

Letter to Jerry Balsam from Dan and Stephanie Pekarsky, friends of Joy from Madison, Wisconsin

May 31, 2004

Dear Jerry,

After trying unsuccessfully to reach you by phone on my way back from Israel, I realized that, at this stage, it's probably better that I write, the reason being that I'm doubtful that I will be able to express what I want to say in conversation. The written word will also fall far short, but it will probably come closer.

Joy was among the most extraordinary human beings I have known in my life, and her death has left in me, as it has in so many others, deep sadness and an irreparable void. She was a wonderful friend – loyal, caring, wise, playful, unpretentious, funny, candid, a great listener, forgiving of others' faults, appreciative, and always very much *wholly there* in a way that few people I have encountered are. Like so many others, I do and will continue to miss her very much; and like them, I will find inspiration and solace in my memories of her and in her example of how to approach life.

There is so much that I admired in Joy that I won't even attempt to capture it all, confining myself to a couple of things. One of them – epitomized by the way Joy returned the ball on the tennis court – was her capacity to throw her whole being (her energies, her mind, her heart) into what she was doing, creating a kind of beam of intensity that was marvelous to behold. A second trait that I found so inspiring was Joy's resilience – how, after difficult experiences of a kind that would lead most of us to lose our balance in life, she would dust herself off (as she probably did after a slide in a childhood baseball game) and return to the world, ego intact and absent self-pity, with dignity, optimism, and energy, ready to make the most of the life-opportunities that presented themselves. As best I could tell from the outside, the same qualities entered into Joy's response to her illness at its various stages, and I watched with respect bordering on awe as she addressed the challenges of this period.

It is hard not to feel that there is something profoundly unfair about Joy's death at an early age – and just at the moment when, both personally and professionally, she had found the life she had so long wanted. The other way I try to look at it, though, is that Joy died, having had the opportunity to enjoy, if only briefly, a kind of true happiness that eludes most people. The most important element in the happiness she found was, of course, *you*, Jerry – a person who is, as Joy was, a person of genuine and extraordinary quality in every way. As one of Joy's friends, I count it as a great blessing that she met you, and that the two of you could share these last years together. And I am awed by the love, the caring, and the sensitivity with which you accompanied, supported and provided for Joy in so many ways in this last period of her life. I can still remember Joy telling me that, when someone expressed sympathy for her situation at some point in her illness, she responded, "You don't understand. I'm really happy!" – which I'm sure was due to her having found in you her beshert.

As one of Joy's close friends, I cannot begin to express the gratitude to God that I feel that the two of you found each other. Nor can I adequately convey my gratitude to you for evoking Joy so very powerfully and movingly in your eulogy in Beit Shemesh, thus

helping all of us in the process of mourning our friend. And as people who have become, through Joy, your friends and admirers as well, both Stephanie and I are prayerful that you will find the faith, the courage, and the strength to deal with this profound loss and to find your way back into the kind of life-affirming life that you and Joy shared. May we be privileged to continue our friendship with you in the years to come. You are an extraordinary human being, whom we value very deeply. You continue to be in our thoughts and prayers.

With much love,

Dan and Stephanie