

When is the right time to die? My wife lost another sister this morning.



Jen's soul shined through in her art. Along with her love of horses.

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe... Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion... I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain... Time to die.

One of the great lines from cinema, delivered towards the end of Blade Runner, by a replicant that chose to live as human. He actually "lived", as an android, for only a few short years, but experienced far more in those few years than 99% of us would in in normal lifespan. Implied was that Roy (the android) was "ready" to die because he'd lived a full life.

Sweeping and heroic prose, but real life doesn't work that way.

This morning, my wife, Karen, received a message that her sister Jen, who's been fighting breast cancer for some time, and for whom it had become a losing battle, had died. Tomorrow would have been her birthday. My wife had planned to call Jen on her birthday to see how she was doing, and say good-bye, but as things go, these two sisters didn't talk a whole lot and Jen started shutting down a couple weeks ago. Karen wonders why Jen died the day before she was going to call her. Karen wonders why God would not want her to have the chance to say good-bye. And what is it that someone would die just a day before their birthday anyway?

I don't think it works that way. I think, after a long and painful illness, when you've become dependent upon morphine to control most of the pain, there is probably some comfort to be had in no longer focusing on a "goal" but rather accepting the peace that might come from letting go. It's really not about everyone else. It's not about mending relationships or helping people seek closure. I don't know when the time for that ends, but pretty sure that, for those in chronic pain, we, the family, the friends, our only job is to wipe the slate clean ourselves and allow them to move on in peace.

You hear all the stories about someone given a short time to live and yet somehow they manage to make it well past that, allowing them to see a grandchild's birth or a daughter's wedding or some such. I'm sure it does sometimes happen. I think my father was happy that he lived long enough to spend some times with his first grandchild, Becky. But at some point one needs to let go of goals, especially those expressed by others, and nobody should feel bad about it.

It's rough for Karen. She lost her Mom to breast cancer many years ago, her #2 sister to the same cancer... 11 years ago? And now #4 sister, the youngest, today. And Karen herself has been through three separate instances of breast cancer, so far. Karen's the "lucky" one (ok, actually that would be sister #3, Kristi, who's not had cancer at all) in that she's been pretty healthy despite it all, and no indication it's ever spread. Ironically crossing our fingers on that one, as she went in for a routine scan yesterday and they did come up with a very small spot on a lung they want to take a look at, so small that it's difficult to biopsy. She was asked if she'd like to just wait a few months and get another scan, see if it grows, vs have a biopsy now. To the doctors, they don't see a whole lot of difference between the two options, since the spot is so small (they don't see it as much of a threat regardless of what it is). But Karen's always chosen more-aggressive treatment options, which has paid off so far, and we don't see a reason to change strategies today. Near as we can tell, Karen's end-game is not in sight, and I'm hoping it stays that way for a long time to come.

But when that time does come, for me, for her, for anyone else close, I think I'm slowly learning how best to deal with it, especially for the person moving on. But yeah, I'm going to miss Jen; we communicated often through Facebook, and it was tough knowing what was coming and dropping her an occasional note that went without answer. For the last few weeks I'd tell her what was going

on in my life and ask if there was anything I could do for her, but stopped asking anything of her at least 6 weeks ago. I'd check Facebook Messenger each day to see if she'd checked in, just to know she was still alive. The last time looks like about 12 hours prior. I have more questions than answers, but I'm comforted knowing that she died with her two kids (early 20s) at her side. She had expressed earlier to me that she wanted nothing more than that. She didn't want visitors, and I think I now understand that. She'd probably had a lot of time to think about it. She could choose her own time and it had nothing to do with closure or loose ends or obligations others might have thought to be "normal."