Who Let In the Sky?*

Kagan Goh

Defying the Hourglass

The doctor speaks, but I can't hear a word of what he says. There is a ringing in my ears. I feel like my head is submerged underwater. I want to drown out the truth. He points to the X-rays. Suddenly, sound rushes in.

"I'm sorry. I wish I had better news to give you."

"How bad is it, doctor?" asks father.

"It doesn't look good. The colonoscopy reveals the cancer has spread throughout the lower colon."

"Oh dear." Mother reaches out and clutches father's hand. "There is no question, surgery will be necessary. As far as I am concerned, the sooner we operate, the better."

The doctor books an operation for father in two weeks. Leaving the clinic, Mother is the first to break the silence. "Oh Sweet, first depression, then Parkinson's, and now this? When is it going to let up? When are we going to get a break?"

At home, I retreat in despair to my room. I bury myself under the blanket to dream the bad news away. Father enters the room.

"Can I come in?"

He sits on the bed, pulls the blanket from over my head, places his hand on my shoulder and gently rouses me from my numbed state.

"How are you doing?"

"Fine," I lie, rubbing my eyes. How can anything ever be fine after this?

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* This is an edited excerpt from Kagan Goh's forthcoming *Who Let In The Sky? A Son's Tribute To His Father: Goh Poh Seng's Courageous Struggle With Parkinson's Disease* (Select Books, 2012). Dr Goh, poet, playwright and novelist, recognized as one of Singapore's "literary pioneers" passed away on 10 January, 2010 before he could complete his own memoirs. See http://gohpohseng.wordpress.com/2010/01/12/goh-poh-seng-1936-2010 **Ed.**

"I have something important to talk about with you."

"What is it Dad?"

"I may not have much time left."

"Don't say that."

"Listen to me, I need your help. Will you help me finish my memoirs?" I sit up, hearing the urgency in his voice. "I need to complete my life's work before it is too late."

Father wants to tell his story so his family can remember him when he is gone – to achieve immortality through his writing, not for the sake of fame or fortune, but to leave behind the legacy of his life for his children and his children's children.

It will be a formidable undertaking. I am uncertain whether I have what it takes. Yet I am moved that my father believes in me enough to trust me with this final work.

"Yes, of course I will help you. It will be an honour."

"I have had a good sixty-nine years. I have lived a full life. But I am not giving up yet. We can't afford to postpone our lives any longer. No use lying in bed feeling depressed. Come on. Get out of bed. It's a beautiful day. Let's go into the garden."

Father unlatches the gate to our garden. We have two pear trees, an apple tree, a plum tree, a cherry tree and a grape vine in our garden. He inspects the flower buds appearing on the fruit trees, the first sign of spring in the air. Brushing aside overhanging branches and spider webs, we discover that the garden is overgrown with weeds.

"The garden is a mess," my father says, "Let's get to work!"

After a hard day's work, he pats me on the back. "Tomorrow we'll buy seeds and plant some flowers."

Bright and early the next morning, he wakes me to go grocery shopping. I select apples and oranges from the fruit stands outside Donald's Market, our local Chinese grocery store. Father stops me from putting apples and oranges into the basket.

"I'm bored with eating apples and oranges all the time. Let's buy peaches, plums, apricots, grapes and strawberries. Let's treat ourselves, spoil ourselves a little. Next, we stop off at Figaro's Garden. We enter intending to buy some flower seeds but leave carrying a few potted plants and flowers as well. Returning home,

father plants the seeds in fertile soil. As he waters the seeds he has sown, he coaxes them to grow:

"Grow my little lovelies. Grow into beautiful flowers so our garden will be glorious for summer parties."

Having worked up an appetite, father uses the blender to make a healthy fruit smoothie with a dollop of yogurt and a spoonful of honey.

"You eat like a prisoner guarding your food from other inmates," observes father. "Slow down. How do you even taste your food if you eat so quickly? Take your time and enjoy your food."

I eat slower, feeling slightly embarrassed.

"That's better. Savour every morsel and it will make you immortal."

After breakfast, father walks from room to room and plans to improve our home.

"Let us paint the walls and lay new carpet on the floor. I want to renovate the bathroom and kitchen as well. This is our family home. Let's make this a house we can be proud of."

That same day, we go to Home Depot to buy paint, select carpet and look at new kitchen and bathroom designs for the apartments.

Father is a man of action. His motto is: "Those who do, dare. Those who fear, fail." Father looks ahead to the future. Not the attitude of a man facing death. Instead, he is drunk on the rage of being alive.

My Sweet Embraceable You

It almost didn't happen. I didn't want to go, wasn't in the mood, but Mum kept haranguing me, and wouldn't let me be a spoilsport. Finally I agreed. We bundled up, braved the rain and made our way to the Legion to go swing dancing on a Saturday night. While Mum helped Dad climb up the precarious steps to the dance hall, I lugged the wheelchair up two flights of stairs.

I remember the song by the big band, the sweet melody, that sentimental refrain by Ira and George Gershwin:

Embrace me,
My sweet embraceable you.
Embrace me,
My irreplaceable you.
Just to look at you

My heart grows tipsy in me.
You and you alone
Bring out the gypsy in me.

Dad and Mum were the most beautiful couple on the dance floor that night. Beautiful because they were the most loving couple of all. The youngsters had fancier dance moves but no one moved more gracefully or lovelier than the two of them. That night Dad and Mum recaptured the romance of their relationship. I felt so lucky to have been there to see how they became young, healthy and happy again, the years sloughing off their skin like the bark of a Eucalyptus tree. Dad's Parkinson's was gone; Mum's anxieties have melted away. We all felt it.

That night Mum was Dad's gal. Dad was Mum's fella. That was the last time I would ever see my parents dance together. A few days later Mum almost died of a vascular aneurism. A week later Dad suffered a relapse of aspiration pneumonia. Two months later, he passed away. I will never see my parents dance again. And to think I did not want to go. Now I no longer put things off, waiting for tomorrow when today may never come again. Whenever I miss Dad and feel sad, I hold onto that burning vision of him and Mum slow dancing at the Legion. Hear the big band playing that bittersweet refrain.

The Good Fight

Every night at bedtime, just as my father is about to fall asleep, he hallucinates that my mother steals out under the cloak of darkness to go frolicking at parties without him. Perhaps he fears she may be having affairs, suspecting rendezvous with imaginary lovers behind his back. I find it amusing that my father dreams my mother has a jolly good time at night, when in fact she is dead asleep, exhausted from the demands of care-taking and the unrelenting catastrophes that seem to inundate her life.

My father has never accepted the limitations imposed upon him by Parkinson's disease. I admire his fighting spirit, his refusal to succumb to depression and give up on life. He has never felt sorry for himself. Instead he is determined to live life on his own terms despite his illness.

He suffers from fainting spells, brought on by dangerously low blood pressure. His fainting spells are frightening. He blacks out and falls the way a tree falls in a forest; the whole weight of his body comes crashing down. He has had numerous stitches on his head and once even broke his arm. Walking with a cane makes no difference. The fainting spells are so frequent – as many as twelve a day – that his doctor advises him to use a wheelchair. But my father refuses to accept this disability, choosing instead to risk the falls.

When my father gets frustrated and angry, he storms out of the house in a temper tantrum, refusing to tell us where he is going. He refuses to listen to his family's attempts to reason with him, seeing our concern for his risk-taking behaviour as an unacceptable restriction. He blackmails us emotionally, feeling the only way he can make his family care is to make us worry for his safety, so he puts himself in harm's way, exerting his independence in the only way he knows: self-destructively.

"I would rather die than listen to you!"

Invariably he ends up falling and injuring himself. Kind passers by will call the ambulance and they will take him to the emergency ward of the hospital. Meanwhile we sit and wait anxiously by the phone for the fateful call. We have become so accustomed to the routine that we simply wait for the call from the hospital, praying he is safe and has not come to a bad end, fearful that he might get run over by a vehicle while crossing the road.

I have always been afraid of my father dying. Little did I suspect that my mother would be the first one in our family to be courted by death. One morning, Mum collapses on the floor of her bedroom experiencing excruciating spasms of pain in her abdomen and back. I summon an ambulance; but when the ambulance attendants take Mum away, she insists they take Dad along because he is sick with pneumonia. Even at the brink of death, she thinks of him first. If this is not evidence of true love, I do not know what is.

I admit Dad to Saint Paul's hospital's emergency ward at the same time as Mum. Dad is so worried about Mum that he refuses to be treated for pneumonia. More concerned about his wife's wellbeing, he checks himself out of the emergency ward against the doctor's advice. The doctors inform him that his wife is in critical condition, that she has a vascular aneurism, a rupture in her aorta. Nine out of ten patients who undergo surgery for this condition die. Due to the seriousness of her condition, the surgeons decide to operate immediately.

In the waiting room, I try to contemplate the inconceivable. "Your mother might not survive," cautions Dad. "We must brace ourselves for whatever is going to happen."

The operation takes six hours. An eternity. Finally, a nurse informs us: "Your wife survived the operation. Thank goodness! She is lucky to be alive."

Later that night, I help my father change for bed. I tuck him into bed just as he had done for me when I was a child. I enjoy the ritual, this intimacy between father and son.

"Dad, we nearly lost Mum today. We're lucky to have her still with us. She has devoted her life to take care of you. She's been a real trouper and has done

everything she possibly can to make your life comfortable. But the stress of looking after you is so great it nearly killed her. We have to face the fact that she can no longer look after you anymore. We've been putting this off for as long as possible but I believe it is time to explore the option of a nursing home. I know you don't like the idea of being separated from the family, but the truth is, even with the homecare workers coming seven days a week, we still can't manage to look after you."

"I knew this day would come sooner or later," he replies lucidly. "I've seen some of the nursing homes. They're not so bad," he says, unconvincingly. "I admit I'm not keen about the idea but I will simply have to learn to adapt."

Nearly losing his wife has sobered him up to reality. I am moved by how he has chosen to accept his fate with grace and dignity.

The next day, Dad and I visit Mum at the Intensive Care Unit. The nurse leads us to her bed. Hooked up to a battery of machines, Mum is frail and weak. Dad sidles up to her and holds her hand.

"Are you upset with me?"

A strained look appears on her brow. "It's always about you and how *you* feel! Please let me rest. I almost died. Leave me in peace!"

I wheel Dad away in his wheelchair, creating a buffer between him and Mum so she can recover.

Later that afternoon, we eat lunch in silence at a delicatessen near the hospital. In the middle of the meal, father suddenly protests: "I am not going to a nursing home. All of you will abandon me. I have nothing in common with those old people. I will waste away and die alone there. I refuse to go and that's final!"

"Dad, we've discussed this before. We'll find you a nice nursing home. We have no choice."

"I simply refuse to go. I will move out and get an apartment of my own."

"Who will take care of you?"

"I can take care of myself. I can get one of those homecare workers to take care of me."

"The homecare workers come for only five hours a day. You need round the clock care. Who is willing to sacrifice their whole life to take care of you the way Mum did?"

My father broods in silence. On the way back to the hospital, father accuses me of neglecting mother.

"You claim the reason she almost died is because of the stress of looking after me. What about the stress of looking after you? Night after night she complains that she never knows whether you're coming home to eat dinner."

"The reason why I don't come home for dinner is because I can't stand the two of you fighting all the time."

"Maybe *you* are the one who drove her over the edge."

That was the final straw. In a rush of anger, I shove his wheelchair and let go of the handles, shouting "Asshole!"

I derived perverse satisfaction from my outburst, but the next moment I am swamped with guilt, regretting my impulsive action. I chase after the runaway wheelchair and manage to grab hold of the handles before it veers towards traffic.

"Trying to kill your own father! Let me go! Get out of my way! Wait till your mother hears about this!"

He wheels himself through the hospital entrance, manages somehow to open the door and wheels himself down the corridor, swearing and ranting angrily at me, heading in the direction of my mother's ward. I wonder how my father is going to figure out how to get to her ward on his own with his poor sense of direction. But father lets no one get in his way when he is in a rage. By the time I catch up with him, it is too late. I find my weary mother listening to my father's complaints. In exasperation she pleads:

"Sweet, please! I can't hear this. I need to rest. Please leave me alone. Don't come to see me if you are going to behave like this."

Father sags in total defeat. I wheel him out of the hospital, away from her. Outside the hospital, I hail a taxi to take us home.

Concerned about Dad's deteriorating health, Uncle Chin Nan checks him into hospital for observation. In the following weeks, during Mum's absence, Dad's spark diminishes. Against the doctor's advice, he checked himself out of hospital and consequently suffers a serious relapse of pneumonia and is admitted to the Saint Paul hospital's geriatric ward.

My brother Kajin flies back home from Toronto to help take care of Mum and Dad and support the family during this crisis. Jin and I consult with the doctors, nurses and social workers. We are informed that Dad has been rebelling against the hospital staff, nurses and doctors because he is being held under the Mental Health Act. In the doctor's opinion, my father poses a danger to himself and needs to be detained in the hospital against his will for his own good. He fights with all his might; he has lost insight. He won't listen to reason and sees our concern for him as an attempt to control his life. Angered and stubborn beyond reason and believing

there is a conspiracy against him, he is fighting the wrong fight, pitting himself against those who are trying to help him.

Dad wants to get out of bed. He attempts to climb over the railings of the hospital bed. He ends up landing hard on the floor, hurting his head. Two nurses attempt to tie his hands to his bed railings to prevent him from climbing out of bed again.

"Let me go! It's my right to go home!" Dad wrestles with the nurses. He injures one so badly she has bruises, resulting in him being sedated.

Dad wants to get out of hospital. He wants to go home. The hope of going home is the only reason keeping him alive. But home is no longer an option, even for us. Mum might have to move into a seniors' home. The family will have to sell the house. Kajin and I will have to leave our beloved Commercial Drive neighbourhood where we have lived for sixteen years. Major upheaval lies ahead in our lives and it is not going to be easy for any of us.

Kajin is keeping vigil over Dad who shares a room with six other patients. The smell of old people suffering from incontinence fills the air; the mixture of urine and excrement makes my brother sick to the stomach. Kajin draws the curtain around my father's bed for privacy.

"Get me out of here. This place is for old people," my father begs. "I don't want to die here! I want to go home!"

"Sorry Dad. That is not possible. Mum can no longer take care of you." Kajin tries to reason with him. "Neither can we. Your health has deteriorated so badly we can't manage even with help from home care workers seven days a week. Please reconsider the option of a nursing home."

"I will die there, waste away and be forgotten. All of you will abandon me."

Visiting hours are over. My father, waving his cane in protest, follows Kajin into the corridor, berating him as he walks towards the exit.

"Get me out of here! I don't want to die here! Obey your father! Are you going to force me to stay here in this hospital against my will? What kind of a son abandons his own father? Oh I give up. What's the use?"

Hearing the dejection in his voice, Kajin's heart sinks.

"Sorry Dad I can't …" He exits the door. It locks behind him, shutting in our father.

My father's health takes a turn for the worse. I ask the head nurse whether he can be moved to a private room because one of his roommates keeps babbling, "Oh, I am in pain. My ass hurts!" over and over again, driving my father insane.

The nurse is kind and grants my request. My father's bed is wheeled into a single room with a nice view of the West End. Through the window, Christmas lights blink in the pattern of a star, a beacon of hope pulsating in the heart of the dreary winter night.

My father looks shrunken, a mere ghost of the man he once was. He is feeble and weak from fighting all week. Now all the fight is gone out of him. I do not know which is worse, him fighting the forces he perceives as standing in the way of his freedom, or the fear he will stop fighting and give up altogether, surrender and let depression overcome him.

"How is my father doing?" I ask the head nurse. "Is he going to pull through?"

"Pneumonia is known as 'the Old Man's Friend'. To be frank, your father is dying of old age. The next twenty-four to forty-eight hours are critical. I advise you to notify his close relatives. If you have anything to say to him, now is the time to say goodbye."

I call my brothers Kasan and Kakim and inform them of the situation. "This is his third bout of pneumonia since he arrived in hospital. The disease has infected his kidneys; the toxins have affected his mental faculties. He's delirious and has been delusional since the weekend. He goes in and out of lucidity. He might not recognize anyone." I tell them to come as soon as possible if they can. Kakim, my youngest brother, leaves work in Montreal and flies over to Vancouver to see Dad. He risks losing his new job where he is on probation. Kasan, my eldest brother who lives in England, is torn, wondering whether he can spare the time to get away to see Dad who may not even recognize him.

Kajin, Kakim and I take turns keeping vigil over Dad, feeding him his favourite food, reading him his own poems. He claps his hands in delight: "Good poem! Good poem!" His mind is reverting to a child-like state. During the night he calls for his childhood servants and deceased relatives, talking to them as if they are present in the room.

Sitting by my father's bedside, at Saint Paul's hospital's geriatric ward, I watch him drift in and out of consciousness, unable to speak except in indecipherable mumbles, driven mad by loneliness and the loss of the life he once knew, feeling abandoned by his family, and isolated in this cold ward where people come to die.

I read to father, Dylan Thomas' poem:

> *Do not go gentle into the good night,*
> *Old age should burn and rave at close of day;*
> *Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

His breathing is laboured. He struggles to breathe through plastic tubes stuck up his nostrils. He is being fed by saline solution dripping into a tube in his arm from an i.v. Having lost his appetite and not eaten for a week, he is skeletal. I look into the dim spark of my father's eyes, searching for signs of life.

"Dad, do you recognize me? Squeeze my hand if you know who I am."

I clutch his hand. He squeezes, but his grip is weak, like a little child's.

"Please forgive me Dad. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I love you so much. You weren't trying to be difficult. You were just scared to be separated from your family."

Tears fill his eyes.

"You are the best friend I have ever had," I confess. "I don't know how I am going to go on without you."

Under his blanket, I massage my father's calf and thigh muscles. They hang limp and soft. His muscle tone is gone from being bedridden for weeks. His eyes swim in delirium, caught in the hallucinatory state between sleep and wakefulness.

"Mum loves you more than you will ever know. If you have any doubts about her loyalty, remember this. Every night when you think she is stealing out of the house to go partying, she is in fact leaving the house, not to escape or abandon you, but instead to prepare a party, the greatest surprise party in your honour."

Consoling him, I become the Dreamweaver, spinning happy hallucinations for my father: "I know you don't believe in God or don't want to believe in God. Instead believe in your family. Believe that we love you. We will never leave you. We will do anything for you. We are all here waiting for you. Hiding in the dark. Waiting for you to get well, wake up, open your eyes and then to spring the surprise, cheering, "It is your forty-eighth wedding anniversary!" Mum and you together celebrating your golden honeymoon in the bosom of your family.

Walking Amongst Ghosts

In his final days, my father would sometimes hallucinate or become delusional as he fought for his life. Dad's hallucinations were not always bad. Many of them were quite pleasant, happy and benign. One night, he looked up at the ceiling and said:

"Who let in the sky?" It was as if he could see things we could not see. I believe he was actually catching a glimpse of heaven, as if the ceiling of the hospital wall became transparent, revealing a window to God.

Returning home late one night, he tells me he see phantoms in the shadows. He points into the darkness.

"Why is that man sitting on the kerb?"

All I see is a black garbage bag and recycling bin left by the kerbside waiting to be picked up by the garbage truck the next morning.

He points to a tree.

"Look! There is a man sitting on the tree branch!"

I look up at the branches of the tree and half expect to see the Cheshire cat grin at me. All I see is the smile of the crescent moon.

"Dad, there is no one there. Your mind is playing tricks on you."

Back home, father undresses for bed. I help him pee into the piss pot. After he is done, I help him put on his diapers. I lay out a dry pad on his bed and newspaper on the floor in case he wets himself. The indignity of old age, being treated like a baby. Tucking him under the covers, father points his finger, counting out loud.

"One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six …"

"What are you doing Dad?"

"I am counting the number of people in the room."

I am the only person in the bedroom. A shiver runs up my spine; I am unnerved by the thought there are people in our presence I cannot see. Father sees things no one else can.

On another occasion, father sits in the living room and peers out the window on a sunny day. He tells me he sees a group of English ladies and gentlemen, dressed in white, playing badminton in our garden, laughing and frolicking about in great merriment.

"Can't you see them? They are making a loud racket."

"Dad, no one's in the garden."

His visitations by invisible folk are so real to him and have become so frequent that I have come to believe ghosts visit my father. In the final days of his life, father walks between the shadows of the living and the dead. He has one foot in this world and the other foot in the after life. Father spends so much time in the world

of ghosts that eventually his turn comes to cross over. Father lies in a hospital bed. He complains about the noise from the Chinese opera troupe playing next door. But the ward is silent except for the beep of the electrocardiogram machine.

Father's final hallucination: he tells me that he is crossing a bridge with his fellow poets to go to a poetry reading. He tells me the poetry is inspiring, the food marvelous and the wine free flowing. Father is so frail; death is just a whisper away. His deceased poet friends wait patiently for my father. The invisible ghosts gather around to keep him company. Hearing them beckon him, he crosses the bridge to join their ranks. Standing on the bridge, he hesitates a moment, turns to look back one last time and waves goodbye. Like a Brahmin he ventures forth to become a holy man walking the final road to the Holy Land. The poets welcome him at the gates of heaven. He is reunited with Gerry Gilbert, Billy Little, Al Pitman and Charles Watts. They kick up a holy ruckus loud enough to wake God and scare the Devil.

A Strong Front

She had been holding up quite well so far, considering the circumstances. After the surgery, the doctor told her nine out of ten patients with her condition do not survive. She was lucky to be alive.

When she was discharged she checked into a hotel a block away from the hospital. She slept for two weeks, too weak to summon up the strength and energy to visit him. Meanwhile he languished in her absence.

When she finally recovered sufficiently to visit him, she was horrified at how thin and gaunt he was, how quickly he had deteriorated in her absence, as if without her he simply could not survive and had wasted away. He was all skin and bones and looked like an Auschwitz victim. He was hallucinating, delusional, and had reverted to speaking in Hokkien, his mother tongue. He called out in dialect to his servant who had long since died:

"Ah Siew Chia, bite off my hand! BITE OFF MY HAND!"

He struggled, hitting his arm violently as if an invisible dog was biting his hand and he was trying to shake the hand loose of its jaws. His family tried to restrain him from hurting himself. It took three of them to hold him down. They were surprised how strong he still was. He spoke with a Malaysian accent and sounded eerily like his dead father. It was as if he had returned to a child-like state, as if nearing death he was drinking from the same river of his childhood, death and birth coming full circle. The circle of life, a serpent swallowing its own tail; in the end one returns to where one began.

She started visiting him more frequently as her strength returned. Day by day she saw him slip away into the ether, one foot already in the next world. She would spend the day with him, taking shifts with her sons, keeping vigil over her dying husband. When he slept, she would look out the window. Amidst the tall red brick buildings of the hospital, there was a tiny house, more a little cabin, set in a small courtyard amidst an Oriental bamboo grove. It was strange to see this haven of peace and tranquility amidst the domineering larger buildings. She took comfort in this sanctuary.

When she received the phone call from her son, "Come quickly, Dad's body is shutting down. He is slipping away," she did not realize the true urgency of the message. She stopped off at a grocery store to buy food for dinner, then made her way to the hospital, but took the wrong entrance. By the time she got to his room, she had missed him by a few precious minutes. If only she had not stopped for groceries. If only she had taken the right entrance. She cried into his chest, stroking his hair, grief-stricken that she did not have a chance to say goodbye. His eyes were still open, so life-like but the spark within was gone. His flesh was cold to the touch.

She put up a strong front, as she had done all her life, and kept herself busy. She was surprised that in the weeks after he died she had not cried. All that changed one day when she returned to the hospital for a routine checkup. Looking out the window she saw the little cabin amidst the concrete jungle. Reminded of her husband, she burst into tears, sobbing uncontrollably. She felt he now dwelled in the solace of that little sanctuary amidst the tall gleaming headstones in heaven.

Beeper

The son was tidying up his parent's apartment, packing away his father's belongings after the wake, preparing for his mother's return home from the hotel, a life without her husband. Their family had emigrated and moved several times in the son's short life, so much so he had become accustomed to living out of boxes. Even so, this was the hardest packing job he had ever had to do, sorting what to keep, what to give away and what to throw out. He felt reluctant to get rid of his father's belongings, even insignificant junk.

Every item reminded him of his father. His father's many toothpicks, found scattered along kitchen counters and on the floor, made him nostalgic. What to do with the urine catheters? He decided he would donate them to the Home Respite Center where his father resided when his mother needed a break from care-taking. He decided to pocket his father's comb, noticing a few strands of hair stuck in its teeth.

Suddenly, out of the blue, he heard a beeping sound. He wandered throughout the apartment trying to locate its source. Where was it coming from? He followed the sound and finally traced it to a cardboard box. He rummaged through its contents and found the beeper. A white plastic double-A battery-operated digital timer which had been used to remind his father to take his medication every three hours, six times a day. Doses at 7 am, 10 am, 1 pm, 4 pm, 7 pm, finally ending at 10pm.

It had been a source of great anxiety and stress to the family, keeping track of when to remind and dispense meds to his father. Also in the cardboard box was a satchel with his father's medications and several plastic pill dispensers. The countless years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes and seconds spent worrying about him absentmindedly misplacing or losing his pill dispensers, drove his family to distraction. He had to take an endless battery of pills religiously several times a day for his Parkinson's, otherwise his body would stiffen and a horrific onslaught of side-effects would assail him. His father took this cruel communion, swallowing pill after pill every day for the last fifteen years. He became prone to forgetfulness. His memory got progressively worse over the years. He was unable to keep track of time. It drove him crazy.

Now that his father was gone, what had once been a punishing and aggravating chore suddenly made him wish he was still alive so he could remind him when to take his meds. What was once a chore had now become an act of filial love and devotion. He broke down crying, upon which a lifetime of pills floated down the stream of his father's life to the final destination of the Sea, the Mother of All Things. Sorrow engulfed him, then he would laugh out loud, relieved that the suffering was now over and he did not have to look after him anymore; then he would be swept up by guilt, only to be overwhelmed again by grief. Finally he cried and cried, until the storm subsided. The beeper continued to beep in his hand like a mechanical heart. Beep beep beep ... He didn't want to shut it off. He wanted it to beat forever, like his father's heart. Then it stopped all on its own. Never to beep again.