

Memorial for Julia Lee Berg August 15, 2005 Rev. Kate
Tucker

Opening Words

“Set me as a seal upon your heart...
for love is strong as death
passion fierce as the grave
It’s flashes are flashes of fire....
Many waters cannot quench love
neither can floods drown it
If one offered for love
all the wealth of his house
it would be utterly scorned.”

--Song of Songs (Hebrew Scripture) 8:6-7

Friends, welcome to this place, a place made sacred by many years
and many gatherings of grief and gladness, memory and hope.
It’s a gift to be together and yet--
It’s nothing but sorrow to be gathered for this purpose, to say
goodbye to one so young and dear to us.
We’re here to say goodbye to Julia Berg, age 15--our companion,
our daughter, our darling, our blood.
We gather as one family, united in our sorrow over Julia’s death and
united in our gratitude that we are among those whose lives
she touched.
We gather, bringing everything we’re feeling--sadness, confusion,
numbness, fear, tenderness, emptiness, rage--
It’s all part of the grief:

“Give way to grief,
And abandon....fortitude...
Set free, a while, the soul,
Better to bear its load
Tears unshed are stones upon the heart
That choke the healing stream
Unlock the flood-gates;
Loose the waters.
Give way, give way to grief.
--Melville Crane , adapted

Prayer:

Spirit of Life, Spirit of Wisdom, Spirit of Healing, be with us.
We have been overwhelmed.
We have taken a great fall, fallen from our familiar world into a
world so alien and empty of Julia.
Hold us in a sea of love as we do what we came to do--as we
acknowledge that Julia, our sister, daughter, friend, fellow-

traveler--in the bloom of her young womanhood--
is dead and gone from us.
Our hearts overflow for Julia and Dan and Welcome and Hannah.
Carry us.
We can find no comfort except in honest sorrow, and in accepting the
truth that the truth we face is unacceptable.
Help us trust our grief and not fear it.
Help us to know that even as we struggle with our need and our pain
in this hour, we can at the same time give thanks:
We can give thanks for the gift of Julia's life.
We can give thanks for our human capacity to grieve (it's the only
road to healing).
We can give thanks for our sacred heritage--passed down through
generations.
And we can give thanks for the gift of one another, this community
of profound and generous love.
Spirit of Life, we seek you. Amen.

Words from Minister

Rev. Kate Tucker

"For as long as space endures
And for as long as all living beings remain
Until then may I too abide
To dispel the misery of the world."

Those are words Julia memorized.
She spoke those words in a Theater E3 production 2 summers ago.
The words are from the Dalai Lama, and Julia took them from one
of her favorite books, a book called:
THE RIGHT WORDS AT THE RIGHT TIME
It's a hefty collection of stories written by dozens of leaders,
athletes, and artists.
Their stories tell us how the Right Words and the right time
inspired them, guided them, changed them.
I'm thinking about that today.
Because today--though this is largely about just being together--
it's also a time when we're asked to find the words and speak.
(Not just the minister, but you'll all be invited to share words, if you
wish, to honor Julia.)

The right words. What does that mean? The right words.
It seems fitting to think about this:

For one thing, Julia wanted us to get the words right.
When she was very young and language was new to her, she made up
her own words, she created her own contractions.
"I amn't ready" she'd say, when she needed more time to get it together.

But it wasn't long before she became a grammatical hardliner.
She wasn't much older when Welcome would point out the
window to show her, "Look, look at the puppies."

"That's 'puppy,'" said Julia, "because there's only one."

The right words.

More recently, Welcome was describing something in Welcome's
animated way, saying it was absolutely magic.

"That's 'magical,'" Julia corrected her. And so it went.

The right words.

There was a scientist in Julia; details mattered.

It would matter to her that we got the facts straight, about her life.

She would probably want us to lay out some of the basic information as
accurately as possible.

So--for instance--

Her name is Julia Lee Berg and she was born on April 21, 1990, the
first child born to Welcome Jerde and Dan Berg.

She was born about 3 years before her sister Hannah, whose name
she and Dan chose, outvoting Welcome.

Julia was a bright child, so bright.

This is one reason her first beloved babysitter Kira chose "You are
My Sunshine" as the regular lullaby and when Kira sang it softly
close to Julia's ear, her tears would stop or she'd drift off to sleep:

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.

You make me happy when skies are gray.

You'll never know dear how much I love you

Please don't take my sunshine away.

Julia did her growing up in the same house, 4901 Fremont, same
neighborhood same lakes, same community

She went to Windom Open School, then Lake Harriet Community School.

She was a good student. She pushed herself, sometimes too hard;
she'd move so fast she'd later have to catch up with herself.

She played alto saxophone, and piano.

She loved science, so, summers it was science camp

She traveled with the family, far and often--she saw Norway, Russia,
Italy, China, Costa Rica, Peru, Equador, Canada--and in the USA:

Maine, Boston, DC, the Grand Canyon, Seattle, Sanibel Island.

She was a water child, a swimmer on the swim team.

At one point she dreamed of being a marine biologist.

It became clear, that physically, she was close to fearless.

For Julia, there was no roller coaster too high or too fast.

The Wild Ride at Valley Fair, at age 8; no problem

Space Mountain at Disneyworld; bring it on.

She took up skiing, and then snowboarding.

The money she made selling ice cream at the State Fair last year,

that money went for a new snowboard.

Julia liked to bake and to bike.

And to be with friends. Friends were the main thing.

To be grounded--for Julia, that was the worst.

School friends, swimming friends, lately, church friends.

She used to fight, really fight, going to church--until she went on the church bike trip to Lanesboro with Shari and the others.

That was a turnaround. That was some kind of transformation which just kept going, deepening--through the Coming of Age program last year then through the Unity Summer internship where she worked with the Sierra Club.

She loved it. She loved the Sierra Club folks.

She loved a lot, though she didn't easily let on, or sometimes, let it in.

She was cynical, she was a radical, she was a flamingo on stilts in the production of the Wizard of Oz, she was a seeker.

She was, after all, fifteen.

It surely helped her, it surely served her well--that bedtime ritual she did every night when she was younger, the ritual that was a kind of prayer.

After she was tucked in, Mom or Dad or Kira or Liz would ask, "Who loves you?" and Julia would list the names:

"Mom loves me, Dad loves me, Hannah loves me..." and various others depending on the night and the mood:

"Ballerina Baby loves me, Storm (the cat) loves me, the moon loves me...."

And Julia's world would grow so large.

Julia was fifteen.

She was at that age where she was bridging the worlds

She was Harry Potter 1 and she was also the Buddhist prayer of the Dalai Lama.

She was Super America Glazed Donuts (her favorite)

and she was Broder's state-of-the-art pesto.

Her carefully decorated room in the Fremont house says a lot.

The room is bright pink and orange, the warmest colors

The magazine photos lining the walls are mostly of women costumed in more or less black and looking at the camera with "I dare you to make me care" expressions.

There's Julia's rock music collection--Beatles, yes, and also Green Dog,

Modest Mouse, Marilyn Manson, The Flaming Lips, and Coldplay--

And there's her collection of dozens of little black and white cow figures and beany babies.

It's hard to find the "Right Words" for some of the paradoxes and complexities of Julia's life.

But it would be accurate to say: She was on her way.

The right words.

The right words, for Julia, would need to be the honest words.

She didn't want to hide important truths.

A year and a half ago, Thanksgiving 2003, she said she believed she was dealing with depression.

And so she dealt with it. It was a rough road.

You can be fearless on the outside and still fragile on the inside.

Julia believed in being open about the struggle, it's an illness after all,

she said, a chemical imbalance.

Thanks to good medications and fine therapy and Julia's honesty, she was managing. She was learning.

The right words for Julia meant the words that could help you see.

More and more, she'd listen and make an effort to understand,

Something would slip in and change her.

She rebelled against family dinners--it was torture, bondage, agony, and just didn't make sense--

Till Welcome told the story of her own childhood and how hard it was to find anything like family togetherness.

Julia could hear that, and she let herself be softened on the issue.

The right words for Julia needed to be words that stood for what's right.

The rights of same sex couples, protection of our earth, our planet home.

Julia would have to stand for justice; it was in her.

She was five, Kira was walking with her down to the lake to feed the ducks.

Julia said, "You know what?" Kira said, "No, what?"

Julia said, "Some families have 2 mommies, some have 2 daddies, some have a mommy and a grandma. There are all kinds of families."

This fall, at Southwest High School, Julia planned to join the Gay-Straight Alliance.

Some issues didn't have to be worked out; they were a given.

Our great grief includes--of course--our grief that we won't see her future unfold.

I asked Dan and Welcome, what would be Julia's message to us?

They said it would be something about bravery.

Something about speaking up and speaking out.

Dan quoted his Wellstone button. It says, "Stand up and keep fighting."

Those words remind him of Julia.

And here's another way to say it, perhaps, in the words of Julia's hero the Dalai Lama:

"It is only through hardship, dedication, and commitment and by standing firm on one's principles that one can grow spiritually

and attain liberation.” --Dalai Lama in THE GOOD HEART (58)
And, I would add, bring more justice to our lives.

And what are the right words we can say about her death?
There are no right words.

Julia died on Wednesday evening Aug. 10 at Children’s Hospital.
She’d been ill with a fever and flu-like symptoms.
With difficulty she went to the Unity Summer banquet on wednesday
the 3rd; she got herself to work at Rush’s bridal shop on
Saturday the 7th, but she was in pain. She had to leave early.
She went to urgent care.
She ended up at Children’s Hospital and was scheduled for gall bladder
surgery Wednesday midday.
The surgery seemed to go all right, but a couple hours later there
were complications, then more complications.
In spite of efforts to save her, Julia didn’t make it.
When she died at 6 pm our world changed forever.

There are no right words about her death.
Dan offered us this quote from the story of Zorba the Greek, by
Kazantzakis:

Zorba: Why do the young die? Why does anybody die?
Writer: I don’t know.
Zorba: What is the use of all your damn books, then? If they
don’t tell you that, what the hell do they tell you?
Writer; They tell of the agony of [those] who cannot answer
questions like yours.

Maybe those are the right words about death.
And here, perhaps, is the right response:

“For as long as space endures
And for as long as all living beings remain
Until then may I too abide
To dispel the misery of the world.”

And finally, what are the right words that will express our
grief and gratitude?

The right words are any words we say when they come from our
hearts, our broken hearts.
“Set me as a seal upon your heart, for love is stronger than death.”
Whatever words we say, whatever story we tell, the subtext, the
meaning under the words, what we’re really saying is:
Julia, I love you.

Who loves you, Julia? they'd ask her at bedtime.

It's a long list now, and you're on it.

"Who loves you, Julia?"

"Mom loves me Dad loves me Hannah loves me John loves me Eileen loves me, Kira loves me, Liz loves me, Evan loves me, Alex loves me, Rick loves me, Sharon loves me Nora loves me, Linda loves me, Mike loves me, Deb loves me, Polly loves me, Mark loves me, Robin loves me, Jan loves me, Dyce loves me, Susan loves me, Dave loves me, Chris loves me, Shari loves me, Kathy loves me..."and on and on and on.

She knew it. And of course, she loved you back.

She did, she does, she will.

Closing Words

Julia Lee Berg. She came to us from out of the sacred mystery.

She returns to that mystery, but taking with her our love.

And leaving so much with us.

Here's a blessing in honor of Julia:

"Hold on to what is good

Even if it is a handful of earth

Hold on to what you believe

Even if it is a tree which stands by itself

Hold on to what you must do

Even if it is a long way from here

Hold on to my hand even when

I have gone away from you."

--UU Hymnal # 688, attributed to Nancy Wood

--also in Prayers for Healing (ed. by Maggie Oman),
attributed to the Pueblo people.

Prayer:

Spirit of Life and Love, in the days ahead, may we be blessed by Julia's
memory, as we've been blessed by her life.

May Welcome, Dan, Hannah, and all the family, be given what
they need--hour by hour and day by day.

May our fears be transformed, may our loves be deepened, may our
actions be channels for peace and truth.

Keep our lives--our going out and our coming in from this time forth
and forevermore.

Amen.