

Christmas to be marked by empty chair, solitary stone

The date was March 8, 2011. The worst day of our lives. Paul, our second-eldest son, died in Markham Stouffville Hospital.

He was 47. In reality, his passing should have come as no surprise. Six days earlier, doctors truthfully told us there was no hope. He'd been rendered unconscious by a massive stroke, the cause of which we'll never know.

Sometimes, there's no explaining the inexplicable.

Physicians and nurses tried. Oh how they tried. First, with a hand-held device at Uxbridge Hospital and later an automatic support system at Markham Stouffville.

Without success.

His parents and family tried. Oh,

how we tried. First, with comforting words of re-assurance and later with calming words through prayer.

It wasn't to be. Paul had departed this life without an opportunity to say goodbye. This hurt.

Paul had also departed this life without our opportunity to say goodbye. This hurt even more.

And still does.

For, try as I might, the guilty feeling as to what I could have done and what I should have done, won't go away — a trip to the Air Canada Centre to see his beloved Leafs, a box seat at the Rogers Centre to cheer on his adopted Blue Jays, a glimpse of a timber wolf in the Northern Ontario wilds, additional companion walks in the Durham forest during spring, summer and

fall. I'll be forever troubled.

For me, the never-too-late is forever-too-late.

However, Dec. 8 engendered some sense of relief. It was a time to share our loss with others who, during the past 12 months, have endured similar sorrows.

SOME RELIEF

Stouffville's O'Neill Funeral Home hosted its third annual Christmas memorial service.

It was proficiently prepared and well attended.

Amid the glow of hand-held candles, a DVD presentation, co-arranged by home manager Patrick Leblanc assisted by Kelly Martiniello and Cindy Noronha, was beautifully displayed in both print and photographic form.

It was viewed in an atmosphere of respectful silence — memories of 94 lives were re-lived.

The service also included a choir, Voices of Glory, directed by Eugenie Landry, vocal selections by Rosa Alaimo, Amber Gaerlam and Kiana Landry, readings by Peter Hughes, Vanessa Censoni and Mr. Leblanc, bereavement support by Linda Fotheringham and a consoling message by Rev. Nancy Waterman.

"Christmas is a time for Frosty the snowman, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer and Santa Claus," Rev. Waterman said. "But there's also another story — a story about a baby born in Bethlehem."

For us, Christmas will be a sad time — an empty chair and a solitary stone. For others too.



Roaming Around
with Jim Thomas

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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