

Ann's memorial service – Larry's remarks

These few minutes were set aside for remembrance – for remembering Ann, and telling about it. Now when two people have been in love for sixty years, with love increasing more and more, there's clearly much to be remembered and much, much to be told. So I'm going to pick only one thing to tell you. But first let me note that a bit later we're going to hear Ann sing the song that she sang to me at our wedding a good many years ago. If the oddity of one's singing at one's own funeral calls for an apology, I'm sure Ann would graciously offer it, and I trust it would be just as graciously accepted. But she wanted those wedding songs to be heard here as an affirmation of that enduring love.

The one thing I will tell you about Ann is this: that she was more richly endowed than any person I have ever known with the gift of *empathy*. This was not a knack, not an acquired skill. It was just that there was an aura about her that communicated itself as if by telepathy, so that strangers, in a brief moment of intimate connection, would find themselves sharing their joys with her or, without embarrassment, laying bare their burdens. This took place utterly without guile or calculation on Ann's part, nor, even, did it emanate from a sense of duty -- although Ann's sense of duty was strong. Scripture commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and commands give rise to duties. But while I doubt that Ann ever reflected on the matter, I think she would have regarded the idea of a *duty to love* as a contradiction in terms. Her feeling for others – her palpable connection with them and impulsive kindness towards them -- was simply a part of her native endowment as a living being.

Thus she sometimes suffered fools perhaps too gladly. And a wrong done her – and there were some – would evoke bewilderment, perhaps sadness – not recrimination or retribution, although self-aggrandizing knaves or bullies, abusing the vulnerable or the weak, could expect a response from her both spontaneous and fierce.

Still, how one with such a gentle outlook, bereft of the usual psychic weapons of deadly political combat, could bring to bear the force required to accomplish even the half of what she did – most of it in this town, of all places – is something of a mystery. But it has something to do with the fact that gentleness can coexist with courage, and passion, and will. A friend – I presume he won't mind being quoted — put it this way: He wrote, a day or two ago: “Ann was a great and furious force of nature, that was packaged in a loving, beautiful and caring woman.”

I will not tell you anything more *about* Ann. But I hope it is not out of order for me to share with you something that I would say *to* Ann. From time to time she and I wrote and exchanged tiny bits of poetry, particularly on those anniversary dates, later in life, that insistently prod all of us into the realization that our time is both exquisitely precious and cruelly limited – the more precious, the more cruel. If you will indulge me, this is one that I recently gave to her:

*When I was young, I gravely thought myself a poet – of sorts.
Not one of those prolix purveyors of obscure profundities,
But the simple kind that, ambling wide-eyed,
Spies a spot to lightly brush with words
And wondrous lovely things spring radiant into life.
Now, ambling still, I have some doubts.
But now I find, at each new spot that beckons me to pause in wonder or
delight,
That you are there
And that I can't conceive it to be otherwise.*