



Judy Neil

Memorial Reception for Judy Neil

September 26, 1945 - October 11, 2003

Thank you for joining us in remembering my Mom. This program includes some of the many stories and reflections that friends and family have sent to us, as well as some of our own memories. We hope that these passages evoke memories of your own time with Mom.

Our family would like to sincerely thank Roberta Hower--Mom's closest friend and 'chosen sister'--for her tireless care and companionship of Judy. Roberta has been a tremendous mentor, 'extra aunt' and friend to Kevin and I since she taught me the metric system in grade one.

Mom taught me so many things. She was a wonderful mother--understanding, advisory, unconditional. I owe so much of the good in me to her. She made me a feminist without my knowing. She fostered an interest in technology that led to my current career, while supporting my more artistic endeavours. She was proud of everything I did. A few weeks before she died, she sent me a copy of a column that I'd written for the Vancouver Sun in 1993.

I wanted to share a couple of my favourite memories of Mom. Naturally, they both involve animals:

In grade three, my teacher was Roberta, who would go on to become Mom's closest friend. Recognizing my love of books and animals (both traits I inherited from my mother), Roberta (who also insisted we call her 'Roberta' and not 'Mrs. Hower', but no one ever did) assigned me a novel about a species going extinct, entitled *The Last of the Curlens*. The book was well beyond my reading level, and I toiled through each paragraph. Mom and I worked out a deal, where I would read some, and then she would read some to me. I forget the particulars now, but by the end of the book I believe she was reading ten pages aloud for every one that I read. Despite these early reading pains, Mom (and Roberta) managed to instill in me a lifelong love of the written word. Today, it's how I make a living.

The second memory involves my family's regular battles with raccoons. Our house in West Vancouver backed onto a forest, and for many years the critters would visit our garbage cans on a nightly basis. Their refuse banquet would make a terrible noise, and my parents would awaken and try to chase them off. More planning went into anti-raccoon strategies than went into the D-Day landings. One night my mother hit on the ideal raccoon deterrent: ice cubes. They could be hurled from a distance, they wouldn't injure the animals, and there was nothing to clean up. She gave this approach a try on several occasions, but was unsuccessful. It turns out that the raccoons quickly discovered that if they simply stood still, Mom's aim was so poor that they would never get hit.

Thank you, Mom, for everything you gave me.

If other stories of Mom come to mind, please email them to me at darren@darrenbarefoot.com. They are a source of great joy and comfort to our family.

--Darren Barefoot



Judy and I were best friends during our childhood years. The Neils moved in across the street from us in the fall of 1954. Judy and I started 4th grade together at Queen Elizabeth School and graduated from Aden Bowman Collegiate in 1963. We hung out at each others house, played dolls, mud pies, rode bicycles, went ice skating, swimming, sleep overs--everything kids do. I remember the summer we played poker almost every afternoon. I can't remember exactly who was in the group, but I remember Doreen Dick.

Then there were the crushes on the cute boys. We used to go watch pee wee hockey most Friday nights at the arena. Of course every girl had a crush on the same boy. When we went to high school our circle of friends expanded, but Judy and I remained good friends. We would walk to school together every morning, often with Arlene Graham. I remember Mrs. Neil saying how straight my posture was. At five feet two inches, I wanted to look as tall as possible next to Judy and Arlene and I had to walk fast to keep up with them.

--Rubyann (Gunning) Schaefer

I've known Judy since her elementary school days. She was one of my younger sister's girlfriends and in high school I became good friends with Judy's sister, Lynn. I still have vivid memories of my second home--the Neils' house--when I was a teenager. Whenever I did hear Judy's voice and laugh, I was instantly reminded of some very happy times when sisters were best friends with sisters. I can still hear her laugh!

The last time I saw her was the day we spent attending Cydane Morgan's wedding on Saltspring Island. It was a day of great enjoyment--the food, the beautiful summer day, the wine, the friends and family together, and the special wedding. There were a lot of laughs and reminisces of days and times gone by, particularly of life in Saskatoon.

--Joan Dick



Judy first swam into my ken in 1979 as Judy Barefoot, mother of two bright elementary school students, Kevin and Darren, and wife of Gord. Judy was a volunteer extraordinaire, a supportive parent and later a teaching assistant extraordinaire at Glenmore School. Our friendship grew as we worked together in the Learning Assistance Centre at Glenmore and deepened some years later when she came to live in the suite in my house in Ambleside

Who among us has not been enriched and fattened by the fruits of Judy's culinary experiments? She could take a new recipe and make it her own. In this and other ways, Judy outMartha'd the great one.

--Jo Atkins



I knew your mom when we were at Aden Bowman High and the U of S in Saskatoon. I often visited your mom's home in those days and always felt very welcome there. A visit there meant all sorts of interesting conversations with Mrs. Neil and a chance to look at her latest hat creations. There was always plenty of laughter.

Some of my fondest memories of time spent with Judy were on the tennis court. We joined a tennis club in North Vancouver and usually played twice a week. Initially, I managed to come out on top in most of our matches--not a mean feat as this was a select high school basketball player I was facing and I assumed there must be some connection between the two. However, before long the tables turned and I struggled to win a game. I once commented to Judy that in her running down a particular ball, she had a look of concentration and effort that was truly remarkable. With a little more candor than I was expecting, but in a completely helpful hint way, she pointed out that with the same amount of effort on my part, I would likely improve my performance. Judy saw things as they were.

--Orlis Morgan

The first thing that I loved about Judy is that she loved my daughter. Darren and Julie took us to lunch some time before we were to eventually become mothers-in law each for the first time. From the outset, we became a mutual admiration society of each other's youngest children. She was thrilled to have a young woman join her family and I, a young man. What I subsequently came to appreciate and enjoy about Judy was her relaxed and welcoming friendship. We shared many happy times, getting together for our families' birthdays, meeting for lunches and dinners when we crossed the pond between the island and the mainland, and trying to be good moms when needed for weddings, moves, and trans-Atlantic communication.

Last fall about this time, Judy invited me to visit her and Roberta on a lovely, autumn Sunday. We walked along the waterfront in Sydney sharing our thoughts on life and family and searching out the best salmon buy at the local marina. As I listened to her and watched her enjoying that sunshine and the beauty around her, I reminded myself that one day this would become a beautiful memory of how our lives became entwined because of love—the love of her son for my daughter and our shared and continuing love for both of them. I miss her now. They will miss her forever. May our love console them.

"Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now"--Maya Angelou

--Lynn Szabo



When I would arrive in Victoria, after assuring Judy that I would have a car and there was no need to meet me, she was always there--just in case I got lost--and Lynn took over when Judy was ill. Judy always managed to make you feel wanted and welcome. Robert and Judy's home was a wonderful and happy place to visit.

One of my dearest recollections of Judy and Lynn was as two little girls, dressed to the nines at our wedding. They were so young they could hardly sit on the chairs but of course were on their best behaviour and looking like dolls. I still have those pictures and treasure them.

--Jean Broadfoot



I have so many memories of Judy. All our talks in the staff room and in the hall when we crossed paths in the old 3rd St. office. Judy “volunteering” Roberta to help my daughter and I move (I had never even met Roberta!) but, sure enough, Roberta helped me move a few days later and she became my friend, too. Judy bringing some costume jewellery (rings) that had belonged to her mother into the thrift shop, but giving me ‘first dibs’. I still have those rings, you know, and have had such fun with them over the years. Judy bringing me champagne when I was promoted at work (nobody had ever done something like that before).

One night, Sterling and I were at Judy and Roberta’s for dinner. We were thoroughly enjoying ourselves in the living room while the pappadums literally went up in smoke in the kitchen. We all laughed so hard. What a wonderful night. But, then I always had fun with Judy. And, on hearing that Sterling and I were to be going to Logan Lake one year, asked us to stop into the pharmacy in Merritt along the way to “say hello to my son and give him a hug”.

Whenever we were talking, Judy never, ever missed asking about my daughter or how the rest of my family was doing. She remembered everyone in my life and wondered how they were and what they were up to. I told her things I told very few people. She honestly cared. Your Mother was always there for me. Her friendship was constant. And, oh, how she delighted in being a grandmother! Absolutely sure that this darling, wee baby would never, ever learn to walk since no one could possibly stop holding him in their arms long enough for him to learn!

I can say, with all honesty, that I have nothing – absolutely nothing - but happy memories of your Mom. And every single memory makes me smile. I really can’t say that about anyone else in my life. Judy was always open, honest, non judgemental, supportive and caring with me--and lots and lots of fun. I can hear her laugh right now and see her smile and the way her eyes crinkled. I will hold that look of her in my heart forever. I will miss her dearly.

--Kathy Mason

I loved to go to Judy's house after school and in the evenings. I have great memories of Mrs. Neil and how she always had such an interest in my opinions and what was going on in my life. She never missed an opportunity to educate us in consumer rights. Judy's father scared me a little because he was kind of gruff and he didn't like us disturbing him while he was watching TV and enjoying his pipe. He had a sardonic wit which would later show up in his daughter. Coming from a family of six, I marvelled that Lynn and Judy could share a bedroom which seemed pretty neat and orderly most of the time. However, I was soon informed by her older sister of the need for me to stay on Judy's side of the imaginary line that ran down the middle of the room.

By the time I hit high school a year after her, Judy was well established with her own circle of friends. (Many of whom stayed with her throughout her life.) She was into basketball and SRC, but we shared an interest in young men. I was most grateful that she would willingly drive me up and down 8th Street and through the Dog and Suds as I attempted to snare the man of my dreams. One particular night we made the circuit over sixty times thanks to Grandpa Don's car and a full tank of gas. On another occasion she agreed to double date someone who she had absolutely no interest in and spent most of the evening in the back seat fending off his most unwelcome advance—a true friend!

When it came time for University the rest of us followed the more traditional paths at the time: Arts, teaching, Social Work. Judy chose Commerce, and even then I admired that she was an individualist. She told me later in life that Commerce wasn't necessarily her choice but one she felt she chose because of the expectations of others for her. When she graduated and later announced that she was moving to Swift Current I thought she was nuts as many of the rest of us were just heading to Europe to do the traveling thing and find ourselves. But she was clear in her decision which I believe was based partly on a sense of duty, partly on her already blossoming love of the prairies and landscape and other more personal reasons to which I was not privy at the time.

--Doreen Kienlen

One memory I always have of Judy is when the two of you came back from Europe and we were talking in Lynn's living room. Lynn was telling me about this great guy she met in Europe and Judy was also telling me how great he was and saying Lynn should phone him right then so I could "meet" him. I thought, 'what a supportive sister.' She was happy just because Lynn was happy.

--Gwen Greenshields



There are many unfortunate urban myths about Mother-in-Laws – they always claim to know best; they drop by unexpectedly, and they never like your cooking. None of these clichés applied to Judy. From the beginning she was warm, kind and had tremendous faith in me as a partner for Darren.

I admired Judy for many things. She was a gourmet cook, eating at Judy's was always a treat. She loved the outdoors and shared her favourite spots in Saanich with us. One Christmas we celebrated with Judy and Roberta at Point No Point in Sooke. Despite the cold, rain and blustering winds, Judy persuaded us out from our cozy cabin down to the fire pit where she tended a stubborn fire and coaxed us into making smores! She was honest and would give practical advice, but only when you asked. Judy would do 'girlie' things with me, like shopping and watching figure skating, because she wanted to enjoy "finally having a daughter."

In a card she gave me on Darren and my wedding day Judy wrote, "May you always be happy and may we always be friends." Judy wasn't only a wonderful Mother-in-Law, she was, indeed, a true friend.

--Julie Szabo

Dear Miles:
Your grandma died this week. I'm sorry you didn't get much time with her, but she loved you very much, and told me to take care of you. Here are some memories of Mom:

1979. I'm eight. Richard McGeough and I run through the forest to the Cleveland Dam and Hardee's grocery on the other side. We just collected change to spend, and we're discussing what candy to buy. Probably Lick-em sticks. Then I slow, remembering that mom doesn't want me crossing the dam without an adult. Richard goes on without me, and I wait for him at the start of the trail.



1991. Rick, Larry, Thilo, and I have borrowed Roberta and mom's cabin on Bowers Lake for a getaway. And we're stranded. Larry's station wagon broke down on the way in, and mom's friend Wendy drove us the last few kilometres to the lake. Rick carves a log into an ashtray. Thilo drinks beer on the creaky dock. Mom arrives to rescue us, wearing gumboots and carrying bags of food.

September, 2001. Mom and I are on a two-week camping trip in Newfoundland. We flew out from Vancouver, mom with a hatchet packed in her luggage. We're driving a rented minivan with the back seats removed, sleeping in our bags rolled out in the back. We're a week into the trip, and a few kilometres out of the L'Anse aux Meadows viking settlement when we see our first moose. "Oh, Yes," says mom, and snaps away with our camera.

August, 2002. We're in Saskatoon for Aunt Ethyle's 90th birthday. On the way in from the airport mom takes me to their first house after moving in from the farm. Her grandmother lived next door and built a ladder over the back fence so mom and Lynn could visit after school. They used to get ice creams at the Rexall on the corner.

Some places she loved: Point No Point, Grasslands National Park, the Cariboo, North Saanich.

Hugging me hundreds of times that I didn't need to ask--after falling off my skateboard and injuring my collarbone; after hammering my thumb; after feeling guilty for being responsible for the breaking of Berge Hamian's nose; after saying goodbye to Gord and Darren on the way to university; after walking off the ferry at Swartz Bay, every weekend, for a year.

October, 2003. We're in her room at home, and she sleeps and wakes, in a fog of drugs and pain. She holds my hand. "Cold fingies," she says. From time to time she says things that don't make sense. They're 'mom' phrases, but repeated, and not in the right parts of the conversation: "I'm OK. Apparently so. This is my eldest. I'm just teasing you. You're on your own, buddy." You're on your own, buddy. People who were there said the skies cleared when your grandma died. I know it poured rain that night, and I know that when you and your mother and Roberta and I looked out the front windows the next morning, the sky was blue and a rainbow stretched over Deep Cove. I know that lots of us have memories of your grandma, and I know that I'll do everything I can to make her the presence in your life that she was in ours.

Love, Dad.

--Kevin Barefoot

If Not for You

by Bob Dylan

If not for you,
Babe, I couldn't find the door,
Couldn't even see the floor,
I'd be sad and blue,
If not for you.

If not for you,
Babe, I'd lay awake all night,
Wait for the mornin' light
To shine in through,
But it would not be new,
If not for you.

If not for you
My sky would fall,
Rain would gather too.
Without your love I'd be nowhere at all,
I'd be lost if not for you,
And you know it's true.

If not for you
My sky would fall,
Rain would gather too.
Without your love I'd be nowhere at all,
Oh! What would I do
If not for you.

If not for you,
Winter would have no spring,
Couldn't hear the robin sing,
I just wouldn't have a clue,
Anyway it wouldn't ring true,
If not for you.

