

Remembrance of Melinda Gordon
By Debjani Mukherjee

On Thursday evening, I came home and saw on my telephone caller ID that my dear friend Melinda Gordon had called. I love hearing her gentle melodic voice and I smiled until I remembered that she had died the day before. I felt a shooting pain in my heart. The last time I was here in Melinda's church, I was reading a poem during her marriage ceremony. Her face was glowing and her loving husband had found a partner for life. Today, words are inadequate to express our grief, and how unnatural and surreal it is that we are at her memorial service.

But I am supposed to tell you about the Melinda that I knew. I met Melinda in 2001 when we were ethics fellows at the University of Chicago. Our friend Megan, Melinda and I would go to the pub after our case conference and rehash our day and share the comfort of friendship. The ethics cases often involved imminent death and sometimes were about communications gone awry. The Melinda I knew taught me about the science and art of medicine. Sometimes we would sit in one of our cars, long after we meant to go home and continue to share our dreams and fears. We talked about everyday things like new restaurants or movies and about abstract things like what kind of qualities we sought in a partner or how we could make a difference in the world. When she met Steve, we were so excited, and although we could never have anticipated the days that lay ahead of them, the Melinda I knew chose someone who had the strength, integrity and compassion to support her through the good and unbelievably bad. The Melinda I knew was loving and was the kind of friend that you lost time with, and couldn't wait to talk to again.

My first impression of Melinda was her warm smile and openness. I later came to know that she was brilliant, but not arrogant. She knew her stuff and always wanted to learn more. She was strong and kind. She was a great physician whose "problem" was that she took too much time with her patients. She cared deeply about social justice. She was compassionate, empathetic, open-minded and open-hearted. She was a loyal friend, who was quick with a smile or a shoulder to cry on. She cherished her friends and family and looked forward to spending time with her mother and sister. She loved to laugh and to eat good food. She loved to knit. She loved the Chicago Cubs. She had a deep faith. Her warmth and concern were evident, even on-line, where she found and gave comfort on a young survivor's coalition website. She knew her cancer was unfair yet she faced the uncertainty head on. A couple of summers ago after she was diagnosed, she and I went to visit the "bra-lady" at Nordstrom who specialized in working with women with breast cancer. It was overwhelming, but afterwards Melinda suggested that we get some chocolate fondue and we sat and shared each other's company. The Melinda I knew was precious and sparkling and lovely. And irreplaceable. And I am blessed to have known her.