

# Good But Not Religious (GBNR)

AUGUST 2020 - A monthly update on Keith Martin's work as a nonreligious chaplain and educator online

## KEITH'S TRIBUTE TO JENNY



Keith's wife Jenny died on August 8, 2019 from ovarian cancer. On the anniversary of her passing, here is Keith's tribute to her (from a nonreligious perspective) that you might relate to:

In July of 2016 Jenny was diagnosed with stage 3 ovarian cancer, which quickly progressed to stage 4. The average prognosis for stage 4 ovarian cancer is 2 years. Thanks to chemotherapy and an amazing team of caregivers in Owen Sound and Wiarton, we had 3 difficult but wonderful years, spending more time together in 3 years than our previous 10. I'm especially thankful she was able to be with us for 2 important milestones this past year, Ryan's graduation from U. of Guelph in June, and Carol-Lee giving birth to Isabelle also in June.

A week before she passed away, we celebrated our 43rd anniversary at Waterview on the Bay just outside of Wiarton. Within a week she was gone. The 4<sup>th</sup> round of chemo had stop working and a 5<sup>th</sup> round was also not working, as the cancer cells remaining in her body and now spreading aggressively had resisted the 4 previous rounds. On Sunday she stopped eating. On Monday she was unable to stand for me to help her to the washroom and she became bedridden. Our care team nurse came and recommended Wiarton Hospital Emergency for better pain management and to see if they could get her admitted to Chapman House, a hospice with excellent facilities and staff in Owen Sound—all covered, by the way, by OHIP, our public health insurance, for you American friends here with us today! They kept her in the emergency ward overnight and at 3 am I got a call that, based on her breathing, she may not live through the night.

Our house is a block from the hospital, so I immediately walked over, overwhelmed with grief, expecting to say goodbye. I walked into the emergency ward and Jenny opened her eyes and quietly said, "Nice to see you." She rallied enough for us to converse for 2 hours and then again later in the morning when a bed opened up in the main hospital and she had a visit with Jean Sadler, Nelvia Van Dorp (our doctor), and both Ryan and Carol-Lee. Later that day she was transferred to Chapman House where she had more time with each of us and with her brother and family who drove all night from New Jersey for her final 2 days.

When she rallied in the emergency room, I asked her if she was coming to our Celebration of Life today. She smiled and said, "Yes." And she definitely is here—not as some disembodied spirit, but in the thoughts and hearts of each of us.

As we held hands, I looked at the matching wedding rings on our fingers, made up of 3 intertwining strands of gold—yellow, white and pink. When we bought them and exchanged them on our wedding day, they symbolized what we believed was the presence of God in our relationship. Since then Jenny and I have moved or shifted in our beliefs—some might call it a 'seismic shift'—from theism to spiritual but not religious, understanding God as a metaphor or personification of goodness rather than a supernatural Being. So our rings still represent what God symbolizes for us today, namely goodness and love.

Our marriage was held together and enriched by sometime sacred—goodness and love, real love. Not a doormat kind of love. 12 years into our marriage the hardest words I ever heard were Jenny saying, "I love you but I can't live with you." She did not feel loved for who she was, especially in the ways we were different. We separated for 2 years and almost lost our marriage. But thanks to some deep soul searching, personal and then competent marriage counseling, and Jenny loving me enough to give us a second chance, we got 29 more years together!

Without a belief in a supernatural Being to bring us back from the dead, Jenny and I have had to let go of our belief in heaven. So I can't say what many of you may be saying, "See you in heaven, Jenny." Much as I *wish* heaven were real and that I *could* see her again—along with my parents and my brother, Dan—I have to believe in what I have evidence for, not what gives me comfort. So on August 8 I had to say goodbye to Jenny—which, as some of you have said in emails and facebook posts, really sucks.

By the way, I asked Paul Young, the Christian author of *The Shack*, this question: "If at the end of life we discover that you're closer to the truth than I am, will God, or Papa, or Aslan accept someone like me, a follower of Goodness?" In front of hundreds of people, he said, "Absolutely." So maybe I'll see some of you in heaven after all! . . . But I don't think so.

Meanwhile Jenny lives on in us. I have been incredibly blessed to know and live with a remarkable woman, a remarkably good woman. Thank you, Jenny, for 43 years of companionship, marriage and love—real love.