

HOME

She was happy to be home and in her own bed. She continued to use her walker to get around the house. She used the wheelchair whenever she was up for the day. But the important thing was that she was HOME! A nurse checked on her each morning and an occupational and physical therapist put Agnes through the paces. I also had a nurse's aide assist with daily baths. With all this homecare services, she seemed to improve. Pam would come home every weekend and take Agnes for a "wheel" around the neighborhood. We began planning for Christmas. I put up our big tree and Agnes and Pam decorated the tree and the house. We were looking forward to a MERRY Christmas. The house looked festive with all the decorations and lights. Gifts, beautifully wrapped, were beginning to pile under the Christmas tree.

Agnes and I had been very active in our church—Lord of Life Lutheran Church. We were charter members and communicants for some 15 years. I sang in the choir, was a lay preacher, a Eucharistic minister (visited homebound members and delivered wine and bread previously blessed by our pastor), was a board member of the church council several times, served on several committees, and gave two sermons during the pastor's absence. Agnes was a Sunday school teacher and was loved by all her children. A week or so before Christmas, the children from our church came caroling. They came in a pickup truck packed with hay representing a hayride. They visited the homes of church members who were ill or homebound. One evening Agnes and I were sitting by the blazing fireplace when the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, the children began singing Christmas carols. I invited them in, accompanied by parents

playing guitars; the children crowded into our living room, facing Agnes sitting in her wheelchair, and serenaded her. It was a touching scene. It brought tears to my eyes to see how much Agnes enjoyed the moment. Agnes offered them homemade cookies and hot cocoa. They didn't have time to drink the hot cocoa, but they took the cookies. The children kissed and hugged Agnes and soon were on their way to serenade others.

Christmas Day was a special occasion for the three of us. We were thankful to be together as a family. We took turns opening our gifts. It had been Agnes's practice to save all the ribbons and tags indicating who the gifts were from. Special gifts were usually preceded by remarks such as "Open this one first, Mom" or "Open this one, Dad" or "Pam, you gotta open this." It was a great time exchanging gifts, not so much for the gifts, but for the love of giving. All in all, it was a wonderful day!

The year 1999 was coming to an end. We looked anxiously to the coming year with renewed optimism. We hoped Agnes would be "fit as a fiddle" by early spring. Pam came home to help us celebrate the New Year 2000. Agnes and I tried to stay awake until midnight, but we were exhausted and went to bed early. We were awakened by Pam. She turned on our bedroom light and shouted, "Happy New Year!" She turned on the television. People were celebrating the New Year in Times Square, New York. Whistles and horns were blaring and confetti filled the air. Some of our neighbors were celebrating the occasion with fireworks and tooting horns. Pam kissed us and wished us a Happy New Year and we did likewise to her.

I remember thinking—we made it to 2000. It was a landmark entering a new century.

We celebrated New Year's Day quietly and in somber contemplation. When it was time for Pam to return home, she approached me, after saying goodbye to Agnes, who was in bed.

“Mom doesn’t want me to leave; do you think she had a premonition?” I didn’t think so. I assured Pam everything was all right. Agnes never complained to me. I know now that she spared me her problems. She was much sicker than I was aware of. I continued to believe she was going to be healthy and strong once again; that was, until she woke me up in the middle of the night on January 8th. She was complaining of severe pain. I turned on the light and felt her forehead. She was perspiring profusely and burning up. I knew she was in bad shape. I called 911 for an ambulance.

