

For the Joy Set Before Us



Jim Raddin

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First Printing 2023

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With great thanksgiving
To my Lord Jesus Christ
And to those who have served Him in my life,
Most notably my dear wife Janie.
Christ sets the Joy before us and within us.
He is that Joy for us,
And He tells me that **we are** that Joy for Him.

Jim Raddin

January 2023

San Antonio, Texas

For the Joy Set Before Us

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Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
Hebrews 12:1-2 (NASB)

Introduction

I have loved these words from Hebrews for much of my Life in Jesus Christ. I love them far more now. I know the words by heart. The meaning of these words has certainly grown richer in me over the years. But, in these twilight days of my time on this earth, He has given these words New Life.

It surprises me how much my most familiar things can become taken for granted. I think it may be that I stop paying attention to really familiar words and places and things, and even people, probably because I begin to assume that I understand what there is to know about them. I am finding that I do not understand nearly as much as I thought. It has become less about **what** I know or understand and more and more about the One I Know, My Lord and My Savior, Jesus the Christ.

This short study will review some aspects of His Sharing of Himself with me in these two verses and some of the ways He has replaced my conventional attempts at understanding with the Reality of Himself. I will simply go through the text, one phrase at a time, pointing to ways He meets me here. You are welcome to join me, but do not expect to “get it” from my words. He is the One who reveals Himself directly within the intimate relationship that He went to the Cross to create in us.

That relationship in Him has carried me beyond these two verses into the experience of verse 3, that I would ...*not grow weary and lose heart*...even in these difficult days.

My fervent prayer is that He would enable a right response to Him in each of us.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us...

I probably started with a conventional approach to understanding Hebrews 12:1-2. I remember being told something like this: “Whenever you see a ‘therefore’ you need to look and see what the ‘therefore’ is there for.” I remember looking, and it did not seem all that hard to figure out. The immediately preceding Hebrews 11 is often called the “Faith Chapter”. Nineteen people are listed there by name or by description, as significant examples of faith in God. Many others are more generally mentioned on the basis of what they did or what they experienced. Names can be suggested for a few of the latter group. None, we are told, received the fulness of the promise of God in their earthly lifetimes. They were to receive His Promise along with those of us who receive the same riches of a relationship with Christ. I have come to know that it takes place for us, all together, in His Eternal Now.

For a long time, all that seemed enough for me to understand the text and what the therefore was there for. The prophets in the Old Testament and David in the Psalms testified as suitable witnesses to me. But, eventually, I began to find an inadequacy in leaning on my own understanding. (See Proverbs 3:5-6.)

I began to personally recognize some of the witnesses in the great cloud surrounding me. Yes, David and others from the eleventh chapter are there, but they are not sharing words of testimony to me. They share Christ Himself. It is He who comes forth as Testimony. There are others in the cloud, and it is a great cloud indeed! My Mother is recognizable in the group. So is my maternal Grandmother, along with others who shared Christ with me as a child. They share Him more fully in His Present Now. I also recognize some gentle pastors and teachers and those I have known as fellow participants in Christ even up to these days.

My wife Janie is there. She is here too, but she is also recognizable in my great cloud of witnesses because she testifies Christ to me now and she always will.

There are others. You may know who you are.

However, my cloud of witnesses does not include the empty and the pretenders who steadfastly refuse any faith relationship in Christ. These have served only as warnings to me during my days on this earth. They may also include some pastors and teachers and others in the world, but as I look to my Savior, they are nowhere to be seen.

It is noteworthy that my interaction with my great cloud of witnesses does not involve words about Christ. The content of the communication is composed simply of Christ Himself. I do not engage in small talk with those I recognize. They do not deliver speeches to me. We just participate together in the awareness of our joint experience in Jesus Christ. He is the One in whom we live and move and have our being, as Paul was quoted as saying in Acts 17:28. We don't just talk about Jesus; we live together in and through Him. That may sound strange, but I do not know how else to say it.

I do recall some words spoken to me by some of my witnesses in earlier times in this earth. Many of those were significantly used in drawing me into a fuller relationship with Christ. Today, I particularly recall some words of the first, and probably the only, real philosopher I ever met. His name is Osbert Wrightman Warmingham, but I knew him as Kodaya. He died in 1970 at the age of 85. I only met him briefly in the early 1960's when I was a high school kid in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I had travelled one summer for the older boys' program at Camp Miniwanca, an American Youth Foundation Christian camp on the shores of Lake Michigan. Kodaya was not a camp counselor. He was an elder statesman who had several sessions with us as a group. Kodaya's sessions kept me in rapt attention, but one thing he said never required me to return to my notes to recall. He said, "Try walking with Jesus, gentlemen, instead of trying to prove or disprove your philosophies."

He did not ask me to **try hard** to walk with Jesus. He just suggested that I take a walk with Him. I did not know quite how to do that, even though I had come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ some years before, as I have described in earlier books. But here I was, still trying, somewhat tentatively, to do it myself. Self-reliance is not a helpful characteristic for one who would walk with Christ, but Kodaya's words kept coming back to me. They were used to turn me to seek the One who seeks us for Himself.

Today, Kodaya is recognizably here in my great cloud of witnesses. He and I no longer share his words from 60 years ago. Jesus Christ shares of Himself richly and completely with us together in Him. It is truly a great cloud. We no longer try walking together **with** Him. We taste the experience of walking together **in** Him, and He in us.

...let us also lay aside every encumbrance...

Now we come to the first of four suggestions, each of which calls me to do something completely impossible for me to do. How in this world could I lay aside **every** encumbrance, even with a great cloud of witnesses to cheer me on?

The Greek word is *ogkos*, literally meaning a mass or bulk, in this case acting as an encumbrance, weight or burden. It only appears in this one place in all the Bible. This verse goes far beyond getting rid of excess fat. I am being asked here to lay aside every single thing, every single attribute that slows me down or holds me back from living the life God calls me to live. I don't even know how to begin to put together a complete list of everything I need to get rid of, and I have the sneaking hunch that it would not be possible for me to remove many of the burdens that would make the list. I would need more than an effective cloud of witnesses. This is easier to read if you don't bother thinking about how hard it would be to do.

Nevertheless, the passage keeps saying the same thing, no matter how many times I read it. He is calling me to do what I cannot do. If I am honest, however, I should not be all that surprised, because His Word keeps asking me to do what I cannot do, again and again. And He seems to expect for it all to be accomplished.

For years, I thought that I was the one who was being called to live the Christian life, but I was pretty sure that my job of it would not hold a candle to the job that had been done by Paul the Apostle. Again, eventually, I began to see inadequacy in leaning on my own understanding. Even Paul acknowledged Christ as the Doer. He said in Galatians 2:20, ***I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...*** . He also said in I Thessalonians 5:24, ***Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.***

I think God is fully aware that I am incapable, in and of myself, to identify and lay aside all my encumbrances. I think He is fully aware that I have even become enamored with some of those encumbrances. He is the One who is able to do in me what I cannot. He is the One who clears the way in me so that His Will may be brought forth. A little later in Hebrews, we read this, *Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, **working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen*** (So let it be!). (Hebrews 13:20-21). He is pleased and able to move aside any and every encumbrance I have tried to carry.

...and (let us also lay aside) the sin which so easily entangles us...

Here we come to the second suggestion I find to be impossible for me to do. One reason sin is so difficult to lay aside is precisely because it entangles us so easily. Another reason is that my guilt of sin has been so indelibly established that I am eminently unqualified to lay that guilt aside.

From early childhood, I have had an overwhelmingly defective sense about God's forgiveness of my sins. When I would hear or say, "Forgive us our sins", I would think of something akin to an experience with my Grandmother when I had done something wrong. I would apologize and my Grandmother would say something like, "That's OK. Just don't do it again". It seemed like she would just forget it. When I did it again, I would try to do it in such a way that she did not see.

That odd notion about forgiveness can still creep in for me. It may be facilitated by my misreading of passages like Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17 where the Old Testament is quoted speaking of God remembering my sin no more. But God does not just pretend that it did not occur. He does not just decide to forget it. I actually did it. I'm guilty. By God's immutable law, I am deserving of death.

By God's Inestimable Grace, my debt has been paid beyond measure, and I was intimately involved. I had once assumed that Christ died alone on the Cross for everyone and I could appropriate it for myself whenever I felt like it. I am coming to know experientially that Christ died intimately and specifically for me. He was not on the Cross alone. He had me with Him there. When He died for me, I died with Him. Go back and read Galatians 2:20 again on the preceding page. Or read carefully the 6th chapter of Romans. I will quote only a few portions here: *...**How shall we who died to sin still live in it?**...do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ...our old self was crucified with Him.. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.*

There's something else we can do that is even more helpful than reading. Talk to Him. He is standing at our personal doors, offering to work in us that which is well pleasing in His Sight. We need not be stuck here praying over and over for forgiveness for the same sins. He is able to move in us, even to lay our paid-for sin aside.

...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...

Here is a third call to do something I cannot do out of myself. On my own, my tendency is to try to run the less demanding race I set for myself and I can't even run that race with endurance. I certainly have not been able to discern for myself what race He has chosen to set before me. Each time I might think I have it figured out, I discover that something new and different has been added. I shy away from difficulty. Suffering is something I attempt to avoid. When I experience suffering, I ask "Why me?" and I don't wait for the answer.

The Greek word for "endurance" has to do with "**remaining under**". My tendency in hard situations is to try to get out from under them. That's why I tend to set for myself a more conservative race course and a more leisurely pace, but even those generally prove difficult eventually. I stop for breath and I back out often from my chosen path.

I am coming to know that Jesus does not intend for me to run an inconsequential race and He does not intend for me to run alone. The race, the running, and the endurance must all be of Him. Suffering seems to be a fairly frequent occurrence in the race He sets before me. The suffering is of all kinds, sometimes alone and from within, sometimes from the actions or words of others. He calls me not to just remain under the challenge and do my best. He calls me to remain under Him, to remain **in** Him, and He offers to move fully into me. I am beginning to find myself expectantly in Him that He may work in me that which is well pleasing in His Sight.

Suffering is to be expected in the race He sets before us. In Romans 8:16-18, we are told through Paul that, ***The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him** so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed in us.*

The parts of the quote printed in bold letters carry two important implications. We do not hear the testimony of the Holy Spirit unless our spirits have been made alive in Him to receive it. The suffering that attends the race He sets before us is endurable only if the suffering is not just **for Him**, it must be **in and with Him**.

We suffer in and with Him because He suffers in and with us.

...fixing our eyes on Jesus...

And now we come to the fourth suggestion that is impossible if I try to do it on my own. How in this world do I fix my eyes on Jesus? For one thing, I might keep getting distracted. I might look at other stuff. Right now you are looking at this book. More fundamentally, however, is the problem of visibility. Where do I look with my eyes in order to see Him? Do I just gaze into the starry heavens? Unless He shows up to be seen, I cannot decide to fix my eyes on Jesus. It is impossible to do it by myself.

Jesus must be involved for any of this to take place. I believe He expects us to come to realize that to be true for all four of these calls into the Christian Life. He is not calling me to live the Christian Life. He is calling me to Himself.

Jesus is the One who tells me to “***Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*** (Revelation 3:20). It is appropriate that this quote comes from the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The Greek word, “revelation” means the taking off of the cover so that something, or, in this case **Someone**, may be seen.

My response is moving from, “Oh, there He is!”, to “Oh Lord, Here You Are!!!”.

Jesus also tells me, “***Abide in Me, and I in you.***” (John 15: 4a). Consider what He is saying here. When I am living my life fully **in Him**, then, when I look **outside** myself, all I can see is Jesus. Anything else I could see would be through Him. When He lives fully **in me**, then, when I look **inside** myself, all I can see is Jesus. Anything else I could see would be through Him.

By His Grace and by His Doing, the New Eyes He gives to the New Creature in Christ are fixed on Jesus.

What has seemed impossible for me in these verses comes to Life in Him. As I write these words, a few days before Christmas 2022, I am reminded of the words spoken by the angel to the virgin Mary that she would become pregnant with the Son of the Most High. “*For nothing will be impossible with God*”. (Luke 1:37).

May He make of us New Creatures in Christ with eyes to see Him and hearts to know Him! We are given an entirely new and unimaginably intimate relationship within the One who hung the stars. It is more intimate than earthly marriage.

...the author and perfecter of faith...

Faith is an odd word. It is used with remarkable frequency by many in the commercial churches, but it can be rare to come across someone who even knows what it means. People can sing a hymn, like “Have Faith in God”, as a string of words without meaning.

Faith is not something God asks of us. It is not something we are able to do or acquire by ourselves. It would be yet another impossibility for me if our text called me to have it or do it, but it does not. The text tells me that Jesus is the One who brings it into being and brings it to completion. It is something that He brings into being in me as I come to know the wonder of Him living in me and begin to experience the wonder of real living in Him. Faith is not belief, it is a relationship with the One who causes my eyes to become fixed on Him.

In the second chapter of Ephesians, God calls us into the experience of faith through an experience in Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. Verse 8 tells us, *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that (faith is) not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.* Verse 9 goes on to explain that we are neither the authors nor the perfecters of our faith. We have no basis to be proud of it.

Faith does not mean that you have chosen to believe, or even to believe real hard. It does not mean that you have accepted as true some set of statements about God. The commercial churches are fond of writing out “statements of faith”, containing lists of things their members should agree to believe, to distinguish themselves from others whose lists differ. Jesus does not author and perfect a list for me. He just stands at the door and knocks that I might know Him completely as my Lord.

The Greek word for faith is *pistis*. It has to do with being **persuaded**. It is not the changing things of which I can try to persuade myself or of which some salesperson may try to persuade me. I need a more sure Persuader than any of those. I need the One who is One with the Father, as He said in John 10:30.

In Christ’s High Priestly Prayer to the Father for us in John 17, He said this in verse 3, *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* Read His whole prayer that fills that chapter. You will hear Him authoring our faith with the Father. He went on to perfect it on the Cross and in the Resurrection, and as He arrives at our door to knock. Behold and be persuaded, not by any outside influence, but **in Knowing Him**.

...who for the joy set before Him...

Jesus had **Joy** set before Him as He made His difficult way to a hill called Calvary. Otherwise, there would have been no reason for the One by whom the worlds were made to go there and suffer death. What possible joy could explain such an act? The King of Glory, the One in whom was Life, died on a cruel cross, fashioned from wood of His Own creation, that was set up on a hill He had made Himself. Why?? For the Joy set before Him.

The night before, in the Garden, He had prayed to the Father for some other way, if only it could be possible. But the Will of God the Father was clear to God the Son, and He chose that Will rather than His Own. For the Joy set before Him.

Such Joy would have to be far beyond anything I could understand or imagine and it surely is. But He has drawn near to me in these days and He has made the unknowable clear. In the unique and glorious intimacy of the fellowship He creates in me, He has gently given me to know that the Joy set before Him is me.

For God so loved me that He gave His only-begotten Son, so that I might believe on Him and into Him. He gave His Son so that I might not perish, but have everlasting Life in Him. He did not send His Son into the world so that His Perfection would stand as a condemnation to my imperfection, but rather that I might be saved. I am the Joy set before Him. To Him, that is worth it all.

Joy is a fascinating word in the Bible. The Greek word “chara” means joy or delight. The related Greek word “chairo” of course means rejoice or be glad. But the real reason they are related is because they both derive from the same root, namely the Greek “charis” which means **grace**, or God’s freely extended favor. The fundamental root of “charis” is the Greek “char-”, which has the sense of favor or leaning toward to share. We use these to talk about God’s gifts to us. It’s where we get “charismatic”. Quite literally, “joy” is “joy in God’s Grace”. To rejoice is to rejoice in God’s Free Gift. As we saw in the previous page, that Gift involves the glorious Faith Relationship given to us in and with Jesus the Christ.

The Joy set before my Lord Jesus is the Joy of His Grace Alive in me. He leans toward me to share Himself with me, both His Death and His Resurrection Life. Before the cross, in John 15:11, Jesus said, *“These things have I spoken unto you so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full.* (“chara” again.) The Joy set before Him is the gift of Joy He sets before us. It is Jesus Himself.

...endured the cross, despising the shame...

Jesus **endured** the cross. It is the same word used to describe how we are to run the race set before us. He “remained under”, as we are asked to do, but He remained under an inestimably greater burden than he asks us to bear.

Sometimes you may see people’s attempts to vividly describe the physical pain and suffering of His death on the cross. It was horrible, but others have been crucified too. Jesus endured much more. The One by whom the worlds were made, the One who knew no sin, took upon Himself the guilt of all my sins and all my sinfulness as His Own. The Eternal Son of God died, crying out about the awesome burden of seeing the Father whom He loved forsaking Him, all for my sake. This God-With-Us died a real death. He did it for the Joy set before Him.

He did not raise Himself from the dead. God Raised Him!! (Acts 2:32). When He died, I died. My debt was fully paid. It was completely by His Doing. When He was raised, I was raised with Him, that I might live in and through Him.

What about the shame part? With all the pain of death upon Him, what role could shame play? What could Jesus have possibly been ashamed of? It was not His shame. It was mine. But He took it as His Own and despised it. Literally, the Greek word here means He thought little of it. Why? For the Joy set before Him!

II Corinthians 4:14-17 speaks of our suffering as *momentary, light affliction* in comparison to His, but it is *producing in us an eternal weight of glory*. Our passage in Romans 8, quoted earlier on page 6, spoke of our suffering as suffering **with Him**. That is why I am counseled in Matthew 16:24 that I must deny myself and take up my cross and follow Him. But He does not ask me to suffer alone. When we take the sins of others upon ourselves, He joins with us in our suffering, and we join with Him in His. Why? For the Joy set before us. The Joy is mine even now.

I Peter 4:12-13 tells me, *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you... but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on **rejoicing**, so that at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.*

Jesus went to the cross intimately taking all my sin upon Himself, but it was more than just mine. He took yours too. When He died, I died, but you died too. When God the Father raised Him up, I was raised, but so were you. He stands at the door for both of us, seeking to touch us with the Joy of New Life in His Presence.

...and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It is important that it does not say that He **will** sit down. He **has** sat down there, and He **is** there. I think it is not on a separate throne either. I think of it as the right hand side of the throne of God. But we err if we presume to really understand timing and geometry as applied to God. I have some sense that God does not have to wait for things to take place in the way that I have to wait for time to pass here.

But I also need to hear that, even while Jesus is seated with the Father, He is also right here, abiding (living) **in me**. We return to our quote from John 15:4 back on page 7. He did not tell me that I will abide in Him and He will abide in me someday after my days on earth are ended. He just tells me to abide in Him. He is living in me where I am and, simultaneously, I am living in Him where He is. In Him, my sequence of transitory “nows” intersect with His permanent Eternal Now.

That is remarkable news to me! But that is precisely what Ephesians 2:4-7 says. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

It is not that I will be seated with Him someday in the future. It is not even that He seated me there recently, when I came to know Him. It was even when I was dead in my sin. It was even before I was born. The God-Who-Is does not know any limits in time. He knows me before I respond to Him. He knows my response to His enabling. The God of all creation knows me and loves me before the worlds were made. **I am** seated with Christ in the heavenly places before all time, during all time, and forever thereafter by the One who introduces Himself as the **I Am!**

God does not manipulate anyone to force a response to Him or to prevent it, but I have the sure sense from Him that He is not surprised at any outcome. It is not that God loves only a few in His creation. God so loved the world, not just a part of it. Christ died for all (II Corinthians 5:14-15), not just for those who respond. God is *not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.* (II Peter 3:9) That just compounds the tragedy that there are many who reject His call. The fact that He knows what I will choose does not diminish the freedom of my choice. His invitation for all to come is clear in Revelation 22:17. His Joy is set before us. May we eagerly respond to His Call to be intimately joined into Him in His Throne!

Conclusion

Hebrews 12:1-2 is a rich summary of God's intervention that changes me from what I was into who I am. He tells me that He causes us to be surrounded, each with our own unique cloud of witnesses, some seen and others unseen, but He approaches each of us directly, standing at our door and knocking. He offers to enable us to cast aside all hindrances to knowing and walking in Him. Jesus the Christ has carried us, along with all our sins and sinfulness, to His cross. He paid our debt of death enabling us to cast aside the bonds of sin itself. He offers to enable us to endure all He sets before us. By His Spirit, God places Christ in us and He places us in Him so that we may hear Him, see Him, and know Him. Through Christ, He offers to begin and complete a faith relationship, intimately in Him for each of us. God set such Joy before Jesus Christ that He endured the cross and the shame of our guilt. We are assured that this Christ is forever seated on the throne with God the Father. The Lamb of God, my Jesus, has caused me to be there too. He shares an intimate relationship beyond all earthly measure, calling each one as His Eternal Bride. His Joy is truly set before and within me, even now.

The Joy of the Lord is set before each of us. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus gave us a repeatable occasion for quiet Joy and thankful remembrance of Him. But the "Last Supper" is not the **last** supper! The table is now set for the unending experience of Him through the Marriage Supper of the Lamb that we see in Revelation 19:7-9. The invitations have already been sent out. Even the place cards are all filled out. Each name is personally hand-lettered in His Blood by His Own nail-scarred Hand. My wife Janie and I are already seated there with Him in the heavenly places. There will not be any spectators there. Only the Bride of Christ is invited! We look forward to joining with our clouds of Witnesses, and with you, in Him.

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' " And he said to me, "These are true words of God." ...Are you ready? Joy to the world! The Lord is come! Let us adore Him, Together!

Jim Raddin
Christmas Day 2022



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About the Author

Dr. Jim Raddin is a Christian. He and Janie celebrated their 55th anniversary in June 2022. They have two children, six grandchildren and a great grandchild. Jim retired from the US Air Force as a Colonel in 1988 after serving as an aeronautical engineer, physician and flight surgeon. His last assignment was as vice commander of the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine at Brooks AFB, Texas. Jim holds two degrees from MIT, an MD degree from the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, and is board certified in Aerospace Medicine. After retirement, Jim was a consultant in impact injury causation and protection for over 20 years with Biodynamic Research Corporation in San Antonio, Texas. His clients included aircraft and automotive manufacturers and NASCAR. He is now retired. Jim and Janie live in San Antonio with part-time in Rockport, Texas.