

Elizabeth Anne Prostic: Press Room: Eulogy

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In Memory

When Henry David Thoreau died at the age of 44, Ralph Waldo Emerson famously eulogized him as wanting to be "the captain of a huckleberry-party," rather than "engineering for all America." When I first met Lizzie I wanted to live in a tree in the mountains somewhere. But she very much wanted to engineer or at least strategize for all of America. I remember her asking people who their favorite senator was when she was a sophomore in college. I would have had trouble even naming more than a few. But she wanted to know my mind, and our minds both yearned to make things better in the world, even if our politics didn't seem to match. We chose our own ways to effect change, but we understood each other. We were outspoken and strong together. We married our minds, our passions, our futures, and we planned to grow old and gray together.

When I think of Lizzie's heroes I think of strong women, like Eleanor Roosevelt, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher (Ed Prostic's fault, I believe). Harper Lee and Toni Morrison. Twyla Tharp and Barbra Streisand (for her voice that is, I'll take her politics). Mary Matalin to my James Carville, or so they said. When my mother was putting together a baby book just a few weeks ago, she wanted to write down our hopes and aspirations for Harper. Lizzie said, "I want you to be a strong, independent, powerful woman, as well as happy and fulfilled." I couldn't help adding "free to construct your own gender and identity," but obviously Lizzie's words described herself perfectly. Strong, independent, powerful, happy, fulfilled. And I can only flail at the task of trying to capture in words the amazing ways her life proclaimed, "I am Lizzie, hear me roar."

There was a softer side to Lizzie, though, that many of you came to love and respect when she inevitably turned all conversation away from herself. She always wanted to know what you were up to, how you were doing, how that thing you told her about six months ago had turned out. She had an incredible memory for the everyday details of people's lives, and she was genuinely interested in so many different kinds of people. She used to prep me before we

walked into a room, advancing me as if I were a senator, saying, "Now you remember so-and-so; you talked with him about hiking. And so-and-so is working on a PhD in religious studies. Okay?" You would have thought she wrote down the details of every conversation on a note card and filed them in a rolodex. It could be months between conversations and she'd still make people feel as if they had talked only days before. My guess is that many of you do not know all of the amazing things she was doing at the same time: all the people she saw regularly but in different circles; different spheres of her life that you might not know about because she would steer conversation away from herself. But you knew that she cared. Even if you didn't know everything going on in her head. I like to think that I knew her better than anyone. But I know that many of you shared things with her that I did not.

I will always remember her making time to sit and talk with her grandmother, MomMom, even if she was only in Kansas City overnight. This was not an obligation for her but a pleasure. A chance to be a little sassy sometimes and appreciate MomMom's sense of humor. Family was always so important to her, and family always extended beyond what I would have called "first cousins" and so on, even to friends and the families of those friends. By gathering here today perhaps we can begin to recover from the bitterness and anguish of the unfathomable loss we contemplate today.

I remain in love with her razor-sharp mind, with her passion for politics and her insatiable curiosity. The same selflessness and compassion that made her so sensitive to so many people also allowed her to gather a wide range of information before drawing any conclusions. She and I loved to debate, but her assumption was that people were usually beginning with good intentions. I often tend to be more cynical. While I might take Thoreau's advice on civil disobedience, she was a dynamo for using the master's tools to take down the master's house. I think I was finally getting her used to my inclination for protesting, but her passion for the democratic process taught me the need to engage in the messy world at all different kinds of levels. She knew how to appease me, sometimes, when it came to political debate, like when I tried to talk her into a write-in swap this past November: my David Cobb of the Green Party for her John McCain. She even let me believe that she might do it. Just a few weeks after her diagnosis, when she could barely walk, there was no way she would stay away from the polls. And you better have voted too if you had a chance to talk to her then.

I remember the way she used to shimmy sometimes, with a smack of her lips, a glass of wine in her hand--good wine, that is, and stunning, penetrating green eyes behind the glass. I also remember her rubbing her hands together, letting out a low "Yeah" as her eyes twinkled in anticipation of something good about to happen, like victory at Trivial Pursuit.

She liked Jeopardy and Who Wants to be a Millionaire?; betting on the Academy Awards and watching not just Meet the Press but also The Apprentice and The Bachelorette. She loved Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin, Tuck and Patti, Sarah McLauhglin. Red shoes, even numbers, Veuve Clicquot, chocolate anything. Tiffany's, monograms, Ralph Lauren, the color pink, that sassy blue and white dress she wore for her thirtieth birthday. Breakfast at Wimbledon, dinner at Kaz or Kinkead's. Cosmopolitans, crab cakes, sushi, stargazer lilies, gerber daisies. Anything from Amaryllis in D.C. or Trapp in K.C. Vigorous debate, chatty gossip, global politics, boy problems. Lazy Sunday mornings with the New York Times and a big pot of coffee, although we never really had the time. Sunset over Big Sur, sunrise in Cancun. "You Are My Sunshine" and "I'm Little But I'm Loud" for Harper. She loved her friends, her family, Harper, Cooper, and me. I can't even begin to tell you how much I loved her.

At the end of "Song of Myself" Walt Whitman speaks in a voice that I like to think of as Lizzie's, with a hope for letting her live on through each of us. He writes:

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who or what I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.