

Enduring Love

Interview with Cheryl Keller

Jo: *Don't we all love a good love story? Enduring love is something everyone hopes to find in life, whether that be with a life partner or just in friendships that stick around through the tough and the easy times. But what happens when you're not ready to say goodbye? Today on Messages of hope, we talk to Cheryl about her story of love and loss.*

Cheryl: *There'll be swings and roundabouts. You'll be, oh, you're going fine, you know, and then suddenly you won't.*

Part 1: Meeting and Marrying Trevor

Jo: Cheryl, thanks so much for joining us here today. I know you have a beautiful love story to tell about Trevor and yourself and I would really love to be able to hear more about those treasured memories together. Can you tell me how it all started?

Cheryl: Yes, I met Trevor back in 1966. It was the 15th of March, and I was nursing at the Booleroo Centre. I'd been on a broken shift and had come back after lunch and heard that a young man was going to have an appendicectomy in the afternoon, and that he would be prepped and ready by about four o'clock or whatever. And they said, 'oh, his name's Trevor Keller.' And I thought, 'oh, I went to school with Yvonne, his sister!'

So I sort of raced down where he was. And sure enough, it was Yvonne's brother, Trevor, and it was like I was instantly aware of how handsome he was.

Jo: Oh beautiful, love at first sight.

Cheryl: Yes, it was, actually. And after a while I was being teased by the other staff and what have you.

So, what happened was, he had the operation and because I'd come on later in the afternoon, I was chosen to sit with him would you believe, until he woke up.

Jo: Obviously that attraction lasted for quite some time and then you married eventually?

Cheryl: Yes, we married in 1968.

So when we got married, Trevor and his father purchased a farm, and the house was stunning. It was huge, because it had been owned by someone who had six children. We weren't very well off, so we had very bare essentials in this big house, but it was lovely. We didn't have television in those days, so, for being first married, what do you do? But then I found out that Trevor sang. And both of us have always been into music. So we just passed the time away singing. And then people got to know that we did it, and then we were all over the northern area singing at weddings and what have you.

Part 2: Trevor's New Life Direction

Jo: So, Cheryl, you're living on a farm with Trevor, now as a family of four with two daughters, and you're all happy with your life for a number of years. But then Trevor ended up becoming a pastor. That's quite obviously a big change of profession and lifestyle. So how did that all happen and what was that like for you?

Cheryl: Yes, well that's an interesting one. We'd had people from Wycliffe stay with us and we had been really inspired by them and our faith was growing and growing. And just out of the blue one day he came in and said, 'Cheryl, I'm going to have to leave the farm. I feel God's calling me to ministry.'

Jo: Wow, that's a big transition!
So, to become a pastor back then, you had to move to the city to study, right? So, what was that transition like?

Cheryl: We had to sell the house, sell the farm.

It was actually fine, yes. I think wherever you go, you sort of make a go. Angie was already in high school, but our other daughter was going into secondary school. We found a house in two days with an amazing guy that took us to all these houses.

Jo: That's wonderful to hear that you transitioned so well into the city life because I think I would find that a challenge after living the lifestyle.

With Trevor becoming a pastor and having to move into a parish, what was it really like to be the wife of a pastor?

Cheryl: It just felt normal to me. I was a nurse, so, you know, you're always doing things for other people and what have you. And I was really looking forward to it. And I loved being where we were. It was great.

Jo: So once Trevor had done his study in the city and was ordained as a pastor, he ended up back in the country. So, you were in a church there. How did Trevor go in his new profession back in the country again?

Cheryl: Trevor did amazing things because he'd been a farmer, and it was the rural crisis. He didn't expect people to come into his office with because of the amount of men that were having issues because of the drought and lack of income. He went out to the farms, he went on tractors, he was helping with the sheep and doing all sorts of things.

Jo: Tell me a little bit more about this relationship then of him being useful in this community in crisis?

Cheryl: He had two suicides halfway through his ministry. And when he tried to get some help, he had no idea. So Trevor being Trevor, just did it his way. And it was amazing for the families and I think just for the congregation too. And the other thing that happened from that was he realised how much the police are involved with something like that. So, then he went and saw the police and became friendly. And so, he had that relationship as well with the police. But also the doctor, because he just felt, well, how do doctors cope with some of this trauma that they see?

There were two doctors, but he went and saw one in particular. And he came out of that session with him and the doctor running every morning together.

The other thing we did was we joined the local drama group because that's what we were into before, because we had a drama group where we lived. And Trevor played Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, and honestly he was amazing. And him and I did lots of, like, *Annie Get Your Gun* and things like that.

Jo: What a great way to be part of the community.

And I know Trevor was such a character. What did you see in him that made him so likable?

Cheryl: I think because he was gentle, that's one of them. He always listened to people.

And he was very creative. He instigated services by the river, which hadn't been happening before. So he was always going outside of the realm, I suppose.

And he'd always felt that sometimes church was too stiff and starchy, so he always tried to step outside the square a bit and do things that may touch people's hearts.

In all of his ministry, every service and what have you, he always wanted to have something that would connect to people, and not be just a staged managed thing. But, you know, it was something that would touch their heart because that was what he was passionate about.

Jo: I'm hearing a lot about how he cared so much for other people and how he really was quite passionately engaged in his ministry and his love for community, but what was he like in the family context and your relationship?

Cheryl: Trevor was a fantastic husband. What you see is what you get, and even at home, yeah, of course, I mean, like all of us, he'll get, you get angry at some stage or whatever, but he was always helpful. And he was a great father, the girls loved him to bits.

Jo: That's really special.

Part 3: Trevor's Illness and Passing

Jo: So, you mentioned about his illness, so talk me through a little bit more about that. What was the experience for you with Trevor's diagnosis?

Cheryl: He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. And that was going along okay, but then slowly, I could see that he was mentally deteriorating and so he also then had Alzheimer's disease. It wasn't fast, it was sort of a slow deterioration.

Night was awful, it was really, really hard. He was starting to get very agitated every night. And this one night he was really agitated and he was really cross because he wanted Cheryl and he couldn't see that I was Cheryl.

Jo: How did you feel about that?

Cheryl: It was really hard.

In the end I just sort of said, 'I'm a nurse that's come and Cheryl's, look, she's so tired, she looks after you all day, and so I'm this nurse, are you happy to have me here look after you?' 'Oh, yes,' he said.

So I just looked after him as a nurse, and 'as a nurse,' I kissed his forehead and did all those things, and he was quite happy with that.

I felt that that was God's way of using me when you know, it could have been a difficult situation.

This one night, the night that began the beginning of the end I suppose, I'd been up eight times and then got him back to bed and I went to get a glass of water and he must have gotten out of bed again and fell. And I couldn't get him up. So, our beautiful neighbour next door came up in the middle of the night and helped me get him into bed.

And he seemed okay, but the next morning he was in a lot of pain. And obviously he had affected something, probably a hip, and that's what it was.

So, then he went to hospital after that. And he never, ever got out of the bed again.

But one special thing that happened in the hospital - it was near the end of the day and he had to be moved. And I went with him down to it where they did X-rays or whatever they were going to do and it was a room full of people and he was starting to get agitated and what have you.

Anyway, I thought, 'I'll just sing.' So I went close to his ear and started to sing 'Amazing Grace.' And he joined in every verse with harmony.

He was not even with it prior to that and I believe that was a God moment for him.

Jo: There's something quite significant about music and connection to God that I find quite profound.

Cheryl: Absolutely.

And so after that, they couldn't do anything. So, then they suggested palliative care. So we went to the palliative care and it was the most amazing place. He was there for about four days. The day that he passed away, (we didn't realise he would,) there was a lady, it was a Saturday, and she comes in with a cello. And she was playing that beautifully and I said, 'Oh, this is so lovely.' She said, 'Do you like music?' And I said, 'Yes.' And I told her that, you know, my husband did too and he was very unwell. So the lady with the cello came down outside his door and played this beautiful music. I was actually with Trevor on my own. And I just sat with him, and while I was sitting with him, he sort of shuddered and moved, and suddenly he just sort of shuddered, and within that I knew. He was gone.

Part 4: Life After Trevor's Passing

Jo: With Trevor's passing, there's this whole new phase of life now that you're moving into. So, talk me through a bit more about what it was really like for you after he had passed away.

Cheryl: I got through going to the funeral, but it's when you go home and you're alone that that's hard. And there's so much to do after someone passes away. All these things you have to let people know and cancel. And it was easy for me in the beginning because my sister stayed with me for a while and she was wonderful. But once she went, I really missed Trevor. I missed him being on the other side of the bed.

Jo: You're talking about the aloneness.

Cheryl: Yeah

Jo: How did you get through that?

Cheryl: I battled on and battled on until my daughter said, 'I think you need to see a counsellor.'

So I went down to a counsellor and we talked and talked and she was so lovely. She said, 'look, it could take a long time, but you just take a day at a time and there'll be swings and roundabouts. You'll be, oh, you're going fine, you know, and then suddenly you won't. A lot of people just want to get rid of everything. So they get rid of everything out of the house. All their clothes, all their shoes, anything that reminds them of the person.'

And I said, 'oh no, I just want him there!'

Jo: Are there any other things that, the counsellor has been able to share with you that has helped you or you feel like that's the resilience building?

Cheryl: One of the things she said: 'to be alone but not lonely.' And I think that's where I am now. I think I've come to terms with the loneliness, but it doesn't get me down anymore.

Jo: So how has, God been a part of this process for you as well?

Cheryl: He's been all in all, really. The funeral, you know, he really helped me through that. That was huge with the amount of people, it was massive and it was overwhelming. But he helped me through that, and I just think he helps me every day.

Jo: You're talking about God being right there with you.

Cheryl: Yes.

Jo: So, what does it actually look like for you?

Cheryl: It's not actually looking like, it's probably feeling. I feel him. I feel his presence very strongly. And no matter what I do, I feel him with me. Even if I'm out in the garden, I talk to him about, you know, 'oh, these beautiful flowers you created, I'm probably not pruning them as well as I should.' For me he's like my very best friend.

Jo: Do you have a particular Bible verse that has carried you through this?

Cheryl: Yes. It is, 'Be still and know that I am God.' And I have found that that has just been amazing for me, through all of this.

Jo: For listeners who are going through the loss of a loved one or have, are experiencing that sense of a love enduring that is now gone, what have you learned that could be helpful?

Cheryl: Trust in the Lord and lean on his own understanding. I mean, I've always done that, but I've learned that more and more.

I've learned that tears are okay. Have a good cry if you need to, it's healing.

I've learned that I can be okay on my own. I've come through a period where I've just felt I can't do this, but I can. And I only can because God is with me. His rod and staff, they comfort me.

Jo: That's beautiful to know that he's your constant companion.

Part 5: Conclusion

Jo: So in all the things that you have gone through Cheryl, where have you found the most hope?

Cheryl: I've found hope in knowing that nothing's ever hopeless, because you have swings and roundabouts when you lose someone. And sometimes you're fine, sometimes you're not.

But now I just feel so much stronger. And I think that's helped me. Going to a counsellor has helped that. But also, my own faith.

But also, the way God ministers to me through his word. And words like 'be still and know that I am God' are really important to me.

And, every day, I hear the birds and I think, 'Oh Lord, the birds are up and they're happy. And I'm happy too because I've got you and no matter what, you're the best thing I can have.'

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