

“There is within each of us a potential for goodness beyond our imagining; for giving which seeks no reward; for listening without judgment; for loving unconditionally.” Indeed, Elisabeth is all about unconditional love.

We are here to honor the life of Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. My name is Joanne Cacciatore. Like so many of you, I love Elisabeth. Before I begin my tribute to this amazing woman, I'd like to offer my deepest gratitude to her family, especially Ken and Barbara, and Manny wherever you are, for so generously sharing Elisabeth with the world for so many years. Thank you- thank you for supporting her as she answered to her higher calling.

Elisabeth had many gifts. While, reticence was not one of them, she was a true revolutionary, light years ahead of her time. She was generous and genuine, innately courageous and steadfast. Often- yes- stubborn, yet, she was sensitive, comforting, and compassionate with others. She could smell phony-baloney from a mile away and wasn't afraid to tell them so. Elisabeth was the epitome of devotion and she never wavered. She insisted on moral rightness and wasn't afraid to speak her mind, even if others disagreed. She welcomed challenges, even battles, for she knew that in order to elicit transformation in the world, she would need to defy the mold of traditional norms and values. She loved the simple things in life: spending time with her family and friends, Swiss chocolate, Mickey Mouse ears, and coyotes- English breakfast tea and daisies, foreign films, ET, and gossip magazines. Elisabeth taught us that to truly understand and embrace the mystery we call death, we must first truly understand and embrace life.

Serendipity brought Elisabeth into my life. In 1994, after the sudden death of my fourth child, Cheyenne, I was destitute. Thoughts of ending my own life visited daily and I began to wonder about my purpose. A concerned neighbor bought a book written by a trailblazing author- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. The book, *On Children and Death*, contained secret truths that gave life to the light of hope- a once extinguished flame flickered in my heart and I knew that one day, I would find my purpose. Elisabeth's inspiration gave birth to my purpose and thus, the MISS Foundation came to be, an international nonprofit organization I founded in 1996 that provides aid, support, and advocacy for grieving families after an infant or young child's death. Today, the foundation has grown to more than 70 chapters and tens of thousands of members around the world, and so, the flicker of Elisabeth's candle has, again, lit countless other candles from Brisbane to Barcelona, from Rome to Riyadh.

A few years after I started the foundation, I had the privilege to meet the woman who saved me from the darkness of despair. I planned on being at her home for an hour. Five and a half hours later, I left, feeling as if I'd been in the presence of the most beautiful mentor and woman that I'd ever known. Yet, she was more than that to me. Elisabeth was my friend. She shared her feelings and listened to mine. She was playful and silly, one time engaging in a tea-spitting contest with me- in which, by the way, I was not the victor. She loved an attractive man with spunk (and I will say that she often had impeccable taste). Once, over dinner and popcorn, we were watching the French film, *Chocolat*, when Elisabeth commented that if she were just a few years younger, Johnny

Depp would be in serious danger (I was afraid for him...). I looked at her, rather surprised, and she said indignantly, "I'm not dead yet."

She demonstrated gracious gratitude in receiving and endless benevolence in giving. Elisabeth taught me to complain less and do more. On one occasion, I was particularly frustrated by a research study that came out of the U.K. After an hour or so of listening to my whining and droning, she said, "Big deal. They're being idiots...stop talking about it and go and do something about it." And so I did.

There were even times when I wanted to give up this work, disheartened by the never-ending sadness of child death. Elisabeth gently reminded me that I hadn't chosen this course. This course had, in fact, chosen me. "Continue, Joanne," she said. "You have to continue."

On July 24, 2004, I had a dream that Elisabeth died. In my dream, I was sobbing and mourning, feeling desperate to have my friend back. She appeared to me, surprised by my sadness. She told me to stop crying and assured me that she was fine. Then she told me not to worry, well-aware of my enduring tug-of-war with faith- she said reassuringly, "I'll see you again one day."

When I visited Elisabeth the next day, I told her that I dreamt about her the previous night. She asked, "Was it a good dream?" I replied hesitantly, "Well. Not really." She asked further, "Did I die?" "Yes," I said, looking down. Elisabeth told me that she was waiting for death to come so she could do all the things that her broken body could no longer do. She assured me that when she died, she could help me more with my work from the other side than she could here. I walked away from our conversation that day knowing that when the time came, it would be very hard to say goodbye- yet, I realized that she would never *really* leave any of us- her work would never end. Indeed, now, Elisabeth is busy guiding and inspiring us all- dancing and singing and playing, surrounded by stars, amongst the galaxies. And her legacy lives on. Tell your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren about this amazing woman.

So while I will miss her physical presence in my life every day, I am so thankful for every moment I spent with Elisabeth. When you leave these services, keep her memory close to your heart. Consider her timeless words, "Dying is nothing to fear. It can be the most wonderful experience of your life. It all depends on how you have lived." So live your lives well. Remember the time you had with her, honor her path, and hear her voice urging you to do what is right and just. Respond to her calling. Let her intrepid flame continue to flicker in the world through your own good works.

Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." I say that one person alone can change the world for generations to come- and that flame of hope and compassion and dignity and solace and self-less humanity will live for centuries within innumerable hearts. One person alone can illuminate the flame of goodness beyond imagination and unconditional love in the world. Her name is Elisabeth.