

Chapter 18-The Peace That Passes All Understanding

Preface:

Twice in my life I have been blessed with a sample of the peace that passes all understanding. This story is about the second experience that was also the longest lasting experience.

The Peace That Passes All Understanding

The story of the adventures of Eileen and Gary continues in November of 2001. The Holy Spirit had once more guided us to meet during a business trip. I would have another spiritual experience unlike any I had experienced before.

Eileen and I had another spiritual experience in 2000. In June my oldest daughter Kim was killed by a drunk driver. Eileen provided friendship and emotional support. She gave me a journal. She encouraged me to pour out my emotions, frustrations, and feelings into that journal and I did. She shared the experience of the death of her mother and how her father dealt with that. Through tough experiences we had become best friends. I never had a sister so I adopted Eileen as my sister. She was everything, and more, I had ever imagined a sister to be.

In the late summer of 2001, John Deere had offered another early retirement package. In October, I decided to take advantage of the offer and retire on December 31st. The Somat User Conference was scheduled for early November in Detroit. My job at Deere involved the use of Somat equipment. My work had allowed me to be a beta tester for much of Somat's new hardware and software. I had made some presentations at previous conferences about my experiences and I had many friends in the Somat community. I asked my boss to allow me to attend the conference as a courtesy. I was looking forward to the opportunity to say goodbye to my cohorts. My boss agreed to let me attend. A co-worker, Chris, and I made plans to drive to Detroit for the conference.

Eileen was working in Grand Rapids with a company that was creating a new test stand for Deere. Eileen was using some of the test data I had collected to run the new test machine. This test stand was very large, complex, very expensive and it was one of the largest test stand projects in recent years. The two of us had talked about the work on this test stand. I knew management had huge expectations for what Eileen was to accomplish in the delivery of this test stand. It was a standing joke in the test group that many projects required that you walk on water. This project was even more difficult. To meet management's expectations Eileen would have to walk on water and not leave any footprints!

I had talked with Eileen to see if she planned to attend the Somat Conference in Detroit. Things were not going well in Grand Rapids and she was not sure she was going to be able to attend. Chris and I rented a car and drove to Detroit because it was much cheaper to drive than to fly from Waterloo. At supper that night I had been told that Eileen was going to drive to Detroit after work and attend the conference. I found a chair in the hallway of the hotel and settled in to wait for Eileen. Eileen's work ethic and mine were similar. I knew she had been putting in long hours and doing meticulous work. I knew she would be tired and would need a hug. It was late evening when I looked up from the comfort of the big lounge chair and saw Eileen. Her face had that tired and very frustrated look; a look that Eileen seldom wore. Her body language said she was ready to vent. It was obvious a long discussion was on the agenda, but we started with a hug.

In the hallway, we settled into a couple of lounge chairs. It was obvious Eileen needed someone to listen, so I did. The fixture project was not going well and the management expectations were very unrealistic. Another common phrase in the test group was "We the willing, led by the unknowing, are doing the impossible, for the ungrateful." A very apt expression for this fixture project. Eileen shared the frustrations of the project and management expectations. I shared what I knew about being involved in past projects of this nature. I shared with her the need to sleep and take care of yourself. That was an amazing thing. Our roles had been reversed. In 1993 she coached me about the need to take care of myself and now, eight years later, I am giving her the advice she gave me.

By 2001 we had become best friends. We could be encouraged by sharing, caring, and listening to each other. We sat in those chairs and talked until the wee hours of the morning. It is just refreshing to pour out your frustrations to a friend. We didn't solve all the problems that night and we didn't have any magic answers. Eileen asked me if I would go to Grand Rapids with her, help her with the test fixture, and drive back home with her. I said I would. She knew I wouldn't say no. She had already reserved a motel room for me before she left Grand Rapids to come to Detroit. Did we know each other or what!!!

To me, it was no accident that we met in that hallway and talked most of the night. There are no coincidences in life. God guides people to come into your life. Some stay long and some stay short. Some have a little impact on your life and others a big impact. After Yosemite, I knew the Holy Spirit was upon Eileen and I. I had a best friend, the sister I never had in my family. It could only be the Holy Spirit that could take a girl from Washington, DC and a country boy from Story County Iowa, and guide them so they each entered the others life, became best friends, and helped each other to become a better person. Eileen is a great engineer but she is even a better person. There aren't words to describe how good a person Eileen is. When I think of angels on Earth, I think of Eileen.

After the conference I gave my rental car keys to Chris so he could return to Waterloo. Eileen and I headed out to Grand Rapids. It was late in the day when we got there but we went to check on the test fixture. Even though I knew about the fixture, I was amazed at the size and complexity. It takes a lot of hardware to simulate the action of a front axle. The fixture was in a trial run and I was to observe the action of the fixture. I was to determine if the motion of the fixture was correctly simulating the motion I observed in the field when I took the data. The fixture was doing an acceptable job of simulating the motion. At Eileen's request, I inspected some temperatures on the fixture. The temperatures were elevated above what I had observed in the field test. However, since this was an accelerated test, an increase in temperatures was not unexpected. Although the temperatures were elevated, they were within acceptable limits for the test. Eileen decided to let the fixture run all night and we would check it in the morning.

The next morning Eileen went to check on the fixture and I stayed at the motel to await the arrival of the FedEx truck. Important spare parts for the fixture were suppose to be on the FedEx truck and it was expected to arrive at the motel about 10 AM. The truck arrived about 10:30 but the parts Eileen needed were not on the truck. I called Eileen with the bad news. She came and got me and we went back to observe the fixture. The fixture was working in a satisfactory manner but in its current state, it would not meet all of the management expectations. Realistically it would be impossible to meet all of the management expectations. We decided the fixtures performance was acceptable. At this point, our presence would not change anything and we decided we should return home.

We set off on the journey home. It was a big relief to see that fixture in the rear view mirror. Eileen drove and we headed south. We decided to stop at Grand Haven for a late lunch and a side trip. There was a pier in Grand Haven with a light house. Eileen and I were relaxed by water and light houses. We parked in downtown Grand Haven and walked along main street to the pier. We

journeyed, remember Eileen is adventurous, out to the end of the pier to see the light house and soak up the sight and sound of the waves. Being curious engineers we had to inspect all the structures and equipment we encountered along the way.

There is something about the sight and sound of water that can just draw your troubles and stress right out of you. We needed that. Eileen was frustrated about the fixture project. I was frustrated that management had put her into such a situation. Although I had been in similar situations in my career, I never learned to like it nor like other people being put in to those situations. A big frustration was that none of the management people had ever worked on a fixture of this complexity. They had created a list of totally unrealistic expectations and they were too technically ignorant to know that. Anyway, the sight and sound of the water helped draw out those frustrations. At the lighthouse we stood at the end of the pier watching the waves and listened to the sounds of Lake Michigan's waters. We spent some time in silence..... appreciating the beauty God had placed on this Earth.

We meandered back up the main street with the warm sun on our backs. We found a little café for a sandwich. Eileen was big on soup and a sandwich. Today, if you can't find Eileen, look in the Panera Bread café. As we walked back to the car I was feeling really good. I was six weeks away from retirement and I had helped Eileen evaluate the test fixture. Like that day in Yosemite, we had experienced the sight and sound of moving water. I was feeling about as good as a person can.

Eileen was feeling and looking better but she was tired. I asked her if she wanted me to drive. She couldn't get the keys out of her pocket fast enough. So I climbed behind the wheel of the Buick LaSabre rental car and we started for home. We were both hoping we would not get caught in one of those three hour traffic jams on Interstate 80 in Chicago. We were lucky, traffic flowed very well, and we got through Chicago without any major delays. As we headed away from Chicago and toward the Quad Cities, Eileen reclined the seat and settle in for a nap. She went out like a light. I was evaluating the Buick as I drove. It was an easy drive. The cruise control was on at the speed limit, traffic was light, and the weather was good. The car drove and rode very well. The seats were comfortable. I drive a Ford F-150 truck and it was seldom I was in a car that was as comfortable as my truck. This Buick was close and I was impressed.

A strange feeling came over me as I drove. I couldn't put my finger on this enjoyable feeling. I'm an engineer, there has to be a reason for everything. What was this feeling? I looked down at Eileen reclined in the seat. She was sleeping like a baby. She looked like an angel in a peaceful sleep. I was thankful she was getting rest. The driving was easy and for the longest time I just watched her sleeping. The strange feeling remained but I just couldn't grasp what it was. As the trip continued I was glancing back and forth between the road and Eileen in peaceful sleep. I thought about how exhausted Eileen looked that night in the Detroit hotel. I thought, "This must be what it feels like to rescue your sister and take her home." At that moment it struck me.

The strange feeling in that car was peace. The noise of the car and the road had disappeared. It was like we were floating along in a bubble going down I-80. I just soaked it all in, the peace, the calmness. I let it penetrate me, just like the mist in Yosemite. There was peace and calmness like I had never experienced. In the passenger seat, my sister was sleeping like an angel. I had this feeling of enormous peace. The peace was not only around me, it was in me. It was like all was right with Eileen, with me, and with the world. It was the most comfortable feeling I had ever known. The good feeling I had in Grand Haven paled in comparison to this feeling.

The only thing that I could think of was this must be like the peace that passes all understanding. The peace that is talked about in church. This sensation of peace and calmness was not momentary, it lasted a long time. It was like Eileen and I were peacefully isolated from the world as we traveled

down I-80. The feeling, and emotion, of peace stayed in and around that car until Eileen awakened from her nap. She felt much better. Some of the peace I had experienced had also been placed upon her. We were both feeling much better.

I told her about the peace and we talked about the experience. Eileen's 13 step program had gotten me to the point that I could share emotions and experiences, at least with her and Maxine. I had made great strides in sharing emotions since May of 1993 when Eileen enrolled me in her 13 step program. I was back in the position I had been with Maxine when we attended church before we were married. I didn't understand what was going on but I felt, and I knew, I was in the right place doing the right thing.

As we were crossing the Mississippi River into Iowa I asked Eileen if she wanted to stop for a burger. She looked at her watch and said, "No, I'll call Ed (Eileen's husband) and he can fix us something. You can eat at my place." Now Ed's cooking is famous. Even an extra burger would taste great if Ed cooked it. So we continued on to Eileen's home. Ed had supper ready when we arrived. It wasn't just an extra hamburger. It was a full meal with pork chops and all the trimmings. Yep, it was a real Ed meal; the kind of meal he was famous for. After supper, I looked at my watch. If I hustled home, I could catch Maxine just before she left for her 11-7 shift as a nurse.

So I took the rental car and off I went. Just as I drove into my driveway, Maxine was opening the garage door to leave for work. I hugged and kissed her and then she left. I still felt the peace that was in that car as Eileen and I crossed Illinois. All was right in my world.

The peace was so comforting and moving that I longed for more of it. I had no doubt that the Holy Spirit was with Eileen and I that day and provided that peace. If that was a sample of the peace that passes all understanding, then I can hardly wait to experience it in the next life. Although I wanted more of it, I was thankful that I had been given a sample of that peace. I feel very blessed to have experienced that peace and wish that others could also have that experience.

So here I was again, on a business trip with Eileen, and I have a spiritual experience that changed my life forever. God brought Eileen and I into each others life for a reason. Except for my marriage to Maxine, it is often in distant hind sight that I understand why a certain person was brought into my life. However, with Eileen it has been different. I had been able to recognize in the short term, sometimes immediately, that the Holy Spirit is working through Eileen to make me a more spiritual person. Since 2001 the Holy Spirit has brought additional people into my life to help guide me. The journey continues.

Epilogue

During my John Deere career Eileen was always complementing and encouraging me in my report writing. Do you think that was a coincidence? I don't think so. Neither Eileen or I had a clue that in April of 2006 I would be told I had a calling to write stories about the spiritual experiences in my life. Eileen's encouragement from those days at Deere was one of the many factors that led to my deciding, "Yes I can do this." God works in mysterious ways you know.

