



Elizabeth Marie Palmer Schilli

December 12, 1909

February 22, 2008

Eulogy for Elizabeth M. Schilli

March 26, 2008

by Patricia A. Carter

This is the day mom has been waiting for for many years. So, while we mourn the loss of her physical presence with us, it is a day to rejoice with her and celebrate her 98 years of life. A life that saw incredible change and advancements in technology. And one that experienced many difficulties. She began life on a farm with her parents and 11 siblings (one died as an infant). A simple, but hard life, depending on the fruits of their own labors and the unpredictability of mother nature for sustenance. Her marriage ended for all practical purposes soon after I was born, and she raised my sister who was 13 by that time and me on her own. The greatest tragedy of her life was the death of my sister to ovarian cancer over 12 years ago. And these last years were filled with growing debilitation including the inability to speak clearly and then most recently the difficulty in swallowing.

But when thinking about what reading to choose for today, the one that immediately sprang to mind was the reading from Proverbs that describes a woman who fears the Lord.

Since I didn't come along until she was 36, I didn't experience the early part of her adult life. My experience of her was as a single mother bringing up two daughters, although since Mary was 13 years older than I was, it was almost more the experience of being an only child during my elementary school years.

So what I remember of my mother was that she was a resourceful woman who recognized that "*her merchandise was profitable*" even if that merchandise was simply her own hands. She cleaned homes as a way of supporting us and made it possible for both Mary and I to attend St. George's Grade School and then St. Elizabeth's Academy. When I entered high school she took a less labor intensive job at the local pharmacy as a clerk, but returned to part time house work when she "retired." — Work she continued until she was about 80 and decided climbing ladders to wash windows was a bit too strenuous for her.

"And provides food for her household." Mom loved to cook and we loved to eat her cooking. Mom was the kind of cook who always prepared twice as much as you could possibly eat and then complain about all the leftovers and insisted you take some home. She would make up a big batch of something you'd like, like applesauce or chicken and noodles, or apples cut up for making a pie and freeze them and send them home with you. She missed cooking the big meals and making Christmas cookies.

"She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle." Her spindle and distaff were a sewing machine and quilting frame. She sewed many of our clothes when I was young and even made my wedding dress. She continued to hem up pants legs and mend until her hands could no longer hold the needle so that even her great-grandchildren benefitted from her sewing skills.

Whatever parish she was in she involved herself with the quilters. And often our dining room at our home on Austria Avenue was taken over by a quilting frame and a quilting bee. She made a quilt for each of her children and grandchildren. On her 70th birthday we reciprocated by having this quilt made for her with blocks that we each designed. Even when she moved into Sherbrooke, one of the attractions was that there was a quilt up that folks were working on. Even though she couldn't help quilt at that point, it made it feel a bit more like home. Besides a couple of her quilting buddies from St. George's were also there.

"She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness." Mom always had a well-ordered household. She ran a tight financial ship and didn't buy anything she couldn't pay cash for whether groceries or a house. I think we were poor when I was young, but I never felt it because I always had everything I needed. And she was always busy, as any single mom is after working all day, but she also had time to be involved in the parish, and was considered a mainstay of the parish wherever she went,

She was a woman of wisdom. She gave us the gift of making the choices on her own to move from her own home to a condo, then to senior apartments, then to assisted living, then to skilled care. She also was wise enough to know that at age 91 it was time to stop driving so when my son Josh turned 16, she gave him her Ford Tempo.

“Strength and dignity are her clothing and she laughs at the time to come.” Mom loved to laugh. She would get tickled by something and start giggling and everyone else would start. Even the Monday before she died, I was helping to feed her supper after she returned to Sherbrooke Village from the hospital. And of course all she could have was pureed food. Green puddle for salad, pink puddle of ham, brown puddle of roll. I put some ham on a spoon and said, “Some ham, Mom?” And she just laughed.

There are some things mom loved that aren't mentioned in Proverbs.

Mom loved to sing. She was in the choir at St. George's and part of the minstrel shows there. In church she would always join in the hymns. She loved Christmas carols, especially “Silent Night.” Her love of music is something that has been passed down three generations so far.

She also loved playing cards, part of the Palmer gene. I can still remember when we would visit t Grandma and Grandpa's Palmers in Ste. Genevieve, the siblings would gather for Pinocle. I can still hear Grandpa's thump on the table when he made a trump. Often at home, friends would come over to play cards. And if there was no one else around she would play Solitaire. This was one thing she was able to enjoy even up to the time she entered the hospital. At Sherbrooke, Dick Schmitt, his mother Louise, and his friend Carol would play Kings Corners with her regularly and Debbie and I would play solitaire with her. Even though she couldn't handle the cards herself she followed the play carefully and let us know if we missed a play or made a mistake.

“She girded her loins with strength and made her arms strong to meet all the difficulties of her life.” When I asked my son, Josh, last night what values he remembered about Grandma, he said, “Tenacity and strong will.” We sometimes experienced this as stubbornness, but it is what saw her through her difficulties and even be able to laugh at a pink puddle of ham. It was based on her faith in a God who is faithful.

In my spiritual direction work, St. Ignatius mentions in the Spiritual Exercise, that “Love shows itself in deeds over words.” Mom was not overly affectionate, or wordy in her love, but her deeds certainly showed it. In her care and concern for us and others.

“The fruit of her hands” is present here today and in so many other lives that she has touched and that her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren continue to touch.

“Let her works praise her in the gates.”

Proverbs 31: 13-22, 24-31

She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from afar.

She rises when it is yet night

and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong.

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.

Her lamp does not go out at night.

She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant.

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed;

“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,

but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.