

WIFE – MOTHER – SISTER – TEACHER – FRIEND. Joanne was all of these things and more. As the middle of three sisters, Joanne was known by family and friends as the “nice” one because according to her sister Susan, “Mom always liked Jo best!” and for all of you who knew her, I’m sure you understand why. Joanne was all about living life, laughing well and loving deeply.

As a girl and young woman, Joanne was the poet of her family – thoughtful, creative and full of emotion. As she grew to adulthood, those same qualities persisted. When she discovered something she loved – and she loved lots of “somethings!” – she threw herself into it with all of her being.

Joanne married her one true love Richard and gave birth to the “world’s most perfect child”, her son Scott whom she adored. Ever vigilant about his safety, she climbed into her own car and followed the van of the poor woman who was carpooling with her on the first day of his preschool, just to make sure he got there safely. She shared many weekends away with Richard and Scott; they loved to visit the Oregon Coast and Seaside and to camp with the entire Swanson clan at Westport each summer. She baked Richard and Scott’s favorite strawberry pies but most importantly, she loved them unconditionally. When Scott joined the navy, Joanne would have liked nothing better than to be drafted onto a destroyer (above the water) so she could track his submarine (under the water!), but had to settle instead for Scott’s collect phone calls from Singapore and Indonesia.

When Joanne began her work with preschool children, she met her VBF or “very best friend”, Diane Koval. From Diane and her husband Jim and their children, Joanne’s Lacey Family expanded to include her other VBF (as Joanne termed them) Maddy de Give and her husband Henry and their three sons. Diane’s sister-in-law Pat, her husband Tom and their children were final additions to the group that called itself “The Commune”. They shared life together – Jo loved to tease Jim (and he loved to tease her), to win against Henry in Trivial Pursuit, to laugh at Maddy’s endless stories and to bicker with Diane about who was really the “Queen of Everything”. Everyone loved going to the movies with Joanne--it was like taking an entire audience with you – when she laughed, so did the whole theater!

Once she started Sacred Heart’s preschool, “Teacher Joanne” created incredible memories for the children she enjoyed so much. Pumpkin Patch trips, Sacred Heart “Starts” sweatshirts, the banana train, Wee Willie Winkle Day, Christmas gifts for Baby Jesus, Daddy Nights and graduation ceremonies became magical traditions for her students and their families. Even one of her preschoolers driving his Mom’s van through the side of the church in the middle of an annual Mother’s Day Luncheon did not faze Joanne. She loved each child as if he or she were her own and never wavered in her faith that they would leave her softly feathered nest and fly straight and true.

Joanne made friends every day like other people make their beds. Who develops a close friendship with their dental hygienist? With strangers on the Internet? With all the students in an Italian language class and the teacher? With five different priests? With endless parishioners in Sacred Heart? With every nurse and doctor who cared for her during her

illness? Joanne did. And she made peach pies, cross-stitched napkins and filled baskets with fresh berries to let them know she cared just for them.

On her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday when other women might ask for an intimate party or plastic surgery, Jo wanted an extravaganza. Her two “very best friends” worked for days with a devoted following of preschool Moms and endless acquaintances to craft an event that included a head table where “Queen Joanne”, wearing a special crown, held court with a banquet of homemade treats. Jo loved each personal tribute that was given and sang along with the chorus line of women (desperate for a night out) crooning “You can count on me!” The room was filled with Joanne’s laughter and with Joanne – and her joy and pleasure made it all worthwhile.

When Joanne discovered Italy, she didn’t just make homemade pasta or use virgin olive oil-- she became all things Italian. Jo immersed herself in the Italian Forum on the internet and made new friendships with total strangers, traveled three different times to see her newly adopted country, hosted an Italian exchange student, Giovanni Benatti for a year, studied Italian with her dear friend Francesca and dove headlong into Italian music, cooking, culture and art. “Made in Italy” became a shortened version of “Made in Italy for and by Joanne!”

Joanne’s greatest adventure was traveling to Italy with Richard for five weeks. Unlike his wife, Richard was happy to stay home or to go to Hawaii but not Joanne! Her dream was to return to the country she loved-- to share Rome, Venice and the Benatti family with her husband-- and she did. Despite the fact that they packed a little too much and Richard was forced to cart around two of the largest suitcases on wheels ever made, he fell in love with Venice; Joanne fell (if possible) even more in love with Italy; and they both fell in love again with each other.

In the next couple of weeks, we will turn our clocks back and the nights will be colder. When you do this I ask you to take a moment to remember Jo and the warmth she could bring to a room. And when you light your Christmas tree for the first time this December and you feel the wonder of the child within you, I ask you to take a moment to reflect on the great gifts of love, compassion and joy that Joanne brought to so many, especially the children who knew her as “Teacher”, her family and her friends.

For Scott, who no matter how spiritual your Mom was, thought you were the second coming – and that every breath you took was just another miracle, and to Richard, who through this last year devoted yourself with such compassion, love and quiet dignity to Joanne’s care, may you both find peace knowing that you were loved so deeply and so well. For Joanne’s sisters, Kay and Susan, her sisters-in-law, Sis and Darlene, Jo’s best friends, Diane and Maddy, and their families, may you carry Joanne’s spirit in your hearts as she did yours. For all of you here to honor Joanne’s memory, celebrate her life each day – laugh deeply, savor the moment, take joy in a child and love well. These are the gifts she has shared with us. We honor her and we remember her by passing them on to others.