

SAINT LEO

— to gerry and ray and the spirit of the  
49'er tavern, 1971-82

there were thirteen before me who made it to pope. i didn't ask for the job, but the position became available after i was told i have thirty months to live. my wife gave me the title, and i have been trying to keep her alive ever since my elevation. for nearly two years now she has suffered nearly every medical and mental indignity possible, including pneumonia and a psychosomatic version of lou gehrig's disease. whereas i have been in excellent health other than my terminal condition.

just like joe's brain cloud, my disease has allowed me to live like a king. when my wife and kids all suffered colds and flu last winter, i remained in saintly health. i now eat and drink what i like, including coffee, which used to kill my stomach in pre-disease days.

of course, i have sacrificed my arms and legs in my rise, and i have become the ultimate talking head, propped up in my throne lift-chair where i bark out commands in an ever fading voice. and when i am not understood, my voice ascends to an insane shriek and i drool and flail about until my balance or bent foot or itch is restored or satisfied.

miraculously though, a calm has descended upon me that allows me to live day to day in high spirits. i owe this present state to the horror and angst of my teenage years when i came face to face with death in the works of sartre and others. also, i was not raised a catholic. my wife, however, is irish catholic and cannot understand my calm in the face of so much potential suffering.

i try to get out every day in my power wheelchair, tooling in a new-found reckless abandon up the highway to greet people who are amazed at how well i look. and amazed at how heroic i am, keeping up such a pleasant front. i say, "well, i just want to have a good time."

given my wife's upbringing, she has at hand the ultimate solution to a good time. she raised me to sainthood. now she responds to my amorous advances, "how can you possibly want to do it at a time like this?"

— Leo Mailman

Cape Elizabeth ME