

June 26, 2005

To Our Dear Friend,

We will certainly continue to keep you and your family in our prayers. Our constant thoughts of you would prompt us to do so even without your request. I do not pretend to have experienced the sense of loss and bewilderment about the future you are facing without your beloved partner. I can only trust that when the time comes for Chris or I, God in His mercy will comfort and sustain us. I don't know how He accomplishes this, but I know He does, and that He will for you, our beloved Sister in Christ. There are probably wise and spiritual things to tell you, but knowing none of them, I will tell you a story. It is a true story. Perhaps it will mean something to you - I know it does to me.

This year, in celebration of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Chris and I had planned a walking tour through England's Lake District. Although it was supposed to be a mutual blessing, I know Chris was anxious that she would slow me down, not be able to hike at all, or in some other way disappoint me. As it turned out, the joy of just being together doing something that we both love was more than a compensation for whatever limitations her slower pace imposed, but more than that, as I watched her trying so hard to please me and keep up with me, it just deepened my understanding of what a precious woman she is. I became even more determined to stay with her than

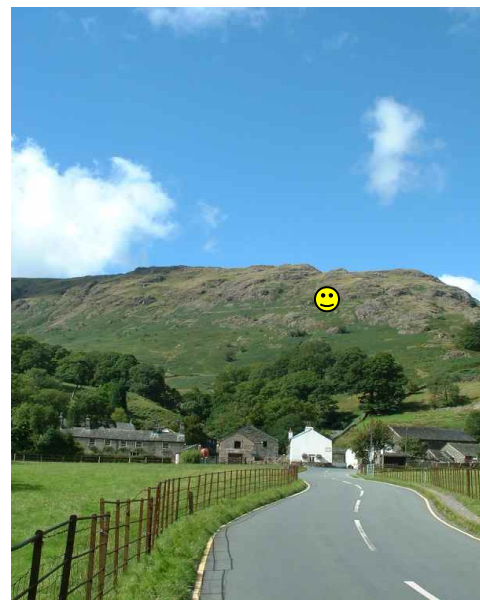


ever. As the week progressed, I was very proud of her for the distances and elevations she did manage.



Our last day, however, was ambitious: we had a 7 mile stretch with about 800M of ascent to our lunch spot, then another 7 miles to catch a boat to Keswick by 4:30, then another mile into the town itself for our transportation connection at 5:30. Fortunately, there was the option of taking a bus at about the 8-mile point, and when we finally got to our lunch spot at 1:30, Chris realized that if I was going to make the launch by 4:30, I would have to hit the trail immediately, leaving her to meet the bus a mile or so down the road while I hiked on to the boat dock 7 miles further on. I really hated to leave her, but she assured me she would be alright and would meet me in Keswick at 5:30. So I started out, and within about 20 minutes came an intersection where our route turned to the left. Unfortunately, it wasn't clearly marked - and I had the maps. I debated about what to do - wait or go on - but my time was limited, and I decided to trust that she would remember about the left turn.

I passed the bus stop and began a steep ascent beyond the little village. As I climbed the fell (mountain) I kept looking back to see if I could see her, feeling more and more worried that she might miss the turn, that something might happen to her because I wasn't there to take care of her. I turned back to look once more - and I saw her, distant and tiny, approaching the intersection. I stopped to watch, and my heart sank as she



paused for a minute and walked directly across - the WRONG way! What to do? I was so far away that running after her was almost futile - by the time I caught her we both would be a mile away from the bus stop. I did the only thing I could think of: cupping my hands I shouted across the valley "Chris!" To my amazement she stopped. "Chris!" I shouted again, and this time she looked up to the mountain, found me, and waved. She says she answered me, but because of our relative positions I couldn't hear. I pointed, and shouted "BACK!" which she heard, hesitated, and then began walking back to the intersection. When she reached it, she read the sign and turned the right way, waved again, and I breathed a prayer of relief. She would find the bus and be safe. "Love You" I shouted, not caring if the whole valley heard me, and resumed climbing up the mountain.

When I reached the top, the valley opened before me in a view so beautiful it presaged Heaven. With tears in my eyes, I realized that God had just answered one of my deepest and most heartfelt questions: If I climb that final mountain before Chris, who will keep her safe? Yes, she is a wonderfully competent woman, but oh! what if she needs me and I am not there? The thought breaks my heart. But now I know that nothing, nothing can separate us forever, and if she needs me and I call her, even from what seems like a great distance, she will hear, and know that I am watching over her, and be safe. You may think, of course, that I am crazy and this is just the ramblings of a sentimental old fool. It may be, but it is of great comfort as I confront the last ¼ of my life with a growing awareness of how precious our time with our loved ones is. While we know that In



Heaven there is perfect peace, we who are left behind still grieve and it seems to me entirely natural that our spirits still have communion even when one of us has gone Home. And so, I believe, it is with you and your beloved: he has gone up the mountain before you, but he is still watching over you, and will be there when you need him, in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is my hope and my comfort for you, and for us.

With all our love,

Allan