

Surprised by Grace

*(The work of God in purifying, maturing,
and elevating the soul or spirit.)*



The *Surprised by Grace* project was begun in late Spring when we invited the congregation to actively look for moments when God graced their lives. The congregation was provided grace diaries in which to record these special moments. Many folks participated in this project and found their lives to have indeed been blessed by it. This booklet tells some of the stories in which God's grace was made evident. We encourage everyone to keep seeking God in the moments of their lives.

It is Spring, and our Spirituality Group has just decided to embark on a project where we watch for examples of God's grace in our lives. I went out to work in my garden, and suddenly it appeared to me that in front of me was a marvellous expression of God's grace, power, and love. Tiny plants had managed to survive a very cold winter, and miraculously had known that this was the time for them to begin to grow again. The trees were filled with buds of leaves just waiting to erupt. The beauty of Spring was more meaningful to me this year because I could see this new season as a wonderful example of God's grace.

It is August, and I have just received a call telling me that I am once again a grandmother. I cried. It is a joy beyond comprehension to have a grand child and also an example of God's grace when you know that this child is healthy and the mother is fine. We start from such a tiny speck of life and, with God's grace, we grow and mature into adults with the capability to reason and understand. This is truly a miracle...a miracle of God.

It is October and I have just addressed the congregation about the link between spirituality and stewardship following Steve's sermon about the face of God. As I stood in front of this loving and caring group of Christian people, I truly felt that I saw the face of God in each one of them. I will always remember that feeling.

Judy Paré

We weren't a family to show affection and one day my grandmother (I was sitting at the table doing homework and probably crying because I did a lot of that when I was a kid) passed behind me and she patted me on the head. I remember the feeling of comfort that it gave me. One day I was sitting in the church, in Brackenridge Hall, and a nice lady from the church went behind me and gave me a pat on the shoulder, and this reminded me of my Grandmother. I felt the same comfort.

Myrna

I have experienced a project long grace moment. From its initial idea, through the advertising stage, handing out of diaries, bulletin announcements, and dinner preparations, the hand of God has moved. The *Surprised by Grace* project has been shared in conversations and with other churches. God just awaits the opportunity then fills our experience with grace.

Chris I.

Summer 2005

I sit on my dock after being refreshed by the cool water during my swim on this calm, still hazy morning in the heat wave. I am not alone, physically yes, but I see the blue herons waiting patiently and still so majestic. The loons, God's gift with their many wondrous calls especially at night. Even the gulls are reminders of my Newfoundland childhood days. Blue jay calls, chickadees feed at the feeder and the dragonflies are doing their work of ridding us of the pesky bugs. What a wondrous world to enjoy and appreciate and feel blessed.

Memories sustain us but are very painful after the loss of a loved one who put his heart and soul into the cottage to provide a happy solace for his family. We feel ever so close to him here and it is a GOOD THING. We are blessed and thankful. One is reminded of his last visit here after 45 summers when the loon family came closer than ever before and played in the bay all day. Each family member thought "they have come to say good-bye" as we knew it was his last summer here. And later, when we were leaving, he sat where he had lovingly guarded the children and then the grand children while in or on the water and said "They have come to say good-bye." When I returned this summer and went for my first swim, there was the loon, God's gift and reminder God is ever present. You are NOT ALONE. So I keep on keeping on.

Grace

Heron perches on the white dock
still, patient
In close, enjoying his man-made island
seeing the lake and yet
the whole world
A gentle reminder that
love is liquid, vast
It shifts with the wind of
the spirit but never recedes.

It drips through dreams
it leaks out of paint and ink
and gets caught in wood,
in windows and in frames.

Roberta for Grace

My Mother died several years ago and while mourning that loss, I especially remembered her as I watched the little chickadees splashing in the birdbath which she had crafted for them at our family cottage. Chickadees were her favourite and would eat out of her hand. Then, two years ago, we sold the family cottage and I felt the loss of her all over again. This spring, we put a birdhouse up in our backyard. We missed watching the sparrows going in and out of the one that our neighbours had taken down and thought maybe we could attract them to ours. It was amazing to see that our first “tenants” were, not sparrows, but chickadees, which we had never seen in our yard before. It was, indeed, a moment of grace.

Mabel

For me, my grace “moment” has lasted for several months. When Lillian told us in May that she would be leaving to take up the post of Presbytery Minister, it hit me hard. I had been looking forward to working with her during my term as Chair of Council. Instead, I had to play a lead role in the transition process to fill the gaping void. I see God’s grace in the support that I have been given in so many ways: the willingness of Steve to play a lead role in our ministry team during the transition to ensure continuity and stability, the willingness of those approached to serve on the JNAC, the support that I have received from my fellow Council Members, and last but not least, the messages of support that I have received from members of the congregation both spoken and written. For me, it has been a long, and much appreciated, grace ~~moment~~ **moment**.

Feel the sheets the next time you go to bed. Rub your hands over their coolness. Smell them. Think of those in poor countries, without the comfort of a bed.

A friend came over and we went walking in the rain. Fun.

The rain has stopped. Drops of it sparkle now on the long grass, forgotten by the mower.
Laziness has its rewards!

The pink flowers in the garden stand out against the green foliage. They make my heart sing. One pink rose climbed up out of the bramble to peak its head out; for me to enjoy the sweet fragrance on the evening air.

Myrna

A Child’s Insights

My son and grandson were having a discussion: Which came first – the chicken or the egg? Chase said, “The chicken.” “Where did it come from?” “The egg.” “Well, way back in time, which one came first?” “The egg.” “But what started the egg?” Without batting an eye, Chase replied, “God made it.”

Grace flowed at Lillian Roberts’ farewell service.

It was a beautiful day in mid- September. I was on the Greyhound bus heading for Toronto. The previous evening, I had learned that my father had been taken to the hospital and I was going to be with him, my mother and sister. My father had been ill for a couple of years and I suspected that, perhaps, the time had come when my mother could no longer care for him and some difficult decisions would need to be made.

I had arrived early and chatted with some of my fellow passengers. I spent the first 3 hours of the 4 hour trip peacefully reading and enjoying the alone time. The plan was for my sister to go to the hospital in the morning, my mother would pick me up at the bus station and we would go to the hospital in the afternoon. About 1 hour outside of Toronto, I called my mother to confirm that she was coming to get me.

I said "I'm calling to make sure there is no change in plans." She paused for a moment and said "Well there have been some big changes here - your father passed away this morning." I couldn't believe it. Just the week prior he had been out buying a digital camera for my daughter. My grief and distress were obvious to everyone on the bus. I asked a few questions but there was nothing that would make any difference.

Before I was off the phone, the lady seated behind me had her hand on my shoulder. She offered her comfort. The young lady across the aisle offered a tissue. A lady from the front of the bus, with whom I had spoken while waiting in line, came back to speak with me. In them, total strangers, I felt God's hand comforting me, reassuring me that I was not alone. What could have been a dreadful, lonely, desolate time was a surprising moment of grace.

Sharon Sanderson

A Visit with Openness

I was going to visit my friend for a few days. She and her husband are struggling with relationship issues. As I was driving along, I asked God to help me to express things that might help them in their struggle. I asked God to place things in our path that might open up meaningful conversations.

The first morning, upon arising, I decided to read an article in the Reader's Digest. It pertained to something that was affecting me in my life. There were some interesting ideas expressed, but the overall topic, like my struggle, left me feeling quite sad.

When I joined my friends for coffee, I told them I wasn't in a very good space. A lot of meaningful conversations then took place because of that statement. Much time passed, and we discussed many topics. Some were extremely helpful to me, and some to them. God had indeed answered my prayers.

Carolyn Scollick

Grace

When

the sunshine and blue sky
break through the overcast grey
of a long wet week,
Or sunlight shimmers on dew drops
on a lush green lawn or a
multicoloured flower bed,
or the scarlet, amber and golds
radiate the glory of fall foliage,
our God of creation
shows Her beauty and bounty.
I am grateful to be alive!

When the wind whispers
through the white pine
my Dad speaks to me.
Pink peonies and yellow day lilies in June
remind me of mother.

When a friend goes out of her way
to share a particular kindness,
or a baby watches in wonder
as her mother talks to and plays with her,
these are times when
that special feeling of grace
bubbles through the mundane
routine of daily chores.

To be able to pause and ponder
these wonders
of nature,
of friends and family,
of our creator,
To me, these are moments of grace.

K.I.

Morning Melody

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Slanting through the tall pines
Early morning sun
Sparkles on the dew blades
Fresh on mown lawn. | 5. Nestled cool and quiet
little girls in mauve
candy tufts sit waiting
watching friends above. |
| 2. Golden Coreopsis,
Ox-eye daisies white
Glow in sun-lit patches,
Dance in Breezes light. | 6. Joyful July chorus;
Robins trill their song.
Cardinal and sparrows
warble loud and strong. |
| 3. Trumpet-orange day lilies,
Lupins in their prime
Join the Shirley poppies,
Nod their heads in time. | 7. High through white pine
branches
whisper wistful winds.
Wonderful this morning,
Summer day begins. |
| 4. White-edged green-gowned Hostas
Sit beside the sod,
Upward reaching flower stems
Matron arms applaud. | |

K.I.

There are crystals hanging in some of our windows where the sun catches them at certain times of the year. This summer, one was hanging in a window totally shaded by large trees and the need to clean the window necessitated taking it down. It was hung in a sunny window and numerous rainbows suddenly began to dance around the room to the delight of two young grandsons and their grandma!

Anonymous

Graeme (age 4) and I used our Grace journals to record “sightings” of God. For some reason, God was easier for us to “spot” during the warm summer of freedom, than in the busy fall. Our journal took the form of GOD IS... What follows is a sample of how we found God.

From Graeme...

God is a pink peony.

From Nadine...

God is music

God is colour

God is beyond music and colour

God is the ancient branches of the city maple shipping about furiously in the summer thunderstorm

God is lurching with a friend on a birdsong garden deck beneath the ivy, talking about God

God is the memory of a distant summer spent in idleness with my grandparents in their country home

Nadine

We were walking in Mer Bleue and were on the board walk crossing the bog. There wasn't much colour immediately around us, but upon looking down, I noticed three bright red branches had made their way through the slats of the board walk as if they were saying “Hey, here I am, look at me!”

A few years ago I had to go to Milton to be with my mother as she underwent hip surgery. The surgery was a decision that I had to make by myself for my mother as my brother was out of the country at the time and I couldn't consult with him. I was anxious and upset as I walked beside the stretcher while they wheeled mother down the hall into the surgical area. The doors closed behind her and I was left standing behind them by myself. A woman (I don't think she was a doctor—I really don't know who she was...) walked by me, touching me on the shoulder, and she said “It's always hard to let go, isn't it?” and she walked on through the door not saying another word. Her words and touch were a comfort to me at a difficult time.

Many years ago I travelled to Milton to be with Mom because my father was having surgery to remove a tumour. I stayed with them in Milton as long as I could, but had to return home because of work commitments. It was not at all easy for me to leave as I really wanted to stay and be a help and support for my aging parents. I boarded the train and shortly thereafter a young gentleman sat down in the seat beside me. We got to talking and I told him that I was sad to be leaving my parents at such a difficult time. I confided in him that I was really upset at having to leave them. While we were talking, he got out pen and paper and busily scribbled something down. He handed to me a mathematical puzzle and asked me to solve it. I thought this rather strange, but set to work solving the puzzle. A while later I handed him the answer that I had gotten. He handed me another sheet with a second puzzle to work on. I spent more time working on that one. I realized at the end of the trip that he had done what he could to relieve my pain. He had distracted me from my preoccupation with the situation. It was indeed a moment of grace for me.

Helen Groeneweg

If I want to photograph a scene, I focus on the scene, snap the shutter, get the film developed and then I have a snapshot of the scene I wanted. The snap of the shutter identifies that scene. Is a grace moment like that? Like the click of the shutter? It's quite possible.

Grace moments are too numerous and too frequent to notice, they simply are there all of the time. Some examples –

Getting up in the morning

First cup of coffee

Sunshine

Falling leaves

A tank full of gas

Newspaper

Sunset

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12

Full moon

Smell of a bakery

Fresh raisin bread

Allergies

Furnace

Fresh strawberries

Screwdriver

Cub scouts selling apples

A walk in the woods

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Grandchildren

Replacing a light bulb

Family Tim Hortons

Bible study

Fresh water

Funeral of Pope John Paul VI

Groceries

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Arriving home after a trip

Health

More fresh strawberries

Matthew 6:10

A drive in the country

Neighbours

A home above sea level

John 6:27

Adscam crooks in court

Post secondary Bible group

Psalms 90

Electric screw driver

Non smoking

Wednesday evening services

Psalms 23:4

Memorial service for a believer

Canadian Tire first thing in the morning

Pumpkin pie

Spring

Chickadees

Matthew 6:25-34

Summer

Hotdog at a ball game

Fall

Christmas dinner

Worship

Prayer

Brakes

Pension

Easter

A Sanctuary full of people

Amazing grace

Breakfast at daily Vacation Bible School

Romans 12

Mastercraft maximum speed ratchet

Smell of fresh cut hay

Philippians 4:6-8

II Thessalonians 2:15-17

A few months ago I got a call to go to the hospital for an MRI which my doctor had ordered. The appointment was for 8 am on a Saturday morning at the Civic Hospital. As Bas was busy, I decided to take the bus. I have been declared blind and needed some help in finding the proper bus stop. The bus driver, who was a Sikh, was more than willing to help me. He asked me if I was going to visit someone and I responded that I was going for a test. We got to chatting about his father and grandfather and the wonderful stories that they would tell him. There was one story in particular that he told me. It went like this: *A man was going on a trip up the mountain to visit a guru. When he found the guru, they went together and sat on some big stones by the lake shore. While he and the guru were chatting, a scorpion came out of the water. The guru leaned down to put the scorpion back in the water. When he did this, the scorpion bit him. The man and the guru continued their chat and once again the scorpion made its way out of the water. The guru picked the scorpion up and gently placed him back in the water, being bitten once again. The man asked the guru why he kept returning the scorpion to the water, risking being bitten each time. The guru said, "It's the spider's habit to bite someone who touches it. It's my habit to help."* The bus driver told the story beautifully and distracted me from my concern about the hospital test. I told him how helpful he had been and was blessed by my encounter with this man I didn't know.

Helen Groeneweg

Grace is Patricia singing Mozart's Laudate Dominum, one of the most beautiful pieces of music ever composed.

Grace is Vince's perpetual genuine heartfelt HUGS!!!!

Grace is 44,000 sober alcoholics having a moment of silence for the alcoholic who still suffers at the 70th Anniversary World Conference of AA in Toronto on the July 1st weekend.

Grace is being home sick on the only day all summer long that my daughter Katie came home from camp to do laundry so I could see how beautiful, tanned and fit she is.

Grace is beautiful flowers watered by neighbours while I was away, looking better than when I left them.

Grace is living in Canada where people can play frisbee on the lawn in front of the Parliament Buildings while a police cruiser goes by and ignores them.

Nadia Senyk

I always feel a great sense of gratitude and awe when I see my grown children with their spouses and children sitting around my dining table. I think I know why Jesus asked us to remember Him at this time, because preparing and serving food for our loved ones is a sacramental act and there can be such moments of love and fun and remembrance of those no longer at the table that it is truly a time of blessing and grace.

Anonymous

It was an August morning, the week after our son's wedding (no small grace moment in itself!), when the phone call came. "Hi," said the voice at the other end of the line, "it's Ben."

I remembered him well from our high school Bible study group, but he hadn't been around much for nearly a year. Now, having finished high school, his days with our group were over. I was more than a little surprised by his call and wondered what it could be about.

As it turned out, he had wonderful news. He'd just come back from a church camp, and while he was there, his life had been changed. Suddenly, the faith that he'd lived with from childhood had become real and had become his own. There was excitement in his voice as he asked, "What do I do now?" He couldn't wait to get started on a new life in Christ, and he had lots of questions.

"Can we talk about this?" "Of course," I said. And we did. A lot. The conversation still continues today.

I felt so privileged to see a grace moment happening in the life of a young person; being asked to share in that moment was a real grace moment for me.

Scott I.

This "collective" grace moment was shared by the whole congregation but is told from the perspective of U.C.W. Unit 2:

In September 2004, our Unit Leader, Martha Becker, became very ill and for several months the news was not good. Then, gradually, she began to recover and when we joyfully welcomed her back to a Sunday morning service early in the spring, it was a grace moment for all of us. This was followed by her progress from wheelchair, to walker to a cane. Every time we see her smiling face, looking as beautiful as ever, we are thankful for her recovery and thank God for her wonderful, supportive family who have been with her every step of the way. Our prayers were answered. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of".

I woke up on the morning of my 73rd birthday to an exceptionally beautiful Ottawa day. Dawn was just breaking and it was breathtakingly beautiful. I had planned to go the gym and then the family had plans for a celebration for me.

I realized with enormous gratitude how blessed I was to be well enough to get out of bed and to go to the gym, to have family to care about me and to be given the concept of looking for moments of grace which is so life-enhancing. I am so pleased that this initiative has been taken and followed through on. Thanks so much. Anonymous

At the Cottage

It is the middle of the afternoon and chickadees, nuthatches and other small birds are making their regular round through the white pines seeking insects. We are on the deck and I hold out bird seed in my palm. A chickadee flies over my right shoulder, lands on my fingers, searches for a sunflower seed, grasps it in its beak, then flies off.

I am kneeling on the dock measuring the water depth with a white ruler. Suddenly a muskrat almost bumps into the stick with its nose. It looks up and for a second we have eye contact before it quickly swims away. I was probably as startled as it was.

We are at the cottage on the Thanksgiving weekend. There is a brilliant orange sunset extending over much of the southwestern skyline and lasting for over fifteen minutes. The reflection from the lake of the tree line on the far shore and the sunset magnify this moment of grace.

It is evening. All is quiet. The loons begin their conversations. Thoughts of the city disappear as we immerse in nature.

We are leaving the cottage late in the afternoon. As we round a corner we see a doe and its fawn in the middle of the road. We have seen this pair on previous occasions. The doe steps to one side and the fawn to the other. They stop, turn and quietly observe us as we drive slowly by. Lorne Gold

Moments of grace appear at our meetings as Richard, Suzanne, Jenni, Steve, Chuck and I laugh, share, support each other and pray for the needs of the congregation. Chris I.

In my search to understand human nature and the "shadow" (that which we repress) part of our being, I made a trip to the Singing Pebble book store, just in case there was something there which would answer some questions I had. I looked at books for a half an hour or so and was about to give up when one book caught my eye. Entitled *Meeting the Shadow*, this book was a compilation of 65 essays written by eminent psychiatrists and psychologists, (living and dead), dealing with the topic. I've always found that when I want to learn something new along the road of life, I am guided to the book, person, dream or situation which will help me along the way. I'm almost finished reading the book now, and am filled with new learning and understandings. Grace guided me to the store and to the book. Chris I.

Over forty years ago at Britannia United Church, a group of young women got together to start a Bible Study. They were not very common in the United Church at that time and some looked at us askance.

The group carried on for a number of years as people came and went but I lost touch as we moved more often and farther than most.

Imagine my surprise when I returned to Ottawa many years later to be invited back to join in the fellowship which had survived with a core of about eight good friends. They were no longer studying the Bible but developed wonderfully fast friendships which had taken them through illness, job loss, wayward children, divorce and death. Some of the group were very old and infirm but they were faithfully picked up each month for a visit. Alzheimer's had claimed one but she was still visited by her special friends. Some of us lost spouses and were helped through that situation.

As part of our conversation that day, the idea of "experiencing of grace" came up. We were sitting in the sunshine laughing and talking about so many things when suddenly we all looked at each other and realized that the friendship and the caring and concern which had started so many years ago was, for all of us right then and there, a gift of Grace. Anonymous

We had lived on the same street for twenty years with a family of three children with a divorced mother. She and I had become friends when we found out we were both canvassing for the Salvation Army. Over the next months and years my late husband and I became surrogate grandparents for the three young people attending school concerts, plays, dinner together.

When my husband became terminally ill with cancer, the family and particularly the young child, a girl of 13, gave us, in retrospect, many moments of grace.

We were all devastated, however, when four months after my husband passed away, Valerie was diagnosed with cancer. The next eighteen months were very difficult in many ways for that little family but I tried to be there for them as much as I could.

A particularly difficult moment came when the oldest child, Jen, a very talented artist, won a scholarship worth \$7,000 to continue her studies in animation and she had to choose between taking it or not. Without complaint, she gave this up to help her mother care for her dying sister. The following year, she went back to finish her studies and graduated.

One day three years later, when I was visiting the family, she told me there was a possibility that she might get an internship with Spielberg's Dreamworks. She had applied but nothing had been finalized. I had been telling the family about our Surprised by Grace series and they really liked the idea. I said, "Maybe this will be one of them." I urged her to phone right then and there, which she did, to discover that she was indeed one of three interns picked in North America.

Her mother, she and I sat around the table holding hands, laughing and crying and feeling such a closeness and such a sense of love and joy triumphing over sadness, death and pain that it was unbelievable. It was a special moment of Grace.

Anonymous

There was a boy on the basketball team that I coached last spring. He was much smaller and slighter than his teammates. When someone passed him the ball, the force of the pass would stagger him. When he was out on the floor in traffic he would be overwhelmed by larger players and would not be able to make a play. He tried hard but basketball was a tough game for him. We tried to encourage him but sometimes he became very discouraged with his play.

On the last day of the season we had a tournament. The game went as usual for him. He tried hard but was buried under bigger, stronger opponents. He had one opportunity in three games to take a shot at the basket but his shot was knocked away by a taller player. As the final game of our season ended he put on his jacket and headed for the door. He looked defeated.

After the last game there was to be a skills competition. With the help of his parents, my co-coach and I managed to get him to take his jacket off and take part in the skills contest. First we had a shooting contest on each individual team. Shooting without large defenders banging into him, our smallest player won our team competition for elimination shooting. He received a medal and now that defeated look was replaced by smile.

He went on to the league final. And going up against the 16 best shooters in the league, our team champion made it to the final two shooters. After a close competition he finished in second place. He won another medal. And his smile got bigger.

At the end of all the competitions he had won a total of three medals. He went away from the last day of the season, staggering under the weight of his medals, wearing a big and self-satisfied smile. Even now some months later when I think about this little guy walking out of the gym with three medals and a big smile on his face I find myself smiling too. This for me was a real moment of grace.

Steve C.

Some of my grace moments include:

- C seeing a monarch butterfly at the beginning of the summer
- C seeing portulaca growing out of the pavement beside the curb of the street
- C seeing a good friend holding her first baby grandson
- C hearing a Rideau Park person greet another Rideau Park person who had been in the hospital with the question "What can I do for you?"
- C hearing laughter and conversation between my father-in-law and his relatives who were visiting
- C visiting with good friends on a day in Pakenham
- C hearing the Cherub Choir sing Sunday morning
- C sharing conversation with Rideau Park friends at coffee time
- C listening to Bas explain a passage from the Bible
- C reading books on grace
- C reading the Ladies #1 Detective Agency book
- C going on retreat and see a perfect rainbow on Saturday afternoon
- C listening to Steve, Lillian and Christina give a sermon
- C the girls cleaning up after Thanksgiving dinner
- C walking to work with Brian in the cool fall weather

Doreen H.

As a memorial for my husband, Ron, I have made several donations for hymn books in his memory. For almost 10 years, on each Sunday when I picked up a hymn book in the pew, I looked immediately as usual to see if it was one of those dedicated to Ron. In late June, to my great joy, when I opened the hymn book, for the first time in all those years, I found it was one of the dedicated ones. I was overwhelmed and caught up in memories at this special moment.

Joyce I.

In May, I returned to revisit friends in the town in England where our family spent four years, forty years ago. It is more than five years since I had last visited and we are all getting older and some friends have moved away or died in the interval. I am still overwhelmed by the warmth of the welcome I am given and the strength of enduring bonds despite the time and distance.

My hosts ask if there is anything special I would like to do while I am with them and I choose a day-long slow tour off the main roads to the little villages, nestled in the Cotswold Hills, I remembered. I am deeply moved by the feeling of timelessness as we stopped and walked down still familiar winding roads through the villages, visited centuries' old country churches and occasionally came upon riders on horseback as we rounded a bend. The vistas of stone fences, green fields with slashes of brilliant golden crops of rapeseed in the distance were stunning reminders of the beauty of nature around us. It was lambing time too and green hillsides were dotted with lambs trying to keep up with their mothers. Another reminder for me of scenes I often recall

Returning to Ottawa from Prague via London in late May, I ventured a few words with my seat mate, a young man who alternated reading a book in Arabic with covering his eyes and trying to catch up on sleep. Early in the trip he had remarked on the newspaper I was reading: "The Guardian", saying it was a good paper! In one of his wakeful moments, I said he must have come some distance that day and he told me he was living in Jerusalem. He was returning to Ottawa to see his mother who was undergoing cardiac surgery. I learned that he was a graduate of Carleton and Dalhousie Universities. In the course of conversation, he told me about his family and his work on the staff of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for Assistance to the Palestinian People. Ehab patiently answered my questions about his work and the situation in that troubled area and showed appreciation for my interest. As I was able to obtain some information when I returned home, about a service in which he was interested, he gave me his business card. We have had several email exchanges since and I feel from them that I have had the privilege of making a new and valued friend. Joyce I.

Some moments in life are filled with grace, saturated with the Holy. This past spring my father-in-law died. This was a time of sadness but also of grace.

He was a great person, larger than life and full of life. He had an auto immune disease that attacked his lungs and in his final weeks it was difficult for him to breathe but he endured it all with grace and with an unshakeable faith. He was an inspiration.

On the final night of his life his children came to be with him. He was the father of nine and all nine of his children were there with him at the end. They sang hymns and read prayers with him for hours. For a few minutes I left our children at home and went over to his home with a prayer book and a copy of Voices United that my wife Keva wanted to have there at his bed side. As I approached his house in the evening's darkness I could see clearly through his lit bedroom window. I can vividly remember seeing all of his children standing together around his bed.. I had the opportunity to pray with everyone for a moment and to exchange some final words with my father-in-law. His passing was filled with God's grace. Steve C.

There was once a rabbi in a small Russian village who mysteriously disappeared every Friday. It was whispered, and the villagers sincerely believed, that on those days he ascended to Heaven itself. A newcomer to the village heard this, and was extremely sceptical. So, making sure he was not seen, he stealthily followed the rabbi one Friday. He saw the rabbi change into the clothes of a peasant. Then, carrying an axe, he went into a nearby forest where he cut down a tree. He cut the tree into firelogs. Gathering enough for a week's burning he took them to the home of an old and frail woman. After that, he returned to the village, changing back into his usual clothes.

And ever afterwards, when the villagers declared that every Friday their rabbi ascended to Heaven, the newcomer would say under his breath, "If not higher."

Saul Bellow

I think we would agree that, generally, volunteers are a happy and uplifting group. They receive moments and minutes of grace in abundance.

There is a resident, her name is Grace, in the Special Care section of one of our Ottawa long term care facilities. I must explain that the tag my dog Dewy wears which says "I am a therapy dog" is often misread as "I am a happy dog" or "I am a happy therapy dog." Grace had obviously been thinking about this when she stopped us while we were leaving and said with emphasis and a twinkle in her eye, "Remember, I am a happy therapy dog!"

This was a moment of grace for me (and I'm sure for Dewy too) because I knew we had connected. We had given her a lift.

Bill Totten

Grace is God in action at Rideau Park United Church.
Grace is hearing the Euchre group laugh at joke time.
Grace is hearing the children laugh at playgroup.
Grace is a church full of mid-week activities.
Grace is singing voices in the Sanctuary.
Grace is committed volunteers.
Grace is Dewy coming to visit.
Grace is Paul Sorg at work.
Grace is uplifted prayers.
Grace is Love lived.

Anonymous

This whole, simple process

of naming our experiences in life,
of coming to the edge,
of facing the ultimate questions,
of choosing to turn back or go beyond
is something we often face alone.

But for those who choose to move beyond
for these who choose to die to self,
this journey
to the heart of the Lord
will not ever be travelled alone.

And this is our point here:

we are graced,
everyone is graced,
empowered, in other words,
to move beyond and be transformed.

A Spirituality of Wholeness - Bill Huebsch