



**Liberty Hall  
Lawrence, KS  
A Celebration of Life, Jana Mackey  
July 9, 2008  
Curt Brungardt  
“Eleven Hundred Torches”**

My name is Curt Brungardt. I am Jana’s stepfather. On behalf of Jana’s family – I would like to personally thank each one of you for sharing this day with us. We would especially like to say a big thank you and hug to Jana’s many friends (the porch pals) who have helped us in our grieving over the last several days. The “campaign headquarters” at the Holiday Inn has truly been our sanctuary. In the last few minutes we have all heard many great things about Jana and her incredible life – about her compassion and friendships, about her love for music, and her passion for changing the world.

As one of her parents, I can say with complete confidence that Jana had three qualities that stood above all others: first, she had an uplifting personality – she was fun to be around and having fun to her was a priority and it was serious business (we all loved that about her); second, Jana had tremendous compassion for others – she had endless love for her family and friends, but what separates her from many of us was her unconstrained commitment and compassion for those who are often powerless; third, she had a deep drive for social justice – her work over the last five years is littered with examples of her passion to make “this world a better place.” She was especially passionate about women’s issues and was proud to be known as a “social activist.” What I would like to do in the last few minutes of this ceremony is to talk with you about two things that Jana’s mother and I have discussed in this last week:

- What was the purpose of Jana’s life? and,
- What meaning do we take from her death?

Actually, the answers to these profound questions came to us fairly quickly. First and foremost, the purpose of her life was “to bring joy to others.” She did this in the way she lived her life – the way she engaged in relationships – the way she served others – and in the way she supported and fought for the causes she so strongly believed. As Christie and I reflect, the purpose of Jana’s life was much bigger than her. She believed so deeply about this world, this country, and this state. As a young adult, she was determined “to make a difference” in such a positive way.

Let me share a personal story about my early relationship with Jana. It wasn’t long after I first met her nearly nine years ago, that I recognized a small flame that burned inside her - a flame that would later be defined as a passionate social activist. On the late afternoon of May 20, 2000, I sat across the dining room table from my girlfriend’s daughter – Jana Mackey (it was her high school graduation day). In addition to talking to her about going

to KU, and her love for music and a potential career in that field – I found a young, dynamic person who had a deep desire to do more with her life than just self-satisfaction. In the months leading up to her high-school graduation, we had many conversations about national and international politics – we would visit about important social issues, justice, and fairness – and most importantly our individual roles that we must play. On that day – at that dining room table – I gave her my graduation gift (last Sunday – and eight years later – I found that gift in Jana’s home) {display book}. It’s John Lewis’ book *Walking with the Wind*. (For those not familiar with this book, it is an inspirational account of this country’s civil rights movement.) Let me read to you what I wrote to her on the inside title page: “Jana, Find the courage to change the world – Good luck at KU.” Curtis Two years later, her passion for social issues was matched with the quality people of KU’s Women’s Studies Program, and a social activist was born.

Let me ask and attempt to answer the tough question – Why? Why would God take her away? Why? Why now, at the age of 25? She had so much important work to do. Why? She had just started making a difference. Why? What is the “meaning of her death?” What meaning do we take from her death? We believe the answer is relatively simple – through her death she can touch many more lives. It is our hope, the family’s hope – that her life and her death are motivation for all of us to pick up her torch. That her single torch is now being passed to all of us – one torch has now turned into 1100 torches (we had expected 500 people to be here today – I was just told there are over 1100 people here today) - eleven hundred people seeking to make this world a better place – eleven hundred making a real difference. It is now our responsibility to carry her work forward. It doesn’t matter your politics, we can all find different ways to serve. Most funerals celebrate a person’s life – and yes we do that with Jana. However, that is not enough. That is not enough for her family and it is definitely not enough for Jana (as we all know, Jana always had to be different). This ceremony is not just about honoring and celebrating Jana’s life – it is also a “call to action”. On behalf of Jana, I ask you to serve. I ask you to “make a difference.”

Now please take a moment and close your eyes. Let me ask you this question – are you doing all you can do to serve others? In memory of Jana ask yourself – What can you do to make a difference? I now hand her torch to you. “Take your sadness and your anger and turn these emotions into positive energy for social change.” For Mike, Anita, Christie and myself, her brothers and sisters and her close friends, I ask you to make Jana proud, AND GO DO GREAT THINGS! Jana, we love you.