

Tribute to Mary Alyce Pearson
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In the spirit of a Pearson Family Holiday letter, I will start with a quote – this one from Mary Oliver who I'm sure is familiar to many. "The Summer Day" ends with these memorable words:

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

With your one wild and precious life?

We are here celebrating a woman who knew exactly what to do with her wild and precious life, which was to fully live every moment of it.

My favorite story of Mary Alyce revolves around a night at the orchestra. During the time they were living in Minneapolis, Mary Alyce and David had season tickets to the Orchestra – usually going on Friday evenings. One afternoon, Mary Alyce called to say that Dave wouldn't be getting home in time to go to the Orchestra that week and did I want to go with her? I accepted, of course, and off we went to the Orchestra on Friday.

Well, we arrived a little early and decided to sit in the lobby with a glass of wine while we waited for the concert to begin. Unfortunately, when they came around chiming the little chime to summon us into the concert, we were in mid-conversation. We consulted the program and decided we weren't so crazy about the first piece so we'd just go in after that one. Well, the short of it is that we never did get to the concert. We simply sat and talked the evening away.

To my mind, this story is vintage Mary Alyce – featuring her love of the arts but in their proper place – behind a glass of wine and a good conversation. Conversation through which she created and developed lasting relationships, relationships that brought all of us to this room today.

I first met Mary Alyce in the early 70's. We were both stay-at-home moms with children and we gravitated to the League of Women Voters where we could have conversations in a modulated tone in words consisting of more than one syllable. The League kept us in touch with the part of our brains that – especially after reading the newly published "Feminine Mystique" – we were all afraid of losing.

We were also at League meetings because we cared about our world and were seeking reasoned answers to the questions of the day. The League meetings were in our neighborhood

– a neighborhood we all chose -- also because we cared about our world. These were the days shortly after the Civil Rights Movement when most major cities – including Minneapolis – had experienced various degrees of unrest. We – along with several other educated, white couples – moved into a changing neighborhood essentially to live the values we believed in and wanted to pass on to our children: the values of relationships, community, respect for all people, and justice.

Our children were all the same age – and they were all very young. So we created a cooperative nursery school. Mary Alyce and Dave were among the many parents who both managed and worked at the school. We took turns being with the children – and the parent we paid \$1,500/year to run the show. It was at the Red Door Preschool that parents and children together learned a new language. Fire fighter instead of fireman, for example. Unfortunately, our school was almost exclusively white, which meant that a standing agenda item at our meetings was how to bring children of color into the school. We never were successful. The world was changing but not enough for us. We had a lot to learn.

Forty years later, my daughter remembers Mary Alyce with these words -- “She never lost her cool -- and she talked to the children just the way she talked with adults, treating us like “real people.”

Coming off our experience of forming a preschool, Mary Alyce and I later occupied an evening after skiing by planning the cooperative nursing home we would put together when the time came. Unlike planning meetings for the nursery school, this conversation was accompanied by a few glasses of wine – and endless laughter. I loved – as I’m sure we all did – to hear Mary Alyce laugh. She could – and frequently did -- lose herself in laughter. What a gift to have – and to share with others!

As we know, Mary Alyce also enjoyed the culinary arts. Our family still makes the soup we had at Pearsons’ one night – Andalusian Condiment Soup. It’s fun to make and fun to eat. A neighborhood friend still has a handwritten recipe from Mary Alyce for an egg dish that she served. The same friend was impressed that Mary Alyce actually cooked from the Julia Child cookbook.

All, however, was not Julie Child. The best cooking story about Mary Alyce from those days features the children, specifically Susan and her friend Melissa. They were close in age and spent a lot of time at each other’s homes. All the kids liked mac and cheese, of course, but Melissa wasn’t too happy with Rosemary’s version. So Rosemary asked various friends for their recipes and tried a few others. No luck. Melissa said the one she liked best was Susan’s Mom’s. So Rosemary asked Mary Alyce for her macaroni and cheese recipe. Mary Alyce reached into

the cupboard and produced the source of her fame – good old Kraft in the box. The right menu for the right audience at the right time.

We saw the Pearsons only a few times after they left Minneapolis in 1978 -- ski trips and a couple of weddings. We kept up with each other through those holiday letters – and we continued to feel close to the family over the years and over the miles. Mary Alyce touched my life in a profound way. Everything about her was real. She was a completely authentic person. Which is why we loved her, why we will miss her. We were serious women at a serious time in our lives and in the history of womanhood. Mary Alyce was very serious about the Big Issues – and, at the same time, lighthearted. I loved her lightheartedness.

I will close with the words of St. John Chrysostom, a leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the 4th century.

Those whom we love and lose are no longer where they were before. They now are where we are.

One does not need to be a capital-B Believer to embrace these lines. We believe them because, though her time on earth was much shorter than we would have wanted, she gave us all so much – so much that is here today. She is where you are, David - where you are, Matthew – where you are, Susan – and where each of us is who were lucky enough to be accompanied on our life's journey with this woman who knew just what to do with her wild and precious life.