

The cruise was a longtime dream of pure joy. Everett and Pat finally arranged it. Chris and Mark set aside the time. On the way, Pat cracked her knee, but that did not deter Everett. They'd come this far; he wanted to see it through. He pushed Pat's chair, which alone summarizes his life. Ev liked doing things for people. This wasn't a self-glorification thing; it's just who he was. When the kids were young, he drove them to all their events. Whether it was sports, the Pontifical Choir, or Pat's rehearsals, he didn't mind. Whatever the destination, he would grab the keys, go to the car, drive where he needed to be, sit and wait, and then, when the event was over, he drove back. He couldn't have been happier.

Everett met Pat in high school, and they enjoyed 61 years of marriage. He co-owned a tire and battery shop, and then operated video stores. That's when I got to know him a little more. He had a lot of redeeming qualities, but providing free videos for the friends of his son outshone the rest. He moved away—first to Silver Dollar City and then South Texas. He always had Pat at his side—or in front of him, as on that cruise. As he drove the family to their commitments, so he drove Pat to the ship. He never changed. Whale watching is one reason to go on a cruise. On this one, the whales showed up in the rain. Didn't matter to Everett. He told Pat, "This is what we came for." So they watched whales in the rain. Pure joy.

Meanwhile, we know now, God was watching Everett. In a sense God sat in his car waiting for Everett to finish his activities before taking him home. They came to an end abruptly, like a clock whose batteries gave out. Death is scary if you know it's coming, like when the doctor says your illness is terminal and sets the timer ticking. It's easier to ignore the signs when life is normal: You're with your family, helping people you love, gazing at the beauty of the world.

St. Paul steered the Romans toward the normal when they experienced abnormal times: He asked, rhetorically, "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?" Then, Paul answered, "No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, ... nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jesus proved that point in his parable. When the master was away, the servants kept watch for his return. They saw him come and opened the door even before he knocked. The master was so pleased that he turned the tables. He girded himself, had the servants recline at table, and proceeded to wait on them.

I'm imagining this happening to Everett. After a lifetime of quietly doing things for people, he approaches the pearly gates and finds Christ his master opening the door before he can knock, girding himself with a cloth, and waiting on him at table. Everett won't find this comfortable. But he'll adapt.

His family says this about him: "He may not have been interested in what you were interested in, but he was interested in you." I think that's how God looks at us—like a good parent, wondering how the kids got interested in the things they like, but loving them nonetheless. As we remember Everett's life, let us strive to imitate his spirit of service, the ultimate dream of pure joy.