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Joyce Harpole Eulogy

There is an empty place in our hearts this day, as we come together to remember our dear Joyce, our beloved friend, to celebrate her life, to remember with joy and gratitude the many ways our lives were linked with hers. This time belongs to Tom and to Jessica, to Helen and Leo, to Joyce's sister and brothers, to Tom's family, to friends and colleagues from near and far, to all of us who loved her; but we want to make this time true to Joyce, and who she was, so our celebration and remembrance must share the honesty that was her honesty, the unassailable integrity and fairness that were hers, the gentleness and lovely friendship that we all knew as part of her.

In celebrating Joyce's life, each of us will have our own memories, but we have something more than that, because Joyce left a chronicle of her life, in the form of a letter addressed to her daughter Jessica, and her family has given me permission to read some excerpts from it this afternoon. Joyce was such a modest and private person that there are many things about her life that even her closest friends outside the family were not aware of, but her chronicle speaks in such simple and honest and measured tones that you will nod in recognition: "Yes, this was Joyce."

"I was the third of four children who lived with Helen and Leo Bridges on a 30-acre farm in Gaston, Oregon. Dad

grew strawberries, green beans, corn, and crooked neck squash. In the summers, the whole family, plus children and adults from the community, helped care for and harvest our crops. We would pick the crops, hoe the weeds from the fields, help move irrigation pipe, and string the beans. To string the beans, we would pass cones of string under a bottom twine and then over a top wire that was fastened to the posts that made up the bean yard. The string would go up and down between the twine and wire and make a lattice work that the bean vines would cling to as they grew up. This was one of my most favorite jobs in the field and I couldn't wait until I grew tall enough to be able to pass the spool of string over the top wire."

That's how Joyce begins her chronicle, and she goes on to tell of learning to drive the tractor when she was seven years old, of running through sprinklers on hot days and sleeping outside on hot nights, of going to mass on Sundays and praying the rosary in the evening as the dishes were washed. She remembers the beach trips, so eagerly anticipated, riding in the back of the pickup with the crates of strawberries that she and Donna had picked, to be delivered to markets along the way to the beach to help pay for the family vacation. She tells of the family's menagerie: Jerry's hogs, Donna's shetland pony, Jerry's rabbits--but as for herself, she says, "I have always loved cats, and we always had a lot of them."

Then school days began. "I always loved school," she says. "I learned fast enough in the first grade that I was

able to go straight from the first grade to the third grade. My sister Donna helped me learn to write cursive over the summer so that I could write like a third grader in the fall."

One of her memories of grade school days was the year she was part of Forest Grove's Gay 90s festival. "One year" she writes, "the theme of the festival was "School Days" and all the local schools were invited to compete for a chance to be in the entertainment program. Our school won, and Donna and I both got to wear old-fashioned dresses and hats and sing a song called "Sunbonnet Sally and Overall Jim" in the program. The program was put on two times, and I think this was the first time I ever stayed up until 11:00 at night. I remember Mom staying up until about 2:00 in the morning before the program finishing our dresses, which she sewed herself.

"Mom taught me to sew, to crochet a little, to embroider, and to knit. By the time I was in high school, I was making my own clothes. *** When I graduated from high school, as a graduation present, Mom and Dad helped me buy a portable Singer sewing machine which I have used ever since, even to make clothes for you. I continued to make many of my own clothes until after I started working as a lawyer.

"I always loved to read. Reading opened up new worlds for me, far beyond what I saw on the farm. I read every chance I could get. *** Unfortunately, I didn't care so much for cooking, a chore that was always with us. We usually had meat and potatoes and other vegetables for supper, and I

regrettably often got distracted by what I was reading and let the water boil dry in the potato pot so that the potatoes ended up getting burned. Mom thought I would never be able to get married because I was so uninterested in cooking that no man would want me as his wife."

After high school, Joyce went on to the University of Oregon, where she majored in journalism. She spent a summer in Washington, D.C. as an intern in Congressman Dallenback's office, writing newsletters and press releases. Dallenback was a Republican, and Joyce says:

"I tried to ignore the fact that I was a Democrat at heart and do as good a job as possible.

"I graduated from the University cum laude, but I didn't know what I was going to do with my degree in journalism. I was led to believe that I would have to go to some small town in Eastern Oregon and work on the town's weekly newspaper. I didn't want to do that at all."

She didn't have to, for she had met Tom Harpole the year before, and on her graduation day, June 11, 1972, they were married. "I made my wedding dress from materials that cost about \$30," she says.

Tom and Joyce immediately set out for San Antonio, where Tom was stationed in the Army. In San Antonio, "I soon learned that an honors degree in journalism wasn't very useful in finding work." She got a job as a word processing secretary at a bank, and later worked as an advertising copywriter for a

department store, but quit when the store fired another employee for reporting labor law violations, and she went back to work for the bank until Tom's tour of duty was over.

In January 1975, Tom and Joyce returned to Oregon, and Joyce went to work for the Public Affairs Director of the Western Wood Products Association. After about a year, she found a job with the Bonneville Power Administration. "I was hired to help write an environmental impact statement," she says, and "while I was doing this, I started taking classes at night at Portland Community College in its legal assistant program. I was looking for a more challenging job and thought that being a legal assistant might be that job. I loved all the classes about law, and finally decided to take the Law School Admissions Test to see if I could qualify to go to law school so that I could become a lawyer. *** Tom was great about this. Going to law school meant that I would not be employed full time for three years and that our income would be reduced, but he supported my doing so."

So Joyce enrolled at Northwestern School of Law at Lewis & Clark, graduated first in her class, and went on to clerk for a year for Judge Burns, who sent me a note this morning that says this: "She was a superstar -- in ability, integrity, and half-a-dozen other categories, above all human decency. I can't think of a better advocate for us all at the court of St. Peter."

In the summer of 1980, Joyce took the bar exam and received the highest score. She and Tom spent six wonderful weeks in Europe later that summer, and she came to work for Stoal Rives on October 1, 1980. Joyce describes for Jessica the work she did as a lawyer, the kind of law she practiced, and some of the cases she worked on. And then she says this:

"I think I am proudest of the work I did on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union with Drew Gardner and others on a case called Burke v. Weissert. We brought suit on behalf of people in Oregon's mental hospitals who were being given psychotropic medication with serious side effects without their consent."

Joyce fought a long legal battle in that case, and it led to significant reforms in the way drugs are administered in Oregon's mental hospitals. Her work was so impressive that she was invited to join the board of the Oregon Advocacy Center, an organization that provides legal services to mentally ill persons. She went on to serve many other civic and bar-related organizations, and her professional career flourished during the 80s, but all that was secondary to the most important event of the decade:

"In 1985, I gave birth to the light of my life, Jessica. I know the day you were born was the happiest day of my life and of your father's, and the time I have spent caring for you, watching you grow and develop, and loving you has been the best time of my life."

Joyce ends her letter to her daughter with this paragraph:

"I have spent a lot of my spare time reading books written by great thinkers, and I have pondered over the question of what life is all about. I think now that the answer is very simple--life is for living and loving--to enjoy every moment possible and to make the lives of those around you the very best you can. I know that I have had a very rich and full life, thanks in large part to the many kind people who helped me in life, and I know that I have had the love of friends and family when I needed it most."

These words from Joyce's heart will be a priceless memento for Jessica in the years ahead, and I know I speak for all of us this afternoon in saying how grateful we are to Jessica and Tom for letting us share them. We're grateful, too, that Joyce was aware of all the love that was focused on her during these last months, from her family, from all of us in her law firm, and from all the others whose lives she touched. And there were so many lives she touched: I've mentioned her work for the Oregon Advocacy Center, where she was president of the Board for two years, but she also served on the board of Oregon Legal Services for three years; the Board of Bar Examiners for three years, and chaired it for one; the Owen Panner Inn of Court, which she was serving as president at the time of her death, and many others. It is a list of accomplishments so impressive that in May of this year,

the Alumni Board of the Northwestern School of Law selected her for its annual award, its highest honor. The inscription reads: "This is to certify that Joyce A. Harpole, in recognition of her singular outstanding achievements and contributions to the profession and community that have distinguished her and have reflected distinction upon the Law School, is hereby awarded the honor of Distinguished Graduate."

All this is part of the public record, but what kind of lawyer was Joyce Harpole? Only this: the kind of lawyer who made you proud to be a lawyer. Intelligent, articulate, analytical, yes; but more than that, she was a person wholly without guile or artifice, a person of such extraordinary integrity and fairness that every moment of her law practice was carried out at the very highest level of professionalism. She was incapable of anything less, and no one knew her very long without realizing that here was a person who could quite simply be trusted -- trusted completely, trusted without reservation, to perform any task, share any burden, hold any confidence.

In our law firm, Joyce worked more closely over the years with Barnes Ellis than with anyone else, and I asked him to describe from his perspective what it was like to work with Joyce. This is part of what he wrote:

"Joyce was soft-spoken, a feature that masked an extraordinary mental and emotional toughness. Often she would be the one to urge a more aggressive course, a stronger

resolve, a tougher position. She did so not out of some instinctive competitiveness or need to assert power, but because she had confidence in her analytical abilities and she had confidence in the legal system. She was right an extraordinary number of times.

"Joyce could organize complex factual materials beautifully. Unique among trial lawyers in our firm, her desk was always clean, except for the one document she was then focused on. She had a miraculous ability to retrieve from her files or computer any key document, brief, or correspondence. The only exception to her completely ordered office were pictures--usually crayon drawings--by Jessica. These were for display, and not to be filed.

"As Joyce's career developed over the years, she was recognized not only as an excellent trial lawyer, but--something rare among trial lawyers--a good manager as well. As time went by, she was asked to take on increasing managerial responsibilities in our firm until in 1992 she became chair of the litigation department. She was, by universal acknowledgment, the best department manager we have ever had.

"For those of us blessed with daughters now entering the new world of professional women, Joyce has been a pioneer and a model of how to have a fulfilling and dynamic professional career, and be a loving and energetic spouse, and be a caring and accessible mother, and be a force in the

broader community, and do all these things with an abundant measure of laughter, perspective, and grace."

All these things can be said about the life of Joyce Harpole, and more, but what now shall we say about her death?

The death of any person we love and admire is an occasion for grief, but on this occasion there are other emotions as well. Joyce left us much too soon, and I suspect there is more than a little anger and resentment at the unfairness of this event. We have been robbed of her wisdom, and her incomparable strength of character, and the force of her personality, and her love--and we wish we had all of that back. But anger and resentment are unproductive emotions, and altogether out of place in any remembrance of Joyce. She was always a voice of calm, a voice of quiet, a voice of reason, and she always had the right word to illuminate a problem, to resolve a conflict, to ease the tension. That was true to the end of her life. Some who visited her in the last weeks, for example, were a little apprehensive. How do you visit a dying friend? What skills does it take? Is there an art to it?

No one need have worried. There was no skill required, no art. Joyce made everyone feel at ease. She was cheerful and warm and hospitable, inquisitive, curious, and interested; able to talk quite objectively about the disease that was overtaking her body, and quite unwilling to be maudlin or sentimental about it. There was no sense of gloom, no self-pity, and above all no fear. Joyce was not afraid of

death, and she was not bitter or resentful about what was happening to her. "I have nothing to complain about," she told me, nine days before she died. "I've never known any adversity in my life." She knew that life her life had been blessed, and she would not let the reality of her approaching death discourage her. Even more importantly, she did not want her approaching death to discourage her family, either. "You've got better things to do; pick yourselves up and get on with it," that was her attitude. And in that way, in her love and in her courage, she did her best to prepare Tom and Jessica for her death, helping them to understand that their lives would go on with fullness and richness whether or not she was there to share in them.

A half century ago, during the London blitz, the great Welsh poet Dylan Thomas wrote a poem entitled, "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London." One stanza reads this way:

"I shall not murder
The mankind of her going with a grave truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the
breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth."

Joyce told me once that she admired those lines, because she believed, with the poet, that a person's death, no matter how cruelly it comes, no matter how out of time, should not be dishonored by the kind of mourning that emphasizes only the loss felt by those who survive. It is blasphemous to do so, the poet suggests, because it implies that death is the final

chapter in the book of life. It isn't, and Joyce knew that it isn't. "There is nothing in life or death," says the Apostle Paul, "nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ." That was Paul's faith, and that was Joyce's faith, and that is why there is no need for grave truths or elegies of innocence and youth when we consider the meaning of Joyce's death, for there is nothing we could say that could add a particle to the joy that she brought to the lives of her family and friends; and there is nothing we could say that could detract a particle from our certainty that she is now in the presence of the One whose love for her is greater than our own.

For everyone who loved her in this life, which is to say everyone who knew her, the memory of the gift that Joyce's life was to us will help to heal the sorrow we feel today, and that memory will remain as a blessing on our own lives for as long as we live. So, even as we grieve this day, we should go from this place today with thankful hearts and joyful spirits: rejoicing that Joyce Harpole lived a creative and productive and giving life, rejoicing that she left this community better than she found it, rejoicing that we were here to have had the privilege of knowing her and having our lives touched by hers, and rejoicing that she gave more to us than death can take away.

To God be the glory.