

The *Metaxu* Between Christ and Orpheus, Life and Death

An Interview with Therese Schroeder-Sheker

Michael Martin



WHEN THERESE SCHROEDER-SHEKER WAS AN UNDERGRADUATE music student working as an orderly in a geriatric nursing home, she saw at firsthand how death in contemporary culture is outsourced, how the elderly and declining among us are warehoused in containment environments until finally sent to the ultimate salvage facility. She knew this way of going about things was wrong (I think, somewhere within us, we all do), yet she didn't possess an answer until the day when she found herself present to the death of an elderly (and often cantankerous) emphysema patient. Not exactly knowing what to do, she nevertheless did what she knew: she held the man and she sang. Inspired by the moment and by the death that unfolded before her, she sang the entire *Mass of the Angels*, the *Adoro te devote* of Thomas Aquinas, the *Ubi Caritas*, the *Salve Regina*, and the *Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. In this combined moment of song and prayer, Schroeder-Sheker not only helped a fellow human being enter the spiritual world, she also discerned her vocation. That is, *she heard a call*. Or, more accurately, one of the three calls that have shaped her vocation. The first, she tells me, was the Eucharist, the second was the dying man, and the third was harp.

Born in Detroit to immigrant parents (her mother was from Ireland and her father from Malta), Schroeder-Sheker was initially an art major, but changed to music when a sensitive Jesuit professor at Denver's Regis College recognized she had a wonderful ear for music and encouraged her to pursue it as a course of study. She studied piano, woodwinds, and composition, but after completing her baccalaureate and spending time in Europe, she came home and commissioned her first harp. At the age of twenty-six she switched from piano to harp as her primary instrument (to which she subsequently added the psaltery and voice). Three years later, she made her debut at Carnegie Hall as a harpist and singer.

Schroeder-Sheker's recordings (under the Windham Hill and Celestial Harmonies labels among others) and touring schedule supported her bi-vocation in

what she eventually termed *music-thanatology*, the art of assisting the dying through music, and to this end she founded The Chalice of Repose Project, the first music-thanatology organization in the world.

Schroeder-Sheker's clinical work is deeply rooted in Cluniac spirituality, though her grounding in medieval music and spirituality should not be understood as academic or theoretical in the least. Indeed, her work's vitality is marked



by an *absolute attentiveness to the present moment*, be it in life or death, which is what gives such immediacy and vitality to her project.

I first encountered Schroeder-Sheker's work at least twenty-five years ago when my wife bought a CD from Celestial Harmonies that featured her beautiful track "Rosa Mystica," a haunting musical prayer featuring her transcendent contralto accompanied by psaltery and bells. I fell in love with that piece, that voice. A few years later when I was working as a Waldorf teacher, I invited psychologist Robert Sardello to give a talk at a conference and in talking to him I learned about his work as a faculty member at The Chalice of Repose Project; he told me

a great deal about Therese's clinical work. Then, three years ago I began communicating with Therese when she contacted my publisher after reading one of my books. So, it's safe to say that she has inhabited my soul for a good long while. We conducted this interview over the course of a few weeks, via mail and telephone.



MM: So, Therese, when I think of your work, I can't help but think of you as a kind of Orpheus figure, but I also know you well enough to know that this would make you wince. Can you speak to your roots? Whether mythic or sacramental or both? Can you say something about your spiritual formation? What individuals or elements were influential to you as a young person emerging into the larger professional world? And, after four-plus decades of career and vocation, has any of that early influence remained? Sustained work and travel, sustained scholarship, and cumulative life experience have allowed you to encounter many different voices and cultures. How has diversity shaped you? As a contemplative, a musician and composer, a writer?

TSS: Well, one Orphic element that I do know inwardly is the grief that comes with the loss of the Beloved. Thankfully, the transformative possibilities that arise from going all the way through (not around) that kind of loss are vast. Eventually, one can choose a life of faithfulness and fine-tuning. Those are Orphic themes and signatures. Other than that, I'm basically a gal from Motown.

I was born in Detroit yet raised in Chicago, and my earliest memories of beauty are intrinsically tied up with Carmel. From my mother I received

the power of the word, whether written, spoken or sung. She also brought me to the Carmelites in Des Plaines, and even at the age of eight, I was sort of *pierced* with the beauty of Carmelite monastic culture and monastic liturgy. On top of that, my mom encouraged and supported the love of reading. She was resourceful and subversive about the need to resist television, so books and reading were her strongest antidote. From my father I received a gift of equal creativity and vitality. He thought imaginatively, spoke in pictures, and said repeatedly: You can do *anything* if you *love* it. He didn't suggest contingencies such as: you can do something once you're an adult... or, when you get married you can... or, after you get your degree you can... This manner of speech was not part of his makeup. Nor did he point to the exterior conventional markers that seem to convey institutional validation or imply some kind of collective authority, but rather, he taught about the transformative power of love which is something one can nurture and generate within, regardless of circumstances. The main thing to relay is that he was a scientist, fully capable of data analysis, he was a walking slide rule, yet he functioned imaginatively.

For instance: as a girl, I had a terrible time with math and assumed that this must mean that I was stupid or

deficient. My dad came home from the office one day and saw me struggling at the table where I was frowning and sputtering over fractions. “Honey, I see what the problem is! You don’t love it. Math is a game, only a game. Let me help. I can show you how to love it...” He then proceeded to translate all mathematical abstractions into living images and the whole entangled mess unraveled into a shimmering ribbon that was a source of joy and elegance. *Boom*. Overnight—D-minus pouty-face to A-minus gleam.

My sense of things is that the parental inheritance I received was simply perfect for who or what or how or why it is that I breathe and live. These were the very currents I truly needed to sail the vessel that was to become not just life but my particular life, so I feel gratitude and awe for their attunement, their insights and intuitions.

I’ve been blessed, too, with immeasurably knowledgeable, generous, and eagle-eyed teachers. In high school, the Madams of the Sacred Heart thought outside of the box, had special insights into my gaps and vulnerabilities, and created a learning contract which allowed me to take the train to the Loop in Chicago every Friday morning for a semester during senior year. I would visit the Art Institute and attend Mass at a small inner city church that had a magnificent *schola cantorum* and I was required to read great literature every week. I would then write a weekly essay about the painters encountered and the music experienced, and a character in Hawthorne or Dostoyevsky or Gide. The Sisters taught a quiet girl much

independence, and from them I learned to risk articulating and to risk new forms of scholarship and life. I flourished because of these women. After high school, in college, both Robert Morton at the Art Institute of Chicago and Father Ed Maginnis at Regis in Denver helped me profoundly, encouraging me in and toward music. “*You can hear!*” Father Maginnis said, whipping off his glasses, after his life-changing Bartok lecture had left me both elevated and shriven.

My teachers never rubber-stamped a single assignment; they believed in me and respected their students enough to ask the most of them rather than the least from them. Perhaps it was the tail end of the era in which teachers were really allowed to or mandated to teach deeply and thoroughly. I remember receiving a paper back from Valerie Lagorio at Iowa City. It is no joke to say that every single page was littered with red marks and her margin annotations, pointing out errors or places where I could improve. The awe, respect, and love I experienced that an educator would go so far out of the way to help someone of uncertain future to learn and progress! My composition masters Evan Copley and Normand Lockwood were also indefatigable in their constructive feedback, and each asked much of all their students. From their integrity, discipline and profundity, I understood that pedagogy can be a spirituality, a higher calling, not merely employment security.

In that way, it seems to me that educators and gardeners have much in common. They both nurture growth, strength and vitality through multi-

ple successive stages, from the preparation of the soil to the planting, germination, blossoming and ripening, and that takes nothing less than labor and love. Today, when higher education is evaluated on the business model, where students are consumers, pedagogy has lost ground. It seems to me that mediocrity is normative for its short-sighted preference for safety over excellence. But that is a lament that is shared by many, not something unique to me.

Oh! And the Christian hermeticist path of Tomberg shows up here. He said that the hermeticist can choose to learn from everything and everyone and that has steered me through thick and thin. Almost everyone I have ever met has been a teacher, whether inadvertent or formal, to the extent that they stood for something, and to the extent that authenticity was present in our encounters.

MM: Can you give simple examples of the inadvertent mentors Therese?

TSS: Happily. I had a college roommate who called me out on some thoughtless complaining I was hiding behind during an hour of personal blathering. Barbara's intensity and accuracy served as formatively (for me) as any course in which we could enroll. *Grow up!* She taught me the importance of personal responsibility and accountability, yet she did it with love. Likewise, as a young woman, I was hired by a family to be the personal aid for a fellow the same age as I who was losing everything to multiple sclerosis. There he was, with the degenerative process taking hold, and he had to ask me to listen more care-

fully to him, to his instructions and requests. What a gift. Big wake-up call! I was humbled and shaken, and his words steered me to something profound about the integrity possible in the art of listening and responding, with presence of being, and in work, the quality of work, if it is taken up as a spirituality. All the stirrings and discernment processes of vocation were trying to germinate in this period.

Another one (*gulp*, my face is red). This took place in England. A woman who was a consummate artist and a master of Bach had a home that was sheer sanctuary. Beauty, beauty, beauty. She was perhaps twenty five years my senior and approached me with a made-in-heaven opportunity. I was twenty-five; it was after a period I had in Oxford, and I was preparing to attend seminars and master classes on 20th-century concerto literature in Chichester. Margaret she said that I could live rent free in a beautiful little hermitage she had if I was willing to do a modest amount of work. Would I please water her rose garden faithfully and vacuum this one rug in the entry way off of the garden, vacuum it as often as needed? If so, I could live in a place of heartbreaking beauty and quiet, and have the majority of my time entirely freed up to learn the new music and the scores assigned for the master classes. Um, imagine my shame when I saw her one day making up for the places on the floor and the roses in the garden that had been so hastily overlooked by that pre-occupied Therese. Margaret was contained, earnest, and sound. *"Paying attention to the details close to home and hearth will teach you how to pay*

attention to the details of any concerto. There is no difference between the beauties or work of the two." This woman set me right, yet my cheeks were burning. To this day, I tune the harp and make my home the same way, the Margaret way.

Again, all three of these examples happened in my early adulthood, when you're still pliable enough to change and grow. All three examples concern layers of honor and dignity, the word-is-your-bond sort of thing, as well as soul, listening and responding with soul. These people kindly taught me that if you care at all, then the how of everything actually matters. Whether parents, children, friends, formal instructors, strangers in the street, chance encounters, or the fragrant plant nearby, all have been mentors. My gratitude for each is great. We *can* choose to learn from everything and everyone, especially the blows of life, and that realization has been transformative, metanoic, and kenotic. As a side bar, as a natural extension of the days in that English rose garden, may I say that today, I tend my own little garden, a memorial garden, and have a rose or lily or perennial or tree planted in honor of each of these individuals recollected today and many others who remain unnamed (during this conversation). I water their areas in joy by hand in the early mornings, and remember them, and listen to them still. I think it is possible to bridge heaven and earth, and to sustain a dialogue across time, after all, we have been taught and I do experience that love is stronger than death. Love bridges worlds. And the prayer of gratitude seems to bear a lot of fruit.

MM: What about von Balthasar and de Chardin? Are they in the garden too?

TSS: You bet. Everyone who has already made their *transitus*, and many across time who have shaped and formed me via the word, the book. You'll find them right along with Mom, Dad, my Maltese Grandma, all my music professors, priests, doctors, physicists, a dozen friends, you'll find Boethius, Mechtild, Bach, Finzi... it is a large and wonderful congregation that spans many time periods and cultures. Maybe it is becoming a metaphysical chapel without walls. In any event, gardening is (at least for me) alchemical and sacramental.

MM: I understand, and know that I am a better father, husband, teacher and person when I can bring inside work and work out in Nature into balance. It seems that you don't separate life from work, or music from prayer, or clinical care from vocation. They are all interconnected. So let me start with music. The music you have composed and recorded—and the Catholic culture in which you were raised—I hear your connections to Tradition in the music you embody, and yet you go beyond. Seamlessly. Distinctly. Can you say something more about Catholic sensibilities, or about the composers who have been formative for you, or about your relationship to harp or voice?

TSS: That's a big swath. Let me try. After we left Detroit and moved to Des Plaines, I attended Mass every day of my life, summer and winter, from

second grade to eighth grade graduation, because I could walk to Mass, needed no parental driving. I wanted to do this; no one pushed it. It was lovely to get up early, make tea for my dad, and then walk to Mass before school. I sang in the parish choir for daily mass and loved it, and my mom drove me to Carmel many weekends, so the beauty of monastic liturgy gradually became metabolized. It sealed me. You must know what this means. You literally breathe it in, breathe and phrase the exact text and content. Translated, this means (among many other things) that every fiber of being was not only being sculpted in music, but raised inside modality, modal music. (Modal music is very nuanced toward degrees of light and dark, and is very sensitively colored). The chant literature at that time was pre-Vatican II, and reflected the Latin texts, yet remained largely unmetered. The chant literature I heard was suffused in timelessness, this sense of the eternal was palpable in the shape of the melody and the meaning of the texts. In addition, the transition from being someone who attended Mass to someone who became Eucharistic took place early on, and deeply. I remain a Eucharistic person, and note that that can be very different from one's relationship to an institution. I never confused the two realities. I mean, I don't conflate the direct contact intimacy with Christ that is so possible in prayer with the relationship one might have to a large impersonal and structured institution.

MM: But your composition teachers. Surely they asked you to become

informed by and conversant with tonality, and polytonality, and atonality, and many schools of composition?

TSS: Yes. Every period from antiquity to the 20th century. And, thankfully, some of the British composers unashamedly explored modality and polymodality even after Schoenberg, not as a throwback, but as an advanced form of recollection. As a lover of music, someone who is always still learning from the nature and significance of music, I listen to music from radically different time periods and cultures, written tradition and oral tradition, and approach them with few preconceived notions. I cannot say enough for Bach, Mahler, Scriabin and Finzi. The same is true for the Bulgarian choirs and the music of Zimbabwe.

As a performer, I have always found myself personally moved, startled and changed by the possibilities arising from the margins and edges, from the two farthest shores—ancient and modern. Something from ancient Greece is at times as compelling to me as an Olivier Messiaen or a Paul Hindemith. But that being said: I don't want to live on the planet without Bach. Musically, to me, Bach is in equal parts terrestrial and cosmic, something like the center as well as the periphery, the heart as well as the North, South, East and West of body, soul and spirit. He developed his horizontality as deeply as his verticality, and I have never stopped learning from him. And of course, I love the contemporary metaphysical minimalists: Arvo Pärt and Henryk Górecki. They allow you to breathe and expand while deepening, and in spiritual

terms, I think of them as the masters of recollection.

MM: You seem at ease with the university-trained composers. Did you simply skip the music of the 60's and 70's? Popular music? What happened?

TSS: Heavens no. Sorry. Everything is interconnected. For a single year of my life, our family lived in Los Angeles because my scientist father had a contract there. This was the only opportunity I ever had in youth to attend a public school, and it was amazing. I learned much that wasn't necessarily about curriculum but that was vital. So there we were in southern California, the place my mother called the den of iniquity. The issue of *Life* magazine had come off the press with featured stories about Haight Ashbury, and my mother was beside herself with worry.

Another family with whom our family was very close also moved to the same area the very same year. Both of our fathers had accepted transfers. Their son Andrew and I were the same age, and he went to Fullerton High while I attended Buena Park High. For a long time, in youth, it seems that songs were more important than bread. I don't even remember a single meal or any food from age fourteen to eighteen, but I do remember the songs, the music.

My friend Andrew Stucker was a wonderful singer and instrumentalist, and generous as well as kind. He used to come over every week and show me these strange, new, expressive, haunting and wistful songs with soulful texts and images. Andrew heard songs performed by artists who were only a

bit older than we were, from the same school, or one school over, and he sang Steve Gillette, Steve Noonan, Jackson Browne and others effortlessly. Andrew introduced me to Gillette's "Darcy Farrow" and Browne's "Shadow Dream Song," Noonan's "Buy for Me the Rain," and chord changes and string tunings that John Primo was showing others. Andrew faithfully learned them all, and was kind enough to bring them to me, since my own mom wasn't keen on my going to this place that was becoming legendary, The Troubadour in West Hollywood. At the time, the power of the singer-songwriter and the power of self-accompanied song were both fresh, startling, hadn't yet become commercial enterprises nor an industry, and the music these individuals risked in unsullied youth could move mountains.

Exactly 365 days after arriving, our family left California and returned to Chicago, so I didn't see Andrew again for a little bit, till the Denver years. By then, the world had Joni Mitchell and, frankly, she was a life-formative force, a new model, the singer-songwriter-multi-instrumentalist, with perfect melodies, perfect pitch, and absolute mastery of both word and image. It was Andrew who brought me as a guest to attend Fr. McGinnis's lecture on Bela Bartok, in the spring of 1971. A life-changing morning! Years later, Andrew went on to serve as a top executive at Sony, and I wound up at Windham Hill, with harp and medieval hymnody and troubadour song together in one creature. I came to Windham Hill because of Will Ackerman; he had received a copy of my first record, *Celebrant*, from my men-

tor Prof. Valerie Lagorio, the one from Iowa City, who was Will Ackerman's Auntie Val! An artist's artist, Will asked me to grow, to sing, and to perform some of my own compositions in addition to the medieval and Marian repertoire that was first nature. I owe worlds to Will. Not everyone realizes this, but Will too is a wordsmith of staggering capacity. The uncanny thing is that Windham Hill has been bought and sold several times since then, and now we come full circle, as a significant part of my catalogue is at Sony.

Years later, as an artist and scholar, I would study and metabolize the works of the Renaissance master Marsilio Ficino, who understood Plato *and* the healing nature of the self-accompanied song. So it is that we discover and rediscover lineage, in its deepest and broadest sense, always emerging like a fresh spring, and perennially going underground again whenever the waters become muddied or too compromised. After every period of desiccation, it re-emerges again when and where the time is right: usually miles and light-years away.

MM: Therese, I didn't know a thing about these connections. So there you were in the midst of flower power, and you're a person who has been very influenced by Eastern Orthodoxy, so far from The Troubadour. How and why and when did that happen?

TSS: Perhaps by virtue of a guardian angel, and in 1989 or 1990 or thereabouts. I was teaching at St. Thomas Theological Seminary in Denver, and while browsing in the bookstore,

found Steven Bingham's translation of Paul Evdokimov's unusually wide theology of beauty, *The Art of the Icon*. Life-changing! I drank in his *philokalic* spirit word for word and have continued to walk with him to this day. One of the most precious ideas I received from Evdokimov is that of his vision of an *interiorized monasticism*. Very modern and urgent. Parallel to reading Evdokimov, St. John of the Ladder (or John Climacus) arrived, as well as Evagrius, and because I was concertizing so much in Europe, I travelled to monasteries in every country. I became familiar with Chevetogne in Belgium, and this led directly to Lev Gillet, and then to Elizabeth Behr-Sigel. With the holy nudging of Barbara Newman at Northwestern, I was led to Anthony Bloom and to our modern day saint, St. Seraphim of Sarov, as well as the remarkable Julia de Beausobre from whom I never cease to learn.

MM: That's the gift of these lights. They lead us onward and inward, yet connected to all cultural ferment. None of them encouraged us to stay cocooned in one bunkered current, but to extend ourselves into large spiritual families. Perhaps because of the war? So, you have a theological formation and a spiritual vocation in Beauty. But who came first in your life? Von Balthasar or Evdokimov?

TSS: Evdokimov. And so, when I discovered von Balthasar's 7-volume monument *The Glory of the Lord* shortly thereafter, with his articulation of Beauty as a Transcendental, the entire theology of beauty became an inexhaustible well, a guiding star, a

raison d'être. It was so substantive that it could be lived in music, in word, in silence, in song, in writing, teaching, gesture, clinical care, homemaking, gardening, personal relationship, liturgy, medicine, business. It seems that the applications and extensions of this path could only be thwarted or limited by our lovelessness, our ignorance, or our lack of imagination. So there we are: *exposed*. Excuse me, Michael, I know this is an interview, and you're the one asking the questions, but may I divert for a moment? Do you know von Balthasar's *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*? I have nothing even similar to it in any other volume of my library. We know that von Balthasar came to his priestly vocation through his love of literature, but he brought the wholly agapeic and philokalic together in the way he read—meditatively—the literary *oeuvre* of Georges Bernanos. The way he entered Bernanos seems to me to be the exact antidote to the form or school of literary criticism that you often decry as deadly. The kind that uses an author to display one's own reconstruction deconstruction or post construction theories, and advances in a merciless and competitive vein. Am I off in what it is you resist in contemporary literary criticism? And do you know of any other theologian writers other than von Balthasar who served literature with equal depth?

MM: Well...Guardini, I suppose (especially his meditations on Rilke)—does Heidegger count? (I can't help but think of him as a kind of theologian outside of theology. But then I wander into the poet-theologians—Blake, Coleridge, even Rilke

(I'd also include Eleanor Farjeon and the Metaphysical Poets). So maybe I don't have an easy time keeping everybody in line! But von Balthasar... he certainly recalibrated the way academic theologians think about aesthetics.

But now we're skating toward the saints and mystics, and I know you love them, but we haven't gotten to your work with the dying: music-thanatology. Before we go to either, can you identify some of the major contemporary voices that have been so formative for you in spirituality? Or the women of spirit across time?

TSS: Yes, happily. Contemporary: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner specifically on death and dying, Henri di Lubac, Romano Guardini, Thomas Merton, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Emil Bock, Valentin Tomberg. *Vox Feminae*: Mechtild of Hackeborn, Julia de Beausobre, Dorothy Day, Mary C. Fullerson, Gitta Mallasz, Joa Bolendas, Noor Inayat Khan, and Sophie Scholl. I don't begin to list the wealth of women scholars and theologians, or the Jungians, those capable of archetypal thought, or the alchemists—or the poets! Of which there are many, and I have taught them in our Chalice curricula too—Another installment is absolutely in order.

MM: You're right. We have enough material for a year-long dialogue, and it's exciting that we share a love of some of the same writers. (We may, in fact, need another lifetime or two!) I just finished reading Gitta Mallasz's *Budaliget 1943: Talking with Angels*, and would love to ask you how you integrated her into your own life and

thought. Can we take all this up on a part two in the near future? I don't want to close today's conversation without visiting your life work, the Chalice of Repose Project and the practice of music-thanatology. I realize that this last topic alone warrants an entire dialogue, but can you say something brief here? To tide us over for something more comprehensive in the near future?

TSS: I really want to discuss Mallasz with you, but for now I'll try to go to our work with the dying. Music-thanatology has a forty-six year history, and is entirely devoted to the loving care of the physical and spiritual needs of the dying with prescriptive music. Since 1992, it has been integrated into hospital (and hospice) medical systems *as a medical modality* and has been offered as a standard component of end-of-life supportive care in centers of excellence which feature palliative medicine. The work I founded is neither a talk therapy, a form of chaplaincy, a behavioral science, a distraction therapy, bedside entertainment nor is it a form of the profession of music therapy. It is a profession with a unique content, curriculum, lexicon, history, methodology and specific clinical foci. These are things that tend to elude people until they have authentic reason witness it or participate with another.

Music-thanatology integrates the marriage of music, medicine, and spirituality into one practical, clinical whole; the work is scientific and evidence-based and yet has a pastoral center. Music-thanatology is entirely devoted to the needs of the dying and by extension, to the loved ones of

those who are actively dying. The work is always delivered live, at the bedside, and employs voice and harp. At the beginning of this conversation, you asked about liminality, that condition of betwixt and between, characterized by role reversals and *communitas* rather than community. The dying person for whom we provide the music-thanatology vigil is truly liminal, is male *or* female, is anywhere from newborn infant to centenarian, and is every race, color, creed and socio-economic background.

The efficacy of prescriptive music is not dependent upon the patient's ability to hear, nor does the patient need to be a member of any faith community for the prescriptive music to have agency. We serve the humanist realist as often as we serve Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist patients precisely because of the moral foundation of medicine—*inestimable value of every single human being*. The spiritual inspiration for music-thanatology is monastic medicine, specifically as it was pioneered at (Benedictine) Cluny in the 11th century: embedded in music! The contemporary medical inspiration for the work is internal medicine and oncology.

These several sentences might seem abstract or conceptual to someone who has not experienced death, but those who work in end-of-life care will recognize the phrases I just used because they arise from having been with thousands of people on the last day or hour of life. I would say that music-thanatology presents a work that is at once profession and vocation. It requires that we be observer-participants rather than merely observers or technicians, and is some

of the most intimate human-making material one can ever choose. I have never known anyone to be able to sustain music-thanatology clinical practice without a genuine daily reflective spiritual praxis, and my colleagues and I witness and attend every kind of death imaginable. Yes, some deaths are anguished, and some are the opposite, making palpable a peace that is pervasive and sacred for all involved.

You know, Michael, I can't close this picture without returning in gratitude to my mother and father. When my mother instilled in me the love of reading, and my father instilled in me the courage to climb any mountain in the energetics of love, they formed me in a particular attitude towards choice and freedom. This attitude has something to do with the radiance of assent and nothing to do with that which is short, swift, or easy. The holy word "yes" strikes me as something that permeates the heart, then the skin and bones, thoughts and volition, and eclipses that escape route that starts with the word "but." It never occurred

to me that a harpist couldn't or shouldn't read or comprehend theology or medicine, or tackle clinical documentation or research design. These were not "off limits" to a harpist, simply because our day and era place end of life suffering in a context that tries to speak the language of medical science rather than music and resonance.

In the end, I am still stymied over the fact that I have at times accepted positions as varied as distinguished theologian of the year and or presented grand rounds at centers of medical excellence. This is not the norm for a harpist, a medievalist, or a gardener, but I have been helped by almost everyone I have ever met. My folks, our friends and loved ones, our colleagues, the sacred Tradition, musical artistry, intellectual and cultural vigor and Nature all show that roots and wings can germinate via love and both can be steered by grace. I would not have had the language for any of this if it weren't for those many who have gone on before us. Till we meet again?

