CHAPTER

THIRTY-FIVE

On my flight from Rome back to New York after the *Good Morning America* concert, I was overwhelmed by deep feelings of sadness. For the longest time, I could not figure out why. The music-making in St. Peter's had been wonderful, and I had survived my brief brush with Code Red. Then I realized that it was my delayed response to Archbishop Dziwisz's telephone call: "His Holiness will be so glad that you are well again. We were all very worried when we heard. And Maestro, you have the Holy Father's blessing. Always. You know this."

Since 1998, the world had watched as Pope John Paul's illness became harder and harder to hide. He was stooped. He walked with ever greater effort, leaning on his cane. His words were more and more difficult to understand. The Pope's physical frailty, his mortality even, was now becoming clear. I was deeply touched that he had been worried about me, and I felt such sadness. How much longer could he go on? And then I grew calm as I realized the answer. As long as his spirit remained strong, everything would be all right. And his spirit seemed as strong as ever.

During the run-up to the televised concert in St. Peter's, a letter had arrived from the Vatican bearing the signatures of both Cardinal Kasper and Archbishop Fitzgerald, officially approving the Papal Concert of Reconciliation to take place on January 17, 2004. That was a good thing, because we had proceeded with the preparations at breakneck speed for months. The Knights of Columbus had agreed to

sponsor the concert. The Pittsburgh Symphony had agreed to perform, as had the London Philharmonic Choir, the Kraków Philharmonic Choir, members of the Pittsburgh Mendelssohn Choir, and true to Ambassador Jim Nicholson's word, the Ankara Polyphonic Choir as well. John Harbison, one of America's foremost composers, had even composed a new work in an extraordinarily short amount of time. Everything was all lined up and ready to go, and now we had our official Vatican invitation in hand.

On November 7, 2003, only hours after we received notice of the *bolletino*, the eagerly awaited Vatican public announcement of the concert, we were permitted to hold a press conference in the ornate marble lobby of Heinz Hall, the storied home of the Pittsburgh Symphony. On hand to announce what had until then been a completely secret event were Richard Simmons, the PSO board chair; Carl Anderson, our Knights of Columbus knight in shining armor; and myself. Ambassador Jim Nicholson participated by telephone from Rome, and Bishop Donald Wuerl of Pittsburgh, who had to be elsewhere on official church business, sent his warm greetings and best wishes via video. Both the national and local press were on hand to tell the story to the world—and tell it they did.

The next day, and for the two months until our Vatican appearance, there was nothing as important in the Pittsburgh press as the Papal Concert of Reconciliation. It was front-page news. The television and radio stations, the mainstream press, and all the religious papers were filled with stories about how the concert had come to be. There were daily accounts of all our preparations, including the orchestra's journey to Rome. The whole city, including its enormous Catholic community, was behind the Pittsburgh Symphony in a way no one could ever remember.

Our concert in Pittsburgh on January 14 was a sold-out send-off. In Heinz Hall we performed the entire Mahler Symphony No. Two, "Resurrection," all eighty minutes of music, all five movements (only three of which, as determined by customary Papal Concert length, would be performed for the Pope in the Vatican). That complete performance was a special treat for our Mahler-loving Pittsburgh public.

However, we were not permitted to perform John Harbison's sacred motet, "Abraham." That was a Papal commission, which would have its world premiere at the Vatican in the presence of the Pope.

The Mahler Second with such a great Mahler orchestra as the Pittsburgh Symphony was deeply satisfying. And each member of that orchestra played in the tradition of all the musicians who had sat in their seats before them. They had passed their Mahler tradition down from generation to generation, mixing their experiences with those of their forebears.

Nothing pleased me so much as having a veteran member of the PSO bass section tell me that my Mahler reminded him of the music-making of William Steinberg, the orchestra's famed Cologne-born music director, who had last led them in concert more than a quarter century before. To me, that was one of the highest compliments I could ever receive.

A Mahler sound is like no other. It takes virtuosity, yes, but coupled with a sense of the style and ethos of the time in which it was written: Central Europe just before the turn of the twentieth century. My time in Kraków was essential to me now. I could bring that southern Polish, Galician, Austro-Hungarian musical sensibility to bear on all the long-line melodic story that Mahler tells so wonderfully.

The Pittsburgh entourage that flew to Rome in January was huge. It seemed like half the city had decided to accompany its orchestra on its historic date at the Holy See. The press contingent alone was enormous but so was the cadre of ordinary citizens, board members, and others who clamored for their coveted special seats in the Sala Nervi that January evening.

Michael Bielski later told me that the entire three days of the Pittsburgh Symphony's stay in Rome passed as if "time had stood still." They had clearly left their economic troubles behind, and welcomed the musical and spiritual experience that was to come, with open arms and hearts.

On the evening of the concert, as I waited with great anticipation with the assembled musicians on platform in the Sala Nervi, I wondered about His Holiness. How would he look? Would he walk in?

Would he be supported by his cane? I had now not seen him in person in two years. What would time and travail have wrought on my beloved Pope John Paul?

The orchestra and the members of the immense choir, assembled from North America, Europe, and Asia especially for this command performance, seemed to grow tense in anticipation of His Holiness' arrival. As I looked around one last time, I felt the audience too beginning to grow quiet in anticipation.

The Sala Nervi seemed like a sea of covered heads, each person according to his or her faith tradition. To my left I saw the face of a beautiful Muslim woman, her head covered in an elegant orange silk scarf. To her right sat a row of rabbis, wearing yarmulkes of various colors, but mostly black, and one with a rounded top hat, signaling his strict orthodox Ashkenazi beliefs.

In another section was what seemed to be a sea of Bishops, Archbishops, and Cardinals marked by their purple and orange skullcaps, next to a small section of black head-coverings, some trimmed in white, of the members of the non-Catholic Christian denominations represented at the concert. Behind them sat row upon row of nuns, in all manner of habit, some in black, some in white, some in the blue and white habits of Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity of Calcutta. The Aula was a sea of color waiting for the holy man in white to arrive.

In the midst of the seated clergy, I spied Bishop Donald Wuerl of Pittsburgh. He, more than most, seemed to be awaiting the coming concert with keen anticipation. It was his orchestra, after all, his beloved city that would be the center of artistic attention for all those in the Aula, and for everyone around the world who would be watching. His quiet pride shone on his smiling, modest, priestly face.

As I turned for the last time, I thought of all the wonderful conductors who had conducted for this Pope, legendary names like Carlo Maria Giulini and Riccardo Muti. Had they felt the same awe as I was feeling now? Had their orchestras, famed ensembles such as the Vienna Philharmonic and the Orchestra of La Scala, also sat on the edge of their chairs, like the Pittsburgh Symphony was right now? And my mentor, Sir Georg Solti, had he felt the exquisite specialness

I now was feeling when he led his renowned Chicago Symphony in their home city for the visiting Pope John Paul in 1979? Although this was my fourth Papal performance in this hall, I had lost none of the wonder of that first occasion in December 1988.

Finally, out of the corner of my eye, I caught the first glimpse of the Pope as he came through the same door through which the orchestra, chorus, and I had entered the Aula. He was flanked on his left by the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Rav Elio Toaff, dressed in an elegant black suit with a rich, silk charcoal-gray tie. Rav Toaff's presence was oddly familiar, since he had been an honored guest at the Papal Concert to Commemorate the Shoah back in 1994. On the Pope's right, however, was Imam Abdulawahab Hussein Gomaa, the Imam of the Mosque of Rome. As I looked at the Imam, dressed in a black caftan, with a black ecclesiastical collar, his head topped with a low white fez, I wondered what was going through his mind as he looked out over this multicolored, interfaith scene.

His Holiness was in the middle, not walking now, but wheeled forward in what looked like a rolling gold-upholstered throne. He was dressed in his usual white cassock, with a golden pectoral cross around his neck and a white sash emblazoned with his Papal Seal. He wore a white zucchetto, or skullcap, on his head. That head covering always reminded me of the *kippah* we Jews all wear in synagogue on Yom Kippur.

Although clearly not able to sit up entirely straight, the Pope looked out at the applauding audience with a warm, deep smile, lifting his right arm in greeting, his open hand reaching out as if he wanted to shake every outstretched hand in the vast audience arrayed before him.

The applause went on, and on, and on. It was directed at all three holy men, to be sure, but it was most especially meant, I felt, for His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

At last, the uproarious welcome died down, and Archbishop Dziwisz, sitting just behind the Pope, signaled me to begin the evening's music-making.

I bowed once more in the direction of the Pontiff, and he in turn gestured directly towards me. He was waving his hand, looking me

upward in the eye, his face tilted downward by the curvature in his spine. To me, it looked as though he were reaching out towards me across the broad expanse between us. I felt as close to him in that moment as I ever had.

The Pittsburgh Symphony and all the choirs and soloists who had spontaneously stood at their first sight of His Holiness continued to stare in his direction, taking in the scene and the presence of His Holiness as if to store it in some precious place inside themselves, to be retrieved and savored again and again, after this experience was over. They seemed not to want to begin our evening's work. Finally, with a gentle gesture from me, they all took their seats.

At long last, I raised my arms in preparation for the opening of John Harbison's sacred motet, "Abraham."

It is a rare privilege to conduct the premiere of any work, especially one by such an important figure as John Harbison. But to bring to life the never-before-heard sounds that John had only imagined in his mind's ear, here in the Vatican, for this beloved Pope, was literally historic. The humbling dedication that Harbison wrote in his manuscript made the prospect all the more daunting:

> To His Holiness Pope John Paul II for his pontificate-long dedication to fostering reconciliation among the peoples of Abraham: Jews, Christians and Muslims, and with deep gratitude to Maestro Sir Gilbert Levine, for his 15-year-long creative collaboration with His Holiness, which led to the great honor of this commission.

I looked to see that everyone was ready, the Pittsburgh Symphony brass and the assembled choirs, and brought my arms down. Harbison's opening staccato chords crackled his music to life. The double chorus and two brass choirs antiphonally declaimed their loud, unanimous, affirmative intent: "And! When!" Chorus One asserts. "And! When!" Chorus Two answers purposefully, in stepwise descent. Harbison unfolded the text and the music as if they were always meant to be one:

> And when Abraham was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abraham, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And thou shalt be the Father of many nations.

This text from Genesis is so simple yet so profound, binding together Muslim, Christian, and Jew, all the progeny of the one Patriarch, in an unbreakable historic union of brothers and sisters. And John Harbison's music perfectly captured that familial unity in our rich religious diversity.

The performance of a new work always raises the question of whether the audience will respond favorably. John Harbison, sitting there in the Aula that evening, must have been wondering the same thing. As his work ended with quiet resolution, intoning over and over the name of the Patriarch Abraham, I heard the vast audience begin to applaud. Their reaction was warm and sustained, which was of course satisfying. But there really was only one reaction that I cared about.

I looked over at the face of His Holiness, who was applauding our performance, and caught his eye; it was as if he wanted to give me his review, right there on the spot. His smile told me all I needed to know. He had approved the text beforehand, and now his smile showed me he approved the music as well.

The other reaction came from the Pittsburgh Symphony itself. Harbison's work is scored for double brass choir, thirteen players in all. So the eighty players who were sitting on the Vatican's stage waiting their turn to play in the Mahler were also hearing the world premiere performance of this work, along with the 7,500 people in attendance and the millions watching on television throughout the world. The orchestra's applause, demonstrated in the string players shaking their bows up and down in the air, and the woodwinds shuffling their feet, was a sign of approbation almost as important as that of the Pope.

After the birth of that new and wonderful work came the Mahler Symphony No. Two. We had performed it in Pittsburgh just three days

before, but much had changed. For one thing, the choir was almost completely different. Only a handful of members of the marvelous Pittsburgh Mendelssohn Choir who had sung with us in Heinz Hall earlier in the week could accompany us to Rome, but the choirs of London, Kraków, and Ankara had all joined us just for the Papal Concert. In two marathon rehearsals, the three choirmasters and I had combined these three terrific, but very different, choirs, with their quite distinct choral traditions and Polish, English, and Turkish languages, into one cohesive, unified vocal ensemble, two hundred strong. If there were miracles in evidence that evening in this holy space, this was surely one of them.

The second challenge for the Pittsburgh orchestra and myself was the change of venue. Heinz Hall is an acoustical marvel, seating an ample 2,676 concertgoers. The Sala Nervi seats 7,500 and is anything but acoustically friendly to any musical event, let alone a complex classical undertaking like Mahler's Second Symphony. In addition, the Mahler score calls for an off-stage orchestra, which must be coordinated precisely with the huge orchestra on stage. In the Sala Nervi, that second orchestra was almost 150 feet away, and connected to me only by a closed-circuit television camera. What was a musical coordination feat in Heinz Hall became an extreme logistical challenge in the Aula Paolo VI.

More important than these logistics (which we thankfully could solve) was the question of whether the Pope would truly appreciate Mahler's work in all its full-throated intensity. He had approved the work based on his familiarity with the original Mickewicz poem "Dziady" and, frankly, based on his belief in me and our sixteen years of doing concerts together; but nothing like this had ever been performed for any pope in the history of the Vatican.

As we got under way, with the thunderous violin and viola tremolo and the pounding upward scales of the cellos and basses, I could only hope we would bring His Holiness with us on the extraordinary spiritual journey that is Mahler's Second Symphony. At the second theme of the first movement, when the violins begin their aching ascent to our first musical glimpse of heaven, I looked out over

the strings towards the Pope sitting on his throne. His eyes were alternately open and closed, but just when I thought he might be off somewhere else, he began to move his head from side to side, almost in rhythm with the inner pulse of the music itself. He seemed enthralled. He seemed to be entering deep into the spirit of the music, into the meaning hidden within the notes. I had never seen him so absorbed in any musical work in all the years that I had made music for him as he was in Mahler's Second Symphony.

In the televised concert for PBS that was produced after the Vatican event, paintings especially commissioned by the Vatican for this occasion (and that were reproduced in the program for this Papal event) were shown. At the crucial section of the last movement, where the Last Judgment seems to be sounded and the call comes forth for all the souls of the faithful to meet their maker, the American television audience would see these paintings, one by one, in slow dissolve. The voice of the choir is intentionally almost inaudible. Coming from an immense chorus of more than two hundred, the effect of so little volume of sound produced by so many voices is unearthly. The paintings made a perfect complement to these heavenly choral tones.

In our live performance in the Vatican there were no such visual prompts. It is pure musical speech, entering the soul through the mind of the ear. And in this too His Holiness seemed to be right there with us, with Mahler, on the spiritual journey of the soul's ascent into heaven. Whether his eyes were open or closed didn't matter. I almost couldn't keep my eyes off him, so distracting was the intensity of his involvement.

As we neared the end, there came the final crashing chords and full choral and orchestral peroration: "Arise, arise my soul. What you have wrought will carry you to God." And it was over. The Pope joined the audience in standing up from his wheeled throne to applaud our performance, in what I hope and believe was his appreciation for the musical journey that we had just concluded with him.

When the applause finally died down, he sat and spoke words of peace that were at the very center of why we had initiated this concert in the first place:

I have taken part with deep emotion in this evening's concert dedicated to the theme of reconciliation among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. I listened to the splendid musical performance that gave us all an opportunity for reflection and prayer. I extend my greetings to the distinguished conductor Maestro Gilbert Levine, to the members of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and to the choirs of Ankara, Kraków, London, and Pittsburgh.

The history of relations among Jews, Christians, and Muslims is marked by both light and shadow, and it has unfortunately known some painful moments. This evening, we gathered here to give concrete expression to reconciliation, entrusting ourselves to the universal message of music.

The unanimous hope we express is that all peoples may be purified from the hatred and evil that threaten peace continuously, and so, be able to extend to one another hands that have never been stained by violence but are ready to offer help and comfort to those in need.

Yes, we must find within us the courage of Peace! We must implore on High the gift of Peace! And this peace will spread like a soothing balm if only we travel unceasingly on the road of reconciliation. Then the wilderness will become a garden in which justice will flourish and the effect of this justice will be peace. *Omnia Vincit Amor*!

The Pope's delivery was halting. He struggled mightily to find his breath. But there was no doubting the immense power of his words, or the powerful personal conviction with which they were delivered.

As His Holiness finished, Archbishop Dziwisz discreetly pointed in my direction for the chosen musical participants to approach His Holiness and receive his personal thanks. When the group, which consisted of Mark Huggins, the Pittsburgh Symphony co-concertmaster; our two wonderful German soloists, soprano Ruth

Ziesak and mezzo-soprano Birgit Remmert; and myself, finally made our way across the stage to where the Pontiff was sitting, Archbishop Dziwisz indicated that I (rather than, as was usual, a member of the Church hierarchy) was to introduce my colleagues to the Pope. This was a public gesture of trust before all those present and all the millions who were watching. I was deeply honored.

After introducing my three wonderful colleagues, I looked for the first time closely into His Holiness' eyes. It seemed to me that he had indeed been deeply moved. The music I had selected for him had made its intended impression. And the event that he had so courageously championed for many months had been well worth his intensive efforts.

He thanked me for all I had done, for the wonderful music we had made. And then he startled me with a remarkable request. "Maestro," the Pope said, "would you please give us an encore? Would that be possible? I would be so grateful if you could do that this time. Your concert pleased me so very much."

I was so stunned, I didn't move. I held his hand, which had been in mine the whole time, and almost didn't let go.

Finally, after what must have been far fewer seconds than it felt like, I answered, "Yes, Your Holiness, of course. We would be most pleased."

I walked back to the podium thinking rapidly about what we could possibly perform as an encore after the conclusion of a huge-canvassed work like the Mahler Second. Just as I climbed up to take my place, it hit me. We would reprise the last few minutes of the symphony itself, reliving for ourselves and for all assembled the final moments of the musical journey we had just concluded.

I quickly flipped through the final movement of the score, and spoke in a stage whisper to the immense orchestra and choirs, who were waiting with quizzical looks on their faces. They had observed the conversation between the Pope and me, but they could not have had any idea whatsoever of his request.

"Number 48. Can we please start again at rehearsal number 48?" I fairly yelled across the wide and deep expanse of the Sala Nervi stage.

Every single one of the musicians looked stunned. But soon they understood. The strings, who were arrayed right in front of me, heard me loud and clear. They noted the place in the score, and in turn passed the spot where we would start back over their shoulders to their colleagues in the woodwinds and the brass, who in turn passed it back to the three choirs who were sitting in long rows behind them. How it got to all two-hundred-plus choristers I will never know. Maybe it was the second miracle of the night, after the choir's unified performance after so few rehearsals.

In any case, we all found our place, plus or minus a few singers and instrumentalists who entered one by one, and by the time we reached the loud climax of that last movement of apotheosis once again, we had found one another, and Mahler. We had created an incredible musical end to a night of wonderful "at-one-ment" in the halls of the Vatican. The Pope's encore had its intended effect.

After we finally left the stage (after the Pope and his entourage had made their own ceremonious exit), I bid members of the Pittsburgh Symphony good-bye as some came, one by one, into my backstage dressing room to thank me for bringing them to Rome. I told them it was I who was grateful to them (and to their choral colleagues and the soloists) for their remarkable music-making. The choirs left quickly, out of the Sala Nervi by the door on the opposite side of the hall, to board the waiting buses and begin their journeys home: to Kraków, London, Ankara, and Pittsburgh. I hoped I would see them all again, orchestra and choirs, but at that very moment I had no idea where or when.

John Harbison came backstage with his wife, Rose, and his publisher, Susan Feder. They wanted to know what the Pope had said about his work. It was clear to me, as I told them: "Couldn't you tell, John? It seemed to me that he loved it." John nodded in deep appreciation.

The new President of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Larry Tamburri, was in Rome as well, but he had only taken up his post at the new year. He came backstage briefly before heading off into the night to a party hosted by the orchestra to celebrate its triumph. What

an initiation to his new job that Papal Concert in the Vatican must have been for Larry. After that, concerts in Heinz Hall would be a piece of cake.

The last to peek in my door was Michael Bielski, the orchestra's manager, who had worked so diligently with me over many months. I thanked him profusely, yet again, for his devoted service to this concert. Through our many trials and tribulations we had become fast friends, and we remain so to this day.

The Pittsburgh Symphony flew back to the United States the next day, but throughout the following week I would meet members of the orchestra's staff and their board all over Rome. Near the Pantheon, on the Via Veneto, in Saint Peter's Square, even in the Villa Borghese up above the Spanish Steps. They were everywhere. They seemed reluctant to let their Papal experience go. Michael Bielski had been right: for the people of Pittsburgh who had come to Rome, "time had stood still." They walked up to me on our family walks or while my family and I were dining in our favorite restaurants, curious and asking about how I had felt that night, and wanting, I suspect, to relive yet again the uplifting and magical feelings of that evening in the Aula.

For me, though, there was just one day off. The Monday after our Saturday concert I went right back to work. In my guise as on-air host of the upcoming PBS broadcast that would be created from this concert, I was to be filmed walking and talking in three of the most privileged places of religious importance in the whole of the Eternal City: The Sala Clementina in the Papal Apartments, the Great Synagogue of Rome, and the Great Mosque of Rome. All of this had been arranged, with the assent of His Holiness, through the good offices of Archbishop Dziwisz himself. The Pope knew the power of television to carry the message of our concert to millions across America, and he was seeing to it as best he could that all three faiths were equally represented in our presentation.

The Sala Clementina and the Great Synagogue were places I had known well, for more than fifteen years. The Great Mosque of Rome was something else again. Permission for a non-Muslim to enter this mosque is rare enough, but to be allowed to film there took the explicit

permission of the same Islamic personage who had sat on the left side of His Holiness at the Concert of Reconciliation, the mosque's Imam, Abdulawahab Hussein Gomaa. His commitment to interfaith dialogue would now become even more self-evident.

When I arrived with my film crew in tow, the guardians of the mosque could not quite believe we had permission to enter the sanctuary. They called whomever they called, the Imam or his representative, I would suppose. The guards remonstrated on the telephone, in Arabic, with their consternation and meaning crystal clear. In the end, though, we were able to enter, just as the Imam had arranged.

I had never been inside a functioning mosque. But now I walked into a place of active worship where thousands upon thousands gathered each and every Friday for the Muslim day of prayer. The vast sanctuary was totally empty and elegantly bare. Only beautifully filigreed ceilings and lighted wall sconces suggested the path of a devout worshipper's prayers to Allah.

In this holy space, I spoke, on air, of the two themes of the concert: our common ancestry in the Patriarch Abraham, and our shared belief in the resurrection of the soul, through different means, of course, but towards the same end, a reunion with our creator above.

I left the mosque with a renewed respect for the prayer life of my Muslim brothers and sisters. Allah is indeed great. All three of our faiths can at least agree on that.

The next day, Tuesday, January 20, 2004, my family and I had an audience with the Pope. Archbishop Dziwisz had said that His Holiness wished to see us before we left for New York. "Maestro, please do bring your family," Archbishop Dziwisz said on the telephone. "They are with you, I know. I saw them at the concert. Your boys, David and Gabriel, have grown so much since they were last here with us. The Holy Father will very much wish to visit with them, and with your wife, Vera, of course, as well."

"Yes, we will all be there," I answered, happy as always to bring my family to see the Pope.

"So, Tuesday, at 11 o'clock, Maestro. In the usual place. We will see you then."

There was nothing unusual in his voice or what he had said, but still I began to get an odd feeling. Something about this meeting felt final. Some inner voice told me perhaps this would be the last time. But I told myself that couldn't be the case. People had been saying that the Pope had been dying for eight years or more. No, I told myself, he has more of a will to live than anyone I have ever seen. Besides, Archbishop Dziwisz had already asked me about my future concert ideas.

The taxi ride from our rented apartment in the center of Rome was longer than from the Hotel Raphael, where I usually stay, but I was very glad for the extra time, just to collect my thoughts. My mind went back almost exactly sixteen years to my first audience with a young, athletic Pope, just ten years into his Pontificate, who had looked at me in astonishment as I had told him what I thought God had in store for him: that God had made him Pope to bring our two peoples together after two millennia of mistrust. I could never have thought that that extraordinary meeting in February 1988 would have led me on the journey of a lifetime. I thought that I must cherish this meeting even more than I usually did. It could be my last. My whole story had been so improbable. I had no right to think that story would go on even one day more. I treasured these moments, and I would count the steps out of the Apostolic Palace once again, as always, trying to remember for the rest of my life every precious memory I had of this great man whom I had been so privileged to serve.

As we walked into Saint Peter's Square, Vera reminded me fondly of her first audience with the Pope, how we had found the gentle nun, and how she had been so trusting, leaving our little son, David, in the nun's sisterly hands while we went "upstairs."

"Where was that kindly sister now?" Vera asked me rhetorically. "Did she remember us? Had she followed your improbable journey? Could she have believed that now, sixteen years later, you had just conducted for her Holy Father in the Vatican, yet again, for peace?"

And then she spoke about her mother, Margit, how important the Pope had been for her, and how clearly dear she had been to His Holiness as well. Margit was gone now, but she never left our thoughts for long.

My boys were by this time twelve and nineteen. They had been so small, tiny children, when they first met the Pontiff that he could have bounced them on his knee. In fact, the Pope had held Gabriel in his arms at the audience for the survivors before the Papal Concert in Commemoration of the Shoah in 1994. He had kissed him so affectionately, like the grandfather on my side of the family whom my children had never known—my father—who had died before they were born.

Finally, lost in all these thoughts, we found ourselves deep in the palace walking toward the great wooden door that leads into the Papal Apartments. The Sediari led us in through the Sala Clementina, where I had been just the day before. But now I didn't even notice its awesome beauty.

We went through the beautiful Papal Palace and entered the Pope's private library, where Archbishop Dziwisz himself welcomed us. The room had changed little since the last time I had been there, except perhaps for the elegant Persian carpets, which covered the checkered marble floor. It was possible, I thought, that these carpets made it easier on the Pope as he perambulated around this space, meeting his special guests throughout the day.

As at my first audience in 1988, His Holiness was seated. But now, in 2004, he did not rise to greet us. The Pope was positioned in a large chair that was similar to the wheeled throne on which he had sat at the concert on Saturday night. Archbishop Dziwisz graciously announced us, and moved off to the side. As I drew near, I could see that the Pope's face was puffy and redder than I had remembered. His smile, though, was as warm and welcoming as ever. As he had done after the concert, Archbishop Dziwisz asked me to introduce my family to the Pontiff.

I spoke in English, in deference to my family. I realized it was the first time I had spoken with him in my native tongue since 1989, when he heard that I had learned Polish. "*Teraz tylko po polsku*"—Now, only in Polish—His Holiness had said, and from then on, that was how we had spoken.

My wife approached His Holiness with a broad smile. She was truly filled with joy at this meeting and showed it openly.

"I am sorry about your mother. She was a wonderful, brave woman," the Pope said, expressing his condolences. "I remember well her visits here to us. Especially at the Concert for the Shoah. Very moving and important." He told her how much Margit had meant to him.

As he spoke, the Pontiff labored over his words, but his shortness of breath did not prevent us from understanding fully what he had to say. Perhaps it was the intimacy of our surroundings here in the Papal library, but his speech seemed to come easier for him than it did after the concert. His head was bent downward, also painful to observe, but his affect was clear and present, and his mood upbeat.

He fairly beamed as he greeted each of my sons, as I updated him on their progress. "David is at Princeton now, Your Holiness. He is studying history and music. He thinks he might become a journalist."

"Yes," the Pope said with a smile, his voice again halting, his speech slurred a bit, but still completely understandable. "I remember you told me he played the violin. Does he play still? Has he played in your orchestra yet, Maestro?"

His Holiness pronounced *orchestra*, in English, as if the *ch* were the *ch* in *chest*. He had been doing the same thing for sixteen years now. In this, His Holiness would never be corrected!

"No, Your Holiness, not quite yet. But we will see," I answered, with a smile. "He is very serious about his studies."

"Yes, I am sure. Welcome," His Holiness said to David, who stood before the Pope dressed in his sharply tailored dark blue suit and orange and black Princeton University tie. "David, the King. A great name. I thank you, David, very much for this visit. Your father is so proud of you. He talks about you all the time."

Next, I said, "Holiness, this is Gabriel."

"Yes, of course. A chess player, no? Can he beat his father?" the Pope needled a little, a smile covering his wide open face.

"Yes, for some years now. He is just too good. And very good in school as well. He gets all A's."

"Ah. This is good," the Pope declared. "And Gabriel, this is also a special name. The archangel. He is holy to all three religions."

For his part, Gabriel just smiled his beautiful childlike smile, which I knew hid so well that he was taking in everything going on around him, with intense concentration and interest.

All this time, at Archbishop Dziwisz's urging, I was sitting in a chair to the Pope's right as we exchanged this familial chatter. It was a joy to be so near him and to witness his pleasure in seeing my family once again.

Finally, the Pope turned to me and said, "Maestro, I was pleased with this concert on Saturday. I pray that it opened the hearts of all those who were there. There is so much terrible hatred. Perhaps we have made a small step forward with this concert."

"Your Holiness, I hope and pray you are right. The atmosphere was remarkable. I felt, Your Holiness, that our music touched a chord. And everyone seemed moved by your speech at the end of the concert. You cannot imagine what gratitude I feel for the privilege you have given me. To make music for you, in the Vatican, to join you on your quest for peace is the greatest honor I could ever have."

I was speaking about the Papal Concert of Reconciliation, but I felt as though I was carried deeper and deeper into my memories of all we had accomplished together in the past sixteen years. I tried to hold these thoughts in check and strove to keep myself in the present, focusing on this lovely time in the Pope's library, conversing with him about what we had just done together three days before.

"Maestro, I know how difficult these are. These concerts," His Holiness told me. "I know how hard you work. But they are filled with such meaning. Your music is an important language. A way for peace. I thank you for this very much."

"No, Your Holiness, it is nothing. I would do it all again. Again and again. It is a privilege. The greatest I will ever know. Now, Your Holiness, if I may, I have for you a special gift."

With that, I offered the Pope an autographed copy of the score of John Harbison's "Abraham," beautifully bound in the finest brown leather I could find in Rome.

"Mr. Harbison has dedicated this to you, Your Holiness. And to us, to the work we do together. It is a symbol of all you have done to

bring the peoples of all three great monotheistic faiths together over so many, many years. It is the musical representation of that vital work. I wanted you to have it, to remember our great evening. I have written some words inside, words that are for you alone, that try to express what is in my heart."

"Maestro, I thank you. I thank you very much for this, and for everything. It will be very dear to me."

And with that, Archbishop Dziwisz suggested we pose for a family portrait. Vera and I sat on either side of His Holiness, with our boys standing just a step back on either side. I wish I could say we all smiled broadly, the way one does at such important moments. But we didn't. We tried, but what seemed to come out of our faint smiles was sadness, in our faces and in our eyes. Afterwards, as I viewed the photographs sent by the Vatican's official photographer, I saw that sadness and perhaps concern on the Pope's face as well. Did he think this would be our last time together? Was this our real farewell? I kept refusing to imagine that would be so. We posed for several shots, all looking very much the same despite our strong collective efforts, and then, much too soon, our audience was over.

As I was preparing to leave, as the Pope leaned towards me to say his good-bye, I did something as necessary as anything I have ever done in my life. I bent down and kissed His Holiness on his hand for the first time. He patted my head with his other hand, bringing me to him, for one brief instant. We were bonded like that for a millisecond, and it was over. In that moment, I think we both knew what neither of us could say.

His cheek had felt soft, and warm, and oh so human. I will remember that human warmth as long as I live.

Finally, I said, "*Do zobaczenja*"—I'll see you soon—"Your Holiness."

He said, "*Do widzenia*, Maestro." Good-bye. Until we see each other again. He knew more than I did. That would never change.

I left his library with a heavy heart. We walked out slowly through all those regal rooms. None of us said a word.