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EULOGY FOR SARAH TRAN

*Holly Roberson**

March 15, 2014

WE all know that Sarah Tran was a compassionate, affectionate wife and a devoted loving mother. What we may not all appreciate, is that she was a person of exceptional daring, an adventurer all her life, in her travels, her career, and her approach to people.

As a teenager, Sarah wrote in a letter “life is an art and an adventure, dance to your own beat.”

She lived by those words. She influenced all of us, whether you knew her for a short time or a long time, if you are reading this, it was enough to make a difference in your life.

She was extraordinarily genuine, guileless but not naïve, beautiful inside and out. She liked to fix things, dance, drive a hard bargain, compete and win. She did not like talking on the phone, but when she was with you in person, you had her full attention. Sarah was a born journeyer. She was not a whiner.

Of course, she was bright; she earned an engineering degree from Berkeley, a law degree from a Georgetown Law, and a coveted teaching position at Southern Methodist University’s Dedman School of Law. You will read more about that from Sarah’s good friend and colleague Cheryl Nelson. However, I want to tell you about Sarah as a person, a girl, and as a young woman. Sarah was bright in that shining light kind of a way— if she was your friend you knew it. Adventure awaited. She had modern, eclectic taste in music, and cared little for fashion but looked good in everything.

As a girl, Sarah loved animals. She was a dedicated vegetarian; as a child she made the logical argument that “you wouldn’t eat a reindeer, and reindeer are animals, therefore we should not eat animals.” She was an accomplished equestrian; she trained her own Arabian horse, Farrah, and excelled in school. I always thought her family moved a lot, because Sarah had been to four different high schools. No, Sarah simply wanted to travel and going to different schools was a way to do that. She had such a thirst for life.

* Sarah was Holly’s first college roommate at UC Berkeley. They have been friends ever since. Sarah and Thuan gave Holly the honor of being a bridesmaid in their wedding, Fairy Godmother to their daughter FarrahSophia and Godmother to their son Jimi. Sarah was always one step ahead of Holly professionally, and mentored her through the LSAT, law school applications, 1L year, the Bar and the early stages of her career. She remains an influential presence in Holly’s life today.

Sarah loved to travel. She lived, worked, volunteered, or traveled in the Netherlands, the Philippines (where she went by the name Bing), Saudi Arabia, India, Nepal, Vietnam, West Africa, England, and France. She made friends wherever she went.

Given half a chance, I am sure she would have traveled to many more countries, and found a way to have it paid for.

Sarah was my first friend in college at UC Berkeley, she cured the homesickness of a country girl away from home by sitting on my bed and letting me show her pictures. She actually seemed interested in looking at pictures of a pond, and wild flowers, and my grandparents. I have been close friends with Sarah for 14 years, and I can honestly say I have never known her to do a single bad thing, to lie, or to be untrue to herself or another person. She was an honest, loyal friend, and she did not tolerate fools, she just bounded right by them. She has influenced my life more than any other friend.

Sarah was a good listener. She had an open heart. She was unfussy and unmaterialistic to the point of asceticism. She liked bright colors and music, ethnic food and chick lit. She loved writing and teaching. She did not spend time on pettiness or insecurity. She accomplished more in thirty-four years than most people do in a lifetime. If someone told her she could not do something, it was taken as a personal dare. Her guiding principals were "yes I can" and "why not," never "no".

Here is an example of Sarah's strong will and independent spirit: When FarrahSophia was born, I had the extraordinary privilege of being in the room with Sarah and Thuan and Jacque. Before we got to that hospital room, and after Sarah was in labor, she decided, insisted, that she had to take a walk around Lake Merritt. For those of you unfamiliar with Oakland, Lake Merritt is a beautiful four-mile walking loop in the heart of downtown. It was late, but Sarah had decided that nothing would do but to walk as much as possible, then go to the hospital at the last possible second.

So, she did. Thuan and I walked around the lake with Sarah, her mother secretly trailing us in a car, and I kept time between contractions. She would crouch down to have contractions, never screaming, and we made it around that lake. It was the longest four miles of my life. Her water broke in the hospital lobby, and a short two hours later, Farrah Sophia was born. She was both fiercely independent and deeply connected to others. She would have been the godmother to my children someday. Just a few weeks later, Sarah, Thuan, and baby FarrahSophia moved to DC and Sarah began her legal career as a law student.

When she was sick in DC, we all had our priorities in place: survival, family, friends, and love. Nothing else mattered. No energy was wasted on cynicism, doubt, politics, or fear. Sarah cared deeply about the things that mattered to her, and just let everything else go.

Sarah was like that in so many aspects of her life, she knew who she was and what she wanted, and she knew what she was capable of. She

beat cancer once, and went on to have another beautiful child, Jimi Owen Tran.

With the help of her husband Thuan, she was able to be a good mother and pursue her legal career. They had two children, FarrahSophia was born just before Sarah started law school, and Jimi was born just before Sarah began teaching law—Sarah held one infant while studying, and then held the other while writing law journal articles.

People often asked how she did it, or how she did it all. Sarah would be the first person to tell you, she did not do it all, and she had help. She made choices about where she would focus her time and energy, and if you were a part of that focus, you were lucky. She also worked incredibly hard, and concentrated on what mattered. Sarah loved her family more than anything. She had her priorities straight.

Sarah did things her own way. She was unique, but not pushy about it. She was the most stubborn person I know, and I believe that kept her alive far longer than the doctors expected. Ultimately, her spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. She would have, and did, willingly endure any treatment, any side effect, if it would increase her chances of being able to live and stay with her children. She beat long odds over and over again.

She made everything an adventure. She would pretend that she was on a cruise ship, or on a vacation while in the hospital. She decorated the room with the hand drawn pictures from her kids and the cards people would send her. She played pop music, danced, and dressed up with friends, wore sexy wigs and walked laps in the hospital. Even when Sarah was exceptionally weak, we never talked about what would happen if she died, because her plan was always to live. Although she had been sick for over a year, it was still a surprise. She was someone who created and received miracles over and over again.

I hope that we can all dedicate ourselves to taking care of Sarah's children and living our lives as she lived hers: with a conscious commitment to excellence and adventure. Her spirit will live on in all of us.

Sarah McQuillen Tran was a wonderful mother, daughter, wife, sister, friend, teacher, neighbor, writer, runner, singer, storyteller, traveler, leader, humanitarian, and beloved colleague. She made her life an art and an adventure; she danced to her own drum.

She will be deeply and forever missed.

