

LOVE NEVER ENDS
Words of Comfort and Assurance –Ona “Johnnie” Deardorff Broberg
I Corinthians 13: 1-13 September 10, 2018
The Church of the Covenant

I asked Mother to write in a little reflection book in 1999 her thoughts and she ended the booklet by writing: “This probes so deep it produces happy memories and PAIN! Thanks for asking me to do this; you asked in love I responded in love. That’s pretty special. Read and enjoy. Laugh and cry with me. Love you lots. I love you like everything. Mother 1999” Yes it is about laughter and tears, love and joy, a Mother’s love, and in the end it is about Mother’s favorite Bible verse from I Corinthians 13, where the Apostle, summarizes all of life and all of time concludes: “*Love never ends...*” (I Corinthians 13: 8). It is the gift my Mother has given me to prepare me for this day...

She received the nickname “Johnnie” from her paternal Grandfather, L.F. Deardorff, whose nickname was “Johnnie”. Grandpa Deardorff was a character and larger than life even though he was just 5’2” and a major Midwest industrialist. The Calkins side of the family for whom Mother was named “Ona Margot”; very Scottish similar to Anne Margaret was all blond haired and blue-eyed. The Deardorffs all had dark brown hair and brown eyes. So LF comes to visit his new granddaughter in the hospital and sees her for the first time and cries out: “That’s not Ona Margot (Blond and blue) that’s my Johnnie Girl!” And it stuck and Mother was named at birth in the hospital. She is Johnnie –Upbeat, positive, joyous, fun, lights up a room when she enters, talkative, defines the word loquacious, strong-willed, opinionated, perfectionist, faithful, unswerving in her faith. The way all her pet dogs greeted her, (And Dad always said if there was reincarnation he wanted to come back as one of her dogs!) with joy and tale-wagging enthusiasm, is a lesson she learned somewhere in life. It was if she was greeting you for the first time, happily, every time and she made you feel special and loved and were included in her sense of joy in life. That’s my “Johnnie Girl”! By the way, she was born tongue-tied and the doctor snipped that at birth and my grandfather, Stuart Deardorff, from whom I was named then always said: “And she hasn’t stopped talking since!”. She always carried the conversation. When just Dad and I were on the phone without Mother, we’d get about five minutes into it and there was silence, nothing more to say, and we’d say “love you” and hang up. My, the house is awfully quiet now! When Mother was on the phone there was no conversation less Than 30 minutes. She was a birthday card sender, she remembered your anniversaries and special dates and get well cards, and a note writer (a lost art if ever there was one!). She was the queen of the gracious thank you note. I could not play with a Christmas gift until I wrote my thank you notes. We lived with the Bible in one hand and her copy of Etiquette by Emily Post in the other. She was a formidable presence with high standards, a little scary in a way, and a person you always wanted to please and be on her good side. Her phone messages were delightful, funny, clever and long. I have saved many of them on my cell phone and will replay them from time to time. Reminders to look out the window and see sunsets; commentary on my sermon (and errors in grammar!); always ending with “I love you like everything. Toodle-loo!” She wrote little hand written notes and would hide them in various places (I find ones I never found or had forgotten about still to this day). “Stuart, Always remember...” All it takes

for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing. Edmund Burke” OR “Dearest Stuart, As always your Dad and I are happy to spend time with you and hear you preach –your sermons were a ten+...for what its worth, don’t let the church and work erode your life, keep you from joy or friendships, It shouldn’t spoil life for you, God, Jesus and friends are what its all about.” Perhaps my favorite was one I found in my underwear drawer –“Holey, holey, holey is a great hymn of the church, not a description of your underwear drawer!” With her will and living will she enclosed a note that said: “I remember how I felt when my Mother gave me copies (of all these documents) God bless you always –and especially so the day you need to refer to and to use these documents. I love you. Remember –love never ends. Mother” I remember little notes tucked into my lunch box and one stuck on an apple reminding me not to be a crabby Appleton but to be a Happy Appleton.” When I was little and crying or angry she would run her hand over my face: Down for crabby Appleton and then UP for happy Appleton, until I regained self-control and was a Happy Appleton again. What a gift she gave me to be able quickly to move from crabby to happy; what a waste it is to be anything but happy in life. (Oh that others could learn the same) At some point the process of aging stopped the card-sending, the message-leaving, the little thoughtful things, the notes left in sock drawers...I grieved the loss of all that but I have tucked it away in my heart, because LOVE never ends...

Mother started as an English Teacher. It is hard to have your Mother an English teacher particularly when you had your own English composition to write. Mother would always say, “The decline of Western Civilization began when English teachers stopped teaching diagramming of sentences!” Some of you younger people have no clue about what I just said. But, boy oh boy, I learned how to diagram sentences.

Mother next was a piano teacher, wonderful and amazing. She had a deep love for children and a deep love for music and the two combined to make amazing moments in time. She probably had 40 students and always hosted big recitals in our home. Her piano teacher was the man who was the accompanist for the Pittsburgh Symphony. One of her signature pieces was Clair de Lune by Debussy, played so well by Darla today. Sometimes she would just sit and play and play; I think it was therapy for Mother; I do the same and I know it is therapy for me. Wisely, she had me study under someone else. But when I would practice she would shout out from the kitchen –One y anda, two y anda, three y anda, four! Or B FLAT, B FLAT! She taught piano to send me to college and lawschool and it was her goal that I would have no student debt. And she achieved that goal, praise God.

Mother next was a real estate salesperson for Northwood Realty. A best friend from high school, Sally White was married to Hal Autenreith the owner, so it was a natural fit. Mother loves homes and how they are decorated and how they look. She coached her clients on curb appeal and her listings always sold. Old real estate agents never die, they just grow list-less! She never showed a house on Sunday because it was the Sabbath. She would then say, it was amazing how she never lost a client and how the Lord always brought her clients, often times strong Christians and pastors, because of her faith. When we stick to what we believe the Lord will bless us. The advertising slogan for the company was “Northwood Better Homes and Gardens –two names you can trust” So I had a special bag made for her to carry that said:

“Johnnie Broberg, Northwood and Better Homes and Gardens –three names you can trust!” She had impeccable integrity. She had two signs in her car, the first “If Momma ain’t happy ain’t nobody happy” and the second “If you’re not buying a house, get out of my car”. Direct and to the point, always. There was a very long wall in the Peters Township Office that had awards and plaques won by agents. I am not exaggerating when I say that floor to ceiling 75% of them, listing leader, sales leader, volume leader, were won by my Mother. I begged her not to retire until she sold me my house back in Pittsburgh. So her last sale was December 2002 when I moved to Mt. Lebanon and she sold me my house. I always said she retired because her last client was so difficult!

Anything Mother set her mind to, she always accomplished. Any organization she joined, she wound up being its President. She got up early and she stayed up late; her most productive hours were from 10pm to 2am in the morning. She was an effective communicator, precise and detailed, she spoke well, she prayed out loud well, she began with brilliant well written devotionals, she led meetings with grace, agendas and purpose. Everything was important to her. She accomplished much in her life. At church she chaired the Personnel Committee three times, and the Worship Committee three times, and the CE Committee once, and the Nominating Committee twice and served on three search committees. I have reflected much about this and was able to say to her: “Mother, you could have chosen to do anything with your life and been highly successful. But you chose to be a good wife and a wonderful, loving Mother. I realize the sacrifice you made for me. You do not know how grateful I am. Mother, the love you have given to me --Love never ends.” She tended to always run late. 5 to ten minutes late always. When I was growing up I would hate that we would be late to church. And I would say the opening hymn was for the Brobergs to be escorted up the central aisle to the front pew. “Latecomers will now be seated” was meant for us. I always joked that it wasn’t until I went away to college that I knew there was such a thing as a Call to Worship. I was amused yesterday during the 11am service when the funeral directors were bringing Mother into the old library, I heard them and the time was 11:15 and I thought, “Yes, Mother, late again!” But then I cried. But it was because she crammed so much into her life, do one or two more things before we go, that she always was late.

Mother loved going to Hilton Head Island and walking the beach. I enjoyed taking long walks with her where we would discuss everything and anything. But I remember one time she stopped because she saw a small hole in the sand and started to dig. I was like, “O Mother, what a waste of time.” But she persevered and then I helped her dig and what she found was a perfect conch shell. Mother could look at something, at someone, and always see the amazing possibilities in them.

I miss the long, late night conversations with her where we discussed everything. I remember the day I was playing the piano furiously --therapy; I was facing perhaps the lowest moment in my life and ministry and she came and sat beside me and took my hand and gave me a kiss and said, “Stuart, it will be alright. God loves you and so do I.”

My Dad was the love of her life. They met when she was a freshman at Bethany College and he a returned World War II veteran, as she called him "a man of the world". He evidently saw something he liked because he stuck to her like glue from the first day. He met her at her dorm and walked her to class. He would just show up when she was studying in the library. She got him through Spanish and Shakespeare and he got her through Economics. They had cups of coffee at the Beehive. They went to church every Sunday at the Christian Church in Bethany where Dad also served as a lay reader. Mother developed a love of receiving communion every Sunday while there. She says of Dad: "He was always there". Throughout their lives together, 4 years in college, and married for almost 65 years, He was always there for her. I like to think of them reunited now in heaven and always being there for one another and for eternity.

Mother loves all animals but particularly little dogs. Glory-Glory Halleluia was the grandchild I have not provided. When you'd drive with her in the car and you'd see some old mangy two week dead groundhog by the side of the road, she'd cry out O No!. Mother is so tiny that when she'd be driving the giant Oldsmobiles and Buicks my Dad favored all you would see was the very top of her head and her sunglasses staring out between the steering wheel and the dash. Her dogs would have their paws up on the dash, barking out instructions: Woof, woof, go left, Johnnie; Woof, woof, woof, go right Johnnie!" Mother was little and nice and always had a smile on her face. But don't let that fool you. She was LITTLE BUT MIGHTY. Don't mess with Texas and don't mess with Johnnie girl. I don't know what a Western PA version of a steel magnolia is, but that's my Mother. Glory-Glory misses her Johnnie very much. Every time I drive up in the car she runs to the passenger side to see if Mother is there. She coaxes to go out in the middle of the night only to wind up jumping up on Mother's bed, hoping to find her. Don't ever tell me that dogs don't grieve.

But to know Mother is to know that she is a person of consummate faith. She came by it honestly; everyone in our family is a strong Christian, a church-goer, a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ, a reader of the scriptures, a person of daily heart-felt prayer. I miss the thought of Mother praying for me each day. I miss as she lived with me these last two years me putting her to bed as she used to put me to bed, and holding her hand, and she prayed for me and I prayed for her. The roles in life beautifully reversing and perfect. She writes: "Best thing: I come from a long line of believers on both sides of my family. I believe this has given me a STRONG and POWERFUL FAITH, which is my spiritual strength." She writes: "The one word that best describes my life is BLESSED. Fulfilled by God. AS I look back over my life I can see the heartache and the joys. The times of heartache were those times when I relied on God, prayer and faith. The times of joy have always been God-given. He has healed heartaches; He has given joy beyond my wildest, craziest dreams. I have been blessed."

As I have said, her favorite Bible verses are those from I Corinthians 13: 1-13. "Love never ends." Mother wrote them often. Bought framed calligraphied plaques with the words inscribed on them. She wrote me these words: "My Father wrote in the front of the Bible he and Mother gave your Father and me on the first Easter after we were married (1952) "Men and nations pass away but love never dies." Remember, Stuart, I have always loved you and I always will." So when Mother's mortal body passed away this past Wednesday is that it? Is

that the end? Is there nothing more? Did this bright and spritely spirit just extinguish and fly off into nothingness?

She was preparing me for this day. Her whole life and her whole faith was preparing me for this day. And it is such a profound gift. No her light is not extinguished. Because Jesus lives my Mother lives also. Because of HIM she lives. The Rockies may tumble Gibraltar may crumble, these stained glass windows will one day break into shards of glass and these stones in this church turn to dust. The clouds be rolled back like a scroll. The heavens and the earth shall pass away. All that was Alpha become Omega; the beginning inexorably turns to the end. Everything we know and see and touch will pass away. But one thing and one thing only will remain. "Faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love." LOVE NEVER ENDS. Never, ever, no never ever –LOVE NEVER ENDS. **It is the message of Christ and it is the meaning of my Mother's life. Love never ends.** It is why I am absolutely certain I shall see her again. Each night we'd say before tucking her into bed: "Good night. Sleep tight. Don't let the bedbugs bite. Don't fall out of bed. Don't forget to say your prayers. I LOVE YOU LIKE EVERYTHING." Yes you do, Mother. Yes, you do. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*