

Kelli/Kathy
Redemption Songs

On Saturday night, May 17, sitting in the audience at the Serenity House fundraiser, listening intently to Kelli's courageous, heartfelt and meticulously crafted description of her journey to redemption, I was unaware that Kathy had been found dead by her sponsor, Deb, the previous evening.

I learned Monday morning that Kathy had arrived back at her condo the previous weekend from a residential treatment program, started drinking and never went back. Mary, who lives in the same complex, had reached out to her by phone/text and door knocking toward the end of the week to no avail. Deb, getting a bad feeling at a Friday night meeting, headed over to do a wellness check, went around back, and saw Kathy's body lying in a pool of blood through the glass doors. Simply a victim of an insidious disease.

I do not know Kelli, although I'd seen her at the Career Center during the time she was at Serenity House a few years back. You could have heard a pin drop as she sang her spoken word redemption song, describing a loving family who never gave up on her, her path to the point where she realized that Serenity "must be the place,"* finding a healthy loving relationship and especially rejoicing in the bond she shares with her sister and her sister's young children.

I only saw fleeting glimpses of the Kathy that others with longer histories with her knew. That Kathy, the one with the loving and supportive family, the Kathy who shared a deep and loving bond with her husband, the Kathy who, along with her husband, helped a lot of people in the recovery community, the whipsmart Kathy, the Kathy with a crackling sense of humor, the successful business woman and the one who shared a special bond with her nieces and nephews, was most often opaque to me during the time I knew her.

Shortly after Kathy graciously agreed to join the SMOC Board in 2010, her husband Billy died suddenly from a heart attack. My

first real conversation with her occurred at Billy's wake, I don't remember the words, just the long line of mourners that snaked around and through the funeral parlor.

She tried, God she tried, but at least in my eyes, never got over Billy's death, stumbling from the path she and Billy had skipped on, run on, walked on, blazed a trail on for so many years. She'd find it, tell me and others she found it only to lose it and stumble again. I'd see her, talk with her and a Jackson Browne lyric "Maybe I've lost my way ..." (Farther On) would start playing in my head. I worried that my words may have seemed rote to her, or part of a chorus of all those who loved and cared about her. On some level stock phrases filled with encouragement, acceptance and reassurance. Occasionally I feared that all the caring and support seemed alien to her, in her mind words meant for someone else.

A couple of months ago Kathy emailed me, telling me that she was in a treatment program in Boston and wondered if she should resign from the Board because she had "nothing to give and hadn't participated."

My response was quick and emphatic "No. Please just take a leave of absence. Come back in the fall, we'll talk, the entire Board wants you to stay as a member. We don't want to lose you."

Now I wonder.

In order to end this piece, I need to wander into a different world, a world that exists side by side with this one of pain and suffering to employ on some levels the technique of magical realism. In this world on Saturday night, May 17th, at the Serenity House fundraiser, my wife Sheila and I are sitting at a table with Billy and Kathy, Mary and Deb. We've been having a great time joking around, amused by Kathy's antics and irreverent sense of humor. Billy, a true car guy, and me, a novice gearhead, had been shooting the breeze about 60's-era GTOs. We grow quiet as Kelli takes to the stage and haltingly launches into her speech. As Kelli gains confidence and finds her delivery, I look around the table and see tears streaming down all our faces. Kathy and Mary, graduates of Serenity House

a couple of decades earlier, beam with pride as Kelli finishes her speech and returns to the loving embrace of her family and friends. After the speech, Kathy, Deb and Mary make it a point to approach Kelli, embrace her, give her a "that's the way to go, girl" and, I'm sure, slip in the message that redemption need not be transitory. It is simply the result of ongoing daily vigilance.

And, granting myself the liberty of continuing in this vein, searching for an ending and recognizing that Billy the car guy and Kathy the business woman never had the chance to share with each other a final thought and a waking dream, I take the following words from a song and place them with Billy.

"Look

It's like you're standing in the window
of a house nobody lives in
and I'm sitting in a car across the way

(Let's just say)

It's an early model Chevrolet

(Let's just say)

It's a warm and windy day
You go and pack your sorrows
The trash man comes tomorrow
Leave it at the curb and we'll just roll away."**

Jim

5/28/14

NOTE:

*Borrowed from the Talking Heads song "This Must be the Place"

** Jackson Browne, "The Late Show"