

## Grief, Grudge and Gratitude: A Farewell to Sandy Lejeune

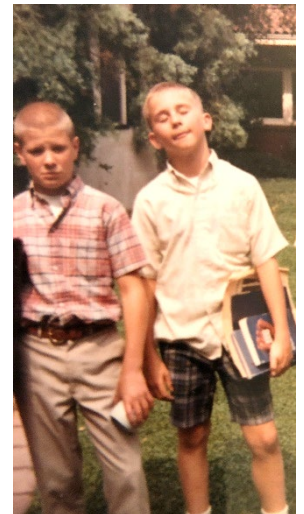
by Ched Myers

*If you've followed our BCM social media and Enews this spring, you'll know that Elaine and I have been accompanying my oldest friend through brain cancer; he passed one day after the Spring Equinox. It has been a very rocky road. Below are edited excerpts of comments I gave at an April 15<sup>th</sup> online memorial, and then at an in-person liturgy a week later (appropriately, on Earth Day). Thanks to all who have supported us and Sandy in this terrible journey. Learn more at [www.caringbridge.org/visit/sandylejeune](http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/sandylejeune).*

Sandy's dying, and the painfully precipitous way it unfolded over ten terrible weeks, has been nothing short of *excruciating*. I've never known the world without him. His journey, though different in many respects, significantly mirrored my own. We grew up around the corner from each other in suburban Los Angeles, and later both sought to defect from that insular, incubator of race, class and gender privilege in order to follow a different Way. We were bone of bone.

Sandy's story can be narrated through the lens of three seasons, each spanning roughly a third of his journey, and each interwoven with largely different circles of beloveds.

- *Son and brother*: The first third centered on his siblings and parents, as well as school friends, a family and neighborhood circle of deep and abiding bonds. Sandy was born Alexander McLaren Lejeune (named after a great, great grandfather, a [famous Scottish preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century](#)) just a week before Christmas, 1954, the second of four kids. Our lives were intertwined from kindergarten on: family camping and backpacking; Little League; surfing and hanging out; yearlong stints as exchange students; listening to (and later playing) music. To the consternation of our Republican fathers—both of whom *also* died at age 68—we leaned toward 60s counter-culture, influenced by our older brothers. *(Right, off to school in 1965.)*



- *Friend and colleague*: After graduating from U.C. Santa Barbara, Sandy made several summer visits to our radical discipleship community in Berkeley, CA, and in 1979 came to live with us. This middle chapter of Sandy's life involved community and service and justice work, from L'Arche in Pennsylvania to Avalon Baptist Church in Australia to Home Boy Industries in East L.A. He became quite an accomplished musician while exploring a potential vocation in farming, which took him to Anathoth Farm in Wisconsin, then to Fairview Gardens north of Santa Barbara. We've heard from dozens of folks from these years who, though now scattered across the landscape, loved Sandy dearly. *(Right: learning one-handed juggling from Marshallese activist Darlene Keju, 1983.)*



- *Husband and father*: The last third of his life centered on 25 years of family life with Eve Rinehart in Santa Barbara, leavened with friendships through the Farmer's Market and Surfrider activism. He became a loving father to Eve's adult children Joey and Lorissa, and enthusiastic grandfather to Lorissa's two boys Hudson and Thoreau. In the early years of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries

Sandy headed up the “Felix Tierra Land Project,” then took a caretaking job at a hillside ranch in Montecito, where he and Eve lived for more than 20 years. When Elaine and I came to live in the Ventura River Watershed in 2005, Sandy helped us start a worm bin that still flourishes, gave us plant cuttings, and taught us about gardening. Still, though only 40 minutes apart, we regrettably saw each other less frequently; a couple of times a year, however, we’d meet halfway at our favorite surf spot, Little Rincon. He did great work helping preserve the Gaviota coast—the spectacular terrain where our families had camped 40 years before. After falling ill in mid-January, Sandy lived out his days in a lovely room set up at the ranch, with round-the clock care. (Right, with Eve and his three siblings shortly before passing.)



Friends and family from *each* of these diverse circles also experienced Sandy’s passing as excruciating. We are all struggling to metabolize his absence, which frankly feels not just like *loss*, but *theft*. As Will Campbell put it in [The Glad River](#), a novel Sandy and I both loved: “What the Giver gave freely, we now return. Without apology for the grudge... Not against the Giver. But against this day...”—referring to that day of ache, frustration and rage when we must say our farewells to those we love.

At the two memorials I used different native California sages—each with a unique leaf, flower and fragrance—to symbolize these chapters of Sandy’s story. Poignantly, these *purple, black and white* sages also corresponded to the colors of the liturgical seasons we traversed during his painful pilgrimage.

- Lent—liturgical color *purple*. On Ash Wednesday, Dennis Apel and Tensie Hernandez of the Guadalupe Catholic Worker visited Sandy on their way back from our Bartimaeus Institute, and read him a [beautiful poem](#) that commissioned him to the sacred work of dying. He completed his laborious journey across the Jordan toward the end of Lent.
- Two weeks later was Good Friday—liturgical color *black*. The word *excruciating* derives from the Latin word for *cross*. On Holy Friday we bring to this cosmic space our deepest griefs—even our grudges.
- We are now in Eastertide—liturgical color *white*—in which we long for that Life which does not end. White sage is used by many Indigenous peoples for ceremony and purification.



At the Santa Barbara memorial Elaine walked down the center aisle of Trinity Episcopal Church with these three sages bundled together, dipped them in a bowl of water—representing the tears of Sandy’s three communities, and of Sandy himself, shed so often in his final days—and offered an “aspersion,” an ancient practice of the church. So were we all sprinkled with the holy waters of our common grief.

I hold fiercely to an Easter faith which assures me that Sandy is now reunited with the ancestors, having been welcomed home by the Great Giver. May we be consoled by that blessed hope. And may this spring’s amazing wildflower superbloom throughout California (*right*) help our grief and grudge slowly give way to gratitude for the gift of Sandy’s sojourn among us. Alexander McLaren Lejeune: ¡PRESENTE!

