A Marriage of Two Minds

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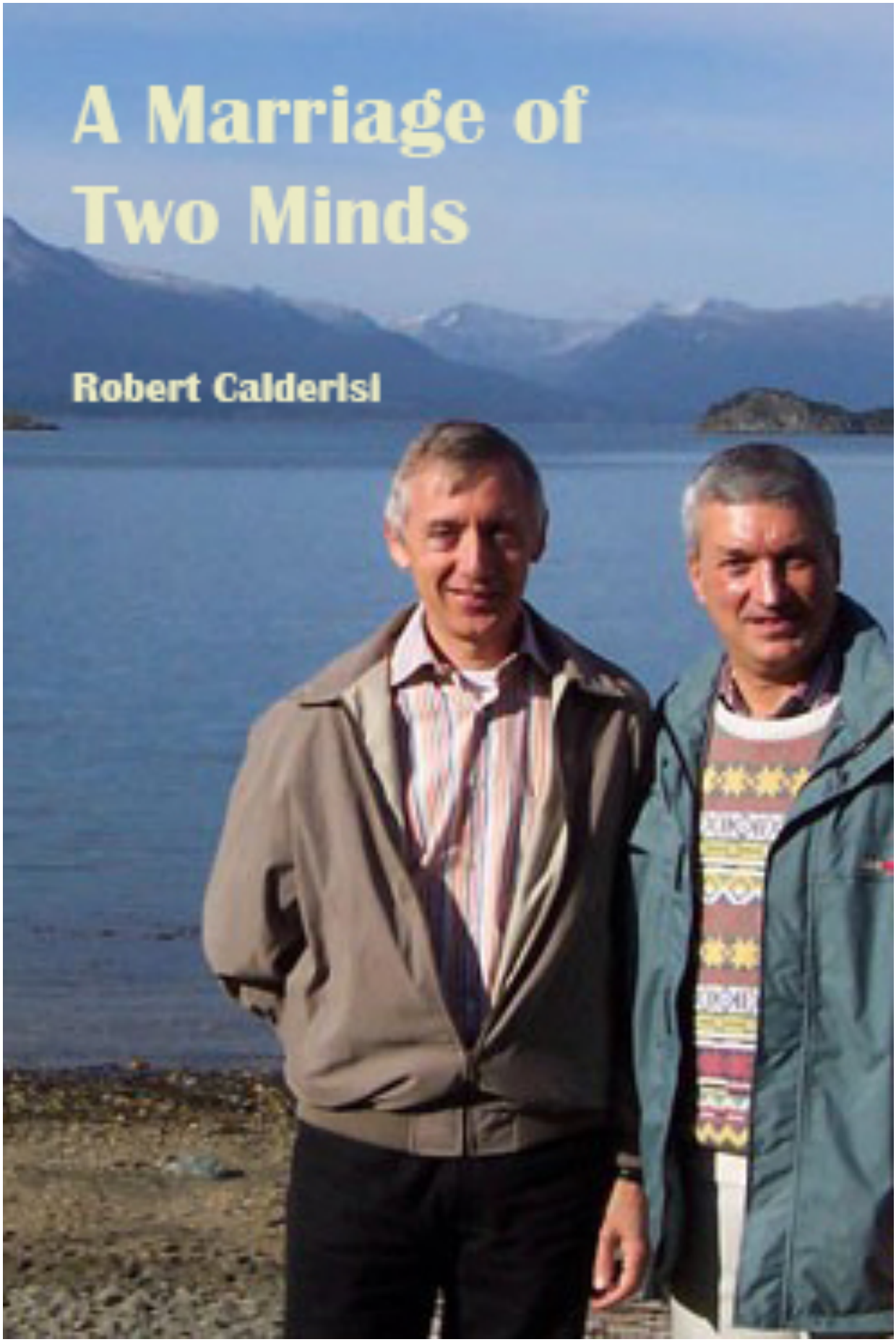

A Marriage of True Minds:

A Modern Love Story

2009

By Robert Calderisi

To the Light of my Life

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Foreword

If you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve;
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

(From *Remember*, by Christina Rossetti, 1830-1894)

Most people recall how gentle and peaceful he was. Although he loved life, steeped himself in history and art, balanced elegant tastes with disarming simplicity, wielded practical and aesthetic gifts that astonished everyone, and drew on deep wisdom and humour, he seemed at times to come from a different world. He was one of those rare human beings who thought almost constantly of others. From an early age, he was drawn to a 1,300-year-old monastery off the coast of France, not far from where he was born, which attracts millions of visitors a year. He lived there as a monk in the late 1970s and lies there now in the small cemetery behind the Church of St. Pierre – carried off by a cruel and mysterious disease. We knew and loved each other for 30 years. We had a beautiful life and he had a beautiful death. This is our story.

Glimpses of Jean Daniel

March 2005. *In front of the hotel in New Delhi, a fortune teller wanted to tell me why I was so lucky. "I'll save you the money," Jean Daniel said. "You're lucky because you're white and rich. It doesn't take much to read your fortune."*

September 2008. *Three and a half years later, he was composing his epitaph:* His life was anchored in love as this Rock is anchored in the earth [*he was referring to Mont Saint Michel, the island monastery off the western coast of France.] "Don't you mean 'anchored in the sea'?" I asked. "Don't be silly," he answered. "You can't anchor anything in water."*

February 2009. *Two friends went to an Indian restaurant in downtown Montreal. The head waiter asked how Jean Daniel was doing. Hearing the news, he turned white, excused himself, and went to the kitchen for ten minutes to compose himself. We had only been to that restaurant three times.*

Meeting

We met in an apartment in Paris's Latin Quarter. He was studying for the priesthood and I was an agnostic. I had travelled widely and had just arrived from living in East Africa for two years, while he had barely budged from his home ground for a number of years. I was a Francophile, but he regarded North Americans as exotic at best. We also had things in common. He was from Saint-Malo, the hometown of the "discoverer" of Canada, and I was from Montreal, where Jacques Cartier was marooned by the ice of the St. Lawrence River in the harsh winter of 1535-36. I had been raised a Catholic, spent five years in religious boarding schools, and studied at a Jesuit college – all of which had left indelible marks. We shared humble beginnings: His father had been a house painter and mine, a factory worker producing women's hats. Both had been born in Italy and emigrated within four years of each other, in 1921 and 1925. We had large and loving families. We both loved history: in fact, it seemed appropriate that we should meet on the rue Dante, one of the winding streets on which the great Italian poet had taught university students seven centuries earlier.

As we got to know each other, we realized that we shared other traits. We enjoyed walking and reading and music, being with other people, and trying to be direct. Neither of us took anything for granted, or believed we deserved our achievements or happiness. We tried to look on the positive side of things. We were polite, even formal at times, but eager to drop the formalities as soon as possible. Deep down, we were serious, but also light-hearted. We were egalitarians, indifferent to people's race or creed or origins. We enjoyed the mystery and beauty of life, and its many gifts, but saw its amusing side, too. He was a good teaser – right to the end – and I sometimes took unnecessary offence. And we complemented each other. He was frugal, practical and punctual; I was extravagant, intellectual, and worried about arriving early. I hoped for the best; he planned for the worst. At least in the early years, he was quiet and discreet, while I was more assertive.

Above all, he was a monk, and temperamentally remained one for the whole of his life. He had studied medicine at the University of Rennes in 1970-74 but was dispirited by what he saw in the teaching hospital – patients treated like

specimens and doctors and nurses caught up in petty professional contests rather than comforting those in their charge. He dropped his studies and spent a year at Taizé in Burgundy where a remarkable man named Roger Schütz, a Swiss Protestant, had founded the first ecumenical monastery in Europe. Every summer, thousands of young people would flock there for weeks at a time, to pray, to meditate, to exchange experiences, and to develop friendships that would last for decades. He did menial duties in the kitchen, helping to prepare meals for hundreds at a time, and performed clerical work in the administrative office, while testing and reinforcing the values that were important to him. He met young people from Europe, the Americas, and Australia, slowly overcoming his shyness and becoming more direct and gregarious. And he decided that this life of serenity, contemplation, and community was meant for him.

The next year, he went to Paris and joined a monastic order that had just been founded at the Church of St. Gervais behind city hall. It was dedicated to the ideal of being a "monk in the city," working half days at a real job with people in different professions and milieus and returning to a life of community and prayer in the afternoons and evenings. During the next three years (1975-78), he worked four hours a day at the Arthus Bertrand shop in St. Germain des Prés, famous for preparing the medals and decorations associated with national military and civic honours. One afternoon, he was asked to carry a large silver sceptre wrapped in newspaper in the Paris Metro to another shop, where it would be measured for its holding case. Paid for by the French government, it was studded with 400 diamonds and destined for the coronation of the infamous Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Republic. Most of the time, he stood for hours at a large table with other staff cutting ribbons, sewing, and assembling the decorations with the taste and precision that would govern everything he did in future years. He loved his fellow workers, most of whom were women, and they loved him, even though they probably felt they had very little in common with him. They were working-class people from the distant suburbs who faced a long journey home each evening and never had the time or energy to see the Eiffel Tower or Notre Dame Cathedral, just blocks away. Few of them were religious and some may even have been anti-clerical. But he had a manner, a smile, and a twinkle in his eye that would melt the hardest heart.

He looked back on those days very fondly and prided himself on how well he had got on with people of very different backgrounds. Although I never asked him why he decided to become a priest, I suspect that those human contacts gave him a taste for serving others in a way that would not be possible in a monastery. During that period, he learned the art of living with others, overlooking their idiosyncrasies, controlling his own instincts and wishes, doing his fair share of work, encouraging and consoling others as much as he could. To those who saw monastic life as a "retreat" from the world, he probably would have answered that community life was an intensive engagement with oneself and with others – a challenge that many living "in" the world could be said to be fleeing. But that would put words in his mouth. At the time, he would probably not have made such comparisons. He was too modest about himself and his own opinions, still searching and struggling, to feel obliged to lecture or defend his way of life. A booklet he later picked up at the Trappist abbey in Gethsemani, Kentucky, where Thomas Merton lived, expressed the monastic ideal more bleakly: "We come into the world alone and we leave it alone, no matter how many attend us. Man has an infinite loneliness, a loneliness without measure. On this seashore the monk often walks and ponders. Under this lonely sky he often stands. At such times he does nothing, for there is nothing you can do. But he lets it happen to him. He lets it sink in."

Jean Daniel's actual name was Daniel Jean René Rossi, but he altered it slightly to prevent misunderstanding. There were four Daniels in the community, so the other monks started distinguishing them by the places they had lived last. As he had shared an apartment with a friend at Meudon, a suburb of Paris, he became "Daniel de Meudon". This sounded too aristocratic to him, so he put his second name first and became Jean Daniel.

By the time I met him, he had left the monastery and entered the Catholic seminary at Issy-les-Moulineaux, south of the city. It was November 16, 1978, a Thursday, and I was staying with two priests close to the River Seine and Notre Dame Cathedral. One of my hosts was Canadian, the brother of a friend I had worked with in Ottawa a few years before; the other was French. They were also a couple. This surprised and even shocked me a bit, even though I had left the Catholic Church ten years before, outraged by Pope Paul VI's encyclical letter

Humanae Vitae that had reaffirmed the Church's opposition to artificial birth control and would, in my view, impose hardships on poor, uneducated people around the world. As an agnostic and free thinker, I was hardly in a position to pass judgments on my hosts; and, in their position, I was not certain that I would have behaved differently. All I knew was that they were charming and generous, and they agreed that I should stay with them as long as necessary while I found an apartment of my own. I had just spent two years in Tanzania, planning Canadian aid to that country, and was now working at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a rich-government think-tank at the western end of the French capital that, among other things, tried to coordinate Western aid efforts in the developing world. Finding an apartment would not be easy, and in fact it took two months.

I was also in need of company. East Africa had been professionally exciting but an emotional wilderness. I was turning 30 and had never lived with anyone. I was feeling some satisfaction at my progress as an economist and was delighted to be able to live in France, but there was a large blank area on the planning board. So it seemed providential that Jean Daniel and I should meet on my fourth evening in the city. My hosts had the habit of inviting a large number of friends for dinner once a week, often seminarians or other priests, and there were 10 or 11 people at the table that night. There was little space around the table and Jean Daniel was seated next to me, so our knees occasionally touched. By the end of the meal, they were glued together. I thought little of this until Sunday evening when my Canadian host informed me that Jean Daniel had invited himself over for a visit. "Why?" I asked a little innocently. "Well," he said, "it's certainly not for tea." "He's arriving at 10."

In the months that followed, we spent more and more time together. I found a small studio in a 17th century building not far from where we had met, on the Rue Saint-Séverin, next to one of the oldest churches in Paris. I started going to Mass again, sometimes next door, but more often at Saint-Gervais behind the Hôtel de Ville where Jean Daniel had been a monk. The services had a light touch of Eastern Orthodox tradition, including the use of icons and musical rhythms and chants that were both unfamiliar and magnetic. And the preaching was superb – drawing out the meaning of the Scriptures, rather than simply repeating or

paraphrasing them, and applying it eloquently to everyday life. This was a simpler, more compelling theology than the one I had learned at a Jesuit college. It was devoid of elaborate reasoning, fine distinctions, and vague imperatives, and rich with the wisdom of the ages, like humus on a forest floor.

Soon, I was in the same position as the two priests I had stayed with. More than superficially, there was a contradiction between the life of celibacy Jean Daniel was preparing for and the time we were spending together. At the start, he was at the apartment one night a week; then it increased to two, three, and four, and by the end of the school year we were essentially living together as a couple. He would get up early to be back in his residence before anyone had missed him, more as a courtesy to the rest of his class than a product of guilt or obligation. We did not discuss the moral issues involved. He had not taken any vows, he was only a student, and I had long questioned Church rules that urged priests to project the love of God without allowing them to experience its earthly variety. But the contradictions of such a life were gnawing away at him in his quieter moments and would become more important after I left France.

In May 1979, I took Jean Daniel to England to visit London and Oxford, where I had studied. In June, my mother visited for a month. The first time she met Jean Daniel, she was enchanted, but she was also surprised to see a seminarian without a cross around his neck. Four days later, she dug into her purse and pulled out a small gold cross for him. "Where did that come from?" I asked. "It was your baptismal cross," she told me. I was not even aware it existed and, from a parent who had often been indifferent and even hostile to her children's friends and had certainly never given any of them a gift, it was an extraordinarily gracious act. (In later years, when friends asked if we had spoken openly about the nature of our relationship to our parents, we replied that it was never necessary and we recounted this early consecration of our friendship.) Later that summer, we went to Italy, visited Subiaco where Saint Benedict, the founder of Western monasticism, had lived, spent time with a great aunt in Rome, and visited my father's hometown in southern Italy. There, we took a small detour to Monte Sant'Angelo where, early in the Christian era, the archangel Michael was said to have appeared. We smiled at each other as we walked through the dank entrance of the musty stone building down a steep flight of steps. We were thinking of

another Christian site, almost as old, off the coast of Brittany and Normandy. We were also enjoying the coincidence of my father's and Jean Daniel's roots.

In 1965, Charles De Gaulle's Minister of Culture, André Malraux, a celebrated writer and not incidentally an atheist, agreed that it would be appropriate to re-establish a monastic community at Mont Saint Michel to celebrate the one thousandth anniversary of the founding of the Benedictine Abbey. Before that, it had been the site of less structured religious communities, and many things since, including a prison during the French Revolution; but there had been no worship at the holy site in two hundred years. The Benedictine monastery at Bec Allouin on the Norman coast agreed to send a small group of monks to the Mont for a year, and one of them – a man named Bruno de Senneville – became so attached to the place that he decided to stay on and attract others to share the historic space, as well as the winter wind and cold and isolation, with him. Jean Daniel, who was studying medicine in Rennes, visited him there, and was equally awed by the history, architectural beauty, and spiritual tradition of the Abbey. Soon after, he was asked to become the president of a Society of Friends for the new community to help raise funds and create a network among those who regularly visited and spent a few days in prayer and reflection at the Abbey. When I met him in late 1978, Jean Daniel had served in this role for eight years and knew every corner of the sprawling monastery by heart. On my first visit to his family in Saint-Malo in February 1979, he was waiting for me on the railway platform with a large ring of keys, some of them heavy and medieval-looking. They were the keys to Mont Saint Michel.

At about the time the original monastery was founded, two monks went off on a two-year journey on foot to visit other holy places associated with St. Michael between western France and southern Italy. Their ultimate goal was the shrine at Monte Sant'Angelo in the Gargano region from where they hoped to bring back some relic for the new monastery in France. On their return trip, they carried with them a small piece of marble on which the Archangel supposedly stood in 732. That marble was set into a primitive altar in the lowest crypt of what has become a towering structure. It was that Italian shrine that Jean Daniel and I were visiting one day in the summer of 1979, eager to see the spot those two monks had visited more than a millennium before us.

By the middle of that summer, Jean Daniel had decided to leave the seminary and enter the small monastic community at Mont Saint Michel. After only a year of clerical training, he could not picture himself serving in a parish, preparing and giving sermons, and living largely alone in some dreary presbytery. He preferred the idea of being in community with people who shared his faith and ideals. He had also been affected by the joy and contradiction of living with me: That and the priesthood seemed incompatible to him and he was not prepared to lead a double life. I had decided to leave Paris early at the end of the year to join the World Bank in Washington DC and that, too, influenced his decision. I understood the attraction of monastic life to him, even if others didn't. (Some Communist friends in Rome, all of them schoolteachers, had been bemused to meet a devout Catholic. "What do you do all day in a monastery?" one of them asked Jean Daniel. "Do you get to play cards?") And while the factors affecting our decisions were different, we had a sense that everything was falling into place. When we said goodbye at Charles de Gaulle airport on November 29, 1979, there were tears in our eyes but no sense of a wrenching separation. We were both going where we wanted to be, and we were happy for each other. I don't recall having second thoughts about leaving, or suspecting that my own decision had had any impact on his. All seemed appropriate, even poetic. We were from two different worlds and, for that reason, never expected our relationship to be deep or permanent. We were parting as friends rather than lovers.

Or so we thought. Within 24 hours, we were missing each other bitterly. I spent my first night in Washington at the Park Square Hotel on 18th and G Streets sobbing into my pillow. (Two years later, Ronald Reagan's would-be assassin John Hinckley started his fateful day there, and [two years after that] it was demolished to make room for the World Bank's Africa Building where I was to work for several years.) I didn't know what was hitting me. My matter-of-fact attitude about leaving each other was now in shreds. On the other side of the Atlantic, Jean Daniel was going through a similar turmoil.

Over the next three months – in letters which I believed had been lost and which I discovered shortly after his death – we tried to stick to our chosen courses, with diminishing success. I did not want him to leave the monastery on my

account, fearing he would regret the decision later and I would be responsible for his "losing" his vocation. I suggested that we wait two years before making any decisions and proposed, a little vaingloriously in retrospect, that he should be as strong as the massive stone columns in the upper Abbey church. We had other concerns, too. The only sensible course would be for him to join me in the United States, as he had no profession or income and my career was going well. But I had trouble imagining him living in a North American city, so different from the small towns and quiet places that he had grown up in. Although he had studied English at school, he had never really spoken the language and had lost almost all of what he had learned. Immigrating to the United States would not be easy, as homosexuality – like Communist beliefs and mental illness – was still grounds for deportation. (This would change in the early 1990s.) I had no idea how living as a couple would affect my professional prospects. And we were concerned about how our parents would react.

He wrote his first note to me on November 22nd, 1979, an hour and a half before we left for Rome for a short visit, knowing it would reach me a week later in Montreal, where I would be visiting my parents on the way to Washington. It was a postcard of his "new horizon," the Bay of Mont Saint Michel. "You have a special place in my heart forever," he wrote. "I thank God for putting you on my path and teaching me how to love. You have made a part of me sing, that has never sung before, melodies I didn't know which I want to sing for others for the whole of my life." On December 2nd, 1979, he wrote from Saint Malo: "On Thursday, I rushed away from the airport after saying goodbye to you at the foot of that horrible escalator that was taking you away from me, so that you would not see my tears. If I mention them now, it is to tell you how deeply proud I am of those tears and the love they expressed. In a few days, I'll be at Mont Saint Michel. I'm eager to be there, knowing that you helped me reach my decision and that our great friendship will be one of the solid foundations on which I can continue to build a life of vivid hopefulness. I know that you will always be present in my life and that my manner of being at the Mont, alone with God, within the monastic community, and with those who come here, will be like the life we led together this last year, echoing with the words love, sharing, peace, truth, tenderness, simplicity, patience in the rare moments of tension, and concern for the other. What a wonderful programme!"

A week later, this time from Mont Saint Michel: "I have embarked on my mysterious journey towards God on this stone ship – in a storm – but the Abbey, imperturbable as ever, hasn't budged. I hope that I can build an inner being just as solid, capable of facing the hard knocks of life unflinchingly." He had received my first letter from Washington. "I was happy that you were here to welcome me on my first day. Your letter was full of tenderness, emotion and love. I was also emotional, trying the whole of Saturday to control my tears, tears of joy and tears of sadness, because I also miss you a great deal. It'll take some time to find a new rhythm without you. At the moment, I have to make a real effort not to mention you in all my conversations and you are present in all my silences, during the liturgy, at the dinner table, or in my room, where your face continues to flash before my eyes." He was already enjoying his work as a monk, looking after pilgrims, preparing their rooms, going to the train station at Pontorson on the mainland to greet them, and getting them settled once they had arrived. At the same time, he was torn. He saw on the calendar that he could fly to Washington in early November 1980 – "in just 11 months" – at the start of the community's annual holiday, time that was set apart for re-connecting with family and friends. "Your 'little Canadian heart', as you call it, is like mine. It is thirsty for love, to be true in front of the other, to be laid completely bare, to share everything. I may not experience that love here at Mont Saint Michel as the two of us have lived it, but the strength of it will push me to try my best."

On December 14th, he described daybreak. "I am sitting at my table and there just in front of me through my little window, the sun is rising, a flaming red, and all at once all the little rivers along the coast, bursting after the rain, are scintillating in scarlet, yellow and orange, illustrating the little saying you found on a bookmark in my missal: 'Everything is expensive, but the essentials – sun, friendship and God – are free.' And it continues. Sister Marie Françoise has just telephoned to say that she has picked three Christmas roses and she wants me to make a bouquet. As we haven't had a frost, there are some last summer flowers in the garden: orange marigolds, blue anemones, white roses, and honeysuckle still giving off a faint perfume. Today, we are celebrating the feast of Saint John of the Cross, who was very close to Saint Theresa of Avila in the 16th century. I don't know him very well, but as he is greatly loved in the Church, I love him, too. I

noted these words of his this morning: 'Where there is no love, put some, and you will get some back. In the evening of our life, we will be judged by our love.'" Then, four days before Christmas: "This morning, there was snow in Normandy, but not here. The Mont is marvellous, and I am experiencing my first full tide. I am full to overflowing. I am adapting well, but my heart if often with you and I am growing accustomed to the sweet void in my heart."

On New Year's Day, he depicted the view from his window again: "The sun is lighting up the immense space outside, accentuated by the morning mist. I no longer have the impression of being on a boat, but on an airplane, because I am above the fog and I don't see the earth. I wish this plane could take me to Washington, a sweet thought that doesn't leave me." He had had a beautiful Christmas. "We were a wonderful group, very young (12 of the 20 guests were under 30) and *sympathique*. Among them was a country boy who had never been to a monastery and came for four days, in such a state that he needed to confide in someone urgently. The poor fellow has been rejected by everyone in his small village, because he has the gift of reading the future in cards and is mixed up in sorcery and black magic, while his mother cures people with her hands. And it was to me that he decided to tell all this! In the end, his greatest suffering is that he is poorly loved, and Christmas allowed us to marvel at how he came to life again with the small amount of love that we as a community were able to show him. Quebec was also present in the form of a young priest from the Gaspé region who was here until Saturday and is completing his thesis at the Sorbonne."

For the first few weeks, we tried to steel each other's resolve. Shortly before I left France, Jean Daniel had given me a beautiful little book called *Récits d'un pélérin russe* [Tales of a Russian Pilgrim], which recounted the experiences of a 19th century Christian traveller meeting holy men along the way. Oddly enough, I took comfort from these stories of isolation and self-denial. But the tempo of our correspondence accelerated. In January 1980 alone, we exchanged 21 letters.

On January 8th, barely a month after entering the monastery, he was sounding forlorn. "What a moment of happiness to be able to be alone in my room and read your letter – crying a little. For several days, it has been hard for me not to be with you and difficult, too, not to control my imagination, which begins to

make me doubt the choice I have made. I live as fully as possible from day to day, struggling hard not to think too much about the future, except the days that you will be able to come see me and those that I will spend with you in November. As you see, I'm not very serious at the moment. I hope to become so again, but today I have no courage and not much faith, and all I can say is that I love you very much. I feel less strong and less of a monk than you, but maybe tomorrow the sun will shine through my window and warm my heart? I'm sorry to be so weak when I know I am rich, with a friend who gives me so much of his heart, and I am sorry, too, to be more faithful to you than to that other Friend who one day put the Mont on my path. I hesitate to send you this clumsy letter. It's stupid to be depressed. Retain only one thing. 'I love you.' That's all that's important. The rest will look after itself."

On January 21st, he posed the big question. "I hope you won't resent this. Do you remember my saying, a short time before we parted, that if I hadn't chosen Mont Saint Michel, I would have liked to be with you in the United States? I didn't say more at the time, as I wasn't very clear about it in my own mind, and I didn't want to make our separation more difficult – but since then I can't stop thinking of it. Hence this foolish question: Have you imagined our living together in the U.S. or somewhere else, and if so, how do you picture it?" On the 28th, I told him that I could imagine it, but we were in France, in our early 40s, and we were running a bed-and-breakfast on the main street of Vézelay, the hill town in Burgundy we loved, famous for its transcendently beautiful Romanesque basilica. The scene occurred to me in the bathtub that morning and it was so vivid, I told him, that it seemed I should start saving money.

I also reported that new friends had come over for dinner on the weekend, and they were amazed that I had a close friend in a monastery. When I told them that I might spend my summer holidays at Mont Saint Michel, they said: "A month might be pleasant. But an entire life?" "Like many people," I told Jean Daniel, "they thought monastic life was a form of running away, rather than a positive choice. Even though they were Protestants, I was surprised by their reaction and suggested that turning on the radio at home in the evening could also be seen as a form of flight, less admirable than monks trying to stare themselves in the face. I thought of our Communist friends in Rome. Should I start drafting the brochures

for the next season of pilgrimages at the Mont [*Lay visitors are free to play cards*]?" I also told Jean Daniel to look after his toes, which had been frostbitten from wandering through the cold corridors of the Abbey in sandals. The next day, I was relieved to hear that he went down to the village to collect the monastery's mail. That way, I could be less self-conscious about the number of times I was writing. I was also beginning to worry about the cost of the stamps he was using. "Is this a sound use of *community* resources?" I joked.

I understood his reluctance to confide in the head of the community, but I urged him to talk to someone about what was going on. He told me that the Prior was the only one he really should talk to, but he had already asked Jean Daniel not to say too much about his personal life, because that might force him to dismiss him from the community, a decision he preferred to avoid. I had just moved into an apartment in Georgetown and was living in the middle of unopened boxes, waiting for two prints of Mont Saint Michel that Jean Daniel had given me to come back from the framers. He wished he could come hammer in some nails, organize the lighting, and "slip in between the sheets with you, listening to Mozart's Don Giovanni, Gabriel Fauré, or the Beatles."

He still needed to learn his American geography. "This morning, the sea is covering the sand, and it would take only a little boat and a lot of faith to reach the coast close to Washington. Is the sea far from you?" It was a hard week for him. On January 25th, he said that he had been identifying with Psalm 60 ("To the rock too high for me, lead me"). For him, the "rock" was Mont Saint Michel. He apologized for the tone of the letter. "I would like to find words that are more consoling, tender and affectionate, but I cannot pretend with you and have only smallness and weakness to offer you at the moment." I told him that people who are always happy are not very serious. In words that now seem snobbish, I added, "Besides, you should see the centre of a large American city or watch a single hour of television in the evening to realize the richness of your simple and tranquil life this year." Three days later, he took a long walk along the coast and painted a verbal picture of the Bay. "The cold has returned, and the sea, which has been running gently along the banks all morning, is freezing up on the way out, leaving white arabesques that the sun is casting into relief. When the sun emerged this morning, birds everywhere started singing to summon the Spring. But since noon,

suddenly, everything is slumbering again, the fog has enveloped the Mont with a winter coat, and the birds have grown quiet and respectful, waiting for the next rehearsal." He reflected that he could only write such lines because he was in love, but he was doing his best to settle down, practising the cithara an hour a day to help the community sing and painting icons.

We spoke on the phone a few days later, while he was visiting friends in Paris, and I trembled. "A strange sensation," I told him, "for someone who considers himself so self-confident." Then, we didn't write for a week. "It's just as well," I said in my next letter, "as our correspondence was becoming a little compulsive. All I hope is that you will become a good monk. Even the most worldly villagers below you are probably not receiving love letters every day. Am I being too harsh?" Without waiting for an answer, I drove home the theme with lines from another book he had recommended to me, *Paroles des anciens* [Words of the Elders]: "There is no passion more frightening than liberty of language, because it gives rise to all other passions... I know a brother who spent a long time in a cell, equipped with a cot he never noticed until someone mentioned it to him. Now, there is a monk who is persistent and combative." The irony of a renascent Christian counselling a devout Catholic apparently was lost on me. He was not discouraged by my suggestion that we put off a decision about the future for 2-3 years. "That leaves me free to put down roots here and live an experience which will be fruitful for me – and hence for you, I hope – whatever conclusion I reach: to be a "good monk" at the Mont, or to be more myself and of greater service to others in a different kind of commitment. Winter is necessary for Spring to come."

He was trying to be brave, but he was distracted, torn, and even jealous. When I told him that I had spent the night with a young woman from the Israeli Embassy, he expressed shock and disappointment, and in the letter after that apologized for being presumptuous. Plainly, the forces driving us together were overpowering. While we wrote to each other, Jean Daniel was bracing himself for a conversation with the head of the community. He had confided his situation to others in the group, men and women alike, all of whom encouraged him to take the bull by the horns. No one could predict the Prior's reaction. In Paris, he lodged occasionally with two women who had been a couple for a long time, yet was said to be uncomfortable with homosexuality. He was a deeply spiritual man, but like

many Benedictines he was also a *bon vivant*, and he was not naive. He had met me several times and must have sensed the deep affection we had for each other. The night before the fateful meeting, Jean Daniel said good night to everyone in his usual way, saying that he was off "to lie in the arms of Morpheus" [the god of sleep]. This was a relatively common idiom in French but the gender of the god – Morphée – is less obvious than in English. For once, the Prior reacted: "Jean Daniel, I hope you know that Morpheus is a man!"

The novice monk blushed deeply. This was certainly not an auspicious prelude to the tête-à-tête he was to have the next day. He planned that conversation in hand-written notes I found after his death. "Since I have been here, I have been comforted by the silence and the solitude but also forced to examine my choices in life as never before. Some of my conclusions do not square easily with living here. After working this summer, spending time with friends, and going on pilgrimages to Italy and the Holy Land, I decided not to go back to the seminary. Two paths were opening up. One led back to the monastic life, and Mont Saint Michel was the obvious place for that. The other was to pursue a human love with a friend I met this year [Jean Daniel used the feminine spelling of the French word *amie*, still shy about telling the full story]. We shared that love stoically, like a bitter poem, without a tomorrow, knowing that we would separate at some point in opposite directions. She left Paris for a new job, and since then, you can imagine what has been going on inside me." Jean Daniel dropped this last subterfuge the next day, and told the whole truth. The Prior heard him out for an hour, then got up and gave him a bear hug. The dam had broken.

They agreed that Jean Daniel should see me for a couple of days in Paris, on my way to East Africa on a business trip, and discuss the pro's and con's of living together. Jean Daniel borrowed the monastery's car to drive to the capital and we met on the bridge separating the Ile de la Cité (where Notre Dame stands) from the Ile St. Louis, where I had booked a room at the Hôtel des Deux Îles. We spent the next 24 hours in bed, mainly talking; I can't even remember eating. The next day, when we emerged into the daylight, a sweet young woman at the front desk gave us a smile as broad as the Arc de Triomphe: "Bonjour, Messieurs, I hope you have had a very good rest."

Once we had made the decision, we reacted like any young couple that had just become engaged. As I walked him back to his car for the return trip to the monastery, I had butterflies in my stomach. Would he be able to live in a place as foreign as the United States? Would I be up to the challenge of looking after him and giving him the space and support he needed to thrive, not just live, in a different environment? Would our families and friends be supportive? Were there traits in each other that we would grow tired of? Would he regret his change of vocation?

The first friend I consulted was accustomed to speaking his mind. As a young priest, he had lost his faith in the Eucharist and confessed the problem to his bishop. "Oh, don't worry, my son," he was told. "There are many priests like you. Don't let it interfere with your ministry." Max stared at his religious master, dumbfounded and disappointed. "You idiot!" he exclaimed, and he walked out of the man's office – and the Church – forever. The day after Jean Daniel returned to Mont Saint Michel, Max and I had lunch at a sunny restaurant overlooking the Seine, 30 kilometres west of Paris. He was in his early 50s and had fallen hopelessly in love with me one Sunday afternoon in a friend's toney apartment in the 16th arrondissement at a talk by a Congolese priest. I was fascinated by the topic that day, *Traditions of Sorcery and Healing in Africa and Brittany*, and listened intently as my ears were still adjusting to the rapidity of the spoken word in Paris. I kept my eyes on the speaker, while Max stared at me. Even a year later, he was hardly an objective observer, and the food was not to his liking either. A man of the old school, he detested *nouvelle cuisine* and was unimpressed by the first course we had been served, filleted raw scallops in lemon juice. "He's only in it for the adventure," he said of Jean Daniel. "These young people can't stay put for a minute. I'll wager that he'll be back in France within six months."

A few days later, a friend from the World Bank was more reassuring. In Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, we were forced to share a room in an overbooked hotel. After turning off the lights, I announced that I was about to be married. "Congratulations! Who's the lucky woman?" was the reaction. "It's to a man," I answered, a little hesitantly. A few seconds of silence ensued. "Well, that should be all right," he said. And then we both slept soundly.

Living

Jean Daniel arrived on April 19, 1980 – at the height of a heat wave. It had been over 90 degrees for three weeks in a row, so I waited for him at Dulles Airport in shorts and a T-shirt. Jean Daniel was dressed more conventionally, but the immigration official had her doubts. "If you're a monk, where's your dress?" she asked sarcastically, but she let him through, a little bewildered and bedraggled. This first experience of American officialdom scarred him for years, and every time we travelled back from Canada or France, his blood pressure rose, knowing we were in a compromising position. Worse than that, we were in a Catch-22. We wanted to tell the whole truth – that he we were living together, that I earned enough for the two of us, and he would never have to work or go on welfare. But, under US policy at the time, such honesty could have had led to his deportation. So, for the next ten years, he was a "frequent visitor," required to leave the country and come back every six months. When we travelled together, we went into separate lines so as not to raise suspicions. As the years wore on, it became increasingly difficult for Jean Daniel to explain how he supported himself. So, we eventually resorted to a different solution.

As the employee of an international organization, I was entitled to hire household staff from overseas, so I applied for Jean Daniel to enter the country as my cook and driver. We ran a new risk in doing this, as the US Consulate in Paris could easily turn down the application and we would run out of options; he could certainly not apply for a frequent visitor visa again. But we were both weary of the tension and uncertainty, and at a pinch I was prepared to move back to Europe to make life easier for both of us. Fortunately, the visa was granted and thereafter he entered the States as fast as I did. Jean Daniel could now relax with the Immigration officials, some of whom marvelled that anyone could be so lucky as to employ a French cook who was also half-Italian. Both of us were relieved that we were also telling something closer to the truth. Looking after the household was in fact his work; now, he would be paid for it.

Jean Daniel lost no time adapting to his new home. A young Washington friend took him in tow and helped him over the hurdles of American English. He

watched the television news, listened intently to the radio, and became familiar with new phrases and accents. He learned some ugly colloquialisms, like "lucking out" and "pigging out," and I tried to veer him back to British and Canadian usages, but he would hear nothing of it. "We're living in the United States," he protested. "Not England." As I was away on business for 3-5 weeks at a time, he was forced to swim in the deep end. One torrid day in August 1980, while I was in Tanzania, he left our Georgetown apartment at the busy intersection of Wisconsin and M, clad only in a skimpy pair of shorts, to buy a newspaper, and discovered on his return that he had locked himself out. It was Saturday afternoon, he had almost no money, and our few friends were away for the weekend. So, putting his fresh syntax to work, he knocked on a neighbour's door and waited while the man called the landlord. Jean Daniel had just befriended the director of the Washington Ballet Company, who let him try on a pair of Mikhail Baryshnikov's dance slippers, while an extra key was being driven in from the suburbs. Soon, Jean Daniel was wielding his newly adopted tongue with admirable and sometimes skewering precision. While I travelled, Jean Daniel fell in love with Washington and steeped himself in the history of the city, proud that a Frenchman – Pierre l'Enfant – had prepared the original design. In later years, he gave walking tours to visitors, rich in local lore that many Washingtonians were unaware of. He had trouble pronouncing the name of the river – saying POtomac rather than PoTOmac – but that was the only thing he stumbled over.

Friends worried about his not having a job or profession, thinking that eventually he would suffer from a lack of purpose in life. But his ambitions were simple, and he was indifferent to status and perceptions. Looking after us, the house, and our friends was highly fulfilling for him, and entertaining others was a pleasure, not an obligation. In fact, he regarded the preparation of a meal for friends or strangers as something sacred, his "ministry" or way of serving others, bringing people together, and spreading peace in the world. No one who dined at our house ever forgot it. Twenty years afterwards, three different guests remembered a dessert he had served one evening: puff pastry in the shape of swans filled with whipping cream. Everything he touched, from a floral arrangement to an ironed shirt, became a little more beautiful. Even regular guests marvelled at his latest culinary feat, the harmony of tablecloth and china, and the symphony of crystal, silver and flowers. Jean Daniel took pride in setting a table with French –

and personal – elegance, but also in putting people at their ease. Arranging food colourfully on a plate or choosing the background music (Scarlatti, Lully, Fauré, Chet Baker, Ella Fitzgerald) was part of creating a propitious environment. The only thing he left to chance – or me – was the choice of wines. With a fine nose for pretension and extravagance, he was suspicious of wine connoisseurs and, left to himself, would let his pocket overrule his palate. He was never showy or stuffy, and was particularly careful not to let a stunning table daunt first-time visitors. There was rarely a sharp exchange at our table. In the George W. Bush years, a raised eyebrow from Jean Daniel was enough to quell a squall between visiting Republicans and Democrats. He was proud to receive everyone on the same terms. He treated a retired postman from our parish choir as kindly as a visiting African dignitary. Everyone was equal in his eyes.

He was a meticulous housekeeper, even cleaning up in other people's houses where we had been guests. In hotel rooms, he thought of the chambermaid, making certain we didn't leave too much for her to do; this was more important for him than leaving a tip, a capitalist trick which he thought encouraged low wages. He always had the spare room ready for an unexpected guest. But he was not fanatical, resorting to the occasional shortcut. Minutes before the door bell rang, even if he hadn't vacuumed, he would straighten the tassels of our Persian carpets or slip quickly into the powder room. "If you have time to do nothing else," he advised me one day, "make certain you polish the bathroom faucet with a dry cloth." To other people, too busy to care, or comfortable enough to hire a maid, this might have seemed pernickety and even bourgeois. To him, it was all part of a proper welcome.

For the first ten years in Washington, he painted Russian icons. An Orthodox monk in Paris had taught him how to do this while he was a seminarian, and he used the traditional methods, constructing the wooden base, covering it with plaster and polishing it till the surface was as smooth as silk. He would then apply egg-based tempera paint and gold leaf, reproducing canonical images of Christ and the saints with a fidelity and attention to detail that astonished even those familiar with the art form. He received several commissions for icons from friends and parishes around the country, and the one he was proudest of came from the progressive pastor of a Lutheran church, who persuaded her parish council to order

a painting of Saint John the Evangelist. It hangs there still, in the little church of Fairfield, Pennsylvania, a testimony to Jean Daniel's skill and a pastor's ecumenism. Then, he called it a day. Although he knew he had the necessary skills, he felt dishonest as an iconographer. "Writing" an icon was a monastic task, and he was no longer a monk. He felt it should be left to those who devoted their whole lives to spiritual contemplation and hence could infuse the paintings with a significance of which he was no longer capable, and he was worried that, as a part-time painter, he was only producing decorations. I was puzzled by his reasoning, as he spent most of the day alone and in silence – he did not turn on the radio even when he was ironing – but he knew better than I did the difference between being a former monk and a real one, or at least he was more honest about it, and I respected his idealism.

Living with Jean Daniel made me a better person. He understood that I needed to work evenings and weekends occasionally, but he kept reminding me of the Rule of St. Benedict: "Eight hours of work, eight hours of sleep, eight hours of community." Or, he would say, "If we're not careful, life will pass us by and when we're old we'll wonder where it went." He was an accomplished practitioner of "domestic ridicule," pricking my balloons, keeping my feet on the ground, and preventing my head from growing too large. He taught me to be thrifty – or, at least, to curb my extravagance, constantly quoting his grandmother: "There is no such thing as a small saving." Most remarkable of all, he taught me to laugh at myself. My family had always been serious; but Jean Daniel had been brought up in the fine art of teasing. "Oh, don't sit THERE!" his father exclaimed with apparent anguish, the first time I visited Saint-Malo. "That armchair is not for guests." I jumped to my feet as if I had sat on a bed of nails, and decided that he didn't like me. But he was only kidding.

Sometimes, Jean Daniel's kibitzing hit close to the bone and I would tell him that his only fault was being too critical of me. I usually meant this as a compliment, but sometimes I was irritated, too. It sometimes seemed easier for him to find fault than to proffer compliments. He could also be a killjoy, citing a battery of infuriatingly good reasons for *not* doing something. Getting a dog? "Goodbye to travelling, goodbye to antiques," he said. Buying an apartment in Paris? "For the amount of money we would spend on it and the number of days we

would use it, it would be cheaper to take a suite now and then at the Georges V Hotel." He operated from a spirit of practicality, frugality, modesty, and prudence, rather than negativism, all the while finding innumerable ways to add order, colour, and depth to our life. He approached even mundane matters with verve and cheerfulness. In his papers, I found a note and photograph that he sent to the gift shop at Washington's National Cathedral: "Madame, This lovely lamp which I purchased at your shop on July 9th is quite happy in my house, but would love to have a sister. Is it possible to order another one?"

As I travelled a great deal, Jean Daniel was alone for weeks at a time, but friends looked after him and we wrote to each other almost as religiously (if that is the word) as when he was at Mont Saint Michel. Some of these letters were maudlin (From Tanzania: "I have just finished a walk on Mount Kilimanjaro smelling the fragrance of bougainvillea, frangipane, jacaranda, poinsettia, oleander, and hibiscus, but I would trade all of this for the empty branches of Washington and your arms," October 1980); others were more practical (From Papua New Guinea: "I forgot to ask you to buy an air ticket for my mother's visit," April 1988.) If he left on a trip before me, he gave me written instructions: "Number One, I love you. Number Two, I didn't put out the garbage, empty the fridge, or rewind the clock... Number Three, There's a roasted rabbit in the oven you can heat up." At night, he in Washington or Paris and I in Nairobi or Jakarta or Hong Kong would kiss the pillow next to us to say "good night." We experienced C.S. Lewis's description of erotic love: "In one high bound it has overleaped the massive wall of our selfhood; it has made appetite itself altruistic, tossed personal happiness aside as a triviality and planted the interests of another in the centre of our being. Spontaneously and without effort we have fulfilled the law (towards one person) by loving our neighbour as ourselves." (*The Four Loves,* p. 158)

Jean Daniel was proud that we were a couple. His eyes brightened when I first printed a business card with both our names on it, and he was glad that we had so many friends in stable relationships. By the end of our life together, we had at least ten sets of friends who had lived together for more than 20 years, some of them much longer. Only one couple had broken up. Undoubtedly, through good example, we all reinforced each other's commitment to battle the vagaries of character, mood, male rivalry, stress, and libido and keep our eye on the North

Star, even in heaving seas. Jean Daniel was the driving force behind the constancy and levelheadedness of our relationship. Living together was easy, and we celebrated it in many ways. The first 132 or 133 times, we opened a bottle of champagne on the 19th of each month to mark the anniversary of his arrival in the United States. When we quarrelled, we patched it up within minutes, smoked the peace pipe (another bottle of champagne), and never put our heads on the pillow before the disagreement had been laughed away. Sometimes, after the lights were out, I would apologize for my behaviour during the day; often, Jean Daniel had completely forgotten about it and told me not to dwell on things.

At the same time, Jean Daniel left nothing to chance. Every weekday morning, he would rise at 5:30 and prepare breakfast while I was shaving and showering, so we could have a quiet moment together before I left for the office. Sometimes, we would talk about my work. At other moments, we would trade ideas on household matters: whom to invite for dinner and what to serve. Occasionally, we would hardly talk at all, listening to the brief morning news or classical music on Washington's NPR station, and simply enjoying each other's company as the dawn seeped into the pretty garden he had created behind the house. It was also a rule that I was not to read a newspaper at table (except on weekends) so as not to interfere with these quiet moments. Reinforcing the point, he told me more than once that he would stay in bed rather than make breakfast if I insisted on catching up with the rest of the world rather than with each other.

He was a pacifist. He disliked competitive sports, including card games. On Friday nights, I had trouble choosing a movie to rent because he disliked violence, police thrillers, suspense, disaster, and horror stories. He had a particular distaste for films about the Holocaust (like *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful*) as we had both visited Dachau separately at an early age and needed no reminding of it. He refused to see Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, which one critic described as "religious pornography." He hated France's national anthem, *La Marseillaise* (which urged the watering of the fields of the country with the enemy's "impure blood"). And somewhere in the bowels of the French Republic, his name was on a list of *insoumis* [i.e., conscientious objectors who had refused the military draft and also opted out of "community service"]. Here, Jean Daniel's principles were emboldened by common sense. He thought it illogical and punitive that objectors

were forced to serve for two years while soldiers returned to civilian life after only 12 months. He was assigned to do manual labour in the national archaeological department, but never showed up. For the rest of his life, he avoided wearing military green. He was also averse to confronting difficult situations, unless it would help others. In 1990, he laboured for days over a letter to his younger brother urging him to seek professional help in fighting alcoholism.

He was placid, but not a pushover, defending himself competently ("Don't use that tone with me, we're not at the office, and I'm not one of your staff"), and he grew more assertive as the years went by. "I bet you miss living with a bimbo," he exclaimed one day. "Yes," I said, light-heartedly. Our foibles would sometimes strain each other's patience. He had an almost irrational fear of mosquitoes, even in temperate climates where there was no threat of malaria. Some of this was well-founded as the insects seemed to seek him out – "They always go to the French restaurant first," he used to complain – and often left sores for days. But I resented his phobia on hot nights in small hotels when we had to keep the windows closed. Jean Daniel was also an inveterate worrier; I told him occasionally that, even if he had nothing to worry about, he would worry about that. "I'm a planner," he would say in his defence. "You expect things to fall into place, but some of them do because I look after them ahead of time." My idiosyncrasies took up more space. He was packed and ready for trips hours ahead of me and had to cool his heels while I dealt with a host of last-minute obligations. In restaurants, he would ask me to wipe my mouth, eat more slowly, avoid slurping, and stop peeling the labels off wine, beer or water bottles. He resented my urge to go to the very edge of very high places, whether it was at a lookout in the Shenandoah Mountains or atop the Renaissance clock tower in Siena. He was impatient that I could not keep a secret; one evening, at a friend's house, I asked him why he was kicking me under the table. I was a partisan of Mark Twain ("If you tell the truth, you never have to remember anything") whereas he preferred to "tell the truth but not all of it at once." However, if the subject was important and he knew the person well, he would pull no punches,. Loving maps, he wondered whether I had fallen asleep the day they were taught at school, because he had to navigate even while driving.

I also had a stubborn streak. One day, in a south-eastern French town called Dieu-le-Fit ["God Made It"], famous for its potters, I was tempted to buy a large platter. Jean Daniel convinced me that we didn't need it, but almost as soon as we drove away I regretted the decision. So, the next day, pretending to be interested in a solitary stroll in the countryside, I walked to the town and back, carrying the platter wrapped in newspaper under my arm, a distance of 18 miles. This was the most spectacular and benign example of my hard-headedness.

Our differences of opinion took new shapes once I had retired. Jean Daniel wondered whether my cholesterol medicine was making me irritable. Some of the tension came from being underfoot all day, so he would exile me to the basement study while he got on with his housework upstairs. Part of it was language. One of his favourite lines was from Antoine de St. Exupéry's *Le petit prince* [The Little Prince]: « Le langage est source de malentendu » [« Language is a source of misunderstanding. »] Sometimes, he was more specific: "It's all cultural: I'm French and you're Anglo-Saxon. François or Christophe [close friends in Paris] would have laughed off my last remark rather than take offence at it." I reminded him that we were also both getting old and both Italian. But these were ripples, not waves, as brief as they were silly, like young antelope locking horns. My ego was often the culprit; his teasing, sometimes too pointed. "No one in my entire life," he said one day, "has been able to insult me. Why, of all people, would I want to put you down?"

I can only remember Jean Daniel losing his temper three or four times – and it was never aimed at me. The first was when I was unfaithful to him within months of his arriving in the United States. The circumstances were particularly appalling. It was a Sunday morning, and I let him go to church alone, ostensibly to work at the apartment. He came home earlier than expected, crossed a friend in the street, put two and two together, and rushed into our bedroom. The bed was made up but not as perfectly as he had left it, so he rushed into the street, banged on the visitor's car as he prepared to drive off, and forced him to get out. I can still see the look of alarm and confusion on Jean Daniel's face. Something snapped between the two of us that day that would never be repaired. In later years, he would poke fun at my wide range of – usually platonic – affections. "You'll be living with someone two weeks after I die," he said with a wicked glint in his eye.

He was also upset when I backed out of a trip to the Grand Canyon because of an emergency at the office. He had prepared the expedition methodically and would have cancelled it altogether, but a friend and his mother were joining us from France, so he was forced to be their companion, interpreter and guide. He wanted to call the office to complain, but I told him it was my decision, no one else's. I felt like the boy who had been bullied in the schoolyard and now was about to be subjected to a second humiliation: a parent riding to his defence. Deep down, perhaps he worried that we would never have this opportunity again. On his return to Washington, he spoke in hushed tones about the beauty of the American West and we resolved to go there at a later date; but time ran out on us.

He was impatient with injustice, prejudice, rudeness, and narrow-mindedness. One Canadian Thanksgiving, we lunched at a friend's country cottage north of Montreal. We knew everybody, except for a woman who was introduced to us as "a real *voyante*" [psychic]. "Isn't it wonderful," she asked, as we sat down to eat, "that the North Koreans have set off a nuclear bomb?". "How so?" I reacted, a little puzzled. "Because it will show the Americans they don't rule the world." I wanted to suggest she attend the next test and enjoy some of the fall-out. But she was only getting started. "Pope Benedict XVI is a criminal," she continued. "He worked in a factory which produced cyanide gas used in killing Jews." I didn't know why she cared, because as I went into the kitchen, I heard her say that all Jews and Arabs were stupid and ugly. Jean Daniel, usually a paragon of patience, had had enough. "Madame," he interjected, "what you have just said is stupid." Then, touching her forearm lightly and looking intently into her eyes, he continued, "No, let me put that differently. What you have just said is VERY stupid." She left shortly afterwards.

Much of this description will make him sound ethereal and disembodied, but in fact – as was evident in his letters from Mont Saint Michel – he was a very sensual man. He liked good food (preferring the savoury to the sweet), saw delphiniums in the garden or goldfinches at the bird feeder through a child's eyes, spotted details in a pattern, an object, or a building that would have escaped the attention of Hercule Poirot, and enjoyed sex. He thought something amiss if we did not make love at least three times a week, or every day on holiday, especially

just back from the beach with the sun and salt still tingling on our skin. He sucked the fruit of life to the end. A month before he died, I turned bright red when he complained to the doctor that one of the sedatives he was taking was interfering with our sex life. Although romantic, he was not operatic. I longed to sleep in his arms all night, but he refused, knowing it would keep him awake. "Won't you consider sacrificing one night's sleep for me before I die?" I pleaded occasionally. "No," he said, matter-of-factly each time. From the start, we agreed not to exchange gifts, even at Christmas, seeing no point to buying things we didn't need, just to prove our affection. He made one exception, buying our first CD player one Valentine's Day in the early 1980s. When I took an African violet off the coffee table to put on my father's grave one snowy day, he gave me one that was on its last legs, seeing no reason to freeze a healthy flower for the sake of a poetic gesture.

Once Jean Daniel gave up the idea of being a priest or monk, neither of us saw a contradiction between being Christian and loving each other. As children, we had not been particularly conscious of our bodies and had never really exercised them, except under the stern eye of gym teachers at school. Growing up by the sea, Jean Daniel was probably more at ease with his body; it was at Oxford that the Latin advice "Mens sana in corpore sano" ["A sound mind in a sound body"] finally hit home to me. Thereafter, I looked after all of myself, remained physically active, and tried to listen to my body as much as my inner thoughts. As a former medical student, Jean Daniel was also conscious of treating the body properly. This did not mean submitting to its every urge, any more than heeding your conscience means acting on every thought that comes into your head. In fact, the "mens sana" principle opposed over-eating, over-drinking, over-working, smoking, and idleness. At the same time, we both felt that denying, suppressing, or hiding our sexual identity would be bad for us, as well as for the ones we loved. This did not mean that we flaunted it, held our hands in public, or ignored the sensitivities of others. We knew that we were individuals, and we refused to be defined by other people's categories. Our religious beliefs were our own concern. No one could tell us what they should be, or what they would permit, and we certainly were not going to allow theologians in Rome, concerned with sex, to drum us out of the Catholic Church, a highly human institution that we revered.

We were equally certain of the nobility of our love and expressed it, like most human beings, in wider and deeper ways than physical relations.

Years later, I found a description of the balance we had arrived at instinctively in a book by Jean Vanier, the Canadian humanitarian: "The truth is also in the 'earth' of our own bodies. So it is a question of moving from theories we have learned to listening to the reality that is in and around us. Truth flows from the earth. This is not to deny the truth that flows from teachers, from books, from tradition, from our ancestors, and from religious faith. But the two must come together. Truth from the sky must be confirmed and strengthened by truth from the earth." (*Becoming Human*, 1998, p. 126)

Ours was a modern, stripped-down version of Catholicism: no superstitions, no rosaries, no novenas, no formal confessions. We went to Mass on Sundays by choice rather than obligation. Like millions of Catholics, we yearned for a married clergy, women priests, and rules that would allow divorced people to re-marry. We were proud of the Church's universal reach, its opposition to the death penalty, and its condemnation of unjust wars (like the 2003 invasion of Iraq) but impatient with the internal politics and preoccupations of the Vatican. Even as a seminarian, Jean Daniel adopted the motto: "If you want to lose your faith, live in Rome." True to French tradition, he was a Gallican Catholic, suspicious of theological rumblings from across the Alps. When I wrote an Open Letter to the Pope in 2005 and published it on my website: www.robertcalderisi.com, he refused to translate it into French, feeling I had been too polite. I respected the papal office, just as people will vote for an unpopular president at a time of war, but Jean Daniel did not let titles or tradition distract him ("I would give the man a piece of my mind"). Throughout our life, he made fun of my "tortured" religious upbringing, my preoccupation with form, and the vestiges of infantile guilt. (At Catholic boarding school, I was ashamed to undress in front of a crucifix.) I used to dress up for Mass and he would dress down, almost as a deliberate counterpoint, reminding me that "God does not judge people by their clothes."

He was private about his faith, even with me. After turning off the lights one night, I asked him if he had said his evening prayers. "Why do you ask?" he wondered. "Because I didn't see you cross yourself," I said. "Mind your own

business," he replied without rancour. "I have my own way of praying." For the same reason, he was discreet with others. In Montreal, where none of our friends was a practising Catholic, he gritted his teeth in company whenever I mentioned that we had just come from Mass. He did not want to make anyone uncomfortable or seem to be boasting about our personal beliefs. He was more interested in *doing* the right thing than talking about it. In a new church, I would want to sit near the front to get a better view; he insisted on our being in the middle or at the back. "Remember," he would tell me. "The last shall be the first and the first shall be last." He respected ritual and appreciated it aesthetically, especially when it was elaborate, like a Russian Orthodox Easter; but he had no need for it. He would have agreed with Marcel Proust: "However beautiful the monstrance [the gold or silver receptacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is displayed], it is when we close our eyes that we sense the presence of God."

Neither of us was evangelical, and both of us were uncomfortable with those who were, like my twin brother, a Baptist convert who had been "born again" in Christ. We felt it was enough to be born just once. Jean Daniel was also true to the 20th century French practice of *laïcité*: the strict separation of Church and State. We thought US presidents presumptuous for asking God to bless America after every speech. Perhaps our faith had its limits, and some days, mine seemed as vaporous as the morning mist; what was certain was that neither of us believed in religious triumphalism. "We are Catholics," Jean Daniel said more than once, "because of where we were brought up. If we had been born somewhere else, we'd be Protestant, Jewish, Hindu or Muslim." But we were strong believers in Christian teachings – especially the equality of human beings and the importance of serving others. And we were still Catholics. During Lent, we avoided superficial sacrifices (like giving up desserts), but tried to re-connect with the messages of the Scriptures. And we retained a devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Two of Jean Daniel's most beautiful icons were of Our Lady of Perpetual Help; he had painted them for our mothers and they hung in our parents' bedrooms in Canada and France.

At the start, I mentioned that we both had a formal side. We felt at home in the States but knew we were guests. Neither of us expressed political opinions, except to very close friends, imagining how we would feel if American visitors

commented critically on Canadian or French events. With little justification, Jean Daniel was also self-conscious about his English, which he felt put him on the sidelines of a society he loved. Once I had mastered my responsibilities at the office and had more time to myself, I talked to Jean Daniel about doing community work together, but he resisted, feeling that it was inappropriate for a foreigner. He thought others would be better at it and that it might even be counterproductive, say, to visit an old people's home, speak with an accent, and struggle to find common points of reference. I respected his hesitations but had no similar compunctions.

For a short period, I spent Saturday mornings in the neighbourhood teaching Hispanic children to read English, but gave that up when it became clear they were more interested in going to the local McDonald's. Later, I worked with an organization in the Maryland suburbs, called Volunteers for the Visually Handicapped, helping an elderly man from North Carolina read his correspondence, answer letters, pay bills, balance his cheque book, and plan his television programs (he had macular degeneration and could still make out large text and images). Clearly, he also enjoyed the company. We had him over for dinner a number of times and Jean Daniel agreed to go to Paris with him, so he could see some of the sights he had remembered as a young soldier at the end of the Second World War. He had a modest government pension but his sister had married a Rothschild and, at her death, left him a nice inheritance. So he offered to cover the costs for both of them. Here was a volunteer task that Jean Daniel could excel at, where his native tongue and knowledge of the French capital could be put to good use. He was not eager to go (he would have preferred that I come along as well), but he knew how important the trip was and was determined to make it memorable. They ended the tour at the Moulin Rouge.

Then, I heard that the Missionaries of Charity, the community of nuns founded by Mother Teresa, were to open a hospice for people infected with HIV/AIDS. Several of our friends – including the two priests I had stayed with in Paris – had already succumbed to the disease. Yet, even without this personal connection, I am certain that I would have been drawn to the cause – at least up to a point. Certainly, I could not see myself ministering physically to those dying of an irreversible disease. My twin brother was a surgeon, but I had a feebler

constitution, queasy at the sight of my own blood. I also doubted that I could buck up the residents' spirits or plausibly share their pain. So I settled on an indirect approach. One cold Saturday morning in October 1986, I knocked on the front door of the former St. Joseph's Orphanage in north-eastern Washington, which the Catholic Archdiocese had offered to Mother Teresa as the site of the hospice. I explained that I was not interested in being a permanent volunteer but I was happy to help them re-paint the premises. Three weeks later, there was an orientation for night volunteers and I was encouraged to attend. "Would you be willing to help a member of your own family if he was ill?" I was asked by an earnest young layman. "When it involves someone very close to you, you'll be surprised by the things you find the strength to do. I assure you that the people here will soon feel like your brothers and sisters, and any difference between them and your actual family will melt away." Jean Daniel understood why I was being drawn into the project and, eventually, his own reservations evaporated, too. He certainly did not look forward to my being absent a whole night each week and this was a way of our "working" together for the first time, too. A month later, we were the Thursday night "shift" and we stayed there for three years. When I was travelling on business, Jean Daniel would still work there with another volunteer.

The spirit of the place was infectious. When I warned my boss at the World Bank, a former deputy prime minister of Turkey, that I might be a little bleary-eyed on Friday mornings, he asked how many people were at the hospice. It had just opened and had a capacity of 25, but so far there were only three residents. "Is it really worth helping such a small number?" he asked. I found myself quoting Mother Teresa: "We may be a drop in the ocean, but without us there wouldn't be that drop."

The hospice was called "The Gift of Peace" and, despite some outlandish rules, it lived up to the name. The Missionaries of Charity had an almost primitive notion of Christianity and an unswerving sense of obedience. One sweltering July day, the Washington Archbishop, James Cardinal Hickey, visited the hospice. Sweating under his vermilion red cap, the Cardinal looked at a thermostat on a corridor wall and saw that it was 105 degrees. Turning to the Mother Superior, he said, "There used to be an air conditioning system in the orphanage. Is it out of order?" "No," she replied respectfully. "We're not accustomed to it in India and we

did not feel we should spend money on the extra electricity." "Think of the residents," he remonstrated. "They're sick, after all." From that day on, the air conditioning was kept at full blast. Some nights, we had to wear sweaters to compensate, and as winter approached I had to suggest that the nuns turn it off.

The sisters also had strict rules for their guests, which did not make the hospice popular with the gay community in Washington DC. Although some of the residents were healthy enough to go out, they were expected to be back by seven in the evening. There was no television, so as to discourage violent, materialistic, and impure thoughts. Volunteers had to wear trousers – even on the hot nights before the air conditioning system was re-discovered – as shorts might lead to lewdness, too. Visiting doctors had to persuade the nuns to use morphine more liberally, as they preferred to administer it only during a patient's final days.

But the people at the hospice had nowhere else to go and the sisters treated everyone as unique and precious. Every Friday morning, before we drove home for breakfast, we would attend Mass in the little chapel and hear them recite a prayer of the 19th century prelate John Henry Newman: "Let me preach you without preaching, not by words but by example." They lived up to that ideal. The purity of their instincts became clearer when a group of young people from Opus Dei – the elitist conservative group featured in *The Da Vinci Code* – joined us as volunteers one evening. The hospice was now full, and every extra set of arms was welcome. But they spent most of the night in the chapel rather than changing diapers. Over coffee, I learned that they had come, not in a spirit of service or sacrifice, but as an act of self-mortification. White and well-bred, they were clearly uncomfortable being at close quarters with mostly black men who were either gay or drug addicts or both. They lasted barely a week and never came back.

Mother Teresa visited the hospice twice. Both times, we were relieved that she didn't look us in the eye and say, "Come, follow me," as we would have complied. Her commitment to helping people living with HIV/AIDS was remarkable. While some evangelical preachers in the United States and Africa regarded the disease as a "God-sent" scourge on the impious, she said that her whole life had been a preparation for helping the world confront the epidemic. She

didn't care that most of those sick in North America were drug takers or homosexuals. She could have ignored the problem, or left it to others. She had enough to do, housing the dying in India or campaigning against abortion in the world. But she jumped right in. The Mother Superior, Sister Dolores, was also impressive, bolstering loyalty and morale among the volunteers. Saturday mornings (which were probably the only free time she had in the entire week), she would occasionally call us at home: "I thought you would like to know that our brother John has gone to the Lord. You made his passing much easier. Please pray for him."

At the end of 1989, we decided to take a breather. A good friend in Paris, a young priest, had died of AIDS in September and Jean Daniel's brother Michel was now at an advanced stage of the disease; as a result, Jean Daniel wanted to pace his emotional strength so as to support the family and his brother in the months ahead. We were also weary of the spirit of regimentation at the hospice. There had been a change of superior, a younger Indian woman who had trouble separating the wheat from the chaff. One day she rebuked me for bringing one of the residents home on a Sunday afternoon to watch a football game. She asked me why I had not invited others to come as well, thereby turning an act of kindness into a suspect manoeuvre. (I had asked others, but no one else was interested.) Her predecessor wrote to us from San Francisco, where she was now looking after novices in one of Mother Teresa's other establishments. It was plain that Sister Dolores knew we were a couple but she displayed the same openness and affection we admired in her from the start. "It is with great respect, profound love and true gratitude in my heart [that] I pen you these few lines for having shared your time and services so lovingly and generously from the beginning of our work in Washington. For all that you have been to me and the Sisters; for all that you have done for our sick and suffering brothers and sisters; so *constantly* given with true love from the bottom of your hearts; and to me, you have been my brothers, as I have looked upon you as my family... Your trust and confidence in the Lord... were a great help to me. This is what John Daniel used to do when Robert was away. He trusts in the power of prayer, keeps smiling and working, and everything turns out to be OK for him."

The three years at the hospice transformed us in a number of ways. In one of his rare compositions in English, for an amateur newsletter run by one of the residents, Jean Daniel described the experience. "Some of the most precious moments are when we are offered a smile from those who suffer, who forget their pain for a few seconds, and allow love to bloom so beautifully in their life. With so many smiles at the Gift of Peace, it is springtime all year round." He saw it as a "great privilege" to stand by those who had no one else to care for them and to share their final hours with them. Serving at the hospice was the most satisfying "work" we ever did. Even washing up after dinner seemed significant. Unknown to us, it was also a preparation for later events.

Our Thursday evenings were free again – but not for long, as I dragged a generous but hesitant Jean Daniel once more into volunteer work. When we arrived in Washington, we had trouble finding a church in Washington where we would be comfortable. From 1980 to 1984, we attended services at the venerable St. Matthew's Cathedral downtown (where JFK's funeral had taken place in 1963), but Sunday Mass was flat and uninspiring compared with those we had attended in Paris. The sermons were particularly dreadful; one priest compared Christ to Superman, while another laced his homilies with excerpts from the Proceedings of the American Psychological Association.

Friends at Georgetown University asked why we had not tried St. Augustine's parish at the corner of 15th and V Streets, the "Mother Church of African-American Catholics in the Nation's Capital." From the moment we walked through the front doors in October 1984, we felt at home. What attracted us was not just the liturgy, the music or the preaching (all of which were beautiful); it was also the warm-heartedness and open-mindedness of everyone we met there. We loved the stubborn simplicity of the older members of the parish who were careful to mould new clergy in their image, asking an ex-Baptist to stop shouting "Praise the Lord" in the middle of every second sentence or reminding a stiff newcomer fresh from Rome that "We are not in the Vatican!" Everyone there was also a refugee from St. Matthew's, or at least descendants of such refugees. St. Augustine's had been founded in 1858 by black Catholics, tired of being consigned to the back choir stall of the Cathedral, and was now famous for introducing Gospel music to the Catholic liturgy in the early 1970s. The choir director, Leon

Roberts, was a nationally renowned composer and arranger; raised a Pentecostal, he had started playing the organ for his preacher father at the age of nine.

There were two choirs at the parish – one sang traditional Anglo-Saxon hymns and African-American spirituals at the 10:00 Mass and the other belted out highly-charged Gospel music at the 12:30. So, when the first of these, the Chorale, asked for volunteers in late 1989, I was tempted to accept. When I asked Jean Daniel his opinion, he didn't say very much but his facial expression was clear, "There you go again..." He was right: I had already made up my mind and was going overboard, joining both choirs. This meant rehearsals on Tuesday and Thursday evenings and seven hours of practice and singing every Sunday. Jean Daniel decided to join the 10:00 group so that at least we would be together on Thursday evenings and part of Sunday morning. Although we were both baritones, I was put in the tenor section and he sang with the basses.

This was a different kind of community service from the one we had performed at the hospice. Apart from occasional performances at old people's homes or the city prison, the choir's efforts were centred on the parish, touching and consoling many hearts. Since Jean Daniel died, some friends have asked me how two intelligent and sophisticated people could still believe in God or have any patience with organized religion. Singing in the choir showed how uncomplicated, natural and deeply rewarding group reflection, or prayer, can be. Neither of us was particularly proud of our voices, and we never aspired to singing a solo, but we enjoyed keeping alive a rich heritage of ecclesiastical music. We were captivated by the beauty of the music – almost a religious experience in its own right as it drew us out of ourselves into a realm beyond our understanding. It helped create the conditions for others to meditate as well. And it was a taste of the universal Church. At Christmas and Easter, we sang spirituals and Gospel music but also Latin hymns and selections from Handel's *Messiah*. In 1990, we toured Italy and sang in Florence, Assisi and Rome -- including Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. We were so much in tune with the parish that the choir director told us one day, "You know, you're African-American Catholics now." "That's nice of you to say," I reacted, "but of course you're exaggerating. To begin with, we're not black." "That doesn't matter," he insisted. "We call ourselves Roman Catholics, but none of us was born in Rome."

In a sense, Jean Daniel was back in his element. For almost five years, in France, he had prayed and sung in large groups. But, at another level, he was in new territory. At the hospice, we were largely alone, apart from our brief contacts with the residents and the sisters. At St. Augustine's, Jean Daniel associated with large numbers of people of different backgrounds and he was the member of a team for the first time. His self-consciousness about being a foreigner or having an accent began to melt away, and he grew more confident and out-going. Serving others served us as well. Throughout those rehearsals and services, we were inspired by an almost military sense of discipline and duty, concentrating on our parts, buoyed by a sense of fellowship and peace. Before each rehearsal, we held hands and shared each other's concerns and worries, prayed for relatives who were suffering from cancer, sought blessings for young people about to write their final exams, thought of those who were travelling, and even asked forgiveness for a woman who had helped the FBI trap DC's mayor Marion Barry in a drug sting. (I swallowed hard at this, but it was a touching expression of loyalty to a former civil rights leader.) We also prayed for Jean Daniel's brother.

Michel was a drag show artist in Geneva. He had the same lithe body as Jean Daniel, the same boyish looks, and the same flair for colour and creation. He made his own costumes, riotous compositions of satin, crinoline and lace, in vermilion, aquamarine and plum. He was the youngest in the family and had trained as a pastry chef. Like Jean Daniel, he had moved away from home at an early age, but was devoted to his parents and siblings and could be counted on to attend major family events. Like Jean Daniel, he exuded a warm serenity. He was the worldly one, exposed to the pleasures and fine things of the big city, but wearing them lightly, happy to share his experiences with his brothers and sisters rather than boast about them. He was also generous with his money. By late 1990, he was showing the signs of Kaposi's Sarcoma, one of the opportunistic diseases associated with AIDS. He had told his parents that he was suffering from cancer, which was literally true, but hoped it would be cured through treatment, which was impossible at that time. He stayed away from home to protect them from the shock, but a friend called them one day to say that Michel barely had the strength to leave his apartment to buy groceries. The very next morning, his parents drove to Geneva, packed his belongings into their car, and brought him home. These

were the early days of AIDS in rural France and, after several months in his parents' care, Michel was the first declared case at the hospital at Saint Malo. He was fatalistic, happy with the life he had led (he was only 34), and still bursting with fun. Nurses at the hospital would take their coffee breaks in his room, weary of the long faces elsewhere on the wards, knowing he would make them chuckle.

We were with him the night he died. He was in a near-coma and was having trouble breathing, but we took turns holding his hand to reassure him. His parents were sitting at the end of the bed, and we encouraged them to do the same. The Bretons are Celts, like the Welsh and the Scots, and are not given to physical displays of affection. Jean Daniel's father was Italian but had lived in Saint Malo for nearly 50 years and had acquired some of the same restraint. Jean Daniel and I then went out for dinner. When we returned, Michel's condition had worsened, his chest heaving with the effort to find oxygen, his body twitching in agony. His doctor had told us to call him at home if we needed him, so Jean Daniel talked to the nurse and consulted his parents. Ten minutes later, the doctor was in the room and Jean Daniel told him it was time. Michel was given a massive dose of morphine and, within a minute, was gone. Jean Daniel and I had seen 50 people succumb to the disease at the hospice in Washington, but that experience shielded us only slightly from the sense of separation. The people we had looked after were, only metaphorically, our "brothers" and "sisters"; Michel was the first actual family member either of us had lost. At the funeral, most parents would have hidden the cause of his death, but Mr. and Mrs. Rossi were made of different stuff. After Mass, from the front of the church, Jean Daniel's mother encouraged the congregation to donate funds to HIV/AIDS research. Later, we dropped his ashes into the sea, near where he and Jean Daniel spent youthful afternoons on the beach.

Then, we had to face a crisis in our life as a couple. We had already survived one, a few years before. In late 1988 – as I was turning 40 – I considered leaving him for another man. For reason which I cannot remember, except perhaps for Jean's Daniel's extraordinary forbearance, I took three months to make up my mind. Jean Daniel knew Geoffrey, had great affection for him, and understood my dilemma. We never talked about it – as he was determined not to influence my choice – but we cried and held each other a lot. "I don't want to hold on to you for my own sake," he said. "I want you to be happy, like a bird flying free, not caught

in a cage." Eventually, I saw the obvious. He was the most important part of my life, the only "project" that would ever matter to me, and he had shown his deep love by his patient reaction. The third person in the equation was also having second thoughts. His former partner had just discovered that he was HIV-positive and Geoffrey felt that he should now remain available to help his friend through what could prove a harrowing period. Looking back, I have no doubt that my passion for Geoffrey would have transformed itself into a tranquil, caring and permanent relationship, but I am also certain that I would never have forgiven myself for leaving Jean Daniel on a whim. To this day, I tremble at how close I came to doing this.

The new trial will seem mundane by comparison, but it was just as serious. While I was getting on and off planes, negotiating development projects in Africa and Asia, attending conferences in Paris and Geneva, and visiting finance and foreign affairs ministries across Europe, Jean Daniel was putting down deep roots in the Washington community. By the time we left the city, neither of us had lived in any place longer. And, in fact, leaving was the problem. All along, I assumed that we would eventually return to Canada or France and, while I enjoyed the US capital, felt we were just "passing through." So, in 1991, when I applied for an overseas assignment in Africa, and in 2002, when I took early retirement to look after my parents in Montreal, I was simply accelerating the inevitable. For Jean Daniel, I was ripping up his garden. He reflected that, as a monk, he had wanted to stay in one place for the whole of his life; instead, he found himself being dragged around the globe. But he accepted the moves, using the same chilling metaphor both times. "Ah well," he said, "at least it's a rehearsal for death."

In November 1991, just four months after Jean Daniel's brother died, I wrenched him away from Washington to move to Abidjan, the capital of the Ivory Coast, where I had been named chief of the World Bank's office in Western Africa. Neither the Bank – nor, to our knowledge, any other United Nations agency – had ever posted a same-sex couple overseas. I had been testing the waters for a number of years, and the results were not encouraging. "Of course, you can accept a foreign assignment," a senior manager assured me, "but Jean Daniel is going to have to live in a separate house." Other colleagues were more supportive. A former division chief of mine, a colorful Texan woman, told me that

if she had a partner like mine, she would put him at the head of every diplomatic reception line in town.

I decided that, when the moment came, I would not make an issue of our domestic circumstances or ask permission to serve overseas. Jean Daniel was more prudent. He wondered whether the institution would appreciate being taken by surprise, and he did not want to be just a shadow lurking in the wings. "After all," Jean Daniel pointed out, "we're going to be living in a Bank-owned house." He wanted to be able to walk through the front door. So, I raised the matter with the Bank's vice president for personnel. "Well, you're certainly entitled to your privacy," he said, "but if I were your supervisor I would want to know about this in advance." With mild trepidation, I went to see my new boss, a former US Marine and reportedly a straight-laced Catholic. He could not have been more understanding. Remembering his early days in the military when he had been stationed at a US base in Germany without his wife, he told me to visit Abidjan and see how my circumstances would fit with the local scene. After a week of reconnoitring, I decided the change of scene would be too wrenching for Jean Daniel and I turned down the appointment. I called him in Paris where he was visiting friends and they went out that evening to celebrate. Another week went by and Jean Daniel could see that I was miserable, worrying that I would always regret passing up this professional opportunity. We decided that we should go. I went to see the country director, confirmed that the job was still available, and promised never to play Hamlet again. Jean Daniel was being generous and brave, and left his network of friends and familiar habits with a heavy heart.

Within months of arriving, our personal life became almost a footnote rather than the centre of attention. At our first diplomatic receptions, I introduced Jean Daniel as my "friend." Our hosts welcomed him eagerly: "How long will you be staying?" "*We*'ll be here at least three years," Jean Daniel replied. Within weeks, we were receiving joint or separate invitations. The agricultural staff at the office had the habit of hosting a dinner for new mission chiefs; they were uncertain what to do in our case, but they decided to be brave. "Within ten minutes," I was told later, "you were just a normal couple, and the next morning we were all scratching our heads at the fact that we had spent an entire evening with two men talking passionately about one subject: the importance of women's rights in Africa." Soon,

Jean Daniel was a favourite at the monthly teas organized by the ambassadors' spouses. For a brief time, we did some volunteering at the city hospital's AIDS ward; but this did not prove very practical as there was no weekend service and increasingly I had trouble getting away during working hours. Later, Jean Daniel went every week to a poor suburb of the city to help a French woman care for severely handicapped children, delivered to her by desperate parents or by the police, who had taken them off the streets.

Jean Daniel had an almost magical effect on people. Six months after we arrived, the woman responsible for our field offices in Africa visited. Before returning to headquarters, she told me, "Now I know why this is working. Jean Daniel is even more charming than you are!" The Prime Minister of the country, a former International Monetary Fund official, was elegant and brilliant, and his wife was equally striking. But she was also white and French, and the mixed couple attracted a remarkable degree of jealousy, calumny, and abuse. It was said that she had murdered her first husband to make her way up the social ladder in the country and that she had been a mistress of the Ivory Coast's founding president, now in his 90s. She met Jean Daniel over dinner at the British ambassador's house and asked me afterwards, "Where have you been hiding Monsieur Rossi all these months?" (I wondered whether we should lock our doors that evening against this formidable temptress.) Years later, an Abidjan friend was to say: "Every time we met him, we wanted to be better and to do everything we could to make the world a better place. He reminded us that laughter and a smile were the best weapons for dealing with the difficulties of life. In short, he was one of those really rare beings who draw us to a higher plane."

People were comfortable with us because we were at ease with ourselves. The American author Marianne Williamson could have been giving us our marching orders: "There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us. It's in everybody, and as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same." Before we knew it, we had slipped quite naturally into being a "public" couple. I was on television and radio or being quoted in the newspapers almost every day and we travelled together in the countryside with entertaining results. People in

the villages would ask local officials who Jean Daniel was. "He's his brother," they would answer, a description that covered a range of possibilities, including just being a friend. That seemed to do the trick. One day, we visited projects in three different places and Jean Daniel was carted off on his own by one of the government teams. (It was an unfortunate feature of the Ivory Coast at the time that the presence of a white person added lustre or weight to a government delegation.) Once again, people asked who he was and he told them: "I am the representative of the representative of the World Bank."

There was a serious side to Jean Daniel's role, too. Like most spouses of international officials or staff of multinational corporations posted overseas, he became an indirect employee of the organization, looking after the household staff, organizing official hospitality, and reinforcing any messages that I might be trying to communicate to those who would listen. Government ministers, business people, women's leaders, human rights activists, environmentalists, journalists, and artists were at our table every week, and both of us set the scene and the tone. One day, when the prime minister was due for lunch, we had an advance visit from his director of protocol, who was concerned that there was an odd number of places at the table (seven, rather than six or eight). I suggested he join us for the meal, but he demurred. "I never have lunch with the boss." Then, he stared at Jean Daniel, and Jean Daniel stared back. "Don't expect me to eat in the kitchen, if that's what you're driving at," he said. Despite the supposed breach of protocol, the lunch was a great success. On a different front, the Bank's vice president for Africa had been miffed not to have been consulted on my appointment, but he soon saw how Jean Daniel's social skills were serving the interests of the organization. Each time he visited the country, he dropped by on his way to the airport to express his personal thanks.

Our period in Africa was one of great personal growth. Any residual shyness Jean Daniel might have had on arriving dissipated during hundreds of encounters, like bubbles in a champagne glass. Three years of on-the-ground experience also convinced me that there was something profoundly wrong in the way the West was trying to help Africa. I later channelled this frustration into a book. Jean Daniel's reaction to the bias and waste and contradictions around us was visceral rather than cerebral. He was especially troubled that so many young

people with talent and ambition faced empty futures because of where their mother had been born or how their father had voted. Ten years later, on the eve of a holiday I had planned in South Africa, I took him to see the film of John Le Carré's *The Constant Gardener*. The contrast in the film between the corrupt elite and suffering poor of Kenya re-opened the wounds of Abidjan. "Do we really have to go back to Africa?" he asked me. I told him that South Africa and the rest of the continent were as different as Iceland and Thailand. But there was no budging him and I cancelled our trip.

At the end of my assignment in Abidjan, I was treated to a number of farewells by colleagues in the diplomatic corps. Jean Daniel was leaving for Washington a month early to prepare the house back in Washington; so the British ambassador, a single woman who had acted as a kind of den-mother, invited us for a special lunch. I thanked her for the honour she had done us. "No," she corrected me. "This was Jean Daniel's event. You'll get your own send-off dinner like everyone else." The country's prime minister gave us a distinctive going-away gift. His standard presentation to departing ambassadors was an ebony bust of a buxom woman, cut discreetly at the base where the breasts began to rise; the most prominent feature of these sculptures was the woman's hair, arranged intricately in carefully sculpted tresses. Our gift was a full-length, bare-chested male musician, sporting suggestively in front of him a traditional stringed instrument with a long, protuberant neck.

It was December 1994, and Jean Daniel slipped back into Washington life like a seal in water. Our house was in Adams Morgan, a 40-minute walk north of the White House, wedged between one of the wealthiest white neighbourhoods in the city (Kalorama), middle-class African-American streets now being gentrified by white yuppies, long blocks where Salvadoran and Nicaraguan immigrants lived four or more to a room, and a largely run-down area across 16th Street where whites preferred to drive rather than walk. It was the "poor man's Georgetown", brimming with ethnic restaurants that attracted customers from the distant suburbs, and it was the perfect base for Jean Daniel. For the first 11 years in DC, we did not have a car, preferring to walk downtown to the Smithsonian or to Georgetown, admiring the architecture and greenery of the city, and popping into antique stores.

At the start, Jean Daniel had found American furniture curiously plain compared with European styles but was gradually attracted to their unusual features, like the use of tiger maple, and the history they represented. One of our earliest friends, also from France, ran an antiques store on 18th Street and Jean Daniel went off with him almost every week on buying expeditions to Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. Soon he could tell the provenance and age of a piece by the choice of materials, the number of drawers, or the finesse of the wood carving. He had also become a buyer, forcing us out of our one-bedroom apartment. A sense of history and aesthetics, not acquisitiveness, inspired him. One afternoon, he brought me to see a grandfather clock from Connecticut made during a trade embargo imposed by the British at the time of the War of 1812. Starved of metal, the clock maker Silas Hoadley made the entire piece, including the mechanism, in wood. "We already have a grandfather clock," I told him. "Someone has to look after it," Jean Daniel replied.

Years of reading *Architectural Digest* and watching *Antiques Roadshow* had worn down his monastic restraint. But he still loved a bargain. He bought our first set of china at a small shop in Alexandria, Virginia for $70 and made two trips back and forth to the house, on the Metro, carrying his booty carefully in paper shopping bags, rather than fritter away his savings on a taxi fare. For two years, in a downtown department store, he circled around a large dining room table, like a lioness sniffing its prey, before deciding to buy it; by then, our income had risen and the price seemed a little less outrageous.

He admired a 17th century French painting, set in an impressive 19th century English gold stucco frame, purportedly of the dramatist Molière. Jean Daniel had his doubts. The subject of the portrait had a fine aquiline nose and was wearing a purple cloak, suggestive of a royal connection; Molière had a bulbous nose and would have dressed more plainly. Jean Daniel brought photocopies of other portraits of the writer to the antiques dealer, who promptly agreed to knock $2,000 off the price. Near the end of our time in Washington, he spotted two Empire chairs (Vienna, circa 1815) at a high-brow store in Chevy Chase. "We already have enough chairs," I said, sounding like the frugal and sensible Jean Daniel of 20 years before. But the next day, over lunch, our real estate agent told us that Jean

Daniel's garden had added 20 percent to the sale price of our house. So we went back to the shop. "I think you deserve a commission," I told him.

It was July 2002 and we were on the move again, this time to look after my parents in Montreal. They were now in their early 90s, still living alone in a country house an hour's drive north of Montreal. Their health had always been solid – they didn't even have aspirins in the house – but recently they had had minor strokes; so, I thought the time had come to be close to them again. I was also running out of steam at the World Bank. Office politics, and my flagging faith in current forms of foreign aid, were pushing me towards early retirement. Although Jean Daniel knew my spirits were sagging and shared my concern for my parents, he was worried about leaving Washington again. "At least it's not Africa," I told him. We left open the possibility that we would move back to the United States in the future, but the change was still very hard on him.

Some of our close friends had already left Washington but those that remained were special to us and we were making new ones. One of them was just 19 when we met him in June 1999, a third-year student at George Washington University. This was more than an ordinary friendship. He was like a meteor blazing across a relationship that had grown slightly blurred at the edges. No one before had provoked the same range and intensity of emotion in both of us. Precocious, articulate and sensitive, Matt could also be moody and self-absorbed, but his curiosity and energy and his own affection for us lightened the shadows that sometimes descended on his already dark Irish features. As he was in a committed relationship with another of our friends, there were limits to how far we could express our love, but we celebrated it in small ways, taking him to France for his 21st birthday in July 2000 and to Costa Rica in March 2001 for Jean Daniel's 50th. Like the child of a healthy marriage, he became a reinforcement and reflection of what Jean Daniel and I felt for each other. For the next nine years, we remained in almost daily contact and he was with us at the end.

Unlike Abidjan, where official duties swept us forward before we had a chance to notice, Montreal was a vacuum. I had not lived there for 34 years, had lost contact with school friends, and was not eager to return to my roots. Jean Daniel's adjustment was even more difficult and he showed signs of a mild

depression. He gave up interest in cooking ("Now that you've retired, I've decided to retire, too," he told me.) I was happy to take over, even though the division of labour was still lopsided. He looked after the house, including the washing and ironing, set the table and tended the garden, while I drove north into the Laurentian mountains several times a week to be with my mother and father.

Jean Daniel loved my parents, although at first he thought I had no father. "When did your dad die?" he asked me a few months after we had met, as I had never mentioned him. I was close to my mother, and he understood why. She protected her brood like a wildcat. During the Second World War, when my father was forced to report to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) every week as a possible traitor, she sprang into action. She could recognize a blatant case of anti-Italian bias. My father's father, a former secretary of the Montreal Italian men's club, Casa d'Italia, was already being detained in an internment camp in Northern Ontario while his three younger sons, my father's brothers, were serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. Franz Kafka might have made sense of it. My mother wrote to the minister of justice, Louis St. Laurent, to describe how exemplary a citizen my father was (including the fact he was a Boy Scout master in his spare time). Within a week, a letter of exemption arrived from Mr. St. Laurent, and my father brought it to the RCMP headquarters downtown. The police officer who had been tormenting him until then was so upset – "You're getting away with murder," he spluttered through clenched teeth – that the exemption card he typed was black with corrected mistakes. A few years later, my sister Maria finished primary school with the highest marks in the class but was denied a scholarship to a private school when the benefactor, the Catholic Women's League, determined that we were Italian and hence ineligible to be registered in an English-speaking parish. My mother wrote to the Archbishop of Montreal, who reversed the decision, confirming that we could live in any parish we wanted. In the late 1950s, my sister Irene trained to be a stewardess with Trans Canada Airlines (the forerunner of Air Canada) and finished first in her class, but was denied a position because she wasn't tall enough (the required minimum was 5'2"). My sister was resigned to defeat, but our mother insisted that the company measure Irene again, knowing that she was half an inch taller than necessary. She was hired.

These and other stories bound Jean Daniel as tightly into my family as I had been melded into his. And while we avoided talking to them about the nature of our relationship, in view of their age and upbringing, both sets of parents opened their hearts to us as if we were extra sons. The first time we were guests, we were put in the same room, and over the years, in different ways, my mother would sing the praises of Jean Daniel. "You know," she told my sister once, "he is even better than a wife." So, in 2002, when my parents needed us, Jean Daniel tried to overcome his anxiety and agreed to be uprooted again.

We returned to Canada in the nick of time. My parents were proud that I had come home and we saw each other two or three times a week, when I drove up to buy groceries, take them to doctors' appointments, or make dinner. Jean Daniel stayed in town, conscious of how important this private time was for me and my parents. At the end of September, we celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary at the house in Montreal and planned on spending Christmas together, too. But sometime in early December, my mother had a silent heart attack and her lungs began to fill with fluid. We went up on Christmas morning with the meal we had prepared and found my mother in bed. She struggled to get up, sitting to face the wall. "Robert, you don't know how much I love you." "Oh, I think I do," I said with a smile. Then, I helped her turn towards the door where Jean Daniel was proudly holding a platter of traditional Italian pastries that she used to make at this time of year. "Who taught you to do that?" she asked. "You did, Mommy." She beamed, and traced a cross on his forehead. "Vaia con Dios," she said, a Spanish phrase that she had adopted recently. She refused to ruin our Christmas lunch, and lay on the couch in the living room until we were done. Then she said it was time, and we called an ambulance, At the hospital, she was given oxygen and was her old self within 15 minutes but, two days later, in the middle of the night, she had a massive stroke and slipped into a coma for four days. I was with her when she died early on the morning of January 2nd, 2003, just six months after I had come home.

My father lived another 13 months, during which we became very close. He decided to start bowling again at the age of 92, so I drove him each week to a nearby town where he re-joined old friends in an afternoon league. I began to see similarities between him and Jean Daniel, including a commitment to doing things

properly and a peasant-like wisdom and wit. We practised together for a few weeks so he could build his average back to 150 before competing again. "I don't want to take some young person's place unnecessarily," he told me. One day, he was off his form and his captain told him, "You just got up on the wrong side of the bed this morning." "What I need," my father answered, "is a bed with two good sides." He was self-conscious about my coming up several times each week to look after him, and he worried about my gasoline costs. "Don't you think I get some pleasure in seeing you and being able to help?" I asked him. "And wouldn't you do the same for your Dad if our roles were reversed?" He winced a little, half appreciative, half embarrassed. "That's a hard question to answer, as I don't have a father my age." In early December 2003, he had another stroke, this time a major one, and he lingered in hospital for two months. He died on February 1, 2004, my sister and I at his side.

Two months before his stroke, we had what I thought would be an awkward conversation. Waiting until we were on the way to the bowling alley, so as not to make the announcement sound too momentous, I told him that Jean Daniel and I would be celebrating our 25th anniversary in mid-November by entering into a civil union. Would he be interested in attending? I said that we would be honoured if he did but would also understand if he felt uncomfortable being there. I just didn't want him to feel left out if he heard about it later. There was a moment of silence. "What day will it be?" he asked. A Saturday, I answered: "Well, that should be all right," he said, and then he laughed. "If you pick me up."

November 15th, 2003 was the proudest day of our life. For me, the only rivals were the day I won a Rhodes Scholarship in December 1967 and the moment in February 2002 when the World Bank extended full spousal benefits to same-sex couples. If anything happened to me, Jean Daniel would receive half my pension for the rest of his life. We were walking on air.

We didn't need to formalize our relationship, as we were regarded as common-law spouses from the day we set foot in Canada. But we wanted to mark our anniversary and an enlightened new law in a public ceremony. In a society once dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, the bill allowing same-sex civil unions (and later marriages) was passed by the National Assembly in early 2002 by

a vote of 125-0, and it was declared effective on Quebec's national holiday, June 24th , the Feast of St. John the Baptist. Our own sense of normalcy as a couple was echoed by a law that made the matter almost banal. The government had not even bothered to changed the forms. We had to delete the word "wife" on one side of the application and pencil in a second "husband."

The ceremony took place at the court house in Old Montreal, known in French as the Palace of Justice. The music was by Mama Cass:

> Once I believed that when love came to me
> It would come with rockets, bells and poetry
> But with me and you
> It just started quietly and grew,
> And believe it or not
> Now there's something groovy and good
> 'Bout whatever we've got
>
> And it's getting better, growing stronger
> Warm and wilder,
> Getting better every day
>
> I don't feel all turned on and starry-eyed
> I just feel a sweet contentment deep inside
> Holding you at night
> Just seems kind of natural and right
> And it's not hard to see
> That it isn't half of what it's gonna turn out to be …

What also seemed natural and right were the people around us. We were only 30, including our six closest friends from Washington. The day started at 6:20 a.m. when my twin brother Ronald called from Abu Dhabi. "I hope I've woken you up," he said rather brightly, with a nine-hour head start on the rest of us. "You did. But why?" I groaned. "So I could be the first to wish you a happy wedding." Later in the morning, flowers arrived from friends in Senegal, south-eastern France, and Paris. There were telephone calls from St. Malo, Paris, Tours,

Washington, Philadelphia and Sydney, and emails from Rennes, Toronto, and California. At the house afterwards, the speeches were short, the mix of mirth and solemnity just right. I played a favourite song of ours by Georges Moustaki, which Jean Daniel worried would sound maudlin. Almost on cue, our next door neighbour, a French Canadian, broke into tears:

Nous prendrons le temps de vivre
D'être libre, mon amour
Sans projets et sans habitudes
Nous pourrons rêver notre vie

Viens, je suis là
Je n'attends que toi
Tout est possible
Tout est permis

Viens, écoute ces mots qui vibrent
Sur les murs du mois de mai
Ils nous disent la certitude
Que tout peut changer un jour

We'll take the time to live,
To be free, my love,
Without projects and routines,
We can live out our dreams.

Come, I'm here,
You're the one I'm waiting for.
Everything is possible,
Everything's allowed.

Come, listen to the words that echo
Off the walls of the month of May
That tell us with certainty
That everything can change one day.

My father could not be there, as he had hurt his leg the previous day, but he sent his blessings with my sister. In the evening, we took our Washington friends to one of the best restaurants in the city, in a white stretched limousine. This was Jean Daniel's idea. ("We don't really want to take taxis back and forth in our tuxedos, do we?")

The next day, we left for a honeymoon in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. At the airport, two customs women stared at us warily, apparently wanting to separate us. We flashed our wedding rings and were waved through. That evening, at a 200-year old hacienda with 11 rooms but only four guests, the maitre d'hôtel asked us if we were on holiday. We explained the occasion and he congratulated us warmly ("muy romantico"), saying that he would prepare a "little surprise" for us. We worried that he would pull a mariachi band out of the shadows, offer us a sickly-coloured cake with sparklers, or treat us to an after-dinner drink fuming with dry ice. Instead, when we went to our room, we saw – in the land of machismo – that he had pulled down the bed and sprinkled red and white bougainvillea blossoms on the sheets.

We were in our mid-50s, but felt like puppy dogs, and Jean Daniel had not yet had enough. At the news that the federal government would soon broaden the definition of marriage, we contacted the Quebec government to ask when we could change our civil status again. "Please bear with us," they said. "It'll take us at least nine months to put the procedure in place. Until then, your only recourse will be to seek a divorce and then re-marry." We certainly didn't want to do that. A year later, on December 6th, 2004, we went back to the "Palace of Justice" and were the first couple to convert a civil union into a marriage. This time, we had only two guests: our witnesses. Logically, the occasion was just a pleasant formality, but oddly enough the next morning, a Canadian pragmatist and French rationalist felt quite different. I told my sister that the marriage had no real significance, distinct only in title, not in substance, from the civil union, and that we were doing it only because Jean Daniel wanted "the whole thing." "And you don't?" she asked provocatively.

We knew that marriage was falling into disrepute in some quarters. In Saint Malo that summer, the owner of a historic manor house we were touring complained that she had never been able to have a Mass celebrated in her private chapel. She didn't care any longer, as she didn't place much stock in ritual: "In fact, I'm not sure we even need weddings. Two people standing alone in a hole, staring each other in the eye and saying 'I will', is probably more to be trusted than most ceremonies." "With that kind of talk," another tourist said under her breath, I can understand why priests won't visit!"

Why did the institution matter so much to us? Undoubtedly, and at a level so sub-conscious that we were hardly aware of it, we had been accepting of a certain kind of narrow-mindedness and injustice in society at large. Almost despite ourselves, we had been human rights pioneers of a sort, but we tried to be patient, understanding the depth and complexity of the prejudice modern society was trying to cast off. Perhaps we were the victims of our own sophistication and self-confidence, seeing a more-than-tenuous connection between our rights and larger causes, like the fight against hate crimes (symbolized by the murder of Matthew Sheperd, tied, beaten and broken, to a wooden fence near Laramie, Wyoming in October 1998); but we were content to keep our heads down, just be ourselves, and hope that our cheerful levelheadedness would be a contribution to broader progress. Yet, apparently, somewhere in the depths of our common sense and idealism about the world, a part of us was hurting, and a public marriage was the perfect antidote. Having lived away from home for most of our lives, we also had a new sense of belonging in Quebec, a once-troubled nation that had become one of the most compelling and intelligent societies on earth. And, soppy as it may sound, like any couple formalizing their relationship, we were proud to declare our love openly.

The night of the big day, before going to bed, I made the mistake of taking off my wedding ring and putting it on the bedroom dresser. "What are you doing?" Jean Daniel asked. "Well," I explained, "you know I've never been comfortable wearing jewellery, but I'll wear it during the day." "Did your parents take theirs off when they undressed at night?" he asked. "I don't know," I answered wryly. "I was never in their room at that hour." "Well, my parents certainly didn't, and if it means so little to you..." He didn't complete the sentence.

He walked over to the dresser, took off his own ring, and put it emphatically on the dresser next to mine. This looked like our first tiff as a married couple, so a few seconds later, I slunk out of bed and slipped the ring back on. After a respectable interval – perhaps a minute – Jean Daniel did the same, and we never took them off again.

We were happy but also philosophical. In an end-of-year note to friends, I quoted the English writer Arnold Bennett: "Ambitions attained are rather like burnt coal, ninety per cent of the heat generated has gone up the chimney instead of into the room… This that you are living now is life itself – it is much more life itself than that which you will be living twenty years hence. Grasp that truth. Dwell on it. Absorb it. Let it influence your conduct, to the end that neither the present nor the future be neglected. You search for happiness? Happiness is chiefly a matter of temperament. It is exceedingly improbable that you will, by struggling, gain more happiness than you already possess." (*Mental Efficiency*, 1911)

Following my parents' death, I began writing a book that had been brewing in my head for years. *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn't Working* was published in March 2006 and was chosen by *The Economist* magazine as one of the best books of the year. Rather surprisingly, given the size of the task and his lack of experience, Jean Daniel decided to translate it into French. He was prompted into this by an email from a former prime minister of the Central African Republic, to whom I had sent the English manuscript. "At first, it made my hair stand on end," the ex-politician said, "but then I saw it as the heartfelt cry of a true lover of Africa. It is an important book, and I would be willing to translate it into French if you allowed me." "Don't answer him just yet," Jean Daniel told me. "I've been considering doing just that. Can you give me a day or two to decide?" I knew he was a good writer – which he needed to be, to be a good translator – but I worried about the scale of the challenge. He measured up to it. In four months of 12-hour days, he finished the job, working at one end of our basement study while I fine-tuned the English manuscript at the other. "Can this statistic really be right?" he would ask. "Did you really mean to say that?" And in the process he strengthened the English version, too. The Quebec publisher was impressed. "The only criticism I would make is that you have used the simple past too often in the text. It sounds a little old-fashioned over here." We smiled. "I used what I

learned at school in France," Jean Daniel said, "but I haven't lived there since 1980." We both knew that the tenses he used were the right ones and that they were still very current in France.

That summer, Death knocked on our door again. On July 29th, 2005, at a quarter to midnight, I had a phone call in Saint Malo, where we were staying with Jean Daniel's mother. My twin brother Ronald, chief of surgery at a regional hospital in Northern Ontario, had collapsed at the airport on his way to meet his wife for a ten-day holiday in Greece. I was still awake, reading a biography of Martin Luther – "a great man," my brother told me, when he heard that I would be bringing the book to France. There was an irony in our common admiration for that historic figure that only Jean Daniel and I could understand. Just as Jean Daniel occasionally teased me about my straight-laced religious upbringing, I sometimes needled my identical twin about his Baptist faith, calling him a "fundamentalist." He brushed off my remarks as easily as I had ignored his moral advice over the years. In the summer of 1976, when I had fallen mutually in love with someone else for the first time in my life, an African American in New York City, my brother advised me to tell our parents. "It is very important for our health to live our sexuality openly," the young doctor told me. Heeding his own advice, he later told my mother that Jean Daniel and I were the most stable couple in the family. ("No," responded my mother, a little shocked at the implication. "There's nothing like that between them.") But, 15 years later, my brother had a different reaction when Jean Daniel and I decided to visit him and his young family in Vancouver. "You know, Robert, you will have to sleep in separate bedrooms so as not to shock the kids." "I'm afraid not," I told him, and we stayed instead at a flamboyant bed-and-breakfast place in West Vancouver, where the owner came to the door in fluffy pink bunny slippers. There were flowers waiting for us in our room, from Ronald's wife, the original Baptist. In the afternoon, Ronald came around to the hotel feeling sheepish and remained so for the rest of his life. In 1998, he invited himself to our 20th anniversary party in Washington, apologized for his short-sightedness, and then announced that he was seeing a woman with a husband and two children. Jean Daniel and I were both shocked. "You know, Ronald, you may not see this as a moral equivalent, but neither of us would think of inserting ourselves into a relationship between two other men." "I know, I know," he said. "It's moral payback time." But, later, I learned that he was being

hard on himself: Anna had already been abandoned by her husband, and despite knowing each other for more than 20 years, they intended to bide their time until her divorce went through.

Despite their disappointments, Ronald and Anna both had a high respect for marriage. Days after Jean Daniel and I appeared before a justice of the peace, I had a touching exchange of emails with my twin:

> Dear Robert,
>
> The description of your special day and your honeymoon brought me to tears and they ran down my cheeks again when I printed it and read it to Anna. We are both very happy for you and Jean Daniel. I wasn't sure how to pray for you during Ramadan [*he was living in the United Arab Emirates, reading the Koran, and trying to observe the Muslim Lent*] but daily I brought both of you to the Lord in prayer. I am deeply sorry for any self-righteousness, judgmentalism, or hurt I caused you in the past. I hope you will both forgive me. Love, Ronald
>
> Dear Ronald,
>
> Thank you for your prayers – and tears. We forgave you a long, long time ago. The hurt was brief. I have been able to tease you ever since. And it makes a good story. Besides, you never, ever implied any discomfort with us, just the way we seem to contradict the Bible. [*Referring to the various hygienic proscriptions in the Book of Leviticus, I added*:] We eat shrimps, too. Love, Robert

Although we looked remarkably alike and had similar values, we led very different lives. Like Anna, Ronald was at the end of a bitter marriage. His work as a surgeon was stressful. He ate badly and rarely did exercise. Despite his profession, he was never financially secure, juggling debt, extravagance, generosity, alimony, and overdue taxes. So it was hardly surprising when he had to have a quadruple by-pass in October 2000. Fortunately, for him, the last four years were probably the happiest of his life. He and Anna spent most of them in

the Persian Gulf working as doctor and nurse in a government hospital, travelling widely. After a life of searing disappointments relieved only by the love of their children, Anna and Ronald were having a second chance, walking lightly through a new universe that was shining strangely upon them. He was a skilful doctor with a sense of compassion that weighed him down as much as it lifted other people's spirits. In my eulogy, I compared him to St. Philip Neri, the so-called Apostle of Rome, who died of a heart that was too large. Anna was devastated by Ronald's death, cut down without warning, alone, in an airport half a world away, their love story severed by a guillotine slicing through the air. My reaction was deep as well, and my siblings grieved almost as much for me as for themselves. Ronald was the other half of me and, seeing our birth date on his tombstone, I could begin to imagine the feelings of a mother losing a child.

At troubled moments like these, Jean Daniel was a steady support, just as he was in quiet times when, in C.S. Lewis's words, the mere ease and ordinariness of our relationship enveloped us. "No need to talk. No need to make love. No needs at all except perhaps to stir the fire" (*The Four Loves,* p. 57). We saw an echo of our self-sufficiency and love of small things in a French song by Frédérik Mey. Like the Georges Moustaki composition that we had played at our wedding, it also contained a note of fatalism.

Approche ton fauteuil du mien
Tire les rideaux
Il y a des crêpes au sarrasin
Et du vin chaud

J'ai débranché le téléphone
La porte est verrouillée
Ce soir ne viendra plus personne
Nous sommes bien cachés

Mon vieux fusil est bien en place
Là-haut dans le grenier
De la, je vise droite en face
L'orée de la forêt

Pas un souffle dans les feuilles
N'éveille le jardin
Et aux abois devant le seuil
Veillent nos chiens

La pendule s'est arrêtée
De battre la cadence
Quand l'oreille s'y est habituée
On entend le silence

Est-ce l'été, est-ce l'hiver
Sous ce méridien
Est-ce la paix, est-ce la guerre
Ce soir je n'en sais rien

Si c'était la fin du chemin
Notre dernier jour
Allons, finissons donc le vin
Et les pommes au four.

Bring your chair close to mine
Draw the blinds
There are buckwheat pancakes
And warm wine

I've disconnected the phone
The door is locked
No one will come this evening
We're hidden away

My old gun is ready
Up in the attic
Where I can aim straight
At the entrance of the woods

There is not a breath of air
In the leaves or the garden
And on the doorstep
Our dogs are on the watch

The clock has stopped
Beating its cadence
When the ear adjusts to it
We hear the silence

Is it summer or winter
On this meridian?
Is it peace or war ?
Tonight I do not know

If it were the end of the road
Our very last day…
Let’s go finish the wine
And the apples in the oven

Travelling

Many of our down-to-earth pleasures – the "wine" and the "apples" in the Frédérik Mey song -- were experienced on the road. From the age of 8 to 18, Jean Daniel and his four siblings would spend a month with their parents in camping grounds and caravan parks across Europe. In 1958, they were at the Brussels World Fair; in 1963, they drove as far as Vienna; most of the time, they lingered in beautiful spots around France and Italy. With the possible exception of Michel (the future drag show artist), the Rossi children were quiet and reserved, but these trips drew them out and gave them a life-long taste for exploration. Remarkably for a family that lived on the English Channel, they never visited the United Kingdom, turning their backs on France's historic rival in favour of warmer climates and tastier cuisines. By the time I joined the family in the early 1980s, tales of those trips were the subject of dinner table conversations: sudden bursts of winter weather at the height of summer (an August hail storm in Italy that pockmarked the family car and a snowfall in the French Alps that made the roads impassable), waking up to the sound of rats and frogs plopping about in the rice fields of the Po Valley, and so on. But, when I met Jean Daniel, he had spent five years within a fairly limited radius: the monastic community at Taizé in Burgundy, a new monastery (the Fraternité de Jérusalem), at the church of Saint Gervais in Paris, and occasionally Mont Saint Michel. Late that year, he made a trip to the Holy Land with a fellow seminarian; otherwise, Jean Daniel did most of his travelling in his thoughts.

In this, as in other respects, living together altered the rhythms of our lives. In the summer of 1979, once his "school" year was over, we visited London and Oxford, Rome, and my father's hometown in southern Italy. Two weeks before we parted – presumably forever – we took a romantic trip to Rome again, bouncing about in a sleeping compartment on an overnight train, and attended Mass on the Feast of Christ the King in St. Peter's Basilica, celebrated by a then still-young John Paul II. Once we moved to Washington, our number-one priority was settling in to life in the States and, in my case, a new job. But, by 1982, we began a pattern which would last more than 20 years, spending four to six weeks in France and

Italy every summer. We were determined to know these countries inside out before venturing to more exotic parts of the world, and it helped that we spoke the two languages. I had learned Italian in the early 70s through evening courses, but Jean Daniel taught himself from a book and, to my pride and occasional exasperation, spoke it better than I did. Those annual holidays began and ended in Saint Malo, Jean Daniel's hometown.

This was no ordinary place. After Paris and the monastery at Mont Saint Michel, it was one of the most visited spots in France, a country that is the most popular tourist destination in the world (attracting more than 80 million visitors a year). Here, History and Nature made a good match. One of the country's oldest ports, Saint Malo was the home of the discoverer of Canada, Jacques Cartier (1491-1557), and the base of renowned privateers like René Duguay-Trouin (1673-1736) and Robert Surcouf (1773-1827). It was also a long-standing military outpost, symbolized by the massive stone ramparts that still face defiantly out towards England. (Along with Carcassonne and Aigues-Mortes, it was one of the few towns in France to survive Cardinal Richelieu's razing of city defences in the 17th century.) Sea-farers from the town ranged across the Atlantic as if it belonged to them. Fishermen spent months on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland competing for cod with Portuguese and Spanish vessels. Two hundred years after Cartier sailed up the Saint Lawrence River, another local hero, Bernard de la Harpe (1683-1765), went from Louisiana up the Mississippi and the Red River, discovering the water route to Santa Fe. The Falkland Islands off the coast of Argentina are also known as Las Malvinas [Spanish for *Les Iles Malouines*, the Islands of St. Malo]. The deep-voiced bell that rings 10:00 p.m. from the Cathedral tower was stolen during a raid on Rio de Janiero in 1711. Local trading companies operated in the Indian Ocean, too, settling the island of Mauritius and grabbing a coffee monopoly at Moka on the Yemen Coast in the early 18th century. Saint Malo is also famous for its pride and stubbornness. For a brief period in the 15th century, it was an independent republic and *chose* to become part of Brittany, boasting that it was never taken by an English fleet. Its loyalties are divided. According to a local saying, "First, we are citizens of Saint Malo, Bretons after that, and French if there is anything left." Drawn by the city's seafood, spa, and cool ocean air, tourists stream in from England, Holland, Germany and Italy while local people go south to the Côte d'Azur and the Mediterranean. As a result, the city's summertime population swells from 50,000 to 300,000.

The Nazis also liked Saint Malo and used it as a forward prong in their Western defences. As a result, it suffered badly during the August 1944 Liberation, most of it burnt to the ground by a combination of German incendiary devices and British and American bombs. But it was re-built in 1947-52 with care and affection and bears few scars, apart from overgrown concrete bunkers along the coastal walk and impressively punctured cast-iron gun turrets on the Cité d'Alet, the old Roman settlement overlooking the entrance to the port. Jean Daniel's father, who had moved to Saint Malo from Paris to set up a house painting business, took part in the reconstruction. In the meantime, Jean Daniel's mother was nursing the wounds of war. As my parents coped with the moral injuries of anti-Italian bias in Montreal, Mrs. Rossi faced a much greater shock, the loss of her 19-year-old brother Denis in July 1940 in one of the most cynical actions of the Second World War, the British bombardment of the French fleet at Mers el-Kebir in Algeria. The French had removed their navy across the Mediterranean to keep it out of German hands, but the British left nothing to chance. Almost 1,300 French sailors lost their lives in the attack. After her brother's death, partly from shock, partly from upbringing, partly for sheer self-protection, Mrs. Rossi never cried again – even when her son Michel died in 1991 and her husband succumbed to heart disease in 1997. "I feel the tears well up within me, right to the brim of my eyes," she told me much later, "but, for reasons I can't understand, they don't come out."

Jean Daniel's parents were remarkable. His mother had an inner calm, a positive outlook on life, and a moral strength that rivalled the ramparts of Saint Malo. Whereas my mother was combative and clear (you always knew where she stood on a subject), Mrs. Rossi was kind and discreet. If I criticized someone's behaviour, she would look for reasons to explain it. She cooked superbly and set a beautiful table. But it was from his father that the son inherited his wicked sense of humour. The French writer Romain Gary believed that humour was "a declaration of human superiority over all that befalls us," and the Canadian novelist Robertson Davies thought that much of it springs from a love of truth. Both of those reflections applied to Jean Daniel, but in a letter he wrote to me from Mont Saint Michel in February 1980, he offered a simpler explanation of the mirth that flowed in his veins. "My parents met at a costume party in 1946 at the Hôtel de l'Univers. That is to say, their love was born under the sign of joy, music,

dance, and festive imagination." Another important influence was the sea, teaching him patience, serenity, and humility. He would sit on the rocky coast for long periods, watching the steady march of the waves or bracing himself against the cold, the surf and the spray, contemplating the deep questions poets ask and theologians try to answer. The sea is hard to ignore along that emerald coast. The tides, which are the third strongest on earth, come in over the flat sand of the Bay of Mont Saint Michel at the speed of a galloping horse. At the Iles Chausey, off the Normandy Coast, you can disembark at 11 in the morning and leave at 5 in the afternoon from a slippery, seaweed-strewn wharf that is 33 feet below the one you arrived on. We saw and enjoyed the sea so often, there was no need to talk about it, but as his own tide ebbed in the final months, Jean Daniel reminisced about it. "Growing up, I always wondered whether I would be able to live away from the ocean, and in fact, apart from our three years in West Africa, I have done just that. It seems to me, though, that I have carried the sea within me."

Every summer, in Saint Malo, we caught up with the sea – and family and friends. We had rambling conversations over lunch and dinner, strolled along the walls of the city gazing out at the water, the sunbathers and the wind-surfers, hiked along the coastal path once used by customs officials to control smuggling in the region's innumerable coves, and took the sun on a nude beach well away from town. We packed a bathing suit for protection against the local police who descended occasionally, ham-fistedly, to restore a degree of decorum. One day, a beefy foreign couple gave the young officers a piece of their mind, in impeccable German. Another afternoon, we admired three generations of women lying on towels nearby, as the youngest, a girl of perhaps nine or ten, affectionately massaged her grandmother's back. We made several friends there and read many books. One summer, I was absorbed in Christopher Hibbert's biography of Wellington, and a highly literate French friend beside me asked who he was. "He beat Napoleon," I explained.

When we were not in Saint Malo, we visited friends that Jean Daniel had made before entering the seminary, and watched their families grow. One couple in the Drôme, in the southwest, had four children of their own, then adopted three others, a slightly retarded boy who had been kept in a doghouse at the bottom of the garden by his natural parents and burnt with cigarette butts when he misbehaved, a 15-year-old refugee from the oppressed Karen people of

Bangladesh, and an HIV-positive Haitian girl who had lost her mother to the disease. The couple earned little money – he worked as a part-time mechanic and she was a homeopathic nurse – but they made it go a long way, in the happiest and most boisterous household we have ever known. We tried to be there on the Feast of Saint Lawrence (August 10th), known by the Italians as the "night of the shooting stars", so we could spend the night in our sleeping bags on the lawn and enjoy the celestial fireworks as a pet donkey brayed intermittently nearby. Other friends lived at Orsay, in the western suburbs of Paris. Antoine had been a monk at Taizé, and was now a psychiatrist and atheist; Catherine was a former nurse, raising three precocious children. In the middle of a forest in Normandy, we would visit a progressive community of Carmelite nuns, walk in the woods with a couple of them (including a hermit who only saw the rest of the group once a month), or enter the supposedly "forbidden" cloister to give them a hand with practical tasks. (One summer, the community asked me to talk to them about world poverty.) We would consult with the nun who ran the bookshop, before leaving for Rome to buy cheap reproductions of famous icons for her, and deliver them at the end of our holiday; then, she mounted them on wood backings, varnished them, and sold them at a handsome (almost Protestant) mark-up. In a village south of Poitiers, we would spend a few days with a young priest (one of Jean Daniel's closest friends from seminary days) so handsome, charming, and convincing that his five churches overflowed with people on Sunday mornings. At least once every summer, we attended noon-time Mass at Mont Saint Michel with Jean Daniel's former "brothers" and "sisters" and shared lunch with pilgrims at a long table in front of a mammoth stone fireplace with a dog lounging languidly in front of it, like a scene from a medieval tapestry.

Once we were on our own, we would visit favourite places, like Vézelay in Burgundy and Le Bettex, a ski station above Saint Gervais-les-Bains in the French Alps, where we took long walks up mountain slopes in lush green countryside, hoping to see Mont Blanc slip free of the clouds. We also explored corners of France and Italy that had eluded us, looking in the Michelin guides for small hotels marked with a red rocking chair, signifying they were far from roads, large towns, nightspots, and other potential disturbances. Each morning, we would get up and find we were the youngest people in the breakfast room: we were in our 30s while everyone else was in their 50s, 60s and 70s, apparently just as fussy as ourselves about spending a quiet night. Despite his discomfort with stiff-necked maîtres

d'hôtel, Jean Daniel indulged me at least one famous restaurant per holiday. Anything more than that, he argued, would blunt our appreciation of the second or third experience and deprive us – or, more accurately, him – of the pleasure of saving money. Our favourite "find" was a hotel in the Pyrenees up behind Lourdes, with rooms so small that we could barely stand up between the bed and the wall; but the restaurant attracted locals from all around, and room and board cost less than $20. This was Jean Daniel's idea of travel.

By the late 1990s, we were ready to stretch our wings more widely. In February 1998, we spent two weeks in Thailand and Cambodia, touched by the serenity, spirituality, and beauty of the temples at Angkor Wat. The next year, we visited Australia and New Zealand's South Island, where we were humbled by the sight of glaciers on the west coast sliding past deep-green rain forests and giant ferns into the sea. Oddly, our most vivid memory of that trip was walking in the woods near Mount Cook, followed by a small thrush that alternated between eating grubs uncovered by our footsteps along the path, lecturing us from a nearby branch, and picking hairs from our heads and eyebrows, presumably to improve his nest. Jean Daniel would describe this almost other-worldly encounter many times afterwards. But our serious wandering began in 2002 in Montreal, where we had the time, the money and – during the winter – the additional incentive to travel wherever we wanted. "I don't mind the Canadian winter," Jean Daniel insisted. "Just its length." In the next six years, we visited Brazil, Chile, Argentina, India, Egypt, Portugal, Spain, Norway, Morocco, Tunisia, and South Africa.

Our first major excursion was a walk across England in May 2003. We had hiked together in the French countryside, criss-crossed Paris many times, and climbed mountains in England, Wales, and the French Alps. But Jean Daniel's idea of a ramble lasted four to five hours; anything longer, he felt, was an effort to prove something, or show off. Before meeting Jean Daniel, I preferred to go as far as possible, stretch my body to its limits, and "lose" myself in the open countryside, usually just figuratively but sometimes literally as well. Most of my long walks had lasted a day – Cambridge to Ely (19 miles), Kenmare to Killarney (20 miles), Jerusalem to Jericho (25 miles). My longest was in East Africa, where I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro twice in the late 1970s (60 miles in five days), accompanied by porters and candlelit dinners in the otherwise austere mountain refuges. But I had long dreamt of walking across northern England from the North

Sea to the Irish Sea, a distance of about 200 miles and cumulative rise of 15,000 feet through three of the country's most beautiful national parks. I decided to do it in ten days instead of the usual two weeks, out of consideration for Jean Daniel.

I was thinking of his patience rather than his feet, as he was to accompany me in a rented car, exploring the English countryside and meeting me in the evening at our hotels. So, while I admired the wild garlic in flower on the banks of the River Swale, he was visiting a French Second-Empire mansion in the heart of Yorkshire (the Bowes Museum) housing a stupendous collection of art, and as I tried to reach the highest point of the walk (Kidsty Pike) in blustery weather along a path that was little more than a dried-out rivulet, tugging hard on tufts of grass at the level of my eyebrows to help me up, Jean Daniel was discovering Edinburgh. I saw very few people during the day but, in the evening over beer, the locals sided with Jean Daniel, saying it was "daft" or even "sad" for me to be walking alone. Others warned that I might twist an ankle and spend the night, cold and helpless, in a barren spot.

At the end of the second day, I came off the moor in the wrong place and stopped a Land Rover for directions. The driver offered to take me to the Lion Inn, just five miles away, as isolated and windswept as anything in Thomas Hardy, depositing me just short of the hotel so I could complete the passage on foot. "Don't wave as I turn around," he said, "or you'll give yourself away." It was too late. Jean Daniel was waiting for me at the edge of the moor where I should have come out, amused to have caught me cheating. On the fourth day, I reached our bed-and-breakfast well after dinner and Jean Daniel was philosophical. "If we were intended to walk long distances, God would not have allowed us to invent the motorcar." He kept hoping for rain, thinking I would give up and join him in the car. But the weather held.

The next day over breakfast, a couple who had come from the opposite direction warned me about peat holes along the next section of the route. At about noon, half way up to the highest point in the Northern Pennines, across a slope that seemed as dry as a bone, I fell waist deep into the ground and had great trouble pulling myself out. When I handed my sodden jeans to the woman running our next hotel, Jean Daniel was worried but struck a positive note. "Luckily, you didn't fall in over your head. Otherwise, we'd have found you in three or four

hundred years mummified like those Bog People in the Low Countries we saw at an exhibition in Ottawa."

Four days later, I lost my way again and two Yorkshire women, former Coast to Coasters themselves, put me back on track. "You shouldn't be walking alone," one of them said. "You should make a friend and convince him to come along." I said I already had a friend, a rational Frenchman with a theory about the motorcar. They were unimpressed. "Tell him that God gave us legs before he gave us cars." Then, they reverted to English chauvinism: "And remind him of Agincourt [Henry V's crushing defeat of the French in 1415]." On the last day, Jean Daniel was waiting for me on the spongy green grass overlooking the Irish Sea, poised to take a victory photograph. He didn't congratulate me but was plainly relieved it was over. "Well," he said, "at least you've got that out of your system." I was also glad. I had walked across England but was now going to have to hobble across London.

Like most travellers, we were driven by a sense of curiosity and adventure, but also a love of Nature, fascination with history and art, a respect for other cultures and, to use an old-fashioned phrase, a belief in the Brotherhood of Man. Jean Daniel loved travel stories, especially when they touched upon history. He was delighted when I first told him about taking an Oxford friend's 11 year old sister to Stonehenge. "Alison, do you know how old this is?" I asked her. "As old as Grandma?" she ventured. "No, much older than that," I assured her. "As old as Jesus?" she continued. "Two thousand years older than Jesus," I told her, as she struggled to take it in. Jean Daniel also enjoyed the serendipity of travel: arriving in Somerset's Wells Cathedral at Evensong just as a boys choir started singing one of our favourite hymns, Henry Purcell's "Rejoice in the Lord," hearing the Organ Scholar at Westminster Abbey show off the range of the musical pipes with a jubilant piece by an unknown Canadian composer; and seeing our first military cortege at Arlington Cemetery one afternoon when we were escorting two French Canadian friends across that sacred ground.

For pleasant coincidences and human brotherhood, few crossroads were as rich as an ocean-liner. In early 2004, friends in Washington convinced us to sail with them from Fort Lauderdale and Rio de Janiero on the new Cunard ship, the *Queen Mary 2*. At first, going on a cruise seemed as tempting as taking up golf,

but Jean Daniel was proud that the largest passenger vessel in the world (150,000 tons and 17 stories high) had been constructed at the St. Nazaire yards in France and he studied the history and design of the ship in elaborate detail ahead of time. It was the first and only time we travelled with nearly 4,000 people (2,600 passengers and 1,300 crew), but we were enchanted from the moment we stepped on board. The ship was teeming with characters, like a Jewish woman from San Francisco who asked me over breakfast one morning what month I was born. When I said November, she looked at me in horror. "You're a Scorpio then?" "No, late November," I corrected her. "Oh," she said. “Sagittarius. That's much better." Later in the trip, we saw her sunning herself on the deck. "I've met so many people," she remarked, “that I almost forgot who you were. Yesterday, I went up to a woman and said 'Oh, you've changed your hair colour since we last met.’ In fact, I had never seen her before."

Also on board was the 82-year old publisher of two small newspapers in Boothbay Harbor, Maine, who was reclusive during the day but emerged for dinner, dressed like a member of the royal family. Disembarking in Salvador de Bahia in a raspberry suit and matching hat as other passengers crowded the gangway in polyester and shorts, she was pounced upon by the Brazilian press who promised to put her on their front pages the next day. In Rio, on the first night of the Carnival high up in our seats in the “Sambadrome”, she turned heads in an already festive atmosphere with a set of flashing coloured lights in her ears. She had given each of us a pair and Jean Daniel was wearing his, but I had put mine in my pocket, determined not to look ridiculous.

As usual, we enjoyed tripping over the tree roots of the past. We learned how the first *Queen Mary* had got her name. Cunard wanted to christen it “Victoria”, but when the company’s chairman advised George V that it would be named after the most glorious queen in modern British history, His Majesty replied: “My wife will be most honoured.” In Salvador de Bahia, in an early 18th century Franciscan cloister, we saw a panorama in blue Delft tiles of the city of Lisbon, said to be the only surviving depiction of the former colonial metropolis before the 1755 earthquake. That was the event which caused Voltaire to lose his faith, as it occurred on November 1, the Feast of All Saints, crushing thousands of worshippers during morning Mass. The large bay at Salvador was discovered by a

Portuguese ship exactly 254 years before that earthquake (in 1501), and is still called Baia de Todos os Santos.

Two years later, we took a second cruise, this time on a smaller vessel (Oceania's *Insignia*) around the tip of South America, from Chile to Argentina. Suddenly, we were back in those "rocking chair" hotels in rural France, except that now we were in our 50s and almost everyone else was in their 70s, 80s and even 90s. Some were on crutches or walking unsteadily, recovering from a stroke or battling obesity. On the bus from Santiago to Valparaiso, one woman shouted to her husband: "Can you hear me?" "Barely," he answered, "I have to change my batteries." Then, she told her neighbour across the aisle: "I don't need a hearing aid. I can hear the words he uses. I just can't make out what he is trying to say." We avoided the daily bingo games, sidestepped the shuffleboard contests, missed most of the afternoon teas, and even stayed away from the group trivia quizzes (until the last couple of days), but we kept being reminded of our relative youthfulness. One night's entertainment was popular TV musical themes from the 50s and 60s, including the early hits of Desi Arnez (sung before he met Lucy). When we signed up for a bus excursion through Tierra de Fuego National Park, the tour organizer said: "You both look young and active. Why don't you do the horse riding expedition instead?" Practical as ever, Jean Daniel suggested we would cover more territory on the bus.

We traveled 4,200 miles in 15 days, sailing through Chile's southern fjords, the Strait of Magellan and the Beagle Channel as if we splitting Wales's Snowdonia National Park or New Zealand's South Island right down the middle. The coastal mountains were rugged, sharp and snow-capped. Albatross swooped to within a millimetre of the water at sharp angles, never miscalculating, while giant petrels keened in the air nearby. We also saw penguins, although as usual the most interesting creatures were on board. The second night, we were surprised to see a couple in their 70s on the dance floor (we had met them the first day at the airport and the woman, plump and weak-legged, had had to sit while her husband weathered the Immigration line). They rushed over to us: "Oh, we're so relieved to see you. The only reason we're dancing is that we were with another couple a half hour ago who talked our ears off. Dancing was our only means of escape." Her husband added: "I'm deaf in both ears and it was even hard on me."

Another day, over lunch, we found ourselves sitting next to a very well-to-do, conservative Republican couple from North Carolina, admirers of retired Senator Jesse Helms. But the husband, who was turning 80, had a zest for life and an infectious sense of humour, some of which he directed at himself. "I'm a VFW. D'you know what that is?" he asked. "Yes," I answered, "you're a Veteran of Foreign Wars." "That's right," he continued, "but there's an interesting story behind it. I signed up with the US Navy in June 1945. The war in Europe was over, and I expected to be shipped out to Asia with 95 percent of the rest of my class. Instead, I was posted to a destroyer at Norfolk, Virginia which saw no action for the rest of the war and didn't even enter international waters, except once when we took her out into the Atlantic for 24 hours. I'm a veteran on the basis of that little spin outside US waters. I received a 'good conduct' medal (which my wife still believes I didn't deserve) and an 'American theatre' medal." I interrupted him: "I had forgotten that there was an 'American theatre' in the Second World War." "So have most Americans," he continued, "but that excursion also entitled me to full credits under the GI Bill."

It was refreshing to hear someone of his generation downplaying rather than embellishing his war record. A few days later, we spent three hours in their suite over cocktails trading stories of American history. He and Jean Daniel had both read David McCullough's life of John Adams and compared notes about it. The next week, in one of the small restaurants on the ship, I heard a booming voice at a table behind us lecturing everyone around him: "If Truman hadn't dropped that atom bomb, three million more Japanese would have died and perhaps just as many Americans." I wheeled around, and saw that it was our friend from North Carolina. We forgave him immediately. The Bomb had probably saved his life.

The crew was from Romania, France, Croatia, Serbia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Turkey, and Ukraine, while the ship's management combined American purpose and European taste. The next cruise had been chartered by a gay travel agency, so the chief of operations scheduled sensitivity training for the 400 personnel on board. There were only five or six male couples on board but we were now the center of attention. Even the cleaning staff, polishing brass railings in the corridors, would stop as we passed to greet us warmly. After dinner on Valentine's Day, all the women were given roses as they left the dining room. As we got to the door, a handsome young American woman from New York flashed

us a beguiling smile: “Which of you is the lady in the couple?” “Neither,” I said, “but we both like flowers,” and we accepted the bouquet happily.

After the cruise, we spent five days in Buenos Aires, dragging a cold I had caught on board into the 90-degree temperatures. Each day, we walked for 12 hours, visiting parks, museums, churches, monuments, the cemetery (Evita Peron’s grave), the port, the botanical garden, the zoo, and the old quarter. Now and then, I suggested we take a taxi, but Jean Daniel urged me on. “You walked across England, didn’t you?” And he was right. After two weeks in a confined space, we needed the exercise, and it was the best way of enjoying the wide avenues, teeming pedestrian districts, and extraordinary Belle Époque architecture which reminded us that Argentina used to be one of the richest countries on earth.

In February 2005, we tried our first organized tour. The operator was French and the destination, Rajasthan, India’s north-western state famous for its palaces and maharajahs. Our guide was a minor philosopher, starting each day with the same speech: “Life is beautiful. Life is always beautiful. Every moment is the best moment. One must take advantage of every moment. That way, life will always be beautiful.” It was an imperfect syllogism, if that’s what it was, but by the end of the trip we were all reciting it with him, grinning from ear to ear. He liked Jean Daniel and me and made certain we had the best rooms. The first was a concubine’s suite in an 18th century castle, decorated with frescoes of armoured elephants in battle. Another day, we were given the bridal suite at a renovated maharajah’s palace high up on a hilltop with a view over the entire valley. It was pure kitsch – the room was round, like the bed, bursting with purple satin and orange cushions, the walls and alcoves sparkling with broken bits of mirrors sunk into the plaster. There was an *Elle* magazine on the bedside table. Knowing that we had been singled out for this honour, Jean Daniel suggested I linger in the lobby and join him later, so as not to disappoint the management,. But our attempt at discretion failed. A half hour later, there was a knock on the door and the manager entered eagerly, expecting to meet a young couple recently embarked on the bright adventure of matrimony. The chagrin on his face was easy to see.

During that trip, I was proud of my English education, as my French fellow travellers compared their intestinal conditions over breakfast. One man kept tumbling out of the bus with two heavy cameras around his neck, eager to

reproduce a picture book of India he had on his coffee table back home; in between, he complained about all the time we were wasting at handicraft shops. Yet, one day, in just a half-hour, he spent $3,500 on an in-laid marble table, miniature paintings, and a sari for his daughter-in-law, boasting about the "bargains" he had made. Three days later, he was growling again about the "women's" interest in shopping. "What about your marble table?" a woman next to him said, with a cherubic smile. Jean Daniel and I also bought a painting. Briefed by our guide, or aware that an open mind was good for business, the shopkeeper took us straight to a scene of two men kissing in a golden tent, set against an alluring landscape, surrounded by finely dressed soldiers and courtiers. Contrary to appearances, it was the Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great (1542-1605) greeting his son after a long journey.

Our greatest surprise was Jaisalmer, a handsome fortress city which, unlike Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Udaipur, we had never heard of before. We stumbled upon it like modern-day conquistadors emerging from the forest, our pupils still adjusting to the light. The city seemed larger and its battlements more daunting than anything we had seen in Europe, while its pleasant streets led through entire neighbourhoods carved richly in yellow sandstone. At Mount Abu, we visited elaborately carved white marble temples, feeling like Lilliputians wandering inside medieval ivory Flemish boxes. And, on the way back to Delhi, the Taj Mahal exceeded our most vivid expectations. For four hours, we forgot Saint Peter's in Rome, Chartres Cathedral, Bach's Mass in B Minor, and Venice's Grand Canal. To us, it was simply the most sublime creation of human history.

Back in Paris, I broke into a sweat during the night and wondered whether I had contracted malaria, so in Rome the next day I checked into an emergency room. Fortunately, Jean Daniel was visiting me from the public area at the front of the hospital when my name was finally called out, as I wouldn't have recognized it. "L'uomo dall' India [The man from India]," someone shouted. I was given a blood test and examined by four doctors, one of whom had a particular interest in the size and location of my spleen. I waited for the results in a smaller waiting room with characters from a Fellini film. A 37-year old drug addict who looked 60 kept rearranging the furniture, when he wasn't pulling off his socks and studying the calluses on his huge feet within inches of our noses. He also offered to read our palms (I declined). One woman had slept in her chair the night before as there

was no bed for her. Another lady, seemingly the youngest person in the room but claiming to be 90, sat serenely for 15 minutes at a time, small, demure, and birdlike, then jumped up with great purpose to inspect the nearby ward. An obese woman near the door needed assistance to get up and go to the bathroom; I set myself in a tug-of-war stance to pull her to her feet. When the food trays arrived, I said that I would be having dinner with a friend. Everyone looked at me as if I were a nitwit. "That's what you think," I heard them musing. My test proved negative, so I thanked the head doctor and asked where I should pay. "Pay?" she asked with astonishment. I started to say that in Canada we still charged foreign visitors, but she was already off to another corner of the ER.

Three weeks later, we were in Morocco, which was less colourful and intense than India, but open and friendly. The first evening, in Fes, we said good night to one of our waiters. "See you tomorrow," we chimed. "God willing," the waiter answered. "Even if we don't," Jean Daniel continued, pointing skyward, "we'll see you Upstairs. It's supposed to be better there." "God willing," the man repeated. "I'd still prefer to see you down here." The hotel owner, who was a psychiatrist, gynaecologist, and university professor on the side, came over to our table, apparently to apologize for the slow service. Instead, he explained that he did not believe food courses should be slapped down on the table one after the other. "One needs to breathe between flavours," he thought. We didn't tell him that, after a 24 hour journey from Montreal via Paris and Casablanca, we were prepared to be rushed before going to bed.

Jean Daniel was wide-eyed when we crossed the Atlas Mountains and entered the open desert, the vistas massive and majestic like Arizona and Colorado, ruddy like the surface of Mars, striped with copper green, moka cream, and ochre like a Berber rug. The only sign of modern life was black plastic bags, floating like the fallen wings of great crows in the acacia trees along the road. And we were no longer in the modern world. In Fes, the day before (Friday, April 1st, 2005), we followed the Pope's final hours on CNN, kneeling by our bed in prayer. The next day, the only newspapers available were in Arabic or weekend editions printed on Friday evening. When we checked in at our hotel at Tinerhir, on the edge of the desert, we asked whether the Pope had died and the manager didn't know whom we were talking about. It was only the next evening, at Zagora, that we learned the Pope had died.

We were impressed by the tolerance and *joie de vivre* of Marrakech and wondered how long they would last at a time of rising religious fanaticism in the American Midwest and Middle East. A few weeks later, on a train between Montreal and New York, we had an encouraging reply. Next to us was a pleasant Moroccan woman (from Fes) who covered her head with a light pink veil twice to pray, swaying gently back and forth in her seat. Both times, she passed her young child to the woman sitting behind her – a Filipino nun. On the return journey, we overheard two Jews speaking to each other, an Israeli woman apparently in her late 30s and a much-older New Yorker with thick glasses and huge liver spots on his scalp. They had been thrown together by chance:

She: "We don't know each other, but I feel so close to you as a Jew. We come from the same source."

He (somewhat dryly): "How can you say that? We eat different things, probably like different music. I don't even consider my wife and me as 'we' and we have been together for more than 50 years. I think of us as 'I' and 'I'."

She (a little shocked): "Really? But we have language in common."

He: "What language? We live in a world of words, but they don't mean the same thing to everyone. I say 'chair' and you think you know what I mean, but I have a high-backed wooden one in mind and you're imagining something cozy and upholstered. So how much less do larger notions, like religion, draw us together."

She (stubbornly): "We all live and die."

He: "My dog and cat lived and died."

She: "So you don't think we have anything in common?"

He: "The only thing we have in common is the womb."

Jean Daniel and I grinned at each other, identifying with the humanity rather than cynicism of the old man's remarks.

Some of our travels were occasioned by my book on Africa. In September 2006, I was invited to the International Festival of Literature and Free Speech in Stavanger, Norway, where I brushed shoulders with novelists and poets rather than economists for a change. Not all of them were easy to approach. I asked a Nigerian, who had won the Booker Prize as a young man, whether he was writing anything at the moment. "I'm usually the last person to know," he said with a straight face. During the week, he asked for a morning panel to be delayed so he could sleep in, then arrived 20 minutes late, delivered some stilted "meditations," and refused to say another word, preferring to "listen" to everyone else. His fellow panellists were indignant but found a way of trimming his feathers. When he was introduced as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE), a Zimbabwean poet leaned over and congratulated him wickedly. The next day, the British reggae poet, Benjamin Zephaniah, explained why he had turned down an OBE in 2003.

With his dreadlocks, twinkling eyes, and militant vegan principles, Zephaniah was our favourite person there. One afternoon, he talked quietly to a young Nigerian journalist with a *fatwa* on her head back home for cracking a mild joke about the Prophet. When she complained that she occasionally felt out of place in Norway, Zephaniah's eyes shone with gentleness and idealism. He could have been talking to anyone, of any culture, displaced, uncertain, and worrying about the future: "I don't want to put you down. You're your own person. But please think of yourself as a pioneer. Twenty years from now, other people will be happy that you stuck it out. We have the right to be anywhere." Jean Daniel noticed that he was carrying a shopping bag containing fruit from his hotel room. "You must eat a lot of salad," he said. "Yes," he answered. "I was once on a tour of North Africa and the Middle East sponsored by the British Council, and was so tired of what I had been served that in Libya I told my hosts, 'I'm a vegan, not a rabbit.' At the end of the tour, in Lebanon, I found myself at tables laden with delicacies, including vegetable couscous, hummus, falafel, baba ganoush, and tabouleh. I complimented my hosts, but they were a step ahead of me. 'We know, we know, Mr. Zephaniah. You're a vegan not a rabbit.'"

Another evening, a man sat down at our table looking like a Viking emerging from a 1,000-year deep freeze, his blond hair long and scraggly, his red face riddled with lines. Instead of armour, he wore a long tunic of bright yellow

and green batik over a black T-shirt with CUBA written in red across it, silver pendants on his chest, and bead bracelets on both arms. He was Norway's greatest poet, about to publish his 33rd book in 38 years, and full of stories. One year, during the winter holidays, he drank so much beer and aquavit that he fell asleep – for two days – under the Christmas tree. He kept abreast of poetry in every language. I asked him for a private opinion of another reggae poet at the Festival. "He's very good," he answered, "but he never changes. He's always writing about the 1981 Brixton riots."

The following week, we took a four-day cruise along Norway's western coast and, in the rain and fog, could only guess at the magnificence of the mountains and fjords around us. We felt guilty buying postcards along the way because the views were as new to us as they would be to those who received them, but a young woman in a souvenir shop set us at ease: she had only seen the sun for two weeks the whole of the summer. Jean Daniel was consoled to cross the Arctic Circle and see the magnificent cathedral at Trondheim, the only large Romanesque structure that far north that he knew of.

Sacred places had always been important to us. In France, we had visited Senanque, Conques, Tournus, le Puy du Dôme, Chartres, and Vézelay more than once. In Italy, Assisi was almost always on our itinerary. We had explored Mont Saint Michel's "cousins" in other countries: Saint Michael's Mount in Cornwall and the Sacra Michele near Turin, Italy. Jean Daniel and I seldom felt closer, more attuned to each other, more aware and at the same time defiant of the essential loneliness of the human condition, than walking slowly through a medieval cathedral. Jean Daniel admired the scale and skill of the High Gothic but felt more at home in the Romanesque, its gentler, more subdued, and purer lines a reflection of his own character and faith. But we had never included Egypt in the same category, until we saw the splendour and scale of the temples along the Nile. The façade at Karnak rose 270 feet, higher than the highest Gothic nave in France. We had been told that Abu Simbel might be anti-climactic, either because it was too familiar from photographs or essentially artificial (having been re-located during the construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1961-64). Not so for us. We got up at three in the morning, flew down to the site, and saw the huge statues of Ramses II lit up by the early morning sun, rising slowly behind us over Lake Nasser. For three hours, touring the honey-stoned remains, we felt re-connected with a part of

our soul or, more prosaically, with a central aspect of the heritage of the human race. Like the Taj Mahal, which was built 3000 years *after* Abu Simbel, its beauty is indescribable and indelible. On the way back to France, we flew over the tip of Italy in the clear morning light and could see Mount Etna steaming away across the Straits of Messina, as it had been doing well before the Great Pyramid of Cheops was built in 2600 BC.

Jean Daniel delighted in planning our travel, bent over the computer for days at a time, plotting out itineraries, choosing our hotels and even our rooms, and looking for bargains. Months before visiting a country, he bought two or three comprehensive guide books, read them from cover to cover, and inserted details into out tours that took me by surprise, like finding Christopher Columbus's sarcophagus in Seville Cathedral and that of his Portuguese counterpart Vasco da Gama at the Jeronimos Monastery in Lisbon. In Spain and Portugal, he put us into former monasteries and palaces, now luxury hotels owned by the State (*paradores* in Spanish, *pusadas* in Portuguese). At the Portuguese town of Evora, we stayed at a former convent next to a 1st century AD Roman temple, in a former bishop's room with frescoed ceiling; at Obidos, we slept in half a dungeon overlooking the town, with windows just large enough to direct arrows at assailants below. At Jaén, in Andalusia, our base was a 14th century castle 850 feet above the town, with mountain vistas all around us. When he saw Jean Daniel's French passport, the receptionist smiled: "You'll enjoy the room we've given you." Used by Charles De Gaulle when he visited in June 1960, it boasted a canopied bed large enough for the French president's entire entourage and an immense bathroom. But the Great Man must have taken a shower, because the bathtub was barely large enough to hold a French poodle.

In southern Spain, we noted that Islam and Catholicism had something important in common: architecture and emotion on such a scale that they were difficult to take in. We felt like rational Protestants. In Seville, where orange and wisteria blossoms perfumed the air, preparations were underway for Holy Week. Huge floats with weeping Virgins and sanguinary Christs were being wheeled out and dusted off. Neighbourhood and confraternity bands were practising their horns and drums in public gardens. Groups of weight-lifters were limbering up, readying themselves to bear floats and statues on their shoulders in ten days' time. And shop windows were full of posters advertising processions in various cities,

rivalling each other for the most effusive expression of repentance. They had the opposite effect on us, making us want to go home for a more serene celebration.

The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 may have shaken Voltaire's faith, but Portugal's beliefs have proved more resilient. In November 2007, we walked slowly across the immense concrete plaza at Fatima where the Blessed Virgin is said to have appeared six times in 1917 and Pope Jean Paul II most definitely appeared three times as well. His statue was larger than that of the Virgin at the other end of the plaza, a space that can contain 300,000 people, where men and women crawled on their knees or on their all-fours. Twenty years before, we might have felt sorry for them; this time, we looked on with respect and mild astonishment. There were medieval monasteries and Renaissance and Baroque palaces in unfamiliar places (Alcobaça, Batalha, Tomar, Mafra, Queluz), all intact thanks to the absence of a Henry VIII or a French Revolution in Portuguese history. Napoleon's troops damaged the sepulchre of Pedro I (1357-1367) at Alcobaça but not the memory of a gruesome love story, as strange as a far-fetched Italian opera. At the start of his reign, Pedro exhumed the body of his mistress (Inès de Castro) whom his father had ordered murdered, placed it on a throne, and had the entire court kiss the ring on her decomposed hand in belated homage. One of Portugal's last kings (Carlos I) was an accomplished landscape painter. In 1908, he was assassinated with his oldest son, the heir to the throne, by a hot-headed Republican in the main square of Lisbon. His other son would have been murdered as well, if the Queen had not assaulted the shooter with the bouquet she was carrying.

The Portuguese are deservedly proud of their history – an advertisement at Lisbon airport invited travellers to "discover the city that discovered half the world" – but they can also treat it lightly. At the National Pantheon in Lisbon, there was background music instead of the solemn silence that marks other such places in the world. It was the voice of the *fado* singer, Amalia Rodriguez, Portugal's Edith Piaf, who is buried there. Although several politicians are interred there, too, there was no trace of the long-time dictator Salazar.

Our last "exotic" trip was to South Africa – our second try, now that Jean Daniel had almost forgotten the John Le Carré movie we had seen four years before. On the way into Johannesburg, our taxi driver asked about winter in

Canada: "What happens to your animals?" "Our bears hibernate," I explained. “Some birds fly south, others just slow down." He persisted: "And what about your monkeys and baboons?" Our favourite moment was in Cradock, a small town that witnessed some grisly political murders under apartheid. After dinner in a low-ceilinged room decorated with pictures of Queen Victoria and dour 19th century Afrikaner farming families, four Xhosa women from a nearby township sang the "Click Song" that Miriam Makeba made famous, as well as the national anthem ("God Bless Africa") *a cappella* with their hands clenched over their hearts. As usual, we had entertaining company. We were with a French group again, one of whom was a social worker back home, a misfit who was late for the bus every morning. One afternoon, visiting a canyon, she went off the path without telling anyone to relieve herself and fell off a three-foot ledge, hurting her hands and shoulder and cutting her chin. She was badly shaken, as Jean Daniel and I helped her back to the bus, but not enough to forget to pick up a handful of dirt from the site of her accident to glue into her small scrapbook. It must have been loaded with eggs because the next day she had ants running all over her hotel room, pouring out of the scrapbook and populating her suitcases until the end of the trip.

In Kruger National Park, I expected our game warden to be hardboiled. He had spent ten years fighting in the Angolan War, putting several close buddies into body bags after they were blown up by landmines; so his gentleness was all the more remarkable. He ground the Land Rover to a sudden halt, as if we were about to see a cheetah make a kill; instead, he showed us the web of a golden orb spider, said to have inspired the invention of the bullet-proof vest. Later, he beamed with almost paternal pride as a young impala suckled at its mother’s breast and trapped us with his humour. “You see that herd of antelope over there?" he said. "Only one of them is male." I fell for it. "Which one?" I asked. He pretended to be deadly serious. "The one with the smile on his face."

In May 2007, we took my elder brother and his wife to Italy to celebrate their 40th anniversary. Naturally, on such a trip, most of the people we met were restaurant staff and taxi drivers. In Rome, our waitress at breakfast was Tanzanian, and she was delighted when Jean Daniel greeted her in Swahili (although he had never been to East Africa). At an Italian-Asian fusion restaurant yards away from where the 16th century goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini had his workshop, I admired

the young waiter's tie. "Do you want my shirt as well?" he replied insouciantly. To a waitress in Venice, we mentioned the reason for our trip and the many years Jean Daniel and I had been together. Suddenly, she looked forlorn. "My daughter is like that," she said rather delicately, "but my husband was too shocked to keep her at home. So I had to choose between him and her." "I chose her," she concluded, fighting back tears as she took our dishes away. Six months later, we were back in Venice on our own, fighting the suspicion that we would never be there again.

Venice had always been special to us. Every second December, we spent a week there, usually at "La Calcina" (the boarding house where John Ruskin finished *The Stones of Venice*), lingering in the quiet streets and squares, enjoying the clear winter light and gentle mists over the canals, bundled up against the cold in the morning but basking in our shirt sleeves over lunch at mid-day on the Giudecca Canal, sampling the cheeses and sausages at the Christmas fair in the Campo San Stefano, poking around in the Tuesday antiques market at San Maurizio, and attending concerts in the Schuola San Giovanni or Ca' Rezzonico. Each time, we would set an afternoon aside to take the *vaporetto* to the small island of Torcello at the northern end of the lagoon (where the original Venetians lived), admire the mosaics in the 9th century church, and have lunch next door at the Cipriani restaurant.

Venice suspended Jean Daniel's sense of frugality, allowing him to buy sumptuous fabrics to re-cover chairs back home, or sit down to delectable seafood dinners in out-of-the-way restaurants we had discovered, without a care in the world. He continued to resist the romance and expense of a gondola ride however – just as he had always refused to take a calèche through New York's Central Park or Quebec's Lower Town – except for one cold evening when a striking young gondolier at the Campo San Moise invited us aboard. Marco was cosmopolitan (he had lived in San Francisco and South Africa) and knew a sentimental couple when he spotted one. But it was the gondolier, rather than I, who set Jean Daniel aglow. At the end of the outing, when Marco dropped his wallet into the canal and lay stretched out on the pier to recover it, Jean Daniel obligingly clutched the back of his pants very securely to prevent him from falling in. Venice was so central to our life and even identity that when we had trouble falling to sleep back home, Jean Daniel would say "Let's count the gondolas."

On this last visit, in a narrow street just behind the clock tower next to St. Mark's Basilica, we discovered a plaque to a woman who had saved the Republic on June 15, 1310 by dropping a stone mortar from her window on conspirators approaching the Doge's Palace. The object missed the rebel leader but killed his standard-bearer. That mishap, the pouring rain, and the sight of the Doge's own troops assembling in the Square, inspired a fast retreat. To recognize her service, the city allowed the woman to hang the city's colours from her window on major feast days and froze her rent in perpetuity. (A century and a half later, in 1468, one of her descendants successfully appealed an increase in the amount.) When we spotted the plaque, we wondered how people campaigning for much larger causes today – like Al Gore on global warming – would be remembered 700 years from now.

Later, we went to a small museum to see one of our favourite paintings, Giovanni Bellini's "Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple". Strewn on the furniture and floors, so profusely that we had to avoid walking on them, was a collection of dog-eared paperbacks, dusty 78 records, handwritten scraps of paper, ebony masks, rudimentary musical instruments, and naive paintings. It was the "work" of a Beninese artist discovered accidentally by a scout for the Venice Biennale Exhibition who went to the wrong house in West Africa. The artist had been in and out of lunatic asylums four times but managed to convince the Biennale staff that he was sane. We were happy for him, as he now had a bright future and was going back to Benin to set up an artist's colony. But part of us also wondered what that woman with the stone mortar would have done in response to this new attack on her city.

We had come a long way from spending $20 a night for a room, but were still happier staying with friends in Paris on a pull-out bed with two cats and a dog jumping on top of us than staying at a stuffy hotel, or walking in the countryside instead of lounging at a luxurious beach resort. As ever, we were also conscious of our good fortune. In fact, beginning shortly after our return from India in 2005, Jean Daniel would say quite regularly: "You know, Robert, if I had to die now, I would be content because of the full life we have led." "Don't be so morbid," I would complain, but I knew what he meant. What we didn't know was that it was a premonition.

Dying

On January 1, 2006, during Mass at St. Gervais in Paris where he was a monk for three years in the 1970s, Jean Daniel's heart started racing. Feeling faint, he asked me to call an ambulance, so I rushed into the street looking for a policeman, but there was no one in sight. In desperation, I tried the town hall of the fourth arrondissement (which fortunately was open on a Sunday morning) and explained what was happening to the receptionist. She rolled her eyes, told me she thought I had to ring 18 for emergencies, and went back to peeling an orange at her desk. The firemen – Paris's famous *sapeurs pompiers* – were wonderful by comparison. They arrived within two minutes, examined Jean Daniel in church and then in their vehicle, and took him to Hôtel Dieu, the old hospital opposite Notre Dame. He was already feeling better just lying down. At the hospital, as I bided my time in the waiting room amid the debris of a busy New Year's night, the wastebaskets brimming with discarded bandages, they gave him a full set of tests, kept him under observation, and released him two hours later. Everything looked normal. I phoned our hosts to let them know what was happening. They were concerned, and later mimicked the way I had delivered the news: "We're at the Hôtel Dieu. Jean Daniel has had a slight malaise, but he seems to be doing all right. So don't worry." In fact, my insides were churning away like a turbine at full throttle.

Over the next year, he had the same experience several times, usually at church for some reason, apparently from standing in a stationary position looking straight ahead of him for an extended period, and he would sit down until the sensation passed. A doctor friend in Montreal suggested he consult a cardiologist, but all the tests showed that his heart was healthy. Then, in July 2007, 18 months after the first incident, Jean Daniel began noticing minor muscular spasms in his legs. By October, they were all over his body (except above the neck), and he began to suspect a neurological disorder. New tests were inconclusive, but the doctors ruled out Parkinson's, because his physical coordination was good. Then, in January 2008, he had MRIs of his brain and spinal column. In South Africa, the following month, we were able to take a two-hour hike into the hills of Royal Natal National Park. Jean Daniel felt unsteady, having to place one foot deliberately in front of the other the whole of the way, but he completed the circuit, including

crossing a rushing mountain stream at the top, like the rest of us, holding each other's hands so as not to slip on the rocks. By the end of the trip, though, walking on the seafront in Cape Town, we had to rest every ten minutes on the park benches along the way. In France in late March, to celebrate his mother's 80th birthday, we walked less than usual. He dropped me off at the seafront so I could take our customary three-mile stroll along the beach, and picked me up at the end, walking a hundred yards very slowly to meet me. So, by the time we saw his doctor in Montreal on April 1st to hear the test results, we were expecting the worst. All the readings were negative – which would usually be good news – but in this case it wasn't, as it eliminated causes such as pinched nerves or a brain tumour which could be treated. We suspected, and the doctor confirmed, that it was probably amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's Disease, a degeneration of the nerves governing motion in the body, including eventually respiration. I asked the doctor how long we could expect the disease to last. "There is no 'average' case," she told us, "but most people live 4, 5, or 6 years. Some live less and, in exceptional cases such as the famous British physicist Stephen Hawking, some live much longer." But there was no treatment available, except a drug that slowed the process by three months over a period of 18 months, according to the most reliable research.

We had been bracing for the news for six months. As soon as the muscular twitches or "fasciculations" started, Jean Daniel went on the Internet and saw what the worst-case explanation could be. As a former medical student, he kept emphasizing to me that the loss of nerve functions was irreversible. We were travelling in the winter and our specialist was on holiday in March, which is why we had to wait so long for the results. But the lack of a telephone call had been informative enough, for it meant that there was no innocent explanation on offer. A physiologist friend in Washington speculated that Jean Daniel had picked up a virus in Africa or Asia that had remained dormant until now. But there was no test for ALS. The disorder could only be diagnosed by eliminating all other possible causes and, even then, when we saw the doctor, all she could tell us was that there was an 80 percent probability that Jean Daniel had the disease. I held his hand as the doctor spoke, both of us shaken by the news, as hearing it was different from imagining it. She was a superb professional, sensitive and at the same time practical, choosing her words carefully but not circumnavigating the truth, gauging

how we were reacting and pacing the information she needed to convey. She suggested that we start making “adjustments” as soon as possible, including selling the house and moving into an apartment so that the stairs wouldn't pose an obstacle. At the time, this seemed premature, but it proved to be her most valuable advice that day. She had no idea how quickly the disease would progress, but she felt we should plan for the worst and we respected her instincts.

We went home stunned, digesting and at the same time trying to resign ourselves to the news. I do not remember our crying, even when our next-door neighbour came out of her house as we pulled into the driveway, asked us the news, and broke into tears as she hugged us. I certainly held Jean Daniel in my arms that night, but whatever he was thinking at the end of that momentous day, he kept largely to himself. During the next 72 hours, trying to be practical as the doctor suggested, we made some decisions. I cancelled a course I was to give at the University of Montreal so that we could prepare the next steps as calmly as we could and spend as much time as possible with people we loved in Canada, France and the US. Jean Daniel looked into organizing one last trip, before accepting the limitations of life in a wheel chair; he wanted to show me the Grand Canyon and Bryce, Zion and Arches National Parks that he had visited in May 2000. But he decided that the early-morning flights and long drives would be too tiring for him. And we contacted a good friend who was a real estate agent.

The morning after the diagnosis, I sent a note to about a hundred friends around the world. The tone was calm, undoubtedly because we had been quietly struggling with the news for months. “We're counting our blessings. We cannot complain about the life we have had so far (we'll be celebrating our 30th anniversary in November). Jean Daniel points out that he is not in pain. He is not yet an invalid. His head and his heart will not be affected. We are surrounded by family and good friends. And we have always approached life a day at a time. We also know that we are not alone. Millions of people face troubles like this every day. Our good fortune is to be able to face it with a life experience most would envy, rich with a sense of proportion, humour, providence and awe. And we know we can count on your affection, encouragement and concern.”

In the next two days, we had more than 80 emails and calls. That's when the crying started. The first morning, I printed about 20 messages for Jean Daniel to read when he came down to breakfast; he had absorbed only two or three of them before he started sobbing uncontrollably. I knelt by his chair and put my arms around him. It was a belated reaction to the diagnosis, made more real by the outpouring of love from our friends. But it did not last long. He read the rest of the messages, then looked out pensively at the first signs of Spring in the garden. We were overwhelmed and comforted by the volume, speed and emotion of the responses. Each was special and even the briefest was eloquent, confirming that our friends were going to be a large part of our medicine. Some commented on the serenity of my message, most admiringly, some more wistfully as if concerned that we were putting on a brave face or surrendering too easily to medical opinion. I replied that we were expressing honestly what both of us felt in the immediate wake of the news. We had done our share of crying over the previous three months as the possibility of the diagnosis became more real, and we knew that some of the people we were writing to were HIV-positive or fighting cancer or living with Parkinson's Disease. One of them, in Hawaii, who was probably HIV-positive before the disease was identified in 1981, told Jean Daniel: "You were, and are, a role model in life. The only thing else I can add is fight this thing any way you can." Neither of us felt combative; we were simply trying to accept the mysterious forces that shaped our lives. It was not even clear what we should be "fighting," as the causes of the disease were unclear.

Several friends suggested websites, research institutes, and specialists that we should consult. A homeopathic nurse in southern France recommended a Swiss product for boosting Jean Daniel's immune system. Our Carmelite friend in Nantes sent us information on beneficial plants. We were urged to increase our intake of antioxidants and switch to organic foods. My former schoolteacher, now living in Costa Rica, reminded us that she had survived cancer, even after dropping her prescribed drugs four years before ("The doctor told me that he could not help me anymore. I answered that I knew a better MD. A fervent Jew, he smiled and said, 'With your faith you probably will be cured.'") A Washington friend wrote from Atlanta, where she was visiting a friend in the terminal stage of cancer, "God operates in weird ways." Several friends who were not religious said they would try their best to pray. A journalist in the UK, who had a knack for cutting through

nonsense, told us to "throw money at the problem." I thought she meant: Get second or third opinions from the best hospitals on earth; but she was being more down to earth. “Yes, move into a flat with a lift, yes, pay for as much physical help in the drudgery of life that you can (cleaners, laundrymen etc), yes, travel business class and not economy. These things are pretty trivial, but you don't want to waste your energies and there are better things to do with your time now. This is the rainy day we all save up for."

Two friends in Washington DC were actually relieved to read the message. I had entitled it ominously “Jean Daniel” and they had concluded that Jean Daniel was already dead! One of them added: "I have had friends with ALS, and it is no fun at all. But it is perhaps better than other diseases, since it involves no dementia. And I can imagine no couple better equipped to face such a development." Two close friends wrote from Sydney. One was reminded of his wife's serious stroke ten years before ("The anguish returns..."); the other said: "Damn, damn, damn..." A friend in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, Florida, quoted the American novelist Willa Cather: "Just remember: 'Where there is great love there are always miracles.'" A Montreal friend wrote: "I never find the right words when I want to comfort friends. But I imagine Jean Daniel is certainly not looking for pity as much as our presence, love and support." French Canadian acquaintances added: "We are with you with all our hearts. Our house is open to you if you want to get away for a few days. Apart from that, I don't know what to say." Another friend who was HIV-positive wrote from South Africa, "Your letter is inspiring, as it points out all the good parts of this bad news. We hope that Jean Daniel, like me, will live for a very long time and keep up his good spirits." From a friend in Madrid: "How lucky you are in having each other. One month in these times for science and they discover a new drug, and God and the body work in incredible ways. All the same, I wish I were there." And from Parisian friends holidaying in Laguna Beach: "We hug you even harder than usual." We thanked everyone for their encouragement and concern, including those who did not react with words, as in the same circumstances, we weren’t sure what we would have been able to say. In the face of these reactions, we were philosophical. We weren’t rolling out the artillery, but we weren’t lowering our arms either. Jean Daniel pointed out that the disease was “purifying” our relationships with others;

there was no longer room for small talk, and people were prepared to say things that normally they would keep to themselves.

Many thought that what was happening was "unfair," but neither of us identified with the thought, as it implied that others *deserved* to fall ill. Even a hardened Mafioso should not have to go through this. But the situation was certainly absurd. We had always looked after ourselves, avoided excess, and consumed a healthy diet. We ate red meat in moderate amounts and loved fruits and vegetables (Jean Daniel thought the fridge was empty if it didn't contain at least one head of broccoli). We had never smoked, did not take drugs, and seldom drank more than two or three glasses of wine. We both exercised regularly: I jogged and went to a sports club, but Jean Daniel preferred to stay home to do calisthenics and lift home-made weights. (As usual, he saw no point to spending money needlessly and, oddly enough for someone who was happy to be nude at the beach, he was self-conscious about showering in front of others.) Neither of us had a weight problem. In 22 years at the World Bank, I had taken only eight days sick leave, including five days getting over an operation for a broken leg after a skiing accident. The most Jean Daniel had to complain about was the occasional sciatica, sinusitis, and varicose veins. In fact, his only real worry was that he might develop Alzheimer's Disease, as there had been a great deal of it in his family. "If that happens," he told me, "I want you to put me away in an institution and get on with your life." He took up Sudoku to keep his brain cells functioning.

Neither of us wanted to become an overnight expert on ALS, even though our intellectual curiosity and Jean Daniel's instinct for planning would normally have pressed us in that direction; some defence mechanism set in, and we chose to learn about the disease in stages. A niece had printed out for us the entire manual of the Canadian ALS Society; we flipped through the thick volume dutifully and decided we did not need to get into the grisly details of how Jean Daniel's body would shut down or learn how to make fruit smoothies for when he would no longer be able to swallow solids. I noted with irony and almost a sense of sacrilege that there were three chapters on "Caring for the Care-Giver." That seemed the least of our concerns at this point. We knew that about ten percent of ALS cases were hereditary and that 70 percent struck men at about the age of 54. Jean Daniel was just a few months short of that when he had his first faint symptom in Paris in

January 2006. We speculated now that his eyelids may have quivered, causing him to think he was about to faint, disorienting him and inducing panic, which in turn set his heart beating at a rapid rate. ALS, or Motor Neuron Disease (as it is known in the UK), or *la maladie de Charcot* (in France) was a relatively rare condition, but here were seven new cases every day in the United States and everyone we met seemed to know someone who was suffering, or had died, from the disease. But each case was different. The brother of a friend in Montreal had been diagnosed two years before and was still able to lead a relatively normal life. He had none of the twitches that were rippling through Jean Daniel's body, waking him up at night when he laid his head on his arm or put his legs together.

We were fragile but trying to be realistic. For the first ten days, over breakfast, we focused on what needed to be done, while also managing our feelings. I was inclined to bring Jean Daniel back to France to be close to his family, but he reasoned differently. He was happy with the care he was getting so far and saw no point to switching health systems; he also observed that our largest single cluster of friends was now in Montreal. The implication was that they (and my family) would be a boon to us in the months and years ahead, but his real intent – he admitted later – was to ensure that I would have a strong support network once he was gone. On the third or fourth morning, Jean Daniel talked about pieces of furniture we would need to get rid of, moving from a three-storey house into an apartment. He mentioned our Victorian wooden bed, now in a guest room, that we had slept in for 12 years in Washington. I said I wanted to hold onto it for sentimental reasons; in fact, I added, I wouldn't mind dying in it. "Oh, be practical," was Jean Daniel's reaction. "We'll probably only have a couple of bedrooms, and in the end one of them will have to be used for my hospital bed." It was my turn to bawl. The thought of finishing our life together in separate beds and rooms was unimaginable to me. Jean Daniel backpedalled quickly. "I'm sorry to have been so blunt," and he wrapped his arms around me. Thereafter, we agreed that it was all right to weep now and then, but not for more than five minutes, and we would try not to cry on our own. I violated the last part of this a number of times in the next few months, and undoubtedly he did, too. It was enough to see an elderly couple helping each other across the street to succumb to my sadness. That would never be us, I reflected. I wanted to trade places with him, but we agreed that that would add nothing to our collective well-being.

All the same, our spirits were solid enough for me to leave Jean Daniel on his own the next weekend and go to New York for the North American Reunion of the University of Oxford, where I had been invited to moderate a panel on global aid. As I walked to Times Square one evening to buy a ticket for "South Pacific" (the first revival on Broadway since the original 1949 production), I realized that my greatest fear now was that something might happen to me first. There was something oddly comforting about this. It meant that we were facing similar odds, and if I were prevented from doing so, I knew that at least two sets of friends would be willing to look after Jean Daniel. We were all living on borrowed time, I told myself, and in Jean Daniel's case, only the diagnosis – not the future – was clear. The next evening, an affable but intense Colombian doctor, who introduced himself to me over drinks at the Rainbow Room on the 64th floor of the Rockefeller Center, offered the same offbeat consolation. "You're as likely to be run over by a bus in the next few years as your partner is to succumb to ALS."

I returned home on Saturday evening and went directly to a friend's 50th birthday party in Old Montreal. Someone there asked me about the floral arrangements at the Waldorf Astoria hotel. I had only seen a single bouquet in the lobby, which was immense and rather plain, but Jean Daniel cautioned: "Robert likes flowers but he doesn't always notice them, especially if he has something on his mind." The next morning, intending to make coffee, I filled the kettle for tea, then realized my mistake and poured beans into the filter without grinding them.

That week, a Parisian friend who had lost his partner to AIDS 20 years before echoed the Colombian doctor's advice: "We all have a sword of Damocles hanging over us, without always being aware of it. Above all, I hope that this illness does not cut you off from your circle of friends, either because you don't want to worry others or because those who are healthier are ashamed or uncertain what to say. I don't want our relations to change in any way. We hope to continue to see you with the same happiness each time and the simple contentment of being with people we love." We also learned that the African-American choir we sang with in Washington was now praying for us at every rehearsal and Mass. That was a lot of praying.

At the end of April, we drove to Washington to visit friends and have my annual medical examination. All around us, there were signs of the fragility of life. A friend in Pennsylvania was fighting the flesh-eating virus; his left arm had swollen to the size of his thigh. Another friend's father had been run over by a car. And someone else had lost his partner to pancreatic cancer just two months after the diagnosis. On Wednesday morning, I woke up and seemed like the survivor of a boxing match. A minor scratch on the bridge of my nose had blossomed into a major facial infection. We rushed to the doctor whom I was to see the next day, and his assistant (the doctor's wife) told us that he was fully booked. There was a walk-in clinic down the hall, but she could not guarantee that anyone would see us very quickly. Jean Daniel clenched his teeth, stared witheringly at the woman in front of us (who was also a friend), the dander rising almost visibly on his neck, and spoke as emphatically as he could. "*Someone is going to examine Robert here in this office immediately. We're not going anywhere."* Our friend knew about Jean Daniel's diagnosis and, struggling to contain her own irritation, let me see one of the other doctors in the office. He prescribed an antibiotic, although he also considered admitting me to hospital for intravenous treatment, and the next day, the infection seemed to be better. But over the weekend with friends near Gettysburg, Jean Daniel grew worried again; so we drove back a day early to check into the emergency ward at the Montreal General Hospital.

It was 10 PM and I was trying to read *The Economist*, when a young man to the right of me stretched out his hand and said: "Hello, my name is Matthew." "A nice name," I said. "I miss my children," he continued. "When did you see them last?" I asked sympathetically. "This morning at 7 o`clock." He was a 24 year old mechanic from Inukjuak, on the eastern shore of Hudson's Bay, a four and a half hour flight north of Montreal. Metal filings had flown into his eyes at work. He cleaned the right one himself but the local clinic had made things worse in the left eye, pushing the debris further back behind the eyeball. So he had been flown down for treatment. He looked fine to me, but was a little absent-minded, having forgotten his IDs and some fish he had caught the day before at the airport that morning ("Otherwise, I'd have shared it with you tonight.") He had never been to Montreal and his eyes brightened at the prospect of seeing Halifax soon for the first time. He would soon be changing jobs to work on a coastal cargo ship.

"Then, I will be able to take my children travelling and marry my girlfriend," he said openheartedly. At 1:30 AM, I saw a doctor, who looked at my face and was reassuring. A few days later I was good as new, but for a week I had changed the subject.

We spent the month of May looking at two dozen apartments, only one of which appealed to us, perched at the top of a new building in the heart of the city with a 180-degree view of downtown Montreal and the St. Lawrence River. However, it stood in a sea of concrete, bounded on all sides by major thoroughfares just below the General Hospital. The noise and pollution would have prevented us from using our terraces or opening the windows; by day, we would have heard busses grinding up the hill below us and, at night, ambulance sirens through the triple-glaze windows. We didn't verbalize the fact, but both of us knew we were choosing our last address and the room in which Jean Daniel would die. Then, just before leaving to spend the Memorial Day weekend with friends in the States, we visited an apartment in a high-rise building on Ile des Soeurs (Nuns' Island), a short drive from the city centre. I had always regarded the Island as suburban, and we were inner-city types, but it was clear that this would be a more serene environment. "How does this compare with the one downtown?" our agent asked us. We answered in tandem. "I would choose this for Jean Daniel," I said quite confidently, while Jean Daniel preferred the other one for me. Within 24 hours, we had made up our mind. All that counted now was making him comfortable.

In mid-May, we attended the funeral of a friend's father, and sensed without saying it that this was a forerunner of things to come. Jean Daniel broke down when he saw our friend's mother approach the urn to kiss it. "I picture you having to do that and I can't bear the thought," he told me. At Mass the next week, a man in his 70s who usually sat in front of us with his wife was all by himself. She had been ill for some time, and that week had wandered off from their apartment in the east end of the city, only to show up 12 hours later at St. Mary's Hospital in the west. She was undergoing blood transfusions as we spoke. They had always been stoic. A year before, they had announced proudly that their 42 year old son had just had his first child; they had never told us that he had been a paraplegic since the age of 21. We offered to take him to the hospital afterwards. He asked how

we were doing (we had not told him about Jean Daniel until now). One of the prayers at the Mass had referred to strengthening “the faith of those battered by the storms of life," and the Offertory hymn was "Be not afraid." Our fellow parishioner echoed those themes as we walked out of the church. But, understandably, he was preoccupied about his wife.

Back on our street, our next-door neighbours were trying to keep us from moving. Our neighbour on the right helped identify what was causing a noise on the roof (a faulty cap to a ventilation shaft) and told us where to order a replacement; then, he installed it himself while we were in the States, noticing that I had been nervous climbing onto the roof. Those on the left offered to share the cost of installing an elevator in the house, if that would make the difference between our staying and moving. We lived between Canada’s two cultures. Our French-speaking neighbours never hid their emotions; after the diagnosis, almost every time we saw Marie-Pierre, she burst into tears, then recovered herself, shook her head and flashed a brave smile. Our English neighbours expressed their emotions differently. Jolaine waited several days before reacting to my email of April 1st, then telephoned us and advised us not to take any “rash” decisions in the immediate wake of the news (i.e., she didn’t want us to move either). Later that day, the front door rang and it was her husband Don, an accounting professor at McGill University. He looked sheepish. “I know this is probably not a good time to visit, but...” He was holding a bottle of wine behind his back, but not presenting it us. “Come in,” we told him. We chatted about the weather and other innocuous subjects for a few minutes, and then he said, “This is to thank you for re-doing our side of the lawn six months ago. I promised you one of my best Bordeaux back then and never got round to it...” He was incapable of saying that he just wanted to raise our spirits. Later, he asked permission to photograph Jean Daniel’s garden which was awash in bright summer colours, as he wanted to do a painting of it, and months later, when Jean Daniel was bed-ridden, he came to show him the result. It was an elaborate and touching example of Anglo-Saxon restraint.

May was a cruel month, but June was even crueller. We tried not to succumb to the drip-drip-drip of new checks and disappointments; we were too busy to dwell on the disease and saw no point in wringing our hands. We still wept every few days over breakfast or before going to bed, but we tried to keep our

sadness in bounds, and felt transformed when we were with friends. Jean Daniel was his old self in conversation – animated, curious, philosophical, laughing, interested in others rather than himself, and eager to do things, until his cane and leg brace got in the way. He tried to draw on his old monastic training of self-abandonment, but it was hard to let go after 30 years of activity, responsibility, and hospitality. He appreciated my willingness to do more around the house, but he was frustrated that I was being forced to do tasks which were unfamiliar to me. I was learning how the washer and dryer worked, and how to open and fold the ironing board. One day in mid-May, after three final efforts at lifting the iron, he wanted to throw it, the ironing board, and the whole basket of clothes out the window. The next week, he looked over my shoulder as I took up the slack, tempted to give me instructions, but the technique came back to me as naturally as skating or riding a bicycle. (He had always said that ironing was a continuous act of love.) Nonetheless, we hired a cleaning lady to help us once a week. My former secretary at the World Bank was a little doubtful, "I still remember those perfectly pressed shirts you took out of your suitcase, arriving in Chad. And those tablecloths at dinner at your place. I pity the person who will be helping you. Will she pass JD's approval?" Jean Daniel also coached me in the garden. Six months before, I would have had trouble distinguishing a self-effacing flower from a pretty weed; this month, I was learning that you didn't water a garden in full sunlight.

We measured time by new concessions: trading bathroom racks so Jean Daniel didn't have to stretch to get his towel down, buying a plastic stool for the shower, applying for a handicapped sticker for the car, ordering a wheelchair ahead of time. In mid-June, the doctor was pleased that we had already bought an apartment. "You're both adapting very well to the situation," she said. "Yes," said Jean Daniel, in a mixture of black humour and bravado. "Everything's ready, except the funeral, and even that we've begun to discuss." The doctor was taken aback. "I don't know you well enough yet. Are you being humorous or camouflaging something deep down?" He insisted that he was kidding, but we confessed that we were worried by the rapid accumulation of symptoms. She confirmed that his case was faster than usual. So, after two months of resisting the idea of taking medicines that would have limited effects, or participating in trials in the autumn in which he might be prescribed a placebo, Jean Daniel agreed to take a

first drug for a month and, if his liver tolerated it, a second, more experimental one afterwards.

Waiting for Jean Daniel that day, I met a 44-year-old man who was diagnosed with ALS in February and given only nine months to live. He had no outward signs of a problem, but his lungs were being affected first. I had seen him with a woman earlier so I asked him how his wife or partner was taking it. "She isn't," he answered. "She thought it was contagious so she moved out within days." (The woman accompanying him was a sister or friend.) He had a curious approach to the problem. "Like cancer, it's only psychological. I look at myself in the mirror each morning and tell myself: 'You have nothing. You're getting better.' And, you know, each day, I feel better. Tell your friend to do the same." But he was lucid enough to tell me that he would end his life before the final stage, and his children were aware of it. A working man all his life, he hoped to squeeze in a cruise in the Baltic Sea as far as Russia before he was done.

We signed for our new apartment on June 20th and sold our house on June 24th. At first, we intended to move in late August but Jean Daniel was having trouble climbing the stairs at the house, so we advanced the moving date to late July and I had to empty the house by August 15th. The next forty days were a blur of boxes, back pain, deadlines, decisions, and the manifold kindness of friends. I sorted through everything we owned, so as to be certain to get rid of things, calling Jean Daniel occasionally to remind me where something had come from, what it was for, who had given it to us (in case it had some sentimental value) and whether we still needed it. In the process, I gave away half my books, a process that I had always dreaded and found straightforward and even purgative once I had begun. It did not take long to decide that I would never re-read the three thick volumes of personal diaries of the 1970s Labour Minister Richard Crossman, or wade into Michael Foot's two-tome biography of another Labour hero of old, Aneurin Bevan. The real mystery was why I had hung on to these titles for almost 40 years.

Amid the busyness and sadness of these weeks, there were touching moments. July 29th was the third anniversary of the death of my twin brother Ronald and I had asked for a Mass to be celebrated in his memory. The day before, knowing that Jean Daniel would not be able to attend, I asked our pastor (a

close friend of ours) whether he could come around to the apartment afterwards, but he doubted he could as it was his last day before going off on holiday. Hearing his sermon the next day, I knew he had changed his mind. It was the feast of St. Martha, the disgruntled housewife who complained that her sister Mary had sat at Jesus' feet all afternoon while Martha was preparing the evening meal. Jesus did nothing to console her, telling her enigmatically that Mary had had the "better part." Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus were the last people Christ stayed with before leaving for Jerusalem to die. "It's a reminder of how important friends were to Jesus and how much we should reach out to our own." Afterwards, our pastor brought Communion to Jean Daniel and blessed our new home.

In early August, at the end of a six-year process, Jean Daniel became a Canadian citizen. The outcome was no longer important, as the only reason we had applied was to make it slightly easier for him to cross over into the States; but, as with our marriage, the process took on another level of importance. The wandering monk wanted to feel completely at home in his newly adopted land. In April, shortly after his diagnosis, Jean Daniel took the bull by the horns and tried to find out why the process was taking so long. He was told that he would need to see a citizenship judge to explain why we had travelled so much during our years of "residence" in Canada; unfortunately, he would have to wait 34 months for an appointment. Jean Daniel explained that he would probably be dead by then and would like to die a Canadian. Touched by the news, the young civil servant at the other end of the line suggested we write a letter seeking a speedier procedure, and ten days later, we were given an appointment. The judge was a sober, unsmiling woman who told us the law was clear: Jean Daniel needed 1,045 days in the country before becoming a Canadian and he was more than 400 days shy of that. I could see Jean Daniel's Cartesian blood vessels beginning to swell. "If it's so clear," I could hear him thinking, "why didn't someone tell us that over the phone and we'd have saved ourselves the trouble." "However," the judge added, "there is a certain jurisprudence in the matter." Jean Daniel bristled again, never having worked in government or been exposed to a diet of dodgy euphemisms. Without quite saying so, she was offering an exception on compassionate grounds, if we submitted solid evidence of continuous residence in the country since July 2002. She concluded a little sternly, "I have 60 days to make a determination and I intend

to exercise my prerogatives." [Translation: "Don't get your hopes up, I'm a busy person, and I have the right to take my time]."

Then we swang into action. We asked our neighbours to write letters, which they did very gladly; one suggested we send a picture of the garden as a sign that we weren't just passing through. Our pastor testified that we were parishioners since 2003. We submitted an excerpt from the 2004 Canadian Who's Who showing our only residential address. And we asked a Canadian Senator I had met to certify that we were hard at work on the English and French versions of my book on Africa during all of 2005 and 2006. Undoubtedly, this had a decisive effect. The first Arab-Canadian elected to the House of Commons in the Trudeau landslide of June 1968, Pierre De Bané had a heart of gold. To make things easier, I had drafted the letter for him. He transcribed it on Senate stationery on a Saturday evening at his home and delivered it to a courier service at the Ottawa bus station the next morning so we would have it on Sunday. He also added a final sentence: "In my 40 years as a parliamentarian, I count Mr. Rossi among the most ethical and sincere people I have ever known." The judge had pretended to be unmoved but she was soft-hearted, too. Jean Daniel was invited to swear allegiance to the Queen on August 4th, a month earlier than expected. That evening, I organized a surprise party for him and the next morning, buying croissants at the market for breakfast, I felt almost happy-go-lucky again.

Family and friends from Montreal, Boston, and Washington helped us with the move. One friend spent a week installing new televisions and stereo equipment, programming remote controls, installing IKEA shelves, fixing sticky cupboard doors, buying wireless phones, etc. Two days later, our former next-door neighbours from DC took over, with one of them looking after Jean Daniel at the apartment and the other helping me to pack the last boxes at the house. Friends did much more than lift boxes; they raised our spirits, too. In fact, for most of the last three months of Jean Daniel's life, we were alone for only a few evenings. We had never regarded friends as an investment. In fact, for a long time, I tended to take them for granted; but the gardener and realist in Jean Daniel had always kept a watering pot handy. Now, he pointed out, we were reaping what we had sown. As he wrote to a friend in July, "Now that my body is slowly switching itself off, more than ever I live for the people I love." But he refused to be the centre of

attention. One evening, during dinner at a friend's house, I kept Jean Daniel company on the sofa in the front room, but after a short while, he urged me to return to the rest of the group. A half hour later, I went back to see how he was doing and found one of our friends (a dermatologist who had been acting as Jean Daniel's GP) sitting on the floor, his head against the sofa, his hand in Jean Daniel's.

Quebec's health system impressed us, too. As an economist, I found it irrational that there were no co-payment or "deterrent" fees (even for the wheelchair that had been custom-built for him); but as a citizen I suddenly saw the fairness of a truly universal system. There was some discrimination in the air the day we ordered a respirator; the health system provided them free, we were told, if the patient was in imminent danger of death, but we could buy one and seek reimbursement, without any guarantee ("We don't see the point of giving them to millionaires"). I was prepared to write a cheque on the spot, but Jean Daniel was his usual earthy self. "If I need one," he told me, "they will give it to us. If not, I can wait for it." A few minutes later, they told us we would have it in a month.

Doctors and nurses were all good-natured. Visiting the lung department of the Hôtel Dieu the first time, we asked the receptionist about the doctor's name, Vandemmoortels (which seemed Flemish for 'Of the Mortals") "Does anyone crack jokes at his expense?" "No," she replied. "But, I have to tell you, he is very nice and smart – and he smells good." An African secretary added, "You forgot to say he is young." A few minutes later, the doctor appeared with gel in his hair, living up to the description.

The disease was now racing through Jean Daniel's body, forcing us to make daily and sometimes hourly adjustments. We tried to deal with the day-to-day while the world changed around us. On July 31st, while a friend and I were shopping for bookshelves at a home supplies store, Jean Daniel began losing the use of his hands. He continued reading the last book of his life, *War and Peace*, but six weeks later he could hardly keep the thick paperback in his hands or turn the pages. These months were like living in a diving bell, crammed in by space and circumstance, adapting each day to a new environment pressing in on us, trying to appreciate the fresh air we still had left, as we sank ever more deeply into the

unknown. It was also like balancing on a high ledge, knowing what was coming but trying to preserve our strength as we looked out, almost disembodied, on what was left of the world. Other days, we seemed to be surfing, keeping just ahead of the wave, getting a cane, then a walker, a wheelchair, and finally a respirator just in the nick of time before the water crashed over us. In mid-August, the wave broke and we found ourselves tumbling about in the water trying to come up for air.

On August 12th, Jean Daniel saw his neurologist again. She was visibly shaken by the change in his condition in just five weeks, saying it was the worst case of ALS she had seen. His lung capacity had dropped from 86 to 55 percent. In her note to the lung specialists, she wrote: "This patient is declining VERY fast on all levels." When Jean Daniel asked if it made sense to bring his mother for a visit in mid-November, the doctor guessed he would still be able to use a wheel chair and portable respirator by then. "If you had said January or February, that would be another matter."

Until then, we had assumed that we still had two or three years ahead of us. We had arranged the furniture in the apartment so Jean Daniel could manoeuvre around it in a wheelchair and we looked forward to travelling again in the future, perhaps on a cruise or two. But the shadows were suddenly lengthening. Jean Daniel now drew deep down within himself and found reserves of fortitude which even I had never suspected he had. Twice in Côte d'Ivoire, he had suffered extreme cases of food poisoning and begun to lose all sensation in his hands and legs. Both times, there was terror in his eyes, and he gripped my arms. "I'm dying," he told me. I remember wondering why he was panicking, not because I doubted his word or knew what was going on, but rather because of his religious faith. "Why should he be so worried?" I asked myself. I expected him to face death calmly. He was in his early 40s then, in his late 50s now, and he would do just that. In fact, he seemed almost transfigured by the events of the next three months.

In her classic work *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross identified five stages of dying: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. By training, reflection, and temperament, Jean Daniel pole-vaulted over the first four of these and went almost directly to the final stage. Some

visitors asked Jean Daniel if he was angry; but they didn't know him very well. "If I wanted to get upset, I would go to the Children's Hospital and see infants who have barely begun their lives suffering from terminal illnesses." When someone asked, "Why you?" he answered, "Why *not* me?" Both of his grandfathers had died in their early 50s, one from an industrial accident, the other from cancer. "What right do I have to live much longer than they did?" he mused one day. But it was hard for him to accept the failing of his physical capacities. He had always been independent and self-reliant, and did not like to be fussed over when he was in bed with the flu. We both struggled with this. He spent the month of August and September on the sofa in the living room, and needed help to sit up, get to his feet, grasp his walker, and go to the bathroom. Then, he would call or ring a small bell to say he was ready, and we would reverse the procedure. I would sometimes take advantage of him while he was in my arms to give him a kiss on his forehead, making some sense of this.

Most of the time, when I held him the right way and was careful not to jar him, he submitted to this dependency gracefully enough; but he grew increasingly worried, as he lost weight and became frail, about breaking a bone or dislocating a shoulder. It became an extreme effort for him to floss his teeth or use his electric shaver, half perched on his walker, half leaning on the bathroom counter, and he let me take over these tasks reluctantly. There was knowledge as well as pride at play here, as I was not the most skilful user of small appliances. (I gave up trying to clip his nails, as I screamed harder than he did when I missed the mark, so I passed that responsibility to friends with steadier hands.) He had always cut our hair; now, unable to hold a mirror behind his head or use the scissors, he agreed to have a barber visit.

I was the only witness to these frustrations, and overall they seemed momentary digressions from his general effort to prepare himself and the rest of us for the inevitable. He questioned my buying a large flat-screen television for the bedroom, as he didn't think we'd use it, but on the morning of August 8th he woke up and reminded me that the opening of the Beijing Olympics would be aired in an hour. "We'll watch the highlights of the ceremony on the evening news," I said dreamily as I rolled over to go back to sleep. "But you know how much I love public festivals," he persisted. A light went on in my head. It was the first time we

used the TV and we were both entranced by the ceremony; I also felt vindicated. But he was right. Except when his mother came to stay and we watched the odd program from France, and on the night of the US elections, we never used the television again. Even when he was confined to his bed and I asked him if he wanted to watch it, or listen to some favourite music, he declined. “I am going towards the Great Silence,” he told me. “I should start preparing myself for it.” Instead of losing himself in distractions, he lay back and watched a newsreel of his life play out in front of his eyes. I didn’t pry, but I am certain it included reminiscences of childhood, dinner conversations in Washington, classical concerts and country walks, long scenes from Mont Saint Michel, and shorter ones at Angkor Wat, Abu Simbel, and the Taj Mahal.

As usual, friends and family were our lifebuoys. Two friends from St. Malo stayed with us for the first half of September. They knew something about rolling seas as they were occasional sailors. The day after they left, a World Bank friend now living in South Africa came to stay for two nights with his husband, a proud and handsome descendant of Zulu warriors. Then, Jean Daniel's mother and older brother arrived for 12 days. My niece – who lived a half hour's drive to the south of us – delivered soup and stuffed peppers one day, but stayed in the parking lot below, as her three small children had colds. Even near-strangers were being kind. Our former postman wrote us a note: "As you travel so often, I thought of sending you a postcard to thank you for the kind and smiling way you greeted me every time I delivered your mail. All I can wish for you is good fortune and to take it a day at a time."

Until mid-September, Jean Daniel was able to sleep and eat normally; now he was having trouble breathing (his lung capacity was down to 47%) and he could not sit up in a chair for more than a few minutes. His neurologist agreed that he should stop taking the experimental drugs. "They're obviously not producing any miracles," she said, "and you don't need the side-effects.” She, our nurse, and the ergo-therapist who came to make certain I was lifting Jean Daniel properly, all suggested that we get a hospital bed as soon as possible. We hesitated, not wanting to enter that phase just yet or sleep in separate beds, but we ordered one a few days later.

That week, an international study ranked Quebec's health services as the eighth best in a country of ten provinces. Ontario or British Columbia probably did have better services, but the people conducting the survey might have reached a different conclusion if they had been at our apartment that Friday. At 7:40 am, a private company delivered a respirator for Jean Daniel as the publicly-funded machine had yet to arrive. At 10:00, a nutritionist from the neighbourhood health clinic came to give us hints on how to make Jean Daniel's meals easier and richer. At 1:00, the Hôpital Notre Dame called to make certain that we had all the services we needed from the clinic, suggesting some we hadn't thought of. At 2:00, the nurse called to confirm that our hospital bed would arrive on Monday. At 3:00, a lung specialist who had seen Jean Daniel for only five minutes six weeks earlier called to say that he was incensed that the public service had not yet delivered the respirator and he was going to raise hell. Twenty minutes later, a woman from the public agency telephoned to express her apologies, promised to expedite the order, and offered to visit the following week to see how we were doing with the rented equipment. And the next morning (Saturday), the weekend nurse at the clinic telephoned to see how Jean Daniel's night had gone.

It was hard to believe that every patient received the same treatment. Jean Daniel's positive attitude and light heartedness were certainly bewitching; but not everyone who called or visited had seen him before. Those who did know him became quickly attached. His neurologist said that he reminded her why she had become a doctor: his GP said it was a "privilege" to look after him. These were not throwaway compliments; it was plain that they came from the heart. Jean Daniel had a special rapport with his nurses, including one who visited us just twice. She was tall, striking, and a bit of a mystic. She asked Jean Daniel profound questions, like what he expected in the next life, and said that she had never seen a patient so positive about the life he had led. She also had her feet on the ground. On her first visit, she asked which of the three men wandering around the apartment was his partner. "Quel pétard!"["What a firecracker!"] she said. Neither of us had heard the expression before, and Jean Daniel quoted it with pride over the next several days: "Do you know that I have been living with a firecracker?"

The hospital bed arrived on schedule but it was old and battered ("like a survivor of World War I," Jean Daniel commented); even worse, it was too short

and too hard. We had been promised a state-of-the-art mattress that would mould itself to Jean Daniel's back and reduce the risk of bedsores. So we called the neighbourhood health service and they promised to act quickly. Two days later, the same two men who had delivered the bed returned with a better mattress, and two days after that they lugged in a heavy-duty electric bed just off the production line. "Boy," they said, huffing and puffing as they installed it. "It usually takes a couple of months to order one of these. You must know someone."

The person we knew was our main nurse, Diane Normandin, who visited us daily and was also – as her calling card delicately put it – a "coordinator of services to persons who are in the process of losing their independence." She was a distant cousin of a local saint, Brother André Bessette, who had founded St. Joseph's Oratory, the Catholic shrine that dominated the western part of Mount Royal, the mountain for which the city is named. She was a lapsed Catholic but a saint in her own right. Even when tired and rushed, she had words of encouragement for both of us. Jean Daniel also became her confidant and coach. Divorced at an early age and now in her early 50s, Diane was using Internet dating services to find a companion. "How did last night's date go?" Jean Daniel asked one morning. A few days later, he volunteered advice: "Don't let them put their hands on you on your first date. If they do, it's a sure sign they're only interested in sex." "Like most men," he added. He even asked me to print out the details of a romantic website that had proved successful with two (straight) couples we knew in Montreal.

Jean Daniel was also preparing the apartment – at first for both of us, and then just for me. He had chosen the colours of the walls and suggested where our furniture and paintings and prints should go. Once his hospital bed arrived, I camouflaged it, covering the metal head and foot with pillow cases matching a new spread I had bought for our main bed. The theme was an English rose garden and the colours brightened the whole room. I kept bedpans, diapers, paper towels and other utilitarian items out of sight to avoid re-creating a hospital environment. I wanted everything to be perfect, and the finishing touch was to be a new Venetian glass chandelier for the front entrance; but when it arrived, it was damaged and I had to return it for repairs. It wasn't just another object. I had chosen it as a whimsical symbol of the charmed and aesthetic life we had led and a nod to all the

romantic moments we had enjoyed in the ancient city where it had been made. I collapsed in near-grief, worrying that he would never see it, and in fact he never did, because by the time it arrived, six weeks later, he was confined to his bed. We showed him a photograph of it and, on his last day, I felt a twinge of irrational and stubborn regret as the undertakers passed under it, carrying his body away.

Of course, we tried to look on the lighter side, seeing the ridiculous in the grim and appreciating the little accidents that give seasoning to life. The first time the nurse came to take Jean Daniel's blood (to measure the effects of the new drugs on his liver), she nearly stumbled as she walked in and saw the panoramic views through the windows. After she was done, she asked Jean Daniel if she could go back into the kitchen to look at the view again. Shortly after, Jean Daniel decided he didn't need to take the baby aspirin and fish oil pills that had been a staple at breakfast the whole of our time together ("obviously, I am not going to die of heart disease"). Jean Daniel was so fragile now that I could easily hurt him if I held him awkwardly, but in the bathroom my greatest worry was that I was going to part his hair too low or make him look like Hitler. The first weekend in September, the parents of a friend moved out of their bungalow in the country, so we could stay there; but our departure in a convoy of cars from Montreal, with Jean Daniel's wheelchair, walker, shower stool and raised toilet seat in a friend's SUV just ahead of us, reminded me of Lord Stanley setting out on one of his African expeditions. We even developed a deep appreciation for plastic straws, which we were using in large numbers now; but we had trouble finding ones which were long and flexible enough. So, a good friend in Washington, not known for throwing his money around, spent $25 to post us a package of jumbo straws. Another friend, running into him on the way to the drug store, was surprised that Canada needed such things. Now we had 500 of them, but the American ones – like their politics – were more colourful.

In mid-June, we had a remarkable message from our friend Nicole, the Carmelite nun we used to visit each summer in Normandy (I told Jean Daniel, “I won’t have to write a eulogy. She’s done it for us”):

“You know, Daniel, what has always struck me about you? It’s the clarity of your look, physical but also spiritual, as if you were able to go right to the heart

of things, as if you had already begun your eternal life, based on all the love that we have truly *lived* and that will eventually take over our entire beings. Through all our years of friendship, it was you who dragged me along this path as I am much more of an earthling than you!

"So I want to say again an immense thank-you for all that you have been and still are for me, a wonderful brother who taught me a little bit of the Gospel. I am upset about what is happening to you, but I cannot be sad because there is so much love between us which cannot change, whether we are in France, in Africa, or America, or even already, in the deepest sense, in the heart of God.

"Fortunately, you have each other, as well as all your friends around the world who are linked together in a chain of friendship, 'surrounded by a cloud of witnesses,' as Paul's letter to the Hebrews says.

"Here is a text written by a Carmelite from the convent at Nogent, Marie du Saint Esprit, who died of leukemia at the age of 45. She wrote it four years before she died:

I don't know what will happen on the other side,
When everything I know has been swept aside into eternity.
I don't know.
All I believe is that Love is waiting for me.

Don't talk to me of the glory and praise
Of the faithful departed,
And don't tell me anything about angels either.
All I can believe, stubbornly, is
That Love is waiting for me.

Now that my hour is close, what can I say?
Perhaps I should smile.
What I have believed I hope I will believe all the more
On the eve of my death.
It's towards Love that I am going

Into Love that I am slowly descending.
If I die, don't cry;
It is Love that is taking me away.

If I'm afraid – and why shouldn't I be?
Remind me simply
That Love is waiting for me,
And that it will open the whole of my being
To its joy and light.

*(*Marie du St. Esprit, October 1963)

We treasured the quiet moments we had together, while basking in the affection of our friends. At about this time, I was reading my first book in five months (probably the longest literary drought of my life): a 1931 novel by Willa Cather set in Quebec in 1697. One of the characters, a priest living in the wilderness, tells an apothecary friend: "Only solitary men know the full joys of friendship." Cather was usually perceptive to the point of pleasant painfulness, but on this subject, she was strangely off the mark.

From friends, we learned an important lesson about supporting the sick. At the AIDS hospice, we realized that words of comfort were less important to the dying than our physical presence, concern, and the touch of a hand. But, I still felt awkward with family and friends who were terminally ill or had lost someone close, torn between wanting to help and respecting their privacy, conscious of how precious the remaining time was, and worried about striking a false note or adding to their pain. The couple who showed us the way were relatively new friends. Paul was 62, a professor of art at Concordia University, and a veteran of grief. Ten years before, he had nursed his partner of 25 years through the final stages of stomach cancer, and knew what Jean Daniel and I were going through. One evening in early August, he called to say that he would be bringing dinner over the following Tuesday (unless we already had plans) and wanted to know how many we would be. He was not asking whether he could come over, as he knew we already had enough decisions to make. He was being assertive, firm, and practical. Others followed suit, and soon I was managing incoming meals like an air traffic

controller at a small airport. The day before leaving for Boston on business, Paul's new partner, a 33-year-old electronics engineer who had grown up in Pakistan, asked whether we preferred shepherd's pie or a curry that night. The following Thursday, Paul called from the airport on his way to Boston for the weekend, to ask if we had any commitments two Fridays later. "Isn't that the day Inam comes back to Montreal?" I asked. "Yes," Paul said rather cheerfully. "But why waste time?" The next time they came, I told Inam now much Jean Daniel and I appreciated their kindness. In his position, I would have been packing my bags the night before leaving on a trip or soaking in a hot bath the night of my return. "Robert," he replied, "all of your friends are living through this with you; we think of the two of you every day. As for myself, I wonder what I did wrong in my life not to have met Jean Daniel ten years earlier."

They were also worrying about me. One day, they came early, so that Paul could keep Jean Daniel company and Inam and I could swim in the pool. (Jean Daniel couldn't resist a wisecrack: "Don't get into any mischief with Inam. They have security cameras down there.") They were impatient with another set of friends who rarely telephoned or visited, but we defended them, knowing that people react to illness and death differently. "I might have reacted that way, once," I said. What mattered was that we knew they would come immediately if we needed a hand; in fact, one of them had helped me with the move and looked after Jean Daniel another day. But we were touched (and amused) that Paul and Inam wanted everyone to behave with the same generosity. Another support was a young man we met at a friend's country place in early June. We told him about the 80 people who had reacted to Jean Daniel's diagnosis in the first 48 hours. "Helper No. 81", he wrote above his telephone number on a small slip of paper when we left him, and sure enough he was among the first to keep Jean Daniel company while I was packing boxes at the house. He compared Jean Daniel lying on our sunlit couch to someone basking on a desert island. "The only thing missing is a palm tree." So, the following week, he brought a little bonsai plant to put on a table next to the sofa, with strict instructions on how to water it. I sprayed it every day and, each time I put it back, Jean Daniel smiled at our new friend's thoughtfulness and affection. As for striking a wrong note, only one in 400-500 messages came close to offending us. "I know how angry both of you must be

feeling," someone wrote; but, even then, we saw through the awkward projection of what she was feeling and appreciated her telling us.

Shortly after Jean Daniel's diagnosis, a number of people suggested I read *Tuesdays with Morrie*, the bestselling book about a young man's visits to someone dying of ALS. As it happened, I had read it when it first came out in 1997 and put it aside early in the summer when I was going through my books, alongside John Bayley's account of his wife Iris Murdoch's death and Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, intending to read it again. But I didn't find the time. Like everyone else, I was impressed by the wisdom and quiet humour with which Morrie faced his approaching oblivion (though raised a Jew, he no longer had any religious faith). I also wondered whether he was equally philosophical or good-natured during the six days of the week that his young admirer was not by his side. Judging by Jean Daniel's behaviour, I suspected he was, if only because being false or on one's best performance when very sick is difficult to sustain. Genuine *joie de vivre* bubbles up from deep sources, and seven days a week with Jean Daniel were enough to prove it.

Some friends asked whether we tired of having visitors. "I prefer to see them now rather than wait for my funeral," was Jean Daniel's reaction. "Isn't it better being in the apartment than in the hospital?" I asked him one day. "Yes," he answered, "because, instead of being woken by nurses every couple of hours, I get to bother you all night for things." Such humour drew on crystal-like lucidity. Our cleaning lady damaged a small icon Jean Daniel had painted 25 years ago by dusting it too vigorously, so I decided to remove a much larger one from the top of the dresser and mount it on the wall. It was the icon we used at my mother's and father's funerals. Jean Daniel saw me putting its metal stand in a drawer. Conscious of my knack for misplacing things, and thinking ahead to his own funeral, he gave me a small smile. "Don't forget where you put it."

We had a surprise visit in October from our Carmelite friend from Nantes; I had sent her the air ticket without telling Jean Daniel. The day she was to arrive, I asked a friend to come around while I went out "to get some flowers." The previous day (October 1st), Jean Daniel had called her as usual on the feast of the great Carmelite saint, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Nicole thought that perhaps the cat

was out of the bag; but she kept her cool and told Jean Daniel that she still hoped to see him "one way or another" in this world or the next. Instead of erupting in tears of joy, he greeted her arrival as natural. He did wonder, though, why I had taken so long with the flowers. Nicole was the last person through Customs, as she had packed a sandwich in case there was no food on the flight. She forgot about it until a pleasant little sniffer dog and an imperious young functionary pounced upon her and threatened her with a $200 fine. "Out of the question!" she exclaimed with a withering stare, and they let her through.

The next week, two friends from France came just for the weekend and a Bolivian friend with whom I worked in Côte d'Ivoire 16 years before flew up from Washington just for an hour. I told her that this was extraordinary but not surprising. She replied with the straight talk I always respected in her: "What's extraordinary is that people would find this extraordinary. To me this is the marrow of life." Other friends "visited" through loving acts and heart-warming messages. A French friend in Washington and his boyfriend in France paid coordinated visits to two churches that had been important in our life – St. Augustine's in Washington and St. Gervais in Paris. They slipped out of their respective services briefly to call each other and make certain they had not mixed up the time. Neither was a churchgoer.

Other friends sent regular messages of support, like my 82-year-old former history professor: "For someone as shy as I am, Jean Daniel offered the gentlest and most relaxing of greetings each time we met, something that I will always remember. He always seems to have a smile at the ready, a mischievous grin that suggests we shouldn't take ourselves and the work around us too seriously. Friendship and love, especially when they are bound up together as in your case, make everything else fade away." Writing from London, the former Africa editor for the *Financial Times* who was living with Parkinson's Disease, agreed that we should see this time as a gift rather than an ordeal: "Strange as it may seem, I am celebrating your good fortune. And if I had a trumpet I would sound it long and hard and enthusiastically!" One of my former division chiefs at the World Bank put it differently: "I have come increasingly to believe – as I have more and more opportunity to see the end of life – that the greatest gift a terminally ill person and his/her life partner can give to the rest of us is a sense of comfort with imminent

death. Acknowledgment instead of denial, reconciliation – even humour – instead of anger, and Jean Daniel's abiding faith, all make our own deaths less frightening."

Our faith, many assumed, made it easier to live through the ordeal. Thousands of hours of contemplation of ultimate things (and, in Jean Daniel's case, thousands more) had certainly fortified us for these moments. Just as important were the three years we spent as night volunteers at the AIDS hospice in Washington. But, as the sons of Italian fathers, our strongest belief was in the here-and-now. Hope and love and truthfulness seemed enough of a challenge in this life, without worrying too much about the hereafter. Before Jean Daniel knew he was ill, he was impressed by a passage I came across in Seneca. "What is death?" the Roman Stoic had asked. "Either a transition or an end. I am not afraid of coming to an end, this being the same as never having begun, nor of transition, for I shall never be in confinement quite so cramped anywhere else as I am here." (Letter LXV, page 90.)

But he had thought a great deal about death, and instinctively was trying to live up to advice he gave to a friend 20 years earlier, a young priest who was dying of AIDS: "We must separate more clearly what we can and cannot change, humbly accepting all the limits on human life (like illness and death, which await us all, whether we are 20 or 90) from that part of life, unique to Man, over which we have some control, and which Jesus came to reveal in a concrete way, that is to say, the life of the spirit, which can overcome death."

Soeur Emmanuelle – who was France's version of Mother Teresa – died on October 19th just short of her 100th birthday. "Where there is love, there is life," she said. The only thing that worried her about death was the possibility of physical suffering. "Some people think that Christianity is a religion of suffering, but if that were so, I probably wouldn't have become a nun. Christian faith is about joy." Those words seemed true and timely to us, but both of us were wrestling with our doubts; Jean Daniel did not speak to me about his, and I respected his privacy. In Saint Malo in March, we did not go to Holy Week services for the first time in 30 years. "I have my own passion to go through," Jean Daniel said. We might have gone to Easter Mass together but he was stricken with 36-hour flu and spent most of the day in bed; it was also his 57th birthday. I went to church alone.

Back in Montreal, we attended Mass each Sunday, but I was forlorn seeing how much harder it was for him each week to walk up the aisle to take Communion. Eventually, he stayed home, and I went alone, but only because our pastor had lent us a pyx, a small container used for bringing the consecrated host to the ill; otherwise, I probably would have stayed home, too. I was deriving very little comfort from prayer, and for most of the Sunday services I would look up at the altar and think of the eulogy I would have to give for Jean Daniel. I could not imagine delivering it without whimpering, and the thought of our impending separation drove me to tears. At the apartment, he asked me to move his icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help from the left wall of the bedroom to the one facing him, so he could see it more easily; he was now having trouble turning his head. The icon showed a fearful child Jesus in his mother's arms, fleeing a preview of the cross and the crown of thorns which angels were brandishing in the upper corners of the image; in his rush to safety, his sandal has come loose and is dangling from one of his feet. But Jean Daniel did not want the painting right in front of him. "I don't want to see the instruments of the Passion every day," he said wryly. Instead, he preferred to look straight ahead at a small reproduction of a 5th century icon that our Carmelite friend Nicole had brought to him. It was also famous, showing Christ putting his arm around one of the Desert Fathers (Abba Menas) seated next to him. It was the only early painting of Jesus expressing physical affection. "I hope that that's the way I'll be greeted in Heaven," he told me.

But I knew he was struggling. "There has to be something better than this, don't you think?" he asked a close friend, while I was in the kitchen one day. Knowing full well that he could be headed towards mere nothingness made his courage in the face of death all the more remarkable. Yet he continued to use the vocabulary of humour and hope. He told our barber, a Chilean woman who fell under his spell within minutes, that he thought his love for me would be eternal; then, he thanked her for her good work. "I want to look my best for the angels and saints." He told our dermatologist friend the night before he died, "Your death is not too far off, you know. I'm just getting a step up on the rest of you." Only 48, Benoît was taken aback at first, but knew what Jean Daniel was driving at. Benoît had been devoting two weeks each Spring and Fall to volunteer work in Peru and India and confessed to Jean Daniel that he was beginning to wonder whether it

wasn't a little foolish, even self-indulgent, to take that time away from his patients and students in Montreal. "Continue to be a generous fool," Jean Daniel told him, "and when you get to Heaven, look for me in the teasing section."

We had never been morbid, but the reality of Death had always been part of our outlook on life, adding an edge to the joys we experienced each day. Jean Daniel was glad that we had "taken the time to live" (a reference to the Georges Moustaki song); not in the hedonistic ancient Roman version of "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," but the quieter sense of savouring the present, giving full vent to our curiosity and energy, but not being wrapped up in ourselves, trying to find time to be gentle and generous towards others. After I retired, Jean Daniel admitted that every time I had left on a business trip to the other side of the world, he gave me one last look, knowing that I might never come home again. Each time I returned, he met me at Dulles Airport as if our love story was starting all over again. He wanted me to kiss him on the lips in front of the crowd, but I greeted him on the cheeks like a good Italian, not wanting to scandalize anyone. (Oddly enough, it was he who usually advised against public displays of emotion, pointing out that "someone out there may have a gun.")

By the first week of October, Jean Daniel was confined to his bed. He could not sit up, feed himself, or even scratch his head, and he could only sleep with a respirator. I wanted to make every remaining minute as magnificent as possible but some days did not seem long enough and my reserves of strength occasionally let me down. Almost as soon as we moved into the apartment, when Jean Daniel started to need constant attention, visitors would ask me "How are *you* doing?" I recognized the kindness and practical concern in the words, but also resented the question as if it suggested that Jean Daniel and I could have differing reactions to what was going on. "I'm feeling the way he is," I would answer, while allowing that I was drawing more on his courage than my own. But, as the weeks went by, the daily schedule took its toll, and Jean Daniel noticed it. "I'm so sorry that you have to do all of this," he said. But, at the same time, he appreciated it.

I could be awkward at times, moving him on his side too abruptly to massage his back or bending his legs too fast in the morning to help his circulation, but he was patient with me. During the night, I would drag myself out of bed four,

five, six, or seven times to look after him, sleeping only very lightly in between, cocking my ear to detect whether he was resting or needed something. I knew I would hate myself later for doing so, but there was no avoiding it: at least a half dozen times I actually groaned when he called my name and I showed some exasperation as he asked me to shift his pillow or rub him down again, as if forgetting that I already had done that an hour or so before. But he hadn't forgotten. His skin was burning and he was deeply worried about developing bed sores. I tried to remind myself of what I had told him early on. "Would you do anything more or less for me if our positions were reversed? Every time you ask me to do something – get a glass of water, brush your teeth, rub your feet – you're giving me a chance to perform a small act of love."

Some nights, this reasoning sustained me; other nights, I just felt like a limp rag. I was concerned for him and for me and suggested we hire a professional nurse at least one night a week. "You're the best nurse I can possibly have," he told me. "A professional would sit in the living room, fall asleep, and not even hear me call. And can you imagine me asking a stranger to come in just to scratch my head?" My body was dragging, but my heart was aching, too. Each time he called my name, I knew he had waited a half hour at least, trying not to disturb me, hoping the itch or the thirst or the sore would go away, and asked for help only reluctantly.

One night, in the final month, he roused me three or four times in an hour, each time as I was about to drift back to sleep. I was a bit of a brute as I got up, bent over him, and almost barked at him, "What do you want now?" I had to put my ears close to his lips to hear the reply, as the respirator made his throat dry during the night. His eyes glinted in the dark. "All I want is to tell you how much I love you." That phrase fortified me for days, and reminded me of something else I had told him early on. "We are one body now. What I am doing for you I am doing for both of us." I would have to try harder, even in the depths of night. But I felt inadequate, and was sometimes angry with myself, like the day I put out the lights and realized that I had forgotten to shave him and brush his teeth. He had not asked me, seeing how busy I was, but I knew that they were the most important things I would want done if I were in his position.

November was Jean Daniel's final month. He was receiving increased doses of morphine to help him sleep and fight anxiety as his breathing diminished steadily. But they did little damage to his spirits. One night, I was certain he was beginning to have hallucinations. I woke him at 3 a.m. to give him his medication, some water, and a massage. When we were done, he looked at me beatifically and called me his "Chinese prince." The next morning, a little hesitantly so as not to embarrass him, I asked him if he remembered what he had said. "Yes, I called you my Chinese prince. That's what you looked like in your bright-striped bathrobe against the agate-tinted blanket."

Sometimes, I half-wished that the drugs would curb his wit. Our doctor suggested that a friend replace me once a week so I could have a full night's sleep; but Jean Daniel was not convinced that I was on the ropes. I had lost so much weight during the move and racing around the apartment that my shorts were hanging loose around my waist; I showed them proudly to Jean Daniel. "You can keep going," he advised. He told me that he could hear me singing to myself at the other end of the apartment, and that I did not look as haggard as I let on. "It could be worse," he pointed out brightly. "Imagine if I were soiling my bed every night." The following week, the doctor tried again. "I like the idea in theory but not in practice," Jean Daniel told me. "Do you really want us to spend time apart when we have so little of it left?" "No," I said, "but you have to admit that I'm a little irritable now and then." "Yes, "he observed, "but that's just your nature."

I was more than a "little irritable" by then; I was exhausted and overreacting to small events. Friends kept offering to do the dishes and I would say no, because I worried they would break them or store them in the wrong places. "Don't be proud," Jean Daniel would say, concerned that I was already doing enough; I would relent, but the sound of dishes being banged together in the kitchen was like salt on an open wound. I wasn't worried about losing or chipping a few dishes; I was thinking of the love, the patience, and the ingenuity with which Jean Daniel had acquired these things for us over the years. "They can be replaced," Jean Daniel pointed out. One day, I lost track of Jean Daniel's coffee cup, which I had been meaning to use after he had gone. I ransacked the kitchen for an hour, hoping it had been misplaced, but was certain that a friend who was staying with us had broken it and was too ashamed to let me know. I shared my frustration with Jean

Daniel, saying I wanted to get to the bottom of the matter. “Do you really want to lose a friend over a broken cup?” he asked. I kept most of this to myself; friends were understanding; and Jean Daniel channelled my energies into more constructive directions. He continued to run the household from his hospital bed. "Are there still flowers in the entrance hall?" "Have you watered the plant in Maman's room?" "Why not stock up on *orrechiette* (a form of pasta)?"

He seemed intent on clearing the decks. “Why don’t you get rid of my clothes and make room in the closets for more of your own things?” I was aghast. “I’m not going to throw away any of your things before you’ve even died! Besides, I’ll want to go through them for items I may want to wear.” “Now, don’t become a fetishist,” he answered. I continued, “And what if my prayers are answered and there is a miracle?” His eyes brightened: “Well, then we can go shopping!” Three weeks before the end, he looked up at the curtain rods over the bedroom windows and said, “You’re never going to use them, are you? The view is beautiful and you’ll have the electric blinds for privacy. Do you think your older brother would be willing to come around and take them down? I’ve been staring at them for weeks.” (Like the 19th century English designer William Morris, he believed that everything in a home should be beautiful or useful, and preferably both.) “Besides, he added, “you know that if we don’t do it before I go, you’ll keep putting it off.” Thinking of his own family, he gave me his commission: “They’re your brothers and sister now. Please look after them. I won’t be in between.”

“Are you ready?” I asked him one day. “To die?” I nodded. “I think so. And you?” “Well, I’m not ready to lose you,” I told him, “but I’m certainly ready for you to be liberated from all of this. I just hope I can live without you.” There was confidence and love in his eyes. “Robert, the best chapter of your life has yet to be written. People meeting you for the first time will ask, ‘Who is this luminous being? Where does he come from?’” “Because of you?” I asked. “No, because of *us*. What we have built together is real. You will be experiencing life from a higher plane.”

I was worried about crying at the end; I didn’t want his last image of me to me one of desolation. I preferred to smile, if I could, but it was going to be hard.

"You can cry if you need to," he told me. "We *know* each other." I also told him I was trying to think of all the things I would want to tell him if I knew he would be dead in 2-3 days. "You don't have to say anything," he assured me. "We've used all the formulas you could possibly think of, many times already." We talked about where I would feel closest to him once he was gone, on the seafront and ramparts at Saint Malo, at Evensong in Westminster Abbey in London, on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and in Venice. I hesitated on the last location, wanting to be more specific. Crossing the lagoon, walking along the Zattere, lingering on the wooden bridge over the Grand Canal next to the Accademia, having lunch at Torcello, staring at the Doge's Palace from across the water at the old Customs House... He filled in the blanks. "Everywhere," he said, and he was right; every canal, every piazza, every church tower, every bridge, every store window in the city would remind me of him. They were part of our DNA. "Don't live in the past, though" he told me. "I won't," I replied, "but I'll certainly take the past with me." He smiled: "A reasonable distinction." Then, taking a cue from him, I pulled his leg. "There is only one thing I regret in our life," I told him. He looked at me, a little surprised. "You should have tried even harder to persuade me not to buy that watch in Rio." (I had spent $700 for a watch I never wore.) He grunted rather than laughed, as if continuing the disagreement we had had at the time.

He was also preparing his funerals, one in Montreal and the other in France. He chose the readings and even suggested the theme of the sermon the pastor should deliver. He wanted a reference to the Carmelite saint, Theresa of Lisieux, who was asked by her Mother Superior when she first entered the convent to go away and think about what her mission in the Church would be. She considered the matter for several months and then told her Superior unabashedly, "I want my mission to be Love." We also had to decide what to do with his remains, as Jean Daniel never put much stock in cemeteries. "What monstrous monuments to self-importance," he commented once, when I dragged him through the tombstones of Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

He was so indifferent to what happened to his body after he was dead that he once exclaimed, "You can throw it into a dumpster for all I care." But his attitude began to soften in the final months, wondering whether I would like him to be buried with my parents and my brother at Côte des Neiges Cemetery on Mount

Royal. “I’m only suggesting this because you like to visit the grave on special occasions, and eventually – who knows? – we can lie there side by side.” I was charmed by the softening of his opinions on graves and cemeteries, but I had a better idea. “You’re not from here. We’ll want to bring you back to France. And who knows where I will end my life?” I suggested spreading his ashes at sea within sight of Mont Saint Michel. He thought that that would be complicated as it was now illegal to dispose of human remains along the coast (too many urns had been washing up on the beach).

In mid-November, we had a visit from his former prior at the Abbey, now the pastor of the small church in the village below the monastery. Jean Daniel explained our plan to him and Père André confirmed that it would be difficult to dispose of the ashes in the sea. He paused for a couple of minutes. “I think we can do better than that,” he said, and he promised to look into the possibility of burying Jean Daniel’s remains in the small cemetery behind the church. Jean Daniel was already on his way to heaven. “My death,” he told me, “is giving me a new vitality.” I reminded him of his views on cemeteries. "But this is no ordinary cemetery...” and he warned French friends over the telephone, "Don't fall asleep during the service or I'll come back as a seagull and shit on your head." A friend in south-eastern France asked him to send her a sign from the Other Side. "You'll know I'm in church with you," he said, "when you husband sings in the right key."

Of course, there were moments that no amount of positive thinking could deflect. "Can you bring my two hands together?" he asked me one night when the last of his ability to move them had ebbed away. He looked at them wistfully in the lamp light. "It's really too bad," he said. "They were such good friends." He was now unable to move anything except an eyelash. "You're on a journey now," the nurse said encouragingly at the end of the month. "That's fine," said the ever-lucid patient. "Do you want to take my place?"

On the night of the US elections, like much of the rest of the human race, we watched the results on TV with mounting excitement and disbelief. I let Jean Daniel sleep through John McCain’s gracious concession speech but woke him for Barack Obama’s historic address to the crowd in Chicago. “I wouldn’t mind being around to see his Inauguration,” Jean Daniel mused. But he was tired. On

November 11th, our doctor guessed that the "journey" would be over by the beginning of December. Jean Daniel was serene about this. "Robert," he said a number of times, "you'll only have to put up with this for another 2-3 weeks." This infuriated me, and I marched out of the room the first time he said it, aghast at the implication that I needed such relief. Pride and fatigue were eating away at me, but I recognized the love in his thought, and I finally succumbed to his reasoning. "I hope I didn't tease you too much today," he said one evening. "Nah," I reassured him. "I can stand it. After all, it's only going to be another 2-3 weeks." "That's the spirit!" he said, with a large smile.

Our nurse Diane questioned Jean Daniel's eagerness to die. "Don't you want to celebrate your 30th anniversary, or be around for Christmas?" she asked. "November 16th marks the *end* of our 30th year," he said. We have already celebrated it in our hearts. As for Christmas, I always want to be quiet at that time of year, and this time I want to celebrate it up there." Earlier, we had planned to invite 60 friends to celebrate our anniversary at the Château Ramezay in Old Montreal. The château appealed to our sense of historic irony, especially for our American guests. Built in 1705 as the French Governor's residence, it had also served as the headquarters of the Continental Army during the winter of 1774-75 when the Americans occupied the city; among other personalities, Benjamin Franklin had stayed there. We asked a friend who had sung on Broadway to warm up her version of "I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy" from *South Pacific*. But we had to cancel the arrangements when it became plain that Jean Daniel would not be able to sit at the table by then. We asked the friends who had already bought their air tickets not to cancel them, as we would have a smaller celebration at home; but eventually we jettisoned that idea, too, worrying about the hubbub that even a small gathering would create in the apartment.

We were now living in virtual silence, cherishing the stillness, as in a monastery. But Jean Daniel still wanted to share our joy with others, so we invited our two closest friends in Washington (with whom we always stayed) to come for the weekend and we spread the celebration over two evenings, asking two other couples from Montreal to join us successively around Jean Daniel's bed. We did the same thing two weekends later for my 60th birthday, an occasion I had no interest in celebrating but which Jean Daniel insisted we toast in style. The day of

our anniversary, we wanted to do something special. Jean Daniel thought he could join me in the double bed. "You've always wanted to sleep with me in your arms, and now I won't be able to escape because I can't move anymore," he joked. I suggested we watch a schmaltzy movie like *An Affair to Remember* or *Moonstruck*. But it was too complicated. His respirator would get in the way, we were having a string of visitors, and it seemed selfish to set aside two or three hours just to be alone. Instead, that night, after savouring a 1991 Dom Perignon champagne and home-made *foie gras* which friends brought over, I played our two favourite songs – Georges Moustaki's *Le Temps de vivre* and Frédérik Mey's *Approche ton fauteuil du mien* – looking Jean Daniel straight in the eyes, determined not to cry. I succeeded. Our two closest friends in Paris sent 30 blood-red roses (inspiring Jean Daniel to suggest the same arrangement at his funeral) and the overall mood was merriment. "Champagne is not quite the same," Jean Daniel dead-panned, "drunk through a straw."

We had invited Jean Daniel's mother to our anniversary party, but once we cancelled it and the calendar was shrinking in upon us like a vise, we suggested she come in mid-September, accompanied by Jean Daniel's older brother Jean-Pierre. They stayed for two weeks, and the separation was wrenching. Jean-Pierre collapsed in tears as he said goodbye, but Maman gave Jean Daniel a brave smile as she kissed him. The day before, she had asked him whether he wanted her to come again. "I would like that," he replied, "but we don't know how long this will go on and by then it may be too late." "I'd like to be here for Robert, too," she said. Jean Daniel assured her that I would be well looked after, but we both appreciated the thought. We also wanted her to be close to home as she was needed there as well.

It had been a troubling time for her. Three years before, her son-in-law – her only daughter's husband – had suffered a serious brain injury at work and after months of operations and physical rehabilitation had been left mentally helpless at the local hospital, recognizing friends and family members but nothing else. More recently, in February 2008, her daughter was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a double mastectomy; she was undergoing chemotherapy when Jean Daniel's ALS was confirmed. Over the phone during the next few months, Jean Daniel kept asking about his sister Isabelle and complained only about fatigue, not wanting to

alarm his mother. By the time she came, we all knew that the future was going to be short; in fact, the day she arrived was the last time that Jean Daniel was able to sit with us at the table. After that, he ate his meals on the sofa, propped up by pillows so he wouldn't fall over. Once she was back in Saint Malo, they talked every few days. In early November, despite all his efforts to shield his mother from the worst, he broke down and wept on the phone, saying he felt like "the end of a candle burning out." We learned from the family, not her, that she wanted desperately to return to Montreal, so the next day we bought her a ticket and she decided she would stay through Christmas and even the winter, if necessary, rather than sit in her house imagining what her son was going through. We were both relieved to have her by our side.

He was preparing himself, and everyone he knew, for his death. To every friend he saw for the last time, he seemed to be asking permission to leave early. He preferred that there be no tears, but when they came and people apologized, he consoled them. "Don't worry, that's just love pouring out." He left one visitor, my nephew's Chinese girlfriend from Vancouver, quite angry – not at him, but at her father who had died from cancer over a period of two years and refused to talk about what was happening to him. "There were so many questions I could have asked him, if he had been as open and resigned as Jean Daniel."

Jean Daniel was tired, but never too tired to see someone he loved. At the end of one long day, I had a telephone message from someone who lived next door who wanted to come over for ten minutes; as he came almost every day, and there had been a stream of callers that day, I felt we could skip his visit. "Do you mind if I don't call him back?" I asked Jean Daniel. "Are you trying to keep my friends away from me?" he asked, with a little grin on his face. Given the beautiful views that could be had from his room, several people had wondered why his hospital bed was oriented towards an adjoining building. We moved him one day to see whether he would prefer to look out on the Saint Lawrence River, but there were a number of drawbacks to the new arrangement. Our electrical outlets were in the wrong place, requiring extension cords for the bed and respirator that we would trip over, and he would no longer be facing the TV; but the deciding factor was that he couldn't see people coming into the room. "I want to be able to greet my friends," he told me, bidding a silent, matter-of-fact farewell to the river his Breton ancestor Jacques Cartier had sailed up 473 years before.

In the last two weeks, he had several phone calls from France, including some from the children of friends who wanted his advice on how to lead their lives. His commission was straightforward, even trite, but the joy and conviction with which he spoke turned his words into gold. "Love one another, and never be shy about expressing it. If you feel forced to choose between love and something else, choose love every time." When he composed his own epitaph, "His life was anchored in Love as this Rock [Mont Saint Michel] is anchored in the Earth," I thought at first that he was being uncharacteristically vain; but almost immediately, I recognized that, no, this was part of his life's message. At his last Mass, said by his former prior at Mont Saint Michel in his room, Jean Daniel suggested we place a bouquet of white roses on the improvised altar and pray for the ailing parents of the friend who had brought them.

On November 20th, our young friend Matt arrived from Boston. He was between jobs and had just come back from eight months of travel in Europe and India; like Jean Daniel's mother, he was determined to be with us for as long as it took. Jean Daniel suggested that he share the double bed with me, so Matt could help me massage him during the night. (It was so difficult for him to be on his side for more than a minute or two without gasping, that it was more efficient for two of us to rub him down.) The first night, I waited until the lights were out and Jean Daniel was sleeping before rolling over and giving Matt a hug. Suddenly, I heard a voice behind me, "Oh, at last. He's in someone else's arms." I thought Jean Daniel was referring to Matt, who had recently separated from his partner in Rhode Island. "No," Jean Daniel explained. "I meant *you.* It's so long since I've been able to do that to you."

So far, the disease had had the upper hand but Jean Daniel decided to start playing a role in what happened next. The first time our general practitioner visited, he said politely and firmly that all he wanted was to bring matters to a close as quickly as possible. "Can you help me in that way?" he asked. The doctor answered that she was a palliative care specialist, so by definition his condition was advanced and it was her duty to make him as comfortable as possible. She prescribed a number of sedatives (including mild doses of morphine) and authorized me to give him injections if necessary during the night. But he didn't

take the full doses, worried that he would be sleepy during the day and not be able to enjoy the company of his friends.

A few weeks later, his neurologist asked him over the phone. "But are you *comfortable*?" He admitted that he was trying to be brave, but no, within five minutes of waking up, after being given a glass of orange juice, he began to feel uncomfortable trying to digest the liquid, and his joints were stiff and his skin was burning from lying on his back all day. "That's what the drugs are for," the specialist chided him gently. "Don't worry about them. They're for your own good. And even if they make you sleep for part of the day, don't you prefer to see your friends when you are feeling better rather than suffering?"

Our GP visited the same day and Jean Daniel asked her whether he should be woken for meals if he ended up sleeping during large parts of the day. "You shouldn't be eating large amounts anyway, and if you want to accelerate things, this is another way of taking control. You should eat to be comfortable, nothing more." He took the doctors' advice and the effect was immediate. He slept soundly the next three nights without being somnolent during the day. But the effects seemed to weaken after that, and the doctor agreed to increase the doses of morphine.

Jean Daniel was impatient to die but struggling with fear as well. One day, with three friends staying over, I stretched out my arms in a sign of relief and said I was going to go for a long bike ride. "Do you really have to?" Jean Daniel asked with tears in his eyes. "Why don't you go for a swim in the pool downstairs, so at least we know where to find you if something happens? I prefer to have you close. Even hearing you move around in the apartment is a comfort to me." I relented, but the following week, I tried again. "Enjoy the ride," he told me. I winked at him. "What's the difference between now and then?" I asked. "Last week, I thought I was dying," he said. "Today, I'm not." A few days later, he was impatient again. "Robert, I don't have the impression I'm dying any longer. This could stretch out into March or April next year." "Do you really want to *feel* you're dying?" I asked.

He saw no point to stretching out the ordeal. From the very beginning, despite our Catholic faith, we talked of assisted suicide. Jean Daniel's great fear was that the disease would affect his throat, shrinking his tongue, preventing him from eating and most of all talking. We agreed that we should not allow this to happen. "This is not living," he said several times. "We wouldn't let this happen to our cat or dog, so why do we become squeamish when it comes to human beings?" I emailed a psychiatrist friend in Switzerland for information on the Dignitas Clinic that helped terminally ill people put an end to their own lives. My friend insisted on talking to both of us on the phone and counselled a local solution. In any case, it was too late to imagine Jean Daniel travelling. We talked about my administering some drug, if necessary, but ruled that out very quickly as he did not want me to spend time in prison after he was dead, even if only for two or three years.

The only recourse, he decided, was his respirator. In theory, this was not a form of life support; it was of the kind used to help people with apnoea, or irregular breathing during the night. It did not provide oxygen, but forced outside air into the lungs at a regular rate, causing them to adopt the same rhythm. When he was first prescribed a respirator, Jean Daniel was suspicious. "Will this prolong my life artificially?" he asked. "No," he was told, "not if you use it only during the night. It is only meant to make you comfortable." In fact, during the day, the level of oxygen in Jean Daniel's blood, like his heart rate and blood pressure, was nearly perfect; but during the night his shallow breathing did not expel enough carbon dioxide, with the effect that he woke up tired each day.

The respirator changed that and, after a difficult week adapting to it, the machine become a mainstay of his daily routine. By mid-November, he was using it around the clock (except when eating) but he remembered something his neurologist had told him. "What if I end up using it 24 hours a day?" he had asked. "Will it be a life support then?" Reluctantly, torn between respecting his views and wanting him to be comfortable, she said yes, but the GP and respirator technician who visited every week kept insisting that it was not a life-supporting device. Eventually, his lungs would fail even with the respirator on; he would probably slip into a coma and not even be aware of what was going on. Jean Daniel was sceptical; twice in 12 hours, his breathing had failed suddenly and he

was gasping for air. I raced to the kitchen where I had syringes in the refrigerator for just such an event; the drug (Versed) would "knock him out," I had been told, inducing instant amnesia and quelling the panic he was feeling. I administered the drug, but both times it took more than five minutes to have any effect and it certainly did not knock him out; in fact, he didn't even fall asleep. Both times, he looked at me warily until he had relaxed, and teased the doctor on her next visit that her "miracle" medicine hadn't been all that impressive. He also conceded that, while he was prepared to die, his body didn't seem to agree with him; hence, the struggle and the fear he had experienced.

On Saturday, November 29th, at 5:30 a.m., I woke him to give him his medications. Half-sleepily, he asked, "Why does it always hurt when you take off my respirator? You should be a truck driver." But, 15 minutes later, he asked me to move our beds together so we could sleep with our hands entwined. Later that morning, he looked at me, "Do you know why I wanted to be close to you earlier today?" "It wasn't because of my birthday," I answered. (I was turning 60 that day.) "You felt you were nearing the end?" "Yes," he said, and we left the thought dangling in the air. His spirits were brighter that night as we celebrated my birthday with friends. I was massaging his feet at the end of the bed and I noticed a merry glint in his eye. "What are you thinking?" I asked him. "Oh, it's black humour," he said. "I don't think you'll appreciate it." "Out with it," I told him. He looked at me proudly. "I was just thinking that soon there will be another bachelor on the market!"

The next day, he decided to set a date for going off the respirator, but Jean Daniel wanted to talk to the doctor about the risks. Would he suffer terribly for a long time, or would he simply slip away quietly? She offered to talk to him on the phone, but I suggested a face-to-face conversation. It was a Sunday, her day off, but she drove in from her country cottage anyway; Diane the nurse was also there. "You can take yourself off the respirator. That is your right," she said. "But I want to be there and give you extra sedatives, if necessary to make certain you don't suffer." "When do you want to do it?" she asked. "As soon as possible," he answered. "How about Tuesday, December 2nd?" The doctor reflected. "In that case, I can ask Robert to give you the first dose of a new sedative tomorrow morning at 8 a.m. (Monday) and he can do the same the next day, two hours before

I arrive." "Hey, hey, hey, wait a minute," I interjected. Jean Daniel looked at me, a little surprised. "What's the problem?" he asked. "Well, tomorrow could be our last full day together. If you're sleepy, we won't be able to talk very much." There was deep gentleness in his eyes. "Robert, what will we have to say to each other that we haven't already said, except to make each other sad?" "You're right," I conceded, collapsing into tears. Diane the nurse came over and put her arms around me, while Jean Daniel looked on with some detachment, as if he was absorbing his decision; but he would probably have done the same, if he had been able.

The doctor had no idea how long his lungs would hold out once he was off the respirator. It could be an hour, several hours, or even a few days before his strength gave out, and someone would have to watch him round the clock to make certain he did not wake up struggling for breath. I should have guessed it would be quicker than that; he ate his supper that evening a spoonful at a time, and needed the respirator after each bite so he could breathe properly. Monday night, he slept so soundly and his breathing was so deep and noisy that I thought he was going to die within hours. Concerned, and unable to sleep, I went to the side of his bed and sat for a while looking at him in the moonlight, holding his hand. But his breathing remained regular, exactly matching the rhythm of the machine.

Tuesday morning, I roused him at 7 a.m. so that he would be conscious of what was going on, especially the fact that we were following the program he had agreed on. He seemed disappointed, even irritated, to be woken up as he had been sleeping very deeply. At 8 a.m., I gave him the second injection of the sedative the doctor had prescribed, then asked him if he wanted me to read an email from an old friend in Sausalito, California describing a mystical experience he had had recently. Jean Daniel nodded gently and seemed encouraged by the story. I told him that I had lit up his icon of the Virgin off to the left of him; he looked at it briefly, and then we waited for the priest, doctor, and nurse to arrive. It was Diane's day off, but (like the doctor two days before) she never gave it a thought. "Is the bathroom clean?" he asked, just before 10 a.m. "Yes," I told him. "I have even polished the faucet." He seemed pleased, and then noticed an afghan lying on the large bed beside him. "What's that doing there?" He was right (the colours clashed), so I put it away.

When our pastor arrived to give him Communion, he asked for a fragment of the host, concerned about choking. He now was ready, even light-hearted, winking rakishly at Matt who was standing at the end of the bed with his hands on the camouflaged metal railing. Seeing this defiant cheerfulness, the nurse bent over in laughter. Then, as the syringes were prepared, Jean Daniel said his final goodbyes. He told Matt, "I know you will look after Robert," then, after saying a few words to his mother, he turned to me. "*Coco* [Darling], I'm so sorry." "Don't be sorry," I said. "It's time for you to be free of this."

He closed his eyes during the injections, trying to sleep. I hoped that he would drift off as profoundly as the night before, but his rest was shallow. A number of times, the doctor talked to him in a low voice and he woke. "Don't fight this. Let yourself go," she counselled. After an hour and fifteen minutes, I suggested it was time to remove the respirator. "You do it," the doctor said. "You're used to it." I was surprised, thinking that she would be the one to complete the procedure; but she knew what she was doing. Jean Daniel opened his eyes, surprised, when I took the nose-piece away, but his breathing did not become laboured. He squinted slightly as if he was in pain. "Is it hurting?" I whispered to him quickly. "A little bit," he answered, so I motioned to the doctor to give him another injection. "Is that better?" I asked him 15 seconds later. "Yes," he said with his eyes. I recited Mary's prayer the Magnificat over him, kissed him on his forehead, and asked him to take me with him if he could, then his mother and I held his right hand. He seemed to be praying, but I could not make out the words. Matt thought he heard something about "going home," but that was unlikely as he probably would have reverted to French in the final minutes of his life. Barely ten minutes later, just before noon, his breathing stopped.

I had imagined this moment many times, thinking I would rush off to the living room, collapse in a heap, and surrender to my fatigue and desperation. But I stayed where I was, staring at him and noticing that the doctor and nurse were also in tears. Then, I saw that Maman was crying, too, for the first time in many years, and I thought that Jean Daniel would have been relieved to see this.

I announced the news to friends with a line from Scripture that Jean Daniel had placed on one of the first icons he had painted, of Christ: “Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest.” My intention had been different. A few days before, he asked me if I had prepared the announcement. “Yes” I replied. “What have you said?” “One sentence,” I told him. *The light of my life has gone out.*” He looked at me with the knowledge of our 30 years. “Don’t be melodramatic,” he said. “Besides, we’re Christians. I can’t be the Light of your life.” Then, he asked me to do him a favour: “It’s only normal to cry, but try also to be an ambassador of our joy.”

Epilogue

I tried to follow his advice. At the funeral, I wore a pink tie and delivered the eulogy in a strong and steady voice. As planned, I used our Carmelite friend's beautiful message and other people's tributes, instead of my own words, to describe him. I quoted the World Bank's Vice President for East Asia, writing from Hanoi: "In all my reflections there is one thing I can't remember. I can't ever recall Jean Daniel being anything less than kind. Was there anything he couldn't do and do well??" My British publisher, writing from South Africa: "We have spent only one evening with him, but he inhabits our emotions like a friend from a deep past." And his GP in Montreal: "Of all the patients I have had in my 17 years of practicing, he was the one that touched me most."

The next day, his mother and I took his ashes to France. I had visited the French Consulate to obtain a permit to do this; they had X-rayed the urn to make certain we were not carrying any contraband and sealed it impressively. I had worried that they would cover the polished Lebanese cedar container with ugly metal bands; instead, they wrapped it with ribbon carrying the colours of the French Republic and sealed the knot with melted red wax. It was as if the *insoumis* had been given the Legion d`Honneur, France`s highest civilian decoration.

For the service in France, I suggested that Jean Daniel's mother sit with her family while I joined some of the many friends who had come a long distance to be there. As we had been together in Montreal, I did not want to monopolize her back home. "Out of the question," my usually demure mother-in-law replied. "You will sit right next to me. And if you insist on being with your friends, I'll cross the aisle in front of the altar and join you on the other side." It was refreshing to hear this just a few days after returning to the Old World. Jean Daniel's older brother had told a 70 year old woman on the street about his death. "Did he have a family and children?" she asked. "Yes and no," he replied. "He was married, but to a man." She blanched. Trying to reassure her, Jean Pierre continued: "My mother is doing all right. They are returning this week with the ashes." The woman looked quizzical: "You mean, you receive this man at the house?" A few days later,

visiting the local's parish priest to begin the preparations for the Mass, I was asked, "And who are you, Monsieur?" "His companion," I said. (Out of respect for the man, I had decided not to say partner, or spouse, or husband, but even then it seemed I had been indelicate.) He choked mildly, even demonstratively: "His *companion*?" I ignored his discomfiture and started relating Jean Daniel`s life story. As I spoke, the priest seemed to soften and he tried to step back from his first reaction. "Monsieur, were you also a member of a religious community?" "No," I said, seeing no reason to lie, or let him off the hook. Even the obituary had to be amended before I put it into the local paper. "Don't mention that he will be buried at Mont Saint Michel," I was told. "People will be jealous: 'What's so special about him? Why him and not us?' they will ask."

Fortunately, Jean Daniel's spirit and advance arrangements prevailed. The church was full. I had chosen songs he had sung at Taizé in Burgundy and St.Gervais in Paris, while two close friends formed a choir with their children and sang a text of Saint Theresa of Lisieux. The presiding priest was the friend who had visited us in Montreal two weeks before Jean Daniel died. Four other priests, including one of his high school teachers, were also at the altar. I repeated the eulogy I delivered in Montreal, this time in French. And we played Fauré's *Cantique de Jean Racine*, as Jean Daniel had wanted. Several people came up afterwards to say that if all Masses were like this, they would start going to church again. Even the organist said how much he would have liked to know Jean Daniel, in view of the beauty of the celebration.

Afterwards, about fifty of us proceeded to Mont Saint Michel to pray in the small village church. We could not bury the urn immediately as the town council was doing construction work in the cemetery, so I suggested we reconvene on March 23rd, which would have been his 58th birthday. In the meantime, the urn would be locked away in a cupboard in the sacristy of the church. Just before we left, the son of Parisian friends, an engineering student in Lausanne who is down to earth and probably agnostic, asked the pastor whether he could re-open the cabinet so he could have a "last word" with Jean Daniel. Père André, who had already had a long day, patiently took a big ring of ancient keys from a deep drawer and went over to where the ashes were stored. The keys reminded me of the set Jean Daniel had hanging from his belt when he met me at the railway station in February 1979,

the keys to Mont Saint Michel. Now he was back – where our life together had started.

The next day, I was able to relax. I had been pensive, but also busy and distracted; this was the first time in nine months that I had nothing important to do. I had no idea how I would feel when I returned to the empty apartment in Montreal, but for the time being Jean Daniel was being proved right. “The worst will be over in 6-7 days," he told me. I thought this prediction was optimistic, and undoubtedly he was overstating the point to reassure me, but he wasn’t far off the mark; after all, he had often said, “I know you as if I had made you." I had not been sad or sullen for long periods, but I felt peaceful some days and amputated the next. Now I seemed to be emerging into a meadow. During my first couple of weeks in France, I avoided looking at some of my favourite pictures of him; but now, I was finding the courage to glance at them and they were filling me with unutterable joy. The day after the Mass in Saint Malo, I had lunch in the fishing port of Cancale with two close friends from Paris, seeing Mont Saint Michel in the distance from our table. Before going to the car, we joined arms and heads in the sea air and looked fondly towards the stone triangle on the horizon. We cried a little but did not have to say a word.

I started 2009 with Jean Daniel's mother in Saint Malo. We had spent seven straight weeks together and, while friends had invited me to celebrate the New Year in Angoulême, I did not want her to be alone. So, I made dinner-for-two, while Maman set out the crystal, silver and china and Jean Daniel chose the flowers. I had spotted bunches of young tulips sprayed with sparkle outside a florist shop and thought they looked festive. Suddenly, I heard a loud voice inside me say, "How ghastly!"; so I went inside and bought a more traditional arrangement.

The month in France had been good for me. I slept a lot – for 17 hours the first day – and spent time with people who loved Jean Daniel deeply and saw him at most once or twice a year. Seeing them reminded me how fortunate I had been to have him all to myself for 30 years. Some of his family’s flinty common sense was also rubbing off on me. Jean Daniel's maternal grandmother had lived with the family for 15 years after her husband died of cancer. Later, she developed

cancer as well, and told her daughter (my mother-in-law), "If I see you wearing black on the beach after I'm gone, I'll come back and tear the clothes right off your back."

Nor was the month entirely solemn. The day before the Mass for Jean Daniel, I spent the night at the Grand Seminary in Rennes (where about 30 young men were studying to be Catholic priests) and gave a lecture to their "moral economy" class. The professor left explicit guidance with the young friend who had invited me: "Please tell him to begin with the World Bank, move on to Africa, and then end with comments on the current financial crisis. Let him know that there will be two Haitians, a Vietnamese, and an African in the audience; so he can expect informed questions. And please tell him not to talk about his personal life." (The professor had read my book on Africa.) I laughed at the idea of my handing out tracts on sexual identity to all these vulnerable young men. If I'd known that a few days later the Pope would compare love between people of the same sex to global warming (of the wrong kind), I might have done so. But the professor was a very kind man and he invited me to stay in his presbytery in the Breton countryside if I ever needed to be alone.

Other people were kind and reflective, too. The neighbourhood florist gave me a 1961 photograph of Jean Daniel at a school pageant, dressed up as Snow White. My sister-in-law's boss told her that, after she heard me deliver the eulogy at church in a bright orange sweater, she wanted to come up to me and give me a big hug. A wine merchant friend apologized for not attending the Mass, as he had heard about it too late. I described the circumstances of Jean Daniel's final days. "We should all wish to have such a peaceful, rational, and noble death," I concluded. "No," he corrected me gently. "We should all wish to have his character."

My homecoming was just as sweet. A friend in Paris drove me to the airport, while others met me in Montreal and insisted I stay with them for two nights rather than face the empty apartment immediately. The hardest part was going to a grocery store and filling a shopping basket just for myself; my legs almost buckled beneath me. But, in general, I wasn’t sad. My heart felt full rather than broken; in the apartment, every object had a pleasant history that reminded me

of him. It was also where we had spent the last four months of our life, which were intense but cheerful at times as well. I was still digesting events, but I was proud of him. Proud of myself. Proud of our two families. Proud of our friends. And when I was tempted to be melancholy, I thought of his bravery, or imagined him telling me to pull myself together and do something more constructive.

In late January, in Washington, DC, three days before Barack Obama's Inauguration, we had a memorial Mass for Jean Daniel at St. Augustine's Catholic Church, where we had been parishioners for 18 years. The spirit of the parish was as strong as ever. The Deacon and his wife assembled 25 people to sing at the Mass. They invited our former choir director and our former organist to lead the music, enlisted one of the most gifted musicians in the parish to play the flute and saxophone, and arranged for our favourite soprano to sing Gounod's Ave Maria after Communion. (Someone to the far right passed me a paper tissue as Ruby Robertson sang her first note.) In the printed program, the Deacon inserted a reference to our "example of unending love."

I sang with the Choir that day and again the next morning at Sunday Mass. I had hoped to see a parishioner we used to sit behind, but feared she might have died. She came up to me afterwards to express her condolences. Now 84 and using a cane, she kissed me on both cheeks. "I am living on hope," I told her. "You have my permission," she said. We knew her as Penny, but her real name was Esperanza.

In February 2009, I went hiking and camping in Cuba for two weeks with a French group. I thought almost constantly of Jean Daniel, especially in the first few days as we trudged up muddy mountain paths in a driving rain that drenched us to the skin. I knew that life would still bring me pleasures, but rationally and calmly I wondered whether I wanted to experience them without him. I decided that not to do so would be a contradiction of his spirit and wishes. In Havana, I looked at the squat, rugged, asymmetrical facade of the late-baroque cathedral, dominating a tastefully restored square – through his eyes. I studied what made it special, noting what was missing (or had been plundered), and speculating about what had been intended and left out for want of time or money. "What will I do

without your historical knowledge and architectural eye?" I asked him before he died. "You will learn it," he answered.

This was my first old building without him. He had not wanted to go to Cuba, preferring to wait for a change of government. I pointed out that we were prepared to go to China, Burma, Laos, and Vietnam some day without imposing political conditions; but he was adamant, thinking of the oppression of artists, writers and gay men and women since the 1959 Revolution. All the same, he would have enjoyed the ironies I came across. The first local leader to resist the Spanish invasion, an Indian chief named Hatuey, was asked just before he was burnt at the stake whether he wanted to go to Heaven. "Are there any Christians there?" he asked. When he was told yes, he answered: "Then I would prefer not." [There is a painting of the scene in the National Art Gallery with the simple title, *No quiero ir en cielo.*] And a latter-day saint named Che Guevara – who is not usually remembered for irony or self-criticism – wrote to his parents in 1965 before going off to fight briefly in the Congo: "I feel the ribs of Rocinante [Don Quixote's horse] pressing against my legs."

In late March, I was back in France to bury Jean Daniel's ashes. It was a typical Spring morning in Brittany. As we drove along the coast from Saint Malo, the mists wrestled with the sun for attention, but by the time we were in the tiny cemetery at Mont Saint Michel, at about noon, the sun was out on top. About 30 of us clambered up the steep winding street past the souvenir stalls towards the small parish church, where the urn was sitting on a small table next to the altar. I was asked to do the First Reading, from Isaiah (65:17-21):

> I will create a new heaven and a new earth.
> The past will be forgotten and no longer trouble the spirit.
> I will create a Jerusalem of joy, a light-hearted people.
> There will no longer be the sound of crying or weeping.
> The newborn will not be carried off in a matter of days,
> And men will reach their old age; the youngest will be a hundred.
> The people will build houses and live in them,
> They will plant vines and eat the fruit.

After the Mass, I carried the urn to the graveyard, where Jean Daniel's brother Jean-Pierre and I unscrewed the bottom to take out the plastic bag containing the ashes (there was not enough room for the urn as well). I brought the bag of fine white powder to my lips, handed it to our friend Père André, and looked on as he covered the ashes with earth. Maman stood nobly off to the side, remembering how happy Jean Daniel was that his remains would return to Mont St. Michel. For most of us, the tears ended as we entered the bright light of the churchyard under the distant gaze of the Archangel high up atop the Abbey Church, warmed by the poetry of a place which had nurtured Jean Daniel's ideals of service and love and where he had always been at peace. Even the poignancy of his birthday cheered us slightly as we wished him, in simple faith or stubborn hopefulness, a new life.

In April, I spent three weeks on a cattle farm in Australia with the friend I had almost left Jean Daniel for, 20 years earlier. I was there with Jean Daniel's blessing. He had asked me what I intended to do in the first few months after he was gone and I told him about possibly going to New South Wales. His eyes brightened: "That will do you so much good." Geoffrey's partner worked in Sydney and joined him only on the weekends, so I was alone with Geoffrey during the week, helping him repair fences, dig trenches, move steers from one compound to another, and spread thousands of dung beetles (specially air-freighted in) on cowpats across the property. It was a salubrious change of pace. Early on, my hosts questioned the fact that I still had any religious faith or respect for the Roman Catholic Church; I did my best to give Geoffrey an honest and considered reply, but he still seemed sceptical.

At the end of my stay, he offered to take me to the coast for a couple of days to thank me for my help and give me a change of scene. On the Sunday evening, Geoffrey was in the living room trying to book us a hotel on the Internet, while his partner prepared dinner in the kitchen before flying back to Sydney. Suddenly, Geoffrey cried out: "This is not going to work. I can't find a room with twin beds!" I kept my peace (after all, we had shared a bed before and could do so again); but I assumed he was trying to reassure his partner. Eventually, we found a hotel with separate beds and I let Geoffrey take the larger one. Over breakfast, I asked him what the issue was. Was his partner jealous? "No," Geoffrey answered. "He's not possessive." I persisted. "Well, what were you worrying about?" His

face took on a serious look. "I was thinking about Jean Daniel. It's not even six months since he died." I burst into laughter. "Jean Daniel? He'd be the last person to object to our sleeping together!" Then, I couldn't resist some moralizing in reverse. "You know, Geoffrey, for someone who claims to have no religion, you have some awfully conventional notions about grieving." But, deep down, I was thrilled and touched that he had so much respect for Jean Daniel, and his hospitality and thoughtfulness warmed me the whole of the long flight back to Montreal.

The first week of May 2009, six months after Jean Daniel's death, was the first time I felt whole again. I no longer waited for the phone to ring or wondered why I hadn't been invited to dinner. I was alone, but the apartment was far from empty; everywhere I looked, there were objects that reminded me of our life together, his concern for me, and his sense of interior design. It was also a sacred space. It was there that we spent our final four months, rich in emotions of all kinds. I slept in the room where he died and would not trade it for any other imaginable place. But I was still fragile. One evening, flipping through television channels, I chanced upon the theme music of *Antiques Roadshow*; feeling my heart tighten, I switched off the TV and went into the living room, where the setting sun was lighting up his silver-framed picture at the far end of the room. Two small coincidences. I went to his closet, took down the chenille coverlet on which he had lain for two months, went back to the living room to stretch out on the sofa as he had done, and drew the light blanket, still smelling of him, over my face. I cried, but not for long, knowing he wouldn't have approved.

Like others who grieve, I would have appreciated some sign that he was at peace, but none came. I thought of him constantly during the day, but strangely at night he was absent from my dreams. Yet others were hearing from him. A few days after he died, the friend in south-eastern France who was tone deaf chanted the psalms so well at church (despite having a cold) that friends complimented him afterwards on the quality of his singing; none of them was aware of Jean Daniel's teasing prediction. The same week, a friend in Montreal saw him appear in a dream and asked her to let everyone know that he was all right. Two friends in Washington DC, usually sceptical about dreams and apparitions, had similar vivid experiences in the next few months. "Jean Daniel was radiant and reassuring," one

of them told me. The other described putting him over his shoulder to move him from his hospital bed to another room. "He was naked, as he was in the final months, and the sensation of holding him and feeling his skin was so strong that I woke up expecting to see him in the room." I was intrigued and, I have to admit, a little jealous.

In Saint Malo, walking along the seafront, I kept hoping a seagull would fly over me and shit on my head; but they steered well clear of me. Instead of signs, I suffered pangs of further separation. On February 19th, 2009, swimming in the Bay of Pigs, I lost our wedding rings which Jean Daniel had asked me to weld together into one; I grieved all over again for 24 hours. In Montreal, a friend to whom I had given Jean Daniel's miniature palm tree to look after while I was travelling, disposed of it, thinking I no longer wanted it. And one Sunday in early May, getting out of the car in front of church, I noticed that I had lost Jean Daniel's gold cross (the one my mother had given him 30 years before); the chain on which it had hung was dangling loosely around my neck. I searched the pavement, the floor of the car, and inside my shirt, to no avail. With a mixture of desperation and fatalism, I went into Mass hoping that it was still somewhere in my clothes. For the first time in my adult life, I prayed for something trivial and, standing up, felt something slight slipping down my pant leg. There it was, lying on the floor, between my feet. I picked it up, tucked it deep inside a jacket pocket, and almost whooped with delight. It was probably the result of the law of gravity rather than divine intercession, but I appreciated the reprieve all the same.

Since then, I have been living in the light of his character and love rather than the shadow of his death. In one of the letters Jean Daniel wrote to me from Mont Saint Michel in 1980, he informed me that my great uncle in Rome (who was a painter and illustrator for the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*) had died; for reasons that are unclear to me, my great aunt wrote to him first and I had the news second-hand. "Your aunt's suffering must be terrible," he wrote. "They loved each other so much, with a concern and generosity towards each other which I have rarely encountered, 'forming just one flesh,' as the Book of Genesis says. I share your sadness. I hope that in death he can contemplate beauties much greater than those he enjoyed on earth and that drove him all his life to draw and make colours sing. I would like him to become the painter of God and the angels. Zio Otto had a

beautiful soul, which I felt close to during our final moments in his studio. I discovered in him the greatness of the Calderisis that I love in you: there was nothing blurred or tepid in his canvasses, no, just life grasped around the waist, full of vigour, movement, sunshine, truth, clarity, and lots of love." He could have been describing himself.

Quoting him on a wide range of subjects in this small book may make him sound opinionated; but he was not. Most of what I have recounted was expressed to me in private. In groups, he was discreet and observant rather than pushing himself to the fore. Even with friends, he did not want to shine in conversation or be remembered for a *bon mot*. He was never interested in dominating a discussion or being proved right. More typically, he would listen carefully to what others had to say and, given an opening, tell an amusing story or describe a beautiful person we had come across in our travels. He lived up to John Ruskin's ideal – and for that matter, Christ's teaching: he was cruel to no one. More than that, he was comfortable with everyone, except those who "farted higher than their ass-hole." (The French version, *ceux qui pêtent au dessus de leur trou*, sounded much tamer on his lips.)

He could have been a brilliant – even famous – engineer, doctor, painter, carpenter, art restorer, couturier, or chef; but he never looked back or expressed regrets about not having a profession. He was where he wanted to be, in a warm and loving relationship he was proud of, a pure person, purposeful yet without ambition, capable of looking after himself but much more interested in looking after his friends. He left the world with little more in the way of material possessions than when he entered it. I insisted on putting our major assets (house, car, and bank account) in both our names and kept referring to "our" money even though he drew a small salary only in the few years that he was formally our housekeeper. He appreciated my delicacy, and while he took great pleasure in studying, acquiring and displaying fine objects, his happiness did not depend on material possessions. If he was attached to anything, it was to his garden. As another victim of ALS wrote in 2002, "Anyone who's spent time on her knees in a berry patch or flower bed comes to see this attention to small things as a form of prayer, a way of vanishing, for one sweet hour, into whatever crumb of creation we

are privileged to take into our hands." (Philip Simmons, Learning to Fall: The *Blessings of an Imperfect Life*, Bantam Books, New York, 2002, p. 90)

My grief now comes in ripples. It was difficult for me to write the description of Jean Daniel's final minutes in the last chapter, but by and large I try hard not to feel sorry for myself or for him. C.S Lewis thought that Christians are compelled to believe that God is their true Beloved. "That is why bereavement is in some ways easier for the unbeliever than for us. He can storm and rage and shake his fist at the universe, and (if he is a genius) write poems like Housman's or Hardy's. But we, at our lowest ebb, when the least effort seems too much for us, must begin to attempt what seem impossibilities." (*The Four Loves,* p. 191) I am somewhere in between, comforted by hope rather than faith and feeling Jean Daniel still living in me. I appreciate beautiful things more intensely now, as if I were seeing them through his eyes as well as mine, or had to savour them for both of us.

Most of all, I know how fortunate we were. Our greatest consolation was the 30 rich years we spent together. Unlike my twin brother and his wife (whom we thought about each time we were tempted to feel sorry for ourselves), we had the time to appreciate that life anew and prepare for its end. Jean Daniel could have died more painfully (of bone cancer, for example) or more abruptly (in a car accident), lost his mental capacities (through Alzheimer's Disease), lingered in a coma or been bed-ridden for years. He died at home rather than in a hospital, surrounded by family and friends. We had the support of a magnificent public health system and a medical team that Hippocrates would have been proud of. (In France, Jean Daniel would have been obliged to spend his last two months in a clinic, as I would not have been allowed to administer his morphine during the night.) He lived up to Seneca's overstatement: "There's nothing so very great about living – all your slaves and all your animals do it. What is, however, a great thing is to die in a manner which is honourable, enlightened, and courageous" (Letter LXXVII, page 92). He did not have to depend on me or others for very long; he used his wheelchair only three or four times. He lived for only eight months after his diagnosis, just long enough for us to prepare for the inevitable, just short enough for the vigil not to feel like torture.

To honour his wishes and his love, I engage in small rituals. I make my bed first thing in the morning, as he suspected that I would put it off altogether, once caught up in the day's events. Looking around our room in his final days, he said that he would like to come back and see it "in its proper state," i.e., without the hospital bed. I don't expect him to visit, but I keep it tidy just in case. When I leave the apartment, I hang up my clothes or, if in a hurry, stash them in a walk-in closet rather than leave them on the furniture or floor. I promised him that I would always sit down for a proper breakfast or lunch (my mother-in-law insisted on this too, so I am under a double obligation). As a result, I can never grab a bite at the kitchen counter without a sense of betraying him slightly. Conversely, each time I set the table for a meal, I feel I am doing both of us a favour. When I iron clothes, I recall how my preference for all-cotton shirts caused him extra effort over the years. And, now and then, against all the dictates of rationality and common sense, I kiss his pillow at night when I turn off the lights.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds;
Or bends, with the remover to remove;
Oh no! It is an ever-fixéd mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

William Shakespeare

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