

# In the Name of Salvation

**Joekie Loomer-Kruger**

**D**id I miss the first signs of elder abuse happening to him? I believe I did. The clues were in a drawing.

My 87-year-old husband, Herb, is being cared for in a long-term care facility. In his room is an amusing book called *Doodle Mania* in which he completes the drawings. The one he chose that day showed a beleaguered stork with a huge bag weighting down the bird's bill. Above the image was the question, "What is the stork delivering?"

Inside the empty bag, Herb drew a chubby man wearing boxing gloves. I asked him if there was also a story to go with his drawing. I printed his response beside his image. "He's trying to punch his way out of the bag. He doesn't want to be born again."

There was no laughter as he told me this. Not even the hint of a smile. But I interpreted his drawing as a visual pun, knowing Herb's life-long affinity for puns, as well as his life-long identification as a secular humanist.

So what made me look at this drawing differently?

It was a letter. Unsealed, unstamped and addressed to Herb, it had been left on his shelf just inside the entrance to his room.

I picked up the letter, lifted the flap, and unfolded the two stapled pages. The letter read:

Dear Mr. Herb Krueger... [his last name misspelled].

I'm compelled to write you this heartfelt letter to you. Did (sic) you know how lucky (or how blessed you are?) You are alive and well...and you can make the (only) important decision you'll ever make in your life...before it's too late.

The pages quickly revealed themselves as an evangelical proselytizing tract in letter format. Sections were highlighted in pink.

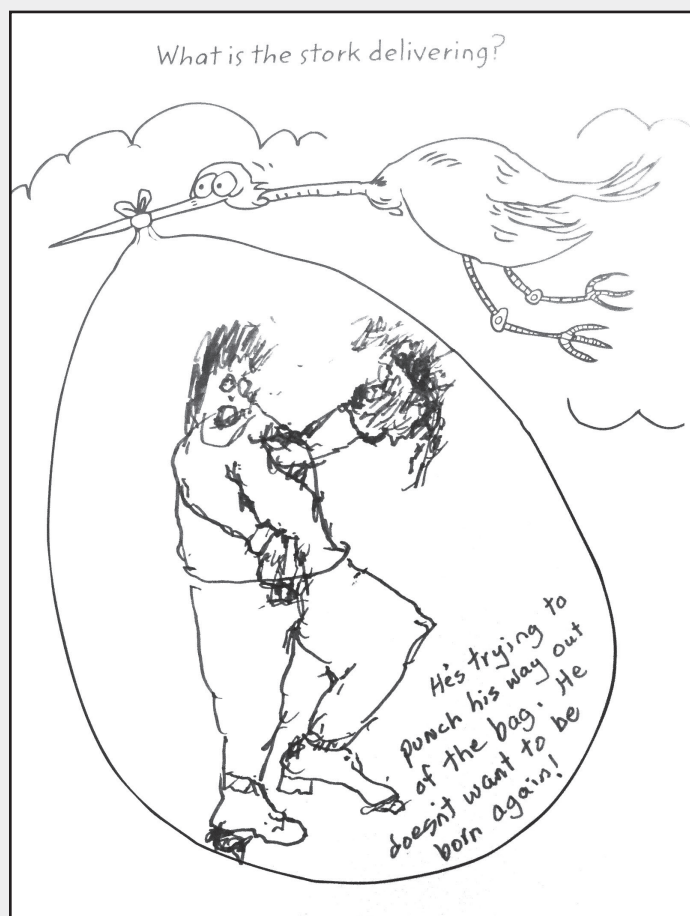
Humble yourself.... Do not let human reasoning or family members talk you out of making Heaven your eternal destination.

It went on to inform that...

being a good and nice person won't save any man...that... if you take offence and neglect to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you will go to hell just like the worst criminal who ever lived.

What Herb needed to do was to pray the words printed at the end of the letter, then write to a particular e-mail address and let "me" (whoever "me" was) know my husband had found Jesus.

As I read, something else that had puzzled me fell into place. A couple of months earlier, I'd found a small comic book-style religious tract in Herb's room. Upon investigation – with the help of the facility's chaplain – we determined no other residents had been targeted with similar booklets. Again, there was only an



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e-mail address as contact, and when the chaplain e-mailed to inquire about the tract he got no response. I let the issue go, satisfied that I'd intercepted the offensive material before Herb happened upon it.

But this time – with the letter – it was different. I felt angry. And upset. "This is abusive," I thought. "Herb has dementia. He's old, ill and vulnerable. He can't handle stuff like this anymore." So, although I'd spotted the envelope after hours, I found a few management personnel still on the premises. I showed them the letter.

Action was swift. And this time I had no doubt where the letter had come from.

"Donald" is the name I'll give the perpetrator.

The morning of the letter I'd called to check on Herb. "He's doing quite well this morning," the nurse said. "He ate a good breakfast, and

he's in his room now with his newspaper. (Herb still reads but doesn't retain.) Oh, I see Donald is just going in to visit with him."

Tall, slim, grey-haired Donald, with a tidy little moustache, is a sixteen-year volunteer visitor to residents there. He periodically stops by to chat with Herb on his rounds. Herb, however, with his "very good forgetter," as we refer to his deepening memory loss, never remembers Donald's name, nor that he has visited. So when I heard Donald was visiting again, I set aside my niggling concerns – concerns going back to when Herb moved into the very caring nursing home a year-and-a-half earlier. At that time, Herb was still able to tell me about things that bothered him.

"There's a man who comes to see me. He keeps trying to convert me. I don't like it."

I promptly intervened. And immediately ascertained that the man who was upsetting my husband was not the thoughtful chaplain in his Roman collar who made cheery, chatty visits. It was Donald.

So early on, at staff request, Donald met with the chaplain, and the Director of Recreation who was responsible for volunteers. They informed Donald that under no circumstances was he to talk religion with Herb. He was to fully respect Herb's rights and his stance as a non-believer. Nor was Donald to bring up religion as a topic with other residents. Donald agreed with the stipulations.

And so he continued to drop in to see my husband...

But why was Donald permitted to volunteer at the facility in the first place?

Before the facility was sold five or six years ago, to a family-owned company, it was owned and operated by a religious denomination. Donald was one of their regular, devoted volunteers. He simply came along with the transfer of assets.

Guilt still nags me for not having protected Herb from Donald, but I am grateful to the staff for their immediate, decisive, and firm action. A formal complaint has been signed. Donald, over protests and claims that someone was trying to frame him, is no longer allowed in the building. The case has been closed.

But I'm left to wonder about others in long-term care. How many more Donalds are out there posing as friendly visitors, while distressing those who cannot stand up for themselves?

Elder abuse takes many forms. •

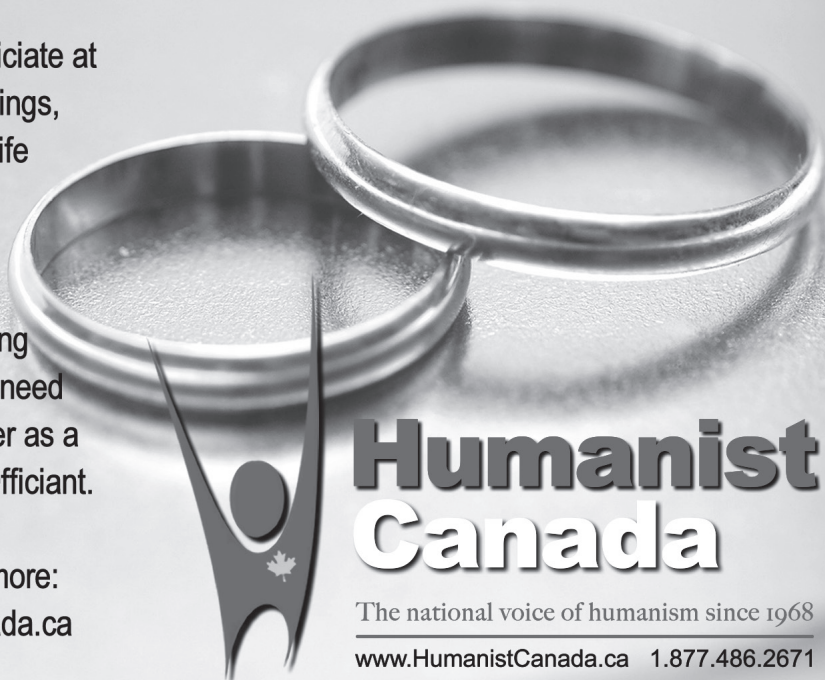
*When they lived in Ottawa in the early 1980s, **Jockie Loomer-Kruger** and her late husband, Herb Kruger, served on the Editorial Board of Humanist in Canada magazine (now called Humanist Perspectives). She now resides in Kitchener, Ontario, where she writes and paints. Two years ago, when she turned 80, she wrote, illustrated and published her first book, "Valley Child – A Memoir." [www.jockie.ca](http://www.jockie.ca)*

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