

Paul Gundersen

**THANKFUL AT EVERY TURN**

NÄKYMÄ

**Dedicated to Elina**

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Second edition, 1992

Cover drawing by Lennart Segerstråle  
ISBN 951-9058-04-4

Näkymä Julkaisut ry (Publishers) Helsinki, Finland  
Printed by Kirjapaino Ajanpaino Oy, Helsinki 1992

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# THANKFUL AT EVERY TURN

## Foreword to the English translation

This little book tells about the last fourteen months of my wife Aino's life. It was first published in January 1990 in Finnish, Aino's mother tongue.

Aino spent long periods of her adult life in the English speaking world; in Britain, America and four years in Australia and New Zealand. Some of her friends abroad, hearing about the book and reading a translation of short excerpts, felt it could also mean something to people beyond Finland. They asked me therefore to translate the whole book.

Except for the two initial chapters and the short pieces preceding the different sections, these pages are in Aino's own words. They express how she experienced life during her last year, how this time of adverse conditions became for her an adventure of faith and trust.

Helsinki, February 1991

Paul Gundersen



## I AINO'S LAST YEAR

Early in January 1983 the fabric of our family life unexpectedly changed overnight. We had celebrated Christmas and New Year in the traditional Finnish way with relatives and friends, with song and music. One morning my wife Aino complained of some minor stomach pain. It seemed worth visiting a doctor and ask for some medicine. The doctor did not think there was anything exceptional but wanted nevertheless to be on the safe side and therefore took a few X-ray pictures. As expected the X-rays did not reveal anything conspicuous, but as the doctor was a general practitioner he wanted to send them to a specialist for his opinion. The specialist took some additional photographs. When the leading surgeon of the hospital looked at the pictures he suggested a small operation to get additional clarity. Our fifteen year old daughter Elina and I were worried at this unexpected turn.

A little earlier Aino had learnt about the plans to make a documentary film on the life of the French Socialist leader Mme Irène Laure. Irène Laure had during the second world war been active in the French resistance movement. Her son had been tortured by the Gestapo. Then later as a Member of Parliament and as Secretary General of the French Socialist Women, Irène Laure, experienced an inner liberation from her deep hatred of the Germans. She became a remarkable

instrument for reconciliation between the two former enemy countries. In the autumn of 1982 Irène Laure, then 82 years old, stayed in our home for two weeks meeting numerous people from political life, from the Labour Movement and many young people.

Aino was immediately convinced that the planned film could also inspire Finns to find the secret of real unity. She decided to take full responsibility for the financing of the film. To be on the safe side, she decided to use all available time before the operation. Even during the evening preceding the operation, she wrote letters till after midnight to raise money for the project. In the morning at seven Aino left for the hospital.

I met the professor, the chief surgeon, on the morning after the operation, just as he was going into Aino's room. The operation had proved to be a difficult full day job for two surgeons, he said. Surprisingly it had revealed a far developed cancer. The surgeons had no other alternative than to remove the entire stomach as well as three other organs. The symptoms during the preceding weeks had been so weak that a proper diagnosis without surgery would have been impossible. A continuous fatigue might have been an indication that something was not in order. But on the other hand, considering our busy life and work as well as the dark time of the year, Aino's tiredness was not surprising.

Aino had just awakened and did not know anything about the result of the operation. I met the professor just as he was going to see her. He asked me how much in my opinion he should tell her. I answered that we had



once decided that there will be no secrets between us, and this was valid also now. "If that is the case, nothing could be better", the professor said. Ten minutes later I was with Aino. With total calm she stated the facts the surgeon had told her and hoped for the best in the coming weeks.

Elina wanted to be fully in the picture. Then and all the time later she knew as much as we did. It meant a strengthening of our family unity and a shared need to turn more than ever to God. We decided that also now we must implicitly trust our Heavenly Father.

With characteristic tenacity Aino began slowly to recover after the operation and her sense of humour soon returned. One morning she came across a verse in the 103rd Psalm where the Psalmist praises the Lord 'for all that is within me'. "There you have exact and literal directives what my attitude to these various stomach troubles should be", said Aino with a smile.

The next months meant a different way of living, a new discipline and attitude to everything. Amazingly, Aino's health began to improve. We dared even to make a short trip to Sweden to experience something different and to meet friends. In January 1984 a doctor, after a thorough investigation, gave a green light for the future. Accordingly, Aino could make long term plans for her life, remembering of course the lasting limitations that such a major operation had brought, as well as her permanently reduced physical strength.

A great joy filled our hearts. We began to plan how we could again invite friends and guests to our home.

We even planned a short journey to a summer conference at Caux in Switzerland. After the experiences of the past months, the situation seemed nearly unbelievable. In April we booked tickets for the journey.

A short while after this, Aino once mentioned that eating occasionally caused some additional difficulty. To be on the safe side we thought it would be best before our journey to ask a doctor for advice. The doctor guessed it was some incidental minor disturbance. He wanted however to take a couple of X-ray pictures and sent them to the surgeon who had performed the operation. More than one year had now passed since the original operation. The surgeon wanted in his turn to make a minor surgical investigation to be sure that all was well. To his surprise the incision revealed again an entirely new large cancer area now spreading everywhere at great speed. The situation was in fact so serious, he said, that there was no longer anything that could be done. Major surgery was no more possible. Neither medical nor radiation treatment could bring any cure. "This is a cruel disease", the doctor said, estimating the end approaching fast, "probably within a few weeks".

A seemingly endless transfer back and forth from home to hospital now followed. Aino was allowed to stay at home whenever the medical situation permitted it. For a second time in a year and a half our life perspective had again changed completely. Now, however, a sense of finality threw its shadow on our life.

In the course of the following months the disease and the pain increasingly marked Aino's features. She con-

tinuously lost weight and finally weighed some forty kilos. Aino accepted all without despair, although the burden at times seemed overpowering. She commented once that it is also part of life to learn to surrender.

Aino had a habit of starting every day by reading the Bible, praying and listening in quiet. The following excerpts are from notes of her morning quiet times, after the second operation in the spring of 1984 until her death in June 1985, when she had just reached her 54th birthday. They give glimpses of her struggle, her attitude to life, how her faith in Christ carried her and how she even during this time constantly wanted to give encouragement to others.

A young woman, a church worker, happened once to lie in the neighbouring bed. She was paralyzed by fear because of her disease. Later this woman told me that through her talks with Aino she had found inner peace, a new faith and confidence. A young couple came a few times to help cleaning our home. Some years later the wife told a gathering how meeting Aino had started her on a new road. Here was a dying woman with a much wider vision about what God could do through an individual and a nation that wants to follow him, than she ever had.

A few weeks before her death Aino said that her calling to build God's Kingdom never had meant more to her than now.

The doctor who after the second operation had estimated that Aino could survive a few weeks or possibly a month, noted after Aino's death that she had in fact

survived fourteen months. He considered this a complete miracle and an indication of how wrong the estimate of even an experienced doctor can be. The psychiatrist Victor Frankl, to whom Aino refers in her notes, says that finding a central purpose for life is a decisive factor in conquering even the greatest of difficulties. Frankl's observations were based on his experiences in the concentration camps. Maybe in Aino's life her calling was the key that opened the door to inner resources.

## II GLIMPSES OF AINO'S LIFE

The knowledge of Aino's death spread fast amongst her circle of relatives and friends, even as far as to Australia. More than three hundred people wrote, telling what Aino's life had meant to them. Yet Aino never had a position of outward importance. Bishop Elinaza Sendoro of Tanzania who had spent a couple of weeks in our home put his finger perhaps on the key point when he wrote, "We who met Aino and were privileged to experience her love towards people, her humility and politeness, cannot but stop for a moment in quiet and remember her before God."

In North America six hundred people from Asia, Africa, North and South America and Australia remembered Aino at a gathering. A young Australian with whose family Aino had once lived sang a song he had written to words by Aino's friend Gerd Jonzon of Sweden, "Jesus Christ carpenter, may I walk with Thee, leaving all to follow Thee?"

Aino grew up in a home in Tampere, in the lake district of Central Finland. Her roots were solidly anchored in the farming communities of the Häme province. Her father was one of a family of twelve children. Aino's parents, Aaro and Martta Poussa, had only been able to get primary education at school and rejoiced when Aino passed her student examination and gained entrance to the Nursing College. Around that

time her teacher of religion Eva Björklund and Bishop Eelis Gulin of Tampere introduced her to the work of the Oxford Group — subsequently known as Moral Re-Armament. She was inspired by the direct, simple and down to earth Christianity she met here. She was captured by the vision of how God uses ordinary people to fulfill his purposes, to create unity in families, in professional life and between nations. And this all through a change of heart in the individual person.

During the war Aino participated in the activities of the Lotta Svärd women's voluntary organisation as a junior "Lotta". During the difficult post war years she often asked herself what a young person could do for her country's future. A new possibility seemed now to open up. Gradually a conviction grew in Aino, that she was meant to give all her time for this world wide Christian programme, without material security and without regular income. Where God guides, He will also take care of the external needs — that was her trust. Aino's parents were first disappointed but her grandmother said, "If Aino believes that God wants to send her to this work, then it is the only thing which she can do." The matter was as simple as that.

During the next twenty years Aino participated with various action groups in different activities, in Britain's industrial areas, in the coal mining communities in the German Ruhr and amongst the immigrant workers in Central Europe. During four years she worked in Australia amongst the port workers and their families, in the desert mining communities in Central Australia and in New Zealand, where she got to know the Maori

people. When we married in 1964, we continued the same work abroad and at home.

What Aino gave to those closest to her was simple and clear. It was a living personal experience that Christ can lead everyone who is open to his guidance, that he wants to use such a surrendered person to build unity. He takes care of each one of us whether we are people in leading positions or ordinary persons. Perhaps just because of this, so many who had learnt of Aino's death wanted to tell what she had meant to them.

Aino was convinced that what she had experienced, the saving power of Christ, his forgiveness and call to work as his companion, was a gift — a gift available to everyone. Aino knew that God had called her to his work and she decided to give an affirmative answer. It was therefore never a question of abandoning material advantages. This calling was a privilege and a life task. It did not mean an easy or comfortable road. But it gave to her life a central purpose, which she would never have wanted to change for anything else.

During the last months of her life Aino often talked about what her relatives and friends most of all needed. She did not want that discussions should too much center around herself. She was often preoccupied with Elina's and my future. One morning she said that she had had a clear thought that I was in due course meant to remarry. I answered immediately "Never! I will never get a companion like you!" To this she said simply, "Now you don't speak as God thinks. You are not closer to God if you don't remarry. Be sure that you don't tie yourself to the past with bonds that are not of

God". Four years later I did marry again.

At Aino's funeral in the Rock Church of Helsinki, our family friend Olavi Aula, conducting the service, said in his address, "Part of that great basic plan in Aino's life was to be called away from this earthly life at a relatively young age, after a difficult disease. Realizing this surely was to her as painful as it would have been to anyone else. But in her own logical way she thought the matter through accepting the facts on the basis of the aims of her Christian faith." And finishing his talk he said, "Also after it was clear to everyone what was going to happen, her life and existence told something very convincing about the sources of the inner life to which the Christian Church should lead every person. She had a very clear and conscious message to every one of us. This message of a temporal and of an eternal Kingdom was so convincing, particularly because in her own life it was a lived-out reality."

"I am just me", Aino said sometimes about herself. But she said it without a sense of inferiority. She was a modest and tactful person by nature. But certainly she could catch fire too. That happened if somebody belittled people whom she knew and valued, or categorized the importance of people on the basis of their external merits.

Aino refused to accept doctors treating patients as mere numbers. A consultant who daily visited her ward of sixteen women was like a cold fish and gave the patients no chance to express any of their own concerns. The ward sister and the assistants accompanying him seemed to be in awe of him. One day when the



doctor reached Aino's bed and looked at the papers, Aino could simply no longer contain herself. "It is impossible, doctor, to get any human contact at all with you," she said in a loud voice so that the whole room heard it. The doctor was visibly taken aback. The ward sister looked shocked. Then Aino burst into tears. Later the sister came to her and said, "You expressed what we all feel but none of us ever dared say." Next time the consultant came, he was a different man.

Aino reacted strongly when confronted with unreal piety. Her capacity to listen to the person next to her and her genuine interest in them helped many. She had a fresh and down to earth relationship with the members of their own family. This applied also to her daughter, whom she regarded as one of the great miracles of her life. The doctors had considered it nearly certain that she would never be able to have a child.

Perhaps Aino's life experience made her sensitive and open in her heart to accept help from God at the time when she most needed it.

The thoughts and reflections of the next pages appear in the same order and exactly as Aino herself noted them down.

### III AINO'S THOUGHTS

#### SPRING 1984

**During Easter time Aino was informed that she had to go immediately to the hospital to wait for a new operation. As the symptoms were mild and a preliminary diagnosis of the doctors optimistic, Elina and I were not able to anticipate that the operation would again shake the hopes and plans of our family. Aino, too, hoped that things would not turn out that way but she was obviously in her innermost thoughts prepared for the worst.**

Thank you for that moment, though short, of feeling comfortable. Today is a day of rejoicing, Palm Sunday.

Dear Jesus, you have to cope with all kinds of situations. Let us together look at and experience also this situation.

Pray much, because now you have time.

Good Friday. The day of the greatest defeat and yet the greatest victory. The text of the day is majestic, familiar and of lasting validity.

The events of Easter Day are a great joy and light. The disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize him. Surely they experienced sorrow, disappointment and confusion so strongly that they did not realize that Jesus was with them. The disciples muddled things up all the time and yet Jesus had called them.

Grateful for friends, relatives and for the prayers of all, for their compassion. Pray for others, in different countries and continents.

In our present situation, easy tricks or closing one's eyes for the facts won't do. A new phase in which new forces are set in motion, new ideas, a new curiosity. Life never remains the same. Nobody is forever a child, forever middle aged, forever healthy, forever in the same life situation.

**Because my job constantly took me on long journeys, Aino was often preoccupied with thoughts of what it would mean for the life of our daughter, now sixteen, if her own life would soon come to an end.**

There lies a great adventure ahead for Elina. She is a gift from the Lord. You have to surrender her into God's hands with joy and with trust, although you would not like to cause her sorrow.

In Elina's life there is much that is solid and positive, which many others have never been given. I wish she will always keep her heart open and warm.

If I feel sorrow on Elina's behalf, it means that I constantly insist that her life continues reasonably happy, secure and without changes. That might prevent her greatest spiritual growth.

Elina has in her soul much wisdom, joy, a sense of humour, backbone, sense of proportion and courage. Besides, she is a dear.

Talk with Elina about everything. Tell her that we do not hide anything about my disease, that we have only known a part of the situation because the doctor himself does not yet know. Elina is a person you could always tell the truth to. It might be a difficult matter, but secrecy would be much worse for her.

Elina is sensitive, but in her soul there is also strength, like so many people have. We have carried things together, openly. Openness is important, especially as we are so very different.

Psalm 17:15 "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." Because of this, a quiet time in the morning is important.

To be alone and in peace during these days. In a way a retreat. There are certain things and certain situations which are good to face and deal with alone.

The Bible is full of promises. The Lord carries us in all situations and gives us the strength to endure in all phases.

It is a joy that all is well with Paul and Elina. Nothing to sort out, no piled up or twisted matters. We love each other. Elina dear is a great source of joy.

### **The day before the operation.**

Psalm 34: "I sought the Lord and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened." — "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

You cannot make any demands on God. But he certainly liberates you from distress, and in its place enter peace and joy and gratitude. I at least have reason for great gratitude. Life has given so tremendously much. Eagerly I want to continue.

### **The morning of the operation.**

Wonderful that Elina had such a fine journey. It is encouraging to see a new active generation of youth growing up who enjoy being together in a meaningful way. Elina has much to give.

## **The day after the operation.**

**The outcome was surprising and shattering. Slowly the truth dawned on us that medically nothing more could be done, that death might follow perhaps within a few weeks. But then the weeks stretched to months and the months to more than a year.**

Although the road that leads to you is a road of suffering and death, teach me, God, to walk this rough road. Your love is boundless.

In my dazed sleepiness the only thought that comes to my mind is Psalm 23:3 "He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake." The Lord also sends the angels he has promised in the shape of people. The nurse Anita Wegelius has been a tremendous help and inspiration. The decisive thing now is to expect positive things. That is the way even in these circumstances. Thanks for all riches and for the Lord's gifts, for Paul and Elina.

We cannot demand anything from God but he gives us freedom from distress and he gives us joy.

We just have to take from God's hand one day at a time as a great gift and not carry worries of coming days. The attitude we now adopt to everything will help Elina and other people too. You cannot protect Elina, but you can carry her these days so that her faith and sense of security will remain. I just wish that Elina would keep her spontaneous joy and warmth of heart.

Aino was lying in the upper hall of the old surgery hospital in Helsinki together with fifteen other women. She was rather happy to have the chance to be with such a group. She was charmed by the spacious high classic halls of this building from the last century.

Trust the Lord every moment. In his hands and in his love I do leave all those dearest to me. Behind sorrow you always discover joy. Help others in this room. Be sensitive to their mood. In my position I can give consolation because my physical condition is the worst.

Wake up every morning to God's love, even though you physically feel awkward. Be a companion of Christ in this hall. He is close to just this sort of people. In normal life I would not seek the company of these people, but Christ has died for each one, whether they are aware of it or not.



The relatives are wonderful; Iika, Hannu, Anssu, Kassu, Inger and Brita, wise, fine people who also carry each other in this present situation. And the friends in many countries. There is the fellowship of saints, of friends who are one in sorrow too, and not just in times of joy. Light and shadows both belong to life. Hannu and the children are darlings. I wish them too, only the very best. In Hannu, Iika and Tellervo there is selfless love.

I can decide that feelings and pity towards others and towards myself do not get the upper hand. You have to live in the realities one day at a time. Through the sorrows each day also brings forth joy.

Music can give much to Elina. The warmth and sensitiveness of Elina's heart also showed when she brought me Tove Jansson's book 'The Enchanted Winter', that lovely story of the squirrel with that long beautiful tail. It is a story with a wonderful solace.

**Every night after work we walked from our home in Helsinki to the surgical hospital. As the weeks and months passed every stone of the road became familiar.**

**The Bible had always meant much to Aino. We experienced now how it had become for her the well of continuous power and hope.**

Proverbs 4:20—23: "Attend to my words ... for they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Excellent counsel. You can neither buy from the Lord nor manipulate him to give health or anything else, but yet he is there ready to show abounding love and generosity.

Life continues here on earth and in eternity. The life of every individual is important and meaningful. Although someone leaves, life continues. The pattern only changes for some people.

Do not give in to sadness or melancholy. Thanks for all that the Lord has given during life. I would not change my life with anyone.

By chance the words in Psalm 102:27—28 opened before me: "But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee." The promises of the Lord are wonderful and give peace.

What I now experience many others have had to face, and will lie ahead for all in some way or other. In that respect too I am a normal person inasmuch as my eagerness to live is tremendous. A certain comfort in all this is the fact that none of those dearest to me are in such a situation, although of course I myself do not want to be in it either. I am grateful that I have no pains.

**At a young age Aino interrupted her studies to be able to devote all her time to the work God had called her to. She never regretted her choice but realized that such a decision must be based on mature conviction. One should not encourage others to take the same step unless the foundation was adequate.**

To give oneself fully to the work of God's kingdom is a magnificent calling, if a person has ripened to it, perhaps at a slightly more mature age. It is good for young people to study. You can work together with them and let them freely mature in their conviction.

Whether they join you depends much on how convincing your aims are.

Environmental protection is necessary. Man and humanity also get contaminated. People strive for things that lead them astray. Many lack a consciousness of the purpose of life. To give this purpose of life to the individual should be of paramount importance. Victor Frankl does it in his own way. There is much to be learnt from his thinking. In ecological matters it is also a help if the motives of people change and a new way of life springs from the innermost of a person. But direct action is still needed on many fronts of nature protection, like Tiu's (Aino's niece) direct actions.

**Aino refused to give up fighting for her health and wanted at every point to see more hope than what the doctors saw.**

The nurse exhorted me to live in the realities. There are so many realities, the present situation, eternal life, the powerful continuing of life here on earth. The nurse is right, but behind it there is so much more. Disease is a reality. The honesty between me and Paul is also a reality. Realities are not just the sorrows and the difficult matters. God's love is also a reality, finding its expression in many people and things.

Grateful for the talk with the nurse. Do not give in to down-heartedness and to a sense of purposelessness. Live a rich life and value each day. Each day carries its own purpose and possibilities.

Give thanks in every circumstance. Be thankful even for this disease, though it seems to be only a sorrow for everyone.

The word of the Lord gives perspective, then you do not gaze at negative things only.

A faith working through love. One of the devil's weapons are sour thoughts.

**Often Aino returned in her thoughts to Elina's future.**

Elina should continue forward with a spirit of trust. Life gives much though it also asks a lot. The richest thing is to live and give to people in small things and big. In Elina there is so much that is lovely and wonderful which I have been allowed to enjoy. I would like to tell Paul and Elina many happy and good things, but I feel rather clumsy. But in their hearts they surely know my

reflections. They are excellent companions and need each other. Paul and Elina must continue a full life; their own arch of life, also through sorrow.

Elina must be able to live this day without worrying about tomorrow. Leave Elina in trust fully in the love of the Lord. If I love Elina and Paul, then how much more does not the Lord love them. Help Elina forward. She too will have to face all kinds of joys and sorrows. To live as a family through this phase of life. An important phase for Elina's future. She is tremendously dear to Jesus.

One would wish for friends around Elina so that she would not be alone. She herself could also take more initiative and seek the company of friends during her leisure time and bring them home. Elina's loneliness has also positive sides. She is able to be alone and does not need clatter around her all the time. There are, however, many things one has to live through a day at a time and friends are good to have. Music gives Elina a long term span and helps her to learn to concentrate. It is also possible to study and to learn to absorb things which one is not interested in.

## Home for a few days.

This day will be an excellent day. Every day is a great gift. Be yourself. Do not try to be above this thing.

The length of life is not that important because it is part of eternity. Akaki, the Orthodox monk experienced life in this way and lived here himself over hundred years. Certainly this also served a purpose. The purpose and meaning of life cannot only be to achieve a ripe old age. Such a life can easily be rather poor.

Happy for my friends. Aune Hämäläinen is wonderful to come and see me. She and Niilo (former TUC leader) are persons whom you value for their quality of life. It has created the foundation for the trust which so many have shown them.

Thanks for the love of your friends. The core of everything is that God is love.

The pastor said yesterday that we have to say to ourselves with our full strength and with complete dedication: "Thy will be done!" My whole being felt so light as if a tremendous burden that I had carried had been

taken away. Peace entered my being.

Over more than twenty years Aino had acquired friends and colleagues in many countries. Their support and prayers were a unique gift to her. Even from Australia friends sometimes phoned to her.

It is good to remember that we belong to a worldwide working fellowship that prays to the Lord like all those to whom Christ is redeemer but also the best personal friend. It is a tremendous privilege to be part of such a group.

I try to be my true self in my own innermost being. It is so complicated that I cannot easily sort it out. I must not too much circle round my own self. I am a privileged person thinking of all the care and love which surround me.

My father's mother, when saying farewell to those closest to her, often wished them into the hands of the Lord. (Jumalan haltuun!) It is the most beautiful and best wish, and at the same time a trust in the Highest. A human being cannot guarantee the future and life for someone else.



Wonderful to be at home on Mother's day and not in hospital!

**To the hospital again. The stays in hospital and the periods at home alternated. Elina and I often felt it difficult when Aino hoped to be more at home but because of our work we could not have given her the care and attendance which the situation demanded. This meant to me sometimes difficult decisions and conflicts of conscience.**

It is right to go to hospital. It is also best for Paul and for Elina although it is wonderful to be together. Illness is a thing which I do not grasp. I cannot grasp it and I do not need to grasp it.

Yesterday the wife of the United States Ambassador was here. (A school friend from Aino's days in Tampere.) The husband is Ambassador of a superpower. I am an Ambassador of the kingdom of God — and so pitiable. Yet it is the highest calling of all.

I have received abounding love. There is reason only to give thanks, to leave the future in the hands of the Lord. Do today what is now right considering the future.

You have to live ready to leave. It does not however mean to acknowledge defeat or to retire from battle. In the war there was the constant awareness that your departure could come at any moment.

It is right to go home and let Elina help and take responsibility. Start every day by giving thanks.

Paul and Elina should take care of their health and eat adequately, particularly vegetables.

### **Again home.**

There are many miracles, especially what happens in a person's soul and in the relationship to God. The changes in attitudes, the realizations of what is really important, they too are miracles.

When you are a so called hopeless case, you have nothing to lose. You can try ways and means in which you believe. Prayer enlightens every day and makes it meaningful. Prayer is the key to a tremendous power field.

Prayer should be in all that you do. To be tuned to God. Sister Benedicta's thought on prayer is that it is something that should never cease, but continue without interruption, in all that we do daily. To transfer prayer to the repair work, to your times of rest, to writing letters, to all that you do, being the Lord's instrument all the time. Prayer 'seeketh not her own', is not to fulfil your own will, but is part of God's continuous creative work and love for this world. This world is God's property.

We pray for a miracle from God. The greatest miracle is perhaps what happens in our soul and spirit. I am grateful for all that has been and for what is to come. At my funeral people should not speak about me, rather about our calling.

Advance a day at a time. Happy for Paul's love. It carries in all phases. The Lord is with us. He truly exists.

It is not pleasant to be ill, yet you can live and rejoice.

In the autumn preceding the second operation a Polish couple Stanislaw and Elvira Stomma were for two weeks our guests in Finland. I had got to know them in Warsaw. Later we discovered to our surprise that a distant family bond linked them to Finland and they came to our country to get to know their relatives here. Elvira Stomma now phoned from Warsaw and told us that all the nuns of the Ursuline convent were praying for Aino.

Thank you for everyone's prayers. The Polish nuns believe in a miracle. Thank the nuns. Trust the Lord one hundred percent. He knows what stuff we are made of. Give thanks, thanks, thanks!

I do not carry my illness alone. The Lord is all the time with me. Every person is alone, because he is an incomparable creature with his own unique surrounding. You have to battle forward. Take a day at a time.

## SUMMER

### Back to hospital.

I am grateful for the care in the hospital. I want to co-operate with the doctors.

Grateful for both of them, for Paul and for Elina. May God bless them both abundantly. They are such a great part of myself, that I love them more than myself.

When Paul retires from industry he will have much to give in different parts of the world. Hopefully Elina will acquire some kind of professional qualification. Elina could learn a few nice pieces of music which she might like to play for others too, at various occasions to the enjoyment of people.

Receive with thanks each day, one at a time. Take part in the worries of other people and in all that each of them carry.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit and its existence is not only a matter of feelings. It is a realistic force. Sometimes I ponder can anyone get it and all the time. I

do not feel myself at all a vessel of the Holy Spirit. I feel myself petty and dull. You can ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing so big that you could not ask the Lord for it. Everything is a gift, which you do not earn, this life too and eternal life. There is nothing unclear about God's promises. The promise of eternal life has been made clearly and in many places in the Bible.

Life is made up of the sum of many things. You cannot say that events are caused by just one thing. When great things happen in God's work, one cannot give credit for this to one individual, but yet the part of the individual is crucially important. Simply obedience. Things can often be influenced by factors of which nobody even knows. Prayer is certainly one affecting factor.

Remember to pray continuously and above all to give thanks in your prayer, even for this illness. "In everything give thanks."

**The ward sister said that Aino had already confounded the predictions of the chief surgeon. Aino believed herself that the decisive factor was the continuous intercession of friends, strengthened by good care and by her own burning wish to live as long as possible.**

When you wake up start by giving thanks. Do whatever you can to gain strength. The most important thing is to remember that the grace and love of the Lord is always the greatest and always present.

### **Home again.**

Wonderful to be home. The saying 'rise to the occasion' can mean many things. Accept the facts, but in the right spirit. Thankful for friends.

Sometimes it feels meaningless to have a quiet time, you feel that the day ahead is going to be just like every other, somehow without effect and without importance. Always remember then that you can pray and be thankful. If you were healthy you would have to live for others, if you are ill the same is true also then. Pray for those for whom you otherwise would have arranged some programme, meals, meetings.

Paul and Elina and friends are a treasure.

One way to love people is to write to them. They love me by praying for me. Thanks for this day. Serve the Lord.

Live a normal life these days. Happy for Iika's company (her sister). You can be your true self.

You easily forget the existence of the Holy Spirit. Pray that he would live in us. His peace and joy. Accept what he gives. I believe that his gift is the best, although you nevertheless can dare to ask what you most of all wish, life and health for us all.

### **A midsummer trip to the countryside.**

I rejoice to be here. Try to live for others, even if it does not come naturally.

Read St Paul. He had the right attitude. Claim from God a love for people that I do not have by nature.

Care for Anssu (her oldest sister). Be genuine and honest. What you are speaks stronger than any words. To love God, that is the most important inheritance also for Elina. I long for Paul and Elina when they are away.



To raise your own spirit do things you like. To be with people whose company you enjoy. Help Anssu to feel at home so that she would be happy to come again. Your destiny is to give a faith to your family and your friends. Every day is a great gift, do remember that! Every day can be a magnificent day!

"In everything give thanks!" Rejoice in each day. "You are not your own." I wonder what it means. Surely that we are his own and give him the right to decide.

**Aino was naturally preoccupied by the thought of eternal life, by what the Bible says about it, what it is like. The thought of death did not seem to frighten her.**

This life is part of eternity. Eternity starts already here. Death is just a transitory stage, and not the end. Rejoice in each day, each moment, in the rain, the flowers, the birds.

The Lord is with Elina and loves her. The Lord loves all of us.

Elina gives with her being. Elina seems quiet in company. She can also develop into a listener of people, a rare skill. Your fellowmen do not easily confide in one who is constantly chattering.

Christ is reality. One cannot understand the stages of a persons's life, but Christ is present. The world would be a cold place without him.

Be out of doors as much as possible. Build a scarecrow.

In the morning when I wake up I realize: I have cancer! Then immediately after: I have Christ!

Live a simple life and with praise of God in your heart. To criticize people is negative energy directed towards them. Pray immediately for them or for yourself when a negative thought crops up. Turn quickly to God.

I can choose to be either an unhappy or a happy patient.

The motive of all work must be love. Would you do everything you do if the thanks and the honour would always go to someone else? Life should be prayer all the time and serving the Lord.

Do not think about the future. God's mercy this day is enough. A human being easily demands too much. Be thankful in spite of everything!

God reads your heart. Attempt everything you have strength enough for. Comparison comes so easily. Some get more prominence than others. There are different abilities and different personalities. You must maintain your sense of your own value and be ready to serve.

**Aino sometimes thought about the question who in the final analysis is effective and important. It was not easy to see her own physical strength continuously decreasing and to feel herself a burden to others.**

I think of the life of Christ. He lived all the time for other people, for everyone who happened to come his way.

Jesus had compassion. He did not heal the meritorious or the important or the noble. He showed compassion for the sick person when he saw one. He loved, he did not calculate. The word about him spread, even too much. Before Jesus no one is more deserving than the other. All are sinful and lacking. "Your faith has made you well". What kind of faith? Is that also a gift of grace from the Lord?

Jesus has died for us. Why should he not then give us the gifts of grace which we need. God knows our thoughts and wishes. I can trust him.

Thank God for all people. They serve God in their own way.

One day is like a thousand years. As great a gift. And different people. To value their qualities. To surrender to the Lord all that you would like to do. Today in your thoughts you can love other people. The attitude is the important thing, not the amount of activities. Thankful again for this day. Thankful that you can do something, do not think of what you cannot do.

I too am only a human being wrestling with my problems and my nature. Put your hand again and

again in the Lord's hand. The adaptation to changes does not come easily.

Elina and her friend Anja. It is a privilege to love them. They too, one day at a time, can stick to simple fundamental truths, whether there is much activity or not. I hope Elina will not get bitter or be overtaken by self pity. Life gives much though it asks much too.

**A friend sent Aino a book from England 'Enfolded in Love' with the thoughts of Julian of Norwich, a nun who lived during the Middle Ages. The book encouraged Aino; it was exactly what she felt she needed. Julian became a friend and nearly a daily conversation companion.**

Mother Julian of Norwich wrote 700 years ago: "Prayer is the deliberate and persevering action of the soul. It is true and enduring and full of grace. Prayer fastens the soul to God and makes it one with his will through the deep inward working of the Holy Spirit." Prayer is activity which you can always engage in, and you can pray for a deep love of people.

Grateful for my sisters and brother, their support has been astonishing.

**Aino was sometimes unhappy about the effect the continuous medication and pain had on the nervous system. She suffered when she was not always able to relate to other people in the way she would have liked to. Her own inadequacy disheartened her. Despair sometimes seemed to get the upper hand. She felt totally helpless. But then again she broke through the dark walls that seemed to surround her on all sides.**

Illness affects the nerves. How can I be an instrument of the Lord? How to battle against boredom and negative feelings? The soul is full of sin again and again.

I do well to remember once more that though I really cannot rely on myself I can nevertheless trust God. That is a gift of grace. That should be part of a normal Christian life and not just of a saint.

"Unto Thee will I cry, O Lord my rock" says the Psalmist. A rock! The promises are all in the Bible. Therefore the spirit should not swing up and down. Be dependent on him, not on yourself. Confidence in God, always!

A new month. Thanks to the Lord. Serve the Lord and do not think of yourself. The source of the deepest satisfaction is the certainty of Christ's tremendous love. Remember this always. Whether life is short or long, the purpose of it is to serve the Lord, to give thanks and praise already here on earth.

Take this illness as a gift, because it compels you to turn to God. In my own strength I cannot manage anything. Let other people take care of everything else.

I am surrounded by God's love and the prayers of my family and friends. I try to be worthy of this spirit and participate in it. As intercessors all have the same value and are equally "influential".

To be positive is a decision also about your own health. Life has given me so much. So many experiences, and the chances to give. To give is the purpose of life and a privilege.

The Bible is a great gift to humanity and to yourself. The manifestation of God, comfort, joy and love.

**Aino sometimes pondered the influence of different Christian currents on our time. She was concerned about the growing foothold of the superficial so-called theology of success in prosperous countries.**

Success is not the same as victory. True victory lies often in the attitude to different events of life. A person's worth is not measured in terms of what he has studied or the schools he attended, but in what he is in his innermost being: do we live for ourselves or do we love others.

Life is not health. Life can be this or that. To one this, to another that. Somehow we should carry each others' joys and burdens. Even on a small scale. In all activities you often have the feeling, that you do not have time to bring a meal to a sick person, to take a child to the pictures, to give time to those left by the wayside of life.

When you really don't have the strength for anything any more you can at least praise the Lord.

You cannot understand your own fate. Why have I had so much good, or bad fortune?



”For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.” Sometimes one feels that a Mother Teresa is a reflection of what a person’s life should be as an attitude. The ideals of the colour magazines are beauty, health, success, popularity and access to certain circles. The greatest gift can be quietness, peace, solitude.

**Aino often thought about her own relationship to Jesus. Gradually Aino came to see that Jesus had truly become her best friend.**

It is wonderful not to have to say ‘Sir’ to Jesus, you can just say ‘hello’, and he is always right there.

Christ is in the boat although he sometimes seems to be asleep. Trust him a hundred percent. Happy are they who have inner peace.

Matthew 6: ”Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?” Continue reading the gospels, in them you can be in the company of Christ. He talks to me as clearly as to the people in those times.

You wish for Elina the gift of compassion. It is the most important of all. More important than your own success, career, reputation or money is to keep your heart open for joy and sorrow.

My sisters and brother: live worthy of the gift you have got. Give them joy and comfort. Telephone calls. Give joy to everyone who phones, and be interested in their affairs.

There is much that you do not understand. For instance the length of the lifespan of different people. Everyone's value is equally great and absolute.

## AUTUMN

Remember that Jesus is your best friend. He does not rejoice about this situation either, but let us do the best possible in it! Grateful that I feel at least this well.

Keep on giving thanks, continuously, in spite of all. It is a gift to pray.

We have learnt something new in our work. The most important thing is to love people. Abundant prayer for them. It is a gift to pray.

**Aino had also taken an active part in the work of the Emmaus movement, doing many jobs, sorting out and packing clothes for Mother Teresa in India, for South America etc. Père Guy, a French Catholic priest, who had survived years in concentration camps in Germany was one of her close collaborators.**

Pray for the members of Père Guy's family who are seriously ill in France. May the grace and love of God be with us. Incomprehensible are the ways of the Lord.

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The matter was that simple to Peter.

Grateful for Paul's and Elina's love. Thank the Lord also for Elina's music teacher. It is a gift of God at this stage, when Elina is eager to play.

I am concerned about Elina's future. There is a spirit of demand in me to have a part in it and to rejoice in her. But Elina has her own road to walk. You can only pray for her to have God's protection and leading. She also has grown-up friends who can support her.

Many others find themselves with this same illness and in this same situation. Everyone has to accept his fate and make the best possible of a difficult situation. Pray, pray, pray. My own prayer seems so weak and insignificant. It joins the power current of others who pray. You can do it especially when you are alone.

Life does not know vacuums, in some way they are always filled. Nothing and no one leaves behind an empty space. When I am gone, Elina will be left with the memories of our happy life together. My space is filled.

The Lord is powerful. It is not important what I do, but what the Lord does. To pray continuously for people.

**One evening when Aino was at home she felt herself sufficiently strong to go to the Salvation Army to listen to a Norwegian Salvation officer, who also prayed for the sick. After the talk Aino responded to the invitation of the speaker to step forward to the altar for a prayer for the sick. During the previous days deep distress had filled her heart. After the evening she felt no difference physically, the pains were the same, but a great relief filled her spirit. Aino simply stated that the body is not the deepest part of a person, the spirit is decisive. If Jesus does something for your spirit then the change that takes place there is perhaps the greatest miracle of all.**

Think of other people. Dear Jesus, thank you for the evening in the Salvation Army. The distress is gone. Remember the prayer about peace and joy. One day at a time!

When you think that you would like to live to old age you have to remember that Jesus died at a much young-

er age. He could have done much good on earth for many years yet. His task was different. The priority was always what God wanted. Jesus prayed: "O My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as you will." Jesus was no robot or automaton although his way was predestined. He had his own will and feelings, but the predictions were fulfilled because he decided to follow God's will.

Jesus surely loved nature and people, and would have liked to stay for a longer time on earth. Surely he too went to a great unknown, to a new but good alternative.

**Week by week life became increasingly difficult with the exception of short intervals. Aino was plagued by repeated fever attacks of over 40 degrees. She suffered from difficult cough attacks and constant sleepless nights.**

When I stay awake I can pray for other people.

A day at a time with my hand in God's hand, and with joy! To do something for others is the best medicine against depression. There is the right to exist al-

though one is ill and does not financially earn anything. One can pray and thus participate in God's work.

**A short visit home. The last time to attend the service in our home congregation in the Rock Church. My cousin Samuel Lehtonen gave the Communion and was visibly moved when he came to Aino.**

Plan for Christmas just as normally. You have to live with your illness and not pretend that it does not exist.

Jesus said: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how." Our life and work too is a work of sowing. We have to leave the result to God. Watering and picking the weeds surely also have their place. Young people in particular need constant care.

In the mornings, if I feel distressed I do not always have the strength to have a quiet time, but then I can talk with Jesus about everything, about people. He is a good companion to me. I would not like to leave this life, nor did Jesus. But he accepted the will of his Father.

Jesus is with me. I know it.

People live in their plans: buying a summer cottage, travel, interior decoration, physical fitness programmes, planning for the future. I can live only a day at a time, but to my last breath I can invest in people.

Jesus is amazing. He really was Saviour and healer. He gave people peace. What people really need is peace of heart and soul. This Jesus brought with him because he had the right values and priorities in life. From that peace you must draw.

Pray that we can celebrate Christmas together. Remember the Christmas cards. Think of other people, try to carry them. Peace enters your spirit when you trust God and obey him.

Continue thanking without giving way to any kind of depression.

Those gospels are wonderful. In their simplicity they are convincingly true.



In a dream I saw a white lamb with wool soft as silk and with a small cross hanging from its neck. There was distress all around but as you approached it a great tranquility and a sense of protective security filled your inner being.

"Nor will they say, see here or see there! For indeed the kingdom of God is within you."

There are very many out-of-the-ordinary people. They need enough care. There are so many lonely people.

"Bless the Lord O my soul." Jesus approaches us in a very human way. He brought the love of God here to this earth. Prayer bears you up. "Always to pray and not lose heart." Read interesting books.

## WINTER AND SPRING 1985

Grateful for all prayers and friends. Thanks again for things you do not understand. Your own fate and the fate of so many others. Remember that many have much greater difficulties.

Where there is faith there is love, where there is law there is easily bitterness, depression, meanness. All of us are human beings. No one is without sin. It is a joy to read in the Bible of the message of salvation.

Rom. 5:3—4 "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope."

When you suffer pain you easily forget to thank Jesus. There is so much to thank him for.

Grateful for Paul and Elina. Elina is maturing in a very good way but she needs help. Paul's support is important. Elina is a great gift. But you cannot decree her future for her. What I have received has exceeded all expectations. It was a joy already to my parents.

No matter what turn events take, life is falling into place. Lord, please give me your joy.

**After a short stay at home, back again to hospital. Even swallowing a drop of water is no longer possible.**

I am not afraid of death, but I am of pain. This is a tremendous promise: "My joy will be made complete." He died for everyone.

**The doctor said that here we have the worst kind of cancer, and there is only an infinitesimal possibility that Aino can survive till Christmas. In all similar cases like it only five percent have lived this long. Another surgeon said to Aino: "Unbelievable that you have managed this far."**

I am not afraid to die. I am ashamed that I have not completely trusted God with Elina.

Psalm 84:6 "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the highways to Zion."

I feel great peace.

God is not interested in our earthly success but in building his kingdom and in our relationship to him. We cannot exploit God's kingdom or God. It is a dangerous heresy. We do not know the ways of the Lord. Blessing can be something different from what we humans think. Even what we do not want, can turn to a blessing. Herod believed that Jesus threatened his seat of power. Christ's threat was of another kind. Herod was a short term power politician.

### **Home for a few days.**

God have mercy. I serve you. I remain in your hands.

In no circumstances can we be bitter towards God. We can feel sadness but we cannot reproach God. How could we reproach love.

I love Jesus. He tells me: "Trust me." It is easy to be thankful for what has been, but difficult to thank for this moment when you have pains.

**The stay at home was discontinued when the fever rose to 41 degrees. Aino asked the doctor whether he has ever seen this kind of illness being cured. "Never", he answered. Aino had extremely severe pains. The doctor states that it is a miracle that Aino is still alive.**

Tellervo's phone call was a gift.

God does not give illnesses so that we should learn something. Our illnesses come because we are a part of nature. God also grants us strength to bear them.

"The worst form of cancer" the doctor told me today. I have accepted it. I have found great inner peace. I do not have such victory that I would wait for death with joy.

If I have Christ I have really everything. Then nothing, no success, failure, illness, can separate me from Christ.

**Once during her worst pains Aino suddenly read with a clear strong voice the blessing of the Lord and then blessed her family.**

I do not think that I will last long now.

I dreamt of a great high city on a mountain, just like San Francisco. Above it there was an enormous light and a crystal clear stream ran through it.

Only trust and surrender! Seek nothing, ask nothing for yourself.

I love Christ because he understood the ordinary person. I do not see death and eternal life as a kind of separating border, but I await eternal life with joy. My faith and trust in eternal life has grown. I too shall get there. Jesus speaks so many times of it.

**In hospital Aino suddenly read aloud as if talking to someone, the whole of the Traveller's hymn. (Church of Finland hymn book)**

Like the flight of the migrant bird  
My journey takes me far away from home  
Stay Lord and protect those dearest to me  
In your hands I can surrender all,  
Help me to reach my goal.

Like the flight of the migrant bird  
my voyage leads towards Heaven  
As a dream life speeds away  
from home on earth to the shore of light  
Grant that my soul would ready stand  
help me to reach my joy!

**Aino was still allowed to come home for two days. When she finally left she said: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, bless his holy name." In the front room before her last departure to the surgical hospital she said: "I know that I shall not come home again" and added: "May the Lord bless this home".**

## **LAST DAYS**

A great privilege to be able to love Jesus Christ. I am moved when I think that love will win.

I have been privileged to experience God's miracles.

**When Elina and I sat at the bedside she said: "These are precious moments".**

**On Aino's birthday the 15th June we sang the hymn "The fragrant summer has come" (Finnish Hymn book). We talked about the care of Jesus and Aino said:**

He cares with great warmth. The Bible abounds with promises.

**Next day, the 16th June**

Wonderful to see you and Elina.



We read II Tim. 4:6-8: "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." We pray together. Aino says: "Here is Paul and Elina".

During the last thirty six hours Elina and I stayed all the time in Aino's room. She now had a private room. Elina rested sometimes on the floor. Aino's sister Iika was with us the last day.

June the 17th, the deathday. Aino says nothing any longer. Her bright eyes seem to look somewhere far and high, and she stretches both her arms up as if to catch something. Elina holds her hand as she passes to a new life. We kneel to bless Aino and to give thanks for her life.