

LAST WORDS

My dear Aunt Betty and I, the one who saved my life in a very real but not mouth-to-mouth sort of way, were recently reminiscing about my Uncle Ned who'd died of cancer several years ago. For some reason, I asked what it was like to watch someone you loved die right before your eyes. She started telling me about his last day on planet earth. They had just had the foundation poured for the beautiful log home they were building and Ned decided it was time to talk about the interior. He asked Betty if she had any decorating magazines they could look through for inspiration. She found a few, sat on the floor by his head and flipped through them so they could both see the pictures from where he lay. They came across a picture of kitchen all decked out in red and white and Ned said, "I like that. We need to think about some *red* in that kitchen." Then, right when Betty was thinking, "Over my dead body!" Ned grabbed his chest, inhaled three times, then died. "Well," she said trying not to laugh, "I guess it was over *his* dead body!" When she said that, I laughed so hard my spleen nearly spit wide open.

But then, sometimes things strike me funny that might not strike another person the same way. I don't know what kind of an answer I was expecting from her at the time. Something dramatic, touching or poignant maybe, but for some reason the thought of that whole scene struck me as hilarious and I laughed! I *couldn't* stop! Well, you can't be in the same room with someone who is laughing hysterically and not start laughing too, so Betty began cackling. We kept trying to regain control of ourselves, but every time we'd look at each other we'd shriek! This went on for half an hour, us laughing 'till we cried about Ned's last words being, "Let's think about some red in that kitchen." (She painted it blue.)

A few days later I was having lunch with my friend Carla, and I told her the story. With a wry smile she nodded and said, "I've got a better one." She told me about a friend whose husband was dying of a brain tumor. His wife was a registered nurse and had been taking care of him at home. He had been heavily sedated the last two weeks of his life and hadn't said a word for days. Then, for one fleeting, lucid moment he awakened, sat up, looked her right in the eye and said, "I've *finally* figured it out!" AND THEN HE DIED!! Can you imagine? Talk about a cliffhanger! Of course, there will be no way of knowing, but I'm convinced his wife's first words in heaven are going to be, "WHAT! WHAT DID YOU FIGURE OUT?!"

We laughed convulsively as we pictured the scene. But later, I couldn't quit thinking about what this man had said and wondered what it was that he'd pondered and then resolved. Maybe he remembered where he'd put his wallet or had suddenly decided where he wanted his ashes scattered. Maybe. But maybe he finally understood the depth of God's great love, or his purpose in life and death or some other deep spiritual truth. Only he and God know. But I can't help thinking that I don't want to be dying before I "figure it out." So lately I've been asking myself what it is that *I* need to understand. Like what I need to do to be a bigger help to my husband, a better friend, a listening mother, a loyal daughter. In short, how to be a better human being by allowing God to develop within me the fruit of the Spirit so I can make a positive difference during my

short time in this world. I want the trials and difficulties I face to build within me the “*peaceful fruit of righteous-ness,*” (Hebrews 12:11) that I will take with me into eternity. I want to glorify His name and have my life count towards building His kingdom.

Who would have ever guessed that the dying words of a man I’d never met would have such a profound and lasting impact? And what, may I ask, might *you* need to figure out?