My Boat in the Water

In memory of my father
Michael T McGinnis
March 10, 1936 - March 29, 2022

Brian P McGinnis

Dad calls out in a voice that's both immediate and distant.

"Help! Help! Help!"

His eyes are half-lidded and looking more inward than outward as I answer his call. He's in his half-dream world, that transition space he inhabits as he approaches the end of his time in our world.

I respond, "I'm here. How can I help?"

"I need help," he repeats, his voice still near but far.

I respond again, "How can I help?"

"Water."

"Do you want some water?" I ask. He softly shakes his head, no, so he must not be thirsty. I probe, "No? How can I help with water?"

"Help me get my boat in the water."

I feel surprise, then answer, "Okay, I can do that. Is it a big boat? Or a little boat?"

"Little boat." His voice is small.

I offer, "I can help you with your boat. Are you going fishing for salmon?"

He nods his head, yes, then relaxes and closes his eyes fully.

Less than two days later, in the early light of dawn, he passes from this world. Mom is alone with him. They're holding hands together as he leaves her. I'm just walking into the room as she rises. I see the tears in her eyes and the pain in her face.

I lean over him. Feeling for breath, listening for heartbeat. There's only the sound of the oxygen machine. I hold Mom, "He's gone." I turn off the oxygen machine and silence fills the room. I check again knowing the truth but delaying the acceptance. I can still feel his warmth.

As I lay in bed that night, the images of the past week play through my mind unheeded. My thoughts keep returning to his boat in the water.

Then my mind comes into understanding what he was asking, what I need to do.

I need to take his urn to Puget Sound near Whidbey Island. To get it in the water. To let him remain on the water with the salmon.

Epilogue
from Donna A McGinnis

His love of the water began as a kid and soon developed into a love of being on the water, in the water, and looking at the water of our Puget Sound region.