

Marjory Ann (McPherson) Veliquette 1944-2013

This is not Marjory's story; this is my story of Marjory, which I feel compelled to tell, for it was my greatest privilege that she chose to love me, being my wife, the mother of my children, my workmate, and friend for almost half a century. Besides, the story might not otherwise ever be told, for she felt unworthy to tell it. It is a broad brush telling. Between the strokes there are thousands of untold intricate personal frescos which only she and the affected persons have seen.
– Norman R. Veliquette

Marjory lived a lifetime of surprises. Perhaps the first was that she arrived before her mother's due date and the second, she was an unexpected twin. Donald and Elura McPherson named their twins Mary and Marjory, girls with strong and beautiful spirits.

During childhood, Marjory was hospitalized with long bouts of kidney infection. She missed weeks of school. She heard doctors tell her parents that if she didn't out-grow the kidney infection, she would probably die. She learned important habits about caring for her body. Then, out-growing the infection, she defied the forecast of a childhood death and became a strong person.

Marjory attended the one-room McPherson School near her home in Vergennes Township of Kent County through the eighth grade. She lived the typical life of a 1950's farm girl: feeding the animals, gathering eggs, and cleaning the chicken coup and calf stalls in the barn. She pulled mustard in the fields with her brothers and sisters. She trained and groomed a 4-H show calf. Through the manure, the sweat, and her calf's shaggy hair, Marjory saw a blue ribbon. And the real winner was Marjory. She also baked and sewed and modeled her clothing projects among the toughest of competitors, including her twin Mary. Among the 2,500 young seamstresses of Kent County, Mary and Marjory both reached the top. She attended and graduated from Lowell High School.

At Michigan State University, Marjory continued in textiles, costume history, and merchandising. She dreamed of becoming a fashion designer. She worked her way through college and earned her degree under difficult circumstances. She worked one summer in her mother's kitchen at the YMCA in downtown Grand Rapids, scrubbing pots and pans and mixing large recipes for YMCA campers, wedding receptions and company picnics. Another summer, she was a housekeeper and waited tables at Chamberlain's up-scale summer resort near Cheboygan. In these jobs, she learned on a grand scale about food-handling, preparation, and presentation—skills she enthusiastically shared in many venues throughout her life--benefitting family, friends, and the many communities of which she was a part.

Also at Michigan State, she became an International Farm Youth Exchange delegate to Nepal in 1966. For half a year, she slept on dirt floors in mud huts, shivered in the cold air of the Himalayan Mountains, and helped poor young mothers and girls fit clothing to their babies and their dolls. The experience strengthened Marjory's chances for achieving her dream as a fashion designer.

But on her international detour from college, she met an Antrim County boy, Norman Veliquette who went to Brazil on the same program. They did not seem headed in the same direction, for his destiny seemed to be international development work. He was headed to Nigeria. But fate played its hand. A civil war erupted in Nigeria and Norman did not go. Marjory dated him and in 1969, she married the Antrim County boy. Three years later, and with month-old baby Roger in tow, she moved with Norman to his hometown of Elk Rapids, abandoning her aspirations for the fashion worlds of New York and Paris.

People in Elk Rapids knew her as Norman Veliquette's wife. But she quickly adopted Norman's business, his community, his church, and became a strong member of his large family. She called her mother-in-law *Mommy* with child-like affection. The result was that people soon began referring to Norman as Marjory Veliquette's husband. In Elk Rapids, she gave her son Roger two sisters: Sara Marie and Mary Judith. Becoming active at school, she gave generously of her time and talents to the children of others. For thirty years, she led a 4-H Club of aspiring seamstresses. She sewed hundreds of baby quilts and scores of Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls which she sold at bazaars. She sold other crafts in homes. One of her proudest accomplishments was that of selling over 100 sets of World Book Encyclopedias in the Elk Rapids area. In that, she felt she had opened the doors of learning all through the community. It was also Marjory's influence that changed the Miss Elk Rapids Contest into the Miss Elk Rapids Scholarship Pageant, funded by a community foundation endowment created through her leadership and relentless efforts.

Marjory committed herself to Sacred Heart Church, becoming an officer in Women of the Heart for twenty-six years, teaching catechism, sewing celebratory garments and altar clothes, decorating the sanctuary for Christmas and other feast days, organizing dinners for funerals, Valentine's Day, priests' visitations, and events like mother-daughter banquets. She skillfully demonstrated her flare for food preparation and presentation, delegating well in all endeavors and usually pushing others into the limelight of appreciation reflected from the parish. She founded and for several years directed Friends of Peterman Auditorium at Elk Rapids High School, providing funds for sound and projection equipment when the auditorium was new.

She was independent. But not *an* independent. She was a peace-maker, a leader, a teacher, the consummate team player not just at church, but in business and at home. She was fiercely loyal to her husband who she supported for twenty years on the school board and as Rotary club president, district governor, polio NID volunteer, author of three books, member of the Michigan Agricultural Commission and a successful businessman. Behind the good man, she was the proverbial good woman and faithful wife. She collected, evaluated, and organized thousands of recipes which she published in several cookbooks. When the books came out, she always gave credit to someone else for their success.

For years after other Rotary partners were unwilling to lead, Marjory was president of the Rotary Anns. In the spring each year, she organized Rotarians and Partners to fill the Rotary planters with flowers throughout the village. In the fall, she organized Christmas-giving for needy children and families, a project that served hundreds of families and was later taken over by the owner and staff at the Village Market.

Foremost, Marjory was a mother, encouraging her children as she did her husband, to reach beyond their comfort zones; reach for the stars. She would say, “You can accomplish anything.” No matter how late they came home, she always waited up for them. She was the greatest fan of their successes and held them tightly in their failures. When Patrick, Erin, and Paul joined the family and grandchildren arrived, she loved them and engaged them all tightly in the same way. When granddaughter Emma said she wasn’t going to do anything during the summer, Marjory said, “Oh, yes you are. Come on. I’ll show you *right now* how to make Jello.”

Marjory had an uncanny ability to size up people and recruit them for work. For more than four decades, she hired thousands of people for summer employment. She went to job fairs, sent cards and phoned untold numbers of prospects with personal invitations to work. When she was hospitalized in Ann Arbor, she told her surgeons and other specialists about the opportunities in Kewadin to drive a forklift for the summer. None came to drive forklift, but several brought their families to see Marjory’s cherry plant. She solved the complex annual puzzle of matching a throng of job applicants with the many positions that existed in her fast-paced factory. She introduced untold hundreds of young people to their first jobs, instilling an ethic of be-on-time, work hard, no nonsense, can do, take pride in the details of your work, and when it’s done have a party. “People want a nice experience,” she would say.

Marjory did something special every year, perhaps providing everyone with a hat or a T-shirt, giving them an identity associated with the important work and the strong team they had joined, something they cherished. She ministered to people; she fed the flock. And many returned over and over again to work for her. She shouldered the greatest burden in assuring a sufficient number of workers, on a timely basis, for the factory. When necessary, she even sheltered college students and migrant families in her own house, garage, or back yard. In her work ethic, she set examples that many followed, rigorously keeping quality records and cleaning her processing plant with the same care by which she cleaned her mother’s YMCA kitchen and the same intensity with which in her childhood she cleaned the chicken coup and calf stalls on the McPherson farm.

She served as the volunteer costume designer and seamstress for some of the most intimidating school plays, sewing and fitting the costumes for surely thousands of theater characters, from the VonTrapp family children in the 1980s *Sound of Music*, to Anna’s students in *The King and I*, fantasies in *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, Athenian lovers in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* and many others, including throngs of performers in several of the first Madrigal Dinners performed at the high school. She helped with Rotary Show costumes; she fitted and sewed dresses for weddings and queen pageants from Little Misses to Miss Michigan. She taught her daughters and other young women the fine skills of sewing and personal presentation, having protégés succeed in state and national competition. She was the queen mother, her goal always being to help others look good and succeed. Daughter Judith became a lead dancer in the international troupe UP WITH PEOPLE. Sara became National Cherry Queen. Both daughters were State 4-H Fashion Revue winners and earned the Miss Elk Rapids title. Roger became a successful and internationally recognized coach of American-style football in Europe.

Marjory measured the value of her participation in every endeavor by the Four Way Test of Rotary, an organization in which her father, her brothers, and her husband were members.

Though she was a Rotarian in spirit, her name was never on the club roster. She manifested her Christian ethic through how truthful, beneficial, and fair to all concerned her activities were. Did they build goodwill and better friendships? She was a driving force in Rotary's Youth Exchange Committee in Elk Rapids. She served as a host mother for several students. Through hundreds of phone calls and personal contacts, without bragging or complaining, she recruited many other families to host young internationals. She likewise recruited and supported many Elk Rapids students in their aspirations to travel and study overseas. During her tenure, Elk Rapids became a Mecca, which it continues to be, for international students. She treasured her own experience of being an international youth exchange student. She gave back by helping others have the same good experience, for each one personally, and for the broader objective of world understanding and peace.

At Rotary International's worldwide assembly with Norman in 1993, women from all the continents of the world befriended Marjory. She was approachable and *took the initiative* to make friends. She would take the same initiative to reconcile with adversaries, saying, "You have to work at it with friends and enemies. You open up your arms and they open up their arms."

In the early 1990s, the kidney problems of Marjory's childhood caught up with her. She intensified her attention to high-quantity water intake and good nutrition. She explored alternative medicine and became a student and a disciple of kinesiology and herbal remedies. She became a distributor of nutritional supplements, helping many like herself who faced health challenges. In 1995, she experienced End Stage Renal Disease, brought on perhaps by a carcinoid in her liver. She had type O blood and other uncommon biological factors that made a well-matched kidney transplant seem improbable. In the long month of January of 1996, she underwent three major surgeries. Half her liver was removed, a plastic tube for dialysis was installed in her arm, and she experienced an accidentally punctured lung.

She prayed and many prayed for her. She recovered, but was tethered to the grueling regimen of hemodialysis. In her wretched condition, she pulled herself out of bed at 5:00 a.m. three times a week and went to Traverse City, a 30-minute drive from home, arriving at six o'clock to start each four-hour ordeal. Sometimes she drove herself to and from the treatment. During her four years on dialysis, she witnessed fellow patients decline and disappear. But she never saw dialysis as a bad situation. If she ever allowed a complaint to slip out, she would quickly say in the same breath how glad she was to be alive. In a compromised condition, she kept up her rigorous standards of motherhood, volunteer work, and career at Great Lakes Packing Company.

Most who experience multiple major surgeries and land on hemodialysis lose their zest for life and fade away. Not Marjory. For several years, even thru her worst conditions, she made scores of video scrapbooks, jobs that frequently came with the pressure of a short timeline: funerals, weddings, beauty pageants, birthdays, and other anniversaries. She enjoyed the creativity; she found that bringing still photographs to life was relatively easy, but editing and transferring old home movies to video and DVD was tedious and trying, as brittle old films frequently broke and 8-mm and 16-mm movie equipment failed. Marjory worked through challenges where others had succumbed to madness and frustration. She was driven by the underlying ambition to ultimately please someone. She worked for pennies, with her greatest desire being to have a

happy customer. Her biggest disappointments came with people she could not please. But she recognized the importance of letting go of successes and failures alike. She had the ability to move on. And she kept moving on.

At bedtime, Marjory read Guideposts Magazine. She subscribed not only to the magazine, but to the philosophy. She would say, "Each day God gives us is a small miracle. We have a choice to make something of it, or to complain and let it slip away."

In 1999, God smiled on this courageous servant and delivered a perfectly matched kidney. She went straight to the front of the line and received the gift. Like other surprises or miracles in Marjory's life, she quickly regained normal health and began a tender relationship with her transplanted kidney that was like a mother and baby, a chance encounter that added over thirteen years of good quality to her distinguished life.

She decorated her home artistically, colorfully, and appropriately for every holiday season-- Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Her busy and skillful hands combined colorful ribbons with greenery and fabric in clever creations. She'd plant tulip bulbs in the fall and cover them with leaves and brush. She would fret during the winter about chipmunks and mice possibly eating them. When snow melted, she raked away the leaves and her flowers would come in waves. When her tulips stopped blooming, she'd lift the bulbs and dry them. She'd plant all varieties of begonias, bleeding hearts, xenias, spikes, baby's breath and other accents for the summer. She'd have geraniums, nasturtium, wild roses, and mums until the snows of winter came. Year round, iconic family images, cherry artistry, and pictures of family generations adorned Marjory's home. At the entrance to her processing plant, she created a flower garden loved by employees and visitors.

On the fourth day of the 2007 cherry pack, fire and smoke scorched the house Marjory and Norman had built and raised their family in. Marjory's response epitomized her resilient character. Even as she kept a crew packing cherries at the processing plant, she took charge of the clean-up, salvaging family heirlooms, furniture, and clothing. After harvest, she washed laundry for weeks, drying more than a hundred loads on a clothesline, saving her insurance money for things she said were more important. She provided relentless leadership in building and furnishing the new home, a place more beautiful than anything she or Norman had ever imagined they might live in.

She loved vibrant colors in clothes and flowers. She saw life itself that way. There were no grays or browns. Marjory judged quickly and fairly, choosing decisively even in matters of life and death. When the carcinoid returned in her liver, she elected to protect her transplanted kidney by avoiding radical cancer treatments. She opted for an octreotide therapy, which as time passed required larger and larger doses. She faithfully self-injected the medication three times a day, no matter the circumstances or the surroundings. She journeyed bravely with cancer in her liver for sixteen years. It was a conscious decision to die of the tumors or their complications rather than to lose her kidney transplant and return to dialysis.

The cherry processing plant was her playground. She loved interviewing, hiring, training, and molding a non-descript mass of people into an efficient, hard-working crew. She was grateful for

meaningful work and the excitement of every pack. She rose to the challenge of quality inspections, and third party audits, always trying to attain new highs in points as well as in plant production. As her condition deteriorated and others said she should take it easy, she reacted tartly, "I'm not going to lie on the couch, waiting to die." At the company retreat in 2011, her 40th year with the company, she said "I am *so lucky!* Nobody else would hire this old lady for the exciting job I have at Great Lakes Packing Company."

It was important to Marjory that her family and friends understand how faithfully she followed her doctor's advice in taking care of herself. She actually did much more than most could imagine. When necessary, she confronted doctors and insurance companies to obtain the care that she felt she needed. Few can fathom her discipline in consuming wholesome nutrition, an adequate intake of water, and her prescribed medications.

She had a confident relationship with her Creator. Her faith was strong. She was often afraid for others but never for herself. When she reached the Valley of Death in the 1990s, she took an angling course along the rim for almost 20 years. Ultimately, she recognized the inevitability of crossing over. She nodded toward the river. When she felt the approval of her family and friends, she plunged into the cold water. Angels arrived in the form of grown children, twin sister, church friends, and hospice workers. In a short time, she emerged on the other side, ascending the slope and disappearing into the ethereal mist. Those with her at the final encampment reversed course to live and find their ultimate destiny.

A great woman has touched our lives. To love all people, work hard, beat deadlines, and finish every job was characteristically Marjory. No nonsense, can do, take pride in the outcome, and when it's done have a party. Marjory was never idle, always serving. She was entitled to boast, yet she did not. Though she was always thinking of the next thing to do, she could say as St. Paul said, "I ran the good race; I fought the good fight."