

# Reflections on Kate Cudlipp by Carole Grunberg

Tribute to the Love of My Life  
Carole Grundberg

September 24, 2011

Katherine. Kathy. Kate. My beloved. My true north. My bride. I may live now with only half a soul; only half a heart but for 29 years I was blessed to live with the woman of my dreams. For 6 days in July I was blessed to be able to say goodbye to her. We had grown so very close in life; in the way she chose to die we grew even closer. As our dear friends Bob and Bill then observed: Kate showed us all how to live, and now she was showing us how to die.

On July 23, Kate's life – and mine – were shattered. Riding her bicycle alone in Rock Creek Park, Kate flipped over the handle bars. Her helmet protected her brilliant brain from harm but she landed on her neck, inflicting severe damage to her spinal cord. The most compassionate doctors and nurses gave her the best care, but after a few days it became clear she would never be able to breathe or speak or move unassisted. How could someone who treasured both written and spoken words face a life in which she could not communicate?

During those days in the Intensive Care Unit it seemed as if we were all swimming in very deep and dark waters. Nothing seemed real. Kate, however, was drawing upon the profound spiritual reservoir she had filled up over decades of study

and wrestling with her faith. Her inability to move, breathe or talk on her own did not deter or discourage her from doing what she could do: that is – think and pray. All those years of thinking, prayer and meditation enabled her to see clearly where no one else could see. Back in 1995 she preached about the end times and the world being turned upside down. In that sermon she cited the gospel of Luke: that those who persevere to the end will win true life. She clearly saw a new life, a life with the holy spirit. Her dear Sophia. Rather than remain in an immobile body that would not allow her to express herself, her mind and her spirit moved her to where she could be free and find her true self again.

I find it truly remarkable that for one who was so scared of change or of almost anything new, Kate's profound spirituality enabled her to embrace the change and the new that were before her. She was completely at peace with her decision to have life support removed and to leave this earth – a peace that is quite beyond my ability to comprehend.

Over the past 6 months Kate told me she was preparing for something new and unknown, although she had no idea of what it might be. She was excited about a new opening in her life. She could not possibly have foreseen the new path but she was prepared. After 27 years in our home we finally cleaned out the basement in June. After many years of talking about changing her investments she had done so in July. And in July we also paid off the mortgage. Kate was prepared.

In being prepared and in so many other ways Kate was an example to many. She cast her goodness, compassion, honesty and patience widely and with open hands. One friend said that when she was with Kate she always felt she should stand a little taller and a little straighter. Many of you have sent

cards and prayers speaking to the influence Kate had on your lives. Although I will not get a chance to thank each of you individually I do want you to know from the bottom of my heart that I am overwhelmed by the love you have for Kate. She would be humbled by your outpouring of love.

Many of you know Kate as a woman of struggle. Before and even after we got together she struggled with her sexuality. She wrestled with her faith and constantly sought to hear the voice of the spirit calling her. She struggled with racism growing up in Richmond's segregated school system and for the rest of her life. She wrestled with injustice and marched against the tide. Kate despaired over the growing income inequality in our country and sought ways to use her resources to lessen the burden of others both locally and in countries like South Africa.

In a world that values action and achieving, Kate listened and reflected. She consistently sought out the goodness in others. She sought common ground among people of different races, religions, political leanings and gender. She sought peace in the midst of turmoil.

One of the ways I am honoring Kate is through the establishment of a scholarship in social justice at Wesley Seminary, from which she received her Master of Theological Studies summa cum laude. The award will be to a student with top grades who is committed to the cause of social justice and urban ministry. There is information about the scholarship on the Seekers website and it is also available through Wesley Seminary here in Washington, DC.

Kate was a true seeker. Some of you know she was forever

trying to find the meaning of life. Actually, I believe that she found the meaning of life lying there immobilized in the ICU. I believe that she realized she could let go of what she once thought was absolutely essential to hold onto. She recognized that she could hold lightly – not tightly – that which she had been given. She knew that the body I found so beautiful and so strong and so fit was not important in the next step on her journey. She knew that she had been given the gift of a full life – a *vita abundantior* as they called it at her alma mater, Randolph Macon Woman's College.

In closing, I want to thank each of you for your love and support. My deep appreciation goes to Seekers for this lovely service and to my former colleagues in Senator Wyden's office for the flowers. I thank Kate's college roommate, Molly, in Eugene, Oregon, who helped select the music for today. I thank Evelyn, who was the first responder to get to Kate in Rock Creek Park. I thank her medical team at Washington Hospital Center. I thank her spiritual team, especially Peter, Marjory, Diann and Brenda, who kept vigil with us at the hospital. My deepest appreciation goes to our dear pals Lisa, Kate, Claire, Diana, Kathie, the Vache, Bob and Bill and Susan and Miss. You supported me through the darkest days of my life and you continue to be the pillars on which I will lean.

May the spirit bless us all and keep us mindful of Kate's life.