

I remember Jeannie's phone call that morning. She was so excited to tell me that she had just given birth to her daughter, Shannon. We cried and squealed together in happiness and delight at the miracle that is life. Plus, A Girl! She had her Baby Girl! Now, little boys are one thing, and always cause for great celebration in families, but it's the girls that bring out a special kind of love and satisfaction to new mothers. We pin all our old desires for the fairy tale ending on each new baby daughter. Beauty, intelligence, kindness, success, and love. Lots of love. Prince Charming kind of love. We bring our girls up to believe that there is nothing impossible that a beautiful princess cannot achieve or do in her life. A lot of it is Disney culture, which translates to middle class Americans raising their children by the socially accepted Disney rule. Sweet movies and songs about beautiful girls who escape hard lives and go on to find and marry the Prince of their Dreams. We all saw those movies and we all loved them. And I daresay that we were all equally dismayed when the end result of our own life didn't even come close to Ariel's, Cinderella's, Belle's, Jasmine's, and on and on..... So.... We put away childish things, soldiered on, and went to school and went to work. For most of us, there remained a tiny bit of glitter here and there that was the end of a very old and dying dream. Secretly, we still believed that our

Prince Charming, whoever he was and wherever he was, was going to somehow, someday, rescue us. It was this kind of optimism that Shannon grew up with. She was a real princess with real princess traits. Her kindness was God given and for real. Her pleasantness was not an act – she found joy in everything around her. She had a natural born inquisitiveness and curiosity that took her farther than anyone in this family academically. Shannon was patient, and loving and generous. And why not? Her mother Jeannie absolutely doted on her. Shannon was Jeannie's dream come true. There wasn't anything that was too good for Shannon. Jeannie, on a budget (always) figured out a way to have the finest and prettiest clothes for Shannon, the best experiences and holidays she could afford, and access to all the wonderful stories and movies and enrichment that any little girl would want. Jeannie told me once that Shannon taught herself how to read. Really. Jeannie had been reading nightly bedtime stories to Scott and Stephen, and totally by accident discovered that Shannon was not only paying attention, she was teaching herself to read as Jeannie's finger traversed the words on each line. By the time she got to pre-K, her skills were that of a child much much more advanced than her age. And she stayed like that. Shannon loved the challenge of learning. She enjoyed learning for it's

own sake. She was an absolute natural.

Her favorite things to do when she was a young girl was to spend time with Scott's daughter's three daughters, her nieces, and encourage them to find their dreams. She made many trips to be with those young girls, and for them it must have felt wonderful to have their glamorous, young Aunt come and visit them. Her cousin, Mary, was also especially close to her. It's so much fun having a cousin that is somewhat older than you (and therefore able to explain some of life's big mysteries to you) while at the same time being young enough herself to laugh at the naughtiness of it all and make you pinky promise not to tell mom.

It wasn't just family that fell under Shannon's spell. She had for a time in California a relationship that was as loving and serious as a marriage. The man she loved had a little boy that became very close to Shannon. This was a family. A real family. Her family. I look back on it now and I believe that this was one of the happiest times in her life. She was studying at UCLA Law School, she was in a fulfilling relationship, and she was mother to a precious little boy who idolized her. Also, at this time, Shannon was spreading her wings as the

newest cast member of a Westwood Comedy Club, and trying out that particular brand of crash-and-burn stand-up Comedy that definitely not for the faint hearted! Confidence. Those were great years for Shannon. She had confidence in abundance, and she was loved, really loved, for herself. And as much as that era in LA still seemed to hold onto those old Hippie ideals, it could still be a very cutthroat town. This was Show Business. Capitalized. And Los Angeles, if anything, is nothing but a Company Town. Everybody is in the business in one way or the other. If you weren't an actor (translation, waiter or waitress) you were in one of the many other professions it takes to keep the Movie Business afloat. Makeup, Hair, Costuming, Catering, Music, Transportation, and yes, Law. Lots and lots of opportunities to draw up legal documents for this or that project or various actors and actresses. Shannon was in her element. She actually had a great chance to pitch herself in as legal support, or even as a performer. The world in those days was her Oyster. As I typed this, my daughter Mary reminded me that Shannon had referred to herself as "Pretty, pretty little princess," during this time. She had it all. Beauty, brains, personality, and an enviable career that she was completely in charge of. A young, beautiful woman making it on her own in one of the hardest professions out there. A legal eagle with a southern accent

and strong will to match. A real Steel Magnolia. Shannon was ready, and she was going to shake up her world and everyone in it. For a while, that's just what she did. A real life Fairy Princess who could also bring home the bacon.

There was always a group of loyal friends and acquaintances around Shannon. She drew people into her orbit like a moth to a flame. She irresistible. Beautiful, with a big, wide and welcoming grin, always something fascinating to say, be it naughty or nice, and she made you feel like you were the most interesting person in the whole world.

People lined up to see her. I'll never forget that time when Shannon was about to graduate from Wolfson High School. Jeannie was living in the Goodby's lake apartments down San Jose Boulevard, long since divorced from Greg, and was doing her best to make ends meet raising three children on her own in a fairly upscale neighborhood. Lots of homemade meals and thrift shop clothes, and change scraped together for a movie or two. Well – Shannon had just been diagnosed with Aplastic Anaemia, and Stephen (thanks be to God) had proven to be a perfect match for his sister. They both were to go through a very complicated and dangerous procedure, combined with chemotherapy and radiation, and attempt to introduce healthy

red blood cells through the bone marrow transplant that she needed. It was successful, followed by a stem cell transplant later that year, Stephen, bless him, a perfect match again.

All this during her senior year of high school. I'll never forget coming to Jeannie's apartment, and seeing all the popular senior boys (the entire football team, basically) crowded around Jeannie's kitchen table, with scissors and bits of colored paper doing a class project together. Bald. Every one of them Bald. Shannon had lost her hair during her chemotherapy treatment, and the entire class (girls included) had decided to shave their heads in solidarity and support of Shannon. The girls had all babied their long hair through high school, and didn't hesitate when it came time to cut it off. They didn't give each other buzzes, but there were some awfully cute pixies going on in that graduating class. I also cut my daughter Mary's hair into a pixie that year. Everybody did whatever they could to support Shannon during that rough time. I remember feeling so overwhelmed by the sincerity and deep commitment each classmate showed to her. At that age, the power of love and the belief in something greater than yourselves is something you don't ordinarily see.

About this time Shannon started to develop her spiritual life. We always went to church, but Shannon at this time was actively searching for more in her life. She had questions. She wanted answers. She needed more in her life. I recall her getting bible study groups together with her friends. She did a lot of reading. She was out there sampling everything. Also, later on in her life it became apparent that she couldn't retain the massive amounts of information a lawyer needs to call upon to have a successful career. The very strong medications and chemicals given to her over the years had compromised her memory. With a great deal of regret and pain, she left the legal profession. With Jeannie's help, she moved to Atlanta and enrolled in a prestigious beauty academy. Shannon always had had an artistic side, enjoyed doing hair, and decided to spend her days pursuing a career that she loved and found fulfilling to her.

If only her health could have kept up with her desire. I believe she just ran out of time. She was living well in Atlanta, had clients, and was working in a creative field that gave back to her the knowledge and pleasure that she was doing what was right for herself in her life. Her Graft vs Host had become very difficult to manage, and Shannon increasingly found herself more and more ill trying to

maintain her life and her health.

Her family never deserted her. The pain we all saw Shannon suffer through was difficult to bear witness to. She maintained good relationships, Mary, her cousin – Alyssa, her friend – Nick, her cousin and conservator and the one who was there for her in the middle of the night when she would reach out. And, her brothers, Scott and Stephen. Shannon's illness was the sort that affected the whole family. We all will be praying to God throughout the coming years for guidance and knowledge as we look back on this time that we suffered with her, trying to make sense of it all. Also, the great unanswered question that will plague us for years to come: What could we have done to prevent what happened to her?

I believe we should look to Shannon herself for some of these answers: She prayed unceasingly. She read her scripture. She stepped outside the teachings of her culture and investigated crystals, rocks, plants, and nature. She was interested in Eastern philosophies. Hers was a nimble, questioning, and adventurous brain. Had she lived longer I believe she would have found ways to help

shed some light on these mysterious diseases of the brain.

Goodbye, dearest Shannon. You were our Golden Girl. Here all too briefly, and then gone. We will never forget you, and we will keep you in our hearts and love the perfection that was you forever. Rest in God's arms. May you now know only peace. At last, you are at your purest elements – Love and Light. Forever.

“When You Wish Upon A Star”

“A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes”