



## WAITING

*"Phyllis, you are the craziest person I know, and the dearest!"*

On any given day, after months of caring for someone, you find yourself not knowing what day it is, and wrestling with your own spiritual loneliness. Suddenly you want to make the dying hurry up so you don't have to constantly witness the pain. It was hard to watch George struggle so valiantly, to watch death happen every day, and to not yearn to die with him or for him.

One evening after dinner, when we'd finished watching the Wimbledon tennis finals in the family room, George grew quiet. Feeling a little weepy, we joked about the fact that I still played for him in his men's group, using his god-awful heavy racket, so that he could still be 'on the court' with his friends.

As I finished cleaning up the kitchen, I asked him to tell me about his greatest frustrations so far on this journey. He didn't answer. I wondered if he'd heard me since he didn't wear his hearing aid anymore. Perhaps he was asleep.

Finally, he said, "I'm tired of waiting."

"Waiting? For what?" I asked.

"That could take all night. There's just too much to say."

"Well, I have all night. Let's talk about it."

I prepared his hot toddy, and a glass of pinot noir for me. Then we talked for more than an hour, with our eyes tearing up in pain and tender laughter. It was the first time George shared what it meant to him to wait for each moment of living—and dying. This began many hours of sharing. Over many months, these were some of the things that George told me were hard or meant a lot to him:

"When I wake up, I wait to see if my eyes are getting worse. They are.

"I wait to feel if I can move my head, my arms or legs. Each day I can move less.

"I wait to see if I can still whistle. I worry that if I lose my whistle, I won't be able to call you when I need you. I love our joke that this is the only time I can whistle for you without getting a shoe thrown at me.

"I wait for your smile.

"I wait for you to get me out of bed into the wheelchair, lift me out of the wheelchair onto the bidet, and close the bathroom door and let me sit alone for a few minutes. I love that you tell me it's time for bowel movements with Beethoven, and then you turn on the Bose music system. You always say that you'd love to smell