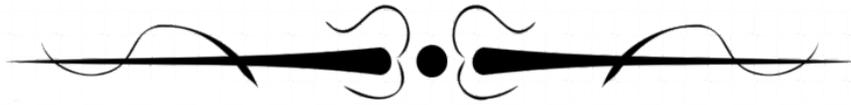
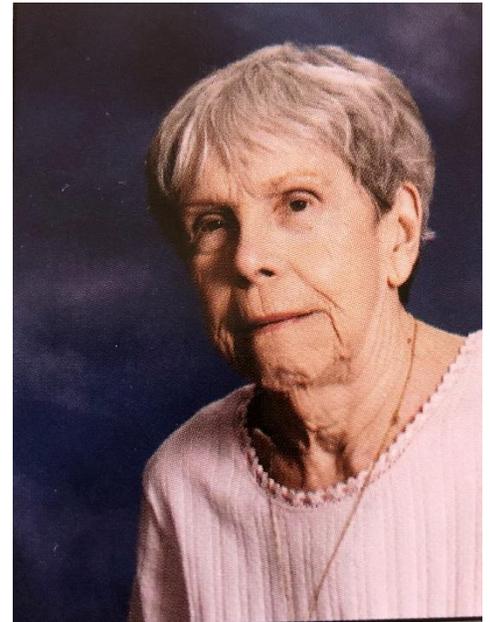


Marilyn L. Anderson



November 17, 1934 - May 11, 2020

In his book *Fully Human, Fully Alive*, author John Powell writes some touching words: “The size of a person’s world is the size of his or her heart.” As we tell stories about Marilyn today, and remember her life, we get a sense of the size of her world – and her heart. I’ve come to the conclusion that as Marilyn’s years added up, her world got bigger. And so did her heart. But as you might imagine, there were challenges too.



Marilyn Machek got started in the city of Chicago – the west side. She was born into a small family. Her parents were Charles and Dorothy. She had a sister who was also named Dorothy. Marilyn’s grandparents lived on the second floor of their house. That’s what often happened back in those days...family looked out for family.

Marilyn lived a rather sheltered life. The family was not churchgoers. Marilyn went to school and did well there, but her parents were protective of her. She didn’t learn to ride a bike. She didn’t learn to drive a car. She tried a car, but she never passed the driver’s test. A reason for her parent’s protectiveness might have been that, as they advanced in years, they were hoping for someone to look after them, just like they were looking after Marilyn’s grandparents. So, smart, competent, hard-working Marilyn came to understand her role in life as a caregiver.

Marilyn’s world got a little bigger when she attended a USO event in Chicago. She went with a friend named Delores. Sailors were on leave. They were looking to blow off some steam. Marilyn got introduced to a sailor named Robert (or Bob). They hit it off.

The next thing you know, Bob got transferred to the west coast, and Marilyn was making plans to come for a visit. One visit led to another, and still another. On one of those visits, Marilyn met Bob in Reno, Nevada, and – would you believe – they got hitched. It took place before a justice of the peace. No pictures. Maybe a bouquet of flowers. They signed the license. And that was it. They were officially joined as husband and wife.

Bob was still in the Navy, so Marilyn headed back to Chicago on her own. That’s when she broke the news to mom and dad. I’m not sure about this, but maybe the old adage applied: “Sometimes it’s easier to ask for forgiveness than permission.”

Bob was eventually discharged from the Navy and joined Marilyn in Chicago. He arrived in the nick of time. Marilyn gave birth to a daughter. They named her Dorothy but called her “Dotti.” Marilyn’s world was about to get bigger, and so was her heart.

A year-and-a-half later, another baby came along--this time a boy. They named him Bob. For those keeping track of the names in this family, that’s three Dorothy’s and two Bob’s. I don’t how they kept everybody straight.

Marilyn readily embraced her role as a homemaker. Husband Bob got a job driving a laundry truck and then eventually a garbage truck. Marilyn woke up early in the morning to fix him breakfast and get him out the door.

Then there were children to look after – breakfast to cook, beds to make, clothes to wash, floors to scrub. There were also pets to raise. Marilyn had a soft spot for stray dogs and cats, especially cats. She rarely hesitated when she had a chance to take one in.

Marilyn was in her element. Bob worked hard, and so did she. As was the case when she was growing up, she looked after her parents and made sure they had the care they needed. Little by little, Marilyn's world got bigger, and so did her heart.

Time passed. The children grew up. Charles and Dorothy faced a variety of health concerns. Bob retired. But I suspect there was no real retirement for Marilyn – the cooking, baking, cleaning, and rescuing of animals continued. She wouldn't have it any other way.

In 1995 Marilyn and Bob moved to Rochester. Bob had grown up here. Now he was coming home. For her part, Marilyn had some new opportunities. To get to know her new neighbors, especially at Christmastime, Marilyn baked hundreds and hundreds of Christmas cookies. She baked so many cookies, in fact, that a reporter from the Post Bulletin did a story on her. Don't we all wish for a neighbor like that?

Marilyn soon became friends with Loraine Mitchell, who happened to be her son's mother-in-law. Marilyn and Loraine jumped into volunteer work at the Mayo Clinic with great enthusiasm. They delivered maps, pamphlets, and magazines to various departments around the campus. They helped with special projects, distributing information on new doctors. Each year the Clinic hosted a social work symposium. Marilyn and Loraine tended the door and directed those who were coming and going. The world of this sheltered girl from the west side of Chicago was filled to overflowing, but a part of her was hurting.

You see, Bob had lung cancer. He'd had it for a number of years, but the doctors caught it late, and the treatment was not effective. Toward the end, Bob had part of a lung removed in an effort to help him breathe easier. The surgery was not successful, however, and Bob died on the operating table.

Fortunately, son Bob and Mary Ann had stayed closely connected. Soon afterward, they moved from Chicago to Rochester. If this story sounds familiar, it is. Family was looking out for family.

Bob and Mary Ann bought Marilyn's home, and moved her into a twin home. On the other side of that twin was – you guessed it – Loraine. Marilyn and Loraine continued their volunteer efforts at Mayo. They expanded their horizons by going on bus trips together – at least one big trip per year. They traveled to faraway places like Branson, Missouri, the Calgary Stampede, and whale watching on the east coast. And as these two traveled, if they happened to spot a Harley dealership, and could bring home a memento for Bob and Mary Ann, that made the trip especially worthwhile. Marilyn's world was getting bigger still, and so was the size of her heart.

As you may have surmised, Bob grew up without a church, but Mary Ann was raised a Catholic. When they got to Rochester, they ended up hearing about a church named Zumbro. In this church, there was a pastor – Wayne Vogt – who liked old cars. There was another pastor – Gary Benson – who rode a motorcycle. It was a match made in heaven. There was only one slight problem. Pastor Benson drove a Honda and not a Harley. Given enough time, though, and enough nudging from Bob and Mary Ann, they hoped that Pastor Benson would eventually see the light. And from what I've heard, he did.

Marilyn followed Bob and Mary Ann to Zumbro. This was her first and only church. She connected with folks who came to 8:30 worship and sat in the last three or four pews. Maybe they didn't know it at the time, but they were Marilyn's first impressions of Christianity and the church. They were Marilyn's idea of a good time. Marilyn's world was getting bigger still, and so was the size of her heart. Much like Dotti, she gradually developed a love for Jesus.

During Marilyn's last few years, she had a number of health challenges. She had sores on a leg that refused to heal. Her leg had to be amputated below the knee. When a blood clot was discovered in her other leg, there was talk of a second amputation. That was more than Marilyn could face. She was ready to be done.

As she resigned herself to her fate, she sounded a little like the Apostle Paul when he confided in a young co-worker named Timothy: "I have fought the good fight," said Paul, "I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Now there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord will give me on that day."

Marilyn spent the last months of her life at Samaritan Bethany. It wasn't easy. I visited her a number of times. Because of the condition of her leg, I often read Psalm 121 to her, offering up a silent prayer as I did: "I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved." Marilyn did her best to take these words to heart, but it took all the strength she could muster.

Toward the end of her days, Marilyn had a surprising discovery. It was about her identity. For years, she thought she was of Eastern European descent – Czech, Polish, Bohemian. Then Dotti and Bob did some ancestry testing. It came back that they were 80% German. No offense to the Germans out there, but Marilyn had a lot of trouble accepting it.

I'd like to believe, however, that Marilyn was open to another discovery about her identity: she was as a child of God. Somewhere along the way she'd fallen in love with Jesus, and that made a world of difference. In fact, the size of Marilyn's world with Jesus made her heart even bigger still.

As we say goodbye to Marilyn today, we wish her God's eternal rest. She's fallen asleep in the arms of Jesus. She fought the good fight. She finished the race; she kept the faith. Regardless of any ancestry test, she was – and is – a beloved child of God. And she's got a crown of righteousness waiting for her. Amen.

Pastor Vern Christopherson
June 5, 2021