

Aubrey Bean grew up in the congregation at Light of the Hill United Methodist Church. At that time, it was not an official Reconciling Congregation, but she was amongst folks who believed in equality. Her grandpa, Vince Hart, has also been a key leader in the Pacific Northwest Reconciling Network. Here is a letter written by her husband after hearing about heckling that took place at his Alma Mater during a showing of The Laramie Project.

Dear Editor,

While I lay beside her, trying my best to comfort her, my best friend, partner, and wife took her last breath during the early morning hours of a still and quiet night this past June. She was 31.

For the past five years, Aubrey battled cancer. It took away her ability to run and walk. It took away her ability to work and to live life free of pain. And, finally, it took away her ability to inhale enough air.

I would like the Ole Miss community to know two things about my wife. First, she loved art, especially theater, and believed in its power to heal and transform lives. Second, inspired by her grandfather, a Methodist minister who for years has campaigned for gay equality within the church, she unequivocally supported the rights of homosexuals to marry and to live free of shame or harassment.

To the cast and crew of The Laramie Project, I have this to say: My wife's grace and beauty live on through your courage, truth, and forgiving attitude. Thank you for your vision and your perseverance. Your art will conquer hate.

To those who participated in the heckling of their fellow students, I say this: If you know the history of Mississippi and Ole Miss, then you know it is scalded with deep wounds from hatred. Wounds that cost lives and happiness. Wounds that were neither necessary nor just. And if you understand hatred, then you know that, just like the cancer which destroyed my wife's body, hate destroys the soul of the person it infects.

My wife's final days were filled with joy and love. I realized in those moments that all that truly matters in this world is joy and love. At its essence, this is the message of great art and a brave performance. We are here to love and support those around us---no matter their sexual preference, no matter what color they are, no matter their religion or politics.

May the students and faculty who share in this understanding continue to encourage us with their patient example so that our future is brighter than our history.

Chris Thompson
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