

**Column071419**

**Companions on the Journey**

July 14, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

*Today is the tenth anniversary of the death of my nephew Christopher, my sister Barbara's son. Below is a portion of the column I wrote the week after he died.*

My nephew Christopher died on the 14th of July. He died in the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania where he had been a patient many times over the 40+ years of his life. Chris was a unique young man. He had chronic health issues all his life but was truly a battler, a quiet battler. He accepted what he had as part of life and did his best simply to move through life and do the best he could within the limits his physical health allowed. He never chose to view himself as a victim of life's inerrant ways.

I have no actual number to fall back on but my educated guess is that Chris had been admitted into the hospital over 80 times in his life. He had to hook up to an Intravenous rig every night of his life for almost 20 years. It is what kept him alive. His body was not able to draw sufficient nourishment from the food he ate to sustain him so this supplemental help did the job. But just think of that. Going away? Pack the IV pole and the cooler with the IV packets. But his attitude was—"There are people with a lot worse stuff wrong with them than I have. Let's move on." And so he did.

He had worked for Prudential for 19 years but then there were cutbacks and layoffs. There was not a thing wrong with the quality of his work, it was just that his department had to be "downsized" and so he was let go. It was last September that he began to cook at the rectory and help with the laundry just to keep him in a little extra money while he was looking for work. Eventually he realized that his working days of employment were over and he applied for, and received on the first try, his disability from the Federal Government. He was a good cook. Years ago he had cooked for two different convents—one Sisters of Mercy, one Sisters of Saint Joseph—and acquitted himself quite well.

He has a daughter, Julie, who just graduated from Saint Catherine of Sienna school in Horsham. She lives in Florida and has completed her Associates degree and works in the Publix food store chain. Part of me thinks that he lived longer than he would have because of her. He took seriously his responsibility for forming her as a young woman and as a Catholic. He was aware that sometimes an only child can rather easily be spoiled but he was determined that was not to be so in his daughter's case.

In the end he had yet another infection. This time it traveled to his heart. The endocarditis ate away the valve of his heart. Small pieces entered the blood stream, traveled to his brain and there were two strokes. The second one a massive one. This time there was no rallying. There was nothing he could do any longer. He had been placed on life support to help him breathe but it was clear that he had passed the point of no return. When he was removed from the ventilator he was able to breathe on his own for about 45 minutes and then the Lord called him home. He has carried his cross to the very end. He can put it down now. We will all still miss him terribly but not one of us would bring him back from what he now knows face to face—the loving embrace of his God.

Peace,  
Msgr.

McHenry