

## Living with an Angel; Living without My Angel

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My wife, Shelly, was an angel. I mean that, of course, in a figurative sense. In fact, Merriam-Webster offers up for *angel*: a person who is good, kind, beautiful, etc. I could elaborate at length on the *etc.*, but let's just stick to *good*, *kind* and *beautiful*. Any one of you who has read any of the essays in these pages will have no doubt that Shelly was good, kind and beautiful.

The numerous pictures of Shelly in the photos section prove unassailably that she was a stunningly beautiful creature – from when she was a young girl right up until the time she died. But Shelly's beauty was more than physical. Her nature, disposition and personality were as beautiful as her lovely face. Again, Messrs. Merriam & Webster on *beauty*: the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person...that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit. Indeed, Shelly's innate goodness and kindness were always in evidence as she moved through life: interacting with friends or co-workers, bestowing love and generosity on her family members, doing favors – instinctively, and without calculation – for strangers as well as relatives and friends. And always with a smile – that beautiful smile, which is again so evident in the accompanying photos. These qualities undoubtedly gave pleasure to those on the receiving end of her sweet and kind nature. Thus, according to the definitions above, Shelly was angelic.

Did I know this explicitly? Yes and no! Her beauty – both physical and “spiritual” – were totally evident from the moment I met her. As I've explained in other essays, it was my great good fortune that Shelly chose to bestow her angelic gifts on me as her mate. It was impossible not to see the physical beauty; and only the densest interlocutor would fail to note her profound spiritual beauty. How wonderful that I got to live my life (55 years together) in the constant company of such a marvelous human being. So why did I say “yes and no?” Because I fear that as the years went by, I fell into a not so surprising trap. I took her for granted.

Yes I always knew how precious her beauty was and that she had chosen to share it and her life with me. And at innumerable times over the years, I noted to myself – and, not often enough, to her – how beautiful and kind I thought she was. But when one is exposed to the same beauty day after day after day, for decades, it is very hard to continually note that anything special is going on. For me, it became standard fare.

Which brings me to the title. I believe I've explained how it was to live with an angel. It was heavenly! How is it to live without her? Well, first of all, Shelly's illness was very swift – three months from diagnosis to death. And much, if not most, of the time was spent dealing with her care, which was very intense. We had some time to talk right after the diagnosis – during which conversations, I assured her that she was the most beautiful person (in both the physical and

spiritual senses) by far that I had ever encountered. And I thanked her for bestowing the gift of her beauty upon me. But I could not find the words to adequately apologize for not having told her that every day of our lives together.

Those of you who have lost the love of your life understand what I experience daily living without Shelly – the emptiness, the sorrow, the longing, the anxiety, all of which comprise my grief over the loss. In some ways, it has softened in the two years since Shelly died. In other ways, it remains as intense as ever. Those of you fortunate enough not to have suffered such a loss probably do not comprehend – although, you may have gained some understanding from my essays, or from other bereavement literature. But the difficulty of living without Shelly is exacerbated by my regret that I didn't tell Shelly *every* day of our lives how beautiful she was. For two years now, I've "told" her so virtually every hour. But living without the physical presence of my angelic wife is rendered very difficult by my uncertainty as to whether she can hear me.