

From Henry's Desk:

The Gifts of the Magi *by Henry Holland*

The holiday season is approaching and our annual holiday luncheon/gift exchange/party is approaching. This occasion is consistently one of the highlights of our year. This year promises to be no different. For those of the Christian faith, the story of the magi (wise men) is very familiar. Tradition suggests that there were three magi because three separate gifts were presented to the Christ Child. Magi can be defined as magicians. Magicians perform magical, unexplained or unusual acts. In this essay I will try to describe three magi within our own support group. I will also try to pay proper respect and honor to three magi of the recent past. Readers who find it difficult to attend our meetings and readers in other parts of the country may easily identify with any of the folks mentioned below.

Dave, Hans, and Brenda are three caretakers who provide present day gifts of the magi. There are many magi in our group and countless others around the world. I know Dave, Hans, and Brenda and something about what they do for their respective spouses. Dave is married to Linda. For most of her life Linda would have been called a "passer." However as Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS) has gradually slowed Linda down, Dave has assumed more duties of care taking. Dave and Linda have made the necessary adjustments and purchased adaptive equipment, as Linda's needs increased. This is an all too familiar adjustment that so many with and associated with PPS are having to make. Not only does Dave do so much for Linda, he unselfishly does a lot for all of us that know him. Dave is always ready to assist any of us in pushing a wheelchair, carrying items, and helping to load and unload scooters and wheelchairs. All of us know how Dave masterfully and with good wit and humor leads our annual Christmas gift exchange at our December party. Dave's gift is his love for all of us.

Hans is married to Irene. He and Irene shared their courtship and marriage with our group. Some of us have observed that Hans has tamed Irene. Hans is a native of Sweden. He is a quiet, soft-spoken, gentle man. A few years ago Irene experienced a rather sudden and severe attack of rheumatoid arthritis. She experienced a lot of pain from arthritis in addition to the pain and fatigue of PPS. During this time, Hans was visibly devoted to Irene and made it possible for her to attend meetings and social functions. Irene has had two shoulder surgeries and Hans was Irene's primary caretaker. Like Dave, Hans has always been willing and able to help others at our meetings. Hans and Irene live about eighty miles from our meeting place, but they are both loyal attendees. Hans' gift is his love for all of us.

Brenda is married to Henry (me). She has done the bulk of the necessary physical work in our thirty-seven years of marriage. This includes jobs, raising our three children, and now taking care of me on a gradually increasing basis. Just as Dave and Hans, she rises to the occasion of each new challenge that my care involves. As Linda and Irene, I have declined from a state of relative independence to a state of greater dependence. Brenda has gotten older and yet she is fulfilling these new tasks for my benefit. For our group she has been a welcoming hostess for our quarterly board meetings for many years. She is

always available to assist others at our meetings. She has made many friends among our members. Brenda's gift is her love for all of us.

Dave, Hans, and Brenda represent a host of names that simply love us and make it possible for so many of us to experience life with PPS with greater quality and fulfillment.

I have learned of the deaths of three polio survivors in the last month. Deborah Gately-McKeen, Virginia "Ginny" Palmer, and Spencer D. Albright III may be names that most of you do not recognize. Each had accomplished so much despite their polio handicap. Deborah Gately-McKeen was significantly damaged by polio as a child. She had earned a Masters Degree in Education specializing in counseling. She worked as a counselor for fifteen years. During her later years, she became a writer. I first learned of Deborah on the Internet. She could write about simple life experiences with realism and excitement. She wrote about her adventures in a motorized wheelchair while being caught in a terrible storm and she wrote vividly about her time in an iron lung as a child. She created a website called Windows to Wisdom. The link is <http://www.wtow.com>. Some of her writing can be found there. She lived some time in Virginia and I once spoke to her on the phone. Deborah was feisty, a real advocate for the disabled, and a caring, fearless, loving person. She died on October 14 after a brief illness at the age of fifty-three. Her obituary simply read: "In Lieu of flowers, lovingly give to someone in need." Her gift was her life.

Virginia "Ginny" Palmer was a homebound freshman in high school when I met her. I was the editor of my high school newspaper. Along with a reporter from the school newspaper, I visited Ginny at her home and the reporter wrote an article on Ginny in *The Jeffersonian*, our high school newspaper. Ginny had been severely damaged by polio at age nine. She walked slowly with two braces and crutches. She was unable to attend a barrier-ridden high school, but she did earn a degree in social science from Richmond Professional Institute (RPI, now VCU) in 1965. She was chosen Ms. Wheelchair Virginia in 1983 on the basis of poise, achievement since the onset of her disability and her ability to communicate the needs of disabled people. She worked as an eligibility worker and employment counselor in northern Virginia until she was totally disabled by PPS. She was active in the northern Virginia Post-Polio Support Group. She loved children. She died October 2 at the age of fifty-nine after a long illness. Her gift was her life.

Dr. Spencer Albright graduated from the University of Richmond in August 1954 when he was twenty years old. On the night that he graduated he felt some stiffness and pain in his neck. He had contracted polio and his plans to enter medical school seemed almost impossible. A year later, he entered the Medical College of Virginia despite his handicap and earned his MD in 1959. He wore two braces and used Canadian crutches. He did his internship at Dartmouth and his residency in dermatology at the University of Georgia. He practiced in Fayetteville, Arkansas until five years ago. He developed PPS, used a scooter, and often spoke of "hitting the wall" as a result of PPS. He had four children. He died on October 26 after a long illness. He was sixty-eight years old. When I was in

high school I learned of Spencer Albright and his success provided inspiration to many, including me. His gift was his life.

Survivors of polio are dying at increasing numbers. I am convinced that PPS causes greater vulnerability to life threatening events. Daily we all should honor and give thanks to those that help bear our burden and love us. We should never forget those who have already lived their lives to the fullest. They are all magi. Some are still following their star and others have found their star.

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” (Matthew 2:10). Those of us with PPS rejoice for the magi in our lives today and for those of the past.

Happy Holidays to All Our Members
and Their Families