

Reflections on Kate by Marjory Bankson

Reflections on the Life of Kate Cudlipp Marjory Bankson

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Just over a year ago, many of us gathered here to celebrate the marriage of Kate and Carole after they had already spent 28 years together. About that same time, in 1982, Kate put her feet down in Seekers – as tho to claim a sacred context for their relationship.

Now we come to grieve Kate's unexpected death and to celebrate her life among us.

In her profile called "Meet a Seeker," Kate acknowledged her lifelong search for meaning. Her doubts and questions made her a religious pilgrim in the truest sense. At the same time, she was willing to make and keep commitments that would require both stability and sacrifice. Kate expected to be changed by her work – from government service to FLOC, in the wider network of Church of the Saviour and here at Seekers. She was generous with her time, money and skills. Kate invested

herself deeply and fully, knowing that it could all end tomorrow. She knew how to “love what is mortal,” as Mary Oliver says, “and hold it close to her bones.”

Although I have known Kate since she joined Seekers, we stumbled on a gift of time that can deepen any relationship. For nearly ten years, I rode with Kate to board meetings at Kirkridge – a five-hour drive each way without distractions. Three or four times a year, we let our talk range to our changing understanding of God, the mysteries of life and death, the challenges of community and how to discern God’s unfolding call. She was in seminary during that time, continuing to explore her questions of faith while she served on the Servant Leadership Team here. She was also claiming her authority to perform weddings for others in the wider GLBT community. Her doubts and questions invited me to grow and change too.

Kate’s passion for social justice and preserving the environment found a good home at Seekers and in the other ministries of Church of the Saviour. Kate frequently attended noon-time prayers at the Festival Center and met people for lunch at the Potter’s House to keep her connections lively in this do-it-yourself church. Kate allowed Jesus challenge her comforts and open her heart by stepping into missions that would take her where she hadn’t been before and didn’t necessarily want to go. As a disciple, nobody was more intentional about her faith journey than Kate.

A couple of years ago, I was surprised when Kate purchased the unfired burial urn which I made that you see here on the altar. She anticipated her return to the earth even then. Kate was intrigued by the notion that the clay would dissolve in

water or damp earth, making no attempt to preserve our remains forever. We joked about the Good Friday ritual in many Christian churches, in which it seems so easy to make a cross of ashes on the forehead and say “ashes to ashes and dust to dust” – because we don’t really believe it would happen to us. But when it did, Kate was ready. She had been preparing all along.

After her bicycle accident, when Kate learned that there was no hope of recovering her ability to breathe, to eat or make any movement in her body, she wept – and then she chose to have the ventilator removed. Although her body was paralyzed, she had some slight movement of her head to indicate “yes” and “no,” so her decision was clear. I was there when the psychiatrist came to ascertain whether Kate might be anxious or depressed. She was neither. Later, the psychiatrist remarked, “I have been doing this for more than thirty years and I have never seen anyone as calm and clear about this decision.”

I believe Kate understood her life as a gift from God. And when the time came for her to let it go, she was ready to do that too. It was the suddenness of her death that left our breath ragged, our hearts torn asunder.

Last Sunday, Will Ramsey shared something that Kate had written on his spiritual report. It was from a book by Forrest Church called Love and Death – the life story of a pastor who had only months to live. Kate quoted Church saying: “Want what you have, do what you can, and be who you are. Do these things with reverence, humbled by awe, and your cup will overflow.”

Kate did those things, and now Kate's life is overflowing into ours. Like the biblical couple from Emmaus, who suddenly recognized that it was Jesus in a new form at their table, Kate will be present to us in a different way. In the silence and the space before words, she will be known to us in moments of breaking bread and sharing wine, the sound of a song or memory of her words, the smell of lavender oil or the rising of tears. She is here, now.

May God bless us all with these glimpses of resurrection.
Amen.