

January 2008—Do You Need to Write a Letter?

I never wrote the letter. I should have, but I never did.

Terri, Kathy and I were friends in high school. Actually, Kathy was my serious girlfriend until Terri . . . well, that story is better left for another time (or left untold). At any rate, the break-up was nasty and absolute. Then, seven years ago, my mother had a car accident, and Kathy was her therapist.

We literally bumped into each other in the hospital. After a polite (and careful) hug we sat on opposite ends of a family visiting room. Our visit had the potential of being awkward after 27 years; that was alleviated as we both started bragging about our spouses—our own declarations of satisfaction. As I told her of my life in Christ, I recognized a deep spiritual interest and an open door. Terri also began working to reestablish their friendship. Within a couple of months, Kathy accepted Christ as her Savior.

Kathy and her husband were still living in our hometown of Anaconda, Montana. Larry was a strong, powerful man. A pipe fitter by trade. He tried his best to portray himself as a tough guy—intent on conveying his unhappiness with the "Baptist Preacher" who was coming to dinner. He'd say, "Kath, your old boyfriend is here." I'd tell him, "I'm your friend too," and he would gruffly respond, "No your not!" But he took a liking to Terri, which enhanced the relationship among the four of us.

In April of 2006, Larry was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). Shortly after the diagnosis—a promise of slow, continual, and irreversible muscle atrophy—I saw Larry come to Christ.

This past August, after a visit with Larry, I was stacking logs for my cabin. Using a Pee-Vee, leverage, and brute strength, I was able to get the 50-foot logs off the ground and up on the skids. It was brutal yet wonderful work, and I was extremely satisfied at the physical accomplishment of moving and stacking those logs.

I prayed for Larry while I worked. While he was mentally as sharp as ever, the disease was quickly robbing him of his physical strength. This once powerful man could no longer talk, walk, eat, or even hold his head up by himself. The week before I had helped him walk around the perimeter of our cabin so he could "inspect" the new deck Terri and I had built. We both knew it was one of his last walks.

As I moved another massive log into place, I thanked the Lord for the strength He gives me to do this kind of work. I stopped for a break and continued to pray for Larry. His dependence on the Lord inspired me—even as he was becoming completely dependent on Kathy. Humanly speaking, I'm not sure I would have the strength or courage to handle it.

That day I decided to write Larry a letter and tell him that even though I could move logs, he was stronger and braver than I was in his gallant fight with that terrible disease.

Then he died.

I regret that I never wrote that letter. Larry was my friend—he had finally admitted it. He even told me that he loved me. That letter was in my head—it still is. But Larry never knew about it.

Dear Missionaries, we are blessed to have many significant people in our lives. Do you need to take time to thank someone for his or her influence? I have. Actually, I've contacted two.

Bill