

## **Eulogy – Darlene (Carruthers) Caron – by Leanne Caron Piper**

Although we had months to prepare for today, we were surprisingly flustered when it came to finding the right words to adequately express the person Mom was. She was a bit of a puzzle really. The person we knew as “mom” had two very different sides – fun-loving and serious, free-spirited and strict, whimsical and practical, and so many other dichotomies.

A good eulogy attempts to capture who a person was. A great eulogy attempts to capture the legacy that person has left on others.

And Mom left a legacy...

Going through family documents, we found glimpses of the person she was, through the eyes of others.

- Photos from her high school and nursing days.
- Photos with her parents, sister and brothers in Drumheller.
- Photos of mom and dad with their closest friends at parties and on their many travels.
- And after we all left home, photos of her at various community, Kiwanis and Rotary events. (some who are here today)

To us, she was Mom. And there are plenty of photos of her in that role too. But to others, she was grandmother, great grandmother, cousin, friend, colleague.

As I struggled to find the words to capture who Darlene was....they found me instead. They appeared in the form of a very special treasure that I found in mom’s dresser, something that Laurie, David and I had never seen before. It was a letter (**PULL OUT LETTER**) written by my father to his parents at Lake Cameron dated Tuesday evening, July 17, 1962 from the Officers Mess, RCAF Station, Winnipeg. This letter became the foundation for this reflection...

It starts.... *“Your son has got himself engaged.”*

In the 10 pages that follow, Dad describes in details how they met, and why she is the perfect woman for him. He writes...

*...she is a very intelligent woman, and very respected in the work she does. Not only is Darlene an intelligent woman, but she is kind, very easy to get along with, enjoys a good time, likes good music and books, loves kids, plays the piano, sings, enjoys going to the theatre, dresses conservatively, uses very little make up, can cook, is sentimental, has a very pleasant personality, will do her utmost to get along with people, but doesn't let them walk all over her. I love her, she loves me, we love each other, I could go on all night. "*

Wow. All of these things are true. And much much more.

In a later paragraph he espouses her amazing figure, blue-green eyes and nice legs. But I digress.

The most powerful part of reading these words from 54 years ago is how these qualities were alive and well up until the very end. Until the pain and nausea weakened her stamina, I don't remember a single day in my life when she didn't have a book on the go, and a stack on the shelf in waiting. Sometimes, she would be at the library every week because she finished the 4 or 5 books that she had taken out the week before. Her love of reading and books is something we all inherited – David works in book publishing, I pursued degrees in English and History, Laurie devours books like candy.

Cooking was a huge creative outlet for her. David and I love to cook, and although that quality skipped over Laurie completely, it came out twice as strong in her daughter Jaime. There was nothing she loved more than a dinner with her family. Finding the day for everyone - kids, grandkids - to be at her house for a holiday dinner was always a must and we learned so much about cooking at her side. Shopping for groceries was also something she enjoyed and for all of us, it was a social occasion that took twice as long as it should have because mom

would stop and talk with friend and neighbours. Until this summer, one of the things she looked forward to was Saturday mornings at the Guelph Farmers Market, and was on a first-name basis with her favourite vendors. She would always have on hand the things we all loved – roast beef and Yorkshire pudding were always a favourite.

We all inherited a love of theatre, David and I being involved in theatre all through high school and university, with David working as a theatre professional for 10 years. My son Douglas has this ability in his blood. I took mom to his performance of the Grimms and she was blown away.

But she demanded good performances. When David was in kindergarten, he played a jack in the box where his role was to pop up at the end of the show and surprise everyone. But all during the show, he opened the lid and waved to mom. The audience would laugh but my mom never reacted. When we were finally home, mom told David she was so disappointed that he kept raising the lid and going out of character. He worked very hard after that to not blow any performance.

Her quiet intelligence is something we all appreciated. Maybe it came from a love of reading, but she knew a lot about everything – science, literature, politics – but you would never know it unless you got into a deep conversation and then walked away saying “wow.” Dad wrote in his letter about her kindness, sentimentality, her pleasant personality and ability to get along with people...these were her greatest strengths. Mom was well-ahead of her time on issues of social justice – women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, First Nations reconciliation, religious and cultural tolerance and compassion for the disabled and marginalized. Laurie and I loved to play with dolls so mom bought Laurie a black doll and I got an Ojibwe doll, they were well loved and are still at the house. We were raised in a home of inclusiveness, empathy and tolerance and are thankful for this part of mom’s legacy.

Dad wrote that she enjoyed a good time .... she did indeed! Curling. So many parties. Absent friends who wrote to us this week shared memories of wonderful parties, sitting on the kitchen floor till all hours talking, music and more. Even after kids, there were parties. Laurie and I remember sitting at the top of the stairs when mom and dad hosted parties below – bridge parties, dinner parties, new year’s parties – and then coming down the next morning to scavenge the leftover party food, amid ashtrays full of cigarettes. Even when we ordered these excellent flower arrangements from Monte, he remarked, “Darlene always made the Rotary events fun!”

Mom’s love of music, her mastery of piano and her singing ability are alive and well. Not me though. Mom signed Laurie and I up for piano lessons at the same time, and Laurie flew through the Royal Conservatory at lightning speed. She was on level 8 when I was still barely mastering Level 1. Mom finally gave up on me and let me sign up for baton twirling and softball, while Laurie continued to excel in piano. When David taught himself the piano as a teenager, so he could play while he sang, Mom told him she regretted being sexist and not signing him for lessons. My three sons, Brad, Bryan and Douglas have incredible musical talents and Laurie’s children Kal and Shawna and David’s son, Spencer also carry this talent. Shawna so beautifully shared that gift with us today.

Mom had an appreciation for nature and handmade beautiful things. This love of beauty came out in so many ways. She loved landscaping wherever she lived, starting with the spectacular rock garden that we had in Bramalea. And all the needlepoint and crafts that she made throughout her life. And she stood by her macramé Christmas tree despite the ribbing each year. Now it’s considered a family heirloom. Several grandchildren have their eye on it...

She was proud of her nursing career, excelled in getting specialization in the OR, and was well respected in her work.

She was a professional working woman in the 1950s, well ahead of her time.

Her grandson Justin has that same drive, adding to his credentials and opening his own shop and is well-respected in his field.

Her calling as a health professional and pursuit of the sciences is evident today in her three grand-daughters. My daughter Lyndsay studied Biological sciences, went to Africa and Guatemala to do front line work, and went back to school and is now a paramedic in the City of Toronto. Shawna is in her 3<sup>rd</sup> at Ryerson in Nursing, Bryan is doing his Masters of Applied Science in Biomedical field, and her youngest granddaughter Olivia, who is not able to be here today, is in her first year of biological science at St. F.X. in Nova Scotia.

Dad wrote....

“She doesn’t let someone walk all over them...” We experienced throughout our lives, and thankfully, all of us carry that quality. Mom didn’t suffer fools lightly, and she had an innate sense of natural justice. This force is strong in her youngest grandchild Spencer, who I have noticed has a keen sense of fairness and equity. I have often heard Spencer exclaim “that’s not fair” when he sees something that doesn’t seem right to him.

When Mom felt strongly about something, she had a way of bringing you on side. Some call it charm, some call it stubborn determination.

That stubborn determination, that quality of not letting someone (or something) walk all over them...is what got her through cancer five times.

FIVE TIMES! Cancer. So let’s talk about cancer. **PAUSE.** Let’s call it what it is ... it’s an evil vile beast. It’s a dragon, a noose, a curse. Jaime, cover Lion’s ears.... **FUCK CANCER!** Throat, lung paratid gland, her eye, and her spine. Five random places, five random times, five different courses of treatment and four triumphs of the spirit and body. But it wore her down, honestly. And years of being a caregiver to so many others also wore her down. And when the last diagnosis happened, she said to me “I’m not sure I can do this again.” That was the beginning of the end. Previously, she would say “here we go again” and “ready for

another round” with hope and fortitude. This time, she knew – before any of the rest of us would admit it – that this was her last battle.

Just this past spring, mom was baking muffins when Bryan and Claudia were over for a visit. She was bent over in pain in the kitchen and couldn’t remember if she had added oil to the batter. She put the muffins in the oven, went to lie down and back up again when they were ready. Admitting that she wasn’t up for the fight didn’t come easy. She braved radiation and tests, as she always did, but being an RN, she knew what it meant when it got to a certain point. She understood the cycle of pain medication dependency, the decreasing mobility, and when the pain from the lymphoma and her degenerated discs in her back got too much last June, that determination kicked in in a different way. She was determined that she would not die a long, slow death. When assisted dying legislation passed in June of this year, she articulated that this is would be the relief she would be asking for when the time came.

The time came quickly. A fall in October and a fractured C1 was the catalyst that led to a more rapid decline than we were expecting. Her cognitive function was as sharp as always and she enjoyed her news of the outside world, the Trump election, community news, family activities, and Blue Jay scores.

By late November, she was immobile. By Christmas, she was barely eating. By New Years, she was struggling. A bad day, followed by a good day, but still there. Her love for her family never waived through the last two weeks. On Boxing Day, I showed her a Facebook photo of Calvin and Nat and told her about their recent engagement. She smiled and gave a thumbs up. She took comfort in knowing that her family would continue to grow and thrive and carry her legacy forward.

Indeed we will. We all will. Everyone here whose life she touched will – I hope – carry a piece of her. And even if you didn’t know her personally, but know her by association, you know her through her husband, her children or her grandchildren.

Finally, thank you to everyone for joining us today to celebrate our mother's life. It means a lot to our father John and to David, Laurie and myself that you have joined us today to remember this remarkable woman.