

A GRATITUDE LETTER TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Alan Mirabelli

Alan Mirabelli was the Vanier Institute of the Family's Executive Director of Administration, who retired in 2007 after more than 30 years of service. He was diagnosed with cancer the first time in 2015 and again in 2017. He died on December 20, 2017.

His Celebration of Life was held in Ottawa on January 20, 2018. The service, which Alan had planned, was attended by more than 200 people from across Canada. This is a letter he wrote to his son, Michel Mirabelli, and those in attendance at the service. The letter was read by his close friend Cynthia Barlow.

Dear Michel, family and friends,

At the moment that I am composing my thoughts for this letter, I feel like I am and have been a lucky man.

I endeavoured, as of 1998, to leave this earth with a smile, not a frown on my face - and I have absolutely no doubt that this is where I am as I write this message.

Now let me change tense to reflect the current reality...

I was lucky to have danced with cancer, because it gave me time to reflect and act on feelings, emotions and thoughts that time permitted - and act on the ones that mattered - all this with affection, appreciation and love in my heart.

It was a beautiful journey.

When I recalled all of my cherished moments on what was my journey in life, they were about conversations, time spent with friends, my father, sister and especially my son, Michel. Moments shared - recalling thoughts/feelings shared and their significance all brought joy to my heart. Remembering the attention brought to those moments reignited the love and support given and returned.

This moment is not about me. I have died, I have left. I am here in spirit.

One of my conversations with my closest friend - my father - was about funerals and memorial services. He would say these rituals and celebrations are all about the living. His voice guided each decision I made planning this service.

This moment is not about me. I have died, I have left. I am here in spirit.

My purpose for this celebration of life was to surround my son and his family, as I was at my own father's funeral, with the love and affection that I felt during a difficult personal time. I invite you to do the same for him. It was the support of family and friends, appreciative of their affection for him, that was the blanket of warm love that made all the difference over time.

REMEMBERING ALAN MIRABELLI

It is said that all emotions can be synthesized into just two – *love or fear*. And my last days confirm that being guided by the former – LOVE – is a supremely rewarding way to live life.

Love attends... Fear defends.

Love is attentive... Fear is defensive.

As I danced out of the ballroom of life, I coined the metaphor that my life was like a run-on sentence. I lived each day as it unfolded without thought to the significance of how I might have touched or been touched by others. The moment I received the diagnosis of terminal cancer, I made a very conscious choice as I heard the news, represented by a comma in that run-on sentence: I would choose how I would “live” between the comma and the period.

Like a huge wave of comfort, I knew that time between the two punctuation marks would be joyful, purposeful and filled with gratitude. And it was — I lived and left this earth as a lucky man.

My recollections reminded me that I was at my happiest between the age of two years and eight years, until world events introduced me to fear, and my journey became over time more and more toxic as a result.

In 1998, that toxicity led me to focus on reversing the corrosion.

Cynthia Barlow, reading this letter, was one of my guides leading me from the thorns to the gentle path...

All emotions can be synthesized into just two – *love or fear*.

With an unreserved open heart, I can say that from diagnosis, to my palliative stage, to the walk to the period that has been my life – I walked as that eight-year-old. Even in the lowest moments of my journey, I was guided by love. Fear became just a word.

And so I left with love for all who walked with me throughout my days – all of them.

In life, this man never walked alone and always cherished the enduring friendships that were forged over time and sustained through thick and thin by all who were present and those who held me close in their hearts.

Family; friends who were as close as family, where a mutual relationship was acknowledged and that we chose to be in each other’s company and act as family; and, with casual acquaintances... when authenticity and integrity existed, all have contributed to my understanding of the love, playfulness and joy that brought me back to the joyful place of that eight-year-old.

REMEMBERING ALAN MIRABELLI

An intuitive voice told me in 2002 that I learn from “spirited children.” As I attended to children, those of friends, my grandchildren, those I would encounter on the street, I observed the wonder they brought to the moment and my life became richer. They were instructors, issuing subtle invitations to simplify, acting as catalysts to tap into a sense of wonder and instructions to live fully now. Spirited children held the map to return to my port of passion. Those who know my images know how successful the children’s compass has been in bringing me to my harbour of relationships, inspiration and comfort in stillness. They were guides to trust and love. Fear was fading even as a word.

I leave as an eight-year-old with appreciation and passion about everything that matters.

healed the toxicity of fear. Your trust was the balm that allowed LOVE to re-emerge with such a sense of vitality.

To all who walked with me in reality or in my heart, it was your generosity that led to love, joy and regaining an innocent sense of wonder... a spirited existence that fuelled my passion as expressed in everything I did, including my walk to the ballroom door. I say a heartfelt thank you for joining me on my journey. Your company

This is a celebration of life, a celebration of spirit, a celebration of relationships, a celebration of innocence and a celebration of your courage, for at times it would have been required. Simply put, this moment celebrates the living. It celebrates you for the difference you made in supporting my dreams, for not abandoning me when it mattered most.

I leave without any regrets.

I leave as an eight-year-old with appreciation and passion about everything that matters.

Spirited children have much to teach us.

I leave a very lucky man.

Please leave this celebration of life uplifted, knowing that however long we have walked together, I have always appreciated the support and companionship we shared on my journey with you.

With love in my heart,

Alan

Alan Mirabelli (1948–2017)