

Eulogy for Ida Peterson
January 30th, 2009
Batavia United Methodist Church, Batavia, Illinois

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A Reading from the Book of Proverbs, 31:26-29

Strength and self-respect are her clothing; she is facing the future with a smile.
Her mouth is open to give out wisdom, and the law of mercy is on her tongue.
She gives attention to the ways of her family, she does not take her food without working for it.

Her children get up and give her honour, and her husband gives her praise, saying,
Unnumbered women have done well, but you are better than all of them.

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On behalf of the Peterson Family, I would like to thank everyone for attending today to celebrate the life of Ida Peterson.

For those of you who do not know me, I am the son-in-law of Shirley Haedt, who is one of three of Ida's daughters.

Being asked to give a eulogy is not something you take lightly, and I am sincerely honored and touched to have been asked to stand before you and share a few of the memories of Ida we will carry with us.

My wife, Sue – one of Ida's grand-daughters, was just a little worried, though. She told me, "Be sure to keep it kind of light – don't make it too sad. Tell some funny stories." As I prepared this, Ida definitely made me smile more than once, and I hope you will, too.

Once upon a Christmastide, Ida was coming into our dining room for Christmas Day dinner. I met her at the doorway, leaned over to her ear and asked, "do you have a reservation?"

Ida looked up at me, raised her eyebrows indignantly as if she was about to slap me, and then quickly retorted, "Well, is the food here any good?" Then she slowly raised her hand, put it on my cheek, smiled and laughed. Then she said, "I love you".

She had a very special way of saying those three words that – if you never heard her say them – I wish I could impersonate for you. But I can't.

That was actually December 25th, 2008 – just more than one short month ago.

How quickly our lives change, and it is at times like this when we are missing someone that our faith, our family, and our friends get us through, along with our fond memories that bring smiles back to our faces.

Another fond memory I have of Ida was one particular Communion Sunday right here at Batavia United Methodist Church.

Now, like many 90-something year olds, Ida's hearing was not the best. She was never a "loud talker" because of her hearing, but there were times she would lose awareness of how quiet it might be around her.

The tray came around, and along with the congregation, Ida raised her grapejuice and drank the sacrament.

In the middle of that quiet holy moment she then gruffed, "bwua – this is terrible", and said it plenty loud enough to be heard by several rows of pews and people who found great humor in her candor.

Now, as if this was not funny enough, Ida was sitting with Jill Stoner that morning, who as many of you know is our Pastor Stoner's wife. Who needs a complaint box outside the Pastor's office when you can just sit next to his wife on a Sunday and call things exactly like you see them.

I don't know if that complaint ever got back to Pastor Mike or if it resulted in any change in the brand of communion grape juice. You'll have to ask him about that yourself.

Seriously, though, Ida was not a complainer.

For those of you who are not aware, Ida suffered a stroke a few years ago that took away most of her swallowing reflex.

It made it very, very difficult for her to eat any solid food after that, and in her last weeks of her life it was difficult for her to even swallow any liquids.

Yet, I never heard her complain about it – or anything else for that matter. Not once.

The only thing I know of that came close to her voicing a complaint about anything involved one family gathering.

Everyone had seemingly arrived, yet we looked around and noted that it felt like someone was missing.

Indeed, someone was missing, and it was Ida. No one had gotten her yet.

I wasn't there to see it, but I guess she was sitting on her front porch in her Sunday finery, rocking in her rocking chair with some agitation wondering why no one had come by to pick her up.

Of course, if you are the 95 year old matriarch of your family, you have probably earned the right to get your feathers a little ruffled when your loved ones forget to pick you up for Mother's Day Brunch.

Ida was 98 at the time she passed. Even after that stroke, she lived on her own until she was 97. I have absolutely no doubt that if it had not been for the loss of her swallowing reflex, she would have easily lived to 100.

In fact, she probably would have had the opportunity to stand up here and eulogize me. She could have said something like, ". . . Yes, he was a nice boy, just not as tough as me. So I'm still here, and he isn't".

There are so many more memories that the family has of Ida that I know I have yet to hear. It's for reasons like this that I wasn't really sure I should be the one standing here talking about Ida.

As I said before, I am sincerely touched and honored, especially since I am not a blood relative. In fact, of those who have married into this wonderful Peterson family, I am one of the latest. I knew Ida for a shorter time than just about anyone in the extended family.

But here is the thing: Imagine a family that sticks together.

Imagine a family that gets together more often than just on Easter and Thanksgiving and Christmas – and that gets along. That is a very rare thing, and something to be cherished.

They are not perfect, and they don't always agree – but they get along. And when they do disagree, there is civility and courtesy in it.

And there is always love.

And, they are the kind of family who takes you in. This family has certainly taken me in. And Ida took me in as well. She treated me like I was her own blood grandson.

That was the way she treated everyone.

Whenever family gatherings would end and everyone was leaving, she would always do the same thing.

She would raise both hands, put them on your cheeks and pull you in closely, and say "I love you" in that special way of hers that I cannot impersonate.

When Ida's daughter – my mother in law - Shirley came up to me to answer my question of, "Am I really the right person to stand up here", she replied: "You are part of this family".

Where does a family like the Peterson's come from – a family that gets together and gets along and takes people in?

To me, the answer is simple. Ida. The family is a testament to the kind of person she was. She is the matriarch of the Peterson family, and still is to us though she is now gone. And now, we are her legacy.

I don't think you can say much more than to just point to the kind of family she raised. That's about as good as it gets.

Skål, everyone. (a Swedish "Toast")