

## Karen (memorial service - 7/23/07)

I'm going to give this a shot, we'll see what happens.

I warn you though that there are two places where I've done most of my crying over the past 10 years. The first was during those beautiful early morning rides to work down Columbia Parkway. The second place was in this sanctuary. Of course, a third place, was every time Karen and my Buckeyes played Florida the past year. But that's something different.

### Thank You's

Let me start with some thank you's because that's where Karen wanted me to start. We would like to thank Karen's medical team. The medical community in Cincinnati knows how to fight breast cancer. And we feel very fortunate to have been able to fight this battle on our home turf. As for our oncologist, Dr. Cody and his staff, you masterfully handled my high-spirited wife with a wonderful combination of compassion, common sense and patience. Karen's life was a victory by any medical or human standard. Well done.

I'd like to thank our families. And in particular, Karen's parents (Tom and Angie Krubl). I know how difficult this was for you. At night, when I'd had given Karen the same pep talk for the 1,000th time and I wasn't having much success, I always knew there was one trump card I could play that would turn her around. I'd say, "At least what's happening to you is not happening to our kids." I realize that you didn't even have that card to play. But I want you to know, that when the chips were down (and they were down a lot), you two shined as parents - giving Karen just the right balance of love and space. You did a great job. And it was an honor to be married to your daughter.

I'd like to thank our friends at work (Graydon Head) and in particular, two unsung heroes: my good friends and sidekicks, Jenni Chinn and Debbie Durham. Your extra effort and rock solid reliability in helping me take care of our clients, gave me more time to take care of Karen. We both thank you for that.

And to Karen's friends. You made all the difference. The chemo, radiation and hormone therapy drugs slowed the cancer. But it was you who gave her the energy to fight back. Every flower you planted, every note you sent, every "Starbucks 2% grande extra hot latte" you dropped off, every 3 hour phone call where you talked about the same issue 30 times - all of that kept her heart beating. And in the days ahead, when you look back on a photo of Karen or maybe one of her paintings, I hope you take a moment to pat yourself on the back. For there will be few things you will do in life that are more meaningful than the friendship you showed Karen.

Thanks to Liz, Dee, Rachel, Sarah, Jamie, and others of you who got out of your comfort zone to get down in the trenches with us. I know that was not easy.

And finally, to Dave and Connie Laug, words cannot do justice to our appreciation of your friendship. I can only say that there is a very special place in heaven for you. And knowing Karen, she's already working on an upgrade for you two at no additional charge.

### Karen

But enough about you, let's talk about Karen.

A few weeks ago, when things were pretty serious, Karen asked that I direct my remarks to Robby and Angeline. And she gave me some excellent material for a letter from her. A letter that will guide me through graduation celebrations, first dances, and those tough teenage years.

A letter that I can refer to when Robby's getting ready to drive in 4 years or before Angeline comes downstairs for her first date (when she's 25 years old). It's a letter I will share with you. But not today.

No, if you're going to write a letter to our kids for THIS important day, it would go like this:

### Letter

Dear Robby and Angeline:

Your mother loves you very much and so do I. And so do the people who have gathered together today to say thank you, as well as goodbye, to her.

### Growing Up

Your mother was born in Chicago, squeezed between two precocious and highly talented brothers. Uncle Tommy to the north, Uncle John to the south. She battled them tooth and nail, but they helped make her the fun, self-reliant, confident person she became. Your Morn's father (Bapa) was even more talented. But unlike his sons, he didn't spend his time shooting arrows into neighbors' garage doors and roofs, leaving snakes in the mailbox for the mailman, or sprinkling food out for squirrels (smothered in hot sauce).

But make no mistake about it, she was always her mother's girl. Your mother was DeeDee to a tee. Her sense of art, design, beauty, gift giving, love for games, not to mention a pathological need to clean, came from her own Mom. Vacations hadn't officially started until your Mom had the first load of laundry in the washer. The beach could wait. [Speaking of cleanliness, Robby had a great line after we were about 4 hours into the receiving line yesterday. He said, "Dad, we're definitely going to need to wash our hands after this."]

Your mother valued the friends of her youth - school friends from Centerville and college friends from Columbus. Then there was that army of Chicago family members that included 80 year olds who would stay up until 3:00 a.m. eating filets, drinking Uzo, telling stories about Uncle John and making fun of the males in the family. There was a big piece of that Chicago family in your mother. And we'll make sure it also remains a part of you.

### Live for Today

10 years ago, your Mom got some bad news. She had breast cancer and it was pretty advanced. How she reacted to that bad news really defined her life.

For the past 10 years, your mother has shown us all what wonderful things can be accomplished if you live like there will be no next year. You do more. You experience more. You appreciate more. In short, you live more.

As a consequence, your mother wasn't afraid to try new things or risk looking silly or failing. She wanted you to know that the sooner you get over those fears, the sooner you will really start to live.

If she wanted to sing, she got up on the stage with Connie, Jamie, or the guys in the band and sang. And she danced. She decorated our home and the homes of others. One day she decided she wanted to be a painter. So she became one. Since then, she has sprinkled beautiful paintings throughout the houses of Hyde Park, Dayton, Chicago and one special view found its way to San Francisco. All pieces of your mother that will live on forever.

She helped Rachel and Jill at *Fetish*. What a "job." They'd take shoe-buying "*business*" trips to New York, Chicago and Las Vegas. Come on. Who were they trying to kid. That's like me and a couple of my buddies getting jobs as beer tasters on the 50-yard line at Bengals' games.

She stayed at "The Plaza" in New York (or at least thought she did until one of her friends corrected her and said, "Karen, you're at the 'CROWN Plaza. It's not the same thing.")

She planted flowers and played tennis. She was a wonderful wife. And she spent the most important years of your development right by your side. Coaching soccer, reading stories, baking birthday cakes, cutting your hair and, for one of you, making sure you never left the house without a bow in it. She was bold and unflinching as a mother. If you wanted to play at a new friend's house, your mother would drop you off, introduce herself and ask if there were any guns in the house. I remember one Mom said, "Oh no, my kids would shoot me."

She danced with Flamingo dancers in Spain and wore a golden gown to hobnob with Ron Howard and Nicolas Cage at a Beverly Hills award banquet. She went horseback riding in the hillsides of Maui and accompanied you to that special family cabin in Canada where she had gone when she was your age. She kicked back under olive trees in Tuscany and sang with the gondoliers in Venice. And for a magical few moments, when visiting good friends in the San Juan Islands, your mother even swam with the whales.

All in all, your mother lived a wonderful life. And so will you.

### Quality

Now there are some people who might say that your mother lived less of a life because it ended early. Those people judge the quality of one's life by the numbers of years one lives. But that's an arbitrary and meaningless standard. For those people confuse the *quantity* of one's life with the *quality* of life. Your mother was all about quality. And if truth be told, I'd rather see you really live 40 years, like your mother, then just show-up for 70 or 80.

### Triumphing over adversity

Your mother routinely triumphed over adversity. Her favorite hymn was the Lord of *the Dance*, a song about the death and resurrection of Jesus. But a song that also always reminds me of the challenges your mother faced and conquered. For example...

I remember the 4th of July back in 2005, when your mother spent the weekend fighting infections with an IV in her arm, yet showed up to her 20th high school reunion festivities on back-to-back nights with a bundle of energy, looking like a million dollars. Nobody knew. She loved that.

I remember the weekend she accompanied you (Angeline) and some friends to Kings Island's water park for your birthday. Karen rode most of the water slides even though she had about 100 bobby pins in her hat to hold her wig on. One time I saw her come down a slide, go under water and emerged with hat and wig in place and a big smile on her face. You two were concerned that the wig might come off. But I know what her response would have been if it did. She would have fished it out, rung it out, put it back on her head and jumped on another water slide.

I remember birthdays and holidays in the hospital. Your mother made the best of them - helping the Easter Bunny hide eggs on top of the I.V. machines and under the lung-strengthening tubes. And is there any better view of the Fireworks than from a Christ Hospital southward facing room?

## Never Gave Up

Your mother never gave up. When she couldn't run any more, she walked. When she couldn't play tennis, she played paddle. And when she could no longer do physical activities because her lungs were shutting down, there were plenty of other things to do. She made these adjustments without self-pity. When she wasn't supposed to go out in the sun because of nasty side effects from a new chemo drug, she still coached soccer - making me run up and down the sideline (looking like an idiot) with a golf umbrella over her head. When we went to the high elevation of Breckenridge with Uncle Tommy this February to ski and snowboard, she gladly waited for us at the base of the slopes with an oxygen spray bottle in her hand enjoying the views and smells of the mountains.

## Not a Victim

And through it all, the key was that your mother NEVER wore the victim's hat. If you wanted to pay her the ultimate insult, refer to her as "the mother with cancer." She hated that and everything it implied. I thought at first that your mother would become an out-spoken champion for fighting breast cancer. Committees, speaking engagements, 5k walks. But I was wrong. When she wasn't getting treatments, she had no time for cancer. She wore no pink ribbons. No yellow wristbands. Support groups were not her thing. Ironically, in the end, by choosing NOT to focus on the cancer, she became an exceptional role model for living with breast cancer.

A few weeks ago, when she had gotten some more bad news at the hospital, I became a little concerned that she might be giving up. After all, how much can one person take? She looked at her thinning hair, grabbed tufts of it from her head as it was falling out and threw it up in the air with disgust like she always did. I then helped her to the bathroom where she hung out for a while with the oxygen tubes and IV's running under the door. There was some shuffling in there and when she emerged, she had that look on her face. A look I had seen hundreds of times before. Usually on mornings after very tough nights when I had thought to myself that there is no way she is going to be able to get up in the morning. It was my favorite look. It was a look that said, "OK cancer, bring it on. But understand that I got better things to do." It was the same look that Dr. Cody probably saw on those chemo Tuesdays when he expected Karen to crawl into the office. And instead, she bopped in with a tennis skirt on talking on her cell phone. She'd say, "I don't want to see the test scores or blood counts. Throw those pieces of paper away. I've got tennis in, a late lunch with friends and soccer practice after school. So unless you want to talk about your wife or your sons or something fun, let's get going." When I entered the bathroom, I saw what the woman with virtually no hair had been doing. Four different shampoos and three different hair conditioners had been pulled from a bag and lined up neatly in a row in the shower. I knew then that she would never give up. **As the song your mother sang, "100 years," emphasized, each moment matters** and "every day's a new day." And with each new day, there was still *hope* that she'd be around to see that beautiful hair grow back.

## Friendship

Your mother had many good friends. Primarily because your mother was a good friend to others. If there was a birthday to celebrate, she wanted to be the one who baked the cake. Usually, a heaping, jaw-dropping mix of art and chocolate. And if she didn't get it right the first time, she baked another one. If a friend was having problems with kids, a spouse, in-laws, or, worse yet, was struggling with what shoes to wear to a party, your mother was there, ready to weigh in with her advice. The "Advisor." **In the end, I think that friendship (and all the responsibilities that go with it) was your mother's finest quality.**

## Style

Your mother had style. In a town where fashion is sometimes measured by the amount of glitter on one's holiday sweater, your mother was a breath of fresh air. She also was the most beautiful woman I ever met. Not a bad combination.

## Not Perfect

Now I don't want you to get the idea that your mother was some picture of perfection. Some unattainable standard of excellence. She was not. She worried over little things. She spent more time fretting over her tennis rating than tumor markers and chemotherapy treatments. The list of imperfections (real or imagined) was as long for your mother as it is for any of us. **But the difference was that your mother didn't dwell on what she couldn't do, but instead focused on all the wonderful things she could TRY to do. She saw opportunities for fun where other people saw risk of embarrassment.**

She fretted over her appearance a bit too much. Even before the chemo took away her hair, her eyebrows, nails and other body parts. And Angeline, as you look at pictures of your beautiful mother in the years ahead, you should know that your gorgeous mother NEVER thought she looked good. Ironically enough, your mother was never more beautiful than the other day when she went to heaven. No make-up. No glitter. No bling. Just a small smile on her face and a hospital gown, pulled off her shoulders so that it looked like a summer sundress. I think she probably liked what she saw as she looked down on her body as she ascended to heaven.

## Memories and Choices

Your mother wanted me to end by saying that there will be some tough days ahead and some uncertain days. However, she will be there with you. Usually right behind you, pushing you forward to try to do more than you think you can. **And I can assure you this. If you choose to make the choices your mother made: not to wait for another day to try something new, not to wait for tomorrow to be a good friend today, not to skimp on birthday cakes; in the end, you will not only have lived a life without regrets, but you also will leave the world a better place. Like your mother did. Regardless of WHEN you leave it.**

**One of the CHOICES I will try to make is to remember the good times when I think of your mother.** I will remember those Friday evenings at Skyline and those big sundaes your mother scarfed down at Graeters on the way home. I will remember the shrieks and laughter when she would corral Robby like a longhorn steer to cut your fingernails or shove a flashlight into your mouth to determine if those two front teeth were coming in yet. I'll remember Ohio State football games and the way Angeline lead us in singing the fight songs and "Hang on Sloopy" over and over again as we drove up and back from Columbus. I'll remember her band in a packed house at Allyn's. I'll remember how your Mom would throw the chessboard when Robby had her beat. Or how she could tickle you and make you laugh by just moving one finger. **I'll remember your mother singing, painting, coaching, laughing. We'll remember it all together.**

But in the end, your mother only insists that you remember this. No matter where you go, no matter what you do, don't you ever forget that your MOTHER loves you very much. And so do I.

Goodbye Babe.