

MM Email Blue Sheet From Garden Grove California

On Attending the Last Supper

How can anyone turn down an invitation to a Last Supper? We were on our final road trip of the season when the call came. A friend who claims me as “pastor and mentor” was diagnosed terminal. Instead of being present after her death she wanted an “A-Wake”... a “pre-memorial party.” Family and friends were invited. She was determined that we were to be present. Air fare and hotel would be provided. I thought of the more famous “last supper” where Jesus’ friends gathered somewhat stunned that an end was coming, but honored to be included in an inner circle. How does one attend a “last supper?”

Plans are often changed with a phone call

Plan A was to come home by way of our Puget Sound cabin. We have tools, laundry and our business files that need to be in Corvallis. Our plans were changed while we were on the road. Plan B would be to drive directly from Pocatello Idaho to Corvallis to prepare for a flight to Los Angeles. We were expected at a last supper.

June’s party would draw over 100 people to a home that has an open hospitality tradition that goes back for many years. All sorts of people were on the list. We met all her children and grandchildren and some great-grandchildren as well. We met her mechanic and the University President where her husband had been a professor. We met neighbors and even a Nobel Laureate.

If people expected a sober event they were in for a surprise...

There was June, bright and chipper, her radiation sessions temporarily suspended. Brightly dressed and bright-eyed she knew every guest and greeted each with a hug and kiss. Balloons filled the rooms, and plenty of bubbly was included with the beverages. The tables overflowed with food. People soon got into the spirit of a celebration. Each had an opportunity for a personal moment with her to speak a special memory. It was as she wished. She wanted to be present to hear such words. She is not in denial about what is. There were occasional tears as good-byes were said, but very few. Again, as June wished.

I watched the party bubble on thinking what I will miss.

I will miss her thoughtful responses to my thoughts and the honesty of her own. I will miss her inquisitive mind and intentional reading. She has not only read authors like Marcus Borg, Dominic Crossan, and Shelby Spong, she has gone out at night to Chapman University to hear them lecture, and to personally embrace each of them with a hug, just as she did with me when we first met on her doorstep years ago.

The final words most heard her speak were of her love for them.

It is touching to see a family gather from across the country for a last party with a beloved matriarch...to see her embrace each one with a hug and kiss, then hold them at arm’s length to look deeply into their eyes. She knew...we all knew...that these were the last hugs, the last good-byes. It was a special time, a sacred moment.

+++++

While we were down there...

We stayed close enough to allow some extra visits and personal time with June. We were able to work in a bit quality time with three of our 90+ year-old friends as well as a mini-reunion with my cousins in exile. We did one unscheduled visit a day. Then we parked the rental car and flew home. Oh, I forgot to tell about Jean and the smoke. Oh well.

Morgan’s Moment...

*Did I mention the birthday cake episode?
when a special cake was presented...
at June’s “pre-memorial party?”
With June trying to get the song leader
to up the “Happy Birthday” tempo
because it sounded like a funeral dirge
And the lighted cake was presented...
for June to gather her breath
to snuff
All the candles out in one blow
greeted by cheers and applause...
and smiles
When the beautiful cake
skidded off the tray
crashing smashed to the floor!
A stunned holy moment of silence...
Until Jean started applauding
And smiles and laughter sprang out
the widest from June herself
as her cake lay at her feet.
It was a perfect June “moment”
in a life rich with the unexpected
and joy dancing as dying waited.
I suggested “divine intervention” to June
whose theology is too advanced
for such superstition.
June said, I think,
“I couldn’t have planned it any better...
even if I tried.”*

—Art Morgan

BOOK CORNER

Many of our readers read books. Some get suggestions from this corner. This corner is always on the lookout for suggestions.

I try to warn people that this corner only lists books I’ve been reading, not all of which I recommend.

The “party lady” mentioned on this page was one who often bought books mentioned here. Her reading fueled a life-long openness to new ideas and contemporary scholarship.