



LIVING LUTHERAN

Lively engagement in faith and life

JOIN NOW

[HOME](#) [BLOGS](#) [CONNECT](#) [SEEDS](#) [STORIES](#) [VIDEOS](#)

SEARCH

LUTHERAN BLOGS BIOS

Life-changing grace

By Sue Edison-Swift on **October 9, 2010 5:00 AM** | [6 Comments](#)[Share](#)*The Edison-Swifts in 1985*

It's been 25 years. Twenty-five years since the time of amazing, undeserved and life-changing grace upon grace.

On September 24, 1985, I took almost 5-year-old daughter Annie to the pediatrician to be checked for a possible ear infection. He discovered an abdominal mass.

After 36 surreal hours, we had a diagnosis: Stage 4 Neuroblastoma, a deadly childhood cancer. We had a prognosis: My husband, Paul, and I were told it was highly unlikely that Annie would live to see her sixth birthday.

Normal ceased, replaced by test upon test, procedure after procedure. I imagined handing out a list of things not to say after Annie's death. The don't-say list included, "God needed another angel in heaven," and "It's for the best."

At this point in the story, even after 25 years of practice, I stumble. The details, etched in my memory, heart and face make the story too long. So, I will summarize: For 10 days there was no hope.

Then, there was a chance.

On October 9, 1985, a cantaloupe-sized tumor was surgically removed from Annie's abdomen. Two days later the lab report confirmed the impossible good news: the tumor was Ganglioneuroma, the benign, "mature" form of Neuroblastoma. Annie did not have, or no longer had, cancer.

I worry about offering the condensed version, though. It's easy, hurtful and wrong to confuse cure with faithfulness. When the bottom line is "cured," the point — undeserved grace — can be missed.

Grace: Paul and I were emptied, but not empty. There was nothing we could do to change Annie's diagnosis or prognosis. Instead of feeling alienated from God, which we had every right to be, when we were emptied of our own usual notions of control and autonomy, we found the space to be filled with God's presence.

Grace: We were given the gift to recognize our assets and could skip the "Why, me?" "Why, Annie?" questions, which we had every right to ask. We lived five minutes from a world-class hospital.

Paul worked across the sidewalk from Annie's hospital room. One or both of us could always be with her. We had excellent health insurance benefits. We had amazing community surrounding us: congregation, friends, family and dear neighbors.

In a time before e-mail, when a typewriter, not a computer, was in most homes, Paul had programmed our address book in our computer. This made it possible to send a series of five letters to about 100 people, who passed the letters on to others and created an amazing support network.

Grace: Sighs and prayers. Most times Paul and I were using the "sighs too deep for words" prayer approach, so we were especially grateful for those people who could voice in prayer what we could not. "I will pray for Annie's cure every time I nurse the baby," one acquaintance wrote. "I pray that our faith will be stronger than our fear," wrote a member of our congregation who was battling cancer.

How has true repentance made a difference in your life?

Share »

[Subscribe to this blog's feed](#)

CATEGORIES



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on Facebook

✓ Like You like this.

RECENT COMMENTS

John Campbell: "I learned a lot reading the article. Thanks for the" | [more »](#)

Rob_Chapman: "Great article, thank you! Very interesting!" | [more »](#)

Phyllis: "I know Teresa Jackson, and also know what a blessing" | [more »](#)

Pastor John: "Delmer — Thanks for these wonderful insights into the preaching" | [more »](#)

Rob_Chapman: "This is awesome, you are definitely a good role model" | [more »](#)

be stronger than our fear, "wrote a member of our congregation who was facing cancer.

Grace: Vocation. In a November 1985 letter to family and friends, I wrote: "This experience will surely shape our lives, influence our choices, give us direction. ... We will learn from Annie how to put some of this experience behind us and some of it ahead of us. Instead of counting blessings, we will try to use them. And, we will always remember how the love of God, our love for each other and the love from all of you saved us."

In November 1987, Paul accepted the invitation to join the newly formed ELCA churchwide staff and help launch the communication department, believing that God was offering him the chance to "give back."

This led me to begin my service at the churchwide office in February 1988. Home alone one afternoon, 9-year-old Annie read through the scrapbook of letters, documents and details of this time.

That afternoon, when she realized how serious her illness had been, she understood that God had a claim on her life. "God must want me alive for a reason," she told us. Annie was ordained as an ELCA pastor on September 18, 2010.

Grace: The gift of gratitude. Each year around October 9, I remember the time of amazing, undeserved and life-changing grace upon grace, and I am reminded to be grateful.

Thanks be to God.

[Sue Edison-Swift blogs at Hand in Hand blog](#)

Categories: [Vocation](#), [Women](#), [Youth and family](#)

Tags: [Blogs](#), [Childhood cancer](#), [Grace](#), [Prayer](#), [Vocation](#)