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How to take a soul picture

Joyce Rupp | Jul. 3, 2012 Soul Seeing

Several weeks ago I made a trip to Kansas to visit a friend who has lung cancer. We had little contact with one another for a number of years and I sensed our visit would be a special one. Little did I know how special. When I arrived in Topeka I learned that Ken's wife, Bibi, had taken him to the emergency room that morning because of severe chest pains. I hurriedly drove to the hospital, hoping we could have some quality time together. Indeed, we did. I found Ken to be as I remembered: gentle, optimistic, loving and faith-filled. Fortunately he had not lost his sly sense of humor either.

When I was readying to say goodbye, Ken asked if he could take a picture of me and would I stand at the foot of his bed. A bit puzzled (knowing he had no camera), I proceeded to do so. "There," he chuckled, "just perfect." Then he asked me if I would stand there quietly for a minute. As I did so, Ken gazed at my face with a soft smile. In turn, I gazed back at him. That's how we took "photos" of one another.

As I looked in silence at Ken's face, my gaze moved to focus on his eyes. It was as if I could enter the light there and see far beyond his physical being, to a sphere of pure love. When the minute was over and Ken thanked me, I responded, "I'm awed. I think there was a moment when I saw your soul." I know he understood.

After I returned home I sent Ken a note and affirmed his beautiful approach to remembering a friend. Here is the email I received in return: "I got out of the hospital on Saturday and every now and then I take your picture out and look at it. I did not wear it out though and I cannot lose it. I can look at it any time, even in the dentist chair and he never says a word. He just keeps drilling."

Later that week Ken sent me another note when I asked him if I could share his "taking a picture" with my readers: "Sure, Joyce, you can use that simple little picture thing. It's easy. Flowers are great subjects. Just take a time exposure in your mind. Close your eyes. Review your picture with the real subject and it is secured. Once in a while you can take out your album for review. And at night you can get lots of memories, laughs and good times. Human subjects are best. It has to be a time exposure though or it doesn't work. No copyright rules apply. Oh, I forgot. Beginners should avoid time exposures of wild beasts, advancing tornadoes, and spiders."

One day as I was taking out my "photo" of Ken, I recalled a section in John O'Donohue's book *Anam Cara* where he describes the human face as "an artistic achievement." The Irish poet goes on to write: "On such a small surface an incredible variety and intensity of presence can be expressed. ... There is always a special variation of presence in each one. Each face is a particular intensity of human presence. ... When you return again and see the face you love, at this moment you enjoy a feast of seeing. In that face, you see the intensity and depth of loving presence looking toward you and meeting you."

Since being with Ken I am taking more soul pictures of those I care about. I'm relishing my growing photo album. It truly is "a feast of seeing."

May it be so for you as well.

[Joyce Rupp is a Servite sister, retreat and conference speaker, and author of numerous best-selling books, most recently *Fragments of an Ancient Name*. Her website is www.joycerupp.com.]

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