



# Only The Laughter: Light Years

*Barbara L. McAllister*

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Sometimes, when death comes, sorrow overshadows the joy of the life that was and so when the Anderson family first knew that Jim Mitchell was coming into their lives, they decided they would not allow his approaching death to replace the good. They would make the best of the short time they were to have with him. They would do this for Jim, but little did they know just how much he would influence all of their lives and prepare them for things to come. They would collect the laughter they shared, that precious element necessary to sustain the human spirit, and carry it with them on their own life's journey.

..... Kate Anderson sat at her computer deep in thought listening to the theme song from Somewhere in Time - a tape Jim had given her. In her mind, she was not here in this room. She was once again on the farm in Fayette County during the days when she had her Rachel and that daughter's little flock of boys beneath her wings. She could see herself there in that farmhouse working at her keyboard. Her hair was not silver as it was today, but as it had been back then, black and frizzed in its usual way due to the moist air and perspiration on her brow. On that long ago afternoon she had been working on her first novel, that mythical quest long scoffed at by family and friends. Now that book was in print and Rachel had been the main catalyst to make that happen. A Miller bug struggled against the windowpane above her desk. As if she could no longer bear his mindless search for freedom, Kate grasped the window, raised it, and gently guided the frantic creature toward the opening. Sometimes it is the little things that make us smile and she smiled now as she watched the tiny insect fluttering happily on his way. Its flight made her think of Jim, bound to that wheelchair and never wanting to see anything caged or held against its will.

..... The upfront facts were that Jim Mitchell was a man of 32 young years who had been diagnosed at the age of 30 with ALS. Rachel Anderson became his nurse near the beginning of his illness. During those days the most memorable words said about him at the Anderson house was that he was a bit of a monster to care for. A more significant fact learned at a later date was that Jim could be a rogue and had been known most of his young years as a lady's man. He could charm a leaf off of a tree and what he could do to the ladies was whatever he chose for the most part. His silver tongue was well known and his nurses all immediately fell in love with him to one degree or another, with the exception of Rachel. In her, he found his match and she took little of his sarcastic lip. In his anger at his illness, he took aim at this particular nurse. Maybe that was true because he loved nothing better than a good argument and she gave that to him. During their first year, she usually headed for home after each shift extremely grateful that that was over and she could briefly forget about her patient and the stress of being near him. .... Jim tried desperately to finish a book about his life. He was unable to do so but part of it is here in these pages - a promise fulfilled at last. I have chosen the title Only the Laughter because I prefer to remember the laughter we all shared during those short years with Jim and those Rachel continued on without him. All was not easy as you will see but don't think that this is only a sad tale of lives cut short. This is a love story, a record of the beauty and struggles of life and the value of time.

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