

Another one bites ...

December 27, 2009

This year contained a moment sadly seared into my memory. On Sunday, April 26, Joanna and I had returned home from church and a quick lunch. She checked the voicemail while I let the dog out. As I straightened up from petting our puppy, I saw the strangest look of distress on Jo's face, and she said, "Marv, I think Martha's gone."

Sure enough, she understood the brief message my dad left on our phone. After 50 years and countless surgeries on her kidney/bladder system, [Martha](#), my sister, went to be with the Lord.

While heaven no doubt greeted her passage with joy, and while we who remain felt relief that my deaf sister now hears and possesses a healthy, whole body, we have grieved for ourselves. My brother, Martin, and I have grieved for our own loss, but we have felt the sharpest grief as we have borne witness to the agony our mother and father continue to endure. No parent should bury a child, no matter how old.

Death, disease & disaster

A couple of months later, my friend [David](#) died after fighting cancer for more than two years. His death dealt a blow to our entire church, First Baptist in Lewisville, Texas, because we miss him so. He was far and away the friendliest guy in a church full of friendly people. I can't tell you how many times I've stopped short, thinking about how he enjoyed life and how he made everyone's life better.

This year, we learned about the cancer that grows inside three friends and even a dog I call my friend. God only knows if they'll be around when the clock winds down on 2010.

And these are merely the personal tragedies of 2009. As a nation and as a world, we've endured wars and terror, financial chaos, and the deaths of the famous and the noble. We've seen suffering brought about by disasters, both man-made and products of nature. We've witnessed atrocities that defy the imagination, and we've watched human grief and sadness that defy description.

And yet still splendid ...

But 2009 was a good year, too. A splendid year, in fact.

The depths of my pain at Martha's loss reflected the heights of the joy I experienced at her side and in her presence throughout our lifetimes. Same thing for the tears I cried when David died. All that pain couldn't hurt so bad had it not mirrored joy and gladness of equal or greater degree. And so, in death and other sources of sadness, I leaned into grief to remind me of the beauty and joy and happiness of their lives. I bet you did, too, if you lost a loved one this year.

This is a year I'll also never forget because of the events that marked our children's lives. Lindsay, our older daughter, and Aaron, her husband, moved back to Texas from Florida, where he had been in seminary. Then Forest Glade Baptist Church near Mexia called him to be their pastor. And, after that, Lindsay and Aaron told Jo and me we will be grandparents for the first time next year. Meanwhile, Molly, our younger daughter, graduated from Baylor University and started a master's program at Texas Christian University. She also said "yes" to David, her best friend, and they will be married next summer.

Those are red-letter events in our family history. But other, more ordinary, days were splendid, too. We ate luscious meals, laughed with each other, played with friends, listened to lovely music, read fascinating books, and cried at sappy movies. We cheered ball teams, played on the beach in

Florida, oohed and ahed the beauty of fall foliage in New England, and even stood out in our front yard to appreciate the full effect of the first white Christmas to befall these parts in ages.

Looking ahead

The death and sadness of 2009 make me glad to usher the old geezer out the back door. But I'll look back in fondness, not only on all the splendid things that happened, but even the sad. They are part of the story of life.

And all that transpired this past year leads me to look ahead with wonder at what will take place in the next.