each person claims a memento, a hat, a shirt, or a tie. Even my brother-in-law surprises me when he says, "I'd like that belt as a remembrance of Rodney."

Mary pulls out a drawer of assorted mish-mash from the small stand next to the bed. She dumps pictures, Rotary symbols, pocketknives, key chains, whistles, Santa Fe emblems, and assorted nick-nacks on the bed.

Comments drift through the room sharing tender memories of this

wonderful man who is gone, "Look at this picture of that camping trip at Starved Rock, how many years ago?" "All these Rotary symbols, what love for his times with Rotary." "I never saw so many key chains from so many places."

Izzy finally wakes from her long slumber and begins to play with the colorful straps on the bed. Straps meant for securing suitcases take on the role of imaginary clothing as she wraps them around herself. I join her giggle as she struggles with the buckles. Tim, on the other side of the bed, watches her with an expression of quiet wonder.

Tiring of straps, Izzy discovers a pile of whistles in the middle of the bed and adds to the noise level as she tries out each.

I experience an atmosphere of joy, sorrow, love and respect. I know that in some strange way we are participating in the process of our grief. Unexpectedly, laughter has become a healing tonic.

Memories of family times, and individual times with Rodney spin through my mind. My breathing slows as memories take over. Gratitude overwhelms me as I ponder the blessings of my sixty years with Rodney.

The mood lightens again as both teenage grand children Nora and Warren try on suspenders. Warren brags, "Nora may have the Christmas suspenders, but I have this Christmas tie." I later discover that he learned how to tie a tie on YouTube.

Mary, sitting on the floor reflects. "I am exhausted, but somehow the energy in this room keeps me going."

The afternoon is one of Rodney's last gifts to us as a gathered family. As we swim in an ocean of grace all afternoon, the holy touches us. All sense of time disappears as we share in our grief and love. I hug the yellow shirt

around me and I sense him blessing me with one more giant hug. I didn't come from a hugging family, but early in our marriage he taught me to hug. Through the years, hugs and laughter have sustained us in those rocky moments that all marriages face. I remember declaring many years ago, "One reason I stay with you, you make me laugh." For one more afternoon, he has triggered the blessing of laughter.

Healing fills the room. If someone asks, I can claim to be part of a family that loves and heals. Mystery beyond us, mystery among us, mystery within us.

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