

Jamie Buckingham

THE BODY OF Al West is dead. It died Tuesday, May 27, about 8:30 a.m. after a valiant struggle against leukemia.

Sunday afternoon Dan Malachuk had gone by his house and asked permission to pray like the old Pentecostals, "Lord heal him now or take him home." Dan kissed him and left. Thirty-nine hours later God answered that prayer.

The following Thursday evening we attended a magnificent celebration of joy at the First Christian Assembly in Plainfield, N.J. The platform was filled with noted men of God, all personal friends of Al. Donna and the four children sat on the front row.

There was singing. "Thy loving kindness is better than life..." All through the packed church building hands were raised in praise.

Then prophecy. Tongues and interpretation. Spontaneous singing. David du Plessis, whose book Al was writing, had flown in from Rome. He talked about Heaven. Dan Malachuk talked about the early days at Logos Journal. Donna and the kids joined in the laughter. Others spoke. At the end of the almost two-hour service the casket was wheeled out while we sang in the Spirit. Hallelujah, oh hallelujah! Despite the death of his body, Al lives on—all because of Jesus.

Tell me not in mournful numbers, Life is but an empty dream. I'm with you, Mr. Longfellow. Life was no empty dream to my friend with whom I shared so much of my soul. To him life was real, life was ear-

nest, and the grave was not its goal. Dust thou art, to dust returnest, was not spoken of his soul.

I remember Al's first trip to the Philippines. He had visited me in Florida and said, "I don't know why I'm going. All I know is a native pastor wrote asking me to come over and help him."

He went, without money or even knowledge of who would meet him at the plane.

He found Aley Gonzalez, a little Filipino pastor who was struggling to train young native ministers. Al returned to the States, determined to see a Bible school built in the little fishing village of Cabadbaran on the island of Mindanao.

Others went, including myself. When I returned to the Philippines again last fall, Al was unable to go with me. The leukemia was already sapping the strength from his body. The seedling Bible School was under construction, however, and already thousands had been won to the Lord.

That seemed to have been Al's greatest contribution to the Kingdom. Planting seeds. It's all coming back to me tonight as I sit here in this office at his typewriter, pounding out this column to meet tomorrow's deadline for the Journal.

Last summer I had withdrawn from the world to my little cabin in the Blue Ridge Mountains to work on *Into the Glory*. Al had flown down from New Jersey to check my progress. He was driving me to complete the manuscript. Unusual. Almost contrary to his character. Always before he had respected my sense of timing while I was writing.

Why this push, this urgency? Yet he sensed time was short.

Late that afternoon, as the sun was setting over the mountains, we left behind the stacks of research to walk deep into the woods. We moved in silence through the gathering cool of twilight, our feet making soft, padding noises on the carpet of leaves. The towering white pines and tulip poplars stretched above us as though to brush the face of God whose presence was so real.

We crossed a clear, rippling brook and wound our way up a steep hill, ducking through the mountain laurel to a place where lightning had struck and killed a mighty white oak. For a year it had lain on its side where it had fallen. Even in death it towered above the smaller saplings in the dense forest, the huge branches reaching out to yoke the tops of the lesser trees and bend them all in the same direction.

Two weeks before, in one of my solitary strolls through the forest, I had discovered the fallen giant. The heart of the stump was beginning to rot, leaving the shell filled with soft powder and moulting leaves.

Now, in the gathering shadows, we both had the same thought. While I plucked, root and all, a small white pine from the soft ground, Al buried his hands in the rotten wood and stump water, scooping out a nesting place. Working together in silence, we planted new life in the base of that mighty stump. The transferral of life.

The scent of pine wafted through the mist of twilight; a dog barked in the distance; the soft clanging of a

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cow's bell echoed across the valley.
We turned back to the cabin.

Late into the night, far past the midnight hour, we lay in our separate beds—speaking softly of tender moments, laughing at silly things until we wept, confessing in halting words the unresolved guilts of the past. Then, gently, as sleep crept upon us, we thanked God for His loving kindness. It was good to be alive.

Across these last hectic months I forgot about the incident. Then last week I returned to the mountains for a day. The big oak is now beginning to decay. The outstretched limbs which had pressed down on the saplings had broken off. But the trees are still bent in the same direction. They always will be. And the little white pine, its roots sunk deep into the decayed stump, is flourishing. Like the Bible School, and this magazine, it stands as a living example of a man, who, departing, leaves behind him footprints on the sands of time.

I'm finished now. Moments ago, I

pulled the paper from the machine, leaned back in Al's chair and stared at the ceiling through misty eyes. Only God knows how much I loved this man. But something caught my attention. A typed sign on the wall above the typewriter encapsulates the life of this editor who walked with God, my friend—still very much alive. α

When Jesus proofread my life,

making corrections in red

He deleted all ^{errata}

closed up the spaces

aligned my thinking

transposed ^{will} my

lowercased my ego

indented my spirit with his

ending.
and rewrote the finish.

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