

Barbara C Memorial Service

April 17, 2003

Musical Prelude

Opening Words/Greeting: Rev. Robin L. Zucker

Welcome. We have come together this morning to mourn our beloved Barbara C (Auntie Bobbie, Babs, Nana, Queen B), Mother, Grandmother, hipster, traditionalist, kindergarten teacher, beachcomber, Notre Dame's #1 fan, brave optimist, surrogate Mom, and devoted wife. A woman who leaves behind something of her nobler self, something beyond all time, in each of us gathered together this morning.

Yet, while it is good to grieve, we gather also to lift up and express our gratitude for those deeper things about Barbara that will never pass away or lose their vitality, but will remain an inspiration, and shall forevermore.

We stand with our present sorrow and with our glad memories of Barbara in the presence of an impenetrable mystery. By our attendance here in this Sanctuary, we pay tribute to her and express our love and support for Barbara's family.

From what I've heard about her, Barbara would want us to come together this morning, greeting the day (even a day dampened by grief) with a glad heart. She would want us to laugh a little, hold one another's hands, remember the bitter and sweet, and feel lucky for this wonderful world, for our lives and for hers (nearly 90 years in the making and the living).

And so we have come together.

It is right and fitting that we have come together

Because we need each other

In empathy and consolation,

And because we need each other

In courage and wisdom:

To face Barbara's death

To celebrate Barbara's life

It is right and fitting that we have come together

Because a human life is sacred

In its being born

And also in its dying.

Music – Dvorak. "Going Home" Symphony

Readings: "Canon" Deb Diemer

Success – Emerson – Richard Cuff

Tribute/Eulogy: Rev. Robin Zucker

If this cynical world has made you believe that optimism is for the birds, let me tell you the story of Barbara C. In celebrating her life today, we're helped along tremendously by a memory book prepared by Barbara for her grandchildren. So many of the details you're about to hear come courtesy of her own memories, lovingly recalled.

Barbara was born on April 11, 1913 at home in W. Medford, Mass. An only child, she lived there with her loving parents: Flora, a homemaker, and Fred, the treasurer of the Ashton valve Co. in Cambridge.

Barbara recalls a happy childhood of old room schoolhouses, Sunday walks with her father, frolicking in her huge yard among the pear trees with her friend June Waldwin and her gray coon cat, Izzy. She read *Little Women* and *Just So* stories over and over again, until the pages were tattered. Summertime found the family journeying to a hunting lodge in Rangeley, Maine by horse and buggy and the cog railway. This fact alone reminds us how long a life this woman had the good fortune to live.

In High School, Barbara was more keen on flirting than on academics. Apparently, even back then, Bobbie was a real "man's woman," a feminine exterior blended with self confidence and a resilient spirit. After graduating from Wheelock College, Barbara became a kindergarten teacher in Winchester and in Auburn, Maine.

But Barbara was a traditionalist at heart, a June Cleaver-vacuuming in pearls kind of dame. So when she met Tracy C. at a Harvard dance in 1940, she suspected that her teaching days were numbered. They became engaged at the NY World's fair in June of that year, and wed by candlelight on November 9th at the Baptist Church, with a wedding ring Tracy had found in the street. Yes, she was practical, too!

Their 56-year marriage was characterized by love, understanding, humor, and tolerance. They were totally devoted to one another, through the idyllic family summers on Balch Pond as well as through the crushing tragedies that befell them.

Tracy and Barbara moved around a bit and then settled in Reading, where they raised their three beloved children: Nancy, Sally, and Allen. Sally and Allen recall happy, carefree childhoods in a great neighborhood of great families (such as the Currans, Fortins, Burnigers, and Reisings) with whom they shared food, gossip, sewing, and cards (Michigan Rummy was a favorite, and by the way, the sewing group didn't actually sew – they just gossiped.)

Barbara's parents lived with them, and Sally remembers her Grandma as a great scratch cook who made spider cakes and homemade chicken pies. Barbara, on the other hand, notes in her memory book, that her favorite kind of meals are the ones she doesn't have to cook! Babs was so fun loving and zesty – If there was fun to be had, she'd do it, including a ride in a hot-air balloon. She loved to stroll along the beaches in Lynn and Nahant, to dance to ballroom standards like "Stardust," and to screen Westerns and old movies starring romantic heartthrobs like Clark Gable and Cary Grant. She even had a beau, well into her 80's, after Tracy's death in 1996.

She was traditional but also managed to be up-to-the-minute, contemporary and hip. Her grandsons could have spent time elsewhere, but they doted on their Grandmother, even renting limos to take her into Boston for dinner and a show. Sally's friends, such as Susan and Deb, came to so adore Barbara that they, too, feel like bereaved children today.

That Barbara was able to keep her heart open, and to keep the love and laughter flowing, is all the more remarkable in light of the adversity she faced with Tracy in the early 1960's, when their firstborn child, Nancy, was tragically killed in a car accident.

Tracy was deflated by his daughter's death and took an early retirement from his position at Liberty Mutual. Barbara was his buoy and his balm; she kept their life together and she kept herself together. Sally recalls how placid she was, despite all the upheaval and how she always looked so well turned out with lipstick and a dress and yes, the pearls. Barbara also stared down a botched cataract operation, bladder cancer, and in 1996, the death of her beloved husband.

Surely, no one would have blamed Barbara if she had become embittered. But, Babs was no whiner. In spite of it all, her favorite expression was: "I'm the luckiest person alive." What greater inspiration could she provide to her grandchildren (real and surrogate) than her daily ritual of stopping on the stairs, looking out the window and proclaiming,

“Good morning, world.” I wish I had known her. Maybe we would have chatted over some Bloody Marys (or Jack Daniels!) at the Murphy’s weekly gathering for Notre Dame football. She never missed a Saturday. Her family, the kin of her blood and of her heart meant everything to Barbara (and visa versa).

Her friend Paula remarks that Barbara was a “Break the mold kind of babe.” Yes. Although the pearls tarnished over time, Barbara remained a classy, spunky original, and a “success” in all of those important terms laid out by Emerson. Barbara jokingly referred to herself as “Queen B,” and though she can no longer hold court with her family and her many friends, may her influence for good, for courage, for love steadfast and true reign always in our own hearts. So may it be. Amen.

Remembrances: Tuck Gilbert, Tim and Sean M., Peter M.

Hymn #205: Amazing Grace

Silence

Let us pause now to gather our individual feelings and thoughts, meditate upon the meaning of this occasion, and say our private farewells to Barbara.

In the silence, we enter into this time of personal memory and reflection.

Prayer

Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am in a thousand winds that blow.
I am in the gently falling snow.
I am in the gentle showers of rain.
I am in a field of ripening grain.

I am in the morning hush.
I am in the graceful rush
Of beautiful birds in circling flight.
I am in the star shine of the night.
I am in the flowers that bloom
I am in the quiet room.
I am the birds that sing
I am in each lovely thing.
Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there
I do not sleep.
Amen

Our Benediction today is one of Barbara's favorite Scripture passages – these words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel according to John:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house, there are many mansions. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

Today and in the future, as we remember Barbara, may our hearts be untroubled. A place has been prepared for her and she is at peace. Believe that the dead are not dead if we have loved them truly. And by loving and honoring Barbara in death, the best of her will flow into us, challenge us, inspire us to love, to live, to laugh, to endure, to accept adversity, and to dream.

Barbara, may you rest in the knowledge that you have touched this wonderful world with your life. May heaven be a stardust ballroom for you and all of your beloveds.

Musical piece (recorded) – Wonderful World – Louis Armstrong

Musical Postlude