**FAVORITE HYMNS**

***It Is Well With My Soul***

(Note: I write this having learned yesterday of the passing of our dear sister in Christ Linda Grannes. May Gary, her husband of 50 years, find some comfort in these words.)

Horatio Spafford’s father died when he was just four years old. When he was 28 and a licensed lawyer, he moved to Chicago to establish a very successful law practice. He taught Sunday school where he met Anna and they married. Anna’s entire family of dad, mom and baby brother had all died in a cholera epidemic in 1840, leaving her all alone. But now she seemed to have a better life.

When 1871 began he and Anna had a wonderful life. His law practice was thriving and his real estate holdings on the famous lakeshore area of Chicago was booming. They had five children: Anna (age 9), Maggie (age 7), Horatio, Jr (age 4), Bessie (age 3), and Tanetta (newborn). But life was about to take a tragic turn. Their son Horatio died of scarlet fever. Then the infamous Great Chicago Fire broke out on October 8th, burning most of his business holdings, including his law office. It seemed truly devastating. But they slowly picked up the pieces, and with their Christian faith moved on with their life.

Then in 1873 they planned a vacation trip to England with hopes to enroll the two oldest girls (now 11 and 9) in a boarding school in Switzerland. A governess would come also to care for the 5 and 2 year-old girls. While traveling by train to New York he learned of a possible real estate deal that would help his business rebound and so sent the family on to board the ship to England with the promise he would catch up as soon as he could. They boarded the *Ville du Havre* and sailed away. Returning home Horatio learned the business deal had fallen through and that the financial Panic of 1873 had hit, all but destroying what remained of his savings. But the worst news happened four days into the voyage when the *Ville du Havre* was struck by a Scottish clipper named *The Loch Earn.* Within 12 minutes it had sunk in the three-mile deep Atlantic Ocean. 226 of the 313 passengers perished. Only 87 survived, including Anna. It was also learned that the Spafford’s beloved governess, who was to care for the girls, also drowned. When Anna reached Wales she telegraphed her husband with these sad words: “Saved Alone. What Shall I Do?”

To add to the misery two other families had traveled with the Spafford’s. Willie Culver, along with Daniel Goodwin’s wife and three children all perished. They were the Spafford’s best friends. Only Daniel had remained behind, sending his wife and children with the Spafford’s. Daniel, now a widower and childless, joined Horatio on the journey to England, both men consoling one another.

This is truly a Job-type story of tragedy and heartache. It’s as if Satan had once again been challenged by God with the words, “See my servant Horatio, he is a great man of faith.” Satan seemed to take that challenge and bring one catastrophe after another on this once successful man. With sudden fury he lost his wealth, his business, his five children, his best friends, and the beloved friend who helped care for his children.

When the ship that Horatio and Daniel were on came to the place where the *Ville du Havre* sank, the ship’s captain called them to the deck to show them the spot. It was later known that Mr. Spafford was so grieved by the thought that he went below to his cabin and wrote the words we now sing as *It Is Well With My Soul*.

Picture Mr. Spafford at sea, near where his precious four daughters, his governess, and his best friends had drowned, as he picks up pen and paper, and with tears likely streaming down his cheeks, writing these lines:

When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Tho’ Satan should buffet, tho’ trials should come, let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious tho’t, my sin not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.

And Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight, The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend, “Even so” it is well, with my soul.

*Chorus*: It is well (it is well), with my soul (with my soul), It is well, it is well, with my soul.

In 1876, three years after this event, Philip Bliss, the music writer who wrote such melodies as *Almost Persuaded*, *O Happy Day*, *Hallelujah What A Savior* and 160 other hymns, was given Spafford’s lyrics. Learning of the sorrowful story behind it he sat down and wrote the music that made this song so special. It has the perfect combination of mourning and celebration. It has lifted sorrowing souls for the past 144 years.

Every time I sing *It Is Well With My Soul* I can’t help but think of Paul writing his farewell address from the musty, damp, dark dungeon of the Mamertine prison in Rome, facing his impending death. Like this hymn, 2 Timothy 4:6-8 is both sad and glad.

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Paul was ready to die. He had lived the past 30 years preparing for this moment. He is showing us how to face death with dignity and courage. But not only that, he is teaching us how to face death when it is our loved ones who have died, or are dying.

Paul said for Christians to “*comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak*” (I Thess. 5:14). He told us to “*weep with those who weep*” (Rom. 12:15). And we are told to “*strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees…”* (Heb. 12:12). One way we can obey the commands to comfort, uphold, weep and strengthen the heart, hands and knees of the weak is through the avenue of song. It’s little wonder that at funerals it is more often the songs, more than the sermons, that strengthen the hands that hang down.

By joining hands and hearts with grieving souls who grieve over their loved ones we comfort “*in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”* as we sing *“with grace in our hearts to the Lord*” (Col. 3:16). Can’t you imagine Paul sitting in prison singing *It Is Well*?

Until tomorrow… Tho’ trials may come, is it well, is it well, with your soul?

I love you Gary, as we all loved Linda. God be with you. Rick