
Eleazar Cirilo, aka "Charlie"

18 August 1919 – 06 March 1996

Son of Guadalupe and Constancio Cirilo

Eleazar Cirilo was called Chal by his family and Charlie by nearly everyone else, except the church people, who always called him Brother Cirilo. The rest of us called him daddy or grandpa, and he always told us he was "the daddy of the whole bunch." Daddy told me when I was just a small girl that he had had me all by himself with his little hatchet while mama was away visiting in Louisiana. I cried when I discovered, after some years, that it wasn't true.

Daddy, like all of his siblings, was given one name only at birth. Years later, one of his brothers, uncle Eli, changed his name from Elias to Eli Anthony. Daddy commented when Eli changed his name, and years later aunt Emily wrote, "I guess maybe all of you have two names, I just know one. All of us had only one, so as not to confuse anyone.... Of course, most of us had nicknames which most of us didn't like and fought most of our lives to get the others to forget them. I don't think Charlie minded his. I think he liked it more than Eleazar. I hated mine and am not about to tell you what it was. Anyway, since I'm your Mother's age, I've forgotten. Love, your Aunt Emily (Actually, Amelia -only Mother called me that and only when she was mad at me, so the name has a bad connotation - but that is not my nickname-only my real name).

Actually daddy did not hate his name, he signed it in beautiful script even on the most personal of letters. What he did not like particularly was the difficulty most people had with its pronunciation. He did not mind his nickname though, and it too can be found among his signatures.

Eleazar was my father but I knew him always as daddy. I stayed several months with his mama, my grandma Cirilo (Guadalupe) the summer I was 15. She'd talk long hours of her youth in Mexico, of her wedding to grandpa Cirilo, of how they had to swim the river (Rio Grande) so many times before they settled peacefully on this side. Her wedding reception with grandpa lasted three days, she said. That was how they did it back then in Mexico. Grandpa danced all three nights with an old girlfriend while grandma went home with his family. She said she cried a lot and was unhappy but her family and his had agreed to the marriage. She and grandpa lived together all their lives and she had 13 children for him.

When grandma made frightening noises in her sleep, I'd wake her from her nightmares about the house they lived in during those early years: two rooms, separated by a breezeway, with dirt floors, no glass in the windows. She said she swept those dirt floors daily, though they could never become clean. She was so meticulous. We left our shoes at the door when we visited, which was most Sundays when we were small. Daddy would do odd jobs for grandma while we spent many happy hours playing on the railroad track behind their home (1301 Sheryl Dr., San Jacinto, Tx). It was there where we made friends with the many cousins that visited from out of town or out of state. Dolly broke her collarbone while we were playing chase in grandma's yard.

It was the summer I stayed with grandma when she told me daddy and his two older sisters, Lala and Mina, actually had been born in Old Mexico before she and grandpa Cirilo "swam the river." Grandma said she and grandpa had purchased 3 birth certificates for their oldest children from an old country doctor in Hidalgo County (Tx) for \$10, to document their citizenship so they could live free of worry from the immigration police. Ten dollars was a lot of money back then.

[*The 1920 Texas census gives my father's and Aunt Lala's place of birth as Texas, but gives the birthplace of the second child, Mina, as Guerro, Mexico. My grandfather was 33 at the time of the census, grandma was 25, aunt Mina (Herminia) 4 3/12, aunt Lala (Elodia) 2 3/12 and daddy was 5 months old.]

This history may not have been as grandma related to me that year. Aunt Emily wrote me recently that grandma and grandpa had gone to Old Mexico in 1919 or thereabouts, during the

war. Mina and Lala, she said, were born in the U.S. before grandma and grandpa left for Mexico, where daddy was born. As she recalled, there was no swimming in the river, though perhaps illegal crossings. Grandma and grandpa, she said, lived and met in the U.S.

The war at that time would have been World War I, which began in the summer of 1914 and ended in the eleventh month of 1918. If Lala and Mina were born here, and only daddy were born in Mexico, as aunt Emily recalls, then grandma and grandpa must have gone to Old Mexico at some time after aunt Lala was born, on 17 June 1917, but before daddy was born, on 18 August 1919. It would not have been uncommon for the places of birth to be incorrectly identified on the census. In any case, daddy's birth certificate gives his place of birth as Yorktown, DeWitt County, Texas.

Daddy's family worked the fields on this side of the river. From one of his letters:

When I could not hire out as a half-man for fifty cents a day or even a quarter; when I could find no tomato or cabbage to transplant ... for all of us I would find and ask for the cotton gleanings. Sometimes we would glean cotton fields covered with briars (thorns).

Once we gleaned the roadside while mother drove the five miles to town. We made more money than Dad could make in a week, fourteen dollars plus the seed to feed the cows. I proudly looked at all the tired smiling faces in the old car and wondered what unhappy event would separate our family.

Daddy said grandma and grandpa learned their English from their children after the kids started school. Aunt Emily said he also had signed up for a correspondence course through the University of Chicago. I know that in the final years of his life, he and grandma spoke English less frequently, lapsing into their native language when I visited.

Daddy said he only went to school through the second or third grade, leaving then to help his daddy in the fields. My brother Charles recently wrote, "My daddy personally recounted the memories of taking leave of school to work. He told us that he disputed with the rest of the kids over the house on Sheryl Street on the basis of grandpa's promise to him many years ago that he would be repaid by inheriting the double -portion of the firstborn. This concept of birthright so prevailed in daddy's mind that Adrian was given Elderberry without any looking back to consider whether only he receiving it was 'fair' to the rest of us (I naturally think it is fair because that was the soul of my daddy's guiding principles that were formed in him from his youth)."

Although he had taken leave of school at a young age, daddy was one of the most literate men I've known, meticulous with his handwriting and conscientious about his spelling -- not very good at it, but always carrying a dictionary with him or asking how to spell this or that. He read voraciously on any subject and couldn't resist buying books. He browsed the shelves at Goodwills for old hardbacks at a quarter or fifty cents like other people browse Barnes & Nobles. He'd always read the last chapter first to see if he thought the book ended well enough to read the rest of it. He was fluent in both English and Spanish. He could talk you into anything and once talked a man into buying the tires off his own car; then made the man mad when he refused his money. He never let up about the importance of education to us kids. He finished his high school years later (1974) with a private tutor in Houston, Ruby Traylor. He paid the school she ran for private tutoring for all of us kids (Ronnie through Lydia) to complete our high school and he and mama accomplished their high school diploma through much studying and personal sacrifice. I was the first to go on to college. Daddy was so proud.

When I was small, daddy worked as headwaiter, first at the Ding Hou and later at Lee's Den in south Houston. He would come in after closing about 2 or 3 in the morning. Sometimes, when mama kept the car, one or two of us would ride with her to pick daddy up from work, and he'd take us to Lott's Grill for breakfast. More often we'd buy a soft drink and taffy candy at the store next to Lee's Den. If daddy had the car, we'd fight to sleep in the bed with mama until he came in. One such night, daddy came in and slipped into the bed. He said he slept uncomfortably until

morning, with his knees bent and his feet curled close to his body, to keep from kicking the little kids sleeping at the foot of the bed. He was so angry the next morning to discover the 'little kids' were the three big walking dolls he had gotten us three youngest girls for Christmas. We'd tucked them into bed with mama before going to sleep ourselves.

Daddy could accomplish anything he set his mind to doing and changed professions when I was in about the fifth grade. I remember how he checked out library books and studied schematics for hours until he could pass his electrical exams. Mama worked with him and drilled him day and night until he knew the material without hesitation. Daddy began his trade, working first for a man called Charles Foster and then for the M.D. Anderson cancer hospital, where he worked until he retired. Mr. Foster drank a lot, and daddy would work long hours to take up some of the slack. Sometimes we would go on jobs with him and play outside while they wired a house or a restaurant. When the boys were old enough, they all learned the electrical trade on the job with daddy. Later, when Dolly got married, her husband Dan worked with daddy to learn how to wire a house too.

Daddy became skilled as an electrician and loved his craft. He was proud of what he could turn his hand to. After he retired, he kept up his trade through numerous freelance jobs until his cancer prevented him from working any longer. He wired many churches that my siblings attended. His and mama's home on Elderberry was as excellently wired as any commercial establishment around, with all the romex pulled through conduit. Every wall had an electrical outlet that allowed for four grounded plugs so they never lacked for anywhere to plug an iron or a lamp. I don't think I ever moved anywhere that daddy didn't come and ground all the plugs and run the plumbing for a washer and 2-20 for a dryer.

Daddy was skilled at most handyman tasks. He hated plumbing with a passion, though he did a fine job of it. His carpentry skills were excellent, and he and uncle Jay did all the brickmasonry when daddy turned our garage into a small apartment at Almeda Plaza (2846 Monticello, in south Houston). Daddy supplemented his income through the years using his many skills: washing machine, dryer, refrigerator or air conditioning repair, body and fender work, etc. He helped run the barbed wire around the place I had in Centerville, Texas (over 80 acres), and he built the home where we were living behind the levee in Ferriday (Concordia Parish, Louisiana) when my youngest brother, Byron, was born. Adrian and I were small then, but not too small to follow him up the ladder where he was laying roofing tarpaper. Daddy tacked our britches to the roof to keep us from crawling around and falling until he hauled us down the ladder himself.

My brother, Charles, once preached a sermon titled "My Father's Hands" in which he spoke of having never seen our daddy's hands idle. Even today, several long years after daddy's death, I can still see his hands: rebuilding a small motor, installing a ceiling fan, painting a mural, petting my mother, or laying hands on someone in prayer.

"Our Daddy taught us well, never to be a charge to any one and our Mother [taught us] never to eat the bread of idleness." (daddy, in a letter to uncle Manuel, no date)

He was a demonstrative man, easy to laugh, to pray, to cry, to dance a jig in the middle of the floor, to show affection, or to become angry. I remember when his mama died, how hard it was. I found him standing in his bedroom, woefully heaving large wracking breaths, tears streaming down his cheeks. I held him in my arms as he had so many times held me, and he cried on my shoulder, "Oh mi mamá, mi mamacita, no te dueles horita." "No daddy," I told him, "she doesn't hurt any more."

He wasn't embarrassed at showing affection and without reservation hugged and kissed his siblings, parents, children and grandchildren (both boys and girls), even after we were adults at any time the notion struck him. He'd do little smooches on our cheek and make whimpering noises like a small puppy. Once, in recent years, I was kissing my baby sister on the cheek, without thinking of why or how. Lydia said, "You're giving me daddy kisses. You make me miss my daddy." She was right. I still smooch my grown sons in just that daddy kind of way. I

recall many times in my childhood when I'd round an aisle at the grocery store where we'd be shopping and find daddy hugging on mama, smooching her cheek and petting her on the back, telling her how she was his pretty little bird.

Daddy loved beauty, especially the outdoors, the ocean, the mountains, landscapes. In these things, he saw the miracle of God's creation: "no one can love God by the gift of his handiwork much more than I..." From our youngest years, his murals adorned everything from old plywood to the walls of our homes. If he didn't have oils, he'd just use house paint. Hoping to take art classes, he paid tuition when he was young, but gave his place in the class to his younger brother, my uncle Israel, to take the class. Both Lydia and I share his love of painting.

Daddy wrote incessantly through the years: poetry, prose and numerous, numerous letters -- many of which he never mailed. Letters to children, to grandchildren, to his parents and his siblings. We each have our own collection of those that he mailed or delivered personally -- and daddy left us with a trunk full of those he wrote and then tucked away without mailing. They are a record of our lives, our joys and our disappointments over the years, filled with counsel, sometimes disapproval, often with scriptures, always with love.

I guess daddy never missed a year at sending a birthday card. He loved the gaudy, mushy ones with big yellow or pink roses on the front that said how sweet and wonderful you were ... and those that played music when you opened them. I remember thinking after his death that I guess I'd never get another such card, and of course I haven't.

We were poor and there were so many of us to care for. Daddy and mama would shop for months before christmas, scouting the fire sales and salvage places for deals on a doll, a rain coat, bicycle or such. They'd keep our gifts in the trunk of the car, or hide them under their bed, in the top of their closet or in the attic. Once, when we lived at Stafford (Texas), I typed for three months on a small, blue, portable corona typewriter I found hidden in the attic, before christmas came and mama and daddy gave the typewriter to me officially. They never knew about the long months I had been sneaking into the attic in anticipation of owning the gift. I don't know what I would have done if it hadn't been my gift.

Daddy spoke often of farming with his daddy, of hours on the tractor hearing his daddy pray or sing, of irrigating the citrus fields before a late spring cold snap, of his brothers and sisters walking to school in the Valley (Rio Grande), of aunt Alice suffering with T.B. when she was a young beautiful woman, how uncle Manuel had always laughed at the most ridiculously not funny jokes. "I'm laughing at the way they are laughing," he would recall uncle Manuel having said. He spoke of his years in the CCC's working in the federal forests, on skis in the snowy mountains of Colorado, of his time in Hawaii while serving in the army, of sending his allotment checks home to his mama, of his daughter Charlene, whom he had had with his first wife, Adelina, in Corpus Christi. These were the subjects of his many letters, as well as his thoughts on the present business of our numerous lives. We came to know our daddy so well through his letters and his poetry.

We are still here but life behooves the memory of school buildings long returned to the earth. This will remind you of Parks, Texas and our childhood of long ago. Then again of La Villa, Texas and the Weslaco area. (daddy, in a letter to aunt Mina, dated June 1989)

Daddy had a beautiful singing voice and loved to harmonize. He sang gospel songs and old Spanish ballads. His brothers speak of him playing the guitar as a young man, and I remember him playing the electric guitar as I was growing up, but I know his piano music best. He would rise in the early morning hours before daylight and go to the piano to play for hours. I suppose I've heard all of my brothers and sisters mention at one time or another how his music was one of the things we most missed when we left to make our own homes.

Daddy died in the hospital at East Carroll Parish, after homecare for several months in my sister Darlene's home in Oak Grove, Louisiana. He deteriorated rapidly over the last year of his life

from his cancer. We learned as daddy was nearing his death that he had known he had cancer many years before he told us. The last three years before his retirement at M.D. Anderson, he said, his physical showed his cancer count climbing. Rather than endure treatment, which he associated with the many patients he'd seen come through the doors of the M.D. Anderson, and the rats he had seen in the experimental labs, he chose to retire and spend his last years traveling and spending time in his children's homes.

Because I was a single parent so many years, daddy and mama spent more of their time in my home than any other. Sometimes I thought we were fortunate and other times I thought it'd be nice if daddy would take his Cirilo temper and visit with one of the other kids for a spell. Daddy shouted a lot and he cussed a lot when he was mad, and he was mad fairly regularly. He'd throw a wrench at you if you brought him the wrong tool, "I said vice grips, vice grips, vice grips, not kleins ... Mama get this stupid little girl outta here!" ...

He was crazy about some things. I guess there isn't any way to put it other than that. He was insanely jealous of mama. He always thought she was going to run off with someone, usually some preacher or some cousin. He could make us all crazy with his idiocy about that. Once when we were small (we lived at Alameda), he began to question my brother Charles about who had been to visit while he was out of the house. Charles said daddy's folks had been by and daddy wanted to know who mama had kissed. Had she kissed grandma? Yes, Charles told him. Had she kissed grandpa? Yes, Charles said, she kissed grandpa too. Had she kissed Dan (daddy's brother)? Yes again. Well, daddy asked, had she kissed the floor? Yes, Charles dutifully answered, she kissed the floor too. Lord, did daddy cuss then! He knew mama hadn't kissed the floor.

Daddy was paranoid of someone stealing his things. I've seen him hang tires on the dining room wall to keep someone from picking them up outdoors. Wherever we lived, he put screws in the window frames so they wouldn't raise more than four or five inches, to keep anyone from coming in (or to keep us from climbing out). Once he even nailed boards over all the windows so the house looked like an abandoned place rather than a home. If he couldn't find a tool, he'd recall someone who recently had admired it and rant about them stealing it. All of his sons-in-law and sons have stolen some of his tools, to hear daddy tell it. A favorite rant was to accuse uncle Jay of having stolen one of his drills. Later, after I was grown, when daddy would be griping about something he couldn't find, I'd tell him to call Jay Jay, no doubt uncle Jay had put it with the drill. That would make daddy so mad.

Daddy could be awfully aggravating going through the house and shutting off the lights. I can't count the times I told him that when he started paying the light bill at my house, he could go around turning off the lights, but until then I wanted to live in the daylight. I was married four times before I got out of my twenties and then 'gave it up for lent', as I like to put it. Daddy delighted in telling me if there were an @@hole in the bunch, I'd be sure to pick him out and marry him ... after long years and much reflection I realized how right my daddy was. We argued, daddy and I, more than any of the others, I think, unless it might have been Dolly, who can get hotter than all the rest of us put together. Daddy said I had spunk, but mama just said I was hardheaded and stubborn, and a whole lot like my daddy.

Dolly got in a fight with daddy once. They were both under the house at Elderberry (Houston) pulling wire through conduit. Daddy said Doll was yanking his hands against the pipe. He threw his pliers at Dolly and she threw them back. He threw them again and cussed and Dolly threw them back. That went on for a while until daddy told her if she wanted to fight "let's crawl out from under this house and you can fight like a man." Dolly was all for that, like she thought she could handle it or take a whipping. She beat daddy out from under the house and when he'd crawled out they bowed up at each other, chest to chest ... which you'd have to see with Dolly being all of four foot ten inches tall. The incongruity of it must have struck daddy then, because he started laughing at her. "I'm proud of you, son," he told her. I guess she got to be a son that time since she was willing to "fight like a man." They hugged and crawled back under the house

to finish the wiring. Dolly was always feisty like that. Once when she and daddy got into it, she took a broom to daddy and beat him with the bristles until he had backed out the kitchen door onto the back porch. Then she locked the back door behind him. We could see him through the glass window on the kitchen door, cussing and hollering for mama to come let him in. We were gathered there in the kitchen scared someone was going to open the door and we'd all get a good whipping. Of course mama let him in and everybody in the house got a cussing.

Despite his paranoias, daddy was the most generous man I've known in my life. He'd fold a ten or a twenty into the palm of his hand, and pass it to a minister after church, even when he had so little to stretch for himself or his family. He believed that God's share was God's share and you could only be blessed if you blessed others. We never went anywhere for an extended visit that he didn't stop before we got to their home and buy many large bags of groceries for their table. We might have been driving for hours between our home in Houston and uncle Alvin's out at Aimwell (LaSalle Parish) and he'd still stop for groceries before we drove in. He didn't want his six little kids to be a burden to anyone.

We would often go to Louisiana when my grandparents were still living. Daddy would drive the winding back roads through LaSalle and Catahoula Parishes with us six little kids in the back seat, pretending he was a pilot: "We're an airplane!" he would tease us kids as he topped another hill, "Vroom! Vroom! We're an airplane!" We'd squeal and hide on the floorboard and he and mama would laugh so merrily. Years later, I found myself doing the same thing with my boys when I took them thru the backwoods of Louisiana, and it hasn't been too long that my nephew Aaron told me his daddy (Charles) had done the same thing. Daddy really left his mark on all of his kids ...

We went to the beach often also. We'd go to LaPorte, to Silvan Beach, or to Galveston and spend a few days with aunt Gladys and her family, camping on the beach. That was way back, when you could still drive your car down and pitch a tent between the seawall and the ocean. Daddy and mama would tie a bunch of inner tubes together and fit them with laundry baskets and put the littlest kids in them so they could take them out into the salty ocean water. Uncle Raymond and Aunt Rosalie (Kelly) brought all their kids for a visit and we took them to camp on the beach. On that trip, a big manna ray wrapped itself around my cousin Patricia's leg, stinging her, leaving large purple and red whelps. We took uncle Dan and grandma and grandpa Cirilo on other trips. Grandma would go out into the deep water and ride the waves with us kids shouting "Woo, Woo!" every time one would lift us buoyantly and push us toward the shore. It didn't take much to be deep water for grandma as she was only four foot nine. When the undertow would take one of us kids out too far, daddy and grandpa and uncle Dan would come chasing after us and bring us back in. Lydia was so fair-skinned she burnt until she peeled like an onion every time we went.

The day of Martin Luther King's funeral procession, daddy was wiring a house that had a spacious beachfront lot on LaPorte, so he took the whole family so we could swim and play while he worked. On that day, my brother Charles had a fever and had to sit in a quilt to sweat it off while the rest of us played in the water. We watched the news on the television set in that lady's front room. Charles writes that he recalls the events, as it was his first exposure to the "I Have a Dream" speech.

By that year, daddy was already fretting about losing his hair or it turning gray. I recall him sitting in the door of the big truck when he'd taken a break from his work, using his pliers and the view he had in the truck mirror so he could pull the few strands of gray hairs he'd noticed there. Then, as he lost more of his hair, he'd take a black marker to his photos and paint some hair back on. When I bought my first scanner, he had me scan his driver's license and 'enhance' his photo with a head full of hair. He liked that.

When JFK died we were still living on Monticello. Charles said he watched the funeral proceedings briefly through the screen door of our neighbor's homes. They were the neighbors,

who made their small son and daughter whip each other with switches for discipline. People say you can always remember that day, no matter how young you were, but I think I cannot pull it from my memory. It is Martin Luther King's passing, that I recall.

The big truck, as we call it, was an oversized WolfWagon. I've seen only one other in my lifetime. The truck was purchased when we lived at Stafford, and it followed the family on to Niagara and subsequent dwellings. Those were days since we had left Monticello (in Alameda Plaza). Daddy had remodeled the truck into a travel trailer of sorts, and we were living in it at the time. At this time, it was parked in a lot just up from granny Reed's, off Mt Houston Road in north Houston. Granny had been a pastor of the church we attended when Lydia was born, in Denver Harbor (Houston), and she remained a good friend of the family through her lifetime.

Granny's was the kind of church that believed in taking care of the poor. There were two large boxes just inside the front door, and no matter how little you had, you were taught to bring at least one canned item and more if you could, every Sunday. Granny would dispense these groceries to needy folks. Sometimes they were members of our church, but not always. At Christmas, we would do the nativity play and granny would give all of us oranges and apples and brazil nuts, wrapped tightly in a piece of net. She and mama would go to farmer's market and buy vegetables in quantity and can together. Granny would be so aggravated when our family would take a weekend holiday and go swimming down at Galveston, missing church. She would pray: "Blow on 'em, Lord, blow on 'em!"

Daddy never did get rid of the big truck. When he died, it was parked still at Elderberry, packed with the mementos of a lifetime.

Daddy would do anything to help his kids. Once, when my boys broke down on the road in Pennsylvania and I had no way to go to them, daddy and mama drove from Houston, Tx to tow their car back to our place in Buffalo, NY. I called a hotel where they were stranded, gave them my American Express number and authorized my young sons to purchase whatever they needed from the dining room until daddy could get there. That was the year my baby graduated from Amherst High School in Buffalo.

Daddy loved pecans. Until his teeth began to give him trouble, he'd spend long afternoons gathering them from where they fell in my brother Byron's yard (Clayton, Louisiana) and bring sacks full home to eat for months later. He loved watermelon too, and during season, it was common to find five or six of them rolled under our dining table, and a couple more chilling in the icebox. He'd always cut an end off, salt it down and eat it with a spoon. He'd cut a big slice from the center, where he said it was sweetest, and serve that to mama on a plate with a fork. He'd buy big 25 pound sacks of oranges and always he would give them to the baby, Lydia, saying we'd all have to ask her if we wanted one. Daddy never changed much and we never wearied of his special displays of affection. There's a picture taken in the last years of his life at my brother Adrian's. Daddy is on the sofa and Lydia is sitting on the floor in front of him holding up a bag of oranges daddy had just brought her from the store. That was when mama and daddy were house sitting for Adrian and Debbie while Adrian was working up north somewhere (in Boston?). Adrian didn't need anyone to sit his house really, but he said he worried about mama and daddy being cold through the winter in their drafty house at Tyler, so he asked them to housesit those long months for him.

Daddy was a praying man. As common as the strains of his piano playing in the hours before dawn were his prayers and beseeching before the God he worshipped. No one, we thought, could lift their voice to heaven quite like daddy. Daddy believed in the gift of healing and knew God worked miracles through his hands, though he himself might be 'an unworthy vessel.' Many the times were that for the most minor of scrapes or headaches, he'd call, "mama, come help me pray for our baby," and they'd lay hands on our forehead and call on God. It didn't matter if we were a believer or not, we came to accept these acts of faith as a sign of their love and concern. Then he'd kiss our "bo-bo" and make it well. Sometimes, if we had warts on our fingers, he'd say we'd

gotten them from the frogs that lived in the water meter hole at grandma Cirilo's. He would rub a stick, a tree twig, on the wart and tell us it was magic to make the warts would go away. More often than not, his magic worked; I don't know whether from a child's faith or just because it was time ... I heard him once, after we were grown, telling Lydia's little boy, Bubba, that he'd gotten his warts from a frog. Then, just as I expected, he took a penny from his pocket and rubbed Bubba's warts, telling him it was magic and the warts would go away in just a day or two. Then he hugged him up in his arms and kissed him, before he sent him on his way to tell his mama grandpa had healed his warts.

It had been grandpa Tarver's habit to bring the first morning cup of coffee to grandma in bed, and to anyone who was visiting. The morning after grandpa Johnny died, daddy brought mama's morning coffee to her bedside, telling her it would be his job from then on. He griped a lot about how much coffee mama drank, but he faithfully brought her first morning cup to her after that, until he wasn't able.

For some years before daddy gave in and started cancer treatments (in Houston), he drank every old nasty mushroom tea and took shark's teeth and palmetto and any holistic cure he thought would buy him a little more time on this earth. Once he started treatment, he and mama stayed with Ronnie in Pasadena a lot, since she lived close to the clinic. In the end, the cancer got him anyway.

He tried to prepare for his dying. He and mama and I had several big yard sales at my place in Tyler (Texas) where daddy began to sell off tools, compressors and such that he'd gathered over the years. I would hear him encouraging a prospective buyer to make a good offer because he (daddy) would be dying soon from the cancer that was eating him up and it was time to sell his things and 'get his house in order.' He took that phrase from where God had told Hezekiah to get his house in order, he was going to die. It made me so angry to hear him saying that. I just insisted he was not dying and kept insisting until he was laid to rest and the last bit of dirt was thrown over his grave. After he died, we found where he had taken apart a lot of small motors and such and oiled and lubricated the small parts well. He left them wrapped in oiled rags in old one-gallon coffee cans so they would not rust before anyone could attend to his things. He must have spent countless hours at such tedious labor knowing he didn't have much more time.

Elsie died in late November 1995 and mama and daddy made yet another trip to Wyoming to be with her, despite daddy's failing health. They were with her at the hospital in Billings (Montana) the night she passed on and I guess the strain was too much. Daddy had a stroke and they had to give him a bed in the hospital that night. His health only worsened after that, and he was gone by early March.

In daddy's last months he was pretty much bedridden and slept on a hospital bed in Dolly's living/kitchen area in Oak Grove, Louisiana. My eldest son, Pete, had come to visit at Christmas, and seeing his grandpa so ill, he returned to Buffalo, NY, (where he had been attending Buffalo College and working) and took an extended leave of absence so he could come sit with daddy. He stayed those final months helping mama care for daddy, and didn't leave until he and my brother Charles' kids, Aaron and Vanessa, got in the van to drive to Tyler to let me know daddy had breathed his last breath. No one wanted to call me; they said it would be too hard with me being alone, so they decided to drive through to be with me when they told me daddy had died. Pete told me later, after the funeral, that daddy had been the only real daddy he had ever known. He took the funeral very hard.

On one of those last mornings, when daddy hadn't been able to bring mama her coffee in some time, he made a final valiant effort. Mama had left his bedside to shower and was startled and frightened to find daddy was not in his bed when she returned to the room. Daddy had managed to climb over the hospital rail and make his way to the kitchen, where the coffee was already brewed. He had poured a cup of coffee for mama and was struggling to make his way back to the living area. His hands trembled and he spilled most of the coffee as he made his way from the

kitchen area to a counter, to a chair and whatever furniture he could find to rest against until he'd crossed the distance. Mama's tears fell with every feeble step daddy made, but he insisted that she take her seat in the chair beside his bed. "This will be the last time I bring you coffee, my birdie," he told her. Mama had to help daddy back into the bed. He died later that week.

Lydia said it was terrible there, watching daddy die. His breath had become so labored and it was painful to share his pain. She said just before he died, he opened his eyes and looked her way and her heart broke watching him watch her and breathe his final breaths while she held his hand. When they called for an ambulance to take him from the hospital there in East Carroll Parish to Columbia to the funeral home, it happened that the driver was mama's brother, my uncle Jimmy who lives in Monroe, La. Dolly said that helped a lot, just knowing that it wouldn't be a stranger to take daddy on his final trip down the road.

Daddy is buried in the Pine Grove Cemetery at Blade, in LaSalle Parish, Louisiana just up from mama's parents, grandma and grandpa Tarver. I spent the night before they placed him in the grave in wait at the church with my two younger brothers, Charles and Byron, sharing memories through the night. I recall when Byron fell asleep on the church bench I went to the car to find a blanket for him. As I shook the blanket to spread it over Byron, I caught a glimpse of daddy lying at the front of the church and I hesitated for a moment. In that moment, I was thinking how daddy must be cold lying there and I almost stopped to take the blanket to him. The mind is a funny thing. In that fleeting moment, I hadn't recalled that daddy was dead, lying there in his casket ... and then the moment passed and I cried, grieving from the great emptiness left by his passing.

The next day we (his brothers and sisters, children and wife) wrote our final farewells and love on a tiny sheet of paper that we rolled like a cigarette paper, and placed into the glass vial that was made into the foot of the casket. His hands were very, very cold, and aunt RosaLee was crying and saying how he looked like her daddy lying there. It was true. In death, his facial structure appeared more like grandpa Cirilo's than his own. Brother John Crist preached and we all sang "How Great Thou Art," because daddy had loved that hymn. Aaron and Jacqueline and her daddy, Jackie, sang special songs for their grandpa. Dolly ordered tons of beautifully spring-colored flowers to drape the casket because, she said, "Daddy would have loved these best." Lydia offered to paint daddy's hands because daddy had made her promise we wouldn't bury him with his white spots (lack of skin pigmentation) showing, but the funeral people said they would make sure his hands were made up. Adrian grieved so violently I thought he'd have a heart attack and we'd have to bury him no sooner had we put daddy to rest. Tears streaming down his face, Pete rushed from his seat to request a key from me, any key would do. Grandpa, he said, was never without his keys, we couldn't send him away without his keys ... so we buried daddy with my front door key in his suit pocket where Peter placed it during the service. Uncle Manuel spoke of daddy's youth and the family's deep admiration and love for their brother, of the many letters they had received from him over the years. Six grandsons, including my own Peteheart, carried daddy's casket from the church. We mourned and our hearts were heavy with loss.

Afterwards, we drove to Hamburg, Arkansas where aunt Emmy lives, and visited with daddy's brothers and sisters there, sharing memories with one another. We formed a circle and held hands to sing "How Great Thou Art" again. Aunt RosaLee thought it would be nice to sing again, but we cried too hard to sing much or very well. Dan (dolly's husband) told the dumbest jokes, everybody laughed and I thought of how daddy had said Manuel always laughed at dumb jokes. But uncle Manuel sat quietly at the kitchen table with his head bent over the chess set where he and my Peteheart were engaged in a serious match.

Daddy left a gallon jug of keys he had gathered over the years. If ever you lost a key, daddy could always make you one, or retumble your locks for you. The following year, after daddy died, my sister Ronnie made a beautiful wreath for mama that had a lot of daddy's keys on it. Then she hung it on her own dining room wall, where it remains today.

Adrian drowned at Windmill Pond in Houston in August of 1999. Lael said it was a favorite place his daddy had often taken him through the years he was growing up. It was the first time since Daddy's death that I let myself think I was glad daddy was already gone. Had he lived to see Adrian die, I thought it would have killed daddy. Daddy had a thing about firstborn sons, being one himself, and often spoke of Jacob and Esau and their relationship to their daddy on account of being firstborn. He and mama gave Adrian their home at Elderberry in those last years, though Adrian had no use for it, because, daddy said, Adrian was his firstborn and it was his birthright. The place belongs to Adrian's son, Lael, now. We buried Adrian at Pine Grove near daddy's grave. After Adrian's graveside service, I found where one of the guests had taken a rose and scattered its petals in a circle around the small stone set into daddy's grave. I snapped a photograph of the touching memorial. Later someone told me they had seen Ronnie and her girl, Tina, spreading the red rose petals and white daylilies at daddy's grave. We have a large double headstone there now. My boys bought it for daddy's grave. It has all the children's names on the back and it is engraved: "The daddy of the whole bunch."

See: <http://www.cirilo.net/Eleazar/Pics/grave-014f.jpg>
<http://www.cirilo.net/Eleazar/Pics/grave-017f.jpg>
<http://www.cirilo.net/Eleazar/Pics/grave-019f.jpg>

My daddy was like the nursery rhyme that said of the little boy, when he was good, he was very, very good, but when he was bad he was horrendous. He lived with a lot of private fears and he struggled with his demons. In my heart, I know he was not the best of fathers, but oh how we all loved him. He taught us that: to love from the depths of our heart and to be generous with one another. He taught us to work hard and to always give a good day's labor for a day's wages. He taught us to be affectionate, to love poetry and the sound of the ocean waves beating on a sandy beach, the sun warm against our skin and the laughter of children, to read children's books with the all the voices of make-believe characters and to fear things that go bump in the night. (Notes by Lotus Cirilo)

God's Little Bird

Who will go and tell our baby
Who will call our little Doll
Who will go and tell our children
That I don't hurt, Bird,
That this was all?

Who will ring the bells for service
And hold wonder like a cup
When the weeping is all over
And I am covered up?

Who will be my guardian angel
Guide me oe'r the long, long night
Who will reassure Saint Peter
That I'm alright, that I'm alright?

Who will go and tell our baby
And hold wonder like a cup
That now no longer will I labor
That Jesus called and I've gone up?

by Eleazar Cirilo, 1995.

Letter to: Guadalupe "Lupe" Guerra Cirilo

My Dearest Mother,

Today is Friday, no it's Saturday. We are in Votaw, Texas at the church house with the Fleetwoods. It is not church time but there are lots of eager and devout people here singing and playing several instruments.

Lotus came with us. We got here from Lotus' home in Centerville at two in the morning last night, or today, rather. Dolly and her family are here also. Dolly is playing her accordion and singing. Dan Hays is putting some palmetto leaves on the brush arbor outside. Dickie, my wife, is cooking here in the same building. It is all good, and God is rather to be worshipped ... but I have some mixed emotions, not justified, but very real.

My baby Lotus is sad today and hoping and praying that God performs a miracle in her home. Her husband is a good man until he drinks, then he is mean. We are praying that God will perform a miracle in their life.

I grieve to see any of my children with a sorrowful heart.

I imagine we will be in Houston Tuesday or Monday after the weekend.

We will be remembering you in our prayers.

Hoping to see the day when you are free to come with us. Life is passing you by.

We stayed about three days with Lotus. We helped with the garden, with the tractor, and with the horses. Come Friday night and we left. Lotus and her two boys came with us.

I love you, as we all do, and we need your prayers.

With Love,
Your Eldest Son, Charley

by Eleazar Cirilo, n.d

HOLD SWAY

The many tools I had
are everything but gone
Rusty in their mildew,
even the slightly worn.

Generators and starters,
repaired, outdated, kept,

Piled under the fetters
that years away adept.

The furniture from Ruby,
those the evangelist bequest,
Piled upon each other,
all ours, for memories best.

The roof above is leaking,
and termites have begun
To eat also the marrow,
my patience from the bone.

May time help me repair things,
at seventy my frame
Is everything but sly,
so is the money game.

It hurts so much to see this,
to brave that I was born,
To save another fetter,
now rusting and forlorn.

by Eleazar Cirilo, n.d.

Heaven

Enough I've seen of you today
to know I love you, sure!
For in those eyes I see a heart
that's heaven sent, secure!

If angels were to tarry there
For you,
I'd care no less.

Angels would have to lose
their grip,
Some how I'd keep you, Lass!

To Adina Orlea
by Eleazar Cirilo, n.d.

**Letter to all his children,
Anticipating his death.**

To all my children,
Children, Behold thy Mother!

Across the hours and the uncertainty of time we painfully buckle up broken wings with hope, but not without faith, this same faith that brought a misty dream to the miracle of fulfillment.

There was a time when your heartbeats were in my heart a dream; and your breath was in your mother's future a beautiful vision of love and hope, with God our only anchor.

At times we were as two homeless urchins cast abroad.

Today, not unlike the mist, am I lifted while my body is lowered out of view. Not unlike a vapor into timelessness the mist is lifted leaving as dew over the fields my memory among you, and ... an irrevocable reality ... in seed and fruit which is also drama, family, eternal love and one God. All of this is one reality, one love, and one God. The dream expands.

For what is it to die but to stand naked before God and to free the breath from its restless earth?

If there be any doubt of redemption, count our miracles ... how often we have touched God ... and doubt not the power of Love.

And now I bid you good-bye until the fullness of time.

I leave you my blessing, and among all my things my only treasure, Jesus Christ our Lord.

See that you first love God and on this factor hinges every reward. Without God love is nonexistent.

Lovingly,
PaPá EC

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