

# At Memorial Church, May 16, 2008

The following pages contain images and remembrances from the memorial service for Krister Stendahl. Included directly below are remarks by Krister's daughter, Anna Langenfeld, the words of Johanna Glazer, a granddaughter, and Harvey Cox's memories of Krister from his diary entries.

## Anna Langenfeld

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Anna Langenfeld, and I have had the privilege of living my life as Krister and Brita's daughter. The cantata just told us that people are like grass. And, yes, father was like grass—very tall grass. He was tall and graceful, even though his body tried to bend him to be otherwise. As you've heard today, his mind and his contributions were of big, grand things. He truly changed the landscape of thinking and dialogue for so many, in so many venues.

For us, his children, he laid out the landscape on which we were to live our lives. It is a landscape where we are to live boldly, kindly, and with wonder and humor. Father was, of course, the father of the big things—the worldly thinking. But to know Krister is to know that he was a man of the little things. He understood delight and wonder. The respect he had for our larger world was no greater than his delight in the everyday world.

We watched the things which gave him the

most pleasure: polishing the silver; washing the car; cleaning the kitchen counters; standing for hours at his work bench on Nantucket, fixing a something-or-other, and ah, yes, polishing the shoes. As children, we were to put out our shoes on Saturday evenings so that father could polish them for Sunday morning.

What also grew out of his sense of wonder was his constant, constant curiosity. Curious about people, about things, about science, and about language. Dinner conversations in our home were always punctuated with, "Let's look that up! John, get the dictionary. Anna, the Atlas. Donnie, the Who's Who." There is still a dictionary, unabridged, of course, next to father's chair at the kitchen table.

He loved knowing how things worked. He actually read—and enjoyed reading—owner's manuals. There was a time when father built an FM receiver from a kit with hundreds of pieces. When it was done, he made us leave the house, nervous that it wouldn't work. And then he called us in, showing enormous pride when it sang with music.



John Paulson conducts the University Lutheran Church choir.

Father wanted us to live boldly, to have energy. Energy was important to him. It was life. No one knew that better than our mother. She was the reservoir from which he drew. Theirs was an amazing partnership. Our gratitude to her, and admiration for her, are immeasurable. Gratitude is truly what fills our hearts. We as a family are grateful for the life of this wonderful man. We are also immensely grateful to him for the kindness he showed us in his dying. He lifted our worry. He made his passing peaceful. He loved us to the end.

Father had beautiful hands. He animated his speech with his hands. So today I say thank you from all of us for everything said here and for coming. But from father, I say [hand gestures of gratitude], and from mother, I say [hand gesture], thank you.

## Johanna Glazer

Fifty-four years ago, Krister Stendahl—my father's father, my Far-Far—brought his family across the ocean to this city and this country. They were then just a family of four, and they knew very few people here. Today, that little family has grown to span two rooms when we sit down together for Christmas dinner. And as we look around this room, we can see just a glimpse of how wide Krister's circle grew to be.

We've heard today about so many of his wonderful qualities and accomplishments. To me and to my cousins, he was first and foremost our grandfather—a man who inspired us, who taught us, who made us laugh, and who made us think. Most of all, he was a man whom we loved and who we knew loved us so very much.

Krister Stendahl cared deeply about the future. He thought about his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren and the world that he was leaving for us, and he worried about it. He asked himself what the world would be like in 2080 for his great-grandchildren: Joshua, Samantha, Lucy, and those still to come. He hoped for a world where there would be peace and equality and where lessons of love and tolerance would win over those of hate and vengeance. And like any grandfather, he taught us about the world. He has left us, his grandchildren, with many lessons, not just to remember but to pass on. I would like to share some of those lessons with you.

Not surprisingly, my grandfather taught



Johanna Glazer.

us to think and to question. I was fortunate enough to have him come to Brandeis and teach while I was a student there. I was able to spend time with him then, and he would take me to lunch in the Faculty Club, which, as an undergrad, I always thought that was wonderful. We would talk about my courses and about the family and about the world. And he would never let me off the hook, but would question and push and always have something interesting to discuss.

My Far-Far taught us to care about others and to reach out to them. When my cousin Nicholas was younger he was interested in very little other than sports. One morning, when Nick was visiting Nantucket, my grandfather greeted him with a full conversation about the Red Sox. Now Far-Far told me more than once, only partially in jest, that he didn't believe in sports. But that summer he knew Nick was coming, and he knew what Nick was interested in, and so he read the sports pages for a few days before Nick arrived. He wanted to reach out and to connect with his grandson. My grandfather knew about each of us; he knew our interests and our talents. He went out of his way to learn about us, to connect with us, and to let us know that he was proud of us. My grandfather taught us to enjoy life, and not to take the little things too seriously.

At one unforgettable Easter dinner my grandfather picked up an egg, and as was his habit, cracked it on his forehead. As a child I always found it amusing that this dignified man would do something so silly. But this particular Easter, the hard-boiled egg was, in fact, soft

boiled. And my grandfather sat there quite literally with egg on his face, and he laughed, and we laughed, and we learned.

My Far-Far taught us to enjoy the quiet and magical moments in life. Anna spoke about these simple pleasures. For me this is the memory of watching the sunset on Nantucket or enjoying a wonderful glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice that he had made, or sitting when we gathered for Christmas and listening to the poems that he had written, which provided a clue as to what was inside the presents.

My grandfather taught us to respect differences in the world and to stand up for what is right. The equality of all people, regardless of gender, race, creed, or sexual orientation was an assumption that underlay all of our interactions; it was an assumption that was a part of my upbringing and has become a part of who I am. Far-Far taught us to care about the future. My grandfather made it clear to us that he wanted us to be happy, and that he wanted for us the best possible future. He wanted this not only for his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren, but for the whole world.

My responsibility then—in fact, the responsibility of all who knew him—is to learn from the lessons that he left us with. To question, to respect, to take the time to learn about people. To enjoy life and not to take ourselves too seriously. And, most importantly, to pass these on to the future. In that way, the circle of family and friends that have been touched by Krister Stendahl will continue to grow for years and even for generations to come.



Justin Knight  
Brita Stendahl and Peter Gomes.



### Harvey Cox

*Diary excerpts*

**September 1958** – Well, yesterday was my first day as a doctoral student at Harvard, and I met my first Harvard professor. In fact, he's my advisor. His name is Krister Stendahl, a New Testament scholar, and he comes from one of those Scandinavian countries. Sweden, I think.

## A Lasting and Generous Imprint by One Who Exuded Life

*During the service, columnist James Carroll, Dean William A. Graham, Diana Eck, Susannah Heschel, a delegation from the Church of Sweden, Bishop Margaret Payne, and the Rev. Peter Gomes shared memories, briefly excerpted here.*

Who was Krister if not a man who exuded life? Life in his family; life in his partnership with Brita; life of the mind; life of his beautifully erect body. Life, as he put it, “wandering around for a while in the Pauline garden of thought.”

*James Carroll*

Humane, erudite, generous, kind, wise, and tolerant beyond the capacities of most of us mortals, Krister Stendahl set a high standard that we can only strive to reach. But his many concrete contributions here and around the world have given us all a higher base from which to do that reaching.

*Dean William A. Graham*

It's little wonder that during Krister's years as Dean and professor at HDS the serious encounter of the Christian community with the currents of the world's theological and religious thinking was at a high pitch. People throughout the world learned from Krister's wisdom and biblical

He looked quite formidable at first—sitting behind his desk, smoking a cigarette, thumbing through my application papers—but then he looked up at me, and he gave a little smile, and I knew right away that it was all going to be OK. 50 years later, it was.

**November 1968** – We had a meeting of the Divinity School faculty yesterday and everybody was very nervous. Who would the new dean be? President Pusey came in and announced, very unceremoniously, that Krister would be the new dean. I could almost hear the collective sigh of relief that arose from my colleagues. Krister is a scholar, a churchman, ecumenical, fair, large-minded, decisive, and anything but pompous. I can't imagine a better choice. 40 years later, I still cannot.

**April 1972** – I saw the dean today about my upcoming sabbatical semester. I handed him, anxiously, a prospectus outlining what I hoped to accomplish. He took a puff of his cigarette. “Well,” he said. “I'll read it. But I won't take it too seriously, and you shouldn't either. You must know that the word sabbatical stems from

the word Sabbath. And as the Jews know, on the Sabbath, you are not supposed to accomplish anything. Have a good semester.” I did.

**April 2004** – As usual, Krister and Brita came to our Passover Seder, and as usual, he took up his annual debate . . . over the supremacy of polytheism over monotheism. He seems to enjoy the debate as much as he does the Seder.

**January 2008** – I had lunch with Krister and Brita to celebrate her birthday. I was embarrassed because, thinking it was his birthday, I had brought him a gift. He graciously accepted it, however, and said he would open it on his birthday.

**April 15, 2008** – Krister died today, three days short of his 87th birthday. I guess he never had a chance to open my present. Anyway, it was not the gift I had always intended to give him but never did, which was to tell him how very, very much he had meant to me for ever so many years as a teacher, as a dean, as a colleague, and as a friend. Requiescant in pace.

insight. . . . He left a lasting if sometimes hidden imprint in the scope of ecumenical thinking.

*Diana Eck*

Krister was born in Stockholm; he was baptized in Stockholm; he was ordained in Stockholm and served parishes in Stockholm. . . . We in Sweden remember him. . . . We say thank you,

Krister, for all your challenges. Thank you for new ways of thinking and reflecting. Thank you for all that you gave us. And thanks be to God, who Krister loved, and who loves us.

*Eva Brunne, Ann-Cathrin Jarl, Margarethe Isberg, Anne Louise Eriksson (Delegation from the Church of Sweden)*



Justin Knight  
Anna Langenfeld, center, looking at a Stendahl family photo display at the reception following the service.