

Jenny's Blessing

September 12, 1998: Jason and Patricia's wedding day.

Every parent experiences a combination of emotions when their child leaves the nest. But I felt more than the customary intermingling of joy and sadness; you see, this was my son's second wedding.

Jason and Jennifer were married just four years earlier. Although they were obviously deeply in love, I had worried that, in their early twenties, they were too young. Did they know what "for better and for worse, in sickness and in health" really meant? I prayed they would be able to handle whatever came their way. I had no idea how soon they would be tested.

Eager to start a family, Jason and Jenny bought a used mobile home in a quiet residential area. As a child, Jenny adored Winnie the Pooh, so she turned their second bedroom into a Pooh nursery. When she didn't become pregnant right away, they both underwent medical tests. The tests determined that Jenny wasn't ovulating regularly, and her doctor prescribed birth control pills to correct the problem.

At a family picnic a month before their second wedding anniversary, Jenny and Jason were playing volleyball. Suddenly Jenny screamed and fell to the ground, holding her leg and writhing in pain. She said she had jumped up to spike the ball and when she came back down, she felt a searing pain behind her knee. The pain was so severe that she couldn't stand, so we called an ambulance to take her to the nearest hospital. X-rays were inconclusive. The attending physician wrapped her leg and sent her home on crutches, advising her to make an appointment with an orthopedic surgeon the following week.

Jenny called the orthopedist on Monday. The first available appointment was Wednesday afternoon.

On Tuesday morning, Jason went to work. Jenny's mom promised to stop by in the afternoon to check on her. Around noon, as Jenny was preparing to shower, she experienced chest pain. She dialed 911, but when paramedics arrived five minutes later, she was dead.

The autopsy report indicated she died from a pulmonary embolism resulting from a blood clot in her leg which had traveled to her lungs. She was just 24 years old.

The days following Jenny's death were a blur. We were numb, consumed with unfathomable grief. It was inconceivable that someone as vivacious as Jenny could be alive and well one day, and then, just like that, be gone.

Why wasn't the blood clot diagnosed in the emergency room? If the orthopedic surgeon had seen her when she called on Monday, would she still be alive?

As with many rhetorical questions, there were no adequate answers. Jenny was gone and we were left to pick up the pieces and go on with our lives. The day Jenny died, Jason

moved back home with us. It would be six months before he could go back to the home he and Jenny had shared.

For the first several months, I visited Jenny's grave every day. I had long conversations with her, telling her how much we loved and missed her, and asking her to help Jason find someone who would make him as happy as she had. I've always had strong spiritual beliefs, and I felt certain she could hear me. But I wasn't expecting her to answer so quickly!

Seven months after Jenny died, Jason's friends took him out to celebrate his birthday. They invited Patricia, a girl he had known since high school. Patricia had attended Jason and Jenny's wedding with a mutual friend. Since then, she had been married briefly and had a baby boy. Neither she nor Jason was in a hurry to start another relationship.

Jenny apparently had other ideas.

What started out as two old friends helping each other recover from ill-fated relationships soon led to something more serious. One day at the cemetery during my usual talk with Jenny, I told her I hoped Jason wasn't rushing into anything. Suddenly I heard the words, "It's what you prayed for," as clearly as if they had been spoken aloud!

I recognized the truth in that statement, and knew that Jenny was giving her blessing to the new union.

A year later, Jason and Patricia made plans to marry. Jason had remained close to Jenny's family, and her parents attended the ceremony. My heart went out to them as I thought about their daughter's wedding just a few years ago.

The wedding was scheduled for 5:00 p.m. At 4:55, Jason still hadn't arrived. I knew that earlier he and his friends had gone to decorate the reception hall, but surely they had finished by now!

As I later learned, after the others left the reception hall, Jason stayed behind to wait for the cake. When it arrived, he was horrified to discover that it hadn't been decorated. After a frantic call to the bakery, he then had to wait for the decorator. He finally got home with less than an hour to shower, dress and get to the church.

At precisely 5:00 and still minus the groom, the church lights went out--but only in the sanctuary. In the hallway where the wedding party was gathered, the lights remained on. The officiating pastor, a retired minister whose years of experience tending the flock didn't include dealing with electrical problems, was near panic. As luck would have it, the wedding guests included an electrician. He tripped the circuit breaker and the lights in the sanctuary went back on just as Jason ran in the door. The rest of the wedding went off without a hitch. Most of the guests never even knew the groom was late.

I was standing in the receiving line after the ceremony when Jenny's parents approached. As her mother and I embraced, she whispered through her tears, "I think Jenny was here today."

I think so, too.

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