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A Little Sugar

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James Wilbur's situation at Mt. Carmel had become untenable, so the day after his 87th birthday, he decided to die. His family had visited, wishing him another year. But he was ready now. It couldn't be hard. He'd become a shell of himself. His heart beat so weakly he could scarcely feel it. Death would come, a gentle release. To accomplish this, he merely sat propped by pillows in his bed, closed his eyes, and let his awareness merge with everything around him. People spoke. Dishes clattered. Crows raised a ruckus. Peace descended upon him.

A kaleidoscope of faces and events flashed before his inner eye. His joys and sorrows bore the same soft glow. No regrets, no unfinished tasks remained.

James Wilbur felt himself passing from flesh into universal vastness. The nursing home, neighborhood, city and state—like concentric circles his being ranged free. Euphoria suffused him, mitigated slightly by the recognition that he had emptied his bladder. But nothing could stop him now. He was approaching his event horizon—neither precipice nor ascension, just the absolute purity of being, untrammelled by the crudeness of history.

His blood all but ceased to flow, eternity's warm finger poised before the switch of consciousness. James Wilbur ceded himself to the infinite.

"Mr. Wilbur? Naptime's over! Let's clean you up so you can join the others in the day room. Nice flowers! A little sugar in the vase makes them last."

Darrell Petska's fiction has appeared in *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Flash Frontier*, *Bird's Thumb*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and elsewhere. With 30 years on the academic staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 40 years as a father (seven years a grandfather), and a half century as a husband, Darrell lives outside Madison, Wisconsin.