

MEETING WILLIAM

by Raymond L. Balogh, Jr.



Welcome, William Joseph. So glad you could join us. Barely an hour ago I paused at the doorway of your hospital room and smiled at your beautiful mother. She returned an exhausted smile, pointed past the foot of her bed, and said merely, “He’s over there.”

My plan was to stride over to your little bassinet, tower over you, make my face to shine upon you, and beknight you as the blessed grandchild who would, for years to come, look to me as the awesome and mighty source of knowledge, wisdom, and inspiration.

But I couldn’t do it.

From my first step, I was compelled to pad softly, as though walking on holy ground. My throat tightened, and I found myself unable to speak. I could only stare at you in silence, overwhelmed by a wondrous reverence for the miniature wonderfully and purposefully made marvel that you are.

I hesitated a long time before I ventured to cup your tiny feet in my fingers, and I felt as though I were reading a breathtaking masterpiece personally signed by God.

You were only three hours old. I had never interacted with a human being that new, not even when your mother was born (newborn procedures were different back then).

I’ve been watching you since your father placed you in my arms a little while ago. You’ve made a half dozen different faces, your eyes have flitted beneath your eyelids (and I wonder what you’re dreaming), and down below I can feel the gentle rumblings of you digesting your first meal. And I find myself riveted, realizing that everything about you works without any conscious effort on your part.

I’ll let you in on something, William. The past few days I have bristled in silent annoyance at the two most-repeated comments from family, friends, and co-workers:

First, “Congratulations, Grandpa!” I realize this is a customary shibboleth on such occasions, and I know they mean well, so I simply smile and say “Thank you.”

But I've done nothing to merit the kudos, except contribute a small portion of your molecular ancestry.

Second, "How do you feel, Grandpa?" This one is particularly exasperating, and I don't answer, simply because I don't know. I feel, well, everything. But all those emotions are frozen in a block of awe, an awe confirmed here in this chair.

But, yeah, the "Grandpa" thing really gets me. I profoundly regret being irrevocably vaulted into the vintage that role implies with so many partially filled pages on my life's ledger. I look back at the decades that have wisped by and feel the stab of years wasted in sloth and disobedience.

Then I study you and absorb your serenity, and those pangs are driven to the periphery of my soul. And I know, when they return, they won't be nearly as sharp as they were before I met you.

So you see, little boy? Already you've helped me, and I'm grateful.

And again, you did it without even trying. In fact, none of your immeasurable value has come from anything you've done; it's all from your being. And I pray, precious, precious child, that you will always carry with you the front-burner realization that you are suffused with that intractable value as a human being made in the image of our Creator.

(I know: "shibboleth," "periphery," "suffused," "intractable." I can't wait to help you discover that glorious man-made wonder called "the dictionary").

In a few minutes, your dad will retrieve you for another observation session with the doctor on call.

So, just one more thing, dear grandson.

When your mom was little, I used to take her various places, and I would always prime her expectations with, "Lindsey, this will be great!" I told her that most recently at her wedding reception.

I'm hoping to stick around long enough to be your travel buddy, to go on adventures and explore places that exist only in our entwined imaginations.

Well, you can't speak in full sentences yet, you've never seen me (though I don't begrudge you the extended nap), and I doubt I could pick you out of a lineup of neonates.

But I can feel it.

Yeah, you and me, kid. This will be great.