

Winter in July

Dan Hardison

Spring time is birth time,
the time of quickening -
summer is the time of growth,
of fullness -
autumn sees maturity,
ripeness, and passing -
and winter is death.
— George W. Jones

Last fall while attending the last game of the soccer season for the daughter of friends, we met another fourteen-year-old girl who was a friend of a member of the team. Her name was Sarah.

Talking with Sarah off and on during the game, we learned that she did not play sports - a bit clumsy, she loved music and was taking piano lessons, her family were going to Disney World in a couple of weeks. She was pretty and bright, but also polite, well mannered, and courteous - traits that are often hard to find with today's youths. I found myself thinking, what a wonderful girl this was and how we could use more young people like Sarah.

After the game ended and we were walking to the car, we learned that Sarah had an inoperable brain tumor. She had perhaps six-months to live. My heart sank. After that day, we would occasionally receive updates on Sarah as her health declined. On July 2, Sarah died. I only met her the one time, yet the sorrow was great. Here was a young girl on the threshold of life's summer, and now she was gone.

In George Jones' complete poem, he speaks of how our lives mirror the seasons. His focus is on those of "venerable age" who have reached their winter years. So, what of those whose winter comes too soon?

There was a young man named David that George Jones had known since David was a child at the mission church where Jones was the priest. He thought the world of David, but David was

suddenly stricken with an illness and died. Jones was heartbroken. As he described it, "It seems that all the flowers in Sherwood's valley withered when David died, that all strength turned to weakness." He later told the following story.

"In the Mission garden, Florence was cutting roses after David died. There she pondered, as perhaps at sometimes do all, why often the fairest of the young must die - as our David or sweet little ones. Many wonder why David had to die at 23, the best boy, the best young man the Mission has nurtured.

"Florence though, how she loved all the roses, how she gathered those spent and withered and old into her basket and as cherished things rather than trash, tenderly put them away. But she further thought how in selecting roses for God's altars and shrines and glory, she selected the fairest most perfect buds. When the Mission folk heard her story many better understood how God, Who loves us all and gathers all at last, reached into His Mission Garden and gathered David, so young, so fair, into His bosom for His glory."

Sarah's seasons have ended, her morning of song has come, and it is time to begin life anew.



Joseph's Coat
Wilmington, North Carolina
Photo by Dan Hardison