

Merry Christmas! May a star lead you to the crib

A little update on my year.

The year did not begin happily for our family. In January, our brother George died after a short illness. Our parents died more than fifty years ago and during all the years since, George (along with our brother Fred) maintained the family farm and kept a home, a center, that all of us could always go back to. Both George and that center are now gone. For all his anonymity as a farmer in the outback of Saskatchewan, George influenced countless people through his involvement with lay ministries and retreat movements. Indeed, after I talk I gave in New York City in May, a woman came up to me and handed me an envelope with some hundreds of dollars in it and said: "I watched your brother's funeral on live-stream and want you to give this money to the poor in his name." No surprise if you knew George.

2023 was a good, busy, pressured, and grace-filled year for me. I continue to teach full-time on faculty here, with a lot of responsibility for our spirituality programs. I've been teaching for 49 years and am now enjoying the joys of "grandparenting" as I work with these young students who are just finding their vocation in teaching and ministry. It's gratifying and keeps me under constant pressure.

The year was a good one vis-à-vis writing. Beyond continuing the column, now in its 41st year, I completed two new books: *Chastity and the Soul* (to be released in on Valentine's Day by Paraclete Press) and the final installment of the trilogy on Spirituality, *Insane for the Light*, which is at the proofreader's and will be sent to Image Books, Doubleday, before the end of the year. Finishing these two books had been weighing heavily on me this past year.

Health wise, 2023 meant another major cancer surgery. I am now a 4-time cancer survivor and consider myself extraordinarily blessed to still be alive, healthy, and working with full energy. The thanks must go to God – and to the health system in South Texas, particularly the MD Anderson clinic in Houston. I had surgery in mid-August, and it left me with everything intact and working. The last months have been a time of excellent. I'm very much at peace with whatever the future holds vis-à-vis this cancer. Scripture says, "*seventy is the sum of a person's years, eighty for those who are strong*". I'm past seventy, working, and in good health – everything from here on is a bonus!

What does the future hold? I live and work by God's good graces. My own plan is to stay here and continue teaching and writing until my health dictates otherwise. The plan then is that I move back to Canada to be with my local Oblate community and my family.

Thanks for all your prayers, friendship, and support,

Ron Rolheiser OMI