

## **In Remembrance of Melinda K. Gordon, MD** **Sunday, October 28, 2007**

The year 1989 was remarkable for revolutionary earth-shattering events:

Germans began punching holes in the Berlin Wall.

The Dalai Lama won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Unknown Rebel stepped in front of a line of tanks in Tiananmen Square.

George Herbert Walker Bush was inaugurated President. Hmmm...probably should have thought about this earth-shattering thing a little more.....

And, in 1989, I met a young, burgeoning rebel named Melinda, who became my dearest, most cherished friend. Indeed an extraordinary year.

I can't remember the exact date that I became friends with Melinda. It just seemed like she was always there and that we were always friends, because of her tremendous warmth, generosity, and kindness. Plus, she was just so cool, she was so very cool.

We met at the University of Iowa, when she was assigned to my dorm, Hillcrest. We initially bonded because we both had roommates that had "issues," so we managed to find an empty room to share. Roommate troubles solved, she was off to the races.

While many of our classmates were struggling with what to do when they grew up, Melinda knew that she wanted to become a doctor, to deliver care to those in need. She dove into a full compliment of mind-blowing pre-med courses, acing them all. Truly impressive, but it was clear enough to me that wasn't enough for her. Even as an 18 year-old freshman, she was constantly talking about the feminist ideal that women, indeed everyone deserved to be treated with dignity, as whole person. Those early, somewhat revolutionary thoughts formed the basis for the kind of medicine she practiced, and the type of research she conducted. As we kept in touch throughout her years in residency and fellowship, she indeed spoke truth to power about doctor-patient communication and the need to inject more humanity into medical treatment.

I was in awe of Melinda's intellectual prowess – truly unsurpassed. I mean, come on – a perfect 800 score on her math SAT. I see a number of her colleagues here who are also super smart, so that may not be impressive. But just to let you know, I took the SATs 3 times – for me, math is a tad fuzzy, which, is probably why I'm a Washington health care lobbyist and she was a highly regarded board certified physician in internal medicine and oncology.

Even more remarkable than her intellect was Melinda's heart, her kindness and sense of humor. We were roommates for two years, the first in the dorms and the second in an apartment we shared with another dear friend, Tanya.

We had a total blast – much of I will not describe to you within the confines of this sacred place. There are so many good memories: nights of dancing, shopping at our favorite store, the Soap Opera, playing pranks and flirting with our favorite group of college boys, singing sugary 80s songs

at the top of our lungs, skipping class to make snow angels in the middle of an Iowa blizzard, a 19 hour journey to Washington to protest the 1<sup>st</sup> war in Iraq, and a trip on the El with Mary Beth to the Art Institute.

There were so many great conversations – so many about her friends back in Oregon and her loving family – especially Nancy and Mary Beth. And when life became too stressful, she was always there for me – never hesitating to listen and always with words of wisdom far beyond her years. When that didn't work, there was always swearing and laughter.

Oh the laughter, ***the laughter***. Her laughter, and friendship helped me immensely throughout college and into adulthood, through some of my most trying times, including the passing of my father in 2003. I tried to be there for her, too, and for Steve, in the same way she was there for me. When she was diagnosed with cancer in 2005, for instance, I got on the phone with her and we went right to swearing, although we managed to end with some measure of levity.

I agree with Melinda that cancer is a thief and that challenging the traditional notions of how those afflicted with cancer are supposed to live with the disease, as Steve and Nancy wrote in her obituary. I'm not the least bit surprised about her rebellious (yet again somehow totally logical) thinking – her will and spirit in that regard was plainly obvious to me all those years ago at Iowa.

So, my dear friends, 1989 was a splendid year for me, not because the Wall came down, and not because of the Dalai Lama. No, '89 was a year unlike any other because that's the year Melinda befriended me.

I know that all of you have had brilliantly fantastic days and years with Melinda and I pray that those memories sustain you now and forever.

God bless Melinda, Steve, Nancy, Mary Beth, and God be with all of you.