

Remembering Kelly

My first memory of Kelly, like many early memories, was constructed through telling stories. Every young Baptist learns the words to Philip P. Bliss' "Wonderful Words of Life" at a young age. Some learn faster than others. I am told that I used to serenade my baby sister in her crib with those words ... well almost ... I believe it went "Beautiful worms, wonderful worms, wonderful worms of life."

Kelly always did embrace "words of life and beauty, ... faith and duty." In another sense, she also had a wonderful life of words. As most of you know, the term "voracious reader" doesn't even begin to describe my sister. She read for the sheer joy of reading. It transported her ... and fueled her imagination. As a young child, she passed many hours as Laura Ingalls Wilder atop our foldout camper, which eleven months of the year served as her covered wagon just outside our "little house on the prairie."

I have many fond memories of Kelly when we lived in that "little house" in Anthony, KS, walking to and from school, to and from the swimming pool, and to and from the racetrack ... yes, the Baptist preacher's kids frequented the track. The obituary says that I survive Kelly, but truth be told, she survived being my little sister. On one occasion we were returning from the swimming pool – or was it the racetrack – pell mell down the hill on my bicycle, Kelly on the back and I pedaling furiously.

Suddenly, we became separated from my bike's front wheel. As I passed over the handlebars, I looked overhead to see my kid sister in mid-swallow dive before plowing into the asphalt chin first. Yes, for many years, Kelly, literally, had rocks in her head.

So many of my happiest memories of Kelly (and Erin) revolve around Megan, Evan, Haley, Kathryn and Kelsey, all born in the span of a few fleeting years. We spent so many happy holidays and vacations together. Kelly loved to travel and plan trips. I know that one of our Dad's fondest memories, and one of mine and my family's, was a trip she planned ... a Christmas we spent in a mountain cabin in Gatlinburg. My kids still remember trimming that tree together.

On one occasion in 1999, Kelly and Dave evacuated their Charleston home and drove their family to Raleigh to take refuge in our house. Thank goodness they did, because we needed the extra hands to bail water from our basement when Hurricane Floyd missed Charleston, stalling about fifty miles east of our house.

Two of my most cherished memories were destination weddings, Evan's and Haley's, which brought Breanna, Scott, Mikey and now Isaiah into our lives. On the trip out here, Shawn and I were fondly remembering our time together in that house in Green Lake, WI, mice and all, celebrating the marriage of Evan and Breanna.

By the time Haley and Scott were married in the mountains of Virginia, Kelly was in the midst of her courageous battle with the cancer that would claim, but never dictate, her life. I'm sure many of you have stories of how she inspired you with her courage, grace, generosity and unflagging good humor. Two I will cherish. In the midst of one of her multiple bouts with chemotherapy, none of which anyone should have to endure, Kelly and Dave drove halfway across the country to celebrate that wedding with us. That is how she lived, embracing life even when battling death.

During the last few weeks of Kelly's life, I was blessed to spend time with her over the course of almost two weeks. As I watched her embrace the joys of being a grandmother, my heart was at once lifted ... and broken ... as she selected favorite pictures of Isaiah (and there were many) to print and frame prominently in her living room ... shopped for baby clothes ... and sought to share one of the loves of her life with another generation. She loved books, and especially children's literature, and has by any measure an impressive collection of the latter. She wanted so desperately to read those books to her grandchildren. Over the course of days, I watched her peruse these earthly treasures, lingering over favorites and being transported once more, fondly into the past, and hopefully into the future.

Kelly lived a Wonderful Life of Words ...

... filled with Wonderful Words of Life.

Shannon Nix