

Kristie's Thank You on behalf of Joie

To my and Joie's family, friends and colleagues,

On Joie's and my behalf, I wanted to say a few words but knew I would be unable to speak. Please know that now, and throughout Joie's and my life together and I know even before I knew my husband, the thoughts, prayers and support from each of you touched our hearts and brought joy to our lives.

Before I knew Joie, many of you were there against his first fight with death. You gave blood, you comforted his family, you eased his pain.

Then for almost four years, while he lived out of the country, pushed his body and mind to their limits and completed his veterinary education, you were all offering your prayers, providing things for his schooling and our home, and encouraging both of us while we were apart from each other for but a few weeks a year.

We thought the struggle was over. We talked about how we had finally reached the light at the end of the tunnel. We thought that if we fought for those almost four years that we could then resume a normal life when they were over... A life like everyone else has. Where you actually get to see and spend time with your families, do things on the weekend, relax around the house once in a while. We knew that everyone had done so much for us over the years and we were relieved that we could finally stop asking for favors and finally start doing for others. We had dreams. Those dreams, at least most of them, are sadly now gone.

My time with my husband was precious. Although many know we fought hard, we loved even harder. There's nothing we wouldn't do for each other or together to make our dreams a reality. Our plan was to grow old together, as we both understood the value of marriage and took our marriage very seriously. I thought that as Joie got older, we would have to address problems with his health. But I certainly didn't consider 34 old...

I felt deeply loved by my husband and I know that he deeply loved his friends and family. And he admired, respected and wanted to make his colleagues proud.

I wanted to thank some people specifically. Please understand I've become very adept at drawing blanks and having trouble forming complete sentences in the last couple of days, so please forgive me if I leave anyone out.

I would like to thank:

Memaw for raising Joie, being his "rock", encouraging him and sacrificing every part of herself to help him recover from meningitis and resume a normal life

Gay Ballentine for being like a sister to Joie, for supporting him, for being there for us as a couple, for being our "hero" in times of emergency

All of Joie's family and my family for coming to his side (and our's) when we needed you and supporting him through every part of his life.

Dr. John, Suzanne, Brett and Michael Phillips for offering a refuge for Joie's family in their time of need while Joie was hospitalized in Austin and for bringing Joie's black lab, Austin, into his life

Mike Pierce for introducing Joie to the world of hunting retrievers

Chuck Macklin, Terry Fowler and Rob White for their strong friendship and support of Joie in his early hunting and dog training endeavors

My best friend in the world, Michele Clifton, and her husband, Ron, who were constant friends and cheerleaders for me and Joie – and who would drop anything at a moment's notice to be great friends.

All of our clients for their continued support of our business.

KIRsten Davis (not KRISTin) and Melissa Barnett for giving me peace of mind, knowing that the dogs and kennels are well cared for in my absence, for being a great team and for always giving me the time I needed to be away from the kennels in crisis, especially now.

The staff at Ross University and University of Illinois that cared deeply about Joie and his condition, that coached him through his schooling and career decisions and that supported him in his efforts.

The students at Ross University and University of Illinois that provided friendship, support, encouragement and camaraderie. He talked about you all the time and your friendship meant the world to him.

Dr. Williamson and Dr. Ossterreicher at Carrollton Animal Hospital. I'm not sure if you know just how badly he wanted to make you proud of the work he did for you. He had great respect for both of you. Probably his biggest frustration with his struggles these last few months was that it was impacting his work. He really felt like he let you down. He wanted so badly to do well for you and the hospital. And he was so excited about the new clinic and the opportunities you had given him.

The Staff at Carrollton Animal Hospital – He was so relieved to show you all just what he had to deal with on a daily basis. He felt that you all showed compassion and understood and were concerned. That meant a great deal to him. I know he could be difficult in his most painful times. So did he, and he wanted nothing more than to provide great medicine as a team with you all.

To everyone here who was touched by Joie in some way, your presence warms the hearts of me and our family.

From the moment I met my husband, which was over the telephone from 700 miles away, I knew he was the man I was going to marry. I'm not sure why I knew that, except that I felt the Lord had led me to him for some reason. And he felt the same. We were born and raised at opposite ends of the country, yet our grandparents grew up together in south Georgia. My great grandfather was his family doctor. Our families went to school together, went to dances together, picked peaches together. Joie's

uncle worked a block away from my college internship in Washington, DC. The only reason that I actually got to initially meet Joie was because Congress had shut down in the fall of 1995 and I had no work to do for my internship. His uncle had called my boss to find someone to help Joie find sponsorship for his Paralympic endeavors. That someone was me. God sent us so many signs that it was clear he had a plan for us together. Again, by divine intervention, I received a job with Coca-Cola during the Olympics. Joie's first response was "why don't you stay with me when you come down here?". And that was it. We had already fallen in love from miles and miles away. Our families joke about the phone bills. But it was worth every penny.

The Lord moved in our lives in so many ways, we lost count. We watched for signs from God and we saw them. He was always there for us no matter how difficult things got and we rested on our faith throughout the various difficulties of our lives together. There was nothing we couldn't get through between us and our faith. His strengths were my weaknesses and my weaknesses were his strengths. We undoubtedly completed one another. Joie's recent bout of health issues was our next bridge to cross and I'm devastated that we couldn't cross it together.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Joie said "we should make a movie about our life". And my response was "but, honey, we don't know how it's going to end" and he chuckled. And he talked about having children, like he always did. And how badly he wanted to get himself straight so we could proceed with that next part of our lives together. We were excited to see where our lives would take us and here we are today.

His sense of humor carried us through a lot of difficult times. We were silly together, almost to a fault, sometimes I know annoying the folks around us. We didn't care. We were always in our own little world having a good time. We would do silly things like make breakfast for each other, but deliver it with some sort of utensil that made it impossible to eat – like cereal bowls that looked like they had a spoon in them, but actually had a butter knife. We wrestled around a lot and played, one time getting ourselves wedged between a hotel room bed and the wall both on our backs on top of each other (thank God Joie was on the bottom), laughing so hard we about passed out, trying to dig ourself out of the hole. We nicknamed that the "beetle" and would later on in our lives roll around on our backs waving our arms and legs, laughing while we said "beetle, beetle". And it didn't stop in public. So many times we shopped, Joie would be at the front of the buggy checking out. I'd be at the back. And he'd say "hey strange lady, get out of my groceries. Why are you following me?". And, although he didn't feel like women would be attracted to him, they absolutely were. And I'd get a chuckle out of watching his interactions while I was standing off and he was having a conversation or interacting with a woman who didn't know I was there. One time, he was up at the salad bar of a restaurant and I was at the table. And as he approached the salad bar, I saw an attractive lady look him up and down and then put a on a big grin and start talking to him while he was making his salad. I just sat back, watched and giggled. And I gave him a hard time when he got back to the table. He always got a kick out of how nothing like that made me jealous. But it was because I knew how much he loved me and I had nothing to worry about.

My husband meant everything to me and I would have done anything for him. He was a great man with a great sense of humor. He could make everyone laugh. He worked and fought hard for all of his accomplishments in life, not the least of which was his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree. He was a stubborn guy in more ways than one. Living with him, it was easy to take for his disability for granted. He never stopped, he never slowed down. He did not hide from his disability nor was he ashamed of it. We joked about it openly and in public, calling him "gimpy" or "handicapped". There was no reason to be ashamed of it, for it did nothing to stop him. It was almost like it didn't even exist most of the time. He was a very strong spirit with a strong heart.

In the darkest of times, in the deepest of frustration, at the most painful times, Joie would question how long he could physically hold out. These times were not often, but his pain and suffering were deep. He had us all fooled most of the time, because he carried himself as if nothing was wrong. But there were moments where he admitted how difficult his life was and how he had not entirely come to grips with what had happened to him. As his wife, I wish that I could have taken away that pain from every part of his body and mind. But it was not my job to do. Instead, the Lord has provided him eternal relief from his condition. And while we are devastated by his loss, we can find solace that he is free from the pain and suffering of his Earthly body.

Joie, baby, I miss you so much. I cannot wait to see you again. You have given me such great memories and built so much around me to remember you by. You touched so many people, you just don't even know. I don't think you would have ever imagined the outpouring you would receive at the time you left this Earth. I'm proud of you baby and I always will be. I know you struggled and fought to make me happy and to make a life for us. I have always respected you deeply, admired your perseverance and loved you more than words can say. I'm so thankful and proud to have had you as my husband.