

Memories of you drift in like waves coming onto the beach, some of them warm and positive or funny, others sad and disturbing. Many of them, I think, are symbolic of themes which go beyond the particular incident portrayed. Here is an unsettling memory that washed in yesterday.

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I was right to be looking for keys. I already had keys which made it possible for me to move down a path, but I wonder if deep inside myself I knew there were other keys and other paths, paths that would have served me and others (of course including you) and all that is Holy far better than the path I had chosen. Paths that were more in line with what I regarded, then and now, as authentic and important.

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I still do not understand fully what the dynamics were that left you so unhappy and out of step with life. How could I? Even now I search for and grasp for threads to help me put the pieces of your life together. I do remember that I was often very frustrated and very much alone in my efforts to parent you.

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I feel myself getting a knot in my gut as I think and write about those times. I just did not know what to do. I was losing a sense of who I was in that situation. We were in almost constant conflict, and any of the ways that I knew to address that were doomed to failure. I did seek professional help, but at first that did not seem to help much. You were on a scary and dark ride and I was pulled along with you.

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But on the other hand, if I had it to do over again, I would like to think that I could moderate some of that judgment and arrogance that I brought to the table. I would hope that maybe I could, at least occasionally, come down from that high place from which I looked down on you and pointed my finger at you. I would hope that I could open myself to listen more frequently and more deeply to you about how life was unfolding for you. In doing so maybe I could have better and deeply heard your story and, in hearing your story, I believe I could have become closer to you.

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I could go on and on with such memories, but what's the use? They all are just examples and evidence in support of the terrible and tragic alienation in which we lived. We both were serving time in a kind of prison, separated from each other, from most meaning and purpose, from hope, from most others, and from God.

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It was such a sad and painful time for both of us. I believe I have let go of a most of that now, but it still can give me the "willies" to return to it in my memory. I somehow think and hope that, after death, you have processed and let go of much of that garbage and that you have deep understanding of it in ways that you never did when you were here. Correct? I kind of think that if you and I were able to talk about it now we would be able to find our way to a lot of healing and even humor about those days. Wouldn't that be something, finding what we could laugh about in those situations?

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I was so glad, overjoyed actually, that you had found your way to groups that were sustaining you and calling you to a new you during that year before your death. And I am so very glad that I went to Arizona to see that transformation taking place. It was like an early spring flower coming up through the earth that had been cold and barren for the season of winter. But look! Here comes the sun and here comes that little plant and then, oh, my gosh, it is green and beautiful and it is BLOOMING!

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But there was the deeper beauty in you. The gentle and loving James – the James who cared and felt compassion. The James who wanted to love and to be loved. The James who, I think, was the James at the deeper and authentic level, the James of sharing laughter, the James who gave of himself and who listened and cared, the way that God created you.

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I am so glad you experienced that joy, and that you laughed deeply with your whole body and whole being. And, thanks be to God, I got to be there and laugh along with you.

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Merry Christmas Eve to you, my son and my friend. I miss you, James Andy. How great it would be to share a big Christmas hug with you.

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Last night in a dream I got a glimpse of you. Maybe there was more to the dream story, but what I remember is that you and I were together just hanging out doing day-to-day stuff and joking around about it. You were an adult and our togetherness was comfortable. Maybe you visit me a lot in dreams but I usually don't remember dreams when I wake up. But clearly this was you and we were enjoying part of an ordinary day together. You were teasing me about something. I love having you with me in that way.

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However, it is much more than a few days ago and a lot of life has continued to flow under the bridge since the last days of August 2005. A key part of my chance to mark the anniversary of your death this year was that I was able to visit your gravesite with your wonderful daughter. You must know that she is grown up now and brings a lot of goodness to this world. She and I, as we often do when we locate the stone with your name on it, shared silence and sadness and a few words with and about you. She so perfectly expressed what many of us think and feel when she softly said "He is missing so much." How true! We are missing you, but, also, you are missing so much of what life offers – so much we would like to have shared with you.

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That created a huge alienation between us. I think it is true that we both created and sustained that separation in thousands of ways. But I want to say this to you: I hated that separation. In my heart of hearts I wanted to

be reunited with you because I had, and still have, a deep and wide love for you. And I am convinced that you wanted that too. One tragic element of that is that it would have been possible for us to greatly reduce that alienation if I could have shed the restraints of my ego enough to see you and be with you and to accept you and to find words and ways to let you know that I really did and do love you.

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I would never come close to wishing such an experience like losing you on anyone, but it clearly did provide an occasion for much love and support to come into my life. That was focused on your death, but it radiated into my life in other ways. Oh what a wonderful thing to experience compassion and kindheartedness from others in times of shocking loss and gut wrenching sadness! It is hard to imagine going through such a loss alone, although some do just that.

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Let me tell you this. What followed from your death gave me enormous opportunity for personal growth. I know more about and feel closer to myself and life and the universe and the Holy than I would have, had I not gone through all of the 'James has died' experience. Somehow it all fits together in ways it did not before.

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At the top of my list of things I have done for healing, I have to say it is these letters to you. They have given me an opportunity to pour out myself to you, to share with you what I am thinking and remembering and feeling and going through. They give me a space and framework to speak to you and thus, to be with you.

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I don't know how to describe or analyze all the ways in which this writing contributes to my healing, it just does. I think it does in large part because it is a vehicle for me to maintain contact with you. That is so important for

me. It gives me a forum to verbally hug you at times and to shake my fist at you at other times. It gives me a way to share my sadness and my joy. It gives me a chance to wonder and reflect. It gives me a way to take responsibility and to make amends. It gives me a way to share myself with you and to reach to you across the mysterious distance that is now between us.

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How can the world go on without you? I have no answer for that. It just does. But it is not the same; it is a little off balance, seems a little shifted on its axis. Maybe the lenses through which I/we see and know are a little fogged up or a little out of focus.

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