

Excerpts from Eulogy for “Betty” given by Rev. Gary (2013)

Betty had a heart as huge as the sky.

She deeply CARED. She was totally devoted to her family – her parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, grandkids and great-grandkids, grand nieces and nephews, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, and, of course, her kids. She absolutely adored babies and very young children, most recently her great grandkids. She’d often say about them, “He’s so delicious” or “oh, I could just eat her up!” She feasted and feasted on them.

Betty was like a bridge, a nurturer of peace, and a healer, who sought to rise above conflict and divisions of people around her, and tried hard not to take sides. She got along with most everyone, even as sometimes some of those people didn’t get along with each other. It’s not because she was wishy-washy or weak. Rather, she was strong enough to see the good in everyone, especially in her family, to focus on the good, to nourish it, and to make it more important than judging or rejecting people for their unwelcome actions – real or perceived. For her, nothing that anyone did was more important than family bonds.

She took such great delight in giving to others. For many years, she received meals-on-wheels lunches, which would often include little containers of fruit juices. She couldn’t drink them herself, but insisted on saving them, and her refrigerator would be so full of these containers, dozens of them, that there was barely any room for food. When she was asked, “why do you have to have so many of these?” she responded that she had to have enough to give to family, friends, neighbors, her cleaning lady, the woman who delivered her food, even her doctors and their receptionists, and anyone else who might come along.

Betty never gave up on people, especially her kids, not during tough times, not even when she was upset with them or they with her. She took an interest in everything they did, no matter whether she understood it. She was always there for them. She never stopped being a loving mother.

She was funny, outrageous, and loved to tell and receive jokes, as many of you here know. The cornier and cuter the better, such as what some kids reported in their religion classes. For example: Did you know that... Noah's wife was called Joan of Ark? Or that Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day, but a ball of fire by night? She could be quite irreverent at times.

But mostly, she was modest and humble. She shouldered her burdens and challenges with grace, found many things to appreciate, and never despaired for long, especially during the 20-plus years when she took care of her husband. Soon after he became ill, she said, “Some people in my situation would say “Why ME?” But I see it as “Why NOT me?”

Betty loved life, she was interested and curious about the world. She loved to learn and never stopped learning. She had a youthful, adventure spirit, willing to try new things, whether it was riding in a small plane over the Grand Canyon at age 75 – yes, she did that – or trying out energy healing practices, such as qi gong. Into her 90s, her spirit never really grew old. She'd say, "I'm not in any hurry to go. I like it here." To the very end she fought to live, and then could let go gracefully. To the very end, she strived to make the best of each day. Rather than just marking time, or lost in the past, she'd think about what she could do to help, or what she could learn about or enjoy. The writer Jonathan Swift said, "May you live all the days of your life." You did that. May we all be so fortunate.

She was a wonderful person, but human. She did have her idiosyncrasies, challenges, and pet peeves, as we all do. I say this because I'm told she would scoff and be uncomfortable with anyone proclaiming her as a saint, so I won't do that.... But I will say, you come pretty close!,,,

Betty is gone, and we feel an enormous emptiness and sadness. We can take comfort, though, in the strong sense that she hasn't gone very far away. She's around, and I believe that if we think about her, see her in our minds, and feel her in our hearts - she will be there as a spirit presence to connect with. So, everyone, please don't be afraid to call on her, and don't be surprised if she comes....We look forward to your visits, Betty. You don't even have to knock. Just come right in.

And for all the sadness and sense of loss, perhaps there is also some joy... knowing that Betty is finally reunited with the people she loved so dearly... She is surrounded by them, and by God. She is surrounded by love.

Including the love of all of us here. You all loved her very much and she loved all of you perhaps even more. And that will never change as long as we're all breathing, and afterwards too. Her love surrounds us. Last week, as she was barely able to move or speak, she suddenly opened up her arms and reached out to put them around her son. They hugged, and after she made some moaning sounds, she managed to say, "I LOVE YOU SO MUCH" and then she said it again.....When it comes down to it, as one's life on earth ends, love is the only thing that matters, it is the only thing that remains. And so it is today.