

Lavine's husband Leo and my mother Alice were brother and sister. The six Turners grew up in Kansas City but we traveled to Redwood Falls to visit family often on Thanksgiving. When I first met Leo and Lavine they had been living on the upper floor of my grandmother's house. Leo was always full of life and funny; Lavine his faithful companion and as agreeable a woman as you would ever meet. Leo was a handsome man. (I don't know what happened to his sons.) Lavine was a beautiful woman. I don't think she bought expensive clothes, but clothes looked expensive on her. Leo first saw her through the window pane of a jewelry store, where you'd expect to see a model. They raised four terrific kids. We Turners always enjoyed playing with our Minnesota cousins, and we still do.

Nothing in the first half of our experience of Lavine prepared us for the second half. At first she held jobs in retail; she worked in a jewelry store. She was a homemaker. Her family moved around and finally left the snows of the north for the desert of the south. Still, Lavine's resistance to cold remained Minnesotan. She visited us for New Year's once when I'd just bought a convertible. I asked if anybody wanted a ride in the cold, dark air with the top down. Lavine jumped in the car. Her move to Phoenix showed the same spirit of adventure. But the adventure she got was unexpected. Leo died at age 61. Then Lavine showed signs of Alzheimer's. She returned to Minnesota, a State that always welcomes its children home. Lavine's beautiful mind failed more rapidly than her beautiful body. But even more beautiful was the response of people around her. Her children made good decisions on her behalf. Even those who married into our family fell in love with her and generously helped. Lavine received exceptional care from the staff of the nursing homes where she lived. They deserve the thanks and praise of our family for their service. Everyone cared for a person who could not care back. That says something about you. It also says something about Lavine. She was the kind of person you liked to like. She made it easy for you to love her. Even when her abilities changed, her character never did.

Writing to the Christians in Rome in the first generation after the crucifixion of Jesus, Saint Paul consoled them in the midst of all the suffering they were enduring. They believed in Christ, but some members of their families did not. Persecutions ripped them apart. But in spite of all these changes in the world around them, something remained constant: the love of Christ. Paul wrote, "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No.... [N]either death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We don't know what lies ahead for any of us. Maybe the rest of our lives will be very different from the way we've lived so far. But if people have met Christ through us, they will help us when we need them most. And when we need our faith, it will see us through. Lavine revealed the precious gift of life and the powerful example of love. Love makes other people love you even if you are unaware. We place Lavine in the good care of the God who made her. Nothing separated us from her love, and nothing separates her from the love of Christ.