

We took a trip early one summer, Uncle Art and Aunt Wilma, their five children, my cousins, and Mom and Dad, and the four of us, kids. We left Erie County in Ohio and traveled along the lake by the same name, through Erie county in Pennsylvania, and on up to Erie County in New York where the stench of chemical plants and refineries was etched in my brain. Then a little further to our destination, to Niagara Falls. I remember parading down the street, our laughter at comments on nine kids in one family when we were really two. I remember walking by a bar, then stopping, staring into a window to glimpse color TV for the first time in my life. I remember supper time on the Canadian side of the falls, going to the door of a restaurant, but being stopped by a sign, men will not be admitted without coats and ties. But most of all I remember walking out to a ~~xxxx~~ small island above the falls. The waters from Lake Erie were rushing past, swirling, racing. Green waters capped in white, heading for what we could only hear. From our island above the falls we could not see the curtain of white, its explosion on the rocks below. We could not see the falling and the falling, then the smashing. But we could hear the roar of waters, the thunder of the floods ~~wash~~ washing over. I remember my fear of those dancing, swirling waters, so attractive on that hot summers day, so deadly to all caught in their rush. I remember how glad I felt that I was safe, secure on solid ground as the flood washed past.

For me it began with a phone call from Tokyo, Japan. Lynn, your Father is sick, I don't know what to do. We've left the tour party, we'll stay in the hotel until he is well enough to get home. I sensed how critical the situation must be in my mother's voice. There was sense of disappointment over ~~giving~~ giving up on a tour that was to have taken them to Hong Kong and the Philippine and Australia. Only Desperation, I've got to get Bob home.

A week of phone calls went by until the flight home came, my Father underwent immediate surgery for a gangrenous gall bladder. The day after his surgery my mother went in for a check-up because of a serious cough. The X-rays showed a lung tumor.

I remember my first funeral. I was a freshman in high school, in the casket lay the body of my classmate and friend, Bret Blake. He and Ned ^{Lane} ~~and~~ and Chack ^{Gish} ~~whose last name I can't remember~~ went swimming in the lake behind the Russel house. The lake was ~~wide~~, wide and deep, its ^{spring} waters icy cold even in June. It was off limits, posted with no swimming signs, but boys will be boys, they say. The three were almost all the way across when Bret disappeared. ~~and~~ Ned and Chack dove for him, then went for help. In an hour his lifeless body was recovered. I looked into the casket and heard the roar of the waters, and was glad I was safe on solid ground.

I remember when Terry Van Offerens mother got cancer, Terry was my brothers friend, an eighth grader. I remember ^{I saw} Mr. Vanofferen ~~and~~ on the street ~~after she died.~~ His eyes taught me much about the terror of the swirling waters, and ~~the~~ ^{as} the roar grew louder, I was glad I was safe on dry ground.

I remember the Vietnam years, the terrible fear of stepping off my island into the crashing flood of military service in Vietnam. I heard reports of Roger McKinnon who came back with no hands or legs, victim of a mine. ^{Though I didn't hear it} The thunder of rushing waters grew louder.

Since have come deaths in the family, grandparents, ~~and~~ uncles, parents, since have come close friends getting divorces, losing children. Since have come the waiting with dying persons, the wait through the long night when my children are sick, seeing deaths come to claim the husband or wife of my friends. The roar of the crashing waters is deafening at moments, still I cling to my island.

Once I thought my island was forever. If I believed in God, if I lived a good, clean honest life, if I tried my hardest then the island that I thought was God would keep me out of the waters. It's a common mistake, I think. I'm special, I'm different than all the rest. Bret Blake should have known better than to swim in that lake, and Mrs. Van Offeren must have been an especially bad sinner, or a person without faith. I'm special, God will take care of me.

I was like the pastor who knew the answer to every tragedy, if someone's

son was killed in a car accident, it was God visiting his justice on the ungodly. If there was cancer, it was deserved. Which worked fine until the pillar of his congregation, the most righteous man he knew lost his wife to cancer, had no answer at all.

Everyone will get caught in the swirling waters, you and I and that pastor who thought he was safe. Every one. Sickness and suffering and death are no respecter of persons. ~~God did not spare his son from the roaring waters~~

~~Not even his son. Even Jesus was not provided a rock above the waters of suffering and death, he like each of us passed over the falls and crashed on the rocks below.~~

The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice, the floods lift up their roaring. And so it is, But mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty.

Over the roar of the falling waters, God bids us hear another voice. The soft and gentle voice of the one who entered the swirling waters for us, who was washed over into death for us and with us, and who now lives and reigns as Lord and King. God bids us follow the voice of him who has led the way for us, Jesus the crucified and risen one.

Over the roaring waters we hear his gentle assurance, I am with you, fear not. I will be with you always through life and in death. Trust that even as all else fails I will not fail you or forsake you. Mightier than the thunder of many waters am I, mightier than the waves of the sea, mightier than death and darkness and chaos am I. I am the Lord.

Let us pray: Father we fear the roaring waters that threaten our life. We fear all that would remind us that we have no help in ourselves. Be our help in every hour of need, open our ears to hear the gentle voice of Jesus, and bring us safe to the other side. through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.