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PROVICHANCE

One summer in his lovely weekly column in the local newspaper, Jack Harnish wrote, in his always-winsome style, about the series of improbable chances that united him and his wife. I'd say that the Griffioens got together under even more unlikely circumstances than the Harnishes, since ours involved getting a girl in Tokyo and a boy in Tallahassee to meet in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with an inoperable brain tumor thrown in the mix, but that's another story. (That, and how our first kiss happened at gunpoint, but that's yet another story).

"But since I'm not a Calvinist," Jack added in his column, "I don't believe in predestination." Well, I am a Calvinist, and I do, but I'll bet Jack and I would agree that we don't experience God as some sort of celestial puppet-master, micromanaging our every move. Growing up Dutch Calvinist, our least-admirable teachers had seemed to suggest that narrow interpretation of predestination. But as we grew up and learned about free will and the question of evil in philosophy classes, we began to wonder. And as my husband began to learn about how the universe appears to operate at the level of fundamental subatomic particles, where chance reigns, we wondered even more.

So during our grad school days we concocted a bit of speculative theology for our own private use. Combining the widely-held doctrine of the Providence of God—the idea that God not only created, but continues to care for the universe in every way, but in a way that is far beyond our understanding,—with the dice-rolling that appears to undergird the mysteries of quantum mechanics within atomic nuclei, we came up with the idea of "Provichance": God knows all, sees all, anticipates all, but somehow in a way that allows for our complete free will, with a healthy dollop of chance thrown in at every move. It's unorthodox, but it works for us.

~Written by Ruth Griffioen

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