

Northwest Independent Writers Association  
2025 Anthology :: Journey

Available on Amazon

**RIDE TO REDEMPTION**

by Joel Curtis Graves

“He wants to do what!” I couldn’t hide the exasperation in my voice.

“Billy, he wants to go home.”

“That’s impossible.” To be sure she understood, I rephrased it, with emphasis. “Utterly inconceivable.”

“But why?” It’s like she didn’t hear a word I said.

“Where do I start? The bag drip with some kind of medication in it. He’s on what—twenty different drugs? He’s way overweight. He’s always been a demanding S.O.B., and he’s become absolutely impossible to be around. Oh, and here’s the best reason, he’s incontinent!”

The frown slowly disappeared as a mischievous grin started at her mouth and moved up to her eyes. “Imagine the stories you’ll have,” she said, a twinkle in her eye. “You’ll say, why, when we crossed the bridge into Portland, he blew out his tifty-whities, crapped all over the car, even in the air vents, and we had to call the local hazmat team to clean up the mess!”

“What? You think he’s riding in my new Camry? I don’t think so,” I announced firmly. “If he’s going anywhere, he should be transported in an ambulance.”

“From here it would be two days.”

I shook my head, hands on hips. “Two days of pure hell on earth. Just being around him raises my blood pressure. If I have to be with him all day, I’ll have a stroke or heart attack by the time we get to Grants Pass!”

“Does Dobby need master to give him a sock?” The *Harry Potter* reference made the left side of my mouth pull up in a half smile. A sock freed Dobby from Lucius Malfoy’s cruel servitude. She didn’t say anything for a count of ten, and I didn’t feel like I had to fill the silence. “But you do have higher blood pressure around him, that’s well documented.”

“Thank you for that, if Dad’s sock will really free me from him.”

“He knows how to push your buttons.”

I sighed out a long breath. Very true. He always had. To me, he was a big bully. He didn’t just push my buttons, he pounded them. Beat them. And like a cowed dog, I returned, and came home, over and over. Why did I do that? I wasn’t sure if I loved him or not. Maybe it was what some people called a love-hate relationship. I tried to be forgiving and love him, despite the verbal and emotional beatings. But our relationship just never quite worked. Although I lived thirty miles away and visited once a week, he had not told me about this trip idea.

My shoulders sagged. I felt myself caving in. “You’ll come with us?”

“I have to get back to work. Physically. In person. In Chicago.”

I looked over at her laptop, open on the dining room table. She was a successful attorney, and despite coming out here to be with dad in his final days, she still managed to put in long hours with the firm—her firm.

I sat in the bar chair and put my head on my folded arms. Damn. Without looking up, speaking into my arms, I said, “What do the doctors say?”

“He’s on palliative care, honey. They think it’s a good idea. For some reason, he believes he needs to make the trip, perhaps a sense of closure or something.”

I felt trapped. Being around him really did raise my blood pressure. After Mom died, I spent a month with him. One day, Dad and I stopped at Costco for gas, and when I stepped out of the car I almost fell over. I drove over to the nearby hospital emergency room and they said my blood pressure was 240 over 120. Alarmingly high. They gave me something. As we sat there, it slowly came down. I left for four days to visit some friends nearby, and in one day my blood pressure dropped to 135 over 65—normal for me, and stayed there until I went back to Dad, then it shot back up.

So yeah, being around him raises my blood pressure. He's killing me. Always has. And now Clair wants me to spend more time with him—days. Does she think I'm suicidal?

Without raising my head, I turned back to her. "Why does he want to go to Bakersfield?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "He was—vague."

I frowned. More secrets. More deception. More stress.

"Bill, I talked to Dr. Johnson. Dad only needs a few pills to keep him comfortable."

"I'll talk to her." I turned and looked out the window at the meadow and the tree line beyond. A bank of fog was creeping up the hill from Puget Sound. "If we are going to do this, we should leave Saturday morning. Stay the first night in Ashland or Redding."

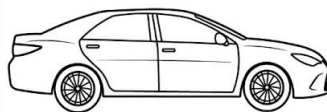
She smiled, then suddenly leaned in and hugged me, laying a brief kiss on my cheek. "Billy, God will reward you in heaven."

"Would be nice if the old gentleman rewarded me here."

"Snarky."

I sat up. "Yeah. All of this is certainly bringing out the snark in me." It was my way of dealing with the infeasibility and absurdity of

the situation, the unimaginableness of the wretched task developing before me.



I wanted to leave earlier, had set up an 8 a.m. departure with the skilled nursing facility, but we didn't even get him into the car until nine.

"I can get it," he announced irritably. He couldn't. But he reached to the left with the seatbelt latch plate silver tip, trying to find the buckle receiver, poking and prodding all around without actually getting it into the hole.

"Here, let me help you with that."

"No!" he shouted. "I can get it."

The nurse frowned at me and huffed knowingly, then turned, pushing the wheelchair back into the facility. Dad continued floundering around. I closed his door and got into the car.

"Dad, your jacket is in the way."

"I can get it." The exasperation in his voice was overshadowed by the fact that he was almost out of breath from the effort. He gave up, sitting there in frustration. "It's the shits getting old."

"I get it, Dad. I really do." I reached over from the driver's seat, grabbed the seat belt out of his hand and placed the end into the receiver. "I'm 71 for God's sake."

He twisted left, looking at me in mock surprise. "Yeah, you're old." He huffed a laugh.

I sat back in my seat, eyes closed, in a slow count to ten. He was trying to be funny. Ha, ha. I felt drained and we hadn't even started. We pulled away from the facility and in less than five minutes were on Interstate 5 southbound. Traffic was light.

"I don't like the nurses there," he began. "It's noisy and they keep the lights on, so I can't get into a deep sleep."

"Do they come into your room at night?"

"Not like at the hospital. No. Mostly, they leave me alone until morning, but I hear things. Julie is like a ray of goddamn sunshine. Always bursts into the room full of piss and vinegar, ready to help me "manage" my day, as she puts it."

"I know her. She's the one with the light auburn hair."

"Not a typical redhead, mind you. She doesn't have the temper you'd expect. I like Silvia the best. She's a dark brown Mexican and

works like a wetback, morning to night, slaves away. She makes sure I get extra chocolate pudding.”

“Dad, we don’t say wetback anymore, or anything else demeaning or belittling of people.”

“She don’t mind. She likes it.”

“I’ll bet she does,” I replied sarcastically.

As far back as I could remember, he had been a racist and regularly threw people different than him under the proverbial bus. When young, he bought into the idea of eugenics and thought white people were superior to everyone else. All his old friends believed the same, and they reinforced the behaviors typical of their group. Jokes were crass and disgusting, and only got worse after a half dozen cheap beers, or when off alone at deer camp. Early on I had divorced myself from that pattern of thinking, and to be stuck in the car with him as he ran down everyone different from him put my teeth on edge.

And he wouldn’t stop talking. It just went on and on and on. Neverending. He complained about the color of grass, too much rain and too much sunshine, everything. I’d make a noise now and then to suggest I was listening, but it really meant I was trapped in the goddamn car with him.

He announced, "I gotta pee."

We were south of Olympia.

"Hold on, Dad. There's a rest stop five miles ahead."

"I'll try," he said grinning. "No promises."

I sped up.

"At the rest stop, I found a spot close to the bathrooms, unlocked his seatbelt, and launched myself out of the car and around to assist him on the way.

"I got this!" he complained.

"I know you do, but let me help."

He forcefully pulled his right elbow out of my hand. "I've got this. Hand me my cane."

"Okay. Okay."

He tottered up the walkway. I held the men's room door open for him, and he made his way to the nearest urinal. He hung the cane on his left arm and began fiddling with his pants. I peed in the spot next to him, finished and washed up. He was still playing with his zipper.

"Need help?"

"I don't need any..." he sneered. "I've been doing this for over ninety years."

“Let me help.”

“Damn!” He huffed in irritation. “Okay.”

I reached over, pulled the pants down from below to straighten out the zipper, and eased the zipper down. I had no plans to reach inside. “There you go, Dad. Do the *Depends* have an opening for peeing outside?”

“What the hell do you think!” he growled. “Would I be trying to get it out otherwise?”

I sighed slowly in exasperation. “Of course not. I’ll wait by the door.”

He fumbled around for a minute. “Oh, shit.”

“What is it?” I said with some alarm.

“Didn’t make it in time.”

“No!”

“Yep, got the dingle half way out and off it went. Sorry, son.”

And then he farted.

“Oh, shit,” he announced again.

I didn’t realize for about five seconds, that it actually was *not* a curse. I wish I had the ability to reach out telepathically and jolt my sister—the high prophetess—with a powerful electric shock. To

suddenly force her to appear here, in this roadside bathroom, to experience my unfolding horror and witness her prediction coming true.

“Dad? Did you just shit yourself?”

He turned to me with a mischievous grin on his face.

“Oh, for the love of Pete.” Me, the decorated combat veteran, felt like weeping. I looked around. “Get into the handicap stall over there. Hurry, before someone comes in and gets it.”

He shuffled over to the stall. He giggled. “Good thing I’m wearing my *Depends*, huh?”

“Damn good thing. Otherwise, you’d be leaving a trail along the floor.” At least it didn’t happen in my car. Thank God for small miracles!

Once in the stall, he just stood there, looking helpless. Which, of course, he was. Damn him.

“First, let’s get that big jacket off you. And the sweater.” Those were not too hard. “Let’s unbuckle the belt, suspenders, and get the pants partway down. And the shoes. Good. Socks.”

“Socks?”

“Yes. Dad. Just in case. Sit down.” He sat and peed into the toilet.

I pulled off his socks.

“Okay, stand again. Good. Now let’s get the pants the rest of the way off.”

As I pulled his pants down, I noticed something. Now, a person might think wearing *Depends* was a blessing or an improvement on the unfolding situation, but you’d be wrong. Because the diarrhea, which I later learned was from a new medication, was coming up and over the top. I cursed in exasperation. How was I going to clean up all of this. I needed rubber gloves. I needed a NASA moon suit.

“What the hell is that smell?” someone complained outside the stall.

“Dad, do you have to go more?”

“Don’t think so. Not really.”

“Good. Stand for a second as I pull the diaper down, then sit back down on the toilet. I’ll clean you up from there.”

I pulled the *Depends* diaper down, smearing everything everywhere all down his legs, and off his feet. Good call that the socks were off. I held the disgusting thing in my left hand and opened the stall door. The janitor stood by the entryway with his yellow trash can

and implements on a cart. When he saw what I was holding, his jaw dropped.

“That’s the smell,” he declared.

“I could use a little help.”

“I’ll get a roll of paper towels,” he said. “And a bucket of warm water.” He opened a new, black plastic bag. “Drop *that* in here.”

I took the bag from him and went back to the stall.

“You doing okay, Dad?”

“It’s cold.”

“The janitor went to get more paper towels. Once I get you cleaned up, I’ll get a fresh pair of pants and a shirt out of your suitcase, and we’ll get you dressed again.”

Ninety minutes.

We were at the Maytown rest area for an hour and a half. The janitor proved to be an angel in disguise. He had helped take care of an aging uncle and was adept at situations like this. More importantly, he had medical gloves. We got Dad cleaned up, dressed and back in the car and onto the highway.

“I’m hungry.”

“Of course, you are,” I said, shaking my head. “Do you want fast food or a restaurant?”

“I need to pee, so a restaurant.”

I don’t know why he equated peeing with restaurants, but I pulled off the highway in Woodland and gassed up at the Safeway gas station. He was talking about the weather and how he had seen it change over the years. We found a restaurant nearby.

He peed at the restaurant without a problem, ordered coffee, and a hamburger with fries.

He held the hamburger in his hands and studied it. “Your mom made the best hamburgers.”

“She sure did. With all the fixings.” We agreed on that. “And her spaghetti with meatballs was magnificent.”

“When I married her, she couldn’t boil water. But the *Betty Crocker Cookbook* came out that year, and she started cooking by following the recipes.”

“Everything she cooked was amazing.”

“That’s why I’m so fat,” he lamented.

I didn’t say anything. Mom had been gone almost three years, so that wasn’t exactly true. He always ate and drank whatever he

wanted—period. He had no concept of “health food” or limiting quantities, or eating anything that would be good for him. He was an avid consumer and devoured whatever caught his eye—food, drink, people. That was how he had lived his life. Lately, his appetite had fallen off and he’d lost about thirty pounds. But by any medical standard or appearance, he would still be considered obese.

He slept until we neared Salem then sat up with a start. “You’re driving too fast. You know, you should support the economy and drive an American car, like a Ford or a Chevy.”

“Dad, this Camry was built in Georgetown, Kentucky. Can’t get any more American than that?”

“Well, it’s a Jap car, isn’t it? Just seems un-American somehow. Now take my old F-150, it was the best truck ever.”

He droned on about the various vehicles he’d owned over the years and the merits of each, while studying the passing farms and fields. Forests came into view on both sides of the freeway and his attention wandered. He talked at length about the merits of Trumpian conservative politics and my hands tightened on the steering wheel.

“You’re driving too fast.”

“Look, Dad. I’ve been driving for fifty-four years without one accident. And I drove the farm tractor before that.”

“I remember when you got your license. I didn’t think you’d get it on the first try.”

“I know. You told me when I got home.” One of many not-so-subtle verbal slaps in the face.

He looked at me. I could tell he was looking at me. I glanced at him then back to the road. “What?”

“I think I was too hard on you. You being the first and all. I had to learn.”

I had heard this pitiful tale before. How he had to *learn* to be a father. He admitted to making mistakes. So, when the other kids came along, he didn’t treat them the same. He tried to treat them better, which meant they were not beaten as often or as severely. It was like he was trying to justify a certain level of institutional child abuse. What else would you call it when a little nine-year old boy was spanked with a thin leather belt, pants down, then dropped into the bath tub where the water turned pink? Repeatedly. One thing was true: he had always been a hands-off father, to all of us. He never said I love you, or hugged us, or played games. He and I played chess until I beat him at thirteen

years old, then he put the game on the top shelf of the hall closet. Mom mostly raised us, as she was able, with four kids.

We learned to be self-sufficient, which in my case, proved to be a very good thing. I left home at seventeen—after a great argument with him—and made my way in the world, pretty much tackling every task that came my way as if it could be won, whether by brain or brawn. Clair was the same way, she was sixty-four now and still working, because she wanted to. I retired twelve years earlier at fifty-nine.

“And what did you learn, Dad? You said you had to learn. What did you learn?”

“You all have your own gifts. Your own talents. You each contribute to the world from what you have, and I think the world is a better place for it.”

I pursed my lips in thought. That made sense. He must have heard that on television; he never read. Which made me wonder, what was Dad’s gift to me? He was talking about something, but my mind kept rolling around a question. Did I get a gift from Dad? Was there at least one?

About Grants Pass, I had a eureka moment. “You made us go to church every Sunday, whether we wanted to or not. Eventually, I

found my faith there at fifteen years old. It informed my whole life, and I found my place in the Lutheran Church. That was your gift to me.”

I looked over at him. He was asleep. I took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. When I found my faith, I also learned to forgive. At the end of *The Lord’s Prayer*, it says, “You can’t get forgiveness from God if you refuse to forgive others.” I took that mandate to heart and forgave my father, out of faith—at first, not because I really desired to. In time, I felt it more. And told him so. But it didn’t change how he treated me. He always had an excuse.

Fortunately, Ashland was uneventful. We stayed at the Holiday Inn Express, ate at a nearby restaurant, and went back to the room. After we watched *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy!*, he rolled over and went to sleep. He got up at 11 p.m., 2 a.m., and 5 a.m.—I know. At five in the morning, he stayed up. He turned on the television to *Fox News*. Even though the volume was very low, it was loud enough to keep my attention.

“Good morning, Dad,” I murmured, shuffling to the bathroom.

“Morning.”

I had to look again. He was completely dressed, packed and ready to go. "The hotel breakfast starts at 6 a.m.," I said, walking past his bed.

I showered, taking my time. When I came out, he was sitting up in bed, back to the headboard, chin on chest, sleeping.

At 7 a.m. I roused him. "Time to go."

"Okay," he murmured.

We ate breakfast, and I made sure he took his three morning pills.

Ashland, up the Siskiyou, then down the hill to Redding. We stopped several times. I didn't realize it until after the second stop, that he didn't really have to pee. He just wanted to stop sitting. Take a break. Walk around. He pretended to pee, then wandered around the little park at each rest area. I guess he was resting in his own way.

For Dad, religion was a complicated matter. He believed that church attendance, asking for forgiveness and taking Holy Communion on Sunday, absolved him of all wrongdoing and sins. In that light, he could do whatever he wanted from Sunday afternoon until the following Sunday morning, because unconditional forgiveness was waiting, always. To me, it seemed like a Mafia mob

boss attending Sunday mass for forgiveness of his nefarious sins then ordering a hit on someone that afternoon.

He could talk religion for hours. The Episcopal Church had been good to him, in its own way, by providing that balance between his earthly affairs and his spiritual angst. Simply put, he feared God and going to hell. But the system he had found allowed him to live his own life, on his own terms, while preparing for the future—life after death—without drawbacks or consequences in his own mind. Very convenient. From 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on Sunday morning, he was as pious as a saint could be.

I wondered what God would think of all this. I wondered if God cared. I wondered if I really cared. On one level, I did. On another level, I didn't give a tinker's damn. Spirituality is both personal and corporate. How he worked out his faith in God was his business, and I knew my mental health needed to keep its distance from whatever worked for him. In a way, I felt a certain therapeutic benefit to figuring this out for myself, although my blood pressure at the hotel was 160 over 95. Elevated. But better than usual around him.

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, we breezed through Sacramento and turned onto Highway 99 south. Not far now.

I finally broached the question. "Dad, why do you want to go to Bakersfield?"

"To visit a few graves," he said without hesitation.

"Who? Mom?"

He looked at me, eyes narrowed and twitched his mouth. "Mom. My sisters Julie and Ruby. Aunt Gracie. Uncle Wilbur. Grandma Ann."

"That's two cemeteries."

"Yeah."

I wanted to probe more but held my questions. If I waited, I thought he would divulge the reason. But as Stockton passed by, he volunteered nothing more.

It was getting late. As we came into the outskirts of town, I said, "The first cemetery is only ten minutes away. Want to go there or straight to the hotel?"

"Cemetery." He leaned forward in his seat.

I pulled into the cemetery and we drove to the back. Dad had a hand-drawn map of each cemetery and where the graves were located. He shuffled along the headstones until he found Aunt Gracie and Uncle Wilbur.

"Wait here," he said sharply, pointing to a place on the ground.

I hovered nearby, maybe twenty feet away and wished I had bionic hearing. What was he saying? I caught *I'm sorry*. From there, we drove around to the north side of the cemetery, and he walked over to Grandma Ann's grave. I stood closer and again heard a quiet, *I'm sorry*. He looked all around the cemetery, then walked over to a tall pine tree and peed at the base. You could take the man out of the farm, but you couldn't take the farm out of the man.

Back in the car, we started for the hotel.

"Dad, what were you saying back there? What are you sorry about?"

He looked at me like I had shot his favorite dog. "You nosey son of a bitch! Can't I have any privacy?"

I was taken aback by the vehemence of his sharp reply, but not really. I frowned, shook my head dejectedly and stared straight ahead. More of the same. "Maybe you can take a cab to the other cemetery tomorrow." Let him chew on that, the mean bastard.

In our hotel room, I said, "Take a rest. We'll go to a restaurant in an hour or so."

He grunted and used the remote to turn on the television. He quickly found *Gunsmoke*. "In every episode, someone gets shot and killed. Every single episode."

We were going to eat out, but he started puking in the toilet, so we stayed in. He wanted a twelve-inch cheese pizza, but when it arrived, only ate one piece.

The next day, he slept in. We left the hotel at 9 a.m., skipped the hotel breakfast but stopped for his favorite coffee at *McDonald's* and drove to the next cemetery. His mom and two sisters, all next to each other.

This time I stayed in the car. He walked over to the graves and stood there for ten minutes. Occasionally, his head would bob up and down, and I knew he was talking to them. He turned toward the car, a deep sadness in his eyes. I got out and opened the door and helped him get in. I wanted to ask what was going on, but did not want my head bit off again.

"Want an early lunch or back to the hotel?"

"I don't care."

"Hotel it is."

As we pulled into the driveway of the hotel, he said, "I'm hungry."

Of course, he was.

"Lunch it is." I was used to this level of duplicity. We had passed a restaurant a few blocks back, so I turned around.

We sat in the booth. He ordered a hamburger and I ordered a chef salad.

He had a sour look on his face. "I guess I should tell you what this is all about."

"Only if you want to," I said, my face and tone purposefully neutral and remote.

He harumphed and I knew he was on the bubble about telling me anything. At this point, I didn't care and I think he sensed that, because I was looking at the weather app on my phone.

"Well, if you'll put that damn thing down for a minute, I'll tell you."

I never wondered where I got my snarky attitude from. I turned the phone over and leaned back. "Go ahead."

He swallowed, fiddling with his napkin. "I...when...when I was young, I thought my shit didn't stink." My right eyebrow shot up and I nodded knowingly. "I was an arrogant fool and didn't have an ounce

of patience. I don't think anyone ever told you how my younger sisters died." He paused, studying his hands on the table. He seemed to be gathering something—thoughts, words, courage? "I drove them to a high school party one night—Valentine's Day, it was. My friends and I were drinking a local moonshine. Well, you can guess what happened. On the way home, I missed a turn in the tule fog and the Pontiac rolled over three or four times. I was completely uninjured. But they were crushed. Died at the scene." He paused. "Mom wouldn't look at me. Her sister, my Aunt Gracie, and Uncle Wilbur cussed me out. I slapped Aunt Gracie, hard, knocking out a tooth. Uncle Wilbur came after me, and I beat him nearly to death; I was bigger than him. They never talked to me again. Everyone told me I was not welcome in that part of the country anymore, so before my sisters were even buried, I moved to Seattle. No phone calls. Never been back. Got a few formal letters from a lawyer that Grandma Ann dropped me from her will; I was supposed to get the family farm. At the nursing home I had a nursing assistant, John something, look up where the graves were in each cemetery and he drew the maps." He looked out the big window at the parking lot. "All of those people are dead now, of course, me living so long and all. Years later, I found the

church, or it found me, and I repented of my actions. I wanted to apologize to everyone, but they had all died.”

He covered his face with his hands, his shoulders shaking, and I realized he was crying. It was the first time in my life that I had seen tears in his eyes. I felt a tendril of compassion leak out of me, as if reaching toward him, but I was afraid to show it, lest he bat it away.

“Dad?”

“Damn!” He wiped furiously at his face. “Don’t know what came over me.”

“Dad? Have you ever told anyone this story before?”

He stared at me like I was a stranger, his eyes strangely out of focus, then shook himself and looked around until he spotted the waitress, holding up his coffee cup. “Over here!”

“So, you’re about to die and you want to get things straight with them before you depart this life.” I said it as a fact, not a question.

He turned from the window and looked at me, his face like flint. “Astute young man, you are. I always said you were the smartest of the bunch.”

The waitress came by with coffee. I added two cream containers to mine and sipped it.

“Do you feel better now?” I asked.

“What the hell difference does it make to you?” he quickly shot back.

“Easy there, cowboy. Has a weight been lifted from your shoulders?”

I think he was surprised I answered him back instead of retreating into my hurt and anger. His shoulders slumped.

He sat the coffee cup down, shaking, spilling some. “I think so. Yeah, I was wrong. Never thought you’d hear those words, did you?”

I gave him a half grin. Nope. Not in a thousand goddamn years.

“I was very wrong and regretted my actions all my life. Seemed like a good thing to visit them here and sort of clear the air between us.”

In Dad’s mind, the wound was as fresh today as the day it happened, and although they had all been dead for many years, did not make a difference at all. I wanted to say something comforting and clever, like I thought they understood, but kept my peace.

His hamburger came; he took one bite and put it down. He sipped his coffee and stared out the window. We had the hamburger boxed

up and went back to the hotel room. He watched *Golden Girls* and *Matlock*, napped, and then *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy!*, as usual.

Then he surprised me. “Bill, thanks for bringing me down here.” He reached toward me from where he sat with his back to the wall in the queen-sized bed, and I came out of my bed and leaned over, so he could take my hand. “I know it has been hard, and I really appreciate it.” He shook my hand a moment and let it go.

I sat in stunned silence. If the sickness and dying brought out a kindness and made him like this, I wished it had happened sooner and lasted longer. He rolled over. In five minutes, he was snoring lightly.

I watched television until ten then went to sleep, thinking about what we would do next—two days back to Seattle, stop at *Walmart* for more *Depends*, wet wipes, disinfectant, bucket, gloves, plastic bags. Call Clair.

In the morning, I got up just after six and went to the bathroom. When I came out, I turned on the bed light and immediately knew he was gone. I stood there for half a minute, then leaned over and picked up his left sock from the floor and held it tightly in my hand.

He had found peace in his soul in his final days; and in a sense, I felt like I had found a sense of reconciliation. That by understanding

his life a little better, it put some of his actions and attitudes in a better light, a clearer perspective. And that I had also come to a certain level of understanding about my own feelings, and could forgive myself, which had ended in something of a truce with him. At the end, it almost seemed like we were finally equals, and I would no longer be ashamed to call him father.

“The day the child realizes all adults are imperfect, he becomes and adolescent; the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult; and the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise.” Alden Nowlan.

THE END