

My name is Pamela Whitney Butterfield. My grandfather was George Amos Whitney. My grandfather's best friend was Elwyn Wakeman, who's wife (Virginia) and son (Bruce) died in the fire. After the fire, my grandfather consistently reached out to his longtime friend, "El" to try to help him heal and move forward in life. As you can imagine, healing and moving on was very difficult for "El".

Several years after the fire, my Mom and Dad suffered a terrible loss; their first born died tragically at the age of two. My parents moved back to West Hartford and moved in with my grandparents. Both Mom and Dad struggled terribly to get back on their feet, after their loss.

At one point, probably out of desperation, my grandfather reached out to El, "Can you help my daughter and son-in-law heal? You've been through such terrible loss. I don't know how to help them". At first, El responded with, "No, I can't help them. I can hardly help myself". And then, about three weeks later, one Sunday afternoon, there was a knock on the door at their Penn Drive house. Standing at the door was El, in his Sunday best. He asked my grandparents to go for a drive. He wanted to speak to my parents by themselves.

Sunday after Sunday, El appeared. My grandparents left the house. El and my parents (Fred and Elinor) talked. Soon, El, Fred and Elinor started having their conversations at Elizabeth Park. Their tears were replaced with smiles. Together, they helped one another heal.

When I was a little girl, on occasion, my Mom would stop by Puritan Furniture on New Britain Avenue in West Hartford. She'd stop by to see this dapper, older gentleman. They'd almost fall into each other's arm, with such love and caring for one another (like father and daughter). And, in the evening, when my Dad would get home from work, Mom would say, "I stopped by and saw El today". And, when I'd ask them, "Who is Mr. Wakeman? How come do you guys like him so much?", my Mom would simply say, "Mr. Wakeman is a dear, dear man. He was your Grandpa's best friend. And, he helped your Dad and me out one time when we needed it."

I never knew what kind of help Mr. Wakeman gave to my parents and why he was so special to him until my Mom, at age 74, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She was so grateful to him for being strong enough and vulnerable enough to be so generous. She did not want this wonderful story of compassion and healing to die with her.

Thank you for the opportunity to share.

Warm regards,
Pam (Butterfield)