

The Dash between the Dates: *A Chronicle of My First Seventy Years*

Chris Alan Foreman

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my quartet of grandchildren: Lorenzo Hugo, Gia Carmela, Genevieve Azalie-Marie, and Zofia Izabela Franciszka, all of whom may live into the twenty-second century and inhabit a world unimaginable to me. My blessing abides upon each of you.

After seven decades in the world, I have concluded that the secret ingredient of life is JOY. Without it, there is nothing. With it, there is everything.

Remember, joy is not a virtue you can strive to attain. It is not an emotion you can conjure through effort. Joy is a contented trust in the goodness of God. It is that fruit of the Spirit that springs forth when “what you want to do” corresponds with “what you ought to do”; that is, when the *delight* of your heart aligns with your *duty* to God. Joy will abound as you live out the prayer, “May Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In childhood I sang, “Joy is the flag that is flown from the castle of my heart when the king is in residence there.” My dear grandchildren, raise aloft your flag of joy.

Your Gwampa Chris
December 24, 2019

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Preface

On the Wednesday following Mother's Day, 2019, I drove across the San Mateo Bridge into Hayward, California. As I passed through the gate of Holy Sepulture Cemetery, a sculpture of Archangel Michael greeted me. With sword in hand, his concrete foot was crushing the snakehead of Satan. I drove down narrow roadways, turned past acres of headstones, parked in a far-corner lot, then walked to gravesite SLR3-45.

I was on a mission for my two sons. For several years, Zachary and Simon had sent flowers to decorate their mother's gravestone. My part in this annual ritual was to stand in front of the stone, photograph the bouquets, and forward a picture to my offspring on the East coast.

With this task complete, I considered once again the two names chiseled into the marble slab. The name on the left belongs to my late wife: *Kim Hyun Deok Foreman, 1951–2010*. Her likeness, imbedded on a ceramic oval, smiled heavenward through fresh calia lilies. The name on the right side is mine, *Chris Alan Foreman, 1949–*, the dash reminding me that this double-decker plot awaits its second occupant. At some yet-to-be-determined date, when my mortal remains are laid to rest under this patch of turf, a second oval will be cemented into place, and a second death date will be duly etched.

Some may think me morose to contemplate my own demise. Not so. From antiquity, the church has instructed her children, "to keep death daily before your eyes." To the extent I practice this, I become free to live realistically and love authentically. I cultivate a beatitude attitude worthy of the one who saved me by His grace. Contemplation of death serves as a corrective to my vanity: "this body will become food for worms." It also provides a curative to my covetousness: "I can take nothing with me."

As a follower of Christ, I recognized death not as a terminus but a transitus—a portal between death and life-to-come, a journey from this world of shadows into the luminous presence of God. By fixing my gaze on death and looking beyond the grave, I anticipate the true goal of life—union with God.

By studying my gravestone, I also recognized life as a brief interlude between a birth date and a death date, with all of life's passion and sorrow, delight and drama, compacted into a single horizontal stroke—the dash between the dates.

As I pondered my own sixty-nine years of life, I thought of my parents who had passed on before me, who display a date at each end of their dash. My father, *John Francis Foreman, 1914–1977*, was laid to rest in Longview, Washington. I viewed his sixty-three years in four occupational/ geographical segments: as a vigorous youth in Ohio, 1914-1933; as a coal miner in Ohio, 1914–1950; as an oil and steel worker in Indiana, 1950–1968; and as an aluminum worker and evangelist in Washington State, 1968–1977.

I saw my mother differently. *Genevieve Marie Foreman, 1915–1999*, was laid to rest beside her beloved husband. I pictured her eighty-four years in three relationship segments: as a single woman, 1915–1933; as a married woman, 1933–1977; and as a widow, 1977–1999.

How do you view the story of *your* life?

Introduction

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” ~ Socrates

The Dash between the Dates includes elements of chronicle, biography, apologia, and memoir. I write about my life month-by-month, year-after-year, as events transpired. I present hundreds of episodes, incidents, and snapshots over my span of seventy years.

This biography is written in my own voice as viewed through my own eyes. I accept the role as biographer of my life but reject being its author. God alone is the author and finisher of all things. As the pages of my life unfolded in real time, I had little control over what might be written in the next sentence, let alone in the next chapter. At one point, joy plummeted into grief at one mis-turn of a steering wheel. Certainly, I am not the author of my own biography. If so, I would have composed the story differently.

Likewise, I accept my role as the central protagonist of my story, but I reject being its hero. I see myself as the person in the poem, *Footprints in the Sand*. At times I complain that Christ has abandoned me along my arduous journey, later to discover that He had carried me in His arms when my own strength had failed. Only in retrospect, can I rightly interpret the single set of tracks. In that sense, this book serves as an apologia, justifying God’s ways in my life.

Memoir is polished remembrance and truth re-imagined. As a memoirist, I recount objective events through the distorted lens of subjective memory. Some parts of my story are magnified, others minimized, and still others slanted or omitted. In one place, a single day fills one page, while in another, a few paragraphs sketch an entire year. Such is the nature of memoir.

My chronicle-biography-apologia-memoir of my first seventy years represents my best attempt to unpack, expand, and examine my dash between the dates.