

Richard Bodie, A Man of *Kharis*

By Matthew Bodie

I confess: I like words. In fact, I've been known to read the dictionary just for fun. I mean. Why say *definitely* when you can say *indubitably*? Or *accessory* when you can say *accoutrement*?

So, in the spirit of my love for word origins, I begin my tribute, homage, panegyric even, to a very special man, Richard Bodie, with some word wrangling of my own.

The word I'd like to introduce here is the Greek word, *kharis*. I originally came across this ancient word in the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle, where translator George Kennedy writes, "*Kharis* has a number of meanings in Greek – 'kindliness,' 'benevolence,' 'good will,' 'a favor,' 'gratitude,' [or] 'grace'" (p. 149).ⁱ Doing a little research, *kharis* is related to *charisma*ⁱⁱ (the gift of grace) and even the *Eucharist*ⁱⁱⁱ (an act of gratitude for God's love).

Certainly, Dad was a man of grace. As my old Bible teacher taught us, grace is "unmerited favor, something you do not deserve and cannot earn." Or as the great philosopher Bono says (yes, *that* Bono who's the lead singer of U2), "[Grace] travels outside of karma...and finds beauty in everything."^{iv} Dad knew that the grace of God was what kept him alive when a bomb went off while in Vietnam and killed many of his fellow soldiers. While leaving him dramatically wounded, grace pulled Dad through, and that inner grace that was extended to him, he re-extended to others through an outward kindness.

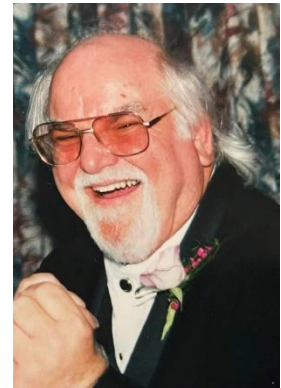
Kindness came in the form of taking long bus rides from Florida to Massachusetts to see his sweetheart. Incidentally, the fares were usually paid for by winning a game of poker or craps.

Kindness was shared in the way he drove dozens of youth to and from church, regardless of the part of town they lived in.

Kindness filled the air when he donned a velvet Santa suit, on a number of occasions (even warm December days in Florida), to give children the joys of telling jolly ol' Saint Nick what they wanted for Christmas.

Kindness showed up one day when an unknown driver broke down on the side of the road, and Dad, dressed in his Sunday best, hopped out to help this stranger push his car. Little did he know the driver wanted to push the vehicle to his home nearly a mile away.

Kindness seized the moment when his daughter, Liz, called from Chicago with a scratched eye and a missed plane, and he bought a ticket of his own, hopped a plane, and went out to help his little girl get back home.



Richard Bodie
4/30/1950 - 8/13/2021

As exemplified here, grace and kindness are part of *kharis*, but beyond those two elements, history also shows that *kharis* is a communal reciprocity, represented in practices of gift-giving and songs^{v1}.

Songs.... Now, music was Dad's favorite pastime! A little known fact: in high school, Dad was a lead singer in a rock band, but my grandmother thought there were some pretty sketchy characters in the group, so it seems that ended Dad's music career rather quickly. But it didn't end his love for music. Many days, in my childhood, Dad would spin his vinyl—and rather loudly. The Beatles, Beach Boys, John Fogerty, Eddie Rabbitt, Dolly Parton were regular visitors in our home, and when Mom said it was too loud, then he'd put on the headphones and just sing away in his strong baritone voice. Dad loved music of all kinds, from classical and jazz to pop and rock. We enjoyed VH1 video playlists together in the 80s and found a lot of commonality. Huey Lewis became one of his favorites, and mine, too. In fact, Dad and I caught a mesmerizing night of Huey and Chicago at the Amphitheater in 2006. It was an unforgettable father-son night. Also, going along with Dad's kindness, he was always happy to share his music with others. Mixed tapes, mixed CDs, mixed playlists—he loved to share his songs!

Kharis. Grace, kindness, music—and you may remember that also I mentioned community. Dad was all about building community. You saw it through his work with the youth at church—and the dozens of committees he sat on. He was on so many committees that the pastor would say we can't start the meeting unless Richard is here. But whether an usher, a deacon, or a Sunday school teacher, one of his favorite ways to build community was through laughter. Dad's laughter was infectious, and he loved to spin a good yarn, whether a funny story about a client whose house he had appraised, or a routine from the comedy albums he enjoyed, from Bill Cosby's "When I Was Kid,"^{vi} to the ridiculous stories from the pulpit of Grady Nutt. Speaking of whom, Dad totally agreed with Grady Nutt that "laughter is the hand of God on the shoulder of a troubled world."

Kharis. Grace, Kindness, Music, Community—these are the beautiful things Richard Bodie taught us and shared with the worlds of which he was part. As part of his legacy, I encourage you to seek grace, perform random acts of kindness, turn the music up loud, and laugh often.

This is Richard Bodie, a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, and a man of *kharis*.

ⁱ See: Kennedy, G., & Aristotle. (1992). *On rhetoric: A theory of civic discourse*. Oxford Press.

ⁱⁱ See: Harper, D. (2001). *Charisma*. Online etymology dictionary.

https://www.etymonline.com/word/charisma#etymonline_v_8441

ⁱⁱⁱ See: Harper, D. (2001). *Eucharist*. Online etymology dictionary.

https://www.etymonline.com/word/Eucharist#etymonline_v_11671

^{iv} See: Hewson, P., Evans, D., Clayton, A., & Mullen, L. (2000). *Grace*. [Recorded by U2]. On *All that you can't leave behind*. [CD]. Island Records

^v See: Fisher, N. (2010). *Kharis, kharites, festivals, and social peace in the classical Greek city*. In R. Rosen & S. Sluter (eds.), *Valuing others in classical antiquity* (pp. 71-112). Brill.

^{vi} Sadly, the allegations against Cosby have seemed to taint his legacy, but his comedy sketches were cause for many laughs in our home while growing up.