

A Celebration
of the
Completed Life of



Mary Iris Bolvin
November 25, 1986

MARY IRIS BOIVIN

Mary Iris Boivin, a member of the staff of the Los Angeles House, died on November 25, 1986 at the UCLA Medical Center in the city of Los Angeles, California - a month before her 59th birthday. A native of Chicago, Illinois, Mary Iris Rettig married Eugene A. Boivin in 1947. The couple continued to live in Chicago and reared nine children. Gene and Iris were both active in the Church renewal movement and became involved with the Ecumenical Institute in its early days in Chicago. In 1965 they moved the entire family into 5th City, the first Human Development Project and in 1968 formally joined the Order: Ecumenical.

Iris was one of the team pioneering in the concept of Imaginal Education and helped create the course and its many applications, including the "spiral curriculum" used in preschool education. The family later served in New Orleans where Iris obtained a high paying position as Director of Family Planning. (Her children state that they were only allowed to visit her office singly!)

After further service in Amarillo, Texas, and again in Chicago, Gene and Iris were assigned to El Bayad, a Human Development Project near Cairo, Egypt. There Iris initiated the preschool program using symbols and sign language to train the local staff since we had no language facility in Arabic. In subsequent years, her talents were utilized in Kenya, Guatemala, Venezuela and in Iowa, USA. In each case they worked in Human Development Projects, and in most cases in third world village conditions.

She was justifiably proud of her coordinating role in launching the replication of the original Human Development Projects in Kenya into a series of villages in the Machakos District and of obtaining funding for a health clinic in the Kabiro Human Development Project in Nairobi as well as breaking open the initial funding through the Ford Foundation for the whole Replication effort.

Iris was a gifted teacher and facilitator. One of her greatest assets was her ability to work with anyone, whether a villager, or a wealthy potential sponsor, or a colleague facing a difficult problem. She will be greatly missed.

FAMILY MEMBER TESTIMONIES

Introduction

I know everyone here experienced the greatness of Iris Boivin and I'm sure you all can share with us the affect she had on your lives. But her children know her as Mom, and the impact she had on our lives is unique and individual. At this time we children would like to share with you our special Mom.

Belinda

There is no single event in my life that fully depicts the gift of love that was my mother. Mom's greatest influence over my life was her example through the subtleness of her words and the greatness of her deeds.

She had the ability to direct my life with love during those crucial moments in my development when I anticipated drastic forms of discipline. Mom just always expected me to perform to the best of my ability, and if I thought I'd failed or if I rebelled against those expectations, Mom would always greet me with love and acceptance, not shame or ridicule.

Clarissa

Mother to me was an incredibly supportive human being. She had the gift of knowing when an encouraging word or deed was needed. She made me feel as though I was the greatest. She made each of us feel individually as though we were her "favorite," although with Mom there was none. But, it was sometimes nothing that she said; there was a look she would give you. A look of deep respect and love. She would key in on the unique quality that each of her children individually had to offer the world. When facing a decision, she never would tell you what you should do. When I was making my decision to go to nursing school. We talked about other career options and she suggested, "What about computers?" and after some thought I said, "Well Mom, I would feel like I missed my calling if I didn't have the human contact, I need to work with individuals". And she paused a minute and said, "Yes, I agree," and after more thought she said, "That's the way I am, too, and that is why I enjoyed working in the Obstetric area as a teenager in the hospital." She went on to recall some funny incidents during those early years. It was as though I had passed her test. Because she and I both knew that the computer area would have been totally wrong for me, but she wanted me to answer that for myself.

Gene

I was sitting holding Mom's hand. Mom said to me, "You know, the last time I held your hand was when you were four years old." So I said, "How do you like holding my hand now?" She said, "Thank you, but you know there were those times when you wanted to hold my hand and I wouldn't let you." "Yeah" I said. "I know, and there were those times when I wouldn't let you hold my hand either."

Pat

Mother was always fascinated with the multiple cultures of this earth. Especially, cultural life in small vilage communities. She loved to work with village women and watch and learn new ways of providing for the basic needs of their families and the community. She also never belittled any small task or deed she had ever done in her life. These two qualities are exemplified for me while I was in India and she was assigned to El Bayad, Egypt. We would correspond to each other and compare notes on the several similarities between the two cultures. In one letter, Mother described her experience in starting a marmalade factory. She talked about trying to introduce the concept and importance of hygiene to the women of that factory. At the end of her letter she said, "I knew all those years of sterilizing baby bottles would prove to be a valuable skill to me."

Mary Iris

What I will remember most about my mother was that she always stood in service to others. As vital to her as food or air to breath was her capacity to minister to others. She was very clear about this.

During the week that we all spent with her in the hospital she talked with my sister Patty and I about it. She looked up at us and crying asked how she was going to be able to continue to care for others while lying on her back. We laughed and assured her that she continued to make a difference in the lives of every nurse and doctor that walked into her room. As soon as one of them walked into her room, she immediately perked up and asked where her smile was today or said, "Oh, I'm so glad you are on this shift," and made sure they knew they were doing a good job and that she appreciated it. That was my mother, to the day she died, she cared for others."

Kevin

Mom was and is a person who wanted me to know that communication was important. I was made aware of this as early as 1st grade in prepping for tests. She was always able to wrap me up in stories and current events just by the way she presented them. They were presented with humor. They made me laugh. I will relish those moments. I feel she has left me with this challenge. The challenge to communicate parts of life and to find those humorous things in life and to share them.

Keith

"Those Big Baby Blues" reflected the love and care that she was about. She always pushed me forward, not always softly and sometimes quite hard. But the level of love and care was always at the highest level and you knew it and never had any doubt about it.

Other times you did not realize she was pushing you forward until it was too late to be upset about it. She would always help you laugh about it.

Her love and care for humanity radiated from her to the point of increasing and reinforcing the levels of care in those around her. Allowing you to do and be all that you are. MOM, YOU ARE THE GREATEST.

Christopher

Mom was a woman of real style. It was inherent in her being. She worked so hard to get us to sit at the table with our hands in our laps and to sit up straight. She worked on me up until I was twelve. Then she figured it was too late if we hadn't learned by then. In my case, I think I'm just a natural slouch, I don't know. Eventually after 5 minutes of sitting with my hands in my lap my elbow would find the table and my hand, my chin. In exasperation Mom's elbow would also find the table and her hand her chin, in imitation of me. She looked so strange in that position. You couldn't imagine her in any other stance than elegance. Bad posture was foreign to Mom. You would take her style for granted because it was so consistent. Even in the hospital, she maintained her poise and style for as long as she was conscious.

Carita

Mom had a presence about her that when she walked into a room you could feel that there was a change in the air of the room. She had an aura about her or an essence that just seeing her you could tell she was a great lady. When we lived on the 6th floor of this building, Liz Reese and I were playing Jacks. When it was my turn I had messed up and screamed "Jesus Christ". Just as those words were coming out of my mouth something had changed in the air. All of the sudden I turned around and there she was. She gave me one of these looks and quietly said, "What does he have to do with it?" Anyway, it was that presence or care that allowed her to care for people all over the world.

The Final Time

Iris was moved in a semi-comatose condition from the Regina Coeli Extended Care Facility to the UCLA Medical Center on the afternoon of November 1st. The prognosis of the Emergency Room Staff was that her condition was critical and that she could pass away at any time.. Her family was notified and all of the children were at her side within 48 hours. She rallied strongly and after 48 hours was conscious and communicative. In her first conversation with her husband she asked how bad she was and when informed that she was about as bad off as she could be and still be in history she said "I think this is great that everyone should come while there is still hope rather than wait until it is too late." She gained strength daily and visited almost constantly with each member of the Family. By the end of the first week her spirit was souring and she was counting her own daily victories and projecting her own final recovery. She went through the operation for her colostomy without a hitch and everyone felt that she had basically won in her fight to claim a human quality of life. In the midst of it all she won the hearts of all the hospital staff, nurses and doctors alike. On the Sunday following her operation we had a fantastic Ice Cream Social in her room serving all with Chocolate Ice Cream and Hot Fudge. She was able by that time to eat soft or liquid foods. She was planning her first full meal and intended to eat a Bismark with cherry filling with lots of frosting and a Hamburger.

On the Monday following the Ice Cream Social, Iris began to go downhill. Her mental capacities began to fail until within three or four days she was totally comatose. The Doctors suspected that she had a fungus infection developing and made a change in her medication designed to deal with it. At this time the family, at the recommendation of the doctors, signed a "Do Not Resuscitate" order and delimited the aggressiveness of therapies to be used on her behalf in order to minimize her pain and suffering while providing the appropriate treatment. On Sunday she seemed to be rallying and was more responsive to the presence of people in the room. On Monday she began having seizures and after conference with the doctors and following a teleconference with the family, it was decided that the only thing left was to make her comfortable and to let her slip away. We gave instructions to stop all injections and blood drawing as well as transfusions and prepared for the end. We brought in a tape player and played "December" by George Winston continuously until her heart beat began to slow and stopped at 12:45 A.M. November 25th. In attendance were her daughter Patricia Price with her husband Tom, Iris' son Christopher, her husband Gene, Claudia Cramer and Molly Shaw of the Global Order.

THE ASSIGNMENT OF IRIS

The earth life of Iris is completed. She now has another assignment. We do not know what that assignment is nor what the statement finally means.

And yet, the mysterious Source of all energy systems maintains and holds secure within the love of all, the energy that is Iris. This is an understanding of gratitude and hope that touches the significance of all of us, making all activities we are and participate in flow with eternal life.