

Fire In My Belly

A Blog by Michael Lavender

Mourning The Passing of a Colleague and Friend

February 16, 2021- Given the course of the last year, none of us should be surprised when the unexpected, shocking or out-of-the-ordinary happens in our lives. It's not that extraordinary things have never happened, because they have—they always have—but the frequency and degree to which they seem to have touched each of our lives this past year is unusual, to say the least.

For most of us, the coronavirus pandemic upended our world, realigned our educational system to a largely online learning platform, changed the way we shop for everyday necessities, and, for a while, caused shortages of food, toiletries, disinfecting supplies and so much more. At times, it brought out the worst in our natures and brought sadness to so many families; hoarding; pitting friends, neighbors and loved ones against each other in disputes over the validity or seriousness of COVID-19; dealing with the tragic loss of life and more.



But despite how much we should have learned over the past year to expect the unexpected, it still came as a shock to many of us when our friend and co-worker, Kim Ledbetter, passed away late Saturday night. Her passing was unexpected and seemingly inexplicable. That is what made it all the more shocking.

It is always devastating when we lose friends, co-workers and family members to death, but sometimes the jolt of a sudden, unexpected death feels more intense. Our heart grieves that we didn't get to say goodbye, hug necks and show our love and affection for the person in other ways.

In those situations, it seems there is nothing left to do but hope and pray that our friend knew and felt our love in his or her lifetime. Surely, it makes us more acutely aware of the need to live our lives from day-to-day so that those who mean most to us know how much we love and care for them as we go forward.

Kim herself was a loving person. To her friends, and especially her close friends, she was a kind and gentle person with a big heart. At the college, she was always quick to

volunteer to help serve meals or bag non-perishable food items for needy students from the college's food pantry. To students who needed financial assistance to be able to afford to attend college, she made every effort to find a way to help them, whether through traditional federal aid programs, through local scholarship programs or internal presidential scholarships.

Her smile and her laugh were contagious. And even when she was frustrated and holding her head in her hand, her warm nature came through; instead of being angry and muttering unkind words under her breath, she would simply say, "Bless it," or some similar phrase.

To be sure, Kim was also a quirky and feisty person at times. Even years after meeting her, it still seemed both odd and funny when she called certain co-workers by their initials instead of their name or nickname—LB and JP, for example.

While she would help anyone in need, only a fool would attempt to pull one over on her or take advantage of either her generosity or the college's financial aid programs. She had a disdain for lazy scoundrels and ne'er-do-wells and had little patience for their scamming. Those who tried it once rarely tried it again, because her feisty spirit was not a force they wanted to reckon with again.

On ordinary days, however, Kim had a calm and peaceful spirit about her, and only in hindsight does it occur to some of us where that spirit originated.

You see, Kim knew that, "There's a land that is fairer than day, and by faith (she) could see it afar." Kim had been prepared for most of her adult life for the day she would visit that place. (From "The Sweet By And By.")

For that reason, Kim did not worry about the future. Today, the words of another hymn made popular by Alison Krauss and the Cox family, "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow," seem to best express the peace Kim knew in her heart. "I don't know about tomorrow, I just live from day to day, I don't borrow from its sunshine, for its skies may turn to gray. I don't worry o'er the future, for I know what Jesus said; and today I'll walk beside Him, for He knows what (lies) ahead."

More than anything else, the chorus of that song seems to parallel the life Kim lived: "Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand; but I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand."

Late Saturday night, those hands welcomed her into the joy of her Lord. While we will grieve her passing, knowing that she is living pain-free in his loving arms is some level of consolation. Knowing that one day those of us who have her same level of assurance, "(Will) meet (her) on that beautiful shore, in the sweet by and by," "And our spirits shall sorrow no more."

Until that day, rest in peace, dear friend.