Grant's Eulogy

The following is the eulogy Jennifer delivered on Saturday, September 19, 2015, referenced in Chapter 10 of *Holding Grief: A Love Letter from a Recovering Death Denier*, for her brother-in-law, Grant Elliott.

Grant Elliott

May 25, 1948 - September 11, 2015

For those of you who don't know who I am, I am Jennifer Elliott, Grant's sister-in-law. I am married to Grant's brother, Tim. I have known Grant, and been a part of the Elliott family, for about 25 years.

When I sat down to write this eulogy, I just couldn't seem to get this story, or anecdote, out of my head. Not too long ago, I took one of our barn cats into the vet. Early on at the appointment, the vet technician asked me if my cat was an indoor cat or an outdoor cat.

"Outdoor cat," I answered.

Sort of incredulously, she shared with me that outdoor cats can get into a lot trouble, catch sicknesses, get hurt, get into fights with other cats, and that I should really think about making him an indoor cat.

"No," I answered. "He's a happy cat. He chases birds and pounces on gophers. He climbs trees and rolls in the dirt. He's happiest and most at home when he's outside - being an outside cat."

For those of you who knew Grant well, you know that he was most at home and happiest when he was outside; especially outside in the wilderness. To say he was an outdoorsman is sort of an understatement. As my husband said, for him it seemed it wasn't so much a desire to be outside- but really, a compulsion. Grant was a consummate horseman, and a bona fide cowboy.

I was never one of Grant's students- in the classroom that is- but he did teach me. I believe he taught us all something. He taught me how to better be around horses, and to ride a horse. His passion was infectious, and his comments were always supportive and kind when he was teaching you. He was a natural-born teacher. Never discouraging, never condescending, always considerate. Grant was one of the most generous souls I have ever known. He gave so much of himself helping others and so much of his time…..

Time. That was one thing about Grant that remains a mystery to me- is how Grant thought about time. But that is just the thing- I don't think he thought

about time. I think that is one reason being in the wilderness resonated with Grant. Time doesn't really matter when you're in the wilderness- the only clock you have or need- is sunrise and sunset. When time is irrelevant, or not a priority, you can live life in a different way, and you can embrace the moments without being rushed- as Grant did. When you were around Grant, he was truly with you- giving you his attention. He was present.

We had this saying in our house that when Grant and Pam would come to visit- we would get sucked into the "vortex". Suddenly, we were all staying up late watching movies, sleeping in, stopping whatever we were doing to saddle the horses and go for a quick ride around the ranch. Or perhaps, most recently, making a quick run to Wal Mart at 10:30 at night. My kids tell the story when recently he took them out for a scoop of ice cream. Upon finishing up their cones, Grant commented, "Those portions were a little small." And without another word/thought, they all went back in the store for seconds. You didn't want to not be with Grant- because you might miss out on something fun and spontaneous. I think Pam knows this best of all.

When you were with Grant -you had license. License to park on the curb in a way that was not allowed. License to be a little late. License to bend the rules just a tiny bit. License to have another scoop, or go back for seconds.

License to embrace life and to never squander an opportunity to have fun or adventure. This was probably one of the most powerful lessons he taught me.

These last few weeks, I have (we all have) been suffering while thinking about all the things that we wanted and were still "supposed to" do with Grant. One of the items on my supposed to list with Grant was to all go to Mexico and eat at the all-you-can-eat buffet, and play in the ocean. We were supposed to all go for a trail ride into the mountains. We were supposed to go fishing in Alaska. I was supposed to feed him my baked chicken one more time. He was really fun to cook for because he loved to eat and appreciated food. I can think of many more, and I know you all have a list of "supposed to's" – that you were going to share with Grant.

But in an effort to heal, I've been trying to turn those "supposed to's"- into "I got to's". I got to watch Grant hold both our children when they were brand new babies. I got to watch Grant help Annie ride a horse. I got to watch Grant teach Michael to shoot a bow. I got to watch Tim riding on the front of the four-wheeler, while Grant was rear-facing on the back of the four-wheeler- gripping a lead rope attached to Buck, the horse, driving down our road trying to tire him out. Oh, and I forgot, Michael was galloping

alongside on the horse, Red. (This vision will eternally make me laugh). I got to watch Grant- watch Danny and James while they were yay-hooing while painting a rental. I got to watch Grant walk down the aisle and hand off Missy to Brian at their wedding. I got to watch Grant and Pam laugh together a lot, with the rest of the family, during the weekend of Grandma's 80th birthday. I got to watch Grant in one of Mike and Krissy's movie with a big, full, grey beard. I feel so blessed to say that there are a lot more "I got to's" than there are "supposed to's –" and for that I am so grateful.

When James died, right after the funeral, I remember walking into the community center for the reception (I think many of you in this room were probably there also), but I remember walking in that room and being stunned with a feeling of profound sorrow; but also with that sorrow, there was profound and raw, love, forgiveness and mercy. It was absent of any pretense or falsehood. Two weeks ago now, as the family, robed in hospital gowns, praying together, standing arm-in-arm encircling Grant in his hospital bed, I felt it again -that profound and raw love, forgiveness and mercy. I wonder if God better helps align us to him by periodically putting us in these situations, or opportunities, even if it is in the depths of sorrow, to feel that profound and raw love, forgiveness and mercy, which bring us back to center

and remind us that really, in the words of Mother Teresa, “We have been created to love and be loved.”

Grant was a reminder of what it meant to love and to be loved. And he taught us how to embrace life and often times live for the moment, to never squander an opportunity to have fun or adventure. He taught us to embrace our inner barn-cat- to get outside and roll in the dirt -even if it meant you might get bucked off now and then. (And with his grittiness, he also taught us how to get back on again, too).