

Eulogy for Kathy Braier

By Phillip Knoll

Read on August 7th, 2021 during Kathy's funeral

I asked the angel of Kathy what she would want me to say here. She honored my independence, so she would definitely leave it up to me... but *she might* have some edits because she always liked to keep me in line with social conventions.

Myself, Tim, and Steven adopted this core value of hers—**independence**—and kind of ran with it... maybe a little further than she would have run with it. But, I think we saw what she valued and we naturally valued that same thing.

There are two parts to this eulogy—"Who Kathy ***was***" and "Who Kathy ***is***". The answer to first is easy, straightforward, simple. The second is difficult, unclear, and less simple.

Who Was Kathy?

I'd say, collectively, we have a somewhat workable answer to this question. No one of us has the full story, obviously. But, I'll relay a few of my own tidbits here.

Kathy was a social worker, psychotherapist, children's therapist, psychology teacher. She had a faith in humanity that she enacted purposefully through children and the youth of the world. She *loved* children. For a very long time, she legitimately wanted and hoped to have 13 children... I'm not exaggerating. Yes, this sounds absurd. This was a

peculiar and fascinating aspect of her world. But, it makes sense when reflecting on her role and identity growing up in the Miller household. As a very young child, she took on the role of caretaker and a kind of mother to her brothers and sisters. You can talk to any of her siblings about this.

I think this gave her faith in children and cultivated the importance of children to her. She noticed that, as a child, she was very important and had a lot of responsibility. And, true to form, all the children I've met, including my friends growing up, always **loved** my mom and would say "your mom is so cool". They said this so often that it became annoying for me to hear when I was trying to be fed up with her.

During her last 2 weeks of life, when her brain was nearly gone, she wanted to write a letter. She really couldn't, but it was addressed "Dear brothers and sisters". This was what she cared about. All the layers of consciousness were peeled back and this was the impulse that came through.

I've always struggled with depression, but this was always a very foreign condition to her. A few years ago, I asked her how she she was able to be happy all the time. She had to think about it for a while. It seems a lot of the things she did were not conscious—they were automatic. She came to the conclusion that acceptance seemed to be the cornerstone behavior behind her relentless cheer. She said every morning as soon as she awoke, she would think about how grateful she was to be alive. This was a natural, automatic thing for her—it wasn't forced. It was genuine. She would literally wake up and think to herself, "Wow, this is cool that I'm alive", and she would recount the things she was grateful for.

Yes, this is a practice of gratitude, but before you can have gratitude, you have to have acceptance. She remarked that this behavior even seemed kind of crazy to her because she would do this while she was on chemo and living with pain every day.

Who is Kathy Now?

We have two popular answers to this question. Kathy is:

1. Dead
2. In Heaven

If either of those are enough to satisfy you, then you can roll with that. If not, because maybe you have unresolved emotions or something, that's what this part is for. I'll add that if her being in Heaven is something you believe, this whole grieving process is really just a matter of being patient. *Can you wait until you join her in everlasting peace and harmony?* That seems like a very reasonable request from the gatekeeper.

I would love to impart the peace of mind I have with her absence. I'm pretty okay with it. I appreciated my time with her, I loved her, she loved me. To me, the tragedy greater than losing someone is the tragedy of not appreciating having that person in the first place. To me, mourning is a kind of existential longing from not having been able to attain ultimate closeness with someone while they were alive. But, as I sat next to Kathy while she was dying and during the years leading up to that, I found there was no real way to express that other than some crying, hugging, and an exchange of *"I love you more than you could know"*, which I

did accomplish during my time with her.

Understanding the instability of our definitions might be where I find the most solace in interpreting difficult events. When we probe the significance of our definitions for things, we start to uncover the *significance* of those definitions that make up our personal realities. By a strict technical definition, I was never her child. I was adopted. But, by reinterpretation, a different story is born. This story is now what we are all rewriting. This is the story that matters. It's not the technical definition.

The apparent loss and the absence of things is one such definition that is not as concrete as commonly assumed. Nothing is really fixed. It's convenient to think of things as black and white, but all blacks and whites are not so precise when you start to probe further. Kathy is dead, yes, but everything in the world is an echo from a source. The words I'm speaking are technically over and done with as soon as they leave my mouth. Once they make it to your ears, they are from the past. These echoes unfold at progressively larger scale. While Kathy, her physical self is over, her life echoes on through us. You can't say those echoes are dead. As long as they're echoing, they are reverberating through life **in the same way they always did.**

Why are we here today? We are here to recollect, i.e., to "recollect". We are here to recapture, retell, and recall everything we can find to elucidate and embed the meaning of Kathy's life into our own lives. We are here to solidify old meanings and find new ones.

But what does one do to fill the hole of sorrow after a loved

one has passed other than wallow in misery? It does not have to do with them anymore. It has to do with you and I. It has to do with ***honor***—honoring them and their existence. It's about them inside us and *as us*. It's now our responsibility. It's not Kathy's anymore. She's gone.

And in keeping with Kathy's appreciation of the **individual**, it's seems befitting for her to die before us, and for us now to prove that we have valued her contributions and can uphold the generosity, love, and exemplary behavior she's taught us. It's all us now.