# He Who Listens

I'm something of a doubting *Thomas*, and that's my middle name. However, my first name is *Simon*. That name is Hebrew in origin and means, "he who listens."

After a Parkinson's related fall Michael was admitted to the critical care unit at Grand Strand Medical Center in Myrtle Beach.

Anxiety has been a constant companion in my life. I never listen to the car radio, but on my first solo drive to the hospital I put it on as a distraction. As I pulled into the hospital parking lot the song "Let it Be" by the Beatles came on. Of course tears welled up inside because the song is one of comfort in trying times.

While sitting at Michael's bedside I quietly read the lyrics to *Let it Be* on my phone. For an anxious person with the need to control every outcome, the words *Let it Be* felt like a message I needed to hear.

Michael's nurse came into the room and introduced herself. She had an interesting accent. I asked her where she was from, "Albania," she replied. And then she proceeded to say, "You have an accent too, where are you from?" I replied, "I'm from England. And out of nowhere she says, "Me and my husband love Liverpool, he wants to move there." She could have said any other city in the UK but, she said the hometown of the Beatles. She did not know I was reading the lyrics to *Let it Be* on my phone.

I quietly thought to myself *Let it Be* would be a song my Dad would choose for me. I imagined his spirit, on the other side of the veil, being instrumental in it playing on my car radio. And knowing my Mum's sense of humor, she would have said to Dad, "and I'm going to have an Albanian nurse go into the room and tell Simon that she loves *Liverpool* just to underscore the fact the song is for him. After all, he is our little doubting Thomas."

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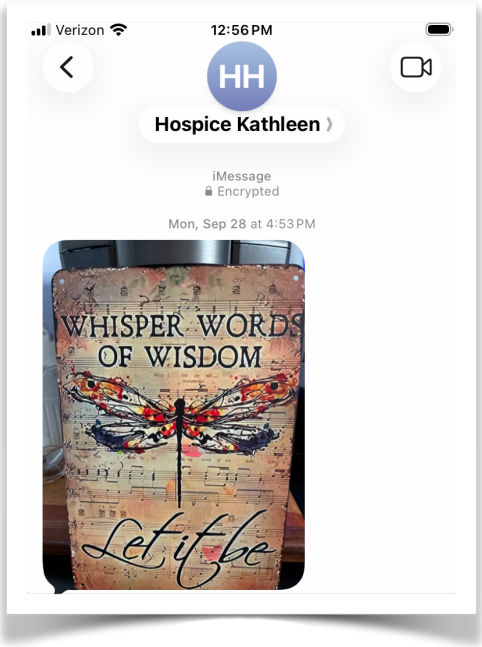
Michael was not recovering. At home, I had a couple of nights worrying about him. I would wake up with terrible anxiety, so I would just repeat the words *Let it Be.* And it became my mantra to calm myself.

It quickly became apparent Michael was not going to survive this fall, due to the severity of his injuries and his advanced Parkinson's symptoms. I received a phone call from Kathleen, the community relations coordinator for Tidelands Community Hopsice.

The name *Kathleen* is of Irish and Greek origin, meaning "pure and clear." Kathleen told me about the hospital equipment she was ordering and the process of inhome hospice care for Michael's final days. She said, "Simon, I know it's a lot to take in. I don't want you to worry.  I just want you to BE. She emphasized the word "Be."

So I smiled, and replied, "Kathleen you just told me I had to "Be" and I proceeded to tell her about my experience with the song *Let it Be*. Then Kathleen, who was working from home starts to sing the lyrics, *"Whisper words of wisdom. Let it Be."* And she tells me that she has a plaque in her kitchen leaning against her coffee pot with those words printed on it. She immediately took a photo of the plaque and texted it to me right then and there. Our phone call momentarily disconnected as she texted the photo of the plaque in her kitchen to my phone as I'm standing in my kitchen. Here is that photo

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I met with Inés, the hospice and palliative care nurse at the hospital. We sat in a room together while I cried. She was sitting to my right, consoling me. I told her her about Michael's palliative care nurse, Amanda, who had been visiting us at home for two years and what a gift that had been. Turns out Inés knew Amanda and they were friends. My phone rang. I said to Inés "Let me just check who's trying to reach me at

this moment"...and it was Amanda!  I'm not sure where she was calling from but, in that moment, I felt her physical presence holding me on my left side, while Inés was holding me on the right.

The name *Amanda* is of Latin origin and means "worthy of love, or beloved"
The name *Inés* is of Spanish and Latin origin and means "pure and holy"

Amanda and Inés, two strong, radiant and compassionate women - angels are truly among us. My tears of grief were transmuted to tears of gratitude.

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A day later, It turned out that Michael's condition was deteriorating rapidly and he would not be discharged from hospital. I knew I couldn't drive myself to the hospital. My brother Jonathan came up to drive me. The name *Jonathan* is of Hebrew origin and means "Yahweh has given" or "Gift from God" My brother was truly God's gift to me.

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Sadly Michael passed, but I got to be with him and now his suffering is over. He was courageous and never once complained about his illness. Parkinson's patients usually die from injuries sustained from a fall or from aspiration pneumonia. I had spoken with Amanda about my fears for Michael suffering a fatal fall "on my watch" and how that would be hard for me to accept.

Anyone who knew Michael knows that he was born to be a librarian. He actually got his Masters in Librarianship twice. He completed the degree the first time in the 1970s at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee. And then he completed the degree a second time at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC, in the 1990s, in order to update his skills with new emerging technologies. I met Michael there, at USC. Michael worked in libraries, both public and academic, for over 40 years.

Michael died on September 30th, the Feast Day of St Jerome, the **Patron Saint of Librarians**. Not only was it a beautiful gift for Michael, it was a gift for me too. It was God's way of speaking to me directly and saying, "No matter how hard you tried to prevent that last fall Simon, it was already decided that I would bring Michael to his heavenly home on this day."

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I may be a *doubting Thomas*, but I'm also *Simon*, *he who listens*.