

## What I’d Have Said at My 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Bash

So, I’m turning seventy this week. That was fast. And Dr. Kari and I were planning a big celebration of her 55<sup>th</sup>, my 70<sup>th</sup> and our 25<sup>th</sup>. But, of course, in 2020 the magic of human proximity is in short supply. So, in lieu of party planning, I started writing. Since I’m far more used to asking about the stories of others, writing a mini memoir about some of my own feels a little indulgent. On the other hand, if you read on, maybe you’ll see yourself in some of what came to me . . .

For as long as I can remember, I’ve lived “a charmed life”: A phrase originated by Shakespeare and clarified by Webster as “*An existence that seems protected by extreme good luck.*” Somewhere I picked up the habit of expecting goodness and grace and good behavior--even in times when my heart has been broken and lost. As President Reagan used to say, when an optimist sees a pile of manure, she thinks, “*There must be a pony around here!*” Truth.

**Charmed** to have been born right in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Happily, it’s always been easy for me to calculate from this round number how old I am. On the way to Sacred Heart Hospital in Eugene, Oregon on November 11, 1950, with his six-days-past-due wife next to him, my nervous Dad had to make a succession of quick turns--first to avoid flooded streets and then to avoid the turn that would have put them in line to join the Veterans Day Parade. **Charmed** because I had him in my life until just three years ago. **Charmed** because I still have my sweet and playful Mom, a woman with lifelong amnesia regarding my faults. This, I’m certain, has helped me to learn what I can from my rough patches, to forgive myself, and to then leave them in my rearview mirror.

**Charmed** because I had a quintessential American childhood filled with sweet relatives, grandparents with a farm and draft horses, costumes at Halloween, Sunday school and a succession of pets beginning with Barney, who understood that his job was to accompany my three-year-old-free-range self on walks up and down Myoak Drive. The accepted fact of the free-range parenting continued through the years, mostly disaster-free.

**Charmed** by Mr. Hibbard at Parkrose High School who gave me a life-long love for our ever-self-critical and ever-self-correcting miracle of a country. He introduced us to the ideas and founding documents behind the best continuous improvement trend line in all of history. I was just a girl (and very unhappy that I couldn’t tryout to be an astronaut in 1968), but I was free. And Mr. Hibbard helped me to begin to trust the trend line, even though I was young and could only see things in present-tense snapshots. I could build a life that mattered. I could join the American trend line. The trend line mattered. **Charmed** even when I graduated from high school in the catastrophic spring of 1968. Reverend King had been assassinated in April, and Bobby Kennedy just two days before we put on our robes and walked across the football field. I remember that our speaker was a dejected adult who seemed to have lost all hope in the trend line. But I also remember that all of life was before those of us who sat poking each other in his audience.

**Charmed** because I got to live a season as a half-hippy, half-sorority woman, environmental activist who for comic relief, dated cowboys with low draft lottery numbers. You could do all of those things simultaneously in Oregon in 1970.

**Charmed** because early-on I became convinced of my Creator’s vast and affectionate presence and interest in my path. And nowhere has the Creativity been so apparent as in the beloved and unique friends and family who have appeared along the way.

**Charmed** because in my first career, I got to think and talk a lot about my Creator, traveling the world with companions with whom I worked hard, played hard and got occasionally scared to death. We adopted a line from an old Vanessa Redgrave movie, “*Work hard. Take chances. Be very bold.*” And we did. It is still a mystery to me that

when a flash-flood in Colorado took the lives of seven of them (the best and the brightest among us), I got to walk away, living on to try and make sense of it. I knew as I stood in a pasture above the flood, watching in the rain as cars and trucks, lights still on, swept by below, that my survival wasn’t necessarily a reward for good behavior. My survival was an invitation to live a life that could be big enough to matter.

**Charmed** because part of my work in those days involved travel in the former Soviet Union with American and Canadian students. In the words of a Russian friend who is still in my life, I learned how much easier it was *“to be a communist in a free society than to try to be a free woman in a communist society.”*

**Charmed** because I finally came to peace with who I am. **Charmed** that twenty-five years ago, Dr. Kari showed up at gay bible study (aka *“Reconnecting with an Old Friend”*). **Charmed** because the Creator gave me a partner who is the most generous and kind and funny person I know. **Charmed** because Dr. Kari brought with her a new chapter of forgiveness, possibility and second chances. And pets. So many pets.

**Charmed** because, though I became a therapist, I figured out that I was an even better coach (whatever that was in 1995). And then **charmed** because I was there at the birth of a new profession. **Charmed** because the vast affectionate Presence seemed to be interested in my walk down that path too.

**Charmed** by a generation of accomplished and purpose-driven men and women who have found their way to my little SeattleCoach enterprise, so that they could be coaches too. They share a grasp of both grace and truth, of knowing both how to support and how to challenge. I adore each of them. And I’ve told each of them my vision, that *“if this coaching thing works, your children’s children’s lives will be sweeter.”*

**Charmed** about the new kind of social fabric this tribe of people is co-creating. Daily, they confirm my hunch: that in a free country, anyone with grit can become an exemplary person with a compelling story and a service that the world needs.

**Charmed** because, though I failed to reproduce, Coaching has become a pathway for me to leave behind some things that are big enough to matter.

**Charmed** to be on the receiving end of so much goodness when cancer came and I did not die.

Seventy. My neuroscientist pal, John Medina tells me, *“Don’t retire!”* OK. I won’t. And I don’t anticipate that my **charmed** status will change. I do anticipate that I will continue to refine what I do and how I do it.

Did you see yourself in my mini memoir? If you’ve read this far, I hope you did. You’re one of the people who has brought so much of the charm and goodness to my life. And I’m grateful.

