

April 12 2009

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009

Dear People,

The flood of messages pouring in since Fran's death on January 20th has been profoundly nourishing. The loving and insightful words go straight to my bloodstream. They accompany me as I cope with the shock and the huge, sudden loss. They lift me up again and again, which is good because often I fall into an unrecognizable, empty place. Your words lift Fran up too, hold him high to show the brilliant goodness and class of the man. The memories of us that you describe bring our life together back into focus for me--and put ground under my feet.

I'd like to tell you a little more of what happened than you will find in the memorial website (www.francismacy.com)

No one was with Fran when he died. I had gone down to work in my cottage in the garden, after he and I dragged ourselves away from watching President Obama's inaugural parade, and gave each other a long, strong hug of jubilation. The doctor says the heart attack was instantaneous, but we don't know exactly when it struck. Daughter Peggy, coming upstairs about an hour and a half after that last hug, found him lying back across our bed with one hand, already cool to the touch, resting on his heart and the other holding a copy of The Nation. Within minutes firemen and paramedics from the fire station down the street were attempting to revive him, and grandson Julien was running to find me, screaming "Something happened to Opa!" Imagining they detected a flicker of a pulse, the medics took Fran to the ER at the hospital some five blocks away. Peggy and I followed, with Jack, Barbara, Anne and Enid joining us. We didn't wait long before Fran's death was confirmed.

Given the shock of the suddenness of it all, it made a huge difference to bring Fran's body home. It took some doing, but I was determined--and finally succeeded, thanks to the green burial cemetery in Marin which Fran and I had already joined. They sent a mortuary vehicle to which the hospital could legally surrender the body--and then brought it to our house.

It was a surreal and exquisite night. Our bedroom filled with flowers, candlelight, music--Russian liturgies and Bach cello suites. With scented water and rose petals in a Palestinian bowl he'd given me for Christmas, Fran's beautiful body was washed slowly, caressingly, reverently by his son, his daughter, and his wife. Then we dressed him, choosing sweatpants and a faded denim shirt I loved, and tucked bags of dry ice under his neck and back and sides, and covered his legs and torso with a sheet of royal blue. He looked calm, handsome, and noble, like a Viking chief on his funeral boat.

The next two days from ten in the morning till ten at night people came to pay their respects. No idea how many came, all told, in that steady flow of friends and neighbors, some returning more than once. No need to ring or knock, just come in and up the stairs. Go straight ahead to the bedroom and sit in silent meditation with Fran, or read to him, or join in a song. Or turn right into the dining room where more bounteous food appears by the minute or join in a quiet chat at the kitchen table. Or turn left into the living room and sit down to draw messages or pictures on muslin to be applied to Fran's shroud. The sewing of that was in Peggy's domain downstairs--two friends took turns stitching long strips from her quilting fabrics, while the grandchildren and their friends kibitzed, choosing colors and making more decorations for Opa. What struck me above all was the atmosphere that reigned. I can still almost feel it, the softness and buoyancy of the air, a sweet lightness around us and inside us.

On the morning of the third day we smudged Fran's body with sage and wrapped him fully in the finished shroud. The burial took place at Fernwood Cemetery with family and a handful of friends. First a lovely spare service in the chapel, beyond its glass wall a tumbling stream. Between Kurt Kuhwald's prayer of welcome and Jennifer Berezan's closing chant ("She Carries Me") people came forward to speak directly, spontaneously to Fran. Then we all circled up for the Elm Dance around his body. Up on a hillside about a quarter mile distant, the grave was ready. Six men--sons, nephews, friends--took hold of straps and lowered the shrouded body into the earth. No coffin, no box, just cloth and dirt. Prayers. Dona Nobis Pacem. Flowers tossed in, then handfuls of loose soil. A gentle rain. The hillside looks out toward Mount Tamalpais to the northwest and due west to a rolling ridge and the great ocean.

On February 21st hundreds of Fran's friends, colleagues, and kin joined us at Berkeley's First Congregational Church to honor his life. What a great outpouring of heart that was, with tears, laughter, wonderful words, and a wealth of music. Chris, our first-born, was on hand, returning from four years in Amsterdam. Now that he's back in Berkeley he's ready to stay for a while, making us very happy.

Another memorial, unplanned and ongoing, is in the training DVD for the Work That Reconnects. That film, to be seen on this web site and ordered from it, would not have been made without Fran's belief in its importance as a teaching tool, and his determination to pull it off and raise the needed funds. How fitting that it now carries *him* forward in a scene of his teaching the Great Turning. Like others who have noted this, Louise Dunlap writes me:

"I have been watching my DVD of the Work That Reconnects, in part to help me prepare for the writing workshops I am giving in the next weeks in Ethiopia and coastal Maine, but also as a way to focus on Fran as a Being with us all in the Great Turning. He is there so visibly, with you and the others, playing his role. So much richness and depth come to me in this moment from this video. I almost feel like one of the future ones, talking to Fran, tearing up and thanking him for the important role he has played. Thinking in terms of ancestors and future ones and systems flow makes it very clear to me how unfinal death is."

One of the many hardest things about losing Fran was the sense of losing myself as well. Disinterest in my life and work would sweep over me at moments, and then it was hard to see any value in the teaching and writing that for decades had imbued me with purpose and joy. At those awful moments everything seemed pointless and I'd wonder if I could or even wanted to continue.

Then, just a month after the memorial, that changed. I had a kind of visitation from Fran. Awakening in the middle of the night, I looked up through our high bedroom window to see two stars grow brighter and brighter as they seemed to move toward me. Then every cell of my body was flooded with warmth and energy. I recognized that it was Fran, his love for me, and then, just as strong a charge, my love for him--I couldn't tell the difference, and kept weeping on and on with thanksgiving. Then, in the thought chamber of my mind, these words: "I stayed as long as I could." Given the cardiologistical history of Macy men, that's true: he made every effort to keep his heart ticking and succeeded till almost 82, twelve years longer than his father and his brother. A second communication followed, and more insistently. "Continue the work, it's needed. You must keep on."

Since that night the terrible lostness is all but gone. I still get ambushed by grief. The hollowness in my stomach still comes, without warning. I would still crawl on my hands and knees to the ends of the Earth to find him and be with him, even for the shortest while. I want so badly to talk with him about what's happening to our country, our world. But a lot of the time, I'm okay--steady and willing. And when I meet with groups and teach, the old glee erupts.

Each time I teach and share the Work That Reconnects, folks come forward who feel drawn to deeper learning and to facilitating the work themselves. This is cause for great gladness in me. Fran's insistence that I continue the work is an invitation to me and also to others. I want to respond to everyone who feels called to carry the work forward, and many young people who want to work with me are struggling financially, especially in today's economy.

My 80th birthday is coming up on May 2, and I will enjoy it with a modest, family-organized, picnic-style celebration. I will surely tune to the love and support I know you feel for me, and my gratitude for your lives. I invite you to send me your blessing on May 2. If you are inclined to celebrate with a gift, I would be honored to receive contributions to my scholarship fund, which will support more young people to learn and facilitate the Work That Reconnects.

I have lots more to tell you--about forms the courses and workshops are taking; about the 365 page book for Harpers, *A Year with Rilke*, that I'm hurrying to complete with Anita Barrows; and about the measureless gratitude I feel every single day for my daughter, sons, their spouses, and