

A Partial Recounting of Our Journey Through Dementia

Via Facebook Posts

This story of our journey does not include the years (maybe three or four) of Dementia before the onset of Dementia related to Alzheimer's. It doesn't include the wonderful assistance of sons and daughters-in-law who helped around the house. We were dog walkers. When Myrtle was not walking with me and the dogs, neighbors asked. Some already knew she was dealing with Alzheimer's, but it was new to others. All expressed support for us and the willingness to help if they could. As did many others. Love, faith and hope were the foundations of our journey.

*In Jesus's love,
David*

November 28, 2023

Random musings excerpt:

My wife and I could use your prayers. At the present time, I'd rather not share publicly, just think of us and pray for us if the Spirit leads. God is good and He is a daily source of strength. One Sunday morning a few months ago, as I was in that stage of in between sleeping and waking up, the words came to me, "My grace is sufficient for you." I think of that often.

(No responses needed, just words to think about. I'm just sharing a few things from my heart, without knowing why I'm saying these things "out loud.")

Blessings. From Numbers 6, "May the Lord bless you and keep you."

David

January 2, 2024 ·

Some of you may have noticed that I've shared posts relating to Alzheimer's Disease. If you noticed, you may have wondered. I've debated with myself.... I don't usually share family pictures and concerns, health, etc. This year, after much going back and forth in my mind, I did share a note inside our Christmas cards talking about the journey Myrtle and I are now on. After reading it, you may find that it speaks to you in some way and in some situations, you have found yourself in or are now in... may you see the meaning in your lives. The note is passed below:

Christmas 2023
The Hope of Christmas

The screen is blank, much like my mind...

I sit here, grasping for words of hope, of peace...

but my mind reels around chaotic events in the world,

in my country, in my life...

And I, one who appears to have it all together, I

Mourn for lost lives, for split families and friends over political, social and religious beliefs...

I grieve loves that don't last, for friends or family who feel betrayed, I grieve deteriorating minds and the loss of memories and hopes for the future...

She said to me this morning as we sat at the table, "Your dad must be talking a lot at the Y." Yes, I sometimes do, but I remind her that I didn't go to the Y today...and we both are remorseful as we know what's happening...

The screen is no longer blank; it's filling up with lament...

I don't do public lament...I don't usually share my innermost feelings...but today I am...

I'm reminded that I maybe don't know you as well as I should...What are you going through that no one knows about...what are you hiding that only you and God know about?

I am reminded that a small child was born in a stable and placed in a manger...He's the hope of Christmas and He's the hope for each one who believes...

And I believe she and I will one day be whole together in the presence of the Holy One...

Early one morning, His word came to me, "My grace is sufficient for you." Peter reminds us to give to Him all our cares, for He cares for us. Thanks, Pastor Vetter for the reminder yesterday...

I believe...

The chaos of the world and life in general will not go away yet...but because I believe, there is hope, hope in Christmas and the message of the Child...

May you have hope.

Love,
Myrtle and David

November 30, 2024

Just thinking excerpt:

We were blessed to have family at our house today. Myrtle handled it fairly well. Pray for us as decline in cognitive abilities is increasing rapidly. Even in this, I see God's blessings at times.

Blessings, y'all.

December 15, 2024 at 8:36 AM ·

Before heading to church Sunday morning musings:

It's a sunny morning in Wichita, with highs expected to be in the low 60's.

Last evening, as I was giving Myrtle her pre-bedtime pills, she said to me, "You should be getting paid for doing this, you could get rich." As I tucked her in, I gave her a kiss and told her that was my pay. And, of course, I had to give her one for overtime and then one for my bonus. She smiled and participated fully in the kisses. Sometimes there's clarity. That's a blessing each time.

A dog/any pet person knows the feeling down inside the gut: if your pet dies, before too long there's that yearning for the mutual companionship they provide. In our situation, I thought it impractical to replace our last dog who died in February. Our dogs have been good for Myrtle also. Well, yesterday afternoon, we made our way to Pet Smart on North Rock Road to meet dogs from Pals Animal Rescue. We have an application pending. And, is it ever "practical" to have a pet(s)?

Getting older brings its challenges. Yesterday as I was signing Christmas cards, the arthritis in my hands cramped my preferred cursive phrase and signature, so I switched to printing and it worked well. I had to swallow some of my pride...lol

It's the Third Sunday of Advent. Looking forward to morning service.

You all have a blessed day.

David

December 25 at 10:30 AM ·

JUST THINKING/MUSING: (with corrections)

Most of the day yesterday, I thought we would be going to the church Christmas Eve service and reminded Myrtle of it several times, but she forgot all of the reminders. She didn't want to go anywhere. But I (David) could go. I said we both would stay home.

After a few minutes, in a moment of clarity, she came to me and said, "Can't we watch it someway?" Wow. I hadn't thought of that. Thank you, Jesus.

Staying home was almost worth it as I listened to her sing along with the music. Not many in church know of her singing history so it brought back memories of her singing in church choirs, leading at least one church children's choir, her alto solo role in a community choir presentation of the "Messiah," leading singing in our last church, sometimes from the piano, etc. After we retired the last time from church ministry, she told me one Sunday after we came home, "I feel useless, I'm not needed anymore." Her vocal musical talents were not needed. So, it was good to hear her sing along with the Praise Team last night, with much of the strength and talent she still has.

Speaking of the "Messiah." I went to PBS after the church service. If you're a purist, you might not have liked the program, but, musically, I'm very flexible in my listening. The "Gospel Messiah" was on from Royal Albert Hall in London. I highly recommend the experience, especially if you like music with a gospel bent.

Enough for now. Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May the "Son of God, love's pure light" (from "Silent Night") be with you.

Blessings.

David ♥

12/31/24

A.M.Musings:

Sometimes the best part of the day is at the end of the day when I tuck Myrtle into bed, usually before 8:30, and after we've had our frozen yogurt. She'll look up at me and say something like "Are we having fun yet?" and then smile that sweet smile. Or, "Thank you for taking care of me." There's always a good night kiss or two and a mutual voicing of, "I love you." That makes my day. Then I relax in the living room for a while...that's a necessity. A line from "One Day at a Time": "One day at a time, sweet Jesus, that's all I ask of you. You know I'm only human..."

J. Brent Hill finished today's devotion in the Guidepost's devotional book with this: My faith tells me to move forward with hope. To trust in the living Word of God--and let Him be the light unto my path.

Amen. May it ever be so...

Blessings, ya'll

SUNDAY EVENING MUSINGS:

This afternoon, Myrtle and I sang along with You Tube generated traditional Christmas carols. We enjoyed it. I told Myrtle I was better (and less inhibited) at singing along with

children because they don't care what a person sounds like. Or at health care facilities. I must admit I have sung a couple of solos and once unintentionally took the lead in a choir number. My church in McPherson asked this high school kid for a Sunday night special. I'm sure he/she thought I would play my cornet. But I decided I wanted to sing and asked Myrtle to play for me. She practiced and practiced with me...one good thing...they never asked again. At a memorial service for an elderly woman in our KC Kansas church, I recounted how I began to sing "Jesus Loves Me" for her, trying to direct the group to sing along with me...there I was, all by myself, finishing the first verse by myself. I never did that again. The lead came in the same church. Our choir was desperate for members...another man and I sang melody while Henry took the tenor part. This was before complex sound systems. I stood by the pulpit, controlling the mike and also controlling the lapel mike. Both mikes should've been off. I goofed...the lapel mike picked me up loud and clear. Realizing my mistake, when I stepped over to the pulpit, I asked, pointing to the lapel mike, "Was this on?" Giggles and good-natured laughter confirmed it. At least it wasn't the story painter Ross told of being fitted with a lapel mike and then being greeted with humor after making a pre-performance trip to the restroom. Ah, the memories.

Blessings, ya'll.

Musings: 1/4/25 excerpt:

I "ran into" a couple at Aldi where I had gone to pick up milk. I was there yesterday...I know, but I'm old, remember? Anyway, they are a Christian couple who really love Jesus. They asked about us. And then he prayed for us. I'm getting used to people praying for us in public places. It warms my heart.

Be safe out there...much of the country is dealing with weather issues.

Blessings, Ya'll (a nod to my Louisiana and Texas roots) 🤓

Musing: 1/5/25

I like our fairly new, 50" smart TV. I needed a new, bigger TV because from my recliner, words on the screen were blurry...even with new glasses. So, why not graduate to a Smart TV....like my phone, I'm sure it's way smarter than I am.

I've discovered there's a lot of Christian music to choose from on You Tube. Yesterday we were watching a 2000 Gaither Music Reunion (showing my age) when Bill Gaither explained that he had invited a young man to come back to the group to sing with them. He was hesitant, saying that maybe they wouldn't want him there. Bill basically told him to come and see. After he sang a solo, the group stood and applauded, welcoming him

home. Then he handed the mic off and walked over to Vestal Goodman and hugged her, crying for several minutes on her shoulder. As the hug ended, she took her ever present handkerchief and wiped his face with it and then her eyes. I stood there, tears running out of my eyes. Later, Meadowlark Lemon, yes, that Meadowlark, joined in with a smaller group and sang along with them. Then he explained that he did not grow up in church, that he had only been a Christian for 17 years. Today, he told them he had seen what he believed the church could be and should be. I had been to church. Earlier, Myrtle sang along as we listened to old hymns. I sure am glad we have that new, updated TV that we bought from Hephner's TV and electronics.

Blessings, ya'll.
David

January 26, 2025

The other day, I twice told Myrtle that it wasn't time to get stuff out for the noon meal. Both times she voiced her frustration and retreated to the bedroom. And then it hit me, sometimes in my advanced age it sometimes takes longer for the 2X4 to hit me, her frustration is not about me reminding her or of her reminding herself of how "dumb I am," but what I witnessed was a form of mourning. Mourning the loss over 60 years of becoming proficient in all matters of the kitchen, which she banned me from shortly after our marriage. Mourning the loss of abilities to just whip up a quick meal or expertly follow a recipe. Mourning over becoming the one who sets the table and sometimes not doing it correctly. Mourning because her husband is becoming better at it and is replacing her in ability and domain. I'm sure that she would not recognize this mourning in terms of what I just wrote, but I recognize it and that's the important thing.

*We are almost the official adoptive parents of Lexi, an eight-pound poodle mix who is 11&1/2 years old and who has only a few lower teeth. Friday afternoon she came to us on a home visit. While we were finishing with the dishes after lunch, I said to Myrtle, "I think we've been waiting for this little girl." She is and will be good for Myrtle. And me.

*Blessings,
David

From: Pals Animal Rescue
January 29, 2025

It sometimes takes time to find the right home for our dogs. Lexie's journey started when she was picked up as a stray and taken to the Wichita Animal Shelter.

There she waited for over a week to be reclaimed. Even though she was microchipped her owner could not be located.

There was a call for rescues to help as the shelter was overflowing. So, we went in to see what we could take. As we were evaluating, we saw this poor bedraggled old poodle mix who was wearing a doggie dress that was dirty and had obviously been on her for a long time. Matted and dirty, but oh so sweet. We took out two terrified chihuahuas that day and thought surely someone would tag her. Toni, a foster, always had a soft spot for senior dogs, but we were short on space to take her. We made sure she was safe and still looking for placement, but Toni couldn't forget her, so the next day she became a Pals pup. Lots of work to be done. She was bathed, tested negative for heartworms, but had a mouth full of trouble and soon had a dental and was left with only a few teeth. She had a crooked front leg, but it didn't bother her at all.



She was aged over 10 yrs from her microchip info but looked so much older. Toni had added her to her home, where she stayed waiting for her forever home, and waiting, and waiting. No one was interested in a senior dog, with no teeth, cataracts forming and a crooked leg.

It took a bit over a year but her journey to find a new home ended with a wonderful senior couple, who had just lost their dog, and came to a meet and greet. And the following is "the rest of the story" from her

new family:

"Over the weekend we prepared for a walk. Lexi knew what we were doing...let us know she wanted to go also. I think she's had leash training...she walks beside the one with the leash. We go twice a day with her and Jack from next door. On the weekend it'll just be her. She started out by sleeping at night on the couch. Then she claimed the recliner. When I got her up early she started coming to the bedroom, wanting to get in the bed. Last evening she suddenly jumped off the recliner and ran to the bedroom. When I checked she was lying beside Myrtle, my wife.

Thanks again for making it possible for her to be a part of our lives. Do you think it's possible God kept drawing you back to her cage? Blessings."

February 2, 2025 at 3:32 PM

Musing...

Our church has a Meals to Heal ministry which I tried to decline. But when Connie, the administrator, took my hand with both of hers and said, "David, let us help" my only reply could be in the affirmative. Every two weeks we are blessed with two baggies of frozen soup, cookies, a bread, and a casserole or similar dish. Saturday, I put the ham and beans out to thaw. "Hmmm, cornbread goes well with ham and beans. Muffins this time would be perfect." So, while the muffins baked, I thought I should take advantage of a hot oven; Oh yeah, brownie mix....just happen to have one box. And a can of cherry pie filling. Looked it up, a person suggested half a can in the mixing bowl and then when mix is in the pan, pour the rest over the mix. May I brag about it...it is absolutely delicious. Decadent even. A 9X13 pan is too big for us but we have neighbors who don't mind me sharing.

Continuing our journey into the unknowns of Alzheimer's Disease: After evening meal on 1/19, I ran the dish water for Myrtle, but she just looked at me. Okay, you can dry. Same response. As I looked at her, I thought a switch had flipped off. Since then, her cognitive abilities have steadily declined. And now, we're dealing with "sun downers" symptoms. This morning, our worship service closing song spoke of rising on eagle's wings to heaven, no more pain and sorrow, and I so wanted her to be able to rise to be with God and her family members and my family members who are now celebrating their new life. This afternoon I've been a little melancholy, even listening to Gaither music hasn't lifted me out of it. Trust is the key, and relying on God's grace for every day.

My Guideposts devotional book separates each month with a cover page containing a Bible verse. Yesterday it was: Walk in love, as Christ has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. Eph. 5:2 (NKJV) Something to think about.

Blessings, Y'all.

David

February 12, 2025

I've decided that the two main qualities of a care giver are probably compassion and patience. As I direct my wife in dressing and help her in the actual process, I sometimes tell her that if the roles were reversed, she would be doing the same. I've also noticed that if we are someplace or if someone is here, she picks up some reserve from deep within to show a more positive attitude than is shown in our own home. Shows up at

church, also. Look up "Sundowners" sometime. In our house it begins at about 4:30ish, + or -. I'm thankful for the strength and reserve given to me by the Father; I also learned from my own parents and role models I admired all my life, some close and some at a distance.

Blessings, y'all.

David 🦋

February 16, 2025

Today, I put together beef vegetable soup, some left over some from a new can. Myrtle almost desperately wants to help. All her life she has wanted to be helpful; to her much of her worth is related to what she can do...and now she can't so she's "no longer any good." No matter how much she does alternate tasks related to a meal, it's not the same. The distress did not last long after we ate but it was there. The other day I was thinking of she and I becoming parents to my mom who lived next door. Now, I sometimes feel like a parent to my own wife. I tell her I am a servant/helper to her...she looked after me for many years. Today I hugged her and told her I enjoy serving her and reminded her that she chased (not literally) me out of the kitchen. It was her domain. Today in worship I heard her singing along to the praise songs, reading the words projected on the wall. They spoke of God's love to us. Wanting to still go to church is a good thing.

Later this week, unless the "uncontrollables" interfere, we hope to welcome her brother-in-law Arlen and his son Jim for a time with family. We haven't been anywhere for a long while, so we have not seen them recently. It'll be a great time. Arlen and I consider ourselves to be brothers through different parents.

Many times when asked how I am, I reply, "At my age any day I get up is a great day."

Blessings, Y'all.

David

February 19, 2025

Musing:

This morning at breakfast, Myrtle looked at me and asked, "How did you get this job?" "What job is that?" I replied. "Taking care of all of us" By "us" she was referring to her, our dog and neighbors' dog who stays with us on workdays. I said something like "someone needed to do it." Hopefully most days I get to be by myself for a while so I can get everything ready. I like my routine so if she gets up early, I have to vary the

routine. God is good...with His help I have learned how to deal with our lives without getting overly tired.

Blessings, y'all.

David

February 22, 2025

Musing:

*A few days ago, I mentioned that Myrtle's brother-in-law and his son Jim were coming to be with us Thursday afternoon and Friday, with a family get together Friday evening. They came, we visited a lot, and we got together. A total of 18 of us in our home. Fun time. Some good interaction between Myrtle and the family. She did well until she just wore out; she crashed on the couch, and I stayed by her side. As they left everyone leaned down to give her a hug. I think one of the side benefits for the family was to see the downside. When family comes, she has a positive outlook and gives off the "doing fine" or "okay" answer when she is asked. Last night some saw me leading her hand in hand to the couch and heard her asking, "Where is David?" I had stood up to hug others as they were leaving. When I sat on the couch arm and took her hand, she asked, "Can you take me home." That question is asked at least once a day. This morning, she woke up cheerful. Actually, she dreads get togethers but is happy they happen once people are here. I'm thankful she has a happy memory of last evening even though it might not last more than a couple of days. Thanks to everyone who made last evening possible.

God is good.

Blessings, ya'll.

David

March 9, 2025

I was overwhelmed with your responses. Thank you so much.

Just thinking about (Some difficult musing):

In our journey with Alzheimer's Disease, we were not accepted into hospice in December. That was a disappointment, but I understood why. They were honest in telling us that they don't fudge the guidelines when evaluating new patients. There had been enough change lately, at least in my mind, that I thought Myrtle might qualify.

Two weeks ago, she qualified, not because of her cognitive or physical decline; she qualifies because of nutritional/weight loss.

Those of you close to us over the years may remember her weighing somewhere around 125, dressed. Then she cut down several months ago - maybe a year, on the amount she was eating. Now she's 101 dressed, under 100, not dressed. One day when I was outside, she came out to the back patio. Seeing her side profile I was shocked by her haggardness. When I help her dress or shower, it's sad all over again. She's beginning to take smaller portions again. And she sleeps a lot. Today we watched church on Facebook, but she slept through it. Last night she was up a few times, so the sleep was needed.

We have the nicest team working with us. The first week was tiring but we met her nurse, temporary social worker and chaplain. Friday afternoon a volunteer came while I went grocery shopping. The chaplain brought a blanket made by a volunteer and a pan of frozen poppy seed chicken casserole made by volunteers. Yesterday, she received an encouraging crafted card from another volunteer.

If you're a praying person, please remember her in your prayers. Sometimes when it is appropriate, I will talk to her about going to heaven and how great that will be for her as she experiences complete healing. I know it will be hard when she leaves us, but I believe most of the family will rejoice with her.

Today the congregation sang "I Speak Jesus." It spoke to me. If you're interested, look up the lyrics.

Sorry for the lengthy post. I've been putting it off, not really wanting to share but knowing there's value for me in sharing and for some of you in the reading.

Blessings, Y'all.

David

March 10, 2025

After breakfast this morning Myrtle said to me, "When do you get to do what you want to do?" I told her our friend Rita comes over some mornings during the week so I can go to the Y.

While making the bed together, she said "I hope that people who can do things appreciate it."

I thought she had great insight in the midst of her struggles.

Thankful for the blessings.

David

March 18, 2025

It seems as though writing about our journey with Alzheimer's gets harder as time goes on. I'm not really sure why. I think about it. The process becomes harder for both of us. Myrtle with her decline and me trying to make the best of what is happening. When I get impatient and sometimes a little more adamant in asking her cooperation, I feel badly and tell her I'm sorry. When she sleeps it's a blessing for both of us. She sleeps more and more which is a normal part of the journey. Normally she eats her dry cereal and goes back to sleep, usually on the couch. This morning, she told me I should take the dogs for their walk. She slept while we were gone. Sometimes the dogs don't get their walk.

After breakfast Sunday morning, just before I helped her with her shower, she asked, "Will I be like this the rest of my life?" Later, "I don't want to live the rest of my life like this." During the morning sometime, "Am I imagining this or is it for real." During the day she told me she was sorry for the trouble she causes me and thank you for your help.

Our rescue senior dog is a blessing for her. Lexi is like an intuitive emotional support dog. Myrtle calls her "my baby." I believe God used what happened to Lexi to bring her to us.

Of course we don't know the future; we place it in God's hands. Our hope is in the promises God has made to His children.

Blessings.
David

March 25, 2025

Sunday evening Myrtle went to bed around 8 p.m. During meals she ate very little. Monday morning, she slept until about 10:45ish. When I went into the room she held out her hand, I took it and leaned down to be close to her.

She looked at me and said, "You be good now." My reply was "Why start now?" A slight smile. And then we started talking about various subjects. Heaven, won't that be a wonderful place to be. You'll be surrounded by our families and friends who are there. I didn't mention her parents because to her they are not deceased, She remembered Grandma Dokken who was one of the finest Christians I've ever known. Her Mom's mother, Grandma Almaas. Aunts and uncles, all there. This led to me lead out with old hymns like "We'll Soon be Done" and her singing along with me. While I was writing down titles, she asked what I was doing. "Songs for your service," I said. "I'm not going yet." "We all should be prepared for our service," I replied. Smile.

Back to sleep. A long moment of lucid conservation which I will treasure for the rest of my life. And then she slept into the afternoon. Today, we're back to our normal days of Alzheimer's.

April 2, 2025

I guess I'm just not ready yet. I will say that today I woke up not still tired. Lexie (dog) and Rusty the cat who adopted us have been sleeping with me. Lexi on Myrtle's side and the Rusty by my side. I'm very thankful for their presence and Rusty's antics. We also watch Jack during the day for next door neighbors. How long will I say "We?" God is good and I thank him for being with us throughout this journey.

I promise more of the journey because I have some special things to share with you. And I will go through your responses. I promise.

Blessings. Hug someone today.

David

"Now She's Free"

4/5/25

Thank you all for the wonderful comments. Today I knew in my heart I needed to go to the comments. You have blessed me in my grieving. My love goes out to each of you also. Blessings to you all.

I realize it's been a while since I've posted anything here.

My wonderful wife died 3/28 at 5:30 p.m. I'll be posting more later, but I would like for you to know that you can find her obituary on the Affinity All Faiths Mortuary website. As you read it think of it as titled, "Now She's Free."

Blessings. Give the one you love an extra hug.

David

Musing on an April 20, 2025 Easter Sunday evening:

I'm reflecting on four moments in time as they relate to Myrtle's death.

The first one, the week of her death, occurs as she is lying on the couch. We had a few minutes to reflect on what it would be like to enter heaven's doors. If you're led by a light, follow the light into God's presence, and enjoy the presence of all of your families and friends. Maybe you and Ruthie (her sister) will begin to sing together. We quoted Psalm 23 and the Lord's Prayer. And, then that moment was done.

On Wednesday morning, we both woke up at 12:47 to go to the bathroom. Back in bed, I realized she was talking softly. At first, I thought she was talking to one of the many people who lived in her head. But then I heard the word, "suffering." I knew she was praying. When she said, "Amen," I prayed. Then we sang. Both of us leading out with one of our old favorites. "Precious Lord." "Because He Lives." "His Eye Is on the Sparrow." And many others. Psalm 23 by memory. The Lord's Prayer. Her favorite verse, Philippians 1:6. The faith verse. Singing and praying were happening. In one of her prayers, the old chorus, "Come into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today, come into stay. Come into my heart I pray." Our God-given moment/window lasted about two hours. Then it was done. For her it was gone. But those two Spirit-filled hours were a blessed time.

Then in a brief time on Thursday, I was sitting on the edge of the hospital bed when I noticed clarity. ME: I'm going to keep that sweatshirt you're wearing, the blue Princes Cruises shirt from our 50th Anniversary. SHE: You can. ME: And I'm going to keep your blue Grandma shirt; the one Kim and Philip gave you when they gave us shirts at Christmas to announce that they were expecting. SHE: You can. A wreath hangs on our front door with an image of a vintage trailer in the center. The door was open at an angle where she could see it. ME: And I'm going to buy a vintage trailer like that and the dog, cat and I are going to travel. SHE: You can do that. That was permission to do what I thought we could do after buying a 2018 Dodge Ram several years ago. She shot that down: SHE: I never wanted to do that.

On the day of her death, I noticed a couple of times that her eyes opened into what I thought were blank stares toward the ceiling. Then, that early evening, surrounded by loving family, she with no struggle, quietly and peacefully transitioned into her Eternal Home. Reflecting on it the next day, the thought came to me: Were those really blank-eyed wide-open stares?

Blessings, my friends. My heart is full of love, and as I stand by her side in some future time, I hope you will share with us Myrtle's destination, Heaven.

David

P. S. We must not forget the hymn, Surely Goodness and Mercy that was sung off and on during that two-hour window.

May 11, 2025

Today was the second holiday without Myrtle. I felt this one more than Easter. I used to tell Myrtle, Happy Mother's Day. "I'm not your mother," she would say. To which I would say that she's "the mother of our three sons."

It's common knowledge that the first year of holidays and special days are the hardest. I'm now experiencing this. Lexi and I drove out to the cemetery for the first time since Myrtle was buried. Yes, I talked to her. Told her, "I love you" and "I miss you." Asked if we have a fourth child in heaven, the one we lost early in the pregnancy between John and Mark. I like to think so. Told her we're doing okay. I also just stood there looking at the so far, unmarked grave.

Coming home to an empty house today and last week after church have been times of loneliness. Especially eating alone. I'm just being honest as I want to share some of my new journey as it relates to the death of a loved one.

I do plan to share from Myrtle's service, probably this week.

Blessings.

David

Thinking about the day of Myrtle's celebration of life service:

May 14, 2025

Now that some time has passed since Myrtle's services, please allow me to share with you some of my reflections on the day.

I went to the church early to place items related to the service in their places. There was some comfort in doing that, yet there was some anxiety also. Our church secretary was very helpful and the support of the ones in the kitchen getting ready for the luncheon was great. Of course, there were hugs involved and words of support. Those involved in the service know us and I felt and heard their support.

During the eulogy, I shared some of my reflections on our lives together as we began our lives together and as we became parents of three sons.

Myrtle preferred stability and structure; as a child living in a pastor's family, she moved several times. She didn't like moving but she made close friends in most of the places where they lived.

As a child she learned early the value of frugality. When I took over shopping, she told me I spent more at the grocery store than what she had.

Family was important, our own, immediate family and both of our extended families. She took pleasure in family.

Hospitality was a gift. By her presence, she made others feel comfortable around her. She did not brag about her work, but there was a quiet pride at having done a job well. She became on her own a great cook and wonderful baker.

Special needs students held a special place in her life when she became a para educator.

Music was her happy place. She never admitted it, but she excelled in vocal music. She claimed she only played the piano well enough to play church hymns.

When you became one of Myrtle's good friends, you were a friend for life.

I also shared that at times she wondered if she was good enough that God would love her. When she found Philippians 1:6 she had her answer. It became her favorite verse.

One woman said to me, "She (Myrtle) is the reason I am who I am today." And she explained why to me. At the graveside, one of our daughters-in-law shared that she asked God to show her a sign that Myrtle was in heaven. Immediately, she realized she didn't need a sign. She knew Myrtle was in heaven.

Thank you for sharing some of our journey.

I know that some of you have told me it's been helpful to you. Give God the glory for that.

May 26, 2025

Just thinking:

The other day, the "paint lady" in our Ace Hardware asked, "How are you?" I was ready with my usual bland, upbeat reply when, prompted by an inner thought, or maybe the Holy Spirit, I replied, "Do you really want to know?" She: Yes. Me: I'm exhausted. What followed was a productive sharing of stories, her loss of her mom and my loss. Later on, she said she saw how tired I was the first time I came into the store. And...now we have a friendship. Imagine that!

The morning after Myrtle died, I was walking through the living room when the thought came, "I can just go to Walmart." Or walk the dogs. The day before, the relief I felt was because Myrtle wasn't suffering anymore. The relief I felt on Saturday was different but almost unnerving, it was a freedom, but I wasn't sure I was ready for that freedom. Sometimes, I'm still not sure.

One thing I know, grief has no timetable, no set formulas or steps. Right now, inside, I'm going through a lingering feeling of loss and sadness. Unless you know me well, and if I'm not sure I want to talk about it (church yesterday), I may appear to have it all together. No offense, at times probably most of us have appeared to be what we're really not (does that make sense?). I do know God is with us and he will continue to be with us.

The decision to take care of Myrtle until the end was not made lightly. In fact, I still have the application form for Medicaid given to me when I was at wit's end early on, given to me at Homestead Health Center when I thought I might need it.

With the help of Harry Hynes Hospice, the goal of taking care of Myrtle until she transitioned into Heaven was accomplished. I was impressed with the staff and their care of us.

What did I learn? Faith (including church), family and friends are all important. I should've listened to advice from others to take some time off, like three for four days at a time, even if I would've had to ask for help or pay for it. If you're a primary caregiver, please remember that.

It takes a certain kind of person to be a primary caregiver. I can't describe it, but I knew in my heart I was one of those.

I thank God for all of you who have responded and offered prayers and support. Thank you for sharing our journey.

Blessings, y'all.

David

PS... The jury is still out on whether or not the dog, the cat and I acquire a travel trailer and go off on adventures together. LOL

May 28, 2025

More of the journey:

After my last update, I thought I was done sharing but bear with me. If you want to travel along through my sporadic posts, welcome.

Memorial Day afternoon was pleasant. I was conflicted about not having a bouquet of artificial flowers. My frugal wife would've said it's not necessary, they don't know. But I went, knowing I needed the visit. I talked to her, as I had on Mothers' Day. I miss you. I love you. I stood and reflected and talked and missed her and loved her. Then I went home.

At home were the dog and cat and Teresa's dog, Cooper. Teresa's a former daughter-in-law, still a good friend. She texted she hoped to be here about 4. She had been with friends on a crafting vacation. It was 3:30, so I sat on the couch to rest. During the dozing sleep that came over me, I saw Myrtle standing in front of me. Not saying anything, just a comforting presence. And then she was gone. It was enough.

Blessings.

David

May 29·

Tuesday morning blindside:

Not expecting anything unusual, I decided to get some sweatpants out of the storage area above my half of the closet. Three pairs later, I decided they should be washed as it's been "years" since they've been worn. One was Myrtle's, given to her "several" years ago. I don't wear a "S" so I'm sure she stashed it there. Maybe forgetting it was hers. Her clothes and some of mine are going to a church's free clothing ministry in our neighborhood.

Then I thought I should check her storage area. Did I say she was a stasher? What was inside a small box and a little larger cardboard box got to me. Inside the small box were several hankies and a thank you note sent by John in the mid-1990's. That was before texting. Knowing Myrtle had saved it with hankies from one of our mothers made me somewhat sentimental.

In the next box she had saved "Baby's First Christmas" stocking and three early-in-life shirts John had worn. One was probably given to him by my parents as it had a Mexico flair. Probably purchased by them for John on one of their trips. Underneath was a handkerchief with an envelope in the fold. The letter was from her dad's mom, Grandma Dokken. Dated in 1959. She asked Myrtle how she was getting along with David. We were dating in 1959. (Grandma Dokken became one of my favorite people of all time.) Grandma wanted Myrtle to have this handkerchief as Myrtle was the only grandchild who could remember Grandpa. The hanky had been given to him by his dad in Norway. I have no recollection of having ever seen it. Now, I'm getting emotional.

The next jolt came by way of one of our daughter-in-law's dad. Ron had sent a picture through Facebook Message: "Amy Grant Asks Bart To Perform His Song' Scene | I Can Only Imagine. YouTube."

If you know the song you may have personalized it. But Myrtle is there now and that's how I heard and interpreted it. Now I'm on the verge of sobbing and in just a few minutes I want to be at a lunch with some other seniors from our church. I made it. I loved the song; I believe God prompted Ron to send it on.

I'm sure as I find other stashes, it'll get easier to go through them. Part of the process is doing these kinds of things. And writing less and less about it. I promise. Maybe.

Blessings, y'all. Love you.

David

June 4, 2025

Miscellaneous thoughts since Myrtle's passing:

I talk to myself a lot. I used to do that mostly at the computer.

I should not buy milk by the gallon. Ice cream, yes.

I recently had to discard bacon and sausage, that hurt.

I'm glad God sent Lexi (dog) and Rusty (cat) our way. They're great company. Rusty is young, I'm not used to young cats and their zoomies and quirks. He has been in the garage rafters twice in the past week. Threats don't work. But...Is there anything nicer than a dog next to me and the cat in my lap purring loudly?

Speaking of company, sometimes I can almost strike almost, feel a presence near me some evenings as we're relaxing in the living room. And then it's gone.

I went to Myrtle's grave on Mother's Day and Memorial Day. Yes, I talked to her both times. And, yes, it is comforting. And, yes, I used to think I would not do something like that.

Sundays are the loneliest day of the week, especially Sunday afternoon.

I didn't know I would still be so tired in the evenings.

At my age, every morning I get up is a great day.

Blessings. Stay safe in these current weather events. We did not have flooding where I live in Wichita. I am blessed.

Love you.

David



June 14, 2025

Musings beginning last Sunday, June 8:

It took me a little while, but last Sunday I realized the pastor was not there. I looked inside the bulletin for the sermon title, "Lessons from the Strawberry Patch." Interesting title, I thought. Hope it's not a video to replace the pastor today...well, that's the gist of my thinking...not verbatim.

When Aubrey went from the praise team to the speaker's stand (we don't use a pulpit), I was pleasantly surprised. Aubrey is a very talented person, very involved in the church. We're also good friends so I was looking forward to what she would say to us.

Several years ago, she and the children visited a strawberry patch. They had two choices, a well-tilled, weed free row or a row cluttered with weeds. They chose the row most of us would've, weed free and easy picking. So did previous pickers. They needed to switch over to the weed infested row. Their surprise came as they realized those strawberries were larger and they were more numerous. Adversity was beneficial. Roman's 5:3-5.

Now, Aubrey's talking to me. I know about that...I've preached about it. But I needed it now.

After a while she moved into the importance of allowing others to help us as we deal with the challenges. As she talked and referred to Scripture, she told us Lora Jones's story of losing her husband, son and daughter in a car crash. Aubrey's involvement was as a trauma nurse and, later, as a friend. She's talking to me again. I like people; sometimes I don't let those who care for me into the process of healing. I know better.

After the service, I'm not sure which one of us reached for a hug first, but she assured me she cared about me (not necessarily in those words) and I expressed the same. Then she asked me if I was a reader. Me: Yes. She: I want you to read this book. "Song of a Wounded Heart..." by Lora Jones.

Tuesday night or Wednesday night I finished it. It was hard...sometimes I had to take a break. It was emotional and heartbreaking...sometimes I cried inside or overtly. It was challenging...lessons I need for me and in helping others. And I did underline, with permission.

Page 129: "Healing is allowing joy to enter a heart of pain." Me: Allow them to coexist. It's not a promise that one will be healed soon, but I look at it as gradual, and it may take years before one feels a sense of healing. I recommend the book.

Thank you, Aubrey. Thank you, caring friends. Thank you for sharing your own journeys with me.

Much love.

Blessings.

David

June 15, 2025

Musing:

I didn't see this coming. Since Myrtle died, I have not sat in the church pew where we normally sat for many years. Today, I handed out folders at the front door until after the children left for children's church. As I stood at the back, I saw I had several choices, including "our" spot. Then the hesitation set in. Go sit there. No, it's too soon. You need to. W..e..l..l..... Just go. It was a good choice. I even sang along with the songs.

A week from today, I'm scheduled to be at Vespers at Prairie Homestead. For many years Myrtle and I were a team. She played the piano and led the singing as long as she could. And then she led the singing as long as she could. Then she attended as long as she felt comfortable. And then I kept on as long as I felt comfortable leaving her at home. And then we both stayed home. Now, I need to do this. I will be among people who understand and loved us. Several walked this journey before we did.

It's freeing to return.

It's also freeing to include you in this journey; again, many you have walked this journey and some of you are now walking it. God bless you.

In Christ's love,
David

July 10, 2025

Musings: Thinking about some of the things I've learned and continue to learn about the journey Myrtle and I took through dementia and Alzheimer's. They're random thoughts.

*A caregiver needs to trust God and do all things in love (1 Corinthians 16;14).

*Ask for help. Family, friends and even people one may not be well acquainted with are willing to help. They will not know how to help unless the caregiver tells them. Several women sat with Myrtle while I went to appointments, even when I went to Kiwanis once and to the YMCA several times. After Myrtle's death and when the people associated with death had left and her body had been taken away, the sons, two daughters-in-law and I were sitting in the living room, talking about related concerns when someone told me, "You have to tell us when you need help." I admitted that I'm not very good at that: there might be some pride involved and even some stubbornness. John said, "So, that's where we got it."

*Be willing to share your journey. I think I first shared it with my Kiwanis Club. I also shared it with friends at the Y. When the time was getting shorter, I shared with someone before church and before the service started the news had spread. A few people had noticed, mostly through interaction with Myrtle but they seemed to know we weren't

ready. I'm sure some of that was related to Myrtle's introversion. When it's comfortable to share, do so.

*Perseverance, being positive and having patience are important.

*Consider caregiving as service. When Myrtle would thank me, usually before going off to sleep, for taking care of her, I would remind her that she had been of service to me over the years.

*Don't be afraid to share the memories.

*Accept the people, in Myrtle's case most of them had died, who lived in her head. I learned I had to accept that to her, they were alive.

*Take time off. I didn't. Myrtle knew me throughout the journey. Except for that one time early on. Sometimes there were two me which became confusing. I learned not to question it. In the back of my mind was the thought that if I took time off, she might not remember me when I got back. In retrospect, I should've taken an R&R break.

*Everybody's experience is different. Sometimes situations are such that the loved one needs to be in a place where care is needed full time. Myrtle did not wander, some do. She was mostly compliant and docile. I was fortunate that I could take care of her. Harry Hynes Hospice was only needed for about five weeks. Hospice is wonderful.

*I've mentioned a book by Lora Jones, "Song of a Wounded Heart," which was loaned to me by an intuitive friend. In it, God impressed upon Lora that "Healing is allowing joy to enter a heart of pain."

*The other day while walking the dog, I stopped to visit (imagine that) a friend who was out in her yard. I don't remember the exact phrasing, but she essentially said I was looking better than before. It was a wholeness she hadn't seen for a while. At least that's the way I understood it. I think it's because I'm allowing joy to enter my heart which allows healing to come.

This is it for now.

Blessings and love, y'all.

August 2, 2025

Thinking about:

This month I'll be going to visit some of Myrtle's relatives in MN. As I started thinking about the trip and how I would enjoy it, the thought came that I would be coming home to an empty house. I've taken trips before for various reasons, but I knew I would be coming home to my loved one.

I had already mulled around in my head about how I might feel eating by myself the first time in a sit-down restaurant. Maybe I'll do this on the trip...that's not cheating, is it?

I know it's necessary as part of the healing process, but I'm not looking forward to it.

Otherwise, I try to keep up the positive thoughts as much as possible and give praise to God for what comes my way.

Blessings.

David

August 17, 2025

Recently I told you of my anticipated trip to MN. For security reasons, I don't post actual dates when I plan to leave town for trips.

I'm back after leaving on 8/10 and getting home on 8/16. I had mentioned the concern of coming home to an empty house and also the concern of the first meal at a sit-down restaurant. Friend Louise replied to my post, "You and Jesus got this" or maybe it was "Jesus and you..." She was right... not a hitch. Thank you, Louise. Visiting some of Myrtle's family and our long-time friends was a blessing. Some are experiencing their own concerns.

It's time to bring the recounting of our journey to a close. There's not much to add that will help others. The journey will not close for me, but Jesus and I got this, even though sometimes will be harder than others.

I have one addition to the retelling of the experience related to the young man who was welcomed back in the Gaither video. I told you of crying over that scene. I didn't tell you the rest of the story. I knew my crying was leading up to sobs, so I went to bathroom to sob in private. And I did, almost sobbing violently. Myrtle came, reversed roles and tried to comfort me: She: What's wrong. Me: I hate Alzheimer's. I hate what it's doing to you. I hate that it's going to take you from me...and then I'll be alone. She: Maybe we should pray to die together. Me: I have to be here. There'll be too much to do after you leave. I can't leave. She seemed to accept that, and we both went back to the living room. Why did I not share this at the same time as the other? I don't know.

Thank you for walking the journey with us and then with me. May God bless you in your journeys.

Blessings, friends. Love you.

David

9/13/25

Two or more thoughts from our Journey:

After my vacation in MN, I've had many friends comment that if I made the trip there by myself, I'm sure they're referring to my youngish 83 years, I should take more trips. One trip I'd like to make would be to Florida sometime this winter season, after Easter and before Spring Break. Beaches don't interest me anymore; I've had too many skin pre-cancers removed and actual cancers (one Melanoma close to the skin surface and one MOHS). Myrtle has a first cousin and her husband who live in Auburndale. A few miles west, a niece on my side and her family live in Lakeland and good friends live on the beach near Tampa. Figuring out the logistics is my next hurdle.

Following my trip, it was another week before I mowed the lawn; when I was in the front yard, two times I felt like Myrtle was looking at me from the front window, concerned that I was working too hard. Recently we were on the receiving end of hard winds and hail. A large oak tree dominates the front of the yard. So, from my yard and from neighbors across the street, the front and side yard of my lawn was covered in twigs, enough that I was raking and picking up all afternoon one day and for an hour or so before I mowed a couple of days later. While in the front yard the first afternoon of cleaning up, I had this feeling that Myrtle was going to call to me that "it's almost time to eat."

On Labor Day afternoon, Kim, Justin and Carolyn were here. While showing them some jewelry in one of Myrtle's jewelry boxes, I came across a friendship bracelet that I do not remember ever seeing. On it was inscribed "5 - 22 - 58," That would have been the week before her family moved from Viking, MN to McPherson, KS. She talked about her best friend from there...her friend was in our wedding party. Today, I looked in our Album...her name was Lois T... Now I have some searching to do.

The journey continues. God is good. I'm blessed by having a great network of friends.

Blessings.

David

Now You're Free

October 13, 1943, Myrtle J. Dokken was born to Pastor Justin and Hazel Dokken in Malta, MT. As a "preacher's kid," Myrtle lived in several communities in Minnesota and Wisconsin before her dad's call took them to McPherson KS.

It was there she met the love of her life as she and David Anders began dating, she a sophomore and he a junior. She from Minnesota, he from southern Texas. In June of 1963 they married in the Evangelical Covenant Church in McPherson, KS.

She was a wonderful mother to John, Mark and Philip and mother-in-law to Keri, Kim and Kim. She was a hands-on grandmother to Bret, Eric, Lakyn, Ean, Kensie, Justin and Carolyn and great grandmother to Alec and Everly.



Myrtle's faith was the foundation of her life. She trusted Jesus as her Savior early in life and lived out that faith with integrity and quietness. Church music and involvement in music and other church activities gave her a way of praising her Savior.

She enjoyed family celebrations, daily, long walks, tending to plants, crocheting and caring for the animals that came into their home. And the color pink!

After struggling with dementia and dementia-related Alzheimer's Disease for many years, Myrtle quietly and peacefully made the transition from this life into the presence of her beloved Savior on March 28, 2025, as her family surrounded her. She entered Heaven as she lived, quietly and humbly.

One of her daughters-in-law said of Myrtle: *You were exceptional, Myrtle, and we are fortunate to have shared our lives with you. You were genuine and you possessed the kindest of all hearts. Your memories will live forever in our hearts. We love you, Myrtle, and we will miss you.*



Did I mention she loved her Savior, her family, friends and the color pink? She would've been embarrassed by all this attention. Close friends have told us of the legacy she left in their lives. Now, you're free, Myrtle.

Myrtle's family wishes to express our "thank you" to all who have supported us in our journey with her through the ordeal of dementia related to Alzheimer's Disease. In a sudden, self-revealing moment, David expressed it this way to someone, "All who have supported us in some way, have been our companions on this journey. To our family, friends, church family, Harry Hynes Hospice, and even strangers, we say "Thank you. May God bless you."

(The above is from Myrtle's Celebration of Life folder)