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Eulogy for Charlotte Johnson, delivered on May 31, 2008

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Charlotte Johnson Eulogy
May 31, 2008

Charlotte could make some outrageous comments. Sometimes she made them about Paul in his presence and the presence of others. He would usually smile and his comment to me was, "she always makes life interesting and keeps me challenged. I like that." Theirs must have been a whirlwind courtship. When two people, attractive to others of the opposite sex, in their own territories were momentarily thrown together by circumstances of the Second World War, drawn towards one another and married. In a sense, Charlotte was a war bride. She was not from another country, but just as surely she was transferred from her native Connecticut soil, to a foreign land - Grand Haven, Michigan, into a family that laid strong claim to the place. She married Paul, but an extended family was part of the deal. She told me her mother never quite understood.

Nancy and I met Charlotte because Paul was active as a trustee in the life of Grand Valley. We were together at countless events and dinners. She was my favorite dinner partner, and we came to know one another well through conversations at the dinner table. Our friendship with the Johnson's brought the four of us together on their boat, in restaurants, and occasionally on their annual visit to Florida. It is from these experiences that a close bond developed, a bond seasoned by considerable laughter and chuckles.

Charlotte's sardonic side was unleashed by a martini and sometimes a martini wasn't even necessary. She could see humor in situations, and relate them. She could laugh at herself and help us laugh at ourselves. What I think attracted me most about Charlotte is that she had no pretense. There was no "sacred cow" in Charlotte's life. Everything was "fair game." If there were airs, if she sensed pretense in others, if matters did not seem quite right, she would expose them and often shoot a verbal arrow. I think she had an honesty gene.

I know she had a loyalty gene. She scrutinized, and if you met her character and affability test, she was on your side. She was a good friend to have. My memories overflow with feelings of visceral friendship. It was always there for me and Nancy, and ours was always there for her. Absence never changed that nor did circumstances. I call her one of my foundation friends, always solid, always dependable, always necessary. Her capacity for friendship ran deeper than a casual observer might ascertain, and her friendship was founded in her intelligence.

Intelligent people are hard to fool. When you had a relationship with Charlotte you knew that she came to it with an understanding that was not superficial; it had emanated from a good mind as well as her emotions. I think that mind kept Paul interested even as she at times "took him to task."

Thinking about Charlotte these past few days, I have come to conclusions about her life that satisfy me, yet only those of you who lived with her longer and closer can judge their validity. Earlier, I said she came to a land foreign to her. When she came with Paul, my guess is Paul already had a firm outline for his life's agenda. He was a planner and an executer. She came with an independent mind. Whether she knew their agenda or not, she could hardly know its implications for her life. Life rolled out along the lines Paul laid down. Here she was with a hint of the feminist, but without a feminist's clothing to wear. Their lives were conventional and successful for a returning veteran and his bride. The causes Paul embraced to make his community and state better were ones she could readily share with him. But, Charlotte had a sense of self and was too smart to have her personality sub ~~serve~~^{SUMED} by an environment and culture that was both wholesome and dominating. Paul was born to it. She had to adapt it.

I surmise that both a conclusion and question crossed her mind as she first thought about her life in Grand Haven. Conclusion: This isn't like where I came from. Question: What did I get myself into? She may have taken time to figure out the answer. She brought the honesty and intelligence we have discussed to bear and another quality, toughness. She was tough when she had to be, and Paul liked that, too. She concluded, I

believe, that the life she was to live here was what she wanted, but she would never surrender her right to criticize what she did not like. She did not see herself among the meek when judgments were in order. So in her life, she moved to the position of community loyalist – from outsider to insider, keeping for herself the privilege of saying what she wanted when she wanted. In this way she could be herself, she could have personal integrity, personal equilibrium, sustain the relationships in the way she wanted, and be happy.

Charlotte never needed public recognition. She didn't need to be in charge, though she would not shrink from responsibilities that appealed to her. Somehow she seemed to me a force though she did not realize a personally cultivated power base to exert it. She loved; her daughters, especially; her husband more than she would publicly attest, and in a way completely acceptable and appreciated by him.

In earlier and middle years, there was always a patina of discontent that years of good life in a good place ameliorated. She was a complicated person. Complicated means that her capacities for feelings and thoughts ran deep. From that flow of feeling, I connected with her and our affection ran deep. We came to know each other through table talk and laughter. As the bond deepened the table talk and laughter continued. Now I have many

pleasant memories, and a friendship that does not end with her death, but sustains me in my remaining years.

Charlotte (Char) Albertine Johns

November 16, 1926 - May 28, 2008

First Presbyterian Church, Grand Haven, Michigan

May 31, 2008

4:00 p.m.

"When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of myself on who you are. It means that you summon me back to you even though countless years and miles may stand between us. I know that if we meet again you will know me. It means that even after you can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart. For as long as you remember me, I am never entirely lost."

Frederick Bu
Whistling in the Dark,

CALL TO WORSHIP - Adapted from Guillaume Apollinaire

Minister: God said, "Come to the edge."

People: But they said, "It's too far."

Minister: God said, "Come to the edge."

People: But they said, "It's too dangerous."

Minister: God said, "Come to the edge."

People: But they said, "We might fall."

Minister: God said, "Come to the edge."

People: So they came to the edge...

Minister: God pushed them... and they flew.

INVOCATION

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Minister: Let us lift our hearts in prayer.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN 464 - *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

THANKSGIVING FOR CHAR JOHNSON'S LIFE

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stone, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.
I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it,
nor anything taken away from it; God has made it so... Ecclesiastes 3:1-9 & 14*

*I lift up my eyes to the hills—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.*

Psalm 121

LIFE CELEBRATED WITH MEMORIES

Bari Johnson
Bob Mersereau

Don Lubbers, President Emeritus, G.V.S.U.

*"Set you troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me.
There are many dwelling places in my Father's house; it were not so, I should have told you; for I am going there on purpose to prepare a place for you, I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also; and my way there is known to you...
Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me."
John 14, selections*

Then I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth, for the first Heaven and the first earth had past away, and the sea was no more. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, descending from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride dressed in beauty for her husband. Then I heard a great voice from the throne crying:

"See! The home of God is with people, and he will live among them, shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more, and never again will there be sorrow or crying or pain. For all those former things are past and gone."

1

SPECIAL MUSIC - Alleluja, from the Motet "Exsultate, Jubilate"

A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

***HYMN 526 - For All the Saints**

***BENEDICTION**

***POSTLUDE - Hallelujah Chorus**

*For those who are able, please stand.

Participants: The Rev. Tom Cook
Mike D'Oyly, organist
Brenda Jeisy, soloist



Following this memorial service, the family of Char Johnson extends an invitation to all attending to a reception at the Spring Lake Country Club