

# ***The Dash between the Dates:***

## ***A Memoir of My First Seventy Years***

Chris Alan Foreman

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This book is dedicated to my quartet of grandchildren, my target audience of four: Lorenzo Hugo, Gia Carmela, Zelig Azalie-Marie, and baby-on-the-way, all of whom may live into the twenty-second century and inhabit a world unimaginable to me.

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh. when thou shalt say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain. ... Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:1&2, 6&7, KJV)”.

My dear grandchildren, at my seventieth birthday, I have concluded that the primary purpose of our sovereign God toward his human creatures is not to provide us with happiness, but to cause each of us to come to a knowledge of Him. I have discovered that I gain knowledge of the Holy Spirit while experiencing Him; I gain knowledge of the Son while following Him; and I gain knowledge of the Father while contending with Him. Remember always, you are loved beyond measure. ~ Your Gwampa Chris.

### **Introduction**

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 Angels Cemetery, a sculpture of Archangel Michael welcomed me. With sword and shield in hand, his mighty 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 slab. The name on the left belongs to my late wife: *Kim Hyun Deok Foreman, 1951–2010*. Her likeness, captured

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 anticipates 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 us, “to keep death daily before our 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, a journey from this world of shadows into the luminous presence of God. By turning my gaze toward death, and looking beyond the grave, I have sharp focus on the true goal of my 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 sixty-nine years of life, I thought of those who had passed on before me, those 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 three occupational/geographical segments: as a youth then 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 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?



The genre of this book is memoir. I tell a first-person story in my own voice. I reach into the crannies of my mind to pluck out those nuggets of memory that have shaped my soul. My memoir is polished remembrance. It is truth re-imagined.

As a memoirist, I have meditated on the significant events of my life; the turning points and watersheds; the peaks and valleys; the several seasons of Solomon. An initial step in writing this

story was to parse my life into segments, each building on the previous segment and each expounding the process by which I developed into the person who, in closing paragraphs, celebrates his seventieth birthday.

I accept my role as chronicler of my life but deny being its author. God alone is the author and finisher of all things. Likewise, I accept my role as the central protagonist of my story, but I am far from being its hero. I see myself as the person in the poem, *Footprints in the Sand*. I complain that Christ has abandoned me along my difficult pilgrimage, only to discover that He carried me in His arms when my own strength had failed. In retrospect only, can I rightly reinterpret the single set of tracks.

The twenty chapters of this memoir represent my best attempt to unpack my dash between the dates. I empty my story into chronological containers that make sense to a mind disposed to contemplate in patterns, poetry, theology, and grammar.

## Contents and Synopses

- Chapter 1 — **I am presaged** page 1  
I consider my ancestors and antecedents. I recognize that I was not born out of a vacuum, but that my DNA reaches back through parents and grandparents into the mist of millennia past. “Who am I?” stretches back to Adam if one has a religious bent, or back to primordial ooze if one does not. *Ancestry.com* tells me I have 266 Neandertal variants. That alone explains some aspects of my life.
- Chapter 2 — **I am swaddled** page 10  
I reflect upon my birth date on Christmas Eve, 1949. In these days of pre-cognizance, I recall fleeting flashes of the nursery—nothing concrete but only impressions. I focus on my context as the fifth of six children; my location in Whiting, Indiana; and my era, the early 1950s.
- Chapter 3 — **I am nurtured** page 20  
I record my first continuous memory, the day my oldest sister was married in 1954. I trace my childhood through kindergarten, then grades one through four. I meditate on what I learn in grade school, Monday through Friday; how I play outside on Saturday; and how I sing on Sunday.
- Chapter 4 — **I am anchored** page 30  
I acquire a set of values that have never left me. I am baptized into the Church of Christ and mentored by my father who doubles as my Boy Scoutmaster. I explore far corners of my neighborhood, watch too much television, and become obsessed with baseball statistics.

- Chapter 5 — **I am fledged** page 40  
I begin to acquire the plumage of adulthood. After the assassination of President Kennedy, I start to follow national politics. My hormones kick in, my body spurts, my voice drops, I idolize the Beatles, I excel at track, and I exhibit adolescent behavior—no surprise here. I spend the summer of 1967 with my brother in Germany.
- Chapter 6 — **I am infatuated** page 50  
During my last year of high school, I meet Arlene and fall head over heels. My hungry heart wants to consume her. I leave my home in Whiting for Ball State University while my parents migrate to Washington State. Arlene and I are inseparable for a time but I smother her and she is extinguished.
- Chapter 7 — **I am estranged** page 60  
I blame God for my breakup and heartbreak. I never lose sight of His existence, but I rebel against His rule. A season of destructive behavior leads me into depression, drugs, sex, and radical politics.
- Chapter 8 — **I am reconciled** page 70  
I return to God with passion, becoming a charismatic, group-living, Bible-spouting, long-haired Jesus freak. My final year at Ball State is flush with friends and overflows with the joy of God.
- Chapter 9 — **I am launched** page 80  
As I graduate from college, my future is uncertain. I find no job in public schools and I am liable to the military draft. The Peace Corps rescues me as a volunteer and I prolong my adolescence in the countryside of South Korea. As a lonely American, I live as a native, absorbing the foreign culture and teaching English as a second language,
- Chapter 10 — **I am wed** page 90  
While teaching English to a group of local schoolteachers, I meet Miss Kim. We share tea, conversation, then romance. In March 1974 we share vows. She loses her job and I abandon mine. We migrate to the States and move in with my parents. My first son, Zachary, arrives in 1975. We move into a small apartment. Life is a struggle.
- Chapter 11 — **I am recruited** page 100  
After a series of menial jobs, I enlist in the Army with the prospect of becoming an officer. I train in South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia, before settling into Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. My second son, Simon, comes along and my father passes away. My military uniform proves ill-fitting and after four years of active duty I search for greener pastures.

Chapter 12 — **I am diverted**

page 110

Rather than attend seminary, I opt to resettle in Eugene, Oregon, in proximity to brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. After three years, I earn a PhD and spend six difficult months in Korea. I re-join the Army, serving four years at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. While I evaluate military training, Kim earns a PhD. I enjoy being a father to my two sons more than any employment I could imagine. This plateau in life is both restful and restless.

Chapter 13 — **I am derailed**

page 120

In transit to my new post at Fort Baker, California, I pause in Whiting for my twentieth high-school reunion. Later I receive a letter from my old flame, Arlene. My heart is torn. I stumble, then tumble into infidelity. When Kim uncovers my duplicity, our marriage is nearly undone. Through couple's counseling, my repentance, her forgiveness, and God's grace we survive a horrible year.

Chapter 14 — **I am detoured**

page 130

As San Francisco rebuilds after a major earthquake, I strive to rebuild my life. Four years with the 91<sup>st</sup> Division come to an unceremonious end and my family of four moves to Mill Valley. I endure a patchwork of grinding part-time jobs. Meanwhile, Kim's star rises as a professor at San Francisco State University. Zachary and Simon graduate from high school and move from our house. God is present in my life, but remains on a backburner.

Chapter 15 — **I am rerouted**

page 140

As the new millennium dawns, I determine to re-purpose my life. I ride my bicycle a short distance to Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and enroll in two classes. I never look back. Like a kid in a candy shop, I savor the sweetness of Greek, Hebrew, systematic theology, and homiletics. I begin to teach Bible classes at San Quentin Prison and make annual mission trips with Kim to Rwanda.

Chapter 16 — **I am ordained**

page 150

After graduating with a master of divinity, my extended family attends my ordination ceremony at Tiburon Baptist Church. For two years I pastor an English-speaking congregation in San Francisco. *Liberty*, as we were known, disbands when the head Korean pastor departs. I continue to minister at San Quentin and establish a non-profit called *Come & See Africa*. I preach sporadically, waiting for God's call.

Chapter 17 — **I am actualized**

page 160

In October 2006, I accept a call to pastor First Southern Baptist Church of San Lorenzo. This congregation of one hundred is my perfect fit. I get to preach twice on Sunday and once on Wednesday. I occupy a church office and Kim, graciously, agrees to move from Mill Valley to the adjacent parsonage. Later we move into a Hayward condo. Kim and I become partners in leading annual mission teams to Rwanda. Life has never been so sweet and so fulfilling.

Chapter 18 — **I am bereaved**

page 170

On the final day of Rwanda mission 2010, our car overturns. Franc the driver and I walk away, but Kim suffers traumatic brain injury and dies after three days. We hold one funeral in Kigali and a second in Hayward. I am bereft, my grief beyond words. I struggle to forgive Franc. I wrestle with God. My sons, family, and church rally around me. I acquire a dog for companionship and a camper for escape. The incredible pain lessens as I learn to forgive.

Chapter 19 — **I am re-calibrated**

page 180

For over a year I avoid female companionship. Then in September, 2011, I meet Liz. Soon we enjoy an exclusive relationship. After a year I resign my pastorate, and on the first day of 2013, Liz and I marry. I downsize to move into her San Mateo home. I feel disoriented. In one swoop, I am retired, re-married, reduced, and re-located. I begin to write and continue ministry. Yet it takes a few years to establish a new normal.

Chapter 20 — **I am resolved**

page 190

Liz and I are struck down by a car in a pedestrian crosswalk. I lie in bed with a severe leg break, while she suffers whole-body bruising. Perspectives and priorities shift. I pass through months of rehabilitation, learning patience. I resolve to live in peace with my wife. I resolve to exercise every day, camp once a month, and vacation with Liz once a year. As my seventieth birthday looms, I strive for godliness coupled with contentment, which as scripture tells me is a great gain.

Chapter 21— **I am deceased**

page 200

My capstone chapter has yet to be written. I cannot expect to be like Moses who writes about his own death at the close of his own fourth book. I suspect my life story will be rounded out by my sons and the subtitle will be adjusted. At that time my silver cord shall be loosed, my golden bowl shall be broken, my pitcher shall be broken at the fountain, and my wheel shall be broken at the cistern. Then shall my dust return to the earth as it was: and my spirit shall return unto God who gave it. In addition, a date will be etched to the right of my dash.