

Eulogy for my friend, Sue
Given by Emi Noma
Cove, Oregon
Thursday, March 6, 2008

“The Yogic sages say that all the pain of a human life is caused by words, as is all the joy.” –
Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

I have many words to bring you today, not because I want to bring you pain, but because Sue loved words, and because many words have been said or written by people you do not know who knew and loved your daughter and sister. I hope that these words will bring you joy. If not now, I pray they seep into you over time and bring you comfort.

Colleagues

I am here as a friend of Sue's. But I am also representing many, many people who could not be here today. Sue and I worked together at the Institute for Peace & Justice in San Diego. The program we worked on was called the Women PeaceMakers Program, which lasts two months every fall, and includes eight women from around the world working together, learning of each other's lives and writing about them. In just two intense months, the eight women (10 or 11 if you include the most immediate staff who work with them), forge very deep relationships. This is the context from which I speak today.

Sue was in the program in 2006, but came back last fall to help write the final report from our Women PeaceMakers Summit, so she interacted with many other peacemakers beyond those of her year.

Sue and I were both writers in the program. As such, we told other people's stories. So, it's fitting today that I bring you some words from many other people.

[selected remarks from WPM and writers]

Roommates

Beyond colleagues, however, Sue and I were roommates in the fall of 2006. Our other roommates, Laura Taylor (who also works at the IPJ and who co-wrote the summit report with Sue and me) and Corinne McDaniels, could not be here today. But they have many things to say as well. We shared a lot of life and questioning the universe in just a few short weeks.

[selected stories and remarks from Laura and Corinne]

Friends

As writers, Sue and I were often too busy telling other people's stories to have the energy or strength to tell our own. I only got glimpses of Sue's life beyond the IPJ, her many treks and travels around the world and around her brilliant mind. But we had a story together as colleagues, roommates, friends – if only briefly, it was still deeply. I want to share a small bit of that story now.

A few years ago, I was at a funeral, and the person speaking was describing how when his friend passed away, he went to his bookshelf and took down all the books that this friend had either given him or recommended to him over the course of their friendship. He said that he ended up sitting on the floor, the books stacked all around him, and his shelves lay bare.

I was in New York when I found out about Sue. On the plane ride home, I had my iPod, and I scrolled through all my songs. If these songs were like books, my shelves would lay bare. Over half of them were from CDs that Sue made for me or songs that she demanded I listen to. So it hit me on the plane ride: (She would laugh at my cliché) I have lost a kindred soul. I have lost a friend.

If these were the old days, I would say that Sue and I were both letter writers, lovers of the old-fashioned, handwritten letter. But in this hi-tech age, I would say that our letters were emails – but still in letter form. No crazy abbreviations, (though I must “out” Sue and say she got a little carried away when she discovered smiley faces and emoticons), but mostly it was the full letter feel, with always great closings like “waiting on tenterhooks for a hasty reply” or “take care of yourself and kick the butt of whoever gets in your way” or “wishing you very snowy felicitations from up north” – or a simple, “Love, Sue.” I printed them out to read so they would feel like the handwritten letters they were. Even when we were planning her involvement in our big summit just a few short months ago and all our emails were about logistics and panels and reimbursements and bullet points – they still never strayed from the personal letter, each of us concerned about how the other was holding up under the stress. My favorite closing from her, “I am empathetically, emphatically and telepathically attempting to send healthy, healing vibes your way.”

Just a few days before she left Florida, she wrote me a nice long email – lots of words of encouragement and support (as she sometimes signed off “your biggest fan”) – but mostly about what was going on with her, and about her strange new obsession with the theories of multiple intelligences. She wrote, “At the moment, I’m entrenched in the notions of how social interactions can be contagious and how spending enough time with one person can result in the creation of similar neural pathways in those two people.”

I never got a chance to write her back, but I surely would have said, “Well, thank God you’re not in San Diego anymore, because we already think so alike it’s quite frightening.” And we did: we’d be walking down the street and the comments that would come out of her mouth – usually quite sarcastic – would be exactly what I was thinking at the very same moment. It was the watcher in us: I think we saw the world in much the same way.

When Sue left San Diego in late 2006, I gave her a book called *The Language of Baklava*. It’s a memoir, with family recipes interspersed—so, it’s about the joy of food and family, but mostly it’s about wandering and home. She told me later that she was going to make at least half of the recipes, but she couldn’t decide on which one to make first. Maybe one of you can tell me if she ever made any, then I won’t hold it against her. But the reason I bought it for her was because of one quotation that

I had written down long ago and that reminded me of her—but was also my way of expressing my heartbreak at her leaving.

We grow into the curve of what we know. . . . I miss and I long for every place, every country, I have ever lived – and frequently even the places my friends and my family have lived and talked about as well – and I never want to leave any of these places. I want to cry out, to protest: Why must there be only one home! Surely there is no one as bad, as heartbroken, as hopeless at saying good-bye as I am. The fruits and vegetables, the dishes and the music and the light and the trees of all these places have grown into me, drawing me away. And so I go. Into the world, away.

I have never been good with change, something Sue knew of me and handled very gently with me. When I started working at the IPJ in 2005, and now having been there almost three years, watching 3 groups of women peacemakers and writers come and go, I used to wonder if meeting, connecting, finding kindred spirits and wonderful, passionate, committed friends, was worth the pain of having to watch them walk away after just two months of sharing life together. But I don't wonder anymore. Being one half of a beautiful friendship with Sue, even for less than two years – it has all been worth it.