

Celebrating Beverly

by John Bouwsma

Hello everyone, I want to thank you all for coming and to welcome all of you to our Celebration of the long and fruitful life of Beverly Bouwsma. First of all, I want to thank Egan Neuhengen, one of Beverly's grandsons, for the wild and dramatic music we have been listening to while we all got settled. For any of you who don't know me I am John Bouwsma, one of Beverly's sons. I am married to Nancy, and have had a checkered career spanning many decades and many different jobs. But I have been retired now for 5 years, and all that is mostly a dim memory. We live in Portland Oregon, and my main pursuit in retirement is woodworking. We have one married son with three children and three grandchildren living in southern Ohio. I also want to introduce my three siblings. This is Philip. He has been an artist and a calligrapher since he was about 10 and it was suggested, by Kay Kuhn, whom many of you may remember, that he take up calligraphy as a cure for his terrible handwriting. Philip did the calligraphy on the invitations and the program. He is married to Hildy May, whose father was a colleague of many of you in the History Department. Philip has three daughters, Julia, Lexie, and Anne, two of whom, Julia and Lexie, are also here. You will see more of Philip in a minute. Next I want to introduce Paul (please stand up). Paul is a hospital lab technologist, supervising the operation of the hospital lab in Santa Cruz, training the technicians, etc. He has also used his lab skills to become an excellent wine maker. Many of you have already had the opportunity to enjoy his wine, and you will again today. He is married to Francie, and their children, Laura and John, are both grown and both here. Our other sibling is Sarah (please stand up). After three boys it was a huge relief to our parents have a girl, whom they (perhaps mistakenly) thought would be a lot less trouble than a boy. As it turned out she emulated her three older brothers, and besides that she reached the age of individuation at a time when there was a huge generational shift in expectations regarding women's behavior. Sarah is also a life-long artist, mainly of watercolors, and she has a web site which she can provide you with if you would like to look at some of her paintings. She is married to Don Neuhengen and they have two sons, Jonas and Egan, both grown and both here. She and Don also live in Portland, Oregon. Sarah is responsible for 90% of the planning for this event.

In reading the condolences that all of you and many others who aren't here have been sending, two things about our mother seem to have made the biggest impression. They are her kindness and her sense of humor. Cornelia Levine sent me two interesting stories which illustrate these two traits. The first occurred when her husband Larry was sick, and my mother brought over a huge pot of soup. As she was lifting it to take it in the house she slipped and spilled it all into the trunk of the car. No doubt there were a few choice words of a sort she only infrequently used in front of the children, but of course none of us were there. So then she immediately went back home, made another pot of soup, and took it back over to the Levine's, all before she cleaned up the mess in the trunk.

Cornelia's other story had to do with my brother Paul. And what is especially interesting about this story is that there are two versions, probably both spread by our mother. She

had a terrific talent for story telling, which was greatly enhanced by her tendency to elaborate and embellish. The story Paul remembers is that she was explaining to me about kissing girls and I asked her "but how do you get the girl to let you?" In Cornelia's version, which is much more colorful, she was explaining the specifics of the birds and the bees to Paul, bearing in mind that he had two older brothers, and had probably heard it all from us. In this version he asked "but how do you get the girl to lie down?"

Our mother had a talent for drawing. No doubt this was passed along to Sarah and Philip, though not to Paul and me. Not much of her artwork has survived, but I do have one quick story about it. Before I was born, when Dad was at Harvard, our mother used to help him correct English papers. On one of them some poor sod had written this: "Endless cars were passing by." So instead of getting out her red pen writing some arcane editing symbol, she drew a picture of an endless car in the margin. She used to laugh uproariously at the imagined chagrin of the student when he saw this.

Many of you have been at parties hosted by our parents, especially at their house on La Loma. These included many weddings, some for her own kids, and some for the children of friends, even some for her own friends. One of the most memorable was when Sarah and Don got married. Her garden had just been redone, designed by David Bigham who is here today, and was at its peak of maturity and blossom. She served a sit-down dinner for 50 people, all sitting at one tremendously long table the length of the living room. There were no caterers. Of course we all helped serve, and she had cooked most of the food ahead of time. This massive undertaking went off without a hitch. She had an amazing ability to sit in the living room drinking a glass of wine--or in those days, scotch--appearing not to have a care in the world. Then she would disappear for 2-3 minutes at the end of which she would announce dinner, and everyone would troop into the dining room where a multi-course dinner was ready to be served. Of course this was something she learned to do, and was not part of our early childhood. Until I was about 12 I remember fried eggs with blackened bottoms, peas that were burned when the water boiled out from under them, lots of Swanson's chicken pies with raw bottoms, and fish sticks. In 1960 we spent a year in Italy where she was able to hire a maid to cook and clean. The maid, Azalea, actually taught our mother to cook. If you are lucky you didn't start coming to her dinner parties until after we got back from Italy. Of course while all of you were sitting in grandeur eating these fancy dinners, we, her children, ate in the kitchen--often a meager dinner of Swanson Chicken Pies or fish sticks.

In addition to cooking, sewing was not her thing. The difference is that while she did really take to cooking and became extremely good at it, she never took to sewing. If we had an article of clothing we never wanted to wear, we would put it in her sewing basket, which was a black hole from whence nothing ever returned.

One other little known fact about our mother is that she loved nothing more than naughtiness in children, and especially in little boys. Most often this naughtiness caused her a lot of trouble and extra work, but even so she usually found it uproariously funny. Philip and I formed a club which we called "The Break and Bust Club," with the obvious deplorable purpose. Naturally Paul got into it too. In keeping with her aversion to

sewing, she once gave me the buttonhole attachment from her sewing machine because she thought I would enjoy taking it apart. I couldn't figure out how to get it apart, though I did render it useless, but it never went back on her sewing machine either. Instead it languished in the bottom drawer of my dresser until I left home, and probably for a long time afterwards, along with a lot of other broken and useless things. This was referred to as "John's Junk Drawer." Some of the things that were in it then I still have--she could never quite bring herself to dispose of them.

Another talent of our mother's was her writing ability. She wrote lots of letters, many of which we have. These are long on detail, and she often shared personal information about her children that makes us cringe when we read them today. But where she really excelled was in writing humorous poems. She did this for years, often commemorating someone's birthday or some other special occasion with a poem. She continued this after she moved to Piedmont Gardens, where it became one of her most satisfying activities. Probably the best one she ever wrote is her Soap Poem, which my brother Philip is going to read to you now, along with a sequel which he wrote himself.