



Address: Six Inches Under the Tiger Lilies

Much has been recorded over the millenniums about attempted correspondence with the dead. In nearly every culture some form of clairvoyance, vision seeking, dream interpreting, or other types of psychic powers have been called upon by individuals seeking to receive messages from the recent or long since deceased. In modern times, practitioners of these skills have made fortunes by (or been run out of town for) passing along edicts from deceased leaders and long overdue apologies from relatives or for simply opening the window wide enough to allow in the voice of a faraway spirit.

Through the ages there have been less formalized messages believed to come back from beyond the grave. Bird sightings, rainbows, and strong winds at the time of a death are viewed as final farewells of the newly departed. Taps on shoulders, mysterious voices in the night, and ghosts named and unnamed reinforce the idea that, while all humans become deathly silent, there is much they still want to transmit back to the living.

These lines of communication, however, also suggest that it is the deceased who have all the news. Because I now have terminal cancer, I have been thinking about my own options for correspondence after death. Rather than feeling the need to send messages back, I am looking for ways to get news about the living once I'm six inches under the tiger lilies. I can't imagine that being compost under the garden soil will compel me to reappear at someone's window or tap another's shoulder late in the night demanding to be heard. But I am hoping someone somewhere will be able

to step up to the plate and send me updates on life above ground after I'm gone. I have so many questions I'll want answered, and should there be a volunteer, here are a few ideas to get the much appreciated messenger started.

First and foremost, I hope every message sent to me includes descriptions and stories about my growing grandchildren. If grandchildren arrive after my death, I'd really like to know their names and something about who they become. For the grandchildren I already know, I have enough questions to require weekly correspondence.

Solvin Devine Arnold is only two-months-old, and I have plenty of questions about him. I can't help but wonder what his personality will become and how he will manage as a toddler and then as a young child. Already I am wondering if he'll be an eager-to-talk child or a silent, watchful little guy. Will he want to be read to at night, or will singing be more his cup of bedtime tea? Does he still look so much like his father at one year, two years, ten years?

Dylan Olds MacLean is beyond interesting at age four. What I can't wait to ask about are his next interests and sources of information overload. I am even more curious about what he will become as an adult. So far, if his early interests hold, he seems well suited to becoming a paleontologist, marine biologist, entomologist, or Manuel the Construction Site Chief. Although he now says that he "likes people but isn't interested in people," I want to know who are his new friends in school.

Jae Arnold, the oldest of my grandchildren, will soon be five years old. This fall he enters a Waldorf school, and that gives me lots of questions to ask. I wonder how he'll do with his teachers and new friends. What is he doing these days musically, and how many new dance costumes does he have tucked in the back of his closet? Is he still so happy to have a small brother in the house, and has he sighted any new species of birds lately in his backyard? And, as the oldest of the grandchildren, will he remember our back porch games and doing the wash in the front yard bucket?

I would also be most grateful to my messenger for any and all news about my two sons and their partners. And, not necessarily in the given

order, I've got questions about the following:

What happens to my beloved little cabin in the woods? Does the local and national condo and loft construction glut ever topple the housing market? Does Al Gore's 2006 movie *An Inconvenient Truth* manage to make any difference in the movement to get our nation to stop its part in global warming? How many of my women friends make it to the old-lady-with-flowers-on-her-walker stage? Does the USA ever apologize to the surviving Native People for what Thomas Jefferson in 1803 stated as merely inevitable: that "they must see we have only to shut our hand to crush them" and proceeded to let it happen? Where do all my earthly treasures end up? Who wins the 2010 World Cup soccer game? What happens to my cat Lizzie after I am gone? Do young women get any relief from the increasingly virulent campaigns against contraception and abortion?

I have so many questions large and small to ask from the grave. I have questions about all my friends and neighbors, about politics, and about the future of religious groups like the Taliban, the Christian Conservatives, and the Episcopalians. How does my newly divided bleeding heart plant do in my garden? What about Sierra Leone's Peace Agreement and Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation efforts just now beginning? What becomes of public and private libraries as the digital age becomes more and more dominant in our society? Does my family of origin farm turn into another exurbia development with a Wal-Mart down the road?

And how can I ever express my gratitude to the messenger who sends me news of all those I love, of the world I love, and of the future I can't imagine ceasing to care about? Just know that whoever you are, your messages are most appreciated. Don't ever worry about them finding me, as nothing is ever lost on those who yearn to know. Oh, and one other request for the messenger: could you send along *The New York Times* Sunday newspaper each week? I'll finally have enough time to read it cover to cover, including the obits.