

advance praise for
Wobbling Home

Jim Atwell has taught me a lot about the “non-motor” symptoms of Parkinson’s disease, the cognitive, perceptual, and emotional changes we doctors may not pick up on when we look for the physical signs of tremor, stiffness and slowness, which are the hallmark triad of Parkinson’s. Jim tells us about Parkinson’s “from the inside.” This is a truly great gift for a neurologist to receive—and for patients, spouses, and care givers as well. After an appointment with Jim, I’m the one who feels much better!

—Paul M. Deringer, MD, Chief of Neurology
The Mary Imogene Bassett Hospital, Cooperstown

Don’t for a moment think this is a book about Parkinson’s. It is so much more—a primer on life, a glimpse into a remarkable and resilient soul. All of us have wondered what we might do if faced with the challenge of a terminal illness. Jim Atwell used his disease as a gift, and shared it with us in this marvelous book. His legacy is found not just in those he loved, but between these covers, too. Each page is a witness to wisdom, pluck, and good humor. When it comes my time to wobble home, I hope I do it as well as Jim Atwell.

—Philip Gulley, author of *The Evolution of Faith*

Grace is everywhere in the beautiful and poignant prose of Jim Atwell. This gifted storyteller recounts his grace-filled life with Parkinson’s in this collection of stories. Atwell is attentive to the profundity of everyday life, and to God’s presence and wisdom hidden in conversations with beloved friends, as well as in the bouts of pain and disorientation. Rollicking laughter, bittersweet tears, and glimpses of glory: these are Atwell’s gifts to his friends and readers.

—Father Mark Michael, Rector
Christ Episcopal Church, Cooperstown

For more reviews of *Wobbling Home*, please visit us at

WWW.SQUARECIRCLEPRESS.COM

BOOK PREVIEW

Wobbling Home

**A Spiritual Walk
with Parkinson's**

Jim Atwell



SQUARE CIRCLE PRESS
VOORHEESVILLE, NEW YORK

**Wobbling Home:
A Spiritual Walk with Parkinson's**

Published by
Square Circle Press LLC
137 Ketcham Road
Voorheesville, NY 12186
www.squarecirclepress.com

© 2010 by Jim Atwell.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, except brief quotes extracted for the purpose of book reviews or similar articles, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First paperback edition 2011.

Printed and bound in the United States of America on acid-free, durable paper.

ISBN 13: 978-0-9833897-2-9

ISBN 10: 0-9833897-2-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011930412

Publisher's Acknowledgments

Cover design © 2011, Richard Vang, Square Circle Press.

Cover design assistance from Anne Geddes-Atwell.

Photo of Jim Atwell by Douglas Zullo.

The author's acknowledgments appear at the beginning of the book.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
Introduction: Wobbling Home	3
Grit Between My Teeth	6
Life Viewed from High Ground	10
Follow the River	14
A Sharp Turn in the Road	18
Chance or Plan?	21
Parkinson's Progress	25
But Was I Being Watched?	28
Where the Wild Things Are	32
Fate Takes Charge, Justice Triumphs	36
Before the Point of No Return	39
Yanked Back by the Tail	43
The Gift of Tears	47
No More Tears	51
Crimson with Embarrassment	54
Quiet Celebration	57
A Step at a Time	61
Counting by Tens	64
Put in My Place	67
No More to Build on There	70
"The Hopes and Fears ..."	73
Harrowing Times at Heathrow	77
Working Along the Border	80

Back to Baltimore	83
In Transit	85
Arm-in-Arm	91
When Cows Go Bad	95
Strangers on a Train	99
In the Winter Darkness	102
Yoked as One	106
Who's in Charge Here?	110
When a Second Shoe Drops	114
In for the Long Haul	119
High Drama by Bowen's Toe	122
"Don't look at him, Marlene!"	126
Give the Man a Medal	130
Healing Hands	134
Learning the Ages of Man	138
Dear Old Earth, Still Turning	141
Here's Your Easter Basket	144
A Vacant Place Against the Sky	148
Even in the Best of Families	150
Speaking from Deep Inside	153
All Lines Down, but Still There	157
Woof, Woof, Woof-Woof!	161
It's a Matter of Time	164
All Spill, All Feel Dumped On	167
Just Pick the Right Caterpillar	170
Fresh News From the Front	174
Heinz Kuhne, Going in Style	178
We All Live in a Hundred-Acre Wood	181
Back Among the Unaware	184
Epilogue: "Tidings of Comfort and Joy"	188
<i>About the Author</i>	191

Introduction: Wobbling Home

Wobbling is what I do a lot of lately. Three years after a diagnosis of Parkinsonism, and despite some fine medications, the symptoms persist and slowly grow. And so I wobble, stumble, reel, and sometimes make faces I can't control. The morning mirror can startle me: right eyebrow drooping, left eye flicking like a ship's semaphore, mouth pulled up in a piratical sneer. Sometimes that face appears in public. I only know it by the looks on others' faces.

And I fall down. So far it's been more going upstairs than down, and more onto beds and chairs than floors. I fall outside, too, though so far only onto grass and baled hay.

Before breakfast, I take Blue for his walk, first down the back lawn to open up the chicken house, then around our small west field so that he can do what a dog must do. Simon the cat, who shares Blue's dog bed by night, trots along behind us. (Cats all know that any parade's place of honor is at the end.)

Blue snuffles along the fence line, offering three-legged salutes to locust posts and weeds sticking through the fence wire. Sooner or later, by a standard I've never understood, he finds just the right spot, turns three times in a circle, and unburdens himself. "Good dog! Brave dog!" I say by way of encouragement. He appreciates this, I think; afterwards he cavorts and does a victory lap around the field.

Meanwhile, Simon has done his own morning reconnaissance, his eyes, ears, and nose attuned with an acuity I can't imagine. He's on the alert for any star-crossed mouse

or vole that raises its head above ground at the wrong moment.

A few days ago, at the end of this ritual and when we'd formed up for the march back to breakfast, I fell. Don't know how or why. One moment I was walking fairly well, Blue heeling beside me, Simon parading behind. Suddenly, thud! I was down, first onto knees, then face, then onto one side.

I lay a moment, taking inventory, and found that everything still worked.

By then, Blue's professionalism had kicked in. (A registered therapy dog, he brings much joy to patients at the local hospital.) Blue rushed up and began applying what first aid he could, shoving his cold nose into my ear and lavishly washing my face.

When I got on my feet, he led me by the leash back to the house. I'd taken a jolt, muddied my pants and face, but was otherwise all right. (The sheep were in other fields, and so I hadn't dived into any left-behinds.) What to say? Falling happens.

When friends ask how I am these days, I draw on a nautical metaphor. "I'm shipping water below decks, but I'm still under sail—and pumping, pumping."

And indeed, I am still under sail, and still on course. And I hope that the second word of my title suggests how that course is charted. I'm on my trip's inbound haul. I'm steering for home.

As a Christian, I see my life itself as God's gift, and in it, everything that has occurred in its seventy-plus years. That includes Parkinson's. It's certainly nothing I'd have chosen on my own, but I know that it comes from the same loving Source as my life, and it is meant to shape the rest of it.

Still, it's not exactly the hike toward Home that I'd foreseen. Parkinson's is a clumsy traveling companion. With it holding onto me, I stutter, become confused, even get stuck in place. But never mind. On my other side I have help, strong and abiding. I'm leaning on the Everlasting Arm.

Most of this book's contents come from the weekly columns that I have written since being diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2007. They've largely been published in the *Cooperstown Crier*, a weekly newspaper in Cooperstown, New York.

To give you a sense of how I've shared Parkinson's with my newspaper readers, I've kept the columns largely as they were published, addressed to a readership that had been following me for a dozen years and more. That makes for some repetition as, writing across the weeks, I reminded readers of facts already stated; but I don't think that will distract you.

And, hoping to give you a fuller sense of me, I've mixed the Parkinsonism columns among others that reflect my life and values. Some were written pre-Parkinsonism, but most since diagnosis. Skip those if they're not needed; but since Parkinsonism is so personal and varies so from person to person, I think that you need to know who's speaking to you. This isn't an autobiography, but a lot of me is between these covers.

And last, this book is mainly for others with Parkinson's and their care-partners, but not exclusively. Much of it applies to all with a chronic disease and to all who carry the burden with them. And all of it applies to fellow pilgrims, wending their own way home. (I was a Roman Catholic Christian for the first thirty years of my life and have been a Quaker Christian for the last forty.)

And so, wobble along with me! I hope I'll be good company as you read.

Your friend Jim
Fly Creek, New York
2010

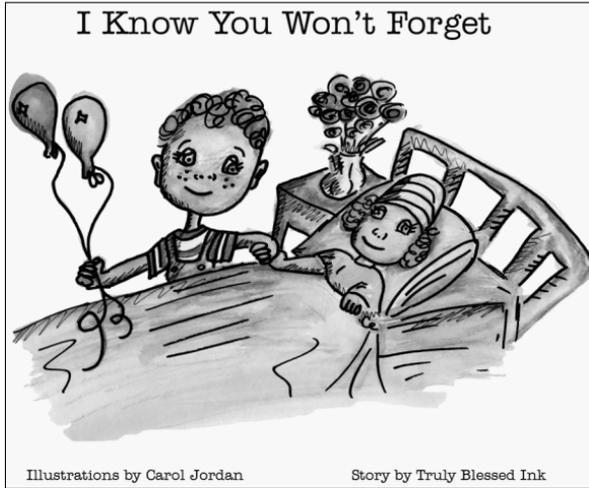
About the Author

A Maryland native, **Jim Atwell** spent thirteen years as a Catholic teaching monk in the Christian Brothers religious order. In 1969, he returned to life as a layman and took a faculty position at Anne Arundel Community College near his hometown of Annapolis. In his twenty-three years at the College, he served as assistant, associate, and full professor, and as chairman, dean, and Vice-President for Academic Affairs. In retirement, he is an emeritus member of the Anne Arundel faculty. His personal spiritual development now marks him as being a practicing Quaker for forty years.

Jim owes his deep love of Upstate New York to his late first wife Gwen, who grew up near Cooperstown. After her death in 1989, he moved north to start life again in the 18th-century farmhouse they had bought for a retirement home. In 1997 Jim remarried; he and Anne Geddes-Atwell still make their home in Fly Creek, raising sheep and chickens, and pursuing writing and graphic design, respectively.

Jim's award-winning weekly columns in Cooperstown's two weekly papers have been a regional institution for a dozen years. They are followed by thousands of readers in print, and thousands more on *The Cooperstown Crier* website. The New York State Press Association has recognized his writing eight times with awards for content and style. Newspaper writing led to a recent anthology of his columns, *From Fly Creek: Celebrating Life in Leatherstocking Country*, published by North Country Books in 2005.

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM SQUARE CIRCLE PRESS



I Know You Won't Forget is the story of a young boy whose mother suffers a traumatic brain injury. After being embarrassed by her unreliable behavior and ridiculed by his classmates, the boy helps his mother develop some coping strategies to overcome her impairments, ultimately finding happiness. The story shows children how a brain injury can affect everyone in a family and strain relationships, and how resulting issues can be resolved. **Written and illustrated by a group of brain injury survivors in Upstate New York.**

I Know You Won't Forget

Story by Truly Blessed Ink; Illustrations by Carol Jordan

\$16.95 retail; ISBN: 978-0-9789066-1-0

40 pages, 10" x 8", full color, casewrap hardcover

Suitable for ages 8 and up

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS BOOK VISIT



WWW.SQUARECIRCLEPRESS.COM