



Celebration of Life for Patricia Telles-Irvin

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on June 14, 2019**



This eulogy was delivered to those in attendance at the Celebration of Life for Patricia Telles-Irvin held at the Alice Millar Chapel in Evanston, IL on Friday, June 14, 2019.

Patricia Telles-Irvin.

Daughter of Ambassador and Delfina Telles, sister of Cynthia, wife to Don, mother to Daniel, grandmother to Isabella, leader for many, role model for more, beloved friend for countless others, including me.

Cancer has taken you physically, but your spirit resides deeply in our souls, forevermore.

The grief that makes us one this afternoon is bound by a sadness that has become all too familiar for those of us touched directly or indirectly by mass tragedy, personal calamity or both.

When I visited Patricia at her home on May 30, I was struck by how in her waking moments, she tried to comfort me in my *apparent* emotional fragility.

There she was. The beautiful daylight floating through the upstairs bedroom windows, surrounded by her loving sister, caregivers Maria and Lala, and Clownie, the faithful clown doll who had been Patricia's nearly constant companion since her very early childhood. Then...the call from Daniel and Amanda came in from Maine – Patricia's granddaughter was born!

I am so grateful that I could bear witness to Patricia's revived joy and rising hope. The birth of her granddaughter. An iPad transmitted miracle of the new *life*, not just any new life. A flesh and blood descendant – I wish you could have been there with me.

That fleeting moment gave me added strength and confidence. Strength and confidence in the transcendence of the human spirit and the renewal that is enabled from generation to generation – *l'dor vador*.

Her joy...her glow...those unforgettable moments...and now this.

What is it about the passing of a family member or a dear friend that clears the mind, reminds us of all that is important?

We have lost a soul who made us better. We have lost a person who always gave comfort. We have lost an individual who gave respect. A dignified lady who took responsibility. A worthy human being who improved the human condition.

The author David Brooks has some guidance from his book on Character...this is why we are grieving hard about our Patricia:

She radiated inner-light. She was *deeply* good. She listened well. Her patience was virtuous. She made me us feel valued. She celebrated us, not her, and *she awakened in us the better angels that we aspire to be.*

Patricia had character about her – a *genuine inner essence* that many of us would like to possess. A genuine elegant effervescence that few of us can attempt, much less sustain – day after day, month after month, and year after year.

So...we grapple with the absence of her physical presence.

In this selfie and big me era, Patricia had a unique inner compass and persona that gave her an authenticity that most of us – including me – might strive for but will rarely achieve.

So...we grieve because we will never again have the gift to share in the glory of her authenticity.

Patricia's unique original self (Brooks, p. 249) is the glue that holds this assembly together as one this afternoon. This unique original self will be the foundation of all the memories that you and I cherish about our Patricia

If this university has a moral ecology, Patricia is surely one of its pillars because of her unique original self. Such was the case when she graced our halls at Florida International University.

Very few people have this gift. Even fewer can share it so consistently and effortlessly.

The legacy that Patricia bequeaths us challenges us to hope that her memory will enable us, that it will improve us, and that it will make us stronger and better human beings.

John O'Donohue answers my search for the answer to the opening question – in an unsatisfactory way – but nonetheless it is an answer:

“No one knows
What has been taken from you
When the silence of absence deepens...”

When the *silence of absence* deepens...

Patricia set a standard in selflessness that was so high, it forces us all to re-think what is important in our lives.

No one or nothing can rob us of the sustaining impact of her being.

A friend, a coach, a mentor, a colleague, the most decent of people.

But why does it take the passing of a friend, a loved one, to move us to rededicate ourselves to what really counts?

Because none of us really want to come to grips with the silence of the absence of our Patricia.

Patricia – thank you. We love you. We miss you.

We celebrate you even as we hold you deep in our hurting hearts.

Mark B. Rosenberg is president of Florida International University (FIU). He had the privilege of working with Patricia Telles-Irvin during the eleven years that she served in a variety of leadership positions at FIU.