



Who was Joy Davidman Gresham before she married C.S. Lewis? Among other things, she was an extremely intelligent woman who was a poet, a thinker, a teacher, a mother and ... a wife (although her marriage, to William "Bill" Lindsay Gresham, ended in divorce).

She later wrote about what caused her to leave Bill (who had called her, one night, to say that he was having a nervous breakdown and couldn't come home):

By nightfall there was nothing left to do but wait and see if he turned up, alive or dead. I put the babies [her two sons with Gresham, David and Douglas] to sleep and waited. For the first time in my life I felt helpless; for the first time my pride was forced to admit that I was not, after all, "the master of my own fate" and "the captain of my soul."

All my defenses—the walls of arrogance and cocksureness and self-love behind which I hid from God—went down momentarily. And God came in. (From *Out of My Bone: The Letters of Joy Davidman*, edited by Don W. King, at page 128.)

Several days later, Bill returned home ... and found another woman with whom he thought he'd make a life. Joy was on her own.

With an apparently irreparable marriage, Joy left her two sons with a cousin (Renee) and sailed to England in 1952. She wanted to consult with a writer and thinker whom she greatly respected—C.S. Lewis.

Staying with her friend, Phyllis Williams, Joy left London for a day-trip to Oxford. In a prearranged meeting, she traveled to the Eastgate Hotel where she had discussions with C.S. ("Jack") Lewis and his brother, Warnie.

The men were impressed by Joy and greatly enjoyed her company. She began to visit the brothers at their home, called "The Kilns," near Oxford. Then Joy received a letter from Bill. He had fallen in love with Joy's cousin Renee, he said, and wanted a divorce.

After sailing back to America, Joy (who was portrayed in the film "Shadowlands" by Debra Winger) officially ended her marriage to Bill Gresham. With her two boys in tow, she returned to England in November of 1953.

She and Jack Lewis (who was portrayed in "Shadowlands" by Anthony Hopkins) grew closer, but Lewis—who was an Anglican—was philosophically opposed to marrying a divorced woman. He believed, as other Anglicans believed, that a marriage is a "holy union" which can't be broken by divorce. **

However ... when Joy's residential permit, to live in Britain, was not renewed, she faced a new reality. Joy, and her sons, had to return to the States.

By this time, however, Jack and Joy shared mutual feelings of respect for each other. Lewis agreed to marry Joy, in a civil ceremony, which—if it happened—meant she would not face a return to America.

The couple married on April 23, 1956. Lewis kept the news quiet, fearing that his friends and colleagues would disapprove.

Soon thereafter, Joy developed cancer. Doctors believed that it likely originated from radiation treatments she had—for a thyroid condition—when she was a girl.

Assessing her predicament, Joy wrote a letter on February 28, 1957. In it, she says:

All I really care about is having a bit of life with Jack and getting adequately on my feet for it. He has been growing more attached to me steadily - is now, I think, even more madly in love with me than I with him, which is saying plenty - and give dear Georgie Sentman my love and tell him he was wrong about the intellectual Englishman's supposed coldness. The truth about these blokes is that they are like H-bombs; it takes something like an ordinary atom bomb to start them off, but when they're started - Whee! See the pretty fireworks! He is mucho hombre, my Jack!" (Out of my Bone, pages 308-09.)

Joy's illness marked a changed point-of-view for Jack Lewis. Realizing he loved Joy, very much, he wanted to remarry her in a religious ceremony.

Their hospital wedding—which took place at Joy's bedside on March 21, 1957—was followed by Joy's condition dramatically improving ... at least for a time. They were able to have a honeymoon in Ireland and Wales. Later, they took a trip to Greece with their friends June and Roger Green.

Then ... the cancer returned. Although she kept-up appearances, and did the best she could to remain optimistic, Joy—and everyone else—realized that she did not have long to live. The image, at the top of this page, depicts Joy during her last struggle with cancer.

Joy died on July 13, 1960. Her loss plunged Lewis into deep grief. He wrote about it, in his book, *A Grief Observed* (which he initially published without his name attached). His friends soon figured out the real author.

Among other things, in *Grief*, Lewis writes how marriage made him complete:

She was my daughter and my mother, my pupil and my teacher, my subject and my sovereign; and always, holding all these in solution, my trusty comrade, friend, shipmate, fellow-soldier. My mistress; but at the same time all that any man friend (and I have good ones) has ever been to me...

There is, hidden or flaunted, a sword between the sexes till an entire marriage reconciles them. It is arrogance in us to call frankness, fairness, and chivalry "masculine" when we see them in a woman; it is arrogance in them to describe a man's sensitiveness or tact or tenderness as "feminine." But also what poor warped fragments of humanity most mere men and mere women must be to make the implications of that arrogance plausible. Marriage heals this. Jointly the two become fully human. (*A Grief Observed*, pages 24-25.)

Viewing all this in hindsight, it is interesting to examine a story—entitled "Apostate"—which Joy wrote as a young woman. Published in the *Hunter College Echo*—in November of 1934 (at pages 17-26)—it's about a young Jewish woman (Joy was Jewish) who elopes with a Christian (the faith of Lewis) to avoid an arranged marriage.

Baptized as a Christian, the young woman is at her wedding when her family breaks in. She gets a violent beating while the pastor escapes and her erstwhile husband watches the goings-on.

The immediate result of the story, for Joy, was the Bernard Cohen Short Story Prize. Perhaps the long-term result was her very successful, albeit brief, marriage to C.S. Lewis.

** Other Anglicans believe that adultery changes the equation and, itself, breaks the "holy union."

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