



#### LAUREEN'S CIRCULAR

Sister Laureen collaborated on books, created liturgies, worded the Psalms in 20th century language, wrote music, rode a motorcycle, loved her family, loved all children, loved the Ecumenical community, and loved the earth.

She died on Wednesday, October 13, shortly after noon with the Sisters praying at her bedside. This final chapter of her life was all too brief, very painful but so well written. Diagnosed with metastatic pancreatic cancer just three weeks before, she regretted that the brevity of this last part of her journey did not give enough time to express her love to family and friends but she remained grateful that she had been able to care for her Mother

during long years of illness. Laureen lived these last days as she had lived all her days: with wisdom, creativity, humor, kindness and thoughtfulness.

“I have been a congregational rabbi for 32 years; and these days, I am a part-time hospice chaplain. I've accompanied many as they died. I've buried them and done their eulogies. Many of them were people about whom I cared deeply. I'm good at this. But I think that I have never found words so hard nor grief so profound as I do today. So I ask your compassion and forbearance now, as surely I will stumble ...

I have no certainty at all as to what it is that lies beyond the grave. But I am sure that, where- or whatever the "hereafter" may be, there is one more angel there now than there was on Wednesday morning. I am certain of that because I know that Sister Laureen Grady was an angel who walked among us, for the too-short days of her life.

I have never known a soul so gracious or a spirit so open or an intellect so joyfully curious as was that of Laureen Grady. I've not done the research on this, but I'm pretty sure that most nuns don't regularly attend their local synagogue for Talmud study. But Laureen did. I was her teacher, and every bit as much her student, in Hebrew and Bible. She studied Hebrew, too, faithfully, with Ethel Jaffe. I think there weren't enough teachers to go around for Laureen. Nor was there any end to the number and diversity of people that Laureen rejoiced in knowing and who were touched so deeply by her. At Sabbath worship this past Friday night at Temple Sinai, there were two rabbis - one who knew Laureen for a decade-and-a-half and the other who had just met her this past year - there were two rabbis who found themselves teary-eyed and unable to speak during our liturgy, as memories of Laureen overwhelmed us. And at our Oneg - the fellowship and food that follows worship - at the Oneg there was a stream of congregants who came up to me with stories of Laureen and the part she had played in their lives - at study, or at a child's Bat Mitzvah, and so on. Little wonder that in the last days of Laureen's life, the parade of visitors to her bedside was really something to behold. I know but a few among the many who came, but they included a rabbi, an Episcopal priest, a Unitarian minister, and a labor organizer who traveled from San Francisco solely to say her goodbyes.

As Laureen came to Temple Sinai, she - in turn -brought me to this monastery. First, I think, for vespers, back

in the days when liturgy was among Lauren's preeminent passions. What a gift to any rabbi ... a second home in which to pray. And once that door was opened by Lauren, I returned many times for many events. For that, I feel exceedingly blessed. Especially this past week ... when so many of you, Lauren's sisters in faith, found a space within your grief to reach out and comfort me in mine. I thank you, Sisters, more than I can say, for that kindness.

It is hard to imagine - and now, of course, I wish I had spoken with her so much more about this - it is hard to imagine the journey that Lauren made from her early days here as barely a young woman, when this community was

one of cloister and silence, to the more recent years of her life so filled with involvement out in the world beyond these walls. That labor organizer from San Francisco's pilgrimage to Lauren's bedside came about because of Lauren's involvement with NV Energy workers, who were looking at losing health care and other benefits to the corporate bottom line. It was only a short, few months ago that Lauren dazzled a meeting of the Public Utilities Commission when she spoke on those workers' behalf. She did so in a way that was gracious and loving; while, at the same time, driven by a sense of divine justice. For months, a group has been working to organize a local chapter of PICO - a faith community based, social justice, grassroots organization. Lauren has been at the center of that too. I doubt she would ever have dreamed, in those first days of her holy vows, that any of this would come to be a part of her calling.

Tho' some of the rest of us are far less surprised. I loved Lauren's faith. It was honest and unafraid - even of being critical of the hierarchy of her beloved Church. And it was so remarkably anchored to the earth ... every bit as much as it was moored to the heavens. I remember our conversations - too few, to be sure - during the years when she was in Connecticut tending to her slowly dying Mother. As any caregiver knows, her tasks were not just those of nurturing and care, but there was the endless and frustrating minutia required for arranging doctors and insurance and all the rest. Somehow, Lauren perceived all of that as matters that strengthened her faith. Every tedious task seemed to her a way of deepening her understanding of God at work in the real world. Which may also explain, I suppose, why there was nothing - not even the most ununny of topics - there was nothing that one couldn't share and discuss with her. The Lauren, that I knew, was always about helping others in very practical ways. I think her down-to-earth helping increased even more when she returned from those years in Connecticut. There were the children she tutored in the Washoe County schools. How she especially loved working with those kids!! One day a week, she was there helping them with their reading and finding ways to alleviate troubled home situations and just plain "huggin' on 'em." Now, in these days of so many scary predators, the School District no longer "allows" volunteers to hug students. So Lauren sought - and received - permission for them to hug her. She would glow when she spoke of those children - the ones she had been able to touch and who had so clearly been touched by her.

Lauren was my soul sister - tho' we were, to be sure, the oddest of couples. Never mind the rabbi and the nun (which sounds rather like the start of a bad joke). Aside from just that ... she was calm and kind to my sometimes caustic high energy. Even so, I had this fantasy of the two of us as a kind of religious Thelma and Louise. Sometime in our even later years, we would travel the world - or at least Washoe County - pooling our gifts to do God's work. That was always, of course, just a fantasy. A fantasy that now has been laid to its eternal rest.

I am an avid ballroom dancer. On Wednesday night, just hours after Lauren had died, I was scheduled to do a cha cha performance. I hardly felt like dancing. I thought about canceling the whole thing. But that, of course, would not have brought Lauren back. So, there I was ... in sequins and fringe ... knowing that Lauren would have been grinning, ear to ear, at the sight.

And indeed, it is Lauren's beautiful smile that frames the vision of her that I will carry with me always. Even in her last hours, one could clearly perceive its image upon her dying face. That gorgeous, ready smile was the window through which her inside loveliness shone through.

It's been a very tough week for all of us. I make no claim to theological certainty. And I am angrier,, than I can say, at a God who would have taken Lauren Grady far too soon. And yet at the same time, I am eternally grateful for whatever the divine plan that brought Lauren into my life. I know that Lauren would have wanted me to lift up the latter ... to let the gratitude trump the anger. And so I will try.

Thank you God for the blessing of Sister Lauren Grady. L'chi I'shalom. May you go in peace, Lauren - free

from pain - resting in the Almighty's loving embrace. Your memory, as was your life, is ever an extraordinary blessing for us all.  
Amen.

Rabbi Myra Soifer October 17, 2010

Laureen came from Connecticut in 1959, just after her 18th birthday, to enter Reno Carmel in the early days of our Foundation and she remained the beloved Benjamin ...the youngest of our tribe for almost 30 years. Formed in a traditional Carmelite life, she was destined to be a woman of the II Vatican Council. Her youth, intelligence and vision helped shape the community's path as we searched for a new spirituality that broke the boundaries defining vows and community life and embraced religious commitment as an organic life-giving entity. She recently reflected that: "our shared insights began from the charism of service to which we were called-a call we couldn't resist- a call to prayer in service of the Church."

Laureen articulated concepts of contemplative life in the 20th and 21st century. Writing on behalf of our community she wrote in "Seasons of Carmel":

"Who has not found themselves lost for words to express some deeply held value: not for its subtlety but for its overwhelming simplicity. It is that way with prayer...the truth of prayer to be really known must be lived. And this is what Carmel is all about...a life of prayer in solitude."

Writing for the Carmelite Association in their "Charter of Life":

"We believe that our life, though as ordinary as ourselves, speaks of more than ourselves. For when we are present in the neighborhoods and cities of the human community, we are a prophetic presence pointing beyond ourselves to the very mystery of God"