



# Miracles Monthly

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September 2012

Miracles Heal Everyone

Volume 26, Issue 7



## Politics And Spirituality



by Rev. Tony Ponticello

*On September 9, 2012, Rev. Tony Ponticello addressed the congregation at the Community Miracles Center in San Francisco, CA. The United States had just completed two weeks of intense political focus, first with the Republican National Convention in Tampa, FL and then with the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, NC. What follows is a lightly edited transcription of that talk.*

**G**ood morning everybody! "Politics and Spirituality," one of my favorite topics. Both conventions are now over, and I

watched as much as I could of both conventions. I really tried this year. It was my guidance. I needed to not just watch the convention of the party that I tend to resonate with. I actually needed to watch as much of the convention as I could, of the party that I don't resonate with.

That would be good for me. That would be my challenge, to see if I could stay open minded and find things that I liked, find commonalities, to stay immersed in the process, with a creative open mind.

I think, pretty much, I was successful. I can at least say that I really enjoyed watching both of them. I always found something that was interesting, or that made me smile, with everything that I heard. I connected with the spirits of the people who were speaking.

Between 30 and 40 million people watched the conventions. That's how the ratings judge it now. Sometimes people talk about how the number of people watching the conventions has actually gone down over the years. That may be true in one sense. That's only the people

who watch them through live television, but we have to remember and always factor in, that one doesn't have to watch conventions on live TV anymore. You can watch them on the internet for days passed. Thousands, and tens of thousands of people, watch individual speeches through the internet. It's a different market place now, and there isn't any way to track how many people watch these conventions anymore. I loved them.

I did my best to rise above my partisan viewpoints. As I said, I think I was fairly successful. It helped me to remember that the conventions, and the speeches that were given, are like everything in the world, they are actually neutral. They will only have the charge that I put on them. It's up to me. *A Course In Miracles* says, "... the world is neutral, and the

bodies which still seem to move about as separate things need not be feared."

(*OrEd. Tx.28.25*) This was a great idea to keep in my mind while I was watching some of the people that I tend to think of as fearful. Those bodies up there, giving those speeches, really weren't fearful, they were actually neutral, and I could perceive them in a positive way.

There were many, many significant things that happened.

I celebrate these things. For me, one of the most significant things that happened was that the platform for the Democratic party now has a clause in it for marriage equality. This is remarkable and significant, if you think about it. Over the years on our *Miracles On-Line Discussion Group (MOLDG)* I've always posted anytime there has been some breakthrough about same sex marriage, some new U.S. state or new country in the world has made same sex marriage legal. I always post it. We have seen steady progression over the years on this issue. Last year, New York State, a huge state, made same sex marriage legal. Now this issue has actually worked it's way into a major political party's platform. I like the new meme, the new expression we have for same sex marriage, "marriage equality." Of course, parties do focus groups to decide what words work well. We don't want to call it "gay marriage" anymore. That doesn't poll as well. Even talking about it as "same sex marriage" isn't as good as referring to it as "marriage equality." Everybody likes "equality." Who doesn't like equality?

*continued on page 2*



... continued from page 1

## Politics And Spirituality

It's hard to be against equality. "Marriage equality" is the new meme for same sex marriage.

The clause in the Democratic platform is called the "Freedom to Marry" clause. I'm going to read it because I think it's pretty amazing. "We ..." they are talking about the Democratic party now, "... support the right of all families to have equal respect, responsibilities, and protections under the law. We support marriage equality and support the movement to secure equal treatment under law for same-sex couples. We also support the freedom of churches and religious entities to decide how to administer marriage as a religious sacrament without government interference." That's a great clause. "We oppose discriminatory federal and state constitutional amendments and other attempts to deny equal protection of the laws to committed same-sex couples who seek the same respect and responsibilities as other married couples. We support the full repeal of the so-called Defense of Marriage Act and the passage of the Respect for Marriage Act." That's a very comprehensive statement, a very powerful statement. I love the clause that states that churches should be able to have whatever right, or ability they need, to administer this as they see fit. In other words, the government should not be able to force the Catholic Church to perform marriage ceremonies for same sex couples, if the Catholic Church does not want to do that. I thought this really covered that issue.

As an *A Course In Miracles* student I want to celebrate this, because I think we should be seeing all our brothers and sisters as equals. In my mind, there should be no reason why any same sex couple should not have the same equal rights and privileges as any opposite sex couple. I think having this clause in the Democratic platform is a very amazing thing, and it wasn't just quietly in the platform. Marriage equality was mentioned over and over again, by speaker after speaker. There was one speaker, congressman Barney Frank from Massachusetts, a gay man who has recently married another gay man, and he mentioned that. Massachusetts is one of the states that has legalized same sex marriage. However, he talked about marriage equality as a brief side issue. He said it was not the main thing he wanted to talk about. He simply mentioned that he was recently married to another man. That was very sweet. Speaker after speaker talked about marriage equality, including Michelle Obama when she made this mention, "And he (*President Obama*) wants everyone in this country, everyone to have the same opportunity no matter who we are or where we are from or what we look like or who we love." That was good.

Through the whole process of watching these conventions, and trying to find good things about everybody, I was involved in a continual discussion with my biological sister. She is a rabid conservative. She spews out all the conservative rhetoric which frequently, to me, sounds hateful and sometimes misogynistic – which is strange considering she's a woman. Sometimes I heard it as racist. She communicated all kinds of stuff. I read or listen, and sometimes it is very, very difficult. I just needed to sit with it. I was guided to just listen, and if I could find anything positive to say

about the conservatives I would say that. She was excited that I would find something positive to say about the conservative Republican speakers. I want to acknowledge her for listening to all the Democrats and liberal speakers as well. I saw her making an effort, although she usually hated what they said, to find something positive to say about their speeches. My sister and I stayed in that communication. I want to give myself some kudos. I think I did really well considering the rhetoric that was coming from her. I saw my interaction with her as a way to keep a loving relationship current. We should be able to talk about these things. I should be able to talk about politics with someone, even if I diametrically disagree with them. We should still be able to have a friendly dialogue and not have it affect a loving connection. There was one particular time when I was really close to saying, "You knew we just need to not talk about politics." However, I didn't say that, because I was not guided to go there.

I did learn something practical while watching these conventions. It's much better to watch the conventions on C-SPAN. I hadn't realized this, but when you watch the conventions on regular, commercial networks – even if you are watching them live – with commentators who comment on the speeches, you don't see and hear all the speeches. The commentators have to give their comments and their analysis, but speeches are happening while the commentators are talking. The speeches at the convention are continuous. The speeches don't take a break so that the network commentators can make their points.

continued on page 3

### EDITORIAL CREDITS

Editor: Rev. Tony Ponticello

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### Miracles Monthly Volume 26, Issue 7 – September 2012

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## 2011 Income & Expenses

Jan. thru Dec. 2011. - Full Year

### Income

Donations		
Supporting Members	50,954.20	
Other Donations	4,334.14	
<b>Donations</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$55,288.34</b>
Books and Products		
2011 Conf. Bookstore	13,001.93	
E-Mail Orders	7,368.48	
Mail & FAX Order	2,409.13	
Wholesale Sales	553.05	
Bookstore in S.F.	359.77	
<b>Books and Products</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$23,692.36</b>
Classes and Events		
2011 Conference	31,048.00	
2011 Conf. Sun. Service	4,344.00	
2011 Marianne Williamson	1,027.00	
2013 Conference	77,397.00	
Classes, ACIM	9,182.00	
<b>Classes and Events</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$122,998.00</b>
Other Income		
Center Rental	5,619.00	
Shipping Income	2,096.90	
Subscriptions MM	682.00	
Advertising Sales	314.94	
Misc. Income	916.75	
<b>Other Income</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$9,629.59</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$211,608.29</b>

### Expenses

Teacher/Minister Comp.		
Rev. Tony Ponticello	18,644.50	
Employees	15,813.75	
Benefits / Medical Insurance	12,072.00	
Private Contractors	2,473.50	
Payroll Taxes	3,548.10	
<b>Teacher/Min. Comp.</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$52,551.85</b>
Fixed Expenses		
Rent Paid	21,705.00	
Utilities	4,964.77	
Credit Trans. Fees	7,383.13	
Business Insurance	1,698.00	
Licenses and Fees	1,878.12	
Depreciation	1,282.68	
On-Line	1,418.30	
<b>Fixed Expenses</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$40,330.00</b>
General Expenses		
Predicted Confer. 2013	61,579.88	
Conference 2011	14,675.57	
Printer/Copier Lease	4,866.56	
Presenter's Books	2,544.88	
Purchases - Books	15,014.69	
Supplies & Services	10,474.20	
Postage	3,132.02	
Royalties	134.96	
Car Expenses	2,237.63	
Expense - Misc.	172.43	
<b>General Expenses</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$114,832.82</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$207,714.67</b>
<b>Income Remaining</b>		<b>\$3,893.62</b>

... continued from page 2

## Politics And Spirituality

The speeches keep right on happening. Apparently, those networks that we like to watch have gone through the list of speakers in advance and made arbitrary decisions about who are the important speakers to cover, and who are not the important ones. Then the programmers have to schedule the commercial breaks too. These decision are often inopportune. Frequently, amazing speeches are missed. Luckily, today in this era of the internet, once you hear that there was an amazing speech that you missed, you can probably go to *YouTube* and find it and listen to it, but it takes an effort to do that. Eventually, I learned that on the days that I watched C-SPAN I got it all. I really got to see how these speeches and presentations come one right after another, after another, and that the excitement can be building in a way that you don't feel when watching on a commercial network with commentators. There were some amazing, inspirational speakers that I first missed, but later was able to hear. There were speakers that were tremendously enthusiastic, excited, and motivating. There were speakers that got delegates to laugh, stand up and cheer, even to march, and now I can watch those again just to psych myself up. I want to save some of those speeches. Those were pretty hot speeches. They were amazing. What I could see, when I really looked, was that this was an example of people using the body, their bodies, as a means of communication which is what *A Course In Miracles* tells us is the only proper use of the body. The *Course* says, "Yet what makes them God's teachers is their recognition of the proper purpose of the body. As they advance in their profession, they become more and more certain that the body's function is but to let God's Voice speak through it to human ears." (*OrEd.Mn.12.4*) I saw many speakers moving in that direction, trying to do that. They were trying to say something inspirational, trying to make people feel good about what it was they were all dedicated to. I saw speakers inspiring people about purpose. Maybe the speakers were inspiring people around viewpoints that I didn't share, but I could appreciate that inspiration was what the speakers were trying to do. They were trying to inspire people to do important work, and I could recognize that as a good thing. It was people doing with the body what is the one, true, spiritual purpose for the body.

I do know that many spiritual people tend to sit out elections because they see elections as divisive, partisan, and really of the ego. However, I think that is the spiritual challenge of the election. I will agree. "Yes," on the surface that is what is going on. I don't deny that division is what is going on on the surface, but I think it is our challenge, as *A Course In Miracles* students, to go past that surface and be the spiritual voice that can see beneath that surface. The *Course* says, "See how the body's eyes rest on externals and cannot go beyond. Watch how they stop at nothingness, unable to go beyond the form to meaning. Nothing's so blinding as perception of form. For sight of form means understanding has been obscured." (*OrEd.Tx.22.34*) Monitor yourself. I needed to monitor myself. How stuck did I get on the externals of what was going on and what was being said? I needed to go beyond that and get to a higher spiritual truth level. I needed to get beyond the polarization.

Everybody knows that I am a liberal. I connect with that point of view. I don't need to be secret about that or hide that. It is a challenge when I am listening to Congressman Ryan and Governor Romney who certainly are not liberals, but are conservatives. I had a shift about Governor Romney. I got that he really and truly believes, in his heart, that his experience, that his success in the world, gives him a certain expertise. It gives him a certain skill set. He's confident. He's very confident about his skill set. He can analyze financial issues and problems. He believes that the country is

continued on page 4



... continued from page 3

## Politics And Spirituality

in a huge financial problem. He believes he has the skills to analyze that problem. He believes he could make decisions and create policies that would solve that problem and create a robust economy. I got that. He's probably not totally pure. Nobody's intentions are totally pure. The ego thoughts come in all the time, but a lot of his message was that he was the one with the expertise and success. He has the skill set. He could really solve the financial problem, and he is trying to convince us, the voters of this country. Romney and his surrogates, together, are telling us that Mitt Romney is the one for the job. And you know what – maybe they are right. Am I willing to accept the fact that maybe Romney does have the financial expertise? If we analyze the problem as strictly a financial problem, maybe candidate Romney would be the one to handle that problem. I was, at least, willing to accept that this was a valid, logical, and defensible argument. For me to get that far was a miracle. That was a stretch, and that is why I said I thought I did really good.

This argument for Mitt Romney reminded me of the *A Course In Miracles* quotation that tells us, "Look about the world, and see the suffering there. Is not your heart willing to bring your weary brothers rest?" (*OrEd. WkBk.191.12*) I actually got, especially when Romney talked about his Mormon faith and wanting to help others, that this is what he is sincerely doing. He's looked at the world; he's seen the suffering. He wants to bring some rest to this weary world, and he thinks he has the skills to do it. Then we have this quote from *ACIM*, "It is of them who learned of freedom that you should ask what freedom is. Ask not the sparrow how the eagle soars, for those with little wings have not accepted for themselves the power to

share with you." (*OrEd. Tx.20.31*) Well, if we want some financial expertise, we would go to somebody who had real, outstanding financial success. Governor Romney is an eagle in the financial world. He's not a sparrow. His is a phenomenal, financial success story. If that is our main issue, than it makes sense that we would want to get somebody who was successful at that issue, to solve that particular issue. I can find a lot of *Course* justification for Mitt Romney and his position. All this helped me to feel better about Mitt Romney and his potential of being our next president.

As I mentioned last week, I probably will not vote for Mitt Romney, but there are certainly things about the Democratic party that don't sit really well with me. The main thing, and this was especially exemplified by Joe Biden – who I like, and I like Joe Biden – but his meme that he pushed, and pushed, and pushed is, "Osama bin Laden is dead and General Motors is alive!" Okay. I've got it. General Motors is alive. That's a great thing, but do we really need to celebrate death as our salvation from something, deliverance from something. He said

continued on page 10



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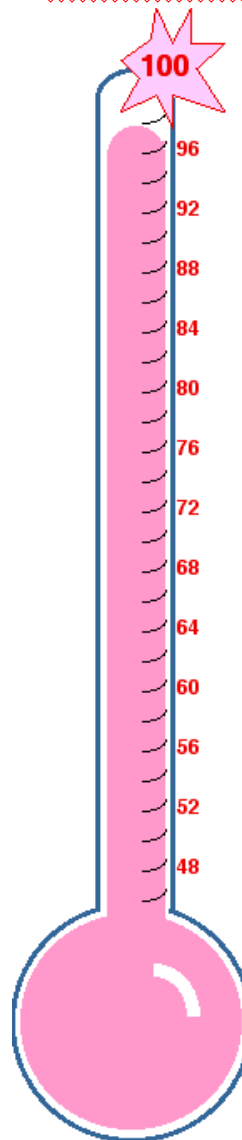
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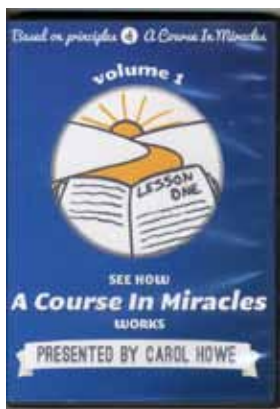
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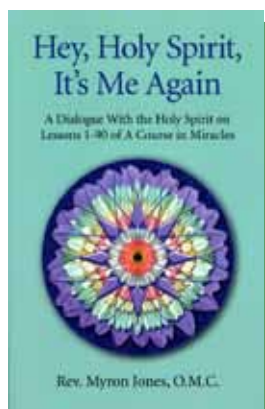
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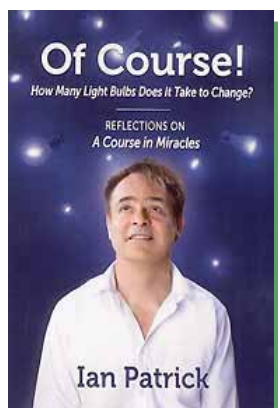


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Larry received his ordination as a reverend for his *ACIM* church, Pathways of Light, in 2008.

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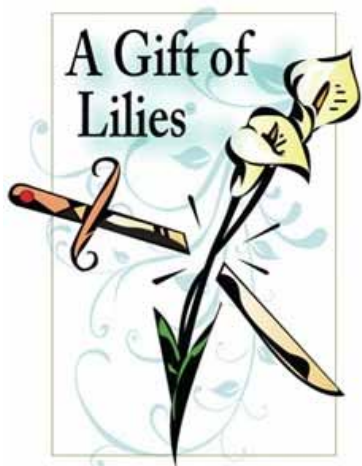
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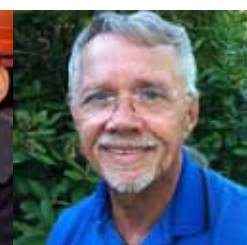


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... continued from page 4

## Politics And Spirituality

that many times. He repeats it on his stump speeches over and over again. This was an often repeated theme from many speakers. Osama bin Laden had been “taken out.” I see the Democrats have stopped saying that Obama “killed” Osama bin Laden. They must have had some focus group decide that they need to drop the “k” word, because it doesn’t poll well. They have stopped talking about killing Osama bin Laden. They do talk about taking him out of the scene and about him lying dead at the bottom of the ocean. There is a part of me that is glad Osama bin Laden is gone. Then I think about it. Does the fact that somebody is dead make me any safer? Does it make the country any safer, the fact that a person has been killed? Then I think, “Great. I am a member of the political party that thinks death is salvation. This isn’t good.” *A Course In Miracles* says, “... nothing is accomplished through death because death is nothing. Everything is accomplished through life, and life is of the mind and in the Mind.” (*OrEd.Tx.6.61*) Let’s look at this idea with our spiritual perspective. Killing Osama bin Laden accomplished nothing, but since I’m a liberal I want to jump right over Democrats touting bin Laden’s death. I tend to not want to see the faults of my own party, because I identify with them, but I was aware of this death problem. It was good for me that I was aware of it.

The most wonderful thing about the conventions wasn’t the big speeches which everybody talks about. There is a lot of talk about President Bill Clinton’s speech. People think he was amazing, and I tend to agree. President Obama’s speech was terrific. Ann Romney did so well at the Republican convention. There were so many wonderful inspirational speeches. However, there were a couple that were a little under the radar that were truly inspirational. One of them was a woman, from the state of Illinois, who is running for the House of Representatives. Her name is Tammy Duckworth. I don’t know if you know who she is. She’s the veteran. She is the fighter, helicopter pilot. She was one of the first women to fly a true combat helicopter in Iraq. Her helicopter got shot, and she has lost both of her legs. She’s a double amputee. She is running for congress. She does not have flesh legs. She has artificial legs, and they don’t look like prosthesis. No, they still look like little mechanical, robot legs. Maybe someday they will fit her with the kind of legs that look more like human legs, but right now she doesn’t have those. When she walked out on stage with those mechanical legs – she walked right out on stage boldly. It was hard not to be moved. That was an inspirational image. To hear

her then talk about her dedication to her Commander in Chief, President Barack Obama – that was effective. The authenticity and honesty was palpable. Her message truly got in, and it was very inspiring. I’ve watched her speech a couple of times.

Another speech that was really, really moving was when former Representative Gabrielle Gifford went on stage, at the Democratic convention, and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. Gabrielle Gifford was the congress woman who was shot in the head about a year and a half ago. The bullet took out a piece of her brain. There has been an amazing recovery. She is still, obviously, challenged and a little compromised, but she looks great. She took the stage with a little help from Florida Representative Deborah Wasserman Schultz, who currently is the chair person for the Democratic National Committee. Representative Gifford can walk, but it was a little difficult for her. Gabrielle Gifford proudly said the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, you could tell it was a little bit of a strain for her to do it. She wanted to say it right, to get all the words right, and she did it! I can’t watch that without crying. When the camera panned the audience there wasn’t a dry eye in the house. That “speech” put things in a different perspective for me. Suddenly these were real people who put their lives at risk. We don’t tend to think about being a politician as a life risking occupation, but it is. It is. These people put their lives at risk. Other people who have risked their lives for their country at other times, in the military like Tammy Duckworth, have now moved into the political arena. Last election there was John McCain. These are people with incredibly strong convictions about wanting to help people. Probably, at the core of all the politicians and speakers – although it can get muddled up with other ego agendas – at the core is that drive of wanting to be “truly helpful.” *A Course In Miracles* says, “I am here only to be truly helpful. – I am here to represent Christ, Who sent me.” (*OrEd.Tx.4.106*) I could feel this energy coming from just about everybody I listened to, at both the Republican and Democratic conventions, whether I agreed with their political positions or not. I could see that at their core they were all in politics to be truly helpful. As such, my heart went out to all of them. I joined with them. I felt one with the whole process. I loved the conventions.

Then a miracle happened for me. After having two weeks of these spirited and challenging conversations with my sister that were so hard for me to get through, after both conventions had ended, I had an entirely different conversation with my sister. She has a big challenge in her life. The man that she lives with has severe diabetes. He has already had part of his foot amputated. My sister feels he isn’t truly working to keep his diabetes in check. Now doctors want to cut his Achilles tendon so that the gangrene in his foot doesn’t spread. Actually, even this procedure doesn’t seem all that hopeful, and the doctors are preparing him for the fact that he might actually lose his whole foot. Obviously, this is very challenging. My sister asked me, “Why do you think

*continued on page 11*

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... continued from page 10

## Politics And Spirituality

he's manifesting this?" I said to her, "You're asking me a spiritual metaphysical question? Let me sit down!" We then had a significant conversation about metaphysics, and spirituality. I don't know if she has ever asked me something like that before. I don't think she would have asked me this, had we not been having two weeks of conversations when I was at least willing to meet her, talk with her, and respect her political views and her energy about them. That connection that we had through all those discussions created the relationship, the rapport, and the oneness to have my sister turn to me for a spiritual and metaphysical reason. I doubt this would have happened otherwise, and I don't remember this ever happening before. It was remarkable to me.

We don't know what comes out of our ability to stay open and one with people who have the extreme opposite views from those we have. There is something about being able to see everybody as our brothers and sisters, regardless of the polarity of our views. I think we, *A Course In Miracles* students, have the tools to do that. We can do that. Maybe that is our role, and that is our challenge. We are not to divorce ourselves from the

political process, but to engage in it with our spiritual perspective, to see beyond the form of the partisan rhetoric and to go deeper to the truth. So many people in both political parties are incredibly dedicated to helping people in whatever way they can. Isn't that a great thing to celebrate. That is indeed what this election does celebrate.

That's my talk for today. Thank you. (applause) ♥

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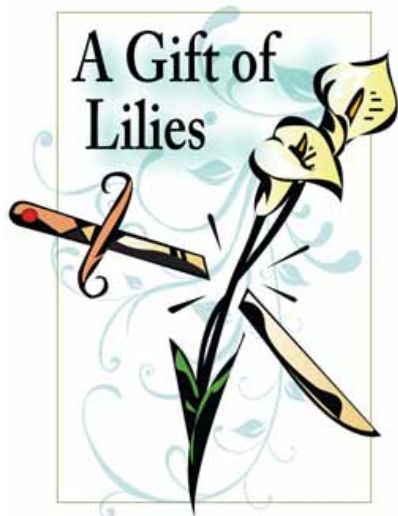


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