



The Bridge Report

REMEMBERING SHELLI SELLARS BY R.K. ULRICH



Shelli Martin Sellars, born January 30th, 1967, finished her greatest race and crossed the finish line into Heaven on Monday September 3rd, 2012. True to Shelli fashion, who never did anything halfway, she was born at 4:05 and died at 4:05 at the age of 45. It was also the birthday of her paternal great-grandmother who nursed her father to health as an infant but whom she had never met until Monday. Shelli fought Stage IV colon cancer since being diagnosed in January of 2010 and was a warrior until the end, holding on tightly to God and the love she had for her family. **She kept Nehemiah 8:10, "The joy of the Lord is my strength," constantly before her. Throughout all the difficulties and disappointments, she held unwaveringly to her faith in her Heavenly Father that loves her more than we can understand.**

Shelli received Jesus at a young age and served Him faithfully in youth ministry for over 25 years as well as being a missionary to **Germany** with her family for almost 9 years. She is survived by her husband **Joseph Sellars** (next April would have been their 25 anniversary), her daughter **Saterra** and her son **Jayden**, all of **Morristown, TN**, her mom and dad, five siblings and a number of other family members.

On Saturday, September 8, I attended the Home-going Celebration of **Shelli Sellars** at **Harvest Fellowship Church** in **Jefferson City, TN**, where **Joe** serves as Youth Pastor. The church was full to overflowing of family, friends, and brothers and sister in faith. The large motto "From Generation to Generation" displayed in bold letters across the wall in the back of the podium, and the sanctuary walls decorated with flags from many nations, "*signify our hearts for reaching the next generation here and in the nations with the Gospel through the indigenous church,*" explained **Jim Price**, the Senior Pastor, a quiet man exuding a pastoral, father's heart. For six years, he had lived with his family in **Dagestan**, a Muslim country in the Caucasus mountains, doing church planting.

Shelli had requested that her death would be a celebration of LIFE as a testimony that she had run the race and won the PRIZE — worshipping in the presence of the Lord! So, true to her wishes, colorful balloons, upbeat worship music magnifying God's love and glory, waving of colorful banners and soap bubbles dispensed by the young people in the church, all provided an atmosphere which underscored who Shelli was: colorful, bubbly, passionate, artistic, articulate; exuding love, light, life and laughter to those around her! She wanted her legacy to be clear, especially to the young people she had been called to serve with her husband, Joe, whether in **Germany**, **Sri Lanka**, or back home in the **Tennessee** mountains: "**Shelli lived life to the fullest, passionately seeking to reflect God's glory through all she was and did with a message to the world, 'God is good — all the time! He has a plan and destiny for you, regardless of your background!'**"

After nine years of mission work as our Bridge partners, in 2009, the Sellars family returned home to Tennessee on furlough, thinking it would be a springboard to their next step of ministry: their moving to **Sri Lanka**.

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REMEMBERING SHELLI SELLARS



Little did they know they were about to embark on one of the toughest races in life which would take them across peaks and valleys and challenge their faith and hope! In Jan 2010, Shelli was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer which had metastasized into her lungs.

In her characteristically open, vulnerable, articulate, and brutally honest fashion, Shelli invited us into her heart as she began journaling and expressing in writing through social media her struggles, her ups and downs, her pain, her hope and disappointments, while holding on to her faith that God is real and He is good! For two and a half years she valiantly battled for LIFE, but toward the end submitted in peace to God's will when it became clear that He would take her home!

Following, I have chosen a few excerpts from her writing which I trust will edify and encourage you in your own struggles with faith and hope amidst difficult circumstances. In the **February** and **March 2010** and **August 2012** issues of The Bridge Report on our website, I have quoted some of her posts from her journey. To read those, please open a new browser and copy the following links:

<http://www.bridgeinternational.org/articles/shellijournal.php>
<http://www.bridgeinternational.org/articles/shelli2haitkaz.php>
<http://www.bridgeinternational.org/articles/editor0812.php>

January 21, 2010: *"HOPE is the word for this new race we're running! Though finding cancer in my colon & lung has thrown giant hurdles in our path, it hasn't broken our stride, nor shaken the fact that God loves us & plans to bring victory to our lives. We're running to win!... and we're going to finish with great joy! He's an awesome coach & we trust Him as we race into His arms, knowing that, even when the running gets hard, He is always good".*

The above was the opening paragraph in the part of her journal she shared, after she was diagnosed. The enclosed Addendum has a few other quotes from her journal which reflects a woman of faith and courage in the midst of adversity.



13762 State Road 84, Suite 423
 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33325
 USA

Ragnild K. Ulrich ("R.K.")
 Executive Director

Tel 1.954.916.0521

Fax 1.954.916.8740

E-Mail:

TheBridge@BridgeInternational.org

Website:

www.BridgeInternational.org

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One of the many photographs Shelli took, this with the verse "Behold the beauty of the Lord" Psalm 27:4

FROM R.K.'S CORNER

"Living the Great Commandment to Fulfill the Great Commission" is Joe and Shelli Sellar's ministry motto, as well as the standard by which they attempt to live their lives. *"Our lives are not just about ministry, but about relationship, about living our lives so that others see Jesus in us — bringing Him honor in everything we do"*, they are quick to explain. And their lives reflect that!

Joe and Shelli have in common that they both grew up in **Tennessee**, were saved and felt called to full time ministry at a young age (Joe 10, Shelli 17), and had a burden for Europe. After they were married in 1988, Joe served in the U.S. Army in **Germany**. They connected with German Christians and came across the ministry of The Bridge, and visited our Bible school in **Kosovo**.

When, in 1999, they were ready to move to Germany with their two children Saterra and Jayden to serve as full time youth ministers, they contacted us, and we joined with them in a partnership which proved very fruitful.

I wrote the above paragraphs in the October 2003 Bridge Report, featuring Joe and Shelli as one of our ministry partners since 1999. If you want to read more about their past work in Germany, that and January 2007's issues are posted in the Archive on The Bridge website.

In 2009, the Sellars decided to return back home from Germany to Tennessee for a brief furlough while helping their respective mothers who had medical issues. Their vision was to move on to **Sri Lanka** where they had taken some of their German youth on short term mission trips, and build a leadership training center for young people with a heart for mission. That plan is now on hold, as, in 2010, Shelli found she had been unexpectedly enlisted to run a new race that culminated in her death on September 3: battling stage IV metastasized colon cancer.

In this issue, we honor Shelli's life and report from her home-going Celebration which took place on September 7 at their church in TN where Joe currently serves as Youth Pastor.

Although a large portion of the cancer treatment given to Shelli by the medical community was paid for, either by her insurance company, by grants, or rendered pro bono, there is still app. \$50,000.00 of unpaid medical bills for which her husband, Joe is now responsible.

If you desire to contribute toward this expense, please write the check to The Bridge International and mark it "8336 Sellars Medical Funds". Thank you!

ASDENDUM PAGE 1 — EXCERPTS FROM SHELLI SELLAR'S JOURNAL

January 23, 2010

I've been thinking a lot this week about a verse so many of us know, Jeremiah 29:11-13. In The Message it says, **"I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed. God's Decree. I'll turn things around for you."** Now I know that's not the translation we're all used to, but just look at how incredible it is! Read it again! God KNOWS what He's doing... He's got it ALL planned out... He's NOT abandoned or neglected me... The dreams He put on my heart forever ago are STILL in the works! I've just got to seek Him, trust Him, love Him, wrap my life around Him. He's gonna turn this thing around and make all things good just like He promised in **Romans 8:28**! Of course, I realize that His definition of good might not match my own concept of what's good for me (His ways are higher than mine, you know), BUT... I can rest, knowing that He'd never allow anything to touch me if it wasn't somehow for the best....

No, I don't understand. I'm not going to pretend I do. And, I don't like it. It wasn't fun as I struggled with a simple 5-mile hike today, because the tennis ball in my lung just kept blocking my air. I felt defeated and afraid, and very, very frustrated. However, as my son said, "You can do it, Mom!" over and over and over, I remembered where my strength comes from. No, it's not easy... but it's doable. I'm not alone! The joy of the Lord is my strength!!! He's the one carrying me, and He's not going to drop me! Ever! Our hike ended with lots of silly laughter and goofiness... and so much hope! We pushed through, did it... and finished with smiles on our faces! Thanks for hiking with us!

January 27, 2010

Well, the same story is retold in **Matthew 7:14-20**, and, in **verse 20**, Jesus actually addresses that question, saying that the disciples didn't have enough faith. Hmmmm, could make you wonder. BUT! Two things stand out to me. First of all, notice that Jesus directed that statement to His disciples, to His ministers, to the ones who were praying for the boy, not to the father, to the one in need. Friends, there is grace! There is room for emotions and times of weakness... especially for those who are in the midst of the battle!

Belief is not a synonym for perfection, never-wavering, or always being some huge giant of faith! In fact, secondly, look at how little faith they (the disciples) actually needed (I wonder if the father might have needed even less)- a teeny, tiny, itty, bitty, little, wittle mustard seed's worth. Amazing! How small is that?! Yes! Faith is absolutely needed for anything we ask of God, but... He sees the heart. He sees that spark of belief, of hope, of trust, of faith... and... He's there, ready to help us in our times of need.

God is so good! His promises are forever and His faithfulness never ever ends!!! And THAT'S what we can bank on!!!! It's not about how much faith we have, but about how faithful HE is!!! Count on it! Count on His love and faithfulness to you... no matter what your situation or troubles. He is there for you!!!

February 11, 2011

Think about how God has prepared me for this challenge:

He has always faithfully and lovingly led me through hard times in my life, and though this is the biggest challenge I've ever faced, He's made me tough, adventurous and fearless. I AM BRAVE & COURAGEOUS!

He directed me on a journey of health, helping me lose over 100 pounds in 2007, and, even more miraculous, maintain it

ADDENDUM PAGE 2 — EXCERPTS FROM SHELLI SELLAR'S JOURNAL

over the past two years, bringing me to a place of great fitness. I was teaching aerobics and training for half marathons before all this hit! I AM PHYSICALLY STRONG!

In Fall 2008, He even warned me of a physical crisis to come, instructing me to stay healthy at all costs to "get through" it. I AM WALKING IN KNOWLEDGE & OBEDIENCE!

He made me a person of laughter and smiles. I CHOOSE JOY!

He brought me to a place of great support and help, giving me a fantastic family and an incredible church and group of friends all over the world. I AM NOT ALONE!

And... most incredible of all...I AM CONVINCED OF HIS LOVE!!!

June 16, 2011

I'm finding it hard to rejoice.... Here I am, poised to give God so much glory for the amazing thing He's done in my life, and though I am immensely grateful, knowing that it's only by His grace, I'm finding it hard to celebrate....

I'm torn with pain for those hurting around me, and even... if you can believe this... guilt for being the one still here. Though I still need it, I don't even want to ask anyone to pray for me anymore, to help me anymore. What are neuropathy, knee pain and possible heart problems, let alone weight gain and not enough strength to run yet, compared to dying, compared to leaving family and friends... hurting and alone. What right do I have to ask for anything?!

Ugh... what a quandary! But... I'm stuck. Yeah, I know the right things to think, believe and say, but... I'm so dazed right now, only my questions can penetrate.

I'm so glad that God's not afraid of my questions, though, and that even if I never ever understand His answers- or lack thereof- I never have to doubt His love and goodness... to us all... in spite of it all. I'm glad He walks with us through it all.

August 9, 2011

Today, I finally had a good cry & scream fest on the way home, then curled up into a fetal position and slept for an hour, waking up just in time to discover my thoughtful husband was taking me to one of our favorite state parks: Burgess Falls. We hiked a couple miles & relished the beauty of four lovely waterfalls, sitting for at least thirty minutes in the mighty wind and soaking spray of the largest and most spectacular one. How cleansing. How refreshing! While there Joe read Scripture over me, particularly **Isaiah 41:9-13**, the verse God gave me the morning before driving to the hospital for my tests, and then he also prayed for me and sang a worship song over me. We left that place- ready to fight, ready to stand strong regardless of the hurdles before me.

August 25, 2012

Shelli is at total peace with whatever happens. We thought again of **Daniel 3** faith and the situation of the three Hebrew young men. They didn't cry, scream, kick or assault the soldiers binding them to throw them into the furnace. They rested in the peace. They knew that: 1. God was able to save them, 2. He would save them, but...3. **Even if He did not, God is God and He is Good and they would serve Him.**

September 3, 2012

We know our Heavenly Father holds us everyday in His hands. He is holding her so close right now. I have never been more proud of anyone in my entire life as I am of my Bride, my Adventure Buddy, my Best Friend, my Treasure of Treasures. She has touched hearts around the world many times over. If the Lord takes her home today, I think it is strangely appropriate. Today is Labor Day. This is the day that our nation honors those laborers who have contributed to our nation's strength, prosperity and well-being. I believe that describes my wife who has contributed to the kingdom of God most of her entire life.