

**Richard Hillert**  
**1923 -2010**  
**REMEMBRANCE**

Jonathan Hillert

This IS the feast of victory for our God, Alleluia!! Richard Hillert has entered heaven triumphantly; let us celebrate the life we have shared with my father.

Somewhere in heaven, there is a celebration, a feast; a feast that my dad is leading. I can imagine him playing the piano, sitting on the edge of the piano bench, one hand playing the piano, the other with a paintbrush in his hand and a pencil in his mouth, probably singing at the same time; playing the piano and painting, both in his own unique style. I would imagine he is playing one of his ragtime songs, which many of you have never heard. Susan Krout could sing this better than I can read it. "The Open Road." It is a song written many years ago, taken from a store window advertisement, circa 1912.

*"The open road offers no terrors to the woman  
who owns a "stylish" motoring coat,  
a "stylish" motoring coat.  
Enjoy the pleasure of motoring as you speed  
through town or country at ten, fifteen, or even  
twenty-five miles an hour, serene in the  
knowledge that you will arrive,  
you will arrive at your destination  
looking your best,  
looking your best."*

He is looking and feeling his best right now and my father is at his destination. He is at peace and will no longer have pain.

One of my earliest memories of my father is coming home after school, and from nearly the time I got home until well into the night, waking up sometimes, everyone in the house would hear him in his study playing the piano, working on, what I thought was the next masterpiece. My mother sisters and I would hear the same measures played repeatedly; at times breaking out in a Gershwin or Cole Porter song just to mix it up a bit. He would have that pencil in his mouth, occasionally drawing it away to write the next few notes on the sheet music. We would have dinner and the music would be playing in the background, over and over again, ten,

fifteen, even twenty-five times. My Dad would say to us, "I am giving it the test of time." I think every one of his pieces was written and dedicated to my mother; she was the one who heard the world premiere of each piece for nearly 50 years. They each share the same qualities of grace, modesty, and humility. I miss hearing that piano echo in the house.

In his eyes, it was never perfect. Years later, he would modify a note or intonation, always trying to make it better. He however, would never think it was a masterpiece, was too humble, but very critical of his own music. However, he never criticized others. He never criticized my mother, my sisters or, me, although he had many opportunities lately to be very critical or disappointed in me. We loved my father very much and his spirit will resonate within the walls of our house forever.

Reading the many cards and conversations I have had with some of you, something that is so apparent is the love of him that all of you share with my family. I read and hear the words;

"Witness of faith through his music,"

"His music resides in me with as much unyielding clarity as it did when I was a student at Concordia forty-five years ago. His music gave life to biblical text",

"This great composer was also a great teacher, encourager, soft spoken, wry humored, and he seemed to always want his students to succeed",

"He was a trusted confidant, brilliant teacher, amazingly vicariously bestowed with taste yet balanced with genuine kindness",

"This man was a genius and the way he put words and music together, they blended and worked so well",

"He was the Frank Lloyd Wright of the Lutheran Book of Worship",

"Endless supply of patience",

Last Sunday, as Rhea Sprecher was walking out of the church following the cross, she came and stood by me in the pew. She said, as a tear was ready to fall from her eye, "He is not in his pew, he is no longer here." The white haired husband, father, mentor, professor, friend is no longer with us here. However, he is still here in this church with the rich voices, within the instruments that play the music, within these walls, within these hymns; all of his love for God and for you is in every one of us. But not only us as we celebrate his life today, or have been a member of this wonderful congregation, but his memory, my dad, your friend, your former professor, and mentor; his love and passion for music extends far beyond these walls.

Last summer my son and I took a trip to Yellowstone Park. We hiked up a trail behind Old Faithful Lodge to get a better view and take pictures of the geyser. While up the mountain we met a couple of ladies with the same idea. We talked for a while and discovered they were from Minnesota, and I immediately thought, they MUST be Lutheran. Whenever I meet a Lutheran, I always wonder if they know my dad's music. Yes, these two women knew his music and proceeded to sing, "This is the Feast" to Goop and me. I felt so pleased and proud of my father. I mentioned this and similar stories like this to my Dad, he always smiled, never said too much, just wanted to know if I knew what their name was.

I think it is amazing; there are so many people around the world who are aware of his music. His music echoes around the world and is in the heart and voices of millions of Christians. They may never have known him or known that it was his music, but so many have been moved to worship our God by the music he wrote. If I could touch just one person's heart in my lifetime, I would be content. However, through the gift of God he was able to touch millions, which is truly God's victory in the life of Richard Hillert.

I will miss my father, my family will miss him, and you will miss your friend. Let us celebrate his life each day knowing his music is within us and that he has brought us closer to God with his abilities of giving life to biblical text. Let us rely on the power of God to learn by his example of humility, strength, and modesty.

He may not be sitting in his pew or at his piano bench, but my father's legacy will remain with us for a long time to come. God's gifts are eternal.

Revelation 5:11-14

<sup>11</sup>Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup>saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" <sup>13</sup>And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" <sup>14</sup>And the four living creatures said, "Amen!"