

In my dream, Ray says he needs a haircut. He, of course, is driving. I, his companion, his wife, am seated beside him watching the road signs, looking for a barbershop.

We ride along the nicely paved road. I, the navigator, am watching the road signs while also searching for a barbershop along the busy road, along the business district's flowered sidewalks. Ray slows down as we come to a fork in the road. Our road, paved and pretty, obviously continues to the right, even road signs with arrows are pointing to the right. This way, I point out to Ray, continue on this road.

After a brief slow down, Ray veers to the left, down the unpaved, muddy road. No! Not this way, I call out. This is not even a road! Actually, it looks more like a walking trail, narrow and dangerous along the side of a steep mountain. Scary looking dead trees hovering over the path, their witch-finger branches seemingly trying to grab us ... the road, if you could call it that, of course, is all down hill. Looking ahead, I cannot fully anticipate the deceptive curves, the slippery, sticky mud, the unpredictable passages. Ray, look! Down there is a place to turn around. Great! Let's turn around!

Ray does not turn around. He continues the maddeningly slow creep downhill. Slowly but surely continuing the decline. Even staying on the road is difficult for him, but he will not turn around! Oh, please, Ray, I beg. I cry, please, don't go this way! Let's turn around! Definitely, we are going the wrong way. Ray, precious and persistent man that he is, thinks he can still find a way; he can overcome this rough road. He thinks we'll go just a little bit further. We'll find our way. But, I don't want to go.

And, now there are no more turn arounds - now it is too late to turn back. Now, of course, there is not even a place to stop; the road becomes more and more narrow. Are there no other people here? Are we completely alone? Everything along the roadside is bare and desolate; only empty, peeling-paint buildings, a ghost town. Why, wild flowers are not even growing here!

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them.¹

Ray and I are going downhill along unfamiliar paths that neither of us have known. We are like blind people who need guides. Was there ever really a choice as to which fork in the road to take? And, once on that downhill turn, was there ever really a place to turn around? No, of course not. This path is not a path of our choosing. Who in their right mind - or wrong mind - would ever choose the road of Frontotemporal Dementia? And, who would ever allow the person with FTD to be in the driver's seat? And, besides that, who has ever even heard of FTD?

I had known for years that something was a little off-kilter, but the incidents, at first, were very few and very far between. In fact, in the beginning they were so subtle that they could innocently be described, and accepted, as simply the quirks of a strong personality, a very smart man, an electrical engineer, a Marine Colonel. The good times were happy, loving times spent traveling, having interesting discussions, volunteering, staying busy in the community and busy with our families. Everything anyone would expect. Can I describe the good times with him as

¹ Isaiah 42:16

being perfect? Of course not. At times, precious man that he is, he was a real pain in the patootie. Sometimes he still is.

I will turn the darkness into light before them.

Everyone has heard of Alzheimers which claims about 80% of all dementia patients. But, few people have heard of Frontotemporal Dementia which accounts for only about 5% of the total dementia cases.² I certainly hadn't heard of FTD and certainly did not recognize Ray's behavior as symptoms. Until I heard a local neurologist speak about the various types of dementia, I had no idea. When she discussed the symptoms of FTD, I had a "light bulb moment." She was describing what I had seen in my husband --- what we were experiencing first-hand. The darkness we lived in turned into light. Now I knew. Now I had no doubt. His personality was being infiltrated, and the boundaries were being eroded, by the insidious behavioral variant of an incurable disease of the brain. Unfair! Undeserved! Unwelcome!

And, will make the rough places smooth.

All is lonely here; just the two of us. Just the two of us in the car that made the downhill turn; the car which is following a definite decline. Where are the other people? Where are the flowers? Where are the birds singing their songs? The little animals scampering along the pathway? There's only two of us here. We have to continue on, but where are we going? How

² *What If It's Not Alzheimer's?* by Lisa Radin and Gary Radin

much further do we have to go? Where will this road end? When will the rough places in this treacherous road become smooth ...

Ohhh, look! Amazingly, I'm just now noticing ... we're not really alone! The roughness in the road is being smoothed out, as we go! As we go, we are experiencing ... Love. Yes, that's it! Love is here, easing this difficult path with a hug, a quick kiss, a hand held, a sweet look, a kind word. Everything else has changed, other things have fallen away, our life together as we once knew is gone. Yes, gone. But, Love is here with us, straightening out the deceptive curves, lifting us up out of the sticky mud; calming and soothing us, as we go through unpredictable passages.

I will not forsake them.

Before he goes to sleep every night, Ray tells me, he prays that in the morning he will be better. In his dreams, he is better. But, I, seated beside him watching the signs, can see he is not getting better, he is continuing the slow downhill ride, the decline. We have quit looking for a barbershop; he no longer talks about needing a haircut. It is enough that we have not been forsaken; Love is here. It is enough that I am riding with him, beside him, holding his hand. No, we have not been forsaken ... for Love is unfailingly here with us ... It is enough.