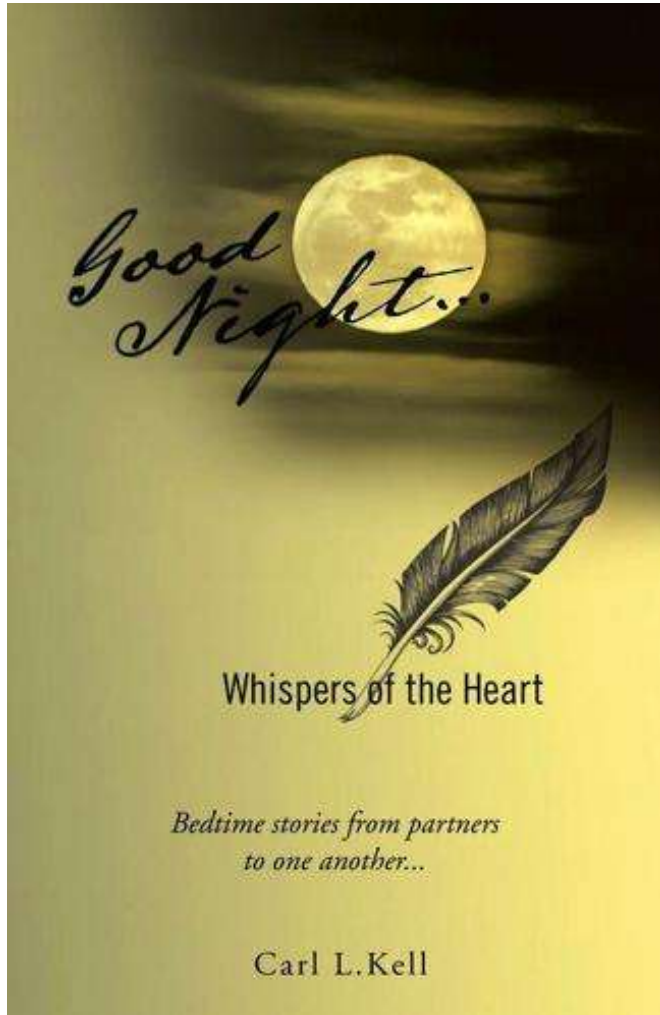


Kell reminds us that love, and appreciation, always in fashion

Posted: Sunday, October 2, 2022

Good Night ... Whispers of the Heart: Bedtime Stories from Partners to One Another, by Carl L. Kell. Bloomington, Ind: AuthorHouse, 2022. 92 pages, \$20.99 (hardcover).



“The central characters of *Good Night ... Whispers of the Heart* are Jack and Joan,” Carl Kell explains near the beginning of this elegant little volume. “Jack is a career human relations manager for a large soft goods corporation, a manufacturer of casual wear, sportswear and seasonal outerwear for every climate. Jack has had a successful career extending to his last decade of full-time employment.”

“The best decision that Jack ever made was marrying Joan,” the author continues. “In recent years, he has often wondered what she sees in him. Their relationship has grown in a mutually beneficial, comfortable, give-and-take routine. He sees himself as the luckiest guy in the world. Without question, he never wanted to doubt her reasons for saying ‘yes’ when he proposed. Like his father who was rescued by his mother many years ago, Joan has rescued him to lead a life of fulfillment in work and family.”

So begins this intimate and moving collection of heartfelt love notes – left to inspire, empathize, encourage and comfort – through the decades. But it is so much more than that. Kell’s manuscript is also a portal into the souls of two people who were obviously meant to be

together; a testament to the devotion they had for each other through thick and thin. At the same time, it also serves as a roadmap for the romantically inclined by providing a glimpse of what can be if we are willing to expose ourselves to the vulnerabilities necessary to sustain a connection that truly transcends time and space.

Consider one of my favorite passages, on pages 31-32:

“Jack gets mushy in writing notes to Joan. He shrugs his shoulders often as he writes, telling himself and Joan, if she were sitting nearby, ‘Sorry, my sweet, that’s just me. Get over it!’ Tonight is a Sunday night. The story has a worshipful note: ‘What we do this side of Heaven for each other will play out in what we become as we grow older. We are not to worry about a future already prepared for us. Here and now, we are required to give each other our best every day. Anything less

is dishonorable to the plans set before us. Tonight, ends a best day. Our rest prepares us for our next 'best day.' Go to sleep!"

Dr. Kell retired from the Department of Communication at Western Kentucky University in 2016 after 43 years of dedicated service to the institution and humanity. He began his distinguished career at WKU in 1972, after earning a Ph.D. in Speech Communication from Kansas University the previous year. The recipient of the Religious Communication of the Year Award from the Religious Communication Association, Kell founded the WKU Spirit Masters group in 1980 and served as the organization's advisor for 22 years. In 2007, President Ransdell presented him with the Spirit of Western Award, a top honor at the institution. His previous books include "The Exiled Generation," "Against the Wind," "In the Name of the Father," "Exiled," and "On Sacred Ground."

What really touched me about Kell's prose was the range of real-life emotions that threads its way through the narrative. The little notes really do reveal something universal about the human experience; the innate craving for reassurance that we are not alone and that we matter – and the desire to make sure those we cherish understand that we will always be there for them and that they matter. Even beyond the current realm, as alluded to on pages 10-11:

"In a somber mood, after the loss of his mother, Jack tried to fathom the time when there might not be a loved one to receive his notes. How would he feel? 'While our light shines, we reflect on the good times we share, but a day may come when we fade. For now, our love shines for all to see. Close your eyes, the sun will come out tomorrow and we will shine again. I love you! Good night!'"

Honestly, it was challenging to finish "Whispers of the Heart" simply because I found myself reading the same pages over and over. While some books are 'page-turners' – you can't wait to get to see what happens next – this was quite the opposite. In this instance, I wanted desperately to genuinely feel what the author was trying to convey. And since Kell writes on multiple levels, I found it difficult to move on until I felt I had fully assimilated and understood everything I think he was trying to convey.

One last example, from page 61:

"In the pandemic, hotels of all price ranges stopped providing pen and paper to write notes. Not this hotel. ... Writing quickly before the story left him, he penned this note to be read at any time of the day: 'Joan – we have faced complicated and emotional challenges in our adult lives. Getting old is new for us, requiring as much creativity as we can muster. Having you by my side not only makes me feel younger, but it also makes life easier. In all these days to come, our love will see us through.'"

Wow.

As noted in the liner notes, "Good Night ... Whispers of the Heart" is a reminder that love, and appreciation, are always in fashion, sustaining the ever-present fact that the thought to write always counts, but the words that envelop the soul never sleep. You see, a love note lasts all through the night."

I could not agree more. You need to pick up a copy of this exquisite little primer on life, love and relationships at your earliest convenience. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.