

Thanksgiving

November 27, 2022

I woke up and stared at the ceiling wondering the kinds of things sixty-year old men wonder. I went back in my mind and traced my career while the sun began to peek through my window. So many things I wished I would have done differently. So many things I wished I would have enjoyed more at the time, and, of course, the big question, “Has my life really meant anything?” Tough questions to ask before breakfast!

I showered and shaved and said my morning prayers, then picked up my laptop and walked into the office. There was a phone message on my desk that stopped me cold. It was from one of my students from 35 years ago at Columbia Christian College. It simply read, “Mutual friends were in plane crash in Alaska. Please return call.”

It was from Kimberly - I did performed her wedding. She was a delightful student who married an Apple engineer and she had been part of our CCC Alpine Club. “Mike and Martha were flying home from Juneau to Haines,” she started. Mike was a tall young man from Dutch Harbor and Martha was a vivacious student as short as Mike was tall. They were also in the club and we had all climbed Mt. Hood together (several times) and made a movie for the college. Mike and Martha married right out of school, bought a sailboat and made their way from Alaska to New Zealand on an ex-

tended honeymoon. By the time they got south of the equator, Martha was expecting and they had to ship their boat home to Alaska. Nik was born and Mike worked fishing and cleaning boat bottoms in Dutch Harbor. He is a very competent pilot and was flying their Cessna 180 home with Martha, Nik and a friend, Victoria, when the engine quit.

Mike had climbed to 2,500 feet



Eldred Rock near the site of the crash

and was looking for a place to put down, but Alaska is wilderness and the beaches were rocky. He called a mayday and decided on a water landing as close to shore as he could make it. It was below freezing outside. The water temperature was 40 degrees with 5-foot waves. He slowed as much as he could, but the plane flipped when they hit the water. Mike had had them open the doors and put their hands on their seat belt re-

leases as they went in. There was no time to put on lifejackets. Victoria was the first person out, followed by Nik and Martha. Mike's feet were trapped under the rudder pedals, but he was able to free his feet from his shoes and join the rest on the wing. They were about 30 yards from shore in 700 feet of ice-cold water. Saying a prayer they jumped in and began to swim as the plane disappeared beneath them. It was a rocky, boulder-strewn beach. Victoria made it. Nik made it. Mike was so exhausted, he couldn't pull himself over the rocks, but Nik grabbed his dad's collar and pulled him to shore then saw his mother's head go beneath the water 30 feet away. The seventeen year old dove in, found his mom and got Martha to shore, but she wasn't breathing. She had swallowed too much water and was blue. Mike began CPR ignoring his black, blistered feet. Martha began to respond, but her heart would stop twice more. 45 minutes passed before a Coast Guard helicopter found them. At the hospital, Martha's core temperature was 75 degrees. They loaded her on a life flight to Seattle's Harbor View trauma center where doctors opened her up and warmed her from the inside out. The surgeon gave Mike his operating room slippers and they prayed.

Martha was in ICU in critical condition with Mike and Nik and Kimberly by her side. Even though

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I hadn't seen them in over twenty years, Martha asked Kim to find me and Mike said the survival training I had given them so long ago kept them alive while they waiting for the helicopter. I don't

remember that, but I do remember their laughter and their faith. "John," Mike said, "It was a God-thing. We shouldn't have lived," and I have something to be very thankful for this Thanksgiving.

We never really know or ap-

preciate the impact we have on the people we meet, but one day we will. Won't it be great in heaven to see all of those people who have touched us and say, "Thank you!"



Martha on Mt. Hood



Mike on Mt. Hood

