



Teri Taylor-Tunski Eulogy

- by Ron Taylor

“This is surreal, Man”

These were the words of Teri, the very first time we matched eyes after her diagnosis and I think anyone who knows her well, can hear Teri’s voice saying them.

For me standing up here is indeed a surreal experience, as I never envisioned having to do this task. I am both honoured and broken hearted at the same time. Throughout my little talk this afternoon, if you notice my head flinching or my shoulders jerking, it is simply Teri cuffing me from behind for being too sentimental. Teri was a very private person who did things publicly, and by publicly, I mean that she shaped the lives of hundreds of students under her care...

Teri Taylor – Tunski was born Teri Lee Rosina Taylor at Grey Nuns Hospital in Regina, Saskatchewan on December 21, 1964 and it was a Monday. Case you were wondering, the Rosina part was in honour of her grandmother in Manitoba. Of course with Christmas coming, both I and my sister Marliiss were excited at the prospect of having someone else to boss around. How little did we know that this would be a fruitless effort. Anyone who knows, Teri and Kirby’s daughter, Gracie will understand the incredible willpower and drive that this little girl has and that comes directly from her mother. In essence we get to watch Teri grow up again, I think and that makes all of us extremely happy. The flip side of Teri’s character is the compassionate and artistic one... and that comes from my friend, Tom Tunski, who also happens to be Teri and Kirby’s son. His flare for standing up in front of a crowd and wowing them comes, again directly from his mother. Now Kirby’s genes are also part of these two magnificent creations, so a little credit is due for him as well, but you get the point. I might add that Tom turns nine in ten days, so lots of cards will be more than welcomed by him.

In the seventies, the Taylors moved back to where my Mom and dad grew up, which was Manitoba. They settled in a little village called Bagot, population 50, just west of Portage la Prairie and it was there that Teri’s grown-up character started to emerge. MacGregor was and remains a small town nearby, where both Teri and our youngest sister Robyn went to school. It was here that friendships started to be bonded and also where closer relationships began to cement with members of our Manitoba family. It was also here where Teri’s road to playing professional ringette began, though that ended up being more a potholed gravel driveway than a road. MacGregor was one of these pockets of sport where everyone played ringette, whether you could skate or not and Teri, ever the goer, gave it a shot as well.

The claim to fame for MacGregor is that in the 10th grade, she discovered a skinny wrestler/farmer named Kirby Tunski, and to say he was skinny would be an understatement. I fully remember him coming to the house all shy and sheepish looking into the black savage hearts of my dad and me as we surveyed him up and down, every which way, just making sure that he might be suitable for the naive and delicate Teri.... For those of you who don't know Teri or Kirby that well, this is the biggest understatement I have ever uttered.

One little story I will relate involves Teri as a young teenager and a conversation she was having with my mother out in Bagot. It involved a morning, which followed a night out with Kirby and some high school friends. As she sat in the living room, placed strategically on her neck was an unmistakable ruby red welt. My mother asked her what the mark was, as my mother, in her strict upbringing had likely never seen such a thing. Teri looked at me, anticipating that the jig was up and that her alleged amorous exercise with Kirby was about to blow the top off my mother's volcano and was preparing for the worst... when I simply... and very casually interjected to my mother, that those kinds of marks are just something that teenagers "get" sometimes and that they will go away in a day or two. Puzzled, my mom accepted this lame excuse and Teri has ever since been indebted to me. I see some grins in the crowd, so some of you may also have experienced this "rash" at some point in your teen years.

Teri was certainly no shrinking violet and what followed with Kirby has been almost 30 years of union that has been rarely matched on this world. They became one mighty force, able to fight the fiercest dragons and fend off the silliest of inane people and challenges that crossed their path. Usually it was done with the sharpest blade that any humourist has ever swung.

Teri and Kirby and to be honest, all of our family (except for me) are blessed with the keenest razor-quality set of comedic observations about the every day world, that I know. All of them have that uncanny ability to dissect a ludicrous or even a serious situation, slice and dice it to the most basic of human fallibility and wring a huge laugh out of it. Teri was front and center in this whole collage of stories and that is a lasting memory I will always have of her. It sounds black, but even as Teri was into her last day and the family was gathered all around, the tears were mixed with many hearty laughs as we related stories of obscure events that we all shared. To be honest, Teri, being included in this odd experience would not have it any other way and although she couldn't tell any of the stories in those last few hours, she was laughing right along inside her head. That I know for a fact.

The next five years in the early eighties, were tough ones for our family as both my dad, then my mom left this earth. They were far too young and that is certainly a theme for today as well. Teri, after surviving the trauma of dad's death and helping our mom and Robyn get back to their feet, attended the University of Winnipeg with the intent of completing her Education degree. The news of Mom's cancer put a hitch in those plans, though and she spent the next year at my Mom's side doing all the things that daughters do in times like this. It was a terrible experience, but Teri took the load on her back and provided some stability to everyone during those times.

Following mom's passing, Teri and Kirby made the huge decision to move to Alberta and this was certainly not done lightly. With our family fragmented and spread all over the place now, Teri and Kirby finally continued with career plans and after completing her Education degree, she embarked on a remarkable career as a teacher in Edmonton. 17 years at McCauley School were memorable ones, not only for the character of the community, but for the little characters who showed up in class. In Teri's class, kids were allowed to be kids, nobody was ever left out and respect for others was essential. Teaching second-language kids who had never even seen any of the luxuries we grew up with, was not only a challenge, but was fodder for all kinds of incredibly poignant and yet hilarious stories. Naturally we hung on every word but in reality, nobody was better suited to take on this type of student than she was. Her teaching philosophy both at McCauley, then later at York, was always to help develop a kid such that they could become self-reliant and it's the same philosophy that she has instilled into Tom and Grace.

Teri also had huge plans and revolutionary new ideas for teaching kids in this province. She had spent the last few years testing them out to great success with her classes, too. The same methods worked for kids who came from countries with limited educational opportunities as those children who grew up with all the benefits of today's society. Unfortunately she ran out of time to implement her ideas any further and this is indeed a huge loss for future students in Edmonton and beyond.



Throughout Teri and Kirby's early years in Edmonton, one thing that Teri and Kirby evolved into was the epi-center of our Taylor family. With no parents and none of the rest of us yet married, Christmas and other family gatherings usually ended up at their house in Edmonton and she became an emotional pillar for all of us. It came as a bit of an adjustment, then when she and Kirby spent a year as an exchange teacher in London, England. It was very hard to see them go, but as Tom and Grace had yet to knock on the door, it made perfect sense. The London experience was an eye opener, but also a wonderful one, as it not only gave them a slice of the quirky British life, it also gave them a base of operations from which to see the world through travel. The various journeys into far flung places were easy to do from London and they wrung every last drop out of the opportunity. No doubt this also made Teri an even better teacher, having experienced other cultures on their own turf.

For me personally, Teri and Kirby in London was especially momentous as it was here that after many aborted efforts to propose in unique locations that I finally asked Deb to marry me. Presenting my gum drop ring to Deb in a 1627 pub older than Alexander the Great was a life experience, which was later commemorated by Teri carving a mashed potato heart into her bangers and mash for us a half hour later. I have the photo to prove it.

Back in Canada our wedding was an odd one, as we got married in Kitchener Ontario in the morning, had a brunch reception, then flew to Calgary for the night time party - same day. Teri, Kirby and the rest of my sisters were all part of this traveling road show and Teri distinguished herself at the morning reception as being the consummate stage performer in bring

ing the toast to the groom. Many laughs were bounced off those walls that morning and again, it simply demonstrated her ability to hold people's attention in the palm of her hand.

It was not long after that that a little boy known as Tom Tunski came into the picture and to say that he was the joy of her life would be another vast understatement. Tom was always a special guy to her and her relationship with him is one for the ages. Tom, my friend... your mom is never going to be forgotten. You know that, mainly because two days ago... when we named part of our lake, Teri's Point...that we will forever say her name whenever we are out on the water.

Speaking of Pigeon Lake, the house out there became a sanctuary for all of our family and when our unique and wonderful Gracie came along, it was a spot where we could all gather, relax, read a book, play in the water, just be ourselves. Teri loved that place and she loved that Kirby and the kids could come out and have such a terrific time.

As I wind down this memorial, I simply have to say that this is the greatest loss in my life and that if hardship makes for stronger people, than I will be the strongest man on the planet. My greatest hope right now is that Kirby will also emerge from this as someone with the strength of many. This man is one of the most special people I have ever known and my heart is in pieces for him. My loss pales in comparison to his and as the people here leave the room and get into their cars to go to their homes, I'm hopeful that plans get made to donate a little time to help Kirby and the kids with life's little challenges. As any parent knows, these challenges add up over time.

Teri was a very private person, who did not want anyone inconvenienced by her ordeal. For that reason she only wanted "her people" with her as we all went through this. Teri got her wish.

Kirby, the kids and the entire family would like to thank those who have come today. The support is very much appreciated, and from a personal perspective, I am optimistic that during the quiet times, when it really hits home, some of you will pick up the phone or drop in when you can spare the time. We're all going to rally around this and that, if nothing else, will put Teri at peace.

She is the bravest person I have ever known for choosing to go through what she did, all for the purpose of giving her kids a little more time with their mother. Sometimes life is not fair, but Teri's horrible pain is now over and that is the only comforting thought about this whole experience.

She will live on in many ways that are unique to each person sitting here. My lasting thought of Teri in her last moments, sent me in my head way back to a sleeping three year old in her nightie after a big day of swallowing up the world. Teri certainly did that in this lifetime and is probably well on her way to conquering the next world.

In closing, I am going to bring you a poem by the 18th century poet, Henry Scott Holland. It kind of captures what Teri might say in a situation like this:

Death is nothing at all,
I have only slipped away
into the next room.

I am I,
and you are you;
whatever we were to each other,
that, we still are.

Call me by my old familiar name,
speak to me in the easy way
which you always used,
put no difference in your tone,
wear no forced air
of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed
at the little jokes we shared together.
Let my name ever be
the household word that it always was.
Let it be spoken without effect,
without the trace of a shadow on it.

Life means all
that it ever meant.
It is the same as it ever was.
There is unbroken continuity.

Why should I be out of mind
because I am out of sight?

I am waiting for you,
for an interval,
somewhere very near,
just around the corner.

All is well.

Given that Henry Scott Holland's words might reflect what she would say, right now Teri would be sitting here looking at all of us eyes peering over the top rims of her glasses with an exasperated look on her face. That look would simply tell us to get on with it. Move ahead. All the same, the words I started with still come back into my head...

"This is surreal, man."