

Something worth living for...

Anniversary of the deaths of our martyred sisters
Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan



December 2, 2000

Letter of Ita Ford to her niece and godchild, Jennifer Ford, August 18, 1980

Dear Jennifer,

The odds that this note will arrive for your birthday are poor, but know I'm with you in spirit as you celebrate 16 big ones. I hope it's a special day for you.

I want to say something to you and I wish I were there to talk to you because sometimes letters don't get across all the meaning and feeling. But, I'll give it a try anyway.

First of all, I love you and care about you and how you are. I'm sure you know that. That holds if you're an angel or a goof-off, a genius or a jerk. A lot of that is up to you, and what you decide to do with your life. What I want to say...some of it isn't too jolly birthday talk, but it's real... Yesterday I stood looking down at a 16-year-old who had been killed a few hours earlier. I know a lot of kids even younger who are dead. This is a terrible time in El Salvador for youth. A lot of idealism and commitment is getting snuffed out here now. The reasons why so many people are being killed are quite complicated, yet there are some clear, simple strands. One is that many people have found a meaning to life, to sacrifice, to struggle, and even to death. And whether their life span is 16 years, 60 or 90, for them, their life has had a purpose. In many ways, they are fortunate people.

Brooklyn is not passing through the drama of El Salvador, but some things hold true wherever one is, and at whatever age. What I'm saying is, I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you...something worth living for, maybe even worth dying for...something that energizes you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can't tell you what it might be — that's for you to find, to choose, to love. I can just encourage you to start looking, and support you in the search.

Maybe this sounds weird and off-the-wall, and maybe, no one else will talk to you like this, but then, too, I'm seeing and living things that others around you aren't... I want to say to you: don't waste the gifts and opportunities you have to make yourself and other people happy...

I hope this doesn't sound like some kind of a sermon because I don't mean it that way. Rather, it's something you learn here, and I want to share it with you. In fact, it's my birthday present to you. If it doesn't make sense right at this moment, keep this and read it sometime from now. Maybe it will be clearer...

A very happy birthday to you and much, much love,

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