

O.M.G.
10:19

Gloria’s Eulogy

March 30, 2006

Nine days ago on a typical overcast day in the bay area, my sister Gloria dropped me and my two children, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] off at the airport. We had just completed a short spring break trip to spend time in San Francisco and with her – cousins [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] included. Being the organized person that I am, I made sure all our clothing was packed, even putting all the dirty clothes in one backpack and the clean in another. We had chewing gum to pop our ears, water for the ride, and even had our pre-boarding passes printed off the Internet. As it turns out, the only thing I forgot to bring home was my sister – Gloria.

She was in pain, desperately grasping at anything that would give her hope. A relationship, a baby, a miraculous turn of events that would bring her children back into her world more fully – just like she wanted. It was not to be.

I have already been told by some of my great friends who have rallied around me...”you can’t blame yourself Rhonda.” Frankly, I look at it a bit differently than that. I have been working closely with Gloria ever since this nightmare of her divorce started. I’ve written legal arguments, 50-page documents, talked with Gloria at length about what was going on her life – often in disbelief. I don’t know everything, but I know a great deal about the hell she has been living and the only way I can explain this tragic event is

that – we all failed her. The system failed her, individuals failed her, and collectively as human beings we failed to save a kind, loving, honest, once vibrant, and always talented young woman from our midst.

My sister Sandy and I do have stories to share to celebrate and remember Gloria. But we feel we must start with the hard truth, the painful truth...otherwise we will fail her again.

December 15, 2003 – an e-mail.

Rhonda,

I sit here at 1:00am CRYING for my little Johsua and how I miss him so much. I now know why I never left Don sooner then I did. I knew the divorce would be total hell and Don would be impossible and I did not think I could bear it. I was basically scared to leave. I was right.

He is wearing me down. He is the most absolute cruelest person I know.

I have a 6:30 am flight so I must go but I can not seem to get myself to bed.

I am so looking forward to coming to Phoenix and being with my family.

From Gloria's documentation throughout the divorce.

January and February 2003

Don absolutely refused to move out of the house unless I signed a 50% visitation agreement. (Gloria was still breastfeeding ██████ at the time.) The tension was extremely high. Each and every day Don would yell at me, tell

me what I was doing wrong, and call me a bitch, frequently in front of the children. I could no longer take his daily harassment of calling me names, and belittling me, so I reluctantly signed the temporary agreements.

March 2003:

Don and I met in the parking lot at Oracle Corporation to talk about the move to Phoenix and potentially to negotiate some asset separation. Don said to me in a very stern voice “When the kids turn 12 I will take them away from you so you can never see them again. I will take them to a place like Alaska, far away from you.” “I will fight you on this move away until you are penniless.” I was extremely scared as I know Don and he was serious. His temper was high. I was crying with fear, but I did not say anything in response to these threats.

The following reflects a letter written to the family court and a court deposition from a former work colleague of Gloria’s who also did things socially with Gloria and her ex-husband. He had engaged the ex to make a presentation to one of his clients. This is what he shared.

1. The presentation was set for December of 2003. After the presentation, Don hung around and he and I started to catch up. I brought up the subject of the divorce proceedings because I wanted to share with Don my own experiences as a divorced father and hopefully provide some advice about how I had handled things in my situation that might be helpful to him. During our conversation, I mentioned that I understood, because of

my own prior divorce experience, how difficult it must be for Gloria and him right now concerning the custody of their children. I advised him, though, that he had to put his own interests aside and think of what was best for the children and further, that exposing the children to contentious litigation was never, in my opinion, best for the children. To my surprise, he responded that he wasn't fighting for custody because he ~~truly did~~ want(ed) primary custody of the children, but was doing it just because he wanted to "get at" Gloria. As we engaged in this discussion, Don became increasingly agitated. He stated that he wanted to punish Gloria for leaving the marriage and that he wanted to ruin her financially. I kept trying to help Don understand that there is no winning or losing in these kinds of situations but he was adamant that he was going to win and further that he was going to get even with Gloria by taking away from her whatever she loved the most – referring to their children. I asked him if he was prepared to be a "single" father raising two children and he stated that he didn't care about that, hadn't really given it much thought and that if he had to figure out how to accomplish this task to the detriment of the children just to make Gloria understand that she should never have tried to do this to him, he was perfectly willing to spend their entire savings to get his point across. When I asked him how he thought the boys would fare if their mother was in Arizona and they were in California he simply said "she should have thought of that; I guess they'll just miss her."

There are notebooks full of this stuff. There are scraps of paper I found in her truck, her purse, all over her home reflecting her desperate attempts to

write down the horrible things he said to her, or the arguments and reasoning she tried to use to persuade him to be nice, to let her see the kids, to make decisions, to come to closure. My family made calls asking, if not begging him to stop being so mean.

Gloria didn't have a black eye or a broken arm, she had a broken heart and we didn't connect the dots to help repair it. Gloria looked for hope, possibility and love. Our eyes did not see clear enough, our arms were not opened wide enough, our lives were filled with the busyness of life and she slipped from our loving grip.

There are relationship con artists in our world – says a good friend who works in the domestic violence and sexual assault fields. They look for your weak spots, they become verbally and emotionally demeaning and manipulative. It happens over time...we don't "see" the pain and hurt. It's hidden...right before our eyes. Yet we are easily conned by the "Mr. Nice Guy or nice gal" charade while a very different story unveils itself beneath the radar.

Gloria's suffering for the last 4-5 years and tragic end to her life needs to have a purpose for us. Otherwise how can we rationalize someone who lived such an incredible early life, was so gifted and charmed, excelled beyond most people's imaginations, and yet couldn't find a break – not from the courts, not from her ex, not from her attorneys, not from her friends and family she reached out to.

I don't know why we're here at this very moment. But a book I gave to Gloria about a year ago suggests a few things that I'd like to share:

Everything happens for a reason. At this moment, that sounds trite. But how else can we rationalize that at every turn there was a wall in front of Gloria...a hurdle to leap over, a burden to carry? Perhaps, when she could no longer carry the burden, having gone on so much longer than most could ever endure, this was her way of sending a message to all of us. There are so many amazing faces here – faces that we should see more of, but we don't. Maybe this is Gloria's way of rallying us all to reconnect, ~~after all, that's what she did before.~~

We should be students in the school of life...every event, experience and person we encounter is intended to impact our development in some way. How has Gloria's life impacted us? What is our take away? How has her death impacted us? What can we do to make it make sense? How can we educate ourselves to open our eyes wider so we can help another friend, a family member? How can we play a role in telling those who hurt with words and manipulation that it's not okay to do that, instead of just staying out of people's business or thinking we're too busy.

I know we're not here for a litany of things we must do, but we ask you to look into your hearts, feel what Gloria must have felt, and find one simple way to make a wrong a right. Please help someone in your life connect a dot, jump over a hurdle, or feel loved.

(pause...)

Gloria taught us other lessons...and they come from the way she lived her life. Seize the moment, she did. No one could argue with that. Gloria had a unique zest for having the most experiences she could. All Sunnyslope alums here would agree. How else do you walk away with 16 Varsity letters and graduating in the top ten of your class.

From doubling up on track and gymnastics practice, to driving in California traffic while curling her hair and eating a yogurt....she engaged her senses....and gave me a few scary moments in the passenger seat.

Sandy and Gloria went on a few trips together. One took them rafting down the Grand Canyon. Sandy remembers Gloria always being the one to entertain the group, having fun, acting goofy, and, of course, being the one in the raft you had to paddle (not just hang on to while others did the work).

Another trip took them to Glacier National Park in Montana where they did a series of hikes over 5 days. Every day there was an option to do a short hike or a long hike. Gloria mostly chose the long hikes. The rangers at the park would orient the hikers about bears being in the area and what to do if you came upon one. Rule 1 – make noise, Rule 2 – never run from a bear. So along they went on the hike; Gloria on the longer hike...Sandy off on a shorter hike. And guess what, Mr. Grizzly came to say hi. With their good training, they made noise. But this time, it didn't seem to matter...and even the guide started running. Who do you think was running ahead of the

pack...Gloria. Mr. Grizzly apparently had never been to a Sunnyslope track meet.

We grew up here in Phoenix...321 W. Diana Avenue...what a great street to be a kid. We faced the Howards, next to them were the Chiochettis. Now how likely would it be that the three kids in our family have names that end with an "A" and they have four kids that have names that begin with an "A." How can you forget the slip-and-slide action on the Chiochetti's front lawn, the great playmates in Angie and great classmate in Anton? And Mr. Chiochetti, our dentist, who's amazing touch prevented us from ever having fear over visiting a dentist for the rest of our lives. But I will say, the Halloween treats needed work – what kid wants another toothbrush? We thank you for helping create Gloria's beautiful smile.

Next door to us were the McCulloughs. All boys...four of them. The youngest, Gloria's classmate as well. Kevin learned some painful lessons from Gloria early on – she could hold her own, and if you messed with her, you might have a hard time walking home from the bus stop. Gloria was a cheerleader both figuratively and literally for Kevin and Anton....on the sidelines at football, to the courtside position in basketball. She always wanted to see them do well and be happy.

She loved to laugh and did a lot of it. Some of it involved the three of us, holding on to our hairbrushes in front of a large mirror, belting out the words to Chirp a Chirp a Cheep Cheep. What the hell are those words anyway?

Gloria would often fall on the bed laughing at how silly we were. And snorts were not uncommon.

As a budding speaker in high school, I dabbled a bit in interpretive work, including one year when I performed a short story by Woody Allen. It involved Count Dracula...and plenty of snorts from Gloria. She always wanted me to perform it for her as she lay in bed. I guess you could say it was her version of a bedtime story...laughing until sleep came.

How else does one show zest? Gloria, depending on the circumstance, would either bounce her fist off of her chest, bark like a dog, or proceed to not only perform farts under her arms by cupping her hand there. But if she was really trying to make a point, she'd get down on her back and do it under her arm and under her knee at the same time. I remember once she actually did this in a bathtub squirting water in the process as well.

Her zest was also shown in her travels...from one country or region to the next, she gave her passport a workout. Trips included Costa Rica, climbing to the base camp of Mt. Everest, making it to the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro, bungee jumping off a bridge in New Zealand, a summer tour through Europe, treks to Israel, India, the Phillipines and elsewhere.

As soon as she graduated from the UofA, she was off to California. To this day, we still don't know what made her so adamant about making that move, but we do know she embraced the California lifestyle and the amazing outdoors. She was off on weekend trips, participated in triathlons, long bike

rides including being a motivating force behind a group of bike riders known as the “slugs.”

But Gloria was no slug.

Sandy would say that a second attribute on top of the “zest for life” was Gloria’s competitiveness.

When she was probably around 6 years old, Auntie Molly would visit from Montreal and engage Gloria in a game of checkers. If Molly got a double jump, Gloria would throw a fit and send the entire checkerboard flying into the air.

I don’t remember much competition between us growing up, but I do remember her efforts to outsmart me every year after Trick or Treating...because I always managed to find her candy and steal some. I think I had the upper hand most of the time.

Competitiveness fueled her life.

Those who watched her excel in athletics...and we know some of her coaches are here – you could probably attest to the fact that while she had ability and talent, much of her success was due to her competitiveness.

Damn it, no one was going to beat her.

One such memory captures this point well. She was at a district or divisional track meet and had done well in the 440, the long jump, and likely the hurdles or relay too. But apparently another teammate had gotten hurt and had to pull out of the 880 race. A coach asked Gloria to run it. Without ever training for that kind of race, Gloria obliged her. With another athlete ahead, Gloria zeroed in her and overcame a huge gap to win the race, collapsing in exhaustion over the finish line.

And then there was work. Never mind she was 9 months pregnant with [REDACTED] She zeroed in on the client and landed a \$20 million dollar account for her employer.

But then she had [REDACTED] – and the third and most amazing characteristic of Gloria came to be – her **Love of children and family**.

Sandy recalls Gloria really wanting to start a family after she got married. And Sandy was there for both births in California. I can tell you right now it's handy having a sister as a doctor.

Sandy remembers sleeping with Gloria the night before [REDACTED] birth...hugging Glo and getting her comforted for the great journey she was about to enter in motherhood.

Gloria loved her children from moment they were born. She was 100 percent dedicated to loving, caring and nurturing them, even to the point of being a

bit perplexed with her intensity of focus. She wanted a second one, even when the marriage was crumbling. When she had them, she jumped through hoops to care for them, engage them in life, share with them her own zest for the adventure. She took time off, worked overnights just to be able to go to the boys schools or activities – many of which in the last few years were restricted by her ex's need to control. She sang to her kids every morning, played music for them, and literally let other things in life wait while she focused on them.

She brought them to Phoenix and encouraged us to visit her. Once she spent two weeks with my parents after her second child was born, needing help to get through the early stages after birth.

Her boys loved her passionately. They always wanted their mom and went through such pain when they were forced through constant transitions in the early stages of this divorce. They screamed for their mommy. Gloria suffered greatly with having to deal with this. She just wanted relief...someone to see the bond she had built.

When they were together, they would never want her to leave their side...dragging her with them from room to room. He'd say..."Mommy I want to show you something"...and he'd lead her there. [REDACTED] the little one, used to sit on her lap always, and run his hand up her sleeve. It was his security blanket, we guess.

When Gloria was trying to move back to Phoenix, she got a home not far from mine and added a trampoline to the back yard. She loved to jump with her boys and make them laugh. We spent many times with all the cousins on there, making them jump. I egged her on to throw a few cheerleading jumps from time to time. I remember once she asked me to spot her on a back flip. I was sort of amazed because just several months before that, when Sandy, Gloria and I were out with Sandy's husband, Brian, and two other friends...we were walking across a busy street to head from a restaurant to a bar to dance...Gloria threw an aerial cartwheel right in the middle of the road. Our friends were amazed. Sandy and I just sort of said...that's our Gloria. So I spotted her in the flip on the trampoline...bringing back memories of doing the same so many years ago on our lawn at our childhood home. She had little problem with the flip...and her boys were in awe.

█████ has love for flowers – he and his brother, on a recent visit here, spent hours with Sandy planting flowers at her home. She was amazed at the way they just dug in and helped out. At 6, █████ is already a master at legos. Gloria spent hours and hours on the floor with █████ building lego Star Wars ships, airports, firetrucks. Their house is a virtual museum of █████ lego work. He likes to read and has recently been on a maze kick...even drawing and designing his own mazes. He loves music – even Madonna. Can you just see the two of them dancing? █████ is the more sensitive son. He's smart as heck, need to be loved. And he loved his mommy so much...when he heard the news, he tried calling Gloria on her cell phone.

Little [REDACTED] has the most piercing brown eyes – just like Gloria. You can just see her right there when you look into his eyes. They recently celebrated his fourth birthday in January – Gloria likely added to his extensive Thomas the Tank Engine collection. [REDACTED] loves to read and playing Home Depot fix it guy. Both boys love spider man. Just last week when we were there, [REDACTED] gave my daughter a little Hebrew lesson and showed her how to make Hebrew letters – yes...with stencils. [REDACTED] is strong minded and determined...much like Gloria.

They will miss her presence, as well all will. The California community is rallying to their side. They were Gloria's light in her day, the love in her heart – and probably the one thing that kept her going so long.

There's so much we don't know about Gloria – we all have pieces of her life, moments and memories that come flying back into our consciousness.

In grade school, she was stuck in John C. Lincoln hospital for a month in traction from a gymnastics accident that required a pin in her elbow – Sandy and I snuck in our cat – Huey, in a pillowcase, to visit her. I remember the time she saved a young child as a lifeguard at the Encanto pool. I remember eating jello from the box with her during summer swimming competitions and big watermelon nights at the Sunnyslope pool. Some of you probably remember sneaking into that pool for night swims with her. Sandy and I remember skinny dipping with Glo as young girls in our own back yard, giggling as my mom talked over the fence to the neighbor behind us. I

remember climbing the grapefruit trees in our front yard...we lived in an old orchard. During the hot summers, we used to see who could walk across the street in barefeet the slowest. I remember going to synogoge with her and braiding my dad's tallisim with her. I remember on the high holidays my dad and the three of us would make the long walk home from synagogue when you weren't supposed to drive. Those were great talks. I remember Gloria getting ready to go for runs, always having to put on ankle wraps ...likely from her years in gymnastics. I remember she'd come home from two practices after school and walk right to the refrigerator to get something to eat and stand next to it drinking and eating – starved from a double workout. I remember she liked Captain Crunch when she was a kid. She still ate it, even at 42. Double stuff Oreos were here passion lately...and just the white stuff. But I remember her eating the chocolate chip cookie dough from the batches of cookies all of us used to make for the football and basketball teams at Sunnyslope. I remember the band striking up the SHS fight song...and I was right there with Gloria on the sidelines saying “fight on.” I remember wearing her letter jacket to a game one time...and feeling so damn proud she was my sister.

I remember her desperate phone calls from California, her crying on the phone.

Gloria could run any race you put her in and gut it out. She'd win or place. Over the last four years, she went the distance – sometimes sprinting, sometimes running in place – never seeming to get anywhere...the finish line

moving farther and farther away. She was always trying to catch a break. She figured if she'd work hard, it would turn out okay for her and the boys...just like the rest of her life had. She grasped for a glimmer of hope...a sign...somebody who would say – Gloria, we know you are a great and loving mom and we know you love your boys beyond our imagination and that you would never do anything to harm them. And we will help you. We will help you.

Yes Gloria, you can wrap your boys in the blanket of your love and you will be okay. We will hold you tight and protect you all.

That was not meant to be.

Instead, we must carry your memories in our broken hearts, aching for you to walk through the door and flash your big smile.

You were our friend and our colleague. You were our sister, you were our daughter and our light. We're sorry we let you down. We're sorry we couldn't save you from your pain. We love you with all of our hearts and know that the pain has finally stopped.

Our love will not.