



## Saving the Best for Last

### Bless This Marriage: Wish Fulfilled Despite Illness

Samatra C. Doyle, MN, ARNP

Attending a patient's wedding was a career first, to say the least. The groom, an older gentleman, and his bride of a similar age had known each other for 35 years—and been in love for the last 10 of those. The couple came to Seattle initially for the surgical management of neurofibromatosis, which unfortunately had transformed into metastatic malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumor. He was admitted to one of the university's hematology/oncology floors. Unfortunately, no curative interventions were available to this gentleman, and plans were being made to discharge him home. His amazing fiancée was his advocate, friend, companion, and source of humor and levity during this tragic and horrible situation. She made him laugh, held his hand, kissed him, and took care of his personal needs, all while being remarkably put together and kind hearted. It was a sight to see—that selfless commitment and love.

The couple had planned to get married at some point in the future but, when it became apparent that the future was suddenly quite finite, it was their wish to be legally married as soon as possible. Personally, it was an honor to be present at the wedding. Another medical service had sent flowers, and the palliative care team was in attendance to witness the ceremony. In addition, the bride's adult children were in attendance, one of whom acted as the wedding photographer. The nurses from the hematology/oncology department had gathered signatures on a congratulatory card and purchased a cake and apple cider (and wine glasses, of course) to celebrate the occasion.

The patient, although bed bound, emaciated, and at times slightly disoriented,

was fully present during his wedding. He could not wait to kiss his bride, and they held hands the entire time. He wore a clean t-shirt and hospital pants; she wore a lovely blouse and skirt, and a friend had provided her with a simple bouquet. He sat up in bed, while his bride stood next to him, holding his hand. The chaplain

came to perform the ceremony, and, as a group, we all said “bless this marriage” at the appropriate time.

The couple then exchanged their vows, which had almost everyone in the room in tears or, at least, misty eyed. Through his slightly labored breaths and clipped sentences, his cachectic and ashen face,



Copyright 2012 iStockphoto.com/Pali Rao

*The following is the ceremonial poem by Fritz Hull spoken by the chaplain and attendees. The poem is reprinted here with permission.*

We call upon all that we hold most sacred to **bless this marriage.**

We call upon the earth, our planet home, with its beautiful depths and soaring heights, its vitality and abundance of life, and together we ask that it **bless this marriage.**

We call upon the mountains, the high valleys and meadows filled with wild flowers, the snows that never melt, the summits of intense silence, and we ask that they **bless this marriage.**

We call upon the waters that rim the earth, horizon to horizon, that flow in our rivers and streams, that fall upon our gardens and fields, that fill our ponds and pools, and we ask that they **bless this marriage.**

We call upon the land which grows our food, the nurturing soil, the fertile fields, the abundant gardens and orchards, and we ask that they **bless this marriage.**

We call upon the forests, the great trees reaching to the sky with earth in their roots and heaven in their branches, the fir and the pine, the cedar and the maple, and we ask them to **bless this marriage.**

We call upon the moon and the stars and the sun, who govern the rhythms and seasons of our lives and remind us that we are a part of a great and wondrous universe, and we ask them to **bless this marriage.**

We call upon all those who have lived on this earth, our ancestors and our friends, who dreamed the best for future generations, and upon whose lives our lives are built, and with thanksgiving, we call upon them to **bless this marriage.**

We call upon the family and friends and all those who love and cherish and sustain this couple, and ask that together we **bless this marriage.**

And lastly, we call upon the power and presence that asks us to become greater than ourselves so that the one may become two and the two may become one, and all together, we **bless this marriage.**