



Derek and Carina in 2022.

## LAMENT FOR A WIFE



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*Derek Schuurman is a new Opa and loved Carina Schuurman deeply. He will miss her editing suggestions for his monthly CC columns.*

WE FIRST MET when we were both first-year university students. Carina was a fine arts major at the new campus of Redeemer College, and I was an engineering major at a nearby university. I had travelled to Redeemer to visit some friends and I can still picture the spot in the hallway where our eyes first met. Our first date was a barn dance in Blyth, Ontario, and our first kiss was in the living room of Redeemer's dorm 7. Carina later told me she was "smitten" when she first met me; I have no idea what I had to "smite" her with, but I thank God he brought us together. She was the most precious gift he gave me, next to my own life and salvation.

After a few years of dating, we got engaged over a simple yet charming dinner I staged in a grove of trees overlooking a gravel pit near her family farm. I hid the engagement ring in some bread and lit some fireworks after she said "yes." We married while we were both still students in our third year of university, and we essentially grew up together while pursuing our respective callings. Carina discovered a love for children, and her nurturing personality was a gift to our four children and later to many

students as a teacher. Her fine arts background complemented my engineering background, and her creative eye found expression in paintings, quilting, gardening, and homemaking. I saw in her the "wife of noble character" described in Proverbs 31.

After graduating I worked as an engineer, but I sensed a call to teaching and began to ponder what my faith had to do with my work. Carina encouraged me to read about how a Christian world-and-life view might apply to the world of technology and to pursue further education for teaching. Eventually, I landed in Christian Higher education, a calling she



Becoming an Opa in January 2024.

had encouraged despite being far less lucrative than an industry position. It also came with upheavals, requiring a move to Dordt University and later to Calvin University. One of our wedding vows we exchanged was a promise to encourage each other to develop the gifts that God had given us, and this she surely did. She also encouraged me in my weaknesses: one of the last documents she left me was titled "How not to live in chaos and filth," a gesture of love if ever there was one.

### SHOCK AND GRIEF

Sadly, Carina was diagnosed with an aggressive lymphoma in early 2023. It came as a shock that she would get sick: she had always been so healthy, while I was the one who did not eat my vegetables. She underwent months of treatments; the cancer raged back with each attempt to put it into remission. On the morning of December 15, 2023, in our home, surrounded by family and with me snuggled next to her, we sang some hymns, read a few Psalms, and shared a few stories. Moments later, my wife of 34 years took her last breath and died peacefully right next to me.

It was as if I was suddenly hurtled into a parallel universe of shock and grief. I visited the gravesite the day after the funeral, and it felt stark and lonely. With the X-ray vision of my imagination, I envisioned her below the ground. Where was God? Why were the earnest and widespread

prayers for healing not answered the way we had hoped? Our first grandchild was born, just over two weeks after she passed. Why couldn't she have lived to hold her grandson? Could the kingdom not accomplish its ends while still allowing her to linger a little longer? When we heard Carina was entering hospice care, we resonated with these words from "A Liturgy for Moments When Dying Seems Unfair" from the book *Every Moment Holy*:

I am like a child, O Lord,  
who knows the injustice  
of an early bedtime imposed  
while the house is full of feasting  
and songs and stories and  
laughter.

I do not want to leave this life.  
I do not want to leave this place  
and time...

Can you not call a halt to my  
dying  
till some time hence when my  
race might finally feel complete...?

### CLINGING TO FAITH

Grief is my new unwelcome companion, punctuated by un-

in the windows."

The Psalms understand this kind of grief and lament, like Psalm 88, which despairs that God has hidden his face. Yet elsewhere in the Psalms we



Carina receiving chemo, May 16, 2023.

read "You keep track of all my sorrows, you have collected my tears in your bottle" (Ps. 56:8). In one of her last lucid conversations with me, Carina remarked about the importance of faith when facing a crisis and repeated a phrase she had spoken at other



The Schuurman family circa 2006.

predictable waves of intense tears. C.S. Lewis wrote about the grief of losing his own wife in *A Grief Observed*. His description of grief rings true: he compares grief to a "bomber circling round and dropping its bombs each time the circle brings it overhead" and in between "there is spread over everything a vague sense of wrongness, of something amiss."

"Why is [God] so present a commander in our time of prosperity," Lewis asks, "and so very absent a help in time of trouble?" During his time of grief, Lewis describes prayer like "a door slammed in your face" and what's more, "there are no lights

times: "knowing God is different than knowing about God." I am clinging to the same faith that Carina professed – sometimes only by my fingernails – and the comfort that "I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ" (HC QA 1).

The Bible tells us that "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30), but I would still like to hang out with Carina when I enter the new heavens and earth.

Oh God, I thank you for Carina – and I miss her so very much! 🙏