

This is the thank-you note I mailed to those who gave flowers.

Thank you so very much for the flowers you sent to cheer us upon Tia's death. Those flowers have a far greater significance than you may know, so in lieu of a thank you note, please accept this little essay as an expression of our gratitude.

Flowers for Tia

I suppose a good husband buys flowers for his wife to show her how much he loves her.

In 33 years of marriage, I don't think I ever bought Tia flowers. There are two reasons. Excuse # 1: For a long time, we didn't have much money. We married on August 8, 1981 which was the same month I started the Physiology Ph.D. program at UNC-Chapel Hill. My graduate student stipend back then was a whopping \$5000 per year. Although trained to teach the hearing impaired, to keep us afloat, Tia took the only available work: a low-paying job at a private school in Hillsborough. She drove a school bus and slung fast-food tacos evenings and weekends for several years before getting a better job as an administrative assistant in the Department of Rheumatology at UNC. Her pay was a little better. Mine was not. In 1985 Alicia was born unto us, and Alayna emerged in 1986. Meanwhile I still hadn't completed that dang Ph.D. I took my first teaching job at Wingate College (now University) even before I'd finished the dissertation. Phillip was born in 1988. For a semester, the administrators at Wingate allowed me to teach just one class so I could spend from Thursday afternoon until Monday afternoon each week in Chapel Hill finishing up that Ph.D. During that semester, Tia lovingly tended to the kids while I was away for four days at a time. Bless her heart: I finally finished in 1989.

While we were in Wingate, Tia taught at Monroe Middle School where her annual salary was higher than mine as an Assistant Professor of Biology at Wingate College. What I'm saying here is that Wingate didn't pay well back then. So for our first eight years of marriage, we were blessed with three growing micro-organisms sharing our genes, we had entry-level jobs and not much money. Though I

appreciated everything she did to hold our family together and she truly deserved flowers for birthdays and anniversaries and Valentines and so forth, in my opinion, there was never excess money to squander on such frivolities.

At Wingate we hired a newly-minted Ph.D. for the Biology Department. Ed Mills became our dear friend. Tia knew Sandi, a math teacher at her school she thought would be a good match for Ed. As usual, Tia was correct. I recently opened a Christmas card from Ed and Sandi with pictures of their lovely daughters Sarah (17) and Abby (14.)

Budgetary circumstances at Wingate necessitated eliminating a member of the biology department. Ed was a terrific teacher and a dear friend but as the most recent hire, he was the one who'd be let go. Our colleague Sid Fletcher was two years from retirement so I had the bright idea to ask the administration if I could take a two year leave of absence to do postdoctoral research at the University of Missouri. That way, Ed could stay. I'd get some more research experience and come back when Sid retired. The administration agreed.

And so it came to pass that we moved to Columbia, Missouri where all the fulltime teaching positions were filled and the best Tia could do was work as a part-time (read "low paid") teacher who carted her materials from classroom to classroom. When she was at work, we paid daycare for three kids. Postdocs don't make much money. Flowers? Not now. Was she truly deserving? Absolutely!

Then the big break came. As the two years in Missouri were concluding and we prepared for a return to Wingate, I looked at job postings and found one for which I thought I might be a good fit at Wofford College. I applied and long-story-short I got the job. Starting pay was much more than what I'd get at Wingate so my dear colleagues there gave their blessing to my good fortune, or at least didn't begrudge it. And some lucky scientist was hired in my place at Wingate.

We moved to Spartanburg in 1993 where Tia was hired as a Math teacher and Assistant Principal at St. Paul's Catholic School. In 1998 Tia started teaching at Woodruff Middle School and became an Assistant Principal there about eight years ago. We and the kids made what has turned out to be life-long friends (at

least for Tia.) Financially we were a bit better off and I could've/should've been extravagant, but after so many years of marriage and still no flowers, Tia once said "If you *ever* got flowers for me, I'd suspect you had been unfaithful." I'm not sure whether she was joking. And that, my friends, is Excuse # 2 for not getting her flowers.

Through every one of those 33 years, Tia should have received flowers as an indication of my love and appreciation. Early on, the scarcity of money was a feeble excuse as we experienced the "for poorer" phase of our marriage vows. For that last several years, we've enjoyed the "for richer" aspect and could afford everything we need and much of what we want. Yet I still could not bring myself to buy flowers for my lovely bride, in part because I wouldn't want to be suspected of infidelity. It became a joke between us. I believe she understood my reluctance to spend money on botanicals that would wilt and die. Instead I bought her gold and precious stones. She liked diamonds, sapphires, rubies, opals and emeralds. I enjoyed buying these items for her as a show of my affection. Stones and gold don't fade. They are a permanent reminder of my appreciation and admiration.

Then she died suddenly on December 18 th , 2014.

None of us had the energy to haul all the Christmas stuff from the attic this year and decorate the house as excessively as Tia always did. Phillip and I managed to erect the artificial tree and hung a few ornaments on it. It was well watered with our tears that evening. Tia's Advent Wreath is on the table, but that's it. No other Christmas decorations.

Yet our home feels as cozy and inviting this year as ever because there are twenty-two flower arrangements where Nativity Scenes and Advent candles and other knickknacks of Noel would have been. Everywhere we look there are lovely green leaves and rich red poinsettias and pure white peace lilies. Other blooms of many colors add joy to what the kids and I hope will be the saddest Merry Christmas we ever have to endure.

Your extravagance has been a great blessing to us, and we shall be ever grateful to you when we recall the beauty and warmth of our home embellished by your lovely flowers this Christmas Season, our first without Tia.

I'm buying one more stone for Tia: a memorial stone to be laid in the floor of the gazebo in the Garden of Hope and Remembrance at Hatcher Gardens in Spartanburg. We'll sprinkle some of her ashes there. Maintained in perpetuity by the Spartanburg Garden Club, you and I can sit on a bench and recall the wonderful life of this good woman: a daughter, sister, wife, mother, aunt, teacher, mentor, servant, and friend. In that garden, we will remember her surrounded by flowers every day of every year.

Finally, flowers for Tia. Forever.

With heartfelt thanks for your generosity,

GR Davis

26 December 2014