

Memories of Joyce Bertelsen

December 31 2009, 11:00 a.m.

I am very honoured to be here today to share with you my memories of Joyce Bertelsen. I have known her and Martin for almost 15 years.

I believe that Joyce Bertelsen had three families that she loved.

- 1. Her personal family – Martin, Stephan, Shannon and Jordan.**
- 2. The Liberal Party**
- 3. Her church family.**

1. Family was front and center in Joyce's life.

Martin, Stephen, Shannon and Jordan were the most important people in her life. She was so proud of her children's achievements. I know I have had many discussions with her about Stephen's work and how he making a difference I the lives of the children he is working with. Joyce would do anything for her family and would always worry and fuss over them when she was unable to personally help.

Just three months ago, after another very difficult time with her health, Joyce was busy planning a surprise 75th birthday party for Martin at Ling's restaurant. After being bedridden for many weeks she succeeded. There she was beautifully dressed up, walking and talking everyone up, as we celebrated Martin's birthday!

Joyce's home was a place people could gather for a cup of coffee or for a holiday meal. Stephen said that their table overflowed with people who might otherwise have spent New Years, Christmas, Thanksgiving, or other holidays alone.

Joyce loved everyone. Friends became family to Joyce. With my family, she fussed over my boys when they were born and continued to be like a grandmother to them. My oldest son Jamieson told me yesterday that there was a time a few years ago when he was upset because a friend named Matthew who came for an overnight got homesick and was picked up by his dad in the middle of the night. Jamieson doesn't remember what she said, but when Joyce learned of this, she said something to him that made him feel better.

2. Joyce's second family was the Liberal Party

For more than 50 years Joyce has been the heart and soul of the riding she worked in. Over the years Joyce held the executive positions of Riding Secretary, Vice President, Director, Fundraising Chair and Membership Chair.

During the late 1980's, Joyce served as a Director, Membership Chair and Young Liberal Contact when Bruce Owen was the local MPP.

In 2007 Joyce was nominated by Dorothy Ramsay, President of the Barrie Provincial Association, and won the "Volunteer Appreciation Award" from the Ontario Liberal Party.

Some comments from the nomination itself states:

"Joyce is the volunteer that goes that extra mile for a candidate. For example, during the 2007 provincial campaign, Joyce would regularly bring home baked goodies or casseroles to the Aileen Carroll campaign office for the sustenance and enjoyment of the team's volunteers."

“During every campaign that Joyce has ever worked on, she has a special talent for rallying the troops, organizing large numbers of workers, soliciting funds, and bolstering team morale. She continually undertakes her duties with humility and quiet perseverance.”

The nomination also mentioned Joyce’s involvement in her church and her position as past President of the Orillia chapter of the Elementary Woman Teacher’s Federation which lobbied for Affirmative Action programs helping young women in developing countries.

The following was posted yesterday, December 30, 2009, on the Barrie Federal and Provincial Liberal website by the President and Aileen Carroll

Dear Fellow Liberals:

It is with great sadness, that I forward on the obituary for Joyce Bertelsen. Joyce was the mother of our Barrie PLA Vice President Stephen Bertelsen. She recently passed away on December 26, 2009.

Joyce was a stalwart and long time volunteer for the federal and provincial Liberals in Simcoe County. She was the backbone of every campaign that she ever worked on. Joyce was a volunteer whose ardent work on behalf of countless Liberal candidates is a model for all political volunteers to emulate.

Joyce once told me a couple of years ago that when she first came to the Barrie area, there was an election going on. Without hesitation and despite her recent arrival to the geographical area, she walked in to the local Liberal candidate's office and boldly stated, "Put me to work!" That was our Joyce, a valiant soldier for the countless elections and community causes that she chose to invest her time, dedication and boundless energy into. Even during her final years when her health was failing, Joyce continued to apply her special brand of volunteerism any way she could, to benefit a local Liberal campaign.

At the onset of our last federal election, Joyce had to be hospitalized for severe health issues. Yet, her son Stephen and I joked about how the doctors restricted her access to the telephone in her hospital room, so she would not begin making telephone calls for the Rick Jones campaign from her hospital bed!

That was the buoyant spirit of Joyce Bertelsen... she was a great lady! She was a loving wife, mother and grandmother. Joyce was the quintessential stalwart political volunteer in the Barrie community.

Joyce was a fervent Christian, whose faith carried her through many personal health and life challenges. She had a deep love for her family, her church, her professional role and her community. Joyce, we will dearly miss you!”

3. Joyce’s third family was her church.

Joyce had a tremendous faith and love for God. She loved bible studies and always had a thought or two to throw into the mix!

Joyce and Martin started to attend St. Margaret’s not long after we moved into the portable in 1995. The occasional visit became more frequent even taking a box of envelopes for those Sundays they attended. In time the Bertelsens fell in love with St. Margaret’s and after a lot of prayer they made the move.

St. Margaret's welcomed the Bertelsens and by 1997 Joyce and Martin were full time members of our fledgling church. It didn't take a long time before Joyce was rolling up her sleeves and getting involved with the Christmas bazaars, Christmas Dinners, Valentine dance and auction, the June event, Sunday School, assisting in worship as a reader and assisting with the chalice, pastoral care committee and visitor, prayer chain and phone caller, Wednesday service attendee and lunch organizer, bible study group leader and attendee, Sunday school; teacher of the older children and also co-leader of the Confirmation class with Margaret Paradis.

Joyce was very proud of her Presbyterian roots and would tell us all about what she learned growing up. The first year or two of teaching the confirmation class with Margaret Paradis, everyone learned as much about the Presbyterian Church as they did about the Anglican Church. Margaret said that told her later that she didn't realize that she didn't know everything about the Anglican Church and was surprised!

Joyce had a great love and compassion for people in need. At St. Margaret's she went from supporting the Christmas hampers given to local families, to working with my wife Annette in coordinating the Hampers. Annette and Joyce worked hard to ensure needs were met. But, whenever Annette thought everything was wrapped up, Joyce would find "one more" family in need!

After we left last year, Joyce continued to have a hand in the Hamper ministry, including passing on her knowledge and support to Kathy Fitzmaurice and Celine Beckett who now run the ministry.

Everyone who knows Joyce knows she loved to talk. If I called her for a 5 minute hello, it usually turned into a 20-30 minute, sit down and put your feet up discussion.

Most Sundays after the coffee time I would see Joyce and Martin getting ready to go home and I would say my goodbyes. I would leave the building about 30 minutes later to go home and I would usually see Martin waiting "dutifully" in the car for Joyce who was still talking to someone in the church.

To know Joyce was also to know her food! Joyce loved to cook and to feed people. She was an active member of our Casserole Ministry bringing casseroles, lasagna, shepherd's pie, and chili to people just out of hospital, grieving a death, or just needing a little pastoral help.

Joyce would occasionally surprise my family with a shepherds pie or chili without the onions and spices that Annette can't eat. She always thought of us and others. There wasn't a problem that couldn't be solved or at least comforted by a casserole or yummy dessert. Even our Wednesday services were followed by a lunch of variety when Joyce was involved.

Joyce had a special place in her heart for children. She always asked about my children by name. Many times she remembered the names of children in the congregation before she knew their parents names! She loved to read stories to them and to teach the children during the Children's Time at the beginning of Sunday Service. She loved to see the children come up to the front, and they loved her.

I remember her reading the story "Love You Forever" by Robert Munsch, a story of a mother talking about her boy who was growing up. There wasn't a dry eye in the church. Joyce would always finish off her talk with three words to the children as they went to their classes, "**VAYA CON DIOS, Go with GOD!**"

Joyce's love for children extended beyond the church. Over the years I have known Joyce and Martin, they shared stories about their work in Northern Quebec in the James Bay Cree First Nation. They talked about children they helped that others often disregarded.

Stephen reminded me that Joyce and Martin were opposed to the idea of taking children out of their communities and rejected the idea of stripping the children of their culture. Although it could have led to their dismissal, Martin and Joyce had Cree language and culture taught in the school as part of their curriculum

When Stephen came back from Korea, he went to work in the north. While there, Grand Chief Cooncome shared his stories about the work Martin and Joyce did. When Stephen taught in Mistassini, former students of Joyce and Martin shared their stories, treating him as family. They shared stories of how Joyce and Martin housed them when their parents had difficulties and how Joyce baked them their first ever Birthday cakes. While many "foreign" teachers were disliked, Joyce and Martin were loved and have even visited them, something almost unheard of.

Joyce loved her church of St. Margaret's and would go the extra mile for the church. Whether it was casseroles; organizing outings to the convent, the Cathedral or synagogue for the confirmation class; Leading a trip to the Holocaust Centre or planning a seminar on the Holocaust; doing the Christmas hampers, or baking for the bazaar, her dedication was unshakeable.

When some people left St. Margaret's because of their own issues or their inability to be happy with any church, Joyce was a rock in the storm, a pillar of the church. She did not leave! Her faith and love for this church kept the ship on course.

Joyce had attended a variety of churches over the years and understood that all churches go through good and bad times in its life cycle. It is always easy to leave when hard work is needed.

St. Margaret's has much to learn from Joyce. She was strong and faithful to her church and to God. She never gave up even in the face of serious illnesses, amputated finger, multiple surgical procedures, and broken bones. She never focused on her own problems, never complained seeking people's pity, but stayed outward focused. From her hospital bed up to three weeks ago she was still calling people to see how they were doing. Margaret told me Joyce even paid someone to make pies for her so she could keep up her commitment to provide pies for the Christmas bazaar.

Faith, Hope and Love were in Joyce's heart. For me she personified the scripture in Matthew 25:31-40 which says,

³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of mine, you did for me.'

Joyce lived this passage. Strong, determined, faithful, loving, and compassionate.

She will be greatly missed by all her friends and family and her church more than we can ever express. Canon David Clark said that when Joyce died a piece of St. Margaret's heart died. That is how much Joyce was loved!

I know in my heart and in my faith that Joyce is no longer in any pain or discomfort and will continue to be watching after us.

I'm also sure she is getting everything organized in heaven... There is so much work to be done!!!

We love you Joyce, and we will never forget you...

"VAYA CON DIOS, Go with GOD!"

Eulogy by the Rev. Warren Leibovitch