

Your Feedback is Requested

This is a Special Preview Edition.

Unfortunately, at this stage, grammar, formatting and spelling mistakes are guaranteed.

I would like your feedback about *any or all* of the following questions. Please e-mail it to me at alan@lbcllc.com or mail to Alan Jordan, P.O. Box 40444, Reno, NV 89505.

[I prefer to take this survey on line.](#)

1. Did you enjoy what you read?
2. Do you feel children would enjoy reading it? (If so, what age brackets?)
3. Can you visualize parents reading this story to their children, or asking their older children to read it?

ALAN H. JORDAN

4. *From your point-of-view*, do you feel that this book has value. (Be candid. “Yes,” “No,” Yes, but...” are all fine answers. I am particularly interested in knowing why it might/might not have value.

5. How do you feel about the title *Daddy Was Dying so We Went for Walks*? Would you change it? If so, how would you change it?

6. What age child might like this book, and how would they go about reading it. (Example 5-years to 7 years, if read to them, 10-13 who read it, etc.)

7. Do you feel that this book is the right length, too short or too long? Why?

8. *From your point of view*, are there any “red flags” in the book?

9. If the book were available now (it’s not) would you recommend it? Why or Why not?)

10. Does the book seem complete? If not, what’s missing?

11. *In your opinion*, what books does it compete with, and how does it compare?

12. Would you prefer to have a shorter version of the book as a picture book with 24-32 pages? (Or two books, one Picture Book, and one Chapter Book, possibly with different titles.)

13. Is there any particular part that appeals to you? (If so, please give details.)

14. Is there any particular scene(s) that you would like to see illustrated?

15. How do you see this book being used? (Children, discussion groups, grief counseling, school counselors, etc.)

16. I'm also considering adding illustrations and/or color photographs within the book. These may be found by following the links on this web page <http://www.WeWentForWalks.com>. What do you think of that idea? Would you prefer to see these in a companion book, like a workbook?

17. Other comments will be most appreciated. If you feel like it, feel free to point out any grammar or spelling mistakes.

You may request a printed copy of this book from
<http://www.WeWentForWalks.com>

The poems “Transformation”, “Pure Gangster” and “A Gaia Life Connection” were originally published in *Mobius, The Poetry Magazine*.

The poem *Here I Go* was written by my daughter, Bianca, when she was 7.

Copyright 2011 by Alan H. Jordan (alan@lbcllc.com) All Rights Reserved.

Hello

My name is Davey. I'm seven, almost eight. I go to Evans Elementary. I have a little sister, Zoey. We call her ZZ for short. I have a dwarf hamster that runs in an exercise ball. I'm in second grade. I like to ride my bike, play hide-and-seek and watch cartoons. I'm probably just like you, except, maybe for one thing: My Daddy is dying.

The day that Daddy told me, I just finished watching "Bubble Trouble" on DVD. That's where Wylie Coyote is chasing the Road Runner and a truck turns over and the coyote gets stuck in a bubble that looks a lot like a hamster ball. The Road Runner shows up. He starts chasing the Road Runner; they run faster and faster. The Road Runner keeps saying, "Meep, Meep," and the coyote starts to fall backwards, but he runs real hard and he makes it to the top of the cliff, but he's going too fast and falls off the other side of the cliff, still a prisoner in his bubble. He bounces up real high and Wylie gets sucked into a jet engine before he falls to the ground and goes boom! Poor coyote.

Just as the cartoon ended, Daddy came in wearing his big backpack and said, "Mommy and Zoey are going over to Uncle Rick's. Let's walk over to the duck pond and have a picnic, just the two of us."

A picnic sounded like fun. I clicked off the TV and we walked out of the house and turned left, just like we always do, but this time the sprinklers came on and we got wet. It felt good, and we laughed. Daddy pointed to one of the sprinklers and said, "Look, Davey, a little rainbow."

I smiled. "A rainbow is one of God's miracles," I said.

He grinned. "Where'd you learn that," he asked.

"From you." His grin turned into a smile.

I told him what he had told me so many times, "Big miracles are hard to find, but little miracles are all around us," and I added, "like rainbows that come from sprinklers."

Dad's smile spread over his whole face. He tousled my hair. "What's the best miracle of all?" he asked me.

"I am," I said, remembering how many times he'd told me, "You and Zoey are my best miracles."

"That's right," he said. "All life is a miracle, every blade of grass, every dog, every cat, every bird..."

"Every hamster," I said, interrupting.

"Yes, every hamster," he said, and he pointed to a dandelion. "What's that?"

"A weed!" I hate weeds. They choke our lawn.

"Marco Polo likes to eat the dandelion greens," he said. Marco Polo is my hamster. We named him that because he likes to explore. He runs all over in his hamster ball, sniffing and smelling. He's a smart little guy. It didn't take him

ALAN H. JORDAN

long to lean how to make the ball take him where he wants to go. He balances on his back legs and puts his front legs on the ball where he wants to go and then keeps pushing on it until the ball turns. When we first put him into the hamster ball, he used to run into walls all of the time, but after a little while, he figured how when to stop pushing. I guess it's a little like riding a tricycle, you get used to it.

We turned the corner and walked down Periwinkle Lane toward the duck pond, and Daddy said, "There's an interesting thing about rainbows, they only last a little while, but I remember some of them for my whole life." He pointed to the duck pond in the distance, "Race you to it."

I didn't answer. I just started running, and running. I ran hard and I beat him to the pond. When we got there, we were both out of breath, but happy. Dad opened his backpack and took out five small balloons attached to a black balloon weight, a blanket and two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, a Thermos bottle of milk and two plastic glasses. Three of the balloons were shaped like stars. Two were shaped like hearts. They were gold, silver, red, yellow and blue. Dad spread out the blanket, put the balloons and food on it, and we sat down to eat our lunch while we watched the ducks swim around the pond.

I still like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, but not as much because in the middle of my fourth bite Daddy said, "Life is like a rainbow. Sometimes, it fades, and life is also like a dandelion. Sometimes it chokes other life." He untied the balloons from the weight and he then gave them to me. "These have a special spirit," he said, "let them loose, and tell me where they go."

Draft 1L – Daddy was Dying so We Went for Walks

I let them loose, and they hung there for a little while, then they started to go up, slowly at first. The wind caught them and they started to go up faster, and faster, and after a minute I couldn't see them anymore. I looked at Dad and said, "I don't know. Up to Heaven I guess."

Dad smiled and said, "Yes, that is where I would think they would go too. Davey, there's no easy way to say this, so I'll just tell you. "I have something called Cancer and it is choking my body. In a little while my body is going to die. Then, my spirit is going to go up to Heaven, just like those balloons."

Everyday Miracles

Everyday Miracles

Squiggles
Broad strokes
Trees

Slide onto the paper

Drawn by a finger
Connected to a heart.

David - Age 13

I woke up this morning to the sweet sound of Zoey giggling. I remember when she was a little baby, I'd blow a raspberry on her belly button, and she'd giggle. I'd get such a kick out her because her would face light up, and she'd break out in a big grin. I still love to watch her giggle. She bobs her head and her black hair bounces up and down. "She's probably watching cartoons," I said to myself, and I bounded out of bed to go in and join her watching the Smurfs or Big Bird or Oscar doing something silly.

Zoey's room is right down the hall from my room, but on the other side of the house. Her door was half way open, and I saw her bent over something on the

floor, and I was about to run in and ask what was so much fun, but I didn't. When I got close to her door, I noticed she was finger painting with Dad. The two of them were scooping up paint on their fingers, and making big circles and small squares and having a good old time. Orange; she smeared orange, then green, then black. *Zoey was making Dad smile and laugh*, and all of a sudden I realized that I hadn't laughed with Dad for a long time.

"It's time to clean up, Zoey" said Dad. He picked up a wet towel and wiped her hands off. Then, he started cleaning off his hands, and putting away the pictures. Zoey, picked up a box of crayons. She picked up a piece of paper that she had scribbled on before. Mostly, it just had a gray background, but there was a small picture of a purple dog under a brown sun too, and a green ice cream cone. She picked up an orange crayon and a purple crayon and she drew a picture of herself with purple hair, and a long orange nose, and a big purple smile. She drew a purple hat on it too. Then she looked at Dad and drew this purple box, and put down the purple crayon and picked up a blue crayon and started blue drawing boxes over the purple in blue. She wrote "**DAD**" under the box and then "*LOVE*" to the right of it. Then, she picked up an orange crayon and drew a bubble—you know like the kind they have in comic books where the characters say or think something. She left the words out, but underneath it she wrote a "*P.*" She put down the orange and picked up a red crayon drew two hearts, one yellow and one red. They reminded me of the balloons Dad asked me to let go. I left before she finished the drawing. I just backed up and went back to my room. When I heard Mom coming down the hallway, I curled up on my bed like I was

ALAN H. JORDAN

asleep. ZZ was making and Dad smile and laugh; that was something I couldn't do, no matter how hard I tried. At least, not right then.

It's the strangest thing, about the only thing I remember about the rest of that day is that I wanted to kill Marco Polo. When Mom and Dad and I picked him out in the pet store, they told me that he'd live about a year. "A year, that's all, David," Mom told me. "Wouldn't you rather have a dog? They live a lot longer."

"I want a hamster, and I want that one, he's an explorer, like me," that's what I told them. I didn't care that he would live only a year. I figured a year was a long time, and we'd do a lot together, and it wasn't his fault that hamsters only lived a year. I figured we'd be friends for all of his life. On the other hand, my Dad is supposed to live a long time, at least until I graduate college, and Marco Polo, a lousy little hamster is going to live longer than my Dad. I wanted to pick up Marco Polo and squeeze all of the life out of him. But, I didn't. I didn't play much with him, but I didn't hurt him, and I'm glad about that because now, when Daddy is gone, Marco Polo puts a smile on my face when he runs up and down my arm, and I smile when I think of Daddy saying, "He's one of life's miracles."

The next day, June 14th—one week before the first day of summer, Daddy came home early and we had a family meeting. He told us, "I'm not working any more. I'm taking sick leave. I'm going to spend the time I have with the three people that I love most in this world; we all hugged him and kissed him.

Draft – Daddy was Dying so We Went for Walks

Then, Mom asked Zoey and me to go in the other room, and she talked to Dad alone, and when she came out, she said, “Zoey get your shoes on, we’re going shopping.” Mom and Zoey left, and Dad reached out his arms to me; I ran into them and I cried and he tousled my hair, and he said, “Let’s go for a walk.”

“Nooooo! I screamed.” I shouldn’t have screamed at him. I saw in his face that I hurt his feelings, but I just couldn’t go for another walk.” He looked at me, and put his hand over his heart, like he was saying The Pledge of Allegiance, and he almost whispered, “I’ve already told you the worst thing possible, Davey. Everything else will be better.”

“Why a walk?” I asked.

“Because I want to see beautiful things, in the world, and in you.”

That didn’t really make sense to me, but I wanted to make him happy, so I put on my Nike All Stars, the red ones with the black trim and the long white checkmark that Dad helped me pick out, and when I came out he had packed up some sandwiches that Mom had made up and some juice and milk, and graham crackers. Meanwhile, I put some mixed nuts and cranraisins into a plastic bag.

“You’re gonna like this hike,” he said. Dad put on his Droid, and we left.” We drove out to Mount Rose Highway and started on the way up to Lake Tahoe. Neither one of us said anything for a long time. I was afraid that if I asked him anything, he’d say he was going to die tomorrow. He plugged his Droid into the car radio and we listened to music. We said nothing until one of his favorite songs came on, *Peaceful Easy Feeling* by the Eagles. It’s one of the songs we sing

ALAN H. JORDAN

when we go to monthly folk sings, and Daddy started singing along. I sang along too, even though Daddy had on his crooked smile.

I remember feeling happy that we didn't have to listen to any commercials. I thought we were going all the way up to Tahoe, but he turned off early, and we went towards a place called Dry Pond. "Why're we going there?" I asked.

"Because for the first time in a long time, Dry Pond is filled with water, and I want to see it," Dad said.

When we got there, there was a mountain in the distance called Slide Mountain. It was covered in snow. I thought that was cool, but Dry Creek was like any other pond. I didn't think it was a big deal, just a bunch of trees and grass growing around it, and the ground was soggy and I didn't want to get my sneakers wet. But, it made him happy to look at it, so I was happy too, and after a while, we had looked enough and started to hike.

While we were hiking, Dad would stop and he'd take a picture. Once he a picture of a rotting out tree stump, and he said, "What you do you see?"

"Nothing, just an old tree stump."

A little while later, we passed an old rotting pine cone, and he looked at it for a while, and said, "I see a porcupine crawling," and he took a picture, but it just looked like an old dirty, broken pine cone to me.

I started to relax because he didn't say one word about dying. We stopped in front of an old log, and he had me take his picture with his foot on top of it, and then he took a picture of me. I climbed up on top of the log, like the King of the

Mountain. He smiled; we walked on and we got to two nice rocks that were in the shade of three big trees, and we sat down, and we ate the ham and Swiss cheese sandwiches that Mom made on small hoagie rolls. They were really good, with lettuce and tomato and mustard and no onions. Dad likes onions, but I don't think onions belong in sandwiches. No how, no way.

We walked for another ten minutes, and didn't say much and we came to a part of the road that went up a steep hill, and it had a lot of twists and turns in it, and Dad took a picture. There was nothing special about it, and I asked Dad, "Why'd you take that picture?"

"It's for my Road of Life series," he said. I didn't know what that meant, but I didn't want to talk about life and death, so I kept quiet.

About ten minutes later, we turned around, and we walked home, and I don't know why, but when I got home, I took out Marco Polo, and played with him, and let him run up my hands and over my shoulder a few times. After a while, he went down my arm into his ball, and he went exploring.

Weird

The Golf Ball

It ran across the beige
into the pirate's mouth
down and out his sword
and stopped

Hole in two.
Where's my light saber when I really need it?

David - Age 8

The next day we played miniature golf, and then we did something I didn't like at all: we went to the funeral home that was going to bury Dad, and Dad showed Zoey and Mom and me the caskets.

There were a bunch of them. One was jet black, with a red velvet lining and a white pillow. It looked like something that they'd shoot out of a space ship in a movie. One was silver with wood on the top, at least I think it was wood. It might have been plastic that looked like oak. One was snow white, inside and out, with gold trim all around it. There was a sky blue one, I mean really sky blue, it looked like the sky, and it had pictures of crosses, like the ones that they used to crucify Jesus on it, and something that looked like a curtain rod. Dad took us into another room.

Dad walked over to a casket, with a white lining and a white pillow. He said, “I like this one because it’s natural, and simple and because it feels right.” It figures that he would like it because it’s the same wood as his desk. If he’s told me once, he’s told me fifty times, “Davey, rub your hand on my oak desk. Feel the energy.” If you haven’t figured it out yet, my Dad is into trees. He even wrote this poem:

A Gaia Life Connection

We meld, exchange philosophy
This venerable being and me
Placing my hands on the sequoia,
I feel
the vitality of its life pulse
the presence of inner peace
it's willingness to help heal me—offered without request
Wisdom. Thousands of years of wisdom.
I offer
an image of myself
whatever it wants from me

It accepts
something
feels renewed, reaffirmed

I understand
we are one, now, yet separate.
we sense through each other's souls
both better for it.

He taught me to
stand straight
proud, yet flexible
warm my spine
directing my blood
identify true goals
cast off forced images.
She taught me the beauty of

ALAN H. JORDAN

staying still
while traversing the universe
viewing the world
through the eyes of others
communication
without words
communion
between species

If I never touch another Redwood again
it matters not.
I am part of the matrix
aware and enriched forever, and
This is just the beginning.

The casket did look natural, but the whole thing felt weird. I couldn't get over the feeling that he was playing a joke on me. Zoey didn't say or do anything, she's younger than me, and she didn't understand what he was talking about, but I knew that if this was not a joke, he'd be lying in that thing, dead, and I started to cry."

We went home, and I put in a DVD. I lost myself in Star Wars where only the bad guys get killed, and they deserve it.

Pain

Silly Simone ate some pain
Because
It was bread, in French.
(*A pain au chocolat.* Yum!)

David - Age 9

Dad didn't feel good for the next two days. A nurse came over, and she gave him some shots, and he watched TV, and I climbed into bed with him, and just lay there. He didn't complain, but I could tell he was in pain—not just a little, a lot of pain.

I remember Mom saying to him, “it must be discouraging.”

“What?” he said.

“Being in pain so much; it doesn't go away,” said Mom.

“Discouraging? No. It's just pain.”

Just pain? His entire body tensed up, even after he had his shots. I know I couldn't be that brave.

Saturday he felt better, and we went outside and Dad looked at the orange Day Lilies in our back yard, and he took a picture and he said, “Let's go for a family walk.” Zoey, Mom and I got ready, and we packed some water, sandwiches and trail mix and left.

ALAN H. JORDAN

We went to White's Creek and while we were walking, Dad pointed out a pine cone, and he said, "It looks like a porcupine dinosaur." But it just looked a like a dirty old beat up pine cone to me.

We walked for a while and Mom said, "keep the creek on your right, and you'll know how to get back." Dad took two more pictures--one of another beat up pine cone and one of a couple of dumb old rocks. He said one reminded him of a bug on a walk, and the other reminded him of an alligator, or maybe a hippo, and a dog hunting.

I guess the pain medication that he was taking was really spacing him out.

Paintings & Poetry

Here I go disappearing
in the dark and night

And, the wicked bitter air
gave me a fright.

- David's friend Bianca, Age 7

I was glad it was the summer and school was out because when we went home and Dad took naps, we all got to lay next to Dad, and hold him, and we'd talk. We'd talk about cool things like Transformers, and dumb things like poetry.

Zoey really likes painting and I really like cars. Every year we go to Hot August Nights, but it's too early to go there now, so we went to the National Automobile Museum and the Reno Art Museum. Dad brought his journal and I brought a pad of paper. We sat on the floor and looked at the pictures from afar, and Dad wrote some poems and Zoey I drew some pictures. People walked by. They talked as if we were not there. We heard everything they said. No one said anything to us, but they smiled. Then, they forgot we were there. It was like we were invisible. Dad wrote lots of poems and we usually had lunch at a restaurant. When we were having lunch in the Artsy Fox, and the waitress came over and talked to my Dad. When people know you're dying, they tell you all sorts of things. It turned out her grand daughter was dying of Cancer. Zoey gave her a

ALAN H. JORDAN

painting that she drew. It showed Dad going up to Heaven. Dad wrote a poem in his journal. Then he asked me to copy it onto the back of the painting that Zoey did. We left the painting on top of a \$10 tip:

Death Fits With Life

Life Energy flows
Embrace the here and the now
Context is crucial

“What’s con-text?” I asked.

“The way things fit in with other things,” he said, “like the way that death fits in with life. It’s all the same, if you look at it a certain way.” We left and as we went out the front door, I looked back at the table to see the waitress looking at the picture. She smiled. I don’t know if she ever turned the picture over to see the poem, but I think she must have. Giving her a part of us made me feel good. I think it made my Dad feel even better because on the way home he started whistling that song we sing when we have a campfire, *Peaceful, Easy Feeling*.

Sage Hen

I Took Today Off

A snow day
First one in twenty years

I've been snowed in
Always worked

On something
Or other

Today, I took off

It made the little kid in me happy
I've been missing a snow day

Made me feel like
My life is getting

Back in balance
Thank you, God.

David - Age 39

“We’re going to Sage Hen,” Dad said to me.

“What’s a ‘Sage Hen’?”

“A really special meadow.”

“What’s there?”

ALAN H. JORDAN

“Flowers and trees.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s good for the soul.”

“I don’t want to go.”

“Why?”

“I want to watch TV.”

“This will be the last time I make you go for a walk. I promise.”

“Why?”

“When we’re done with this, I’ll be through painting.”

“You don’t paint anything. You just take pictures.”

“Yes. I do paint; you don’t realize it. Put your hiking shoes on. It will be soggy there.”

He gave me his stern look, and I put on my shoes.

“Okay.” We went out to the car, but it wasn’t there. Mom was behind the wheel of a big SUV. Dad’s nurse was in the back seat, next to Zoe. He opened the back door and there were extra seats.

“We borrowed Uncle Rick’s SUV for today. We’re going off road,” Dad said.

I brightened up. I had never gone off road in a 4-wheeler. This *was going to be an experience*. Mom drove east on 80 to somewhere and then we went up this back road. It was filled with ruts and rocks, and mud. Believe me, our car would not have liked it, but the truck loved it.

When we got there, we were the only ones around. There were millions of little purple flowers, and three mountains in the background and a lake in the distance. It looked like a jigsaw puzzle picture. Daddy handed me a camera.

“Can I use your phone?”

He nodded, and we swapped. “Lead the way,” he said.

We got out of the car and walked into the meadow. It squished under my feet.

We walked around the meadow, and then we took a hike. There was a river, and it was flowing fast. We walked along it awhile, and I kept it on my right side. There were lots of trees that had fallen down. We got to one place by the river and I took a picture of this tree that had fallen and was rotting. It looked like a dog barking. “Stop!” it commanded. “I won’t let you cut down these trees!”

We kept going and I took a picture of a pile of wood. It looked like a frog who had his knee bent, and was guarding a treasure.

A little while later, Dad asked me to take a picture of a tree. It was old and gnarled and it looked like bears or something had ripped parts of it to shreds to eat the bugs, but it still had little green growths shooting out it, forming new branches. “If you look at it just right, Davey it looks like the woman on mast of a ship, with her hands crossed over her bust, and a tail like a mermaid,” he said. It took me a minute, but I saw what he was talking about and I took the picture.

After we finished hiking, we stopped in Truckee and had milkshakes and hamburgers, and I looked up into the sky and I watched the clouds changing shape, and it was a great day!

Funny Explorer

Davey had a Little Pet

Davey had a little pet
Little pet, little pet
Davey had a little pet
Its fur was soft as snow

And everywhere that Davey went,
Davey went, Davey went
Everywhere that Davey went
Marco wanted to go

- Davey Age 7

Marco Polo is a funny explorer. He makes me laugh. When we take him out of his cage, his eyes shine and his whiskers quiver. Dad likes to hold him in his hand, and Dad makes a tunnel out of his hands so that Marco can run from one hand into the other. Dad says it makes him feel more comfortable because it feels

Daddy is Dying . . . So We Go For Walks

like tunnels. He feels like he's going from one tunnel to another one. I don't think so, because I think he can tell the difference between a tunnel and a hand, especially since tunnels don't scratch you behind the ears.

Dad plays the hand-in-hand game with him for a couple of minutes at a time, and he likes it. When I play with him, he gets squirrely after about thirty seconds. So, I'll put him on my shoulder and hold out my arms, like an airplane and he'll run from my shoulder across my arm out to just before my fingers. Then, he'll turn around and run back and get back to my shoulder I'll put my hand there, and he'll skitter on it, around my neck and then to my other shoulder, and go out to just before those fingers, and head back. We'll do this three or four times, and then he gets bored, and I'll pick him up and put him in his ball, and he'll start to explore.

When he explores in his ball, he love to speed down the wooden hallway all the way from the kitchen to the carpeting in the hallway where the bedrooms are. He can get up a lot of speed and get onto the beige carpeting and keep exploring, and he used to do that a lot, but lately he's been getting older, and it's harder for him to push on the carpeting. Sometimes, he'll try and try, but he won't be able to make the ball turn fast enough to go on the carpet. I put my foot on the ball and give him a shove and that gets him started. Marco Polo loves to get around the corners of the room and smell all of the smells. He thinks it's great to smell the places where the heat comes out, and the trash can. He loves to smell around the trash can.

ALAN H. JORDAN

Sometimes, we take him in the living room, and we block off all of the ways out and we let him run loose. When we let him run from our hand to the carpeted floor, he's surprised and then he figures out that he's free and he takes off. Almost always, he heads left and runs across the room, but when he gets to the end of the room, he can't get out, so he turns around and goes the other way. He can't get out, but he doesn't give up. He just keeps trying different ways. After about five minutes, Dad picks him up, and scratches him behind the ears and then plays the game where he runs from hand to hand for a while.

When we put him back in the cage, he's had a lot of exercise, so we give him some extra food, and he's really hungry, and gobbles it up. He likes lettuce, and little bits of steak, but what he really likes is chicken and broccoli. He loves broccoli and this stuff that's like broccoli called brocolini. It's got a lot of little flowers, and he gobbles them right up. His favorite things in the world are chicken and brocolini and peanut butter. If you open a jar of peanut butter, or cook chicken, he climbs all around the front of the cage. You just know that he wants some. We give him little pieces of chicken, about the size of his paw, but we don't give him peanut butter much because we don't want him to choke on it.

One time, Marco Polo had an adventure. Somehow, he got out of his cage at night and went exploring. We couldn't find him anywhere. I went all over the house calling "Marco," but he never called out "Polo," or if he did I couldn't hear him.

Mom was worried about Marco, so she looked up what to do in a book, and we made up a couple of box traps. These are tall boxes, and inside the box

Daddy is Dying . . . So We Go For Walks

we put lots of bedding so when Marco jumped in to get to the food he doesn't get hurt. Then, we put peanut butter and water, in a dish. Then, we built a ramp out of books, so he can walk up to the top of the box and jump in to get to the peanut butter and water. We also used some old pieces of wood to make a ramp. Then, we waited, and we waited and we waited. We had three traps, but he didn't go into any of them.

"He's probably sleeping," said Mom, but she looked worried. "He sleeps twenty two hours a day."

"That's right, said Dad. He's probably tired from running all around exploring, and he's curled up in a nice warm bed."

"I'm worried about him," I said. "Maybe he got outside, Maybe he ran into a cat!"

"I don't think so, said Dad. I think he's just busy exploring. He'll find the peanut butter when he wakes up. He can smell peanut butter from a mile away."

"I hope he didn't run into any cats, or run outside where a bird zipped him up and ate him."

"I'm sure he's okay," said Dad, but Mom and Zoey and me were worried anyway."

"About three o'clock in the morning—that's when Marco is wide awake and runs in his ball, hamsters are night creatures—Dad went downstairs and found Marco in the box. He had peanut butter all over his fur, and we had to clean it off. Did you know that you can't wash a hamster with water? It can chill them, and they can die.

ALAN H. JORDAN

Marco had a big adventure. He went all of the way into the basement, and even though I don't like the idea of him getting out and getting lost, and not knowing where to go to get food and water, I'm glad he got out once. I figure when he gets bored, he can always dream about his great adventure. I was glad we named him Marco Polo, because he is a great explorer.

Quail

Song Birds

See me
Feel me
Mate me
Squawk!

- David - Age 17

A week later it was over. Dad died in his sleep. I went into kiss him good morning and I climbed into bed with him and he was cold.

Somewhere a stellar jay squawked and a song bird sang. I looked out the window and saw three quail run across the street. They're funny looking birds, but pretty. With a blue chest that only goes down so far and turns into brown feathers. They've got a white stripe on their heads, and they've got this little comma shaped black thing on top of their heads that pops up and looks like a comma.

Daddy is Dying . . . So We Go For Walks

I snuggled up to Dad, but he didn't move. I poked him. He felt stiff, like a bird that I picked up that had died in our front yard. It hit me like a thunderbolt. Dad was dead. I was in the center of a big picture that was being crushed all around me. The universe folded in from every direction at the same time. I felt my skin go cold and I cried, and then I laughed. I started laughing because I knew his pain was over, and I cried again because I knew my pain was just beginning. When I stopped crying, I looked at Dad. He was kind enough to die with a smile, with his eyes closed. I kissed him, and I stayed with him, and I hugged him, like it might make a difference. I thought about watching a sunset with him when we were driving through Arizona, and of a cloud we saw that looked like a dragon. I recalled the Koi we saw in a Japanese garden when we were visiting my Uncle Jack and Aunt Jean and I felt peaceful. After a while, I ran and got Mom and Zoey.

Celebration

Dad's Magical Evening

Celebrate
Move the twinkle in my eyes
Into the stars
Feel my smile.
David - Age 12

“We’re going to have a celebration for Daddy’s life on Thursday,” Mom told Zoey and me. We’re going to have it in the house and I want to know what you would like to do to celebrate.”

“Celebration?” asked Zoey?

“A special way to share Daddy’s spirit, ZZ,” said Mom. “Is there something special that he did with you that you’d like to share with other people, something we can do at the celebration?”

“Can we finger paint pictures?” asked Zoey.

“Yes, we can. I think Daddy would like that, very much,” said Mom.

I thought of Dad letting the five balloons go up to Heaven. “Can we send a balloon up to Heaven, to keep him company,” I asked.

“Yes. That’s a beautiful idea. I know Daddy would love it.”

“Can we sing?” asked Zoey?

Mom nodded.

“Can we have a birthday cake?” I asked.

“We can have a celebration cake,” said Mom. “What flavor would you like.”

“Chocolate!” said Zoey and I at the same time.

For me, planning the celebration was fun! Mom drove us to A Piece of Heaven Bakery first. It was a bright, cherry place. The left wall was painted white, except that the bottom was a shiny metal. There were lots of cakes behind glass cases. Mom looked at the grey-haired lady behind the counter said, “My, you keep everything so spic-and-span.”

The lady smiled and offered us a chocolate chip cookie, which Mom said we could have. Then she asked, “How can I help you?”

Mom went over to the refrigerator cases on the right and looked at the strawberry shortcakes, and éclairs and more. She turned to the lady and said, “My husband passed over, and we want to make a celebration for his life. We’re going to need a selection of pastries and we want the most special chocolate cake you’ve ever made.”

“It will be my pleasure to be a part of your celebration,” the lady said. She looked at Zoey and me and said, “What are your names?”

“David,” I said.

“Zoey!,” said ZZ, loudly and proudly.

ALAN H. JORDAN

“Well David and Zoey, you’ve come to the right place. My name is Grace, and it means the love and kindness that God gives.” She looked at Zoey. “Do you know what your name means?”

Zoey just shook her head.

“It’s the Greek word for ‘Life.’” said Grace. She looked at me. Do you know what David means?”

“Lion king,” I guessed.

“Close,” said Grace, “It means, ‘beloved.’”

“We say Grace before dinner,” I said.

“Yes, I imagine you do,” said Grace, her eyes shining brightly, “and I will be delighted to bake a cake that will help everyone appreciate your dad’s life, and that will make everyone feel like you loved him very much. Do you have anything in mind?”

“Chocolate!” said Zoey and Me at the same time.

Mom held up three of the finger paintings that Zoey had drawn. “Would you decorate the cake with a colorful finger painting and with pictures of balloons going up to Heaven?”

“That would be my pleasure!” said Grace. “When do you need it?”

We told Grace we needed it on Thursday and that it had to be enough for 100 people, and she said, “No problem. You can pick it up anytime after four.”

Mom gave Grace some money, and then Mom and Zoey and I held hands and we went out the door together, with big smiles on our faces. Next, we drove to the dollar store. It’s a really cool place where everything cost \$1 or less.

There's a million aisles filled with all sorts of stuff and on the front and back of each row, and they have balloons. All sorts of balloons, but a lot of hearts and stars and a bunch of balloons that have funny pictures and the words, "Happy Birthday," written on them in big letters. As we walked in the gold stars balloons started rocking back and forth.

Mom went up to the blonde teenage cashier and she read her name tag. A big smile spread over her face. Then she nodded at us said, "Starlit, their father, my husband, passed over and we want to make a celebration for his life. We're going to need about a hundred balloons by Thursday night because we're going to send them up to Heaven. Can you help us with that?"

Starlit's face lit up like Fourth of July fireworks. "You bet." Then she said, "Did you ever try to take ten balloons in your car? It's really hard. They bounce and bobble all over the place? Maybe, I can ask my boss if he can drive me over there, and we can blow up the balloons at your house."

"That would be wonderful," said Mom.

"Just a minute," said Starlit.

"Two minutes later she came back and said, "if you're within a ten minute drive, he'll drive me over and pick me up."

Mom smiled, and said, "We're five minutes away. Do you want me to pay you now?" She held out a credit card.

Starlit nodded, took her credit card. She also got our address and asked what time we were going to send up the balloons.

ALAN H. JORDAN

“About nine o’clock, after it’s dark, “said Mom. We’re going to shine lights on them as they go up to Heaven.”

“I wish I could be there for that,” said Starlit.

“If your parents say it’s okay, and if your boss says it’s okay, we’d love to have you,” said Mom. “But, I’d have to talk to both of them.” Mom paused and then she said, “Are you sure it’s not too much trouble?”

“No!” said “Starlit. I want to do this.”

Zoey poked me. I turned and looked at her, and she was smiling from ear to ear. I thought to myself, that it’s neat that people who didn’t even know my dad were interested in coming to his celebration, but I didn’t say anything.”

On Thursday night, we had a lot of people at our home, including Grace. Every room was filled with pictures of Dad and me and ZZ and Mom, and there were lots of sandwiches, and coffee and tea and juice and soda and the cake that Grace made. Everyone who looked at the cake smiled and said that it looked so pretty that they thought it would be a shame to eat it, but when Mom cut the cake, they devoured it. This made Grace very happy.

Around 7 o’clock, Starlight’s parent’s dropped her off with a box of balloons and a large helium tank. We invited them to stay, and they did. “This is just so special,” said Starlight’s mom, and they walked inside and had coffee and cake and started to talk to everyone else, just like they had known them all of their life.

Draft – Daddy was Dying so We Went for Walks

A little later, Starlit's dad was talking to my Uncle Rick, and I overheard Starlit's dad say, "I didn't know him, but my daughter's blowing up the balloons for the celebration. He must have been a very special person."

"He was," said Uncle Rick, "and somehow we think that he's going to know what we're doing here."

About eight o'clock Zoey and I went around to everyone and gave them some paper and finger paint or crayons. We told them, "For you... draw a picture or make a painting. We're going to tie it the bottom of a balloon and send it up to Heaven."

At quarter to nine Mom got up and thanked everyone for coming and then she said, "Starlit is going to give you a balloon with a long ribbon. Please roll up your picture and tie it to the balloon, but don't let it go. We're going to release all of them at the same time."

The next twenty minutes were so much fun, you would think it was a birthday party for Dad. When everybody was ready, we went out back onto our deck. Mom nodded to the man from the car company where we bought our SUV, and he threw a switch on this gigantic light that lit up the sky. Then, we all let our balloons go. At first, they didn't do much, and then there was a slight breeze, and they all started going up to Heaven. We watched the gold stars and the silver stars and the purple and red hearts bump against each other as they rose, and then we watched as they wandered off in different directions. Each of the balloons was tied to a painting to make my dad smile in Heaven. After about ten minutes they were gone, and Mr. Davison turned off the searchlight.

ALAN H. JORDAN

I watched a gold star drift back and then drift away again as a big breeze
blew. I know it's impossible, but it felt to me like Dad was tousling my hair.

Grateful

Season Shift

Crisp air makes breath show.
Bear begins to hibernate.
Fall into winter.

- David – Age 31

At the funeral Dad lay in the coffin, the simple oak coffin that he had picked out, and I felt as good as I could feel because I knew that he liked it. I looked at his head on the white pillow and his body on the white satin. I thought back to when he took me to Tahoe to go cross country skiing. We went to a place where they gave Mom and Zoey and Dad and me a lesson with five or six other people. Then Dad and I went off on our own. I remember falling at first, but after a while I was able to push and glide on the skis. It really wasn't all that hard, and every time that I got cold, there were these really neat warm-up huts that were made out of wood that looked a lot like the wood in Dad's coffin. I remember thinking that the green roofs seemed much darker than the cheery wood hut. On the front of each hut were two tree trunks that had been cut down; holding up the big thick, long wood that held up the roof. I thought that was neat. I liked the

ALAN H. JORDAN

long wooden benches where I sat down and took my skis off my boots. I really liked the warm stove and the hot chocolate that was inside each hut. It's funny, not "funny ha-ha," "funny peculiar" that Dad's coffin should remind me of those huts, but it did, and once I thought of that, I remembered the rest of the day. That was when Dad was healthy, and he could hike or ski for hours without getting tired, and even pick me up and carry me if I got tired. There were no really big hills. It was a big place, and after about an hour, we got to where we were pretty much the only people. You could tell from the ski tracks that other people had skied, but it had been awhile, maybe we the only the second or third persons that day. There was about a foot of fresh snow.

I love to look at fresh snow; it's the only thing that looks as pretty in real life as it does in my imagination. That's until something or someone walks or skis or sleds in it, or a dog pees or poops in it.

Snow that's walked in is okay because it sits there calling me to come play, and if your cross country skiing or snow shoeing. It's easier to follow someone else than it is to trail blaze so others can follow you. There were two sets of ski tracks in it before us. Tall pine trees, reached up into the sky on both sides of the trail. Everything felt magical, except for one thing: Most of the trees were green, but as we came out of a clearing and headed into another cluster of trees, the first tree on the right had brown needles. Parts of it were green, but parts of it were dying. The air was crisp, so crisp it would make a bear want to hibernate. The sun broke through the clouds and streaked down to the ground. It literally lit up the trees. When the sunbeams streaked down, whatever the sun's

rays touched looked bright green. We went through the trees and we got to this one area where no one had gone, and Dad headed right into the big white untouched snow, and then he took off his backpack and lay down with his back on the snow, and started moving his arms and his legs around fast. When he got up, he had made a snow angel. There are two things that Dad in the white coffin make me think of, Dad laying on that snow, making a snow angel, and that one tree with the brown needles, with the life of it slowly draining away. That tree, like my Dad, stood tall and proud.

“Are you still standing,” I said under my breath.

“What, Sweetheart?” asked Mom.

“I think Dad’s standing in Heaven,” I said to Mom.

I don’t remember much else about the funeral except that there were so many people, and they all came up to me, Mom and Zoey. Mom told me that I if didn’t know what to say to someone, all I had to say was, “Thank you. I loved him too,” and that worked.

When we left the funeral home, we went in this big black limousine and drove to the cemetery. There must have been a hundred cars following each other and we went through red lights, and everyone waited. It didn’t rain, but it looked like it was going to, and I thought that would be okay. It would mean that God was crying because my Dad was dead. I tried to get mad at God for taking my father, but it was like Dad whispered in my ear that everything would be okay.

The hardest part was when they lowered his casket into the ground and said the prayers and Mom and Zoey and I threw dirt onto his casket. It was sad,

ALAN H. JORDAN

and something about the dirt bothered me, but I knew he felt at home with the ground. After I threw in the dirt, I actually felt a little better, and for a prayer I quietly sang the words that he smiled when he sang when we were driving up to take a walk, the words we used to sing at the folk sings, and when we sang around the camp fires when we went camping,

*And I want to sleep with you in the desert tonight, with a billion
stars all around
'Cause I got a peaceful easy feeling
And I know you won't let me down
'cause I'm already standin' on the ground.*

I smiled because I knew that my Dad was going to be one of the stars in the sky, and that he would always be there for me.

Stars twinkled, like Dad's eyes. I thought about three tomato plants that Dad and I had planted, and of a mostly empty bag of potting soil that was left, and I understood what bothered me about the dirt that I had thrown on his casket. It was dry and lifeless, tanish brown. "Ashes to ashes, dust-to-dust," someone had said and I thought how much better it would have been to have thrown the dark, rich potting soil that we used to plant the tomatoes.

Then we went back home, and everyone ate, and talked, and talked and ate, me too. After it got dark, I took Dad's phone, and went outside and took a picture of the stars in the sky.

Mad at Mom

Graceful
Grateful
Depending how you look at it
They're the same.

David – Age 9

Mom brought Zoey and me into Dad's office. It's this bright room on the second floor, and it was the place where Dad would go when he had to make phone calls and use the computer and do things for work. We knew that when Dad was in there, it was important to be quiet. It's a big room, with an oak desk and an oak filing cabinet and a computer.

"Before your father passed over," Mom said, "we talked a lot, and he told me that he wanted to change this room to be a special place for the two of you. So, I'm going to do that. Today, two movers are coming, and they're going to take things away, and bring in new things, and then I have a special present for both of you, a present from Daddy, even though he's not here anymore. So, it's time to say, 'goodbye,' to this room, and 'hello' to the new space. She took out a camera and started taking pictures. "Davey, do you want to sit in Dad's chair?"

ALAN H. JORDAN

I climbed into my father's big brown leather chair, and leaned back and pushed it back with my hands going over my head and then I slid forward again. I turned on the radio and one of the songs that we used to sing around the campfire came on,

*In the early morning rain
With a dollar in my hand
With an achin' in my heart
And my pockets full of sand
I'm a long way from home
And I miss my loved ones so
In the early morning rain
With no place to go*

and Mom turned off the radio.

"Not right now, Honey," she said. She put Zoey into my lap and took a picture of both of us. She smiled. She took a lot of pictures of the room, and then she sat in Dad's chair, and I took pictures of her. She looked around the room, her eyes stopping on lots of little things and a tear formed in her right eye. Mom sang quietly,

*You can't jump a jet plane
Like you can a freight train
So I'd best be on my way
In the early morning rain*

My uncle Rick has two gold cocker spaniels, Samson and Delilah. Sampson has these big brown eyes that get so sad looking when he thinks everybody is going to leave him alone in the house, and that's just how Mom's eyes looked before she took us downstairs, and even though we had just eaten cereal an hour ago, she poured three glasses of milk and she brought down both of the cookie jars from the top of the refrigerator. The glass one that we bought in

the store had oatmeal raisin cookies that someone brought over. The other jar is the one that Zoey and Mom and I made. It's big and creamy white and slopes down like a pot belly stove that was in a cabin we rented once when we went on vacation in Canada. It's got the word "Cookies" written on it in gold and pictures that Zoey and Mom and I painted on it in different colors. We went to this store and we pounded out the clay and shaped it, and painted it, and then we left it there for them to fire it, and came back a week later to pick up our cookie jar. We love it, and we keep the most special cookies in that jar—chocolate chip cookies that we bake ourselves.

I don't know about you, but I can eat milk and chocolate chip cookies any time, day or night and I started to eat them, but I stopped when the two big men came with a truck. They both looked like they were football players. One was really tall, and he had red hair. The other one had black hair and a bushy black beard. Both of them brought in empty boxes. They nodded to Mom, who nodded back and pointed up the stairs. They went upstairs into Daddy's office, and for the next hour, there were noises, like drawers being opened and papers being put into boxes and once something must have fallen on one of the guys because I heard him say, "Owww. Gosh darn it!" Then, the two men came down the stairs carrying something. The man with the bushy beard was on the bottom, and he said to the other guy, "Not too fast. I'm don't want to mar the wall when we turn the corner."

"Nooooo!" I screamed as they carried out his chair. Mom held me back, and I started to pound on the top of her legs. "That's Daddy's chair." A high

ALAN H. JORDAN

pitched wail came out of my mouth and I started crying, then I broke away from Mom, grabbed a chocolate chip cookie, ran into my bedroom and slammed the door.

Our New Space

Jazz came over to baby sit. She lives down the block and across the street. Her real name is Jasmine, but we call her Jazz. She's thin, has brown hair, and brown eyes. She talks fast, and she's always texting one of her friends on her phone. She's really old, like 16.

"I'm here to play with you while your mom makes your new space ready," she said, "Look what I brought." She held up a DVD of *The Wizard of Oz*, and I smiled because just the other day we were talking about the wicked witch and the monkeys and the scarecrow. I told her that Dad used to love that movie and that I wanted to see it again. We went into the den and she popped it in and even though I could see the people moving things around and Mom vacuuming up in Dad's office, I forgot about all that as Dorothy started singing about wishing upon a star and troubles melting like lemon drops and the mean lady who took Dorothy's dog Toto away in a basket.

Just before the part with the flying monkeys, Mom texted Jazz and Jazz stopped the movie, and said, "Your mom says that your new space is ready. Do you want to go up now, or finish watching the movie?"

ALAN H. JORDAN

We put the movie on hold, which was good because the part with the flying monkeys really scares me, and we went upstairs to Daddy's office. Only, it wasn't Daddy's office anymore. The file cabinet, and the fax machine and the phones were all gone. Daddy's desk was still there, but it had a different chair, a grey cloth one that spun around and was my size, and there was a laptop computer that was hooked up to a monitor.

Across the room there was another desk, and a big drawing table. On the desk was a computer and to the right of the computer was a big table with different sizes of paper. On the table's left side was a little stand with drawers in it that held paints and different types of brushes. Mom looked at Zoey and said, "This is for you, from Daddy and me," and she took her over and put a brush in her hand and dipped the brush in some water, and into some water color paints and made a big swirl on the piece of paper that was on the table. Zoey didn't say anything, but she took the brush and started to put it into different colors and paint on the paper.

Mom looked at me again, "Move the mouse on the computer," she said. I looked at her for a moment, not knowing what to expect, and went over and moved the mouse, and the screens on the laptop and on the computer monitor jumped to life. On the right-hand monitor there were pictures that Dad took. One of them was bigger than the others. It showed Uncle Rick's dog chasing his tail around and around. I remember when Dad took that picture. Sampson was chasing his tail because he wanted to go outside to pee pee, and that's how he told everyone. On the laptop's screen there was a poem that Mom wrote.

Ironic

*I want to get in
While the dog wants to get out
For exactly the same reason*

I smiled.

“Dad’s photos,” are on this computer, Mom said. He put them on here for you before he passed over. She handed me his Droid. “The phone part is turned off, but you can listen to music, and record your voice and take photographs with it and put them on the computer, and print them out. Dad thought you might want to write poems about his pictures, and he thought you might want to help Zoey draw pictures based on the photos. Turn it on.”

I knew how to do that. I’d done with Dad, many times. I pushed the button and swiped the screen to unlock it, and there was a song displayed, Over the Rainbow / What a Wonderful World by Israel ‘IZ’ Kamakawiwo’ole. I pushed play and it started to play the song from the *The Wizard of Oz*, but it was way different, with a man singing, and some words being the same, and some words being different.

*Ooooooooooooooooooh
Ooooooooooooooooooh
Ooooooooooooooooooh
oooooooooh oooooooooh*

*Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high
And the dreams that you dream of once in a lullaby*

*Somewhere over the rainbow
Bluebirds fly
And the dreams that you dream of
Dreams really do come true . . .*

ALAN H. JORDAN

I looked at Zoey. She was sitting there painting with real brushes and real paints. I went over and watched what she was doing. She was looking at one of Dad's photos, a picture of a snowman that we all built when it snowed when we were in Tahoe. There wasn't much snow, but we scraped up most of the snow that was on the patio and we made it into a small snowman, about the same size as Zoey. For eyes it had two black pieces of the part of the road that had broken up. For a nose it had a jelly bean. Its mouth was made from part of a pine cone. Mom made eyelashes for it by breaking off part parts of twigs. Come to think of it, I think that's the only snowman I ever saw that had eyelashes. It had two buttons going down its front that came from different pine cones, and it had a scarf that was made from something. It looked like it had arms and they were folded in front of it. Behind the snowman was the glass thing that stops you from falling off the deck and behind that was Lake Tahoe, with bright blue water and waves crashing against rocks.

After a little while the song that was playing had words that didn't have anything to do with *The Wizard of Oz*.

*Well I see skies of blue and
I see clouds of white
And the brightness of day
I like the dark
And I think to myself what a wonderful world*

*The colors of the rainbow
So pretty in the sky
and also on the faces of people passing by
I see friends shaking hands saying
How do you do
They're really saying I, I love you*

, and

I must have looked confused because Mom said, “It’s a medley—two songs combined into one. Your Dad used to like this song. That’s why I put it on your player.” Mom paused. She looked at me for about five seconds, which is a really long time for someone to think about what they want to say, and then she told me, “I’m not sure if I should tell you this now—you might still be too young—but I’m going to share why Daddy loved this medley. First of all it’s two songs. The first song is *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, that was sung by Judy Garland, the girl in *The Wizard of Oz*. It was written in 1939 before Daddy was born. The second song is called *What a Wonderful World*. It was written in 1967, also before Daddy was born, and recorded by Louie Armstrong. But the medley, which combines the two songs, was recorded in 1993, when Daddy was 13, and it was released in a record album called *Facing Future* by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole. He is one of the best selling Hawaiian recording artists of all time.

“Mom,” I said annoyed.

“Yes?”

“That’s boring.”

She looked at me for about five seconds and said, “Judy Garland, Louie Armstrong and Israel Kamakawiwo'ole all passed away, but their music lives on. It lives on in *The Wizard of Oz*, which is one of the most popular movies of all time, and which is based on a book written by a man named L. Frank Baum who died long before Daddy was born.”

“So.”

ALAN H. JORDAN

“These songs have been played millions of times, all over the world.

Davey, that proves that what someone does in their life makes a difference. These songs prove that one person can change the world for the better, even after they pass over. Daddy wasn't a writer, and he wasn't a singer or an artist or an actor, but he was a father, and he was a photographer, and he was absolutely, 100% sure, that the things that made him special will live on in you and ZZ and me.” Mom's eyes swelled up and she cried, but she wasn't crying because she was sad. She was crying because she was happy.

I thought about my name, which means, “beloved,” and I rushed into Mom's arms and gave her a big hug. She tousled my hair, just like Dad would have done.

It's Not Fair

Speaking About Life

Whoever said it was easy
Lied
-David, Age 19

“Mom,” Marco Polo’s mad at me.”

“Why did you say that Honey?” asked Mom.

“When I go to pick him up he bites me.”

“Are you squeezing him?”

I shook my head. “He won’t even go into his cup for me. He always used to go into the cup when Daddy was alive. I don’t think he loves me since Daddy died.”

“Daddy dying probably did upset him. Daddy used to feed him, and clean his cage. It probably feels strange.”

“All he wants to do is eat. As soon as I’m done feeding him, he runs away. He crawls back into his bed and hides underneath the blanket. He won’t come out when I talk to him.”

“Maybe he’s got a headache,” said Mom.

ALAN H. JORDAN

He doesn't hide from Zoey. When she talks to him, he stands up and listens to her. He doesn't have any right to be mad at me.'

"He's not young anymore. Maybe he's tired," said Mom, "or he could have a little cold, and just want to sleep."

"Maybe."

"Maybe he's not mad at you. Maybe he's mad at Daddy for not playing with him and feeding him."

"But, Daddy's dead."

"Marco may not know that. He may think that Daddy just forgot him.

"I need him to be my friend, Mom. It's not fair."

"Hamsters aren't like dogs, Sweetie. They burrow. Sometimes, they just want to be left alone."

"Fine. If he wants to be alone, I'll leave him alone. Let Zoey feed him. He can starve to death for all I care," and with that I went to see Zoey to tell her that she had to feed Marco Polo, but it didn't work out that way. When I went into her room she was crying.

I went over to her and put my arm around her shoulder. "What's wrong?" I asked.

"Ellen's forgetting?"

"What?"

"Jazz's little sister, Ellen," She can't remember what color eyes her Dad had. I don't want to forget Daddy."

"You won't forget."

She sobbed. “Maybe I will.”

“Unnt uh,” I said. “You’ll always remember Dad. We both will.”

“I want to remember Daddy. Forgetting him just isn’t fair.”

Mom knocked pushed the door open, “Hey guys, anyone want to go for ice cream.”

“You scream,” I said.

“I scream,” said ZZ.

“We all scream,” said Mom.

“For ice cream,” we all yelled together, and we giggled and laughed and we went to The Purple Cow and we all got ice cream. I got a Breyer’s chocolate mint cone, and it was good!

When we went home, I gave Marco Polo an itty-bitty bit of the cone that I saved for him. He gobbled in up and put his paws on the cage and begged, but I didn’t have any more. So I got him a little bit of broccoli, and a small bite of cheese—the size of his paw, and then I put offered him the cup, and he ran in it, and I took him out and he ran up and down my hand and, guess what, he went into his ball and explored all over the kitchen and the hallway and the back den, smelling everything, everywhere. I think the exercise made him tired, so when I put him back, and I gave him a piece of fresh lettuce and just a pinch of yogurt, and he licked the spoon until there was nothing left, and I gave him some broccoli, and then he scurried through the tunnel from his sleeping cage to his play cage. He found some of the sunflower seeds that we put inside a toilet roll

ALAN H. JORDAN

that was hidden inside a bag for him to find. It made me happy that he was
happy!

Gypsies and Painting

Answers surround me
It's just a matter of hearing them.
- David Age 27

Did I ever tell you about the walk that Zoey and Dad and I took where we ran into a group of gypsies? A gypsy is someone who doesn't like to live in one place. They're not like street people. They make money doing things like telling fortunes and making and selling jewelry and clothes. They have a place to live, but they move the place where they live all of the time.

We met a band of gypsies in a park just off of 4th Street in Reno. They dressed strangely. One of them, had the longest, blackest hair I ever saw. It was so long that if she took it down from a bun, it ran down her back and

ALAN H. JORDAN

onto the floor and kept going, almost like the dress my cousin Sherrie got married wearing.

She walked over to us. "I'm Nata," she said.

She had the biggest, bluest eyes of anybody I ever saw. When Mom and I play marbles, we sometimes play with the real big bumbos, and Sherrie had eyes as big as bumbos and as blue as Lake Tahoe. Her eyelashes were so long that you could balance a match on them; her lips were so pink that they looked like bubble gum ice cream.

"These are my friends. We make clothing, special clothing that brings pleases The Spirit Of Life."

"I'm afraid you're a little late for me," said Dad. "I have Cancer, less than two months to live."

She nodded, turned away, took two or three steps, stopped, turned around and said, "Maybe you're not the reason why we met."

Dad motioned with his hand, come here. The minutes later, Dad ordered a dress for Mom and a ring for ZZ. Dad said that he would pay them half, when he ordered, but only if he could take a picture of her wearing the dress she had on, because he wanted her to make one just like that for Mom. The dress she was wearing was purple, blue, green, white, black and grey. It was like a million splashes of color, and she told us that she made it so that the trees she'd whisper to would listen to her.

"That's fine, she said." Dad took a picture of her under a tree, and she was reaching out with both of her hands, talking to a tree with small green

and gold leaves, exchanging “wisdom,” with it. And while she did this, the air changed color. In the picture that Dad took, the air between the gypsy and the tree was part blue green and part pink, and the pink and the blue green swirled together to make purple in some places. I tell you this because I woke up early, and I went into ZZ’s room to find her, but she wasn’t there. She was upstairs in our creativity room with this picture propped up on the drawing table, painting in water colors. The thing is that what she painted looked nothing like the photograph, but the energy in the photograph and the painting was the same.

At the top of ZZ’s painting was gold and green and brown reaching out to the sun. I knew that sunlight was streaming down even though there was no sun in the painting. Behind the gold and green leaves and the brown branches was a cyan sky, which got darker as your eye followed the picture down towards streams of black and a bluish purple. The gypsy wasn’t a gypsy, but a swirl of purple and blue, combined with touches of white, light gray, yellowish green and a brick red. It was obvious that the swirl was a part of nature. She showed me a poem that Dad wrote and had attached to the picture of the gypsy. “Read this to me?” she asked.

I did:

Tree Whisperer

She stands
a part of the tree

In front of it
able to move independently
a joined spirit

ALAN H. JORDAN

Her soft skin
A reflection of its bark

The colors of her clothes
the colors of the tree's soul

She entreats the birds to visit
Delighting when they do

The tree experiences
Her experiences

Sees what she se
Tastes what she tastes
Kisses what she kisses

How is it that I see her?
You don't, I know.

Perhaps it's because I
placed my hands on the tree's bark

Said "Thank you."
Wished it well.
Sent it love.

In return I understand
More about Life.

You want to know something, every thing in that poem was in Zoey's painting. "Wow! I said, "if you keep doing pictures like that from Dad's photos, you'll never forget Dad."

"I know," she whispered, and something changed in both of us, forever.

Good Boy

If you don't ask
You don't get
- Davey Age 7

Mom and I heard him in his wheel. It was spinning. Spinning the wheel is one of his ways of telling us, *I'm up. Feed me. Play with me.* That's what I think anyway.

I went to the refrigerator and I got a piece of wheat grass. We keep it growing fresh in the refrigerator. Yesterday, he gobbled a piece up, as Dad would have said, "with zesto." That was yesterday. Today he grabbed the blade of grass and tossed it to the side. *What is this? Give me some real food.*

Okay. I tried again. I opened the plastic box that we keep in the refrigerator where we keep little bits of food ready to feed Marco and I took out a little piece of Jarlsberg cheese. *Yes!* Marco grabbed it and gobbled it up. I watched him eating it. I like to see him eat cheese. It makes my heart sing to see him enjoying himself. When he finished he walked over the front of the cage, and he put both paws on the front of the cage where the gate swings out. It was open. (I have to make sure that I close it because if I don't close it when I'm done feeding him, he could escape again and have to go on another adventure. But, if he goes on another adventure, that's

ALAN H. JORDAN

not good because he's older now and I don't know if he would get upset if he gets stuck in one of the pipes. He's not as good as running in his ball now as he used to be.)

Marco Polo put his paws on the front of the cage. *I want something else. I want something else!* I went and I looked in his box and I gave him another piece of cheese, but this time he looked at the piece of cheese and he wiggled his body as if to say *What else you got?. You got something else? You got something else. You got something good to eat? I already had cheese. Cheese his good, but I had enough.* I looked in his little box, and found this small piece of peach that we cut up and put in the box before we bit into the peach and got our germs all over it. I took half of the small piece of peach, and put it on his feeding spoon and I put it inside his cage.

Yes. Yes! This is good! He grabbed it and he gobbled it up. He's so cute when he eats. He doesn't just eat with his mouth. His whole body moves when he eats. He takes his hands and moves his hands around. His head goes up and his head goes down. It's like he's smiling with his body. Then he finished, and he sniffed the air, and he looked at me. *What else you got? You got something else? Got something else good?* I can't feed him too much because if I do, then he'll get a tummy ache.

I thought about what else I could give him. Having a hamster is a big responsibility—gigantic even—because hamsters can't talk, bark or meow. If something goes wrong, they don't know how to tell you about it. Suppose I fed him something with sugar and he got a toothache. How would he tell me? There's no way of knowing if it hurts him. Did you know that a toothache can kill you? Well it can. Ask any dentist, and he'll tell you that you can get an abscessed tooth, and it can get infected and it can go up through your head, and into your heart and do all sorts of weird things, and boom, you're dead, just like that.

I wanted to keep Marco safe, so I went to the fridge and I got a piece of brocolini for him. I rinsed it off real well, to wake up the flavor and to make sure there's no germs or stuff that they use to kill bugs on it. I went back to his cage to give it to him, but he wasn't there. The door was open, but he wasn't there. I couldn't believe it. Marco Polo wouldn't run away until we're done feeding him, but he wasn't there and I started to panic because I didn't want him to be on a scary adventure. Then, I saw him in his space needle. The space needle is this thing that goes up on top of his cage. He scampers up a tube and get to it, and it's the place where Mom gives him cooked food because it's easy to open the top of the space needle and put the food in and there's no bedding so if there's something like salmon or chicken or hamburger it doesn't get his bedding all greasy.

I sighed with relief. I put the brocolini in the top of the space needle and he grabbed it from my hands. *Oh wow! This is the life. This is it.* He ate it one flower at a time, and he relished each flower. That's a big word, but I heard Mommy say it. He relished it. He rel-ish-ed it. Then, he scampered down to the bottom of his cage. *Well, I guess that's about it. Come back later.* He crept under the blanket, that was made from a piece of one of Daddy's flannel shirts, into his pumpkin. He loves that blanket because it stops the light from coming in, and because it keeps him warm. The pumpkin is this little bowl that's shaped like a pumpkin that Mommy bought for a decoration a couple of Halloween's ago. She gave it to him, and he sleeps in it because it's just the right size for a dwarf hamster, and he feels warm and he feels really secure.

He covers himself up with the blanket. Then he sticks his nose out and wiggles it up and down a couple of times and waves his whiskers. *Thank you! Thank you! My tummy is full now. Going to bed.* Marco went back under his blanket and I smiled.

ALAN H. JORDAN

I figured that I'm wouldn't see Marco for a long time because his tummy was full and when his tummy is full he sleeps, but about an hour later Mom was cooking chicken. Chicken is Marco Polo's favorite food in the whole world, and he can smell it a mile away. Mom and I heard him running in his wheel. Mom went over to him. "Good boy," she said. "Are you a good boy?" She paused and watched him move his whiskers. "You are! You are a good boy," she said.

Marco looked at Mom. *I'm here. The chicken's not ready yet, I can smell that, but I'm not going back to bed. I want to be around when it's time to eat. Lift me out of here, and let's play.* Marco Polo must have thought as he stuck his paws against the cage, and lifted his head up. Mom opened the cage, and tapped her finger on the open part of the cage, the part where the gate is usually locking it. "You're a good boy," Mom said to Marco. "Don't bite me," said Mom as she reached in and picked him up, and she stroked behind his ears, like he was a dog. He didn't used to like that, but he does now. He didn't bite her. "Good boy," she cooed. "You're a good boy!" Then Mom, put him back in the cage, and washed her hands and went back to cooking.

Ten minutes went by and I could smell that the chicken was ready to eat. Marco ate all that food before, but smelling the chicken made him hungry. He wanted to make sure that he got fed.

He went over to the front of the cage, and put his little paws on it. I acted like I didn't understand. *Oh, you people are so dumb. How can I make you understand?* He nibbled at the cage, and he looked up at me. *Chicken! Chicken, please.*

I went and got an itty-bitty piece of chicken from Mom and we washed it off so it wouldn't burn his mouth, and there wouldn't be any grease. I put it on the spoon and put it in the cage. *Yes! Chicken!* He grabbed it off of the spoon and gobbled it. *Got any more? Got more?*

I gave him another small piece, the size of his paw. He pulled it off the spoon. His whole body went up and down as he ate it. *Yes! This is the life. THIS IS THE LIFE!* When he finished, he yawned, and went back to his pumpkin. *My tummy is full. I'm gonna have good dreams!* He turned around to me before he climbed into bed. *Thank you.* Then he slid under his blanky, and it was pleasant dream time for Marco.

Two More Celebrations

Joy Rises

Balloons are lighter than air
Joy lighter than sorrow
Joy Rises
David – Age 16

Marco Polo passed over last night. He was sixteen months. That's really long for a dwarf hamster; they usually live for a year. Mom found him, not me. I was glad that I didn't find him. It was hard enough to find Dad passed over. I think it would have been super hard for me to pick him up, and feel him empty. I was so used to having him jump from one of my hands to another one, and feeling his little heart beat a million times a minute. Mom went into his cage to clean his exercise wheel. Usually, when you go to clean his cage or his wheel, he'll come out and try to stop you. It doesn't work. We know that we have to clean his cage. We bought this book, and it said, and I quote, "If you don't clean your hamster's cage, he will die." I used to change Marco's bedding, but Mom was the one who cleaned his exercise wheel.

After she found him, Mom went into the bathroom and she brought out a little plastic box that she bought to carry her soap when she goes to the gym. We put

hamster bedding in it and placed Marco Polo on the bedding, and all said something to celebrate his life.

Mom went first, “Marco, thank you for the gifts you’ve given us. You have helped me to . . .” then she stopped talking and picked up a poem that she wrote, and read that instead:

Explorer Par Excellence
(Dedicated to the memory of Marco Polo, who made us smile.)

Eyes that wonder
Paws that wander
Nose that sniffs out the truth
Curiosity that puts cats to shame

In Hamster Heaven
You’ll roam free
Skitter here
Scurry there
Explore everywhere.

We love you, Marco.
Zoey, Davey, Mom & Dad

Mom said she included Daddy’s name because she felt that Daddy would somehow know, and would go over to Animal Heaven and welcome Marco Polo, and point the way for him to explore in Animal Heaven, to his heart’s content, forever.

Zoey painted a grey and black blur spinning on a yellow, like a spinning top, and it reminded me of Marco when he used to run in his wheel.

I said a private prayer for his soul.

We went out back and buried Marco’s body near the lettuce in the garden. It was a good place to bury him because he loved fresh lettuce. Then we went to

ALAN H. JORDAN

the dollar store and bought five balloons. Three hearts a star and a rainbow colored one that said Congratulations and had pictures of flowers and balloons on it. I wish Starlit had been there, but we found out that it was just a summer job for her, and that she was going to college in California. So, Mom and Zoey and I took the balloons and we drove across the street to Virginia Lake. We went for walk all of the way around the lake, holding the balloons and when we got back to where we started, Mom tied the five balloon's strings together, and then she tied them to the poem she had written and to the picture that Zoey drew and to my prayer, which was only five words but said everything my heart and soul felt, "Thank you and God bless."

We let the balloons go, and at first, they hung around, and then they started to lift, and we watched as the things we sent to celebrate Marco Polo's spirit headed toward the setting sun.

I closed my eyes, and put my hands together in front of my heart, like I had seen Mom do after she finishes doing Yoga, then I moved my hands, still in a prayer pose, under my nose and cried a bit, and when I took my hands in front of my heart and opened them one in front of the other,, it was almost like I could feel Marco Polo squeeze through the tunnel of my right hand into my left hand, and jump up into the sky. I didn't try to stop him because I knew he would go up, up, up.

Just after we pulled into the driveway at home, Mom's cell phone rang. She answered it. "It's Uncle Rick, she said, and he wants me to put the phone on speaker."

I nodded.

Uncle Rick’s voice came through the speaker. He was excited and happy and he said, “Hi Guys. Guess what, Delilah had her puppies early. Do you want to come over and look at them, and maybe pick out one to take home when it gets old enough?”

I think it was Marco Polo’s way of telling me to celebrate.

Reflections

Yum!

Milk and cookies
Peanut butter too
These are things
I eat at the zoo.

David – Age 8

1. Three years ago, Dad’s celebration may have felt like a birthday, and it was one of the most special days of my life, but it didn’t change the fact that Dad was in Heaven. At first, Zoey didn’t understand why he didn’t come home, but I

ALAN H. JORDAN

did. She would draw a picture and say, "I'm going to show this to Daddy when he gets home."

I knew he was never coming home again, but I smiled and we painted together. My paintings were never as interesting as hers. I showed her this one picture that Dad took last year when we went to see the Great Reno Balloon Race. It's this big event that they have every year where people fly hot air balloons, the kind that the Wizard used in the movie the *Wizard of Oz*. It's this big picture of the Energizer Bunny floating over a house, banging on his drum. I tried to make it look like the bunny, but she didn't she just made this streak of pink zipping over a house over light and dark clouds and even though you don't know it's the Energizer Bunny, you get the feeling of a drum booming.

I showed her a picture Dad and I took of this big Tonka truck, only a real one that rips up streets. It's a Volvo with a long arm that reaches down into the ground and rips the street apart so they can bury pipes. It took her twenty minutes to make a water color painting that didn't look anything like it, but you could feel the road being torn apart.

One day, I came home from school and Mom took one look at me and said, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"You wouldn't understand," I said.

"Try me."

“Bill Johnson says I’m the man of the house now, and that I have to take care of you and Zoey and pay the bills and maybe I should drop out of school like his brother did after his father died.” I made my voice soft, and I couldn’t help crying. I don’t want to drop out of school.”

Mom took me in her arms, and held me to her tightly. Then she said, “Don’t worry your head about this, Davey. You’re the *boy* of the house. It’s good for you to help Zoey and me, but you don’t have to worry about being the man of the house. That comes later, when you have children.”

“But, Mom what about money?” I asked. “I don’t want you to sell the house because we don’t have enough of it.”

“Oh Honey,” she said, “you don’t have to worry about that. Do you know what life insurance is?”

“No.” My bottom lip was shaking, and I couldn’t stop it.

“It’s instant money when someone dies, and your father had a life insurance policy. Besides, I work. There’s more than enough money. Don’t worry your little head about that.”

That helped, but it still didn’t make me feel better when I wanted to talk to Dad, or when there was a father-and-son baseball game, or when I watched TV and saw all of those kids playing with their fathers.

2. One day Zoey came in my room and she showed me a picture she had drawn for Dad. “That’s nice,” I said, glumly.

ALAN H. JORDAN

“You don’t look happy, she said. “Don’t you think Daddy will like it?”

“Daddy’s never going to see it,” I said, tears pouring down my cheek.

“Yes, he is.”

“No, Zoey, Daddy is dead.”

“I know that.”

“He’s never coming home again.”

“I know that.”

“Then, how can he see it?”

“He can see it with his heart. I send him the pictures with my heart, and he can see them in Heaven.”

“Right,” I said.

Zoey ran out of the room and she came back with paper and a pencil.

“Write him a poem,” she said.

“What?”

“Write Dad a poem, from your heart. Write a poem for this picture.”

“I looked at the picture. It was a series of white streaks on black construction paper. Then, she held up the picture she copied. It was a photograph Dad and I had taken up in Tahoe. There was a bunch of snow that had been plowed into a big snow drift. The snow drift melted, and parts of it were very dirty. There was dirt all around part of the shape, and part of the shape had melted and it looked like a dog. There was even a black cinder and black eyes from the dirt that have shoved there. The dog was lying comfortably on the still white snow below it, like it was waiting from someone to come home. An inch of

white snow had fallen on the dog, and it looking like a super hero's cape for a dog. Snowdog, Dad and I had called him. We took that picture at just the right time, because ten minutes later the snow plows came and he was gone.

“Daddy would say this is a little miracle,” Zoey said, and “I know that it is.”

“How do you know that?” I asked cynically.

She made me a believer forever when she answered, “Because my name means ‘truth.’ Write Daddy a poem.”

I took the pencil and the paper and I thought of all of the photographs Dad had taken. I thought of the porcupine pinecone. I thought of the rock that looked just like a critter sticking its head out of the road, I thought of the two rocks that look like a hippo and an dog, and I thought of a picture we had never taken, except in my mind—the sprinkler that made a rainbow when we happened by. I thought of Grace. I thought of Starlit. I thought and I wrote:

Heaven
Always
Everywhere
In everything
Little miracles
Point the way
Every day.

“Done?” Zoey asked.

I shook my head.

I thought of the balloons going up to Heaven and I wrote,

Wish I may
Wish I might
Have the power
Of your Light

Zoey took my poem, and she tied it to her picture and she said, “Let's bury this.”

“You mean send it up to the sky,” I said.

ALAN H. JORDAN

She shook her head, “Like Dad told the waitress,” she said, ““It’s all the same, if you look at it a certain way.””

I couldn’t believe she remembered that.

Mantra

Wish I may

Wish I might

Have the power

Of your Light

(In Greek, photography means drawing and light. In a few other languages it means lines of light.)

Transformation

Yesterday:

I'm like a Redwood in a forest
Unable to move

There's a fire coming
Nothing personal, but it wants to consume me.

Nothing personal.

I'm like a Redwood in a forest
Sentient, aware

There's a fire coming
I stand straight, proud, aware

Aware
Aware of rebirth

Today:

I'm a Redwood in a forest
Being consumed
Transforming
I'm in that place where
The fire and tree
Are me

It is beautiful
Oh, so beautiful.

Tomorrow:

I'm a fire in a forest.

Dad's Special Canvas

On What Would Have Been My
Dad's Birthday
Except for His Death

I got a present: Rice Pudding.
The same taste as the rice pudding
We used to eat together.

I've been on a quest for this taste.
We used to buy it at Horn & Hardarts. (The cafeteria.)

After we walked a mile or two through the woods
Picking berries
Nibbling on sassafras
Talking
Smiling
Laughing

Building a love that would never die.

Nowadays,

Horn & Hardarts is out of business
The woods is a shopping center
My father is dead

Just as I was feeling blue
Ramon's 100% natural, old fashioned, rice pudding
Came into my life

Dad's way of saying
"I'm here for you, Alan?"

ALAN H. JORDAN

I think so.

I love you, Dad.
Happy Birthday.

David, age 35, written in celebration of John, for his son.

My name is David. I'm forty seven, almost forty eight. I'm a writer. My sister is an artist. My poetry is published in seven languages. Zoey's pictures hang in over 100 museums. I'm probably a lot like you, except, maybe for one thing: my life was shaped by a small rainbow from a sprinkler, dandelions, a hamster and pictures my Dad and I took when we went for walks.

I am rejuvenated by the memory of the sprinklers coming on, and my father pointing to one of them saying, "Look, Davey, a little rainbow." It's been forty years, and I still remember the way the rainbow flittered in the sun and moved as the wind blew.

I rejoice talking about dandelions crowding out other plants and how much my hamster loved to eat dandelion greens, which made me feel good because Marco Polo enjoyed part of a plant that was choking our lawn, and I figure that there's some force in the Universe that benefits from the Cancer that choked the life out of my Dad. I believe in the Web of All Existence. It's the only thing that makes sense to me.

Draft – Daddy was Dying so We Went for Walks

I thank God that Zoey made me write poetry to Dad's photographs and her paintings. She insisted that I convey the truth in each, and that that made all of the difference.

I recall Dad telling me about his Road of Life pictures, and I think I understand what he was talking about. He has maybe hundred pictures of lonely, but beautiful, roads. The question is "How does the Road of Life affect life?" Of all of the pictures that he took two stand out. There's exactly the same shot, except that one was taken from the bottom of the hill looking up, and the other was taken from the top of the hill looking down. I've tried a hundred times to write that poem, but I still haven't found the essential truth.

I remember Marco Polo dying and I remember Delilah having puppies, and how Mom and Zoey and I got Verve and how Verve brought laughter and joy into our lives until it was her time to go.

Zoey's artwork and Dad's photographs hang in my office. I have a large office, with 52 photographs and paintings. Many are of my family, and there are pictures that my children took. I always smile when I see the picture of the Mermaid Tree Mast. One of my favorites is "Magical Light." The photo Dad took when we went cross country skiing in Tahoe. It still looks like God is sending a ray of light down from Heaven. Snow Dog still makes

ALAN H. JORDAN

me smile. It helped me discover that there are more magical things to observe in this world than clouds.

My all favorite photograph of Dad's is one that I took with Dad took at Thomas Creek. It shows two rocks in the middle of a field. The rock on the right looks like a Labrador hunting. I see him sniffing the air, about to burst into motion, and the one of the left is an alligator, or maybe a hippo, staring out at me. They're both in a field of golden grass, heading in opposite directions, oblivious to one another, existing only in my imagination. No, that's not true. My son, Johnny, and my daughter, Beth, see them too. It's really quite amazing, and if you look to the left, far back in a bush you can make out another rock, with a branch of a tree resting on it. If you look at it just right you could argue that it was my father gazing at the alligator, or is it a hippo, and the Labrador.

Sitting on my desk in the left side of a hinged two-picture frame, is the photo Dad took of the Porcupine Dinosaur. I see it clearly now, with its quills sticking up and bits of pine cone that look like the scaly bones of Carnotaurus, or maybe, from a different angle, Gastonia. On the right side of the frame is the photo of the orange [Day Lilies](#) that my mother planted in our back yard long ago. Behind them is a scarred wooden fence. The lilies are surrounded by the green leaves of the plant, sending the flowers nourishment and love. Some of the orange Day Lilies are

Draft – Daddy was Dying so We Went for Walks

in full bloom, their stamens reaching out to the sky. Others are buds about to open, and there's one that is just opening up, testing the waters of life. I often think that it must take courage to be the first leaf to unfurl on a tree after the winter is over, to take a chance on encountering killer frost. Nourishment and love, I strive to give that to my family, friends and the world, every day. One day I will write a poem about the lilies.

Finally, there's a picture that everyone thinks is my foot standing on a tree. With all of the trees that I photograph, it's easy for people to think that, and I don't tell them, but it's the photo that I took of my father, standing on a tree in White's Creek. I cropped it. When I need to feel connected, I look at that picture. I feel the muscles in his legs. I had the photo blown up and I clearly see the log that he was standing on, firmly and securely. It's riddled with holes, and it's rotting away. There's moss on it. Where once I would have only seen destruction and decay, I now see life. That log is a home to insects and plants. I remember my father taking me into the funeral parlor and picking out an oak casket. He said "I like this one because it's natural, and simple and because it feels right." I understand that death can feel right and that what's death for one is life for another. I understand that nothing lives forever, and that's it important to celebrate everyone's life, not just mourn it.

ALAN H. JORDAN

I think back to that day that Dad took me to Sage Hen and I understand what canvas he was painting. He was painting on the canvas of my soul. I love you, Dad. I know what you mean about death and life being the same. I'll see you in Heaven, when I've collected enough little miracles down here.

The Beginning.