

OUR “NEWEST” OLDEST MEMBER

ELDER CARE, A GIFT TO BE SHARED

– COMING FULL CIRCLE

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My journal writing is sporadic. It's not something I do every day. I write when something in my life has touched my heart on a deeper level. What I pen is a testament to my life. I would like to share some thoughts found in my journal, which brings together two themes: there is a place for each of us in The Catholic Women's League of Canada, and elder care – growing old gracefully.

In November 2005, during my parish council's membership drive, I asked my mother if she would like to join the League. Mom was 88 years young! Let me also add that she now makes her home in our local manor. Mom broke her hip in January 2004, and since then she has been confined to a wheelchair. So her reply to my question of becoming a member was, “What can I possibly do at my age?”

“There's a lot you can do, Mom,” I enthusiastically told her. “The most meaningful action would be the power of prayer. You can be a prayer partner. Please pray for our League, Mom. Pray for me the most,” I said in a playful tone, “that I can be the best person that God wants me to be.”

I explained how every one of us belongs and has a place in the League. The different reasons for belonging make it possible for every woman to become a member at any stage of her life. This allows her to make a difference right where she is, at the present time in her life.

“Do you think you can keep us all in your prayers, Mom?”

She slowly thought this question over in her mind, then said, “I think I could!”

I contacted our membership chairperson and Mom became an official member. Mothers usually buy their daughter's first membership in the League. What a role reversal this was! I know she will be faithful in her prayers for us.

Mom requires a lot of care, physically and emotionally. She depends on the nursing staff for her physical needs and on her family for her emotional needs. Old age can take away our independence, however, it can't take away our worth when we have the power of the Holy Spirit working and living through us. Our souls have no age, therefore, no restrictions.



There have been many days of exhaustion and feelings of discouragement as I struggle with the changes in my life. I juggle between a full time job, a relationship with a wonderful man, caring for Mom and spending time with her, a brother who is part of my life, and being of service to my parish community and the League. My father died in June 2003, and during his aging years and illness, my brother Bill and I were there for him. There have been many tears shed when I thought I couldn't keep this juggling act going on another minute.

What always encourages me are the love of God and His command, “Honour your father and mother.” These words feed my spirit and guide me in living out the gospel values. It is love that enables me. It is not easy seeing the role reversal take place, when parents become dependent, and the child becomes the caregiver. It breaks my heart a little bit more each day to watch my mother fade away from the mother and woman I grew up with. The child in me refuses to let

go. I want my mother back as I knew her; to a time when we could do things that mothers and daughters do together, like going to a movie, shopping, making a favourite recipe, having lunch together in a restaurant or just spending time together at home. Daily things done so long ago, and taken for granted. Worth so much more today, but only a memory etched in time.

I thank Jesus for giving me compassion and the sense of understanding what must be done. I thank Him for allowing me to return my parents' unconditional love to them. My prayer is for inner strength, hope and wisdom. Help me to see the cycle of life and accept it.

In a telephone conversation with Mom a few days ago, I listened as she told me the events of her day, sometimes forgetting why she was telling me a certain detail, then laughing about it as she continued on. She talked about her dreaded bath, the appointment with her hairdresser, having no change to tip her hairdresser, blocked ears, and not being able to hear the television. Mom's biggest accomplishment that day was changing into her nightgown all by herself. She first had to undo all the buttons on her blouse and sweater, something she said she would never do again as it took too long. I cried as I listened to her. I could hear the pride in her

voice that she had persevered and won the battle this time. Her little hands are skinny, and her fingers full of arthritis, bent and deformed.

In a wheelchair, unable to walk, Mom makes the best of each day in her world. A world that has changed so much from the one she once knew. As I step into her new world, I mourn for what no longer exists, but I also rejoice for the privilege of being her companion, walking with her on her journey "home".

I am so thankful for honouring my mom and dad with love and the gift of time; for being present for them in their old age to care for and love them. I am blessed indeed!

I welcome Agnes Thiffault, my mother, into The Catholic Women's League of Canada. Sisters in the League, Agnes wants you to know that she prays for you daily! And I praise God for what He is doing in my life! †

POSTSCRIPTS

1. Verna's mother went home to the lord on June 20, 2007, two months before her 90th birthday.
2. The "wonderful man" Verna describes became her husband on August 4, 2006.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE BURSARY RECIPIENTS!



In 1988, the League received two generous donations with no stipulation as to their use. In response to the call for lay formation in the Holy Father's apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, and in light of the expressed desire of the League to foster members' service "For God and Canada", the national executive agreed by motion that these donations be used to establish the National Bursary Fund. Subsequently, in 1990, the national bursary was established as an endowment fund with the principal amount invested and the interest earned annually to be distributed as bursary awards. The fund is used to provide financial assistance to League members meeting the established criteria, and who wish to pursue studies in adult faith formation and/or youth ministry.

The League is grateful for the many donations received specifically for this fund. Through careful administration, the League has been able to increase the number of awards annually. Bursary applications are available on request from national office or can be downloaded from www.cwl.ca and must be sent to national office with a postmark of no later than May 31st.

- Jasmine Bean, Calgary, Alberta
 Shirley Bernier, Lachine, Quebec
 Gloria Chopik, Pilot Butte, Saskatchewan
 Louise Eberwein, Kirkland, Quebec
 Kendal Freeman, Madoc, Ontario
 Claire Hatcher, Neils Harbour, Nova Scotia
 Naden Kathleen Hewko, Cactus Lake, Saskatchewan
 Annette Hine, Esterhazy, Saskatchewan
 Deb Hoyer, Vienna, Ontario
 Adele Huculak, Kamloops, British Columbia
 Lynn Lavictoire, Cumberland, Ontario
 Barbara Malcolm, Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia
 Ana-Maria Mattia, Edmonton, Alberta
 Norah McKoy-Mulrooney, Chateaugay, Quebec
 Ann Myers, Kentville, Nova Scotia
 Stacey Rhodes-Nesset, Surrey, British Columbia
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 Bertilla, Watanabe, Vancouver, British Columbia †