

# Reflections

Volume 24

1

St. Paul Ministry

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## Stories That Inspire The Heart

### Blessings to All

My Newsletter this month is quite a bit different. But sometimes we just need to hear a different message to motivate us and to remind us of the important things in life.



God is always listening to our prayers and sometimes He speaks to us through the gifts and wisdom of others. The stories in this month's newsletter remind us how God uses others to guide us, to motivate us and to inspire us to use the gifts He has given us. If God puts someone in your mind after reading these stories, maybe God wants you to pray for them or pass along these stories.

God also uses music to inspire us and the web address below has beautiful music to listen too as you pray your rosary or just relax awhile. Just copy and paste to your browser.

[https://search.aol.com/aol/video?q=tim+janis&s\\_it=video-ans&sfVid=true&videoId=48D09FEA8FD9A552A1A048D09FEA8FD9A552A1A0&v\\_t=webmail-searchbox](https://search.aol.com/aol/video?q=tim+janis&s_it=video-ans&sfVid=true&videoId=48D09FEA8FD9A552A1A048D09FEA8FD9A552A1A0&v_t=webmail-searchbox)

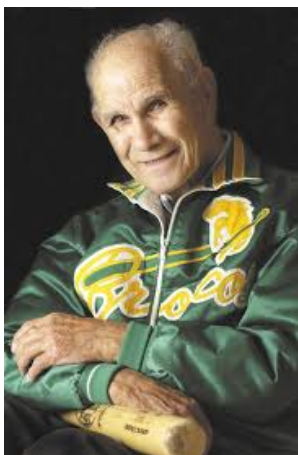
### **17 INCHES OF HOME PLATE - YOU WILL NOT REGRET READING THIS**

By: Chris Sperry, Baseball/Life, LLC

Twenty years ago, in Nashville, Tennessee, during the first week of January, 1996, more than 4,000 baseball coaches descended upon the Opryland Hotel for the 52nd annual ABCA's convention.

While I waited in line to register with the hotel staff, I heard other more veteran coaches rumbling about the lineup of speakers scheduled to present during the

weekend. One name, in particular, kept resurfacing, always with the same sentiment - "John Scolinos is here? Oh, man, worth every penny of my airfare."



Who is John Scolinos, I wondered. No matter; I was just happy to be there.

In 1996, Coach Scolinos was 78 years old and five years retired from a college coaching career that began in 1948. He shuffled to the stage to an impressive standing ovation, wearing dark polyester pants, a light blue shirt, and a string around his neck from which home plate hung - a full-sized, stark-white home plate. Seriously, I wondered, who is this guy?



After speaking for twenty-five minutes, not once mentioning the prop hanging around his neck, Coach Scolinos appeared to **notice the snickering among some of the coaches**. Even those who knew Coach Scolinos had to wonder exactly where he was going with this, or if he had simply forgotten about home plate since he'd gotten on stage. Then, finally ...

"You're probably all wondering why I'm wearing home plate around my neck," he said, his voice growing irascible. I laughed along with the others, acknowledging the possibility. "I may be old, but I'm not crazy. The reason I stand before you today is to share with you baseball people what I've learned in my life, what I've learned about home plate in my 78 years." Several hands went up when Scolinos asked how many Little League coaches were in the room. "Do you know how wide home plate is in Little League?"

After a pause, someone offered, "Seventeen inches?" more of a question than answer.

"That's right," he said. "How about in Babe Ruth's day? Any Babe Ruth coaches in the house?" Another long pause.

"Seventeen inches?" a guess from another reluctant coach.

"That's right," said Scolinos. "Now, how many high school coaches do we have in the room?" Hundreds of hands shot up, as the pattern began to appear. "How wide is home plate in high school baseball?"

"Seventeen inches," they said, sounding more confident.

"You're right!" Scolinos barked. "And you college coaches, how wide is home plate in college?"

"Seventeen inches!" we said, in unison. "Any Minor League coaches here? How wide is home plate in pro ball?"....."Seventeen inches!" "RIGHT! And in the Major Leagues, how wide home plate is in the Major Leagues? "Seventeen inches!"



"SEV-EN-TEEN INCHES!" he confirmed, his voice bellowing off the walls. "And what do they do with a Big League pitcher who can't throw the ball over seventeen inches?" Pause. "They send him to Pocatello !" he hollered, drawing raucous laughter. "What they don't do is this: they don't say, 'Ah, that's okay, Jimmy. If you can't hit a seventeen-inch target?

We'll make it eighteen inches or nineteen inches. We'll make it twenty inches so you have a better chance of hitting it. If you can't hit that, let us know so we can make it wider still, say twenty-five inches."

"Coaches... what do we do when your best player shows up late to practice? or when our team rules forbid facial hair and a guy shows up unshaven? What if he gets caught drinking? Do we hold him accountable? Or do we change the rules to fit him? Do we widen home plate? " The chuckles gradually faded as four thousand coaches grew quiet, the fog lifting as the old coach's message began to unfold. He turned the plate toward himself and, using a Sharpie, began to draw something. When he turned it toward the crowd, point up, a house was revealed, complete with a freshly drawn door and two windows.



"This is the problem in our homes today. With our marriages, with the way we parent our kids. With our discipline. We don't teach accountability to our kids, and there is no consequence for failing to meet standards. We just widen the plate!"



Then, to the point at the top of the house he added a **small American flag**. "This is the problem in our schools today. The quality of our education is going downhill fast and teachers have been stripped of the tools they need to be successful, and to educate and discipline our young people. We are allowing others to widen home plate! Where is that getting us?"



He replaced the flag with a Cross. "And this is the problem in the Church, where powerful people in positions of authority have taken advantage of young children, only to have such an atrocity swept under the rug for years. Our church leaders are widening home plate for themselves! And we allow it."



"And the same is true with our government. Our so called representatives make rules for us that don't apply to themselves. They take bribes from lobbyists and foreign countries. They no longer serve us. And we allow them to widen home plate! We see our country falling into a dark abyss while we just watch."

I was amazed. At a baseball convention where I expected to learn something about curve balls and bunting and how to run better practices, I had learned something far more valuable. From an old man with home plate strung around his neck, I had learned something about life, about myself, about my own weaknesses and about my responsibilities as a leader. I had to hold myself and others accountable to that which I knew to be right, lest our families, our faith, and our society continue down an undesirable path.

"If I am lucky," Coach Scolinos concluded, "you will remember one thing from this old coach today.

It is this: "If we fail to hold ourselves to a higher standard, a standard of what we know to be right; if we fail to hold our spouses and our children to the same

standards, if we are unwilling or unable to provide a consequence when they do not meet the standard; and if our schools & churches & our government fail to hold themselves accountable to those they serve, there is but one thing to look forward to ..."

With that, he held home plate in front of his chest, turned it around, and revealed its dark black backside, "...We have dark days ahead!."



His message was clear: "Coaches, keep your players-no matter how good they are-your own children, your churches, your government, and most of all, keep yourself at seventeen inches."

**"Don't widen the plate."**

## **Golf Balls in the Jar – The Philosophy Professor**

### **Stories to Help People Understand the Important Things in Life**

A Professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly, he picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.





So the Professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The Professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous "yes."



The Professor then produced two cups of coffee from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the space between the grains of sand.



***Our Life is just like this Jar.... Said the Professor with fervor.***

***"Now," said the professor, as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things—your family, your children, your health, your friends, and your favorite passions – things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.***

The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, and your car. The sand is everything else -the small stuff.



**"If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children.**

**Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out to dinner. Play another 18. Help a friend in need and learn about yourself...where you are right now in your head. Are you just along for the ride and letting life manage you? Or did this demonstration of the golf balls in the jar open your mind to what is important?**



**There will always be time to clean the house and fix the disposal. "Take care of the golf balls first, the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand." One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the coffee represented. The Professor smiled. "I'm glad you asked. It just goes to show you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of cups of coffee with a friend."**

## Akiane Kramariks paints her visions

### A Story to Warm the Heart

Akiane began having powerful dreams and visions when she was only three years old. She felt compelled to draw what she had seen, even though she didn't have the vocabulary and didn't really understand what she was seeing.



Akiane Kramariks began sketching at the age of four; by age six, she was painting on canvases. She told her mother that she had to paint because she had "visions from God." Her parents, who were atheists at the time, were simultaneously confused and amazed by their young daughter's paintings of Heaven and Jesus Christ, whom she referred to as "God."

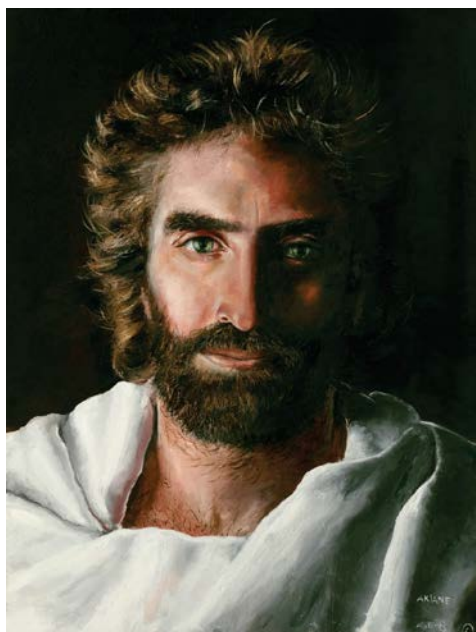
By the age of six, she was painting incredibly complex images based on her visions of Jesus and Heaven. The strange thing was that she had not been exposed to any ideas or thoughts about religion –she was home-schooled and the family didn't own a TV or a radio.

Today Akiane is considered to be one of the world's top 20 artists, and although a completely self-taught artist, she is also considered to be the world's first binary genius in realism art and poetry.

The parents have stated over and over that these were not terms that were discussed in their home. Akiane's mother, Foreli, is originally from Lithuania and had no religious background or belief system. Akiane's father, Mark, was brought up as a Catholic, but had not been a practicing Catholic in years. In an interview with The Washington Times Communities section, "Lori's Centiments," Akiane attempted to explain what it is like to have a "vision from God."

"A vision is like an oasis in a desert. You can't have it all the time, as you need to keep on continuing your journey through the desert of life experiences, full of faith trials... I am not so concerned about waiting for a vision to appear because I know it will come to me when I least expect it... I still do have visions that inspire my work,"





At eight-years-old, Akiane decided she wanted to paint the face of Jesus, based on the visions she received. She looked for a person she might use as an artist's model for a long time, and finally told her family they should pray for God to send someone. On the day they prayed, an acquaintance came by and rang the doorbell at noon. The acquaintance said she wanted to introduce her friend to me. She thought I would find his features suitable for my art. Standing almost 7 feet tall, not only did the stranger resemble one of my recurrent memories of Jesus, but he was a real carpenter. Akiane told her mother he was the one.

In humility, the man initially said he was not worthy to represent his Master. But reluctantly, the man agreed, although he asked to remain anonymous.

Akiane's painting of Jesus was a painstaking effort. "The 'Prince of Peace' took me 40 hours to paint and another 20 hours of working with model sketching," Akiane says. Akiane deftly works with light and shadows to create powerful impressions. "The light side of his face represents the truth, the dark side represents suffering," she notes.

Colton Burpo, the subject of the book "Heaven is for Real," identified this painting of Jesus as the closest representation of the Savior whom he witnessed in his dramatic vision.

Akiane has said in the past that she must paint what she sees in visions, which she says are much like dreams, soon after she experiences them or the vision will lose its clarity. When she gazes at a vision-inspired painting, such as "**Prince of Peace**," she can clearly recall the vision, although she needs to look at the painting to bring it fully to her conscious mind.



Another painting, titled "Father Forgive Them," painted Jesus with his hands raised upward, as though beseeching his Father in Heaven.

Among the some 250 paintings Akiane has completed, many have been influenced by her visions or by some other aspect of her spiritual life. Some of the most awe-inspiring are those of Heaven, which Akiane says she has seen, through revelations from God.

In our interview, Akiane described Heaven using words: "Plants, animals, and all beings spoke not through words, but through color, vibration, and thoughts. Everything was simply effortless. But my recollections of Heaven and visions are fading and new experiences are being formed through time. My understanding of Heaven has expanded and deepened since my first encounter with visions and dreams of Heaven.



Akiane has also repeatedly mentioned the vibrancy and ethereal beauty that exists in Heaven. "All of the colors were out of this world. There are hundreds of millions of colors that we don't know yet. The flowers there were crystal clear. Perhaps Akiane's best known painting of Heaven is, "Supreme Sanctuary," which depicts an ornate building on a hill, flooded in sunshine and warmth, and surrounded by unusual, yet

inherently beautiful flowers of every hue. As Akiane has emphasized, it is impossible for her to capture the colors which exist in Heaven because of their uniqueness.

In an interview she was asked to describe God to someone who doesn't have a relationship with Him. Her response, in part, was that God "is love." Akiane said her goal in life is **"to bring people closer together through art. I want my art to draw people's attention to God."**

Akiane has had no formal training but has definitely elicited great excitement and admiration in the art world. She has also intrigued the public about God and Heaven, making many who didn't believe, pause and wonder about how a little girl could have such a gift if not for a loving God.



The 'unknown territories' that Akiane has explored seems to primarily revolve around her spirituality, which she paints with such passion and fervor that her paintings seem to virtually come to life. One such painting, is titled, "The Angel," which resonates with the purity and love that Akiane often speaks of. The gossamer-like gown that surrounds the angel lends to the painting's ethereal, ephemeral ambiance, drawing the audience in, making the audience long to know more.

Fortunately, Akiane wrote the following explanation about the painting, "The Angel":

"... Sometimes we meet certain angels that appear like humans, and we don't know it. Many of us have been saved from many accidents, and we don't know it either. We should appreciate each safe moment. In this painting, I blended a few dimensions to portray the guardian angels' mission: with the wings invisible to human eyes, yet with the see-through energy veil, the youthful angel is catching a falling child without any tension, difficulty, or worry. Her background is gold, copper, and brass, to signify the providence, the law, and the safety. To save our bodies is easy for an angel, but what is hard is that sometimes she must allow someone to fall or get hurt, according to God's laws. And I don't remember why ..."

A wonderful video of her life's story can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wm9BGxpf0hU>. There is a supplement video from the Katie Couric show. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6HLg2XUFOg>

Take the time to watch these videos. See God's gift to this young girl for the world to enjoy.

**Pass on your gifts to others. God wants to  
use your gifts for the benefit of others.  
God loves you and needs YOU.**



**The new painting of Jesus is by Akiane. See her story and her art gallery at <https://akiane.com/>**

**The *Reflections* Newsletter is published each month, free of charge. If you want to be on the mailing list, please send your request to [r44pick@aol.com](mailto:r44pick@aol.com).**

**Our mission statement is to motivate people to pray and to be Christian examples in their work, home and with others, for those needing the Light in a world of Darkness.**

**St. Paul Ministry, Cypress, TX**