

The Post Read ‘Round the World

This is the post that taught me how many lives my words could touch... and change.

So I thought it should be 'way up front.

I wrote it only a few weeks after I started my Open Salon blog, and it was, in fact, the first to be “tweeted” by my old Sun Times pal who became, after that, my most faithful fan.

To date, it has been read by more than 29000 people—only two more “topical” posts have bested that total. And it amassed most of that impressive total within the first few days it was posted, thanks to Roger.

But I notice, each time I check my stats, that it is still being read. It speaks to something deep and universal, apparently.

That's understandable. We all want to know what love looks like.

And I have a picture of it.

Here it is.



What Love Looks Like

My hard drive finally crashed forever a couple of days ago. I could write a whole piece on that—probably will. But today’s story is much more fun. And more dear to me.

Because among the few fragments of things the Geek Squad were able to salvage was one of my favorite pictures of my favorite person. And the boy who was then her favorite person. Her first love. Decked out in tails, no less, for the prom she flew East to attend on his arm.

It was like a fairy tale, that first love of hers—*Twilight*’s got nothin’ on my baby girl. He was rich, breathtakingly bright, beautiful--and *hopelessly* smitten. She was...not so rich, very chubby—and still, damn her, very beautiful—and kinda shocked that he was so smitten. But she was a goner, too.

And in the picture, he gazes at her in a way that I am certain could save a life. In a way that I am certain we should all be gazed upon just once, so that we know what love looks like.

They lasted just long enough for her to learn some of the most important things about loving someone. The good and the bad.

So I call him her “training wheel love.” The boy she practiced the art of falling into and out of love with in ways that will inform all the rest of her relationships forever. And she was very lucky to have found, so early, a love so sweet.

The way she found him...is totally New Millennium. She was about... I'm thinking 15 or 16, though my memory fails me these days and all the years and moments have sort of...melted together.

But I remember that she and a little group of computer geek pals happened, somehow, upon another group of computer geek kids from school who had formed a little international network of “e- friends.” Real friends. Kids who shared their everyday trials and tribulations thoughtfully and intensely with each other. Kids who fell in love with and “dated” each other, online.

I didn't exactly know the whole story at the time because she knew how apprehensive I would be about this. But I began to catch on, and to be fascinated by the strange world she inhabited every evening.

She did her homework, played computer games...all the while, IMing these kids from all over the world. They would hook up, break up—all the drama of real time dating in cyberspace.

I even remember a particularly... *explicit* animated anime icon someone had, which I commented upon. If that was what he had on his mind...he needed to be “deleted.” And I believe he was. But of course...you never really know in the “e-world.”

This one boy, out of all the rest, caught her fancy. Einstein quick—that's not too far a stretch—he could discuss string theory and the latest hot video game in the same conversation. They began to talk, through headsets, for hours and hours—playing games together and sometimes not even speaking. *Living* together long distance.

He would call to say “Goodnight,” and wind up having sleepy conversations that lasted ‘til morning. I put the kibosh on that after I caught on to why she was so sluggish around the house after a while. So then, he would call to wake her up and get her to school. On *time*.

I was astounded. It seemed so...real. Adult. And when he asked to come meet me, to make sure that I understood how real it was, I was impressed.

He flew out and absolutely won me over. It was a dream, this little love of hers. He bounded down the escalator stairs into her arms as if they’d been together forever. I remember other parents smiling at them. The “Aaaaawwwww” look.

I was a little jealous, truth be told. But mostly, I was stunned. He was a copper-haired cutie pie who introduced himself perfectly. I could tell from the way he spoke that he came from “moneyed” people. Sweetly, but...with an air of “I’m going to own this world someday” that both unnerved and charmed me.

I told all of my own girlfriends about him and they all came back with stuff like: “Whoa, hold on--I’ve spent a *fortune* on dating sites and she just...runs into this guy by accident?!” Followed shortly after by, “Does he have a MUCH older brother?”

Yeah, life...isn’t fair.

He left *me* lots of great memories, too. That arrival. And an evening during his visit when I popped into the den where they were lying upon the couch watching TV.

I found him lying there looking at her, as she drooled down his arm contentedly. In one of the deeeeeep sleeps you fall into when you’re feeling super secure with someone.

He didn't look uncomfy. But she was lying on his arm in that way that happens sometimes with lovers—I knew his arm had probably fallen asleep ages ago. And then there was...well...the drool.

I knew that he would never move unless she woke up on her own. So I said, hoping to wake her, “Oh, my *goodness*, what a mess—baby, wake her up! She'll go right back to sleep.”

And he smiled, and murmured: “I don't mind. It's... *hers..*”

I had to leave. I laughed, but I *had* to leave. *That...* was the line of a lifetime. She'd missed it. But I hadn't. And I didn't even know how to answer him.

But I thanked him, in my mind, for it. And told her later, what he'd said. Just to see the look in *her* eyes.

I also remember him trying to find the very best restaurant in town to take her for a “farewell” dinner. And I remember him crying, openly and wrenchingly, the night before that farewell—he kept repeating that he couldn't go. He just *couldn't* go.

He did go. But a few months later she flew out to attend his prom. And to meet his private school friends who all had names like “Stanford Whittington the Third.” But they all loved and smothered her with attention.

So did his family. His grandfather, who lives in a Currier and Ives house in Cape Cod no less...with the lake, the loons, the lush gardens and all that...declared that he was going to take a trip to the Caribbean and find a little brown “honey” just like her.

Her little lover was embarrassed. And chided him soundly. My daughter understood that grandpa was just...well...not used to such things and didn't know the PC protocols.

She was probably the most whimsically dressed girl at the prom that night. My daughter was voted the girl most likely to have white hair at her white wedding for a reason, and that night she wore purple and streaked her hair to match. Even in black and white she looks...“colorful.”

He *adored* her for it. And he gave her, that night, what I call, The Look. That gaze that tells you how love should be. Taken on her first prom night, *this*...says it all. I am so delighted that it survived the “crash.”

Smile, babies.

RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

If the previous post was one of the most read, these are the posts that put Keka's Blog on the "map" worldwide.

One landed on the cover of Salon.com, and revealed, in the firestorm that followed, the depth and breadth of America's enduring racial divide. Another, a piece about the Trayvon Martin case, earned me an invitation to appear on Democracy Now, a television news show with a decidedly leftist following and slant.

In truth, I am not easily moved to anger. But I was glad I had Open Salon to turn to when I was. It was there that I analyzed the messy truths beneath the anger, and where kindred spirits stopped by to verify and testify. And, yes, sometimes to terrify—I got a phone call at home after Salon.com put that post on the cover.

I was shocked and shaken when the caller explained that he'd read my piece and Google'd up my phone number. I immediately signed up with one of those companies that tries to find and expunge personal and contact info from the Web.

It cannot be done. Not entirely or quickly enough.

But...I kept writing. And though the comments were sometimes scary and scathing, I decided freedom of speech was meant for all of us. Including the people who posted lengthy rebuttals complete with "factual" support, or to tell me to "love it or leave it."

If I didn't love it...I wouldn't try so hard to understand and change it.

Sometimes I asked and tried to answer lots of other controversial questions in my musings on Open Salon. Sometimes...I just had a "bone to pick." Here are some of the posts that touched both hearts and, for some, that "last nerve."



Me, back when I heard that beep ‘way too often...

For Trayvon and Emmett: My “Walking While Black” stories

I’m not going to comment on the 911 calls, the police negligence or the firestorm that followed Trayvon Martin’s death.

I’m just going to tell you why I’m not shocked that it happened or that the man who shot Trayvon Martin wasn’t arrested. And why even knowing all that...hearing him screaming for help seconds before he was murdered made me cry bitter tears.

And brought back the memory of another dead black boy, whose mother I knew and still admire for the electrifying and unforgettable lesson she taught us in his name.

I’m just pouring out my soul here, so it’s gonna be kinda ugly. But so is

what happened to Trayvon.

“Walking While Black” has been an issue since... slavery. But if you’re black *woman* walking in certain places at certain times...there’s a little twist to that “offense”. Here are my “walking while black” stories.

And every black woman I know has at least one or two just like them. The sole difference between Trayvon’s story and ours is that we usually live to tell ours. But sometimes...we’re too ashamed...

Working Girl—the gist of it all

This is the basic story. The better stories, variations on this theme, follow.

As a reporter for the *Chicago Sun Times*, I was often out late at night or in the wee hours of the morning covering stories or taking a late shift... whatever the job required. And I lived in a very popular and very congested area of Chicago at the time, where it was nearly impossible to park, even late at night.

So I tended to take cabs or buses—especially in winter when my car was invariably buried in huge drifts of snow. I always stood on relatively busy corners, but I was usually the only woman out so late/early.

But even if there was lots of traffic and people walking or even standing there *with* me waiting for that bus...I knew it wouldn’t be long before I got the “working girl beep.” Especially if I was well dressed for some sort of gala event or more formal setting...or, actually, even if I wasn’t particularly well dressed.

Black men would beep and wave, or call out a hearty, “Go ‘*head*, Shorty!” and keep going. Not *one* ever pulled over. Only white men did that.

If he was a young man driving what he thought was a hot car, he’d ease