

Mr. Knozit

When Becca was a preschooler, she and her brother Tim were on Joe Pinner's Mr. Knozit TV show here in Columbia. In response to Mr. Knozit's usual question, Rebecca replied that when she grew up, she wanted to be Cinderella. This provided the first evidence of her ability to lead, as each girl who followed her then gave exactly the same answer.

Portugal

In 1995 and again in 1996 our family had opportunities to spend long periods of the summer in Portugal. Rebecca was then 6 or 7 years old. People all over Portugal love children and by this time Rebecca had a headfull of blond ringlets that made her stand out in a Portuguese crowd. People everywhere smiled at her and ran their fingers through her hair; it was as if she had charmed an entire country.

The first summer we lived near the top of a mountain; this was the Monte do Bom Jesus. At the top of the mountain was a beautiful church, with elaborate granite steps leading to it from the bottom. Every day we could look down on the city, the surrounding hills, and even the ocean miles away. Becca got to ride through much of Portugal on the shoulders of our friend Paulo, who was her first boyfriend, although he was about 30 years old, and married, while she was only 6. Looking back, this was a magical time for Rebecca, and she made a lasting impression on those who met her. In the last few days we have received dozens of messages from Portuguese friends who have vivid memories of her from that time.

Love for Animals

When Rebecca was a toddler, we had a nice cat named Nell who had shown up at our house as a stray. Rebecca usually showed her affection by giving Nell an overzealous squeeze. She later mounted a successful campaign for a dog. One day she showed us a picture she had drawn at school. It showed a girl outside on a bright sunny day. There were flowers around and a cat, but the girl had great big tears coming from her eyes. Kathy asked about the tears, and Rebecca said "She doesn't have a dog." So we ended up with a golden retriever named Ginger.

Then after our cat Nell died, she campaigned for a cat, and we got a calico-tabby mix named Buffydora. The cat seemed nice enough for an hour or two at the shelter, but within a day or two we realized that had that it had the intelligence of a squirrel and was meaner than a snake. But Becca loved her cat most of the time, and the cat tolerated Becca better than it did anyone else.

On the last day of school in her freshman year in high school Becca came home with a small white cardboard box. Kathy asked about it, and Becca explained that it contained 6 white mice from her biology class and that her teacher was going to feed them to a snake

if no one wanted to take them home for the summer. So we added the 6 mice to her collection that already included 14 gerbils.

When she was in remission last summer and preparing to move into her apartment downtown, she wanted a dog to go with her. While undergoing chemo, the doctors had asked us not to get any new pets, but since she was out of treatment, there was no prohibition. Rebecca had always eventually been successful in her previous animal campaigns, and now she was able to play the cancer card, so we new resistance would be futile. Besides, one of the nurses, Kenny, had a litter of Chihuahua puppies at home, and they were the perfect size for apartment living. So we acquired Penny Lane. Kathy and I were skeptical of Chihuahuas, but Penny has been a great pet. She is just a puppy, but she has been willing to curl up into a ball under the covers with Rebecca and sit for hours at a time. She was there again with Rebecca on the last night and stayed curled up with her for two hours after her passing, until the drivers from the funeral home came.

Soccer and Tennis

Rebecca enjoyed soccer and tennis. She played in recreational soccer leagues for many years on some very good teams. She had a powerful kick with either the left or right leg, and a great sense of the game. When she was a 10-year old, it often looked like she was a sheepdog and the other players were her flock. It was her job to keep the game in the proper end of the field, where her teammates could knock in a goal.

I encouraged her to play tennis, and she developed a nice game, although she never was as serious about it as many kids who play junior tournaments. She was mentally tough, played without nerves, and won lots of matches by playing intelligently and with determination. But if she lost, she quickly got over it.

Tennis is an individual sport, but Rebecca is by nature a team player. She enjoyed the game much more when she played as a member of the Richland Northeast High School team. In her last two seasons, she was a team captain. Her Coach, Burns Harris, loved her like a daughter, and she loved him like a second father. So this was not just an athletics, but was an opportunity to enjoy the company of others.

With the Nurses

Since Rebecca was diagnosed with leukemia we have endured much pain and sadness. But we have also had experiences that have brought us great comfort and even happiness. We have met wonderful people. We are so thankful for the doctors, the nurses, the staff affiliated with the Children's Center for Cancer & Blood Disorders. These are people we have come to love; Rebecca loved them, and they loved her.

In the hospital, one sees the nurses more than anyone else; they serve on the frontline in the battle against cancer. The nurses who treated Rebecca were professional, intelligent, and skilled, and they were always her advocates. But they were much more, they were her friends. And Rebecca often responded in ways that made a terribly difficult job more

bearable, or even fun, for them. So we thank our nurses: we thank you for your heads, your hands, your hearts.

So here is a story. (My apologies in advance to Dr. Ron.)

Shortly after she was diagnosed, Dr. Ron was concerned with Rebecca's nutrition, and wanted to encourage her to eat. In the course of the conversation, he mentioned that if she couldn't eat normally, it might be possible to feed her by way of a soft, pliable, plastic tube inserted through the nose. Well, Rebecca was not about to have that, and Dr. Ron was not a popular guy at that moment. It also turns out that Rebecca, like her brother Tim, is a rather skilled impressionist. So she performed her rendition of Dr. Ron for the nurses, always featuring the line about the "soft, pliable, plastic tubing." One night an unnamed nurse laughed so long and hard that she feared for the loss of her job.

I would not tell this story about Dr. Ron, except for the way her relationship with him developed. After this slightly rocky start, Dr. Ron had to earn her love, but he worked at it persistently and, ultimately, successfully. In mid-November, our family went to see a band called, RAIN, a Beatles tribute band. (Rebecca had become a big Beatles fan in the last year.) Becca was racked with pain that night, but in a victory of mind over body, she was able to enjoy the concert. She spotted Dr. Ron in the audience and even though she could hardly walk, she ran over to give him a great big hug.

A couple of weeks ago Rebecca was at home, in pain, and receiving medication through a port accessed by a needle. She accidentally pulled the needle from the port, cutting off her access to the medicine that was controlling her pain. The nurse from the home health service came and tried to reinsert the needle, but the placement of the port was tricky, and three separate needle sticks were unsuccessful. At this point we decided to call one of the nurses from the cancer clinic. It was a Saturday, but she had told us to call at any time. So on her day off, this nurse took our call, asked a neighbor to watch her own small children, got in her car, drove 30 miles from Gaston to our home in Northeast Columbia, successfully inserted the needle, and drove 30 miles back to Gaston. She just smiled and said that she was happy she could help.

When Rebecca was in remission last summer, she prepared to return to the University of South Carolina. After spending so many days in the hospital, she had decided to change her major and enter the College of Nursing. This is a reflection of Rebecca's character, and her desire to help others, but it is also a reflection of the inspiration from her nurses.

The doctors and nurses have told us that Rebecca taught them a lot about patients. She was not the typical patient, and not the typical teenager. She had unusual thoughts and interests and followed her own way. One of the nurses has told us that she had previously lacked confidence with older pediatric patients, but that after working with Becca, she now believes that helping teens may be her calling.

Loving Sister

Parents love their kids, but this can be a tense love because it is so intertwined with the parents' need to train, mold, control, punish, and reward; and the desire of kids to grow up without all of that. With brothers and sisters there is conflict, but the love can be much more unconditional. This is the way it has been with Becca and Tim. They loved each other no matter what. Tim always had the ability to make her laugh when no one else could. Just last Saturday he brought over the classic ping pong comedy film, "Balls of Fury" and the two of them were laughing again. He also depended on her; she was steady and reliable. As we go forward, my greatest regret may be that he must go through life without his sister to watch over him.

Becca and Younger Kids with Cancer

In a sad coincidence, Becca and Ashton Walker, the young grandson of one of Kathy's co-workers were going through treatment at the same time. Becca has always been a favorite relative of some of her young cousins, and she and Ashton also hit it off. Ashton loved Becca, and always looked for her when he came into the hospital for treatment. While she was suffering, she had the time to make him feel better.

One night in December Becca's urge to shop was stronger than the pain so we headed to Target. We passed a large stuffed pony in the toy section. The pony turned its electronically controlled head, flicked its tail, and snorted. Becca looked at us, smiled, and said that if she were five years old again she would have to have that pony for Christmas. Then she got the idea of buying the pony for the Cancer Center waiting room, and a few days later we did. This turned out to be a great idea. Since then, on every visit we made to the the clinic we have seen little (and big) kids surrounding that pony.

A Tough Kid

Rebecca was a strong and independent strong person. It's fair to say that she was a tough kid. She was certainly feminine: she liked to have cute clothes, even if it was mainly t-shirts, tank tops and jeans; she liked to wear jewelry, and her bathroom overflowed with make-up and hair care products. She loved her long hair and it was hard for her to lose it, but before it fell out she had it cut and sent to "Locks of Love" so that it could be used to make wigs for other cancer patients.

She was feminine, but she wasn't cut out to be a cheerleader, a baton twirler, a beauty pageant participant, or even a sorority girl. In the summers she loved to go to Camp Greenville, where she hiked, camped, and swam; where she lived out of a trunk and slept in a bunk in a cabin with a dozen other girls. If she had to, she could go a few days without a shower; this is a skill that later was handy in her career as a cancer patient.

In middle school she went on a field trip to Camp Arrowhead, up n the mountains. The camp was fairly primitive, and the cabins had only open screened windows. The temperature went down into the thirties over night, and the adult chaperones started to wonder why they had volunteered for this punishment. What did Becca do? Every morning at 7 am she got up and jumped in the ice-cold lake for a swim.

Rebecca also had a healthy dose of disrespect for those who were a little too high and mighty. Rebecca entered high school in a magnet program, but dropped out when she felt that she was being asked to regurgitate what the teachers wanted to hear. That same year her non-magnet history class entered a team-based contest competition focused on understanding of the U.S. Constitution, and they ended up winning the South Carolina state championship. At the national competition in Washington, D.C. , Rebecca answered a question in a way that probably would have pleased the founding fathers, but which annoyed the heck out of a radical feminist law professor who was serving as a judge. Needless to say, Rebecca was not apologetic, and the team did not win the national title. But her history teacher could not have been prouder of Rebecca and her class.

When it came to handling her disease, she had the same kind of independence and toughness. She was stoic about pain, and when she was not in the hospital she was determined to be normal. Many of her friends must be wondering how she could be gone today when she seemed ok just a few weeks ago. The answer is that she was hiding the pain.

For the most part, Rebecca took control of managing her illness. When she was not in the hospital, she kept track of her prescriptions, she administered her own IV medications, and she handled the tubes, connectors, and syringes needed to do this. She developed fingers that had the same cleverness as those of her nurses. She could calmly take a needle stick without flinching or looking away. Seeing how these tasks were easy and natural for her was probably partly responsible for her decision to switch her major to nursing when she briefly returned to USC last fall. Towards the end of her battle, when the pain was too much to bear, we knew how much it must have hurt. Rebecca fully understood her prognosis, but she never entered a hospice program that would have required her to give up the fight to live. Last Saturday, she told Kathy and me that she was thankful for every day. At that time, the days were not very good, but she was still not ready to give in. She fought for and maintained her dignity to the end, and she kept her independence as long as she could.

Last August, she had moved into an apartment with her good friend Stacey, anticipating the upcoming school year. After her relapse and withdrawal from school, she continued to stay there when she wasn't in the hospital. By the time Christmas break had arrived, Becca was not well enough to be alone, but she wanted to stay in her apartment, so Stacey stayed there in the apartment with her for almost the entire Christmas break, and she was with us holding Rebecca in her arms when she passed away Monday morning. We are thankful that Becca had such a wonderful friend.

Her Voice

When Rebecca was very young, I was concerned that she might have inherited her singing voice from her parents. She sang all the time, but had some trouble with the notes. Then, like the ugly duckling who became a swan, her voice became that of an angel. She sang at home, with her friends, with her cousins, and in the Cavalier Chorale

at school. With illness, the singing stopped for a long time. But about a month ago, while we were driving her to the clinic, Paul McCartney sang from the radio, and then I heard Rebecca join in behind me:

Yesterday,
All my troubles seemed so far away,
Now it looks as though they're here to stay,
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

High Expectations

No one can be perfect. This is of course not a time to think about Rebecca's faults. I'm not sure if this is a fault, but I would say that Rebecca sometimes had high expectations for others, and at times we have all fallen short of those expectations. So if you have been in Rebecca's doghouse, you are not alone. But she was ultimately forgiving and understanding, and I hope that her friends understand this.