

In Memoriam: My Friend Ken

Ken Schmidt, 1963-2004

A Tribute by Laran Snyder

Just wanted to let you know that my friend, photographer and music lover, Ken Schmidt's body was found from the river today, July 12, 2004. He died yesterday in a Kayaking accident off of the Guadalupe River near Comfort, Texas. I kept hope all along that he would somehow make it but it would not come to pass.

Several times today, I had what felt to be encounters with Ken, telling me he was okay and that he was indeed gone. I saw a butterfly. It flew around me and stayed a while. It wasn't until I got in my car and drove off that it flew away. I even said hello and whispered to it. Butterflies are symbolic, you know, of transformation and new life. No matter what your belief, that beautiful butterfly was Ken showing off his fresh wings in a peaceful hello of fluttering and whispering about, "I am okay, in time, you will be too".

I mourn. I ache and cry. My heart is breaking for my good childhood friend Candace Kunz, the lover and love of a lifetime Ken left behind. Helpless is how I feel, wanting to reach out and comfort her, hold her and let her cry. She is surrounded by friends, though and she is said to be taking Ken's departure better than others, or at least at times it seems that way to her mom. Ken always said that he didn't see himself living much longer past his 40th birthday. Ken had freshly turned 41. Still, no amount of warning can prepare you for the heartache, heartbreak and a jagged tear of this loss of a beautiful light in the world. Many people, people who may not have even known him may feel a bit off for the next while. They may not know why, but I tell you it is because one of our precious lights of life was extinguished and that brilliance can not ever be relit.

All we need do, as humans, is watch the fire flies mating on the river banks in the summer, wish upon the stars and look into the eyes of the man in the moon, to remember the light we still have, the love and laughter that Ken left in all of our hearts. Those who knew him well and those who had the honor to meet him, once upon a dream ago.

There are many reasons I am writing this. I remember Ken's smile and laugh. I remember the way he looked at Candace. My memory is full of glimpses and footage that I don't even recall mentally recording. It is funny how that all comes to you. I think of the photographs that Schmidt took of me and one I used for my senior recital invitations and programs.

More and more, on and on. The joy, watching Ken and Candace dancing in their kitchen to a little CD player, one night after having a pot-luck and guitar pickin' out at Luckenbach. My last memory of Ken, though was when he hugged me and said, "Hey baby, good mornin'", in one of his beautiful Hawaiian shirts at the Kerrville Folk Festival, before he was to leave to go back to California for a photo shoot.

My typing fingers could go on and on, but I guess that my story will end here, at least for the time being. I have learned that when I am not sure how or what I am feeling, writing it out becomes good self therapy and gets self awareness a flowin'. I apologize if this email journal seems inappropriate. All I know is that Ken touched many a life and I know his spirit will surround all that wish to be held and comforted. Peace and love be in your heart.

Laran Snyder

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