

Joy and sorrow, remembering a much-loved brother-in-law, and other moments from the week (7 Quick Takes)

~1~

This edition of quick takes is dedicated to my niece Elise. I write quick takes every week, and they are always a treat for me, and I get lots of comments. But this week I thought about skipping my quick takes. Still, Elise, who is 10, helped me think of topics to include, so it's only fair that I come through with my end of the bargain. She is a fellow third child, after all.

~2~

I have two new nephews! My sister Treasa and brother-in-law George welcomed twin boys last week, and their sons, Jogues and Xavier, are now one week and one day old. They are adorable, and we feel so very blessed to have them joining the family. I met them this week, and they're so very sweet. My boys are excited to have two new little boy cousins. Everyone is home and doing really well. New babies bring a special joy to a family, and I can't wait to get to know each of them better.

~3~



But it has also been a week of tremendous grief. My sister Maureen's husband, Eric, died suddenly on Tuesday, and we are in shock. It still doesn't seem possible, but yet it's real. We are grieving the loss of a young and much loved husband, father of four, brother-in-law, son, son-in-law, brother, and uncle.

I still remember the night Eric called to tell me he and Maureen were engaged. I was in college, and I ran to answer the phone in my dorm room. I didn't even recognize his name at first when he introduced himself. He very formally told me he had just asked my sister to marry him. I hadn't even met him yet, but he took the time to tell me himself.

That was Eric. He always wanted to make sure things were handled in the right way. I have been thinking of him this week, obviously, because he was always a source of calm and level-headedness, in addition to making me laugh so much. And I have been trying to handle things the way he would have handled them—calmly and with great concern for everyone he would be breaking the news to.



If you knew Eric, you knew what an extraordinary person he was. He was brilliant and kind, always said exactly the right thing at the right time, and was the most fascinating conversationalist.

I have known Eric for more than 20 years, and I never found a topic he couldn't discuss with knowledge and interest. I'll miss his marvelous sense of humor and how he could launch into song-beautifully-anywhere and anytime.

What I will miss the most about Eric, though, was that he loved me exactly as I was. He knew I had my faults and idiosyncrasies. He knew I wasn't perfect. But he accepted me without judgment or expectations that I should improve in some way.

That's how he loved my husband, and how he loved our sons, and how he loved everyone. He had this ability to look at each individual person and see and

appreciate that person just as he or she was. That, to me, is an incredible gift. (I've been looking at old photos, and when I found the one you see at the top of this post, I knew I had to share it, even though it violates my own blogging rule of not including my children's faces. Because that is how I remember Eric looking at my children and his and all his nieces and nephews and his goddaughter in the group photo here-with pride and admiration and joy.)

Please, if you would, keep Eric and his family in your prayers.

~4~



We received the terrible news on Tuesday, and by Wednesday night I was aching to be with my sister and my nephews and nieces (including Elise).

So I took Thursday off from work and drove 3 ½ hours up to New York and 4 ½ hours back so I could spend a few hours with them.

It was absolutely worth it, and the next day I wanted to do it again, but I held off. We had a really good visit, and it was hard to leave.

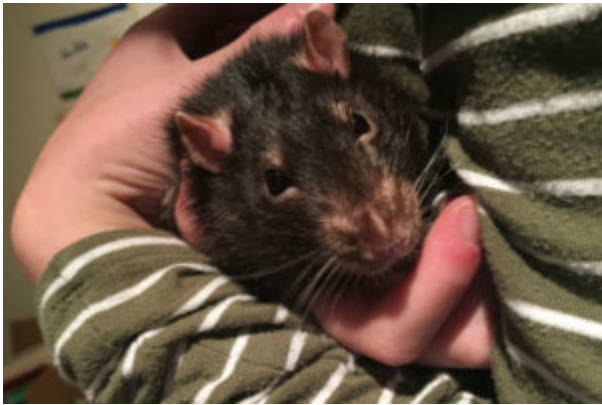
After I got home, I was thinking that I may have needed the drive almost as much as the visit. I needed time alone to think and pray and cry. And to take calls hands-free to share the news. And to send my father a photo of my gas tank from the Chesapeake House rest stop on the way home.

~5~

As I was getting ready to head up to New York that morning, two of my friends appeared with gas station gift cards for my trip. Then one dropped off a delicious chicken pot pie. Another surprised me by booking a hotel room for me for the funeral. And so many friends have reached out to offer to help and to promise to

pray and to express their sympathy. I am overwhelmed and touched and amazed.

~6~



Whenever I visit Maureen's house, I spend time hanging out with their pet rats.

My niece Eileen is the main rat enthusiast, and right now she has five—yes, five—rats.

I met the newest rat, Ryker, and he was friendly and quite large, but my favorite might be Hamlet, who's an oatmeal color.

Ten years ago I would never have thought I would be sitting and stroking a rat and talking to it. But it is hard not to share at least a little bit of Eileen's enthusiasm for these fascinating little creatures. You have to admit, they are pretty cute.

~7~

My sister's wonderful community is surrounding them in support and food. The refrigerator is chock full of food with meals arriving regularly. A few boxes of groceries landed on the porch, and Elise and I laughed at how the labels mysteriously didn't identify the sender. They just said, "To Elise's family from the" and ended there.

We thought we might have to call the company to ask, but my sister glanced at her phone and found a message identifying the generous person who had sent the packages.

Phones solve all. Or at least they solved that mystery.

Thank you for your prayers, and I hope you enjoy the weekend. You can find

more quick takes at Kelly's blog, This Ain't the Lyceum.