

God's Passion--A Memorial Message for Louise

As delivered by John Cardarelli, her husband

February 7, 2009

Forgive me, Friends, for I am an ancient mariner from the South Seas with a long tale to tell. I come from the Falkland Islands, a land of penguins and many kind strangers. My albatross is not hung around my neck. She has spread her long white wings and flown to the heavens. I gasp and stand in awe of Louise's tenacity in the face of her tough cancer. She is true, total GRITS— girls raised in the South, with the determination and will to move mountains. Both of us seeing three sunrises over the Andes high Cordillera as we flew into Santiago speaks volumes about Louise, flying toward the Light with grit and so little complaining, marveling at what she called the “breathtaking” Andes high snow-capped teeth, finding that of God in so many people and the vistas of nature. I am very grateful to have been part of her adventurous ride through life.

Just after her diagnosis of pancreatic cancer in August, during Meeting for Worship in this room, I had a vision of Jesus walking over to a sitting Louise, saw Him grasping both of her hands, standing her up, and walking with her away from me. In November during Meeting for Worship in this room, I saw Louise in my mind's eye floating above a large lotus flower, with legs crossed and quite peaceful, her eyes closed in meditation. The jewel is indeed within the lotus. Om mani padme hum. A vision of her calm acceptance of an awful medical condition, but more importantly, my reverence for her spiritual calm in the middle of her body's storm. What, then, canst thou say, as the early Quakers posed an invitation to discover and share the Truth with a capital T. I can say Louise's and my love is solid as a rock, a firm foundation of divine love that we each intuited before we re-met in 1979. That spiritual calling has been the bedrock of our marriage. I can also say that her cancer has reaffirmed our deep love and total acceptance of the

other. I am moved to tears by the Buddha's story of his enlightened love and friendship with a pretty courtesan. She offers her body to him soon after Enlightenment, but Buddha tells her that he will love her after everyone has stopped loving her and after everyone has abandoned her. During his own dying procession, Buddha gets off his pallet after he sees a leprous woman against a wall. He walks over to her and hugs her in love. For me, love is the ultimate energy in a million manifestations. The look in the eyes, the holding of hands, the gentle kiss and caress, but mostly the deep wellspring of water flowing outward from a loving, centered heart. I am so grateful for the married love of my life. At first, never easy to do, love involves daily forgiveness, reaching out, sharing, and physical embraces that seem to be cycles of movement by two heavenly bodies that are destined to remain in orbit around each other, gravitationally attracted till the next supernova or melting by a red giant star. Love, as I see it now, begins with the Spirit. Love is born of the Spirit, and is Spirit. As such, it is an eternal foundation and touchstone for any "called" relationship, and it remains eternal in the cosmic order.

I don't know what happens at death, or what part of our humanity remains alive beyond the decaying body. But I am certain that real, Spirit-given love is the power and grace that does not disappear, but continues to heal the empty heart. I know I am loved. "I know I am loved" is the fundamental realization I have experienced from my Irish grandmother Nana and now from Louise, as well as God. God reminds me when I truly pray in the Spirit how love changes and moves into compassion and care and joy. I loved Louise more compassionately the more she weakened. I'm not sure how to tell this tale of love and faithfulness to God's calling and the intuitive vision. But I will say both Louise and I had clear messages that we would meet and marry someone we already knew. I got my promise in lengthy, lonely petitioning prayer while I lived in Richmond, VA in the summer of '77. What I received in clear, strong intuitions was this:

my wife would be someone I already knew, and that she would be beautiful, even gorgeous. The other message I got clearly was the number “8.” Louise, on the other hand, paid a Japanese psychic living in Durham to give her a reading on the future and present. She heard Tamiko Smith say that she would marry someone she already knew, that he would have a guttural accent, and it would be in about 18 months. Fittingly, our wedding on April 19, 1980 happened to be precisely 18 months to the day from the psychic reading. I spoke Arabic, we were married in ‘80 and I was 28 years old. Louise and I re-met at an Elijah concert (by Mendelssohn) sung by the Durham Civic Choral Society on Sunday, May 13, 1979. Roger Corless, my friend and Religion Professor, had sold me a ticket, and Louise got a freebie from a friend in her women’s psychic group. The “Gail Group,” named for the schizophrenic leader who liked to pop open people’s brains to intergalactic and spiritualist communings with ethereal beings she called “entities.” During the concert, when the chorus sang that Elijah prayed for rain, a thunderstorm poured down rain through the open horizontal windows in Baldwin Auditorium on East Campus. People actually put up their umbrellas during the concert because of the sheets of rain. The chorus sang on. Louise was wearing a purple antique gown and was genuinely delighted to see me after seven years. I had actually spied Louise on Duke campus in August of ‘74 when I returned from teaching in Palestine, but I did not approach her. I saw that she had wire rim granny glasses, a long hippie dress, and was standing at the West Campus bus stop at Duke. To this day, I remain puzzled why I did not reach out or call to her. I can be a shy, low self-esteem kind of guy at times, and avoid socializing when I feel depressed. At that time, Louise was married to Richard Tuttle, but they divorced the next year. The beginning of our love happened about three days after the Elijah concert. Louise invited me to her house, the downstairs of a shotgun house on Lancaster Street, for a long conversation. I stopped by Duke Gardens on my way walking to her

house. Next to the goldfish pond, I deftly picked a fully blooming magnolia blossom from one of the old trees. I gave it to Louise at her door, thinking this old friend might like the scent of sweet southern magnolia grandiflora. I wasn't even consciously thinking Romance, just plain friendship. I was ever grateful we could share honestly how our lives had transpired in the past seven years. I told her a long story about walking into the land of John the Baptist (my patron saint) into the Wilderness near Jericho, to find shelter at a monastery in Wadi Qilt. But I slept outside the door on a stone slab because they did not understand English and would not let me in. I recalled walking seven miles by moonlight back to Jericho on a narrow canyon trail about eighteen inches wide, and eating freshly baked bread all the way to Jerusalem on a 5 AM taxi. She listened intently, and shared her story of being arrested on the island of Paros for streaking, being imprisoned on another Greek isle, and being interrogated by none other than Israeli General Moshe Dayan, who suspected her of some kind of involvement with a Greek democratic coup d'etat that was just about to happen in 1975. I was also in Greece in April of '75 touring Athens and the Peloponnesus. We marveled at the synchronicity. Ah, synchronicity, a meaningful coincidence according to Carl Jung. Synchronicity, the unexpected meetings that destiny brought us together again and again, 1971, '72, '73, '74, and '79. From the time I first saw her knitting in my group dynamics sociology class, to our neighborhood get-togethers to do telescope gazing and skinny dipping at a nearby apartment swimming pool after 11 PM when the pool officially closed, to an astrology chart reading which she gave me for free in '73. Synchronicity, the story of inexplicable but wonderful coincidences, the story of our love.

My personal romantic falling in love totally with Louise did not happen immediately. In fact, the mushy-gooey-huggy-kissy stuff didn't even happen after she came over to my apartment one night in June of '79. I had just spent a week at a Catholic Trappist monastery in Mepkin, SC.

She spent the week worried if I would ever come back to her. I spent the time soul-searching for a vocation to the celibate life as a priest or monk, but as usual, this was the fourth time in my life I felt strongly that celibacy was not the path for me. Too many Italian hormones below the belt, too much Irish dreaming for a true love in my head and heart. So, Louise it was to be. She came over to my apartment about 9:30 one evening in mid-June and asked if she could spend the night. She explained in great detail how she was in a women's group, practically a coven, of psychics who had vowed to remain celibate for six months so their psychic powers would be enhanced. Since I had just come back from the monastery, the very last words spoken to me by the vocations director priest were, "Don't have sex." So, sleeping together didn't seem like a problem to me. After all, we were just friends in my mind. Well, about 3:30 AM, Louise woke me and said, "I'm going to break my vow of celibacy for you. I don't care what the Gail group thinks." This was literally the first time in my life I had ever slept with a woman, physically slept with a woman in the same bed. I didn't know how to share a double bed. And I barely knew how to make love, having had a brief anxious time of sex in an undergraduate rite of passage with a bright-eyed beauty from El Paso. So sex came unexpectedly and acrobatically into my life. But because Louise was first and foremost "my friend," I couldn't fall in love. Louise has always been the sister I never had, the sister to share a bathroom with, the sister to argue with about driving directions, the sister to cook with, the sister to sing and praise with. Wife? Well, that came later. I fell in love with Louise one long, sleepless night in the back of my Jeep Wagoneer. We witnessed a spectacular display of the Brown Mountain Lights in October of '79. Unlike shooting stars in the sky above the mountain peaks, these lights were peculiar, fascinating bursts of pure plasma. First, we saw two or three yellow, spotlight-sized flashes on and off in the valley below Big Chestnut Ridge. Then in the treetops, we spied a swarm of tiny blue lights

bobbing in and out of the leaves. Through my binoculars, it looked like they were floating up the steep mountainside. Finally, around 3 AM, we saw a UFO, an unidentifiable yellow light hovering and slowly moving back and forth just above Brown Mountain's peak. It was a light show without sound, a display of Earth's energy, a mystery, a delight. I looked at the lovely Weezie-Belle all night in between powerful lightshows from the unknown. I truly fell in love with her, with her light, more fantastic and unpredictable and uncontrollable than even these legendary orbs. There's another reason I fell in love with Louise that weekend. The very Friday we began our journey to Brown Mountain and South Harper Creek Falls, I received my most cherished possession, a love letter. In fact, the only love letter I've ever received in my life. The envelope reads: Mr. John F. Cardarelli, Durham, NC 27705 USA Western Hemisphere Earth Solar System Whatever Galaxy Mind of God. The letter dated October 19, 1979, exactly six months before our wedding, reads: Dear Concerned Person #1; I am in love with you madly. Whatever warmth you have (and I must say you have a lot!), you're always ready to give it to other cold-blooded people like me. Whatever wit or wisdom you chance upon in your mind, you freely express, from the depths of your Scorpio soul. You are a teacher of all of us, not only of your drug-crazed high school students. But most of all, I think I respect your humility and spirit. Those shine around you. Tied to the earth, but climbing to the ether, John Cardarelli, you are quite a beautiful person. And, despite all this flowery sentiment, you're the greatest lover ever a woman could desire. With all my heart (and fingers), Louise... About two weeks before Louise heard her diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, I was moved to visit my favorite place on Earth, Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest and the high mountain bald eight miles above called the Hangover. I was inspired to write a poem, the only poem I ever composed for Louise. It's called Country Eros and it refers back to our day together after the Brown Mountain Lights:

I love you with a fierceness

Blackberry juice lining throats, aftertaste of wild sweet savor,

Morphing butterflies dancing wildly in the sun,

Red-tailed hawk mewing its presence

Silently winging.

Sentinel huckleberry tree, blueberry vibrant on windswept ridge

Your loving on logging trail beneath Brown Mountain blue lights.

Pileated Pair.

Louise will always be Louise, certifiably a character, a liberated Southern belle, a manic depressive, who only goes off the track in one direction, that of hypomania. Before I romantically met her, Louise had been involuntarily committed to John Umstead Mental Hospital in Butner for a hypomanic episode in a women's bathroom on Duke's campus in the summer of '74. She was brutally tied to a chair, left alone for hours, and treated like garbage, a common fate for those who appear to be different from the rest of us so-called well-adjusted individuals. That experience left her with a core of shame and low self-esteem that was first healed by marriage, and finally healed by the loving support of School of the Spirit. Louise was delightfully creative with poetry, piano, and guitar. She earned the right to sing Bessie Smith blues songs which she loved to do. Somehow, the flowers of the South are distinctly and deservedly different from the North. Dutchman's breeches, showy orchis, and pink ladyslippers are my favorites. But my all-time, intoxicating, reverie-inducing, still center of the Southern universe is Magnolia Grandiflora, and that is spelled L-O-U-I-S-E.

As Louise's Grandfather Harris used to say, "Some stories are true, and some stories are beautiful." Our story is both.

I was able to read this story to Louise the evening before she died when she was quite lucid. She said it was good. She gazed at me and listened intently and enjoyed every minute. She corrected me on the purple antique dress she wore to the Elijah concert.