

A Celebration of the Life of Sandi Childers

I wanted to share a story of a co-worker of mine that made me stop and reflect on the blessing most of us take for granted. I need an occasional reminder of just how blessed I really am and this was one of those reminders. I hope the story inspires you like it inspired me. God is good... all the time! :o)

Sandi's funeral was not like anything I've ever experienced, nor do I feel it will be like anything I will ever experience again. The celebration of Sandi's life on that rainy May 3rd afternoon will forever change the course of my life. The following is a brief account of what happened that day, but it is only an attempt to capture a glimpse of what transpired so that I may never forget.

I had attended her service as Steve's co-worker and a past co-worker of Sandi. I wanted to show my support and my compassion for the tragedy that had transpired. Like Steve, I also have a young boy and my wife and I have been married for five years as well. I felt like that could have been me going through the struggles that Steve had to deal with and I wanted to do my part to try to ease his burden.

The leaflets that were handed out were nice in that they were titled, *A Celebration of the Life of Sandi Childers*. While I am a believer in the resurrection, I have been to many funerals that less than a celebration of anything. After the introduction and the opening prayer, there was a beautiful sounding acoustic guitarist and soloist Leah Crisafulli who sang *Yet I Will Praise*. The melody and words were soothing and reached past the uncomfortableness of the moment to grab hold of my heart.

Their Pastor Charles Parker spoke next and gave a beautiful testimony to Sandi's unwavering faith to the very end. He spoke of how during the last weeks of her illness, she would try to save her strength before Sunday so she could make it to church because it rejuvenated her joy each week.

After a reading from Isaiah 35:8-10, Steve's sister Stacey got up to witness. She told how Sandi pushed her beyond her comfort zone – to take a chance – to believe in your dreams and never settle for second best. Stacey told how Sandi inspired her to take chances in life and how she had influenced her life and changed it for the better.

After a reading of the 23 Psalm, Sandi's brother and sister, Andy and Karen, also got up to witness about Sandi's life. They spoke of her compassion for others and her zest for life – they spoke of her happiness and the joy she found in her marriage to Steve. As each person spoke, I was transfixed by their testimony of Sandi's life and her relentless quest for the fullest that life had to offer.

And then, after a reading from John 14:1-6, it happened. Somehow, to my amazement, Steve got up and walked to the podium. While I'm certain that the Lord was guiding him, I believe that the hearts of every person in that church were also lending a hand. Remarkably, like the unwavering champion in a title fight, Steve spoke. He talked about awareness of ovarian cancer and about early detection and how important it was for him to let people know. He said that all things happen for a reason, and while he didn't claim to fully understand why Sandi had to be taken when everything was going so great, he knew some good would come out of this situation.

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Steve said that if ovarian cancer could be detected while it was still intact in the ovaries, that there was greater than a 90% chance of survival, while if it was detected later the chances went down to less than 50%. He also spoke of her smile and how 80% of the letters that people wrote to the family at her viewing written about how her smile could brighten any room. He also recanted the last days of her life on this Earth. He said that the doctor told him that her liver had failed and it was only a matter of time. Steve and the doctor went into the room to tell her the news; he stood on one side while the doctor stood on the other. After the doctor told her the news, she just turned to Steve and smiled, as if to say, "I won't be suffering any more" and Steve lost it. He thought, "here I am supposed to be here for her in the most difficult moment in her life, but instead she was comforting me!" As I sat in my pew, I empathized with Steve. I wanted to come to Sandi's service to support him, but it was me who was getting a 100 times more out of the service! Steve continued on, telling of how he envisioned, at that moment, her taking his hand and the two of them went on a journey. They went through each of the memories they shared together from their wedding day, to their ski trips, to their vacation in the Bahamas, to the birth of their son Jason. He spoke of the blessing of seeing Sandi in Jason's eyes and in his mannerisms for the years to come. He also spoke of the unity that their families had shared during the last hours of her life and how they prayed, laughed and cried with one another. He spoke of her unwavering faith to the very end despite the painful mental and physical anguish she endured for over a year.

The celebration concluded with the song *Love Like Sandi's* sung by Jerry Pastore, the Commendation, Prayer of Thanksgiving, The Lord's Prayer, the Song of Dismissal *May the Road Rise to Meet You* and the recessional, but the celebration really had just begun. I'm sure that I am not alone when I say that I have taken my life for granted at times. Yes, there are moments that I have felt the blessings of the Lord upon my life, but this day, as I stated earlier, has changed my life forever. I am thankful that I was allowed to be a part of Sandi's Celebration and for Steve comforting me when I needed this awakening in my life. I'm thankful to be given the opportunity to tell others about ovarian cancer and how important it is to be tested for it. We have all been given a brief time in this world and hopefully we will take a chance to make a difference in someone else's life. If only each of us would strive to have a part of the "compassion for others and her zest for life" that Andy and Karen spoke of; if we could take the time to smile at someone in the checkout line the next time were racing through Wal-Mart. I went home that day and promised myself I would make a difference and that I would take a chance - to believe in my dreams and never settle for second best! I am glad that I was fortunate enough to witness a glimpse of what life should be, what it could be, and what I hope to make a reality. May the Lord bless you and yours all of the days of your life!

*May the road rise to meet you,
may the wind blow at your back,
may the sun shine warmly on your face,
may the rain fall softly on your field,
and until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.
Amen*