

Eulogy for Lois A. Kesack, August 25, 2021

Dear friends and family of Lois Kesack,

She wasn't saving the best for last. We all know that the last few years of Lois' life were a mere shadow of who she once was - the strength she possessed, the love she shared, the schedule she kept up for so many decades of a busy, meaning-filled life. Today we come together to remember her as she lived and worked and enjoyed being. Today we honor a lady from Pennsylvania Dutch country who could be stoic in the face of life's toughest challenges, tough as nails. And I have a feeling, if there is baseball in heaven, she is already busy, preparing the fields right now. "What are you doing down there, bemoaning my life? There is stuff to do up here!" That's Lois Kesack in heaven...

We will tell the story of her life today, always with a notion of gratitude toward God and all kinds of other people. None of us become the people we are without the divine gift of creation or without the influence of others. We sometimes forget that. As we honor Lois today, part of the honor goes to her family of origin, her church of origin and also those she left behind: you! Yet, the biggest part, as far as I am concerned, goes to her creator. We give thanks to God for her life, a life well lived.

Let me begin by quoting one of her grandchildren, because grandchildren usually know best. This grandchild once remarked on the way to the Kesack family home: "Grammy is the boss." Indeed. This is true for most phases of her life. Lois was in charge of child rearing, transportation to baseball and other sports events. She scheduled umpires and found people to mark the field ahead of contests, often times doing it herself. She kept schedules for all family members. She attended school conferences. She cooked and cleaned. In fact, she is the only person I know who would proudly proclaim for all to hear: "I love cleaning." For much of her life, Lois remained in charge of all kinds of things in and around the house. Only a disease, as vicious as it was mysterious, could take away that aspect of her personality. And not even that. In recent years, with Lois bound to the bed or the wheelchair, her approval or disapproval came via looks, smiles and smirks. Those who knew her could interpret her sign language. Grammy was the boss and even when she was ill, she got her point across.

Lois Ann Gutekunst was born on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1937 into a large German-descent family in Allentown. She hated the fact that she had to share her birthday with another, bigger event, but I don't think Jesus will hold it against her. Because Jesus has many more birthdays than most Christians think. Of course the Kesack's longtime neighbors who always cooked and hosted a big party on December 24, made up for any resentments Lois may have had. She got a nice party every Christmas Eve. And she didn't have to cook.

Lois was the sixth of seven children who were all raised in a three-bedroom house with lots of things to share, including shirts, blouses and hand-me-downs, not to speak of rooms and beds. In other words: with the first breath she took in this world, she was born into communal life. Her father worked for a Power Company near Riverfront Park. Her mother had the tougher job, raising four boys and three girls. Only one of them is still alive, the third-born Clifford.

Lois grew up at St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Allentown; she was a cradle Lutheran. She got married in that same church years later, and today she receives her last service in another St. Peter's Ev. Lutheran Church, the one she belonged to since 1965. That is a total of 56 years!

At 10th grade in High School, she must have noticed that she received a lot of attention from one of the 9th grade boys. Evil tongues spread the rumor that he was interested in the television that the Gutekunst family owned – a treasure in those days. But I can assure you that the interests of the young man from the neighborhood – he only lived two blocks away – and the fact that he spent so much time in the Gutekunst house - were only about a person: the person we remember today.

Bill and Lois got married on August 15, 1959. They moved to West Philadelphia where Bill attended the University of Pennsylvania and Lois worked as a switchboard operator for a local company. After he graduated, Bill got to live his dream for a little while. That summer, he signed up for the Daytona Beach Cardinals, a farm team of the St. Louis Cardinals, and they spent those hot months in Daytona Beach. Bill's ambitions as a Baseball Player ended about a year later, and he signed up for a job with the Boeing plant in Philadelphia. The first child was on his way, the career looked promising, and the family settled down. They lived 25 years in Upper

Gwynedd and then another quarter century in East Norriton. Somewhere along the way, Pastor Fisher convinced them to join St. Peter's. I think they never regretted it.

At one point still early in his career, Bill had the opportunity to work for Boeing in Vietnam. It was during the years of the infamous war and engineers were needed as much as fighters. The assignment was supposed to be good for his career. Sources told me that Louis wasn't happy about the adventure from the beginning. Child number three was on the way and Bill went anyway, following both duty and ambition. He wasn't there very long when he received a letter from Lois. He read the letter a few times. He read it carefully and he finally showed it to his boss. After his boss read Lois' message, he sent him home on the next plane. I don't know what was in the letter, I don't need to know what was written in the letter, but I hope it is well preserved somewhere. "Grammy is the boss!"

As it turned out, Bill would be busy enough in his job locally, and his career certainly didn't suffer. Throughout the growing years of their children, Lois was always there to bring them to games, practices, school events and the like. She was famous for her posted notes and the meticulously kept calendar. When St. Peter's opened the Thrift Store in the 1980's, she was there to help. When they needed a treasurer, she volunteered. When grandchildren were born and grandchildren began having their own events, she was there for them as well.

Another little anecdote was shared by Charlene Bance. She writes:

"In 2010 Bill and Lois, Dave and Olga and Keith and I took a fall trip to western PA to see the Frank Llyod Wright house, Horseshoe Curve and Johnstown. One day Lois kept talking about wanting pie. When it got closer to lunch she really wanted a place where there would be pie. As we are driving, looking for a lunch place we see a huge sign in front of a bakery 'homemade pies'. So of course we went in. It was a bakery and they had small personal size fruit pies so we each got one. The baker managed to find some plastic forks. So out we went with our personal pies. The only place we could find to sit was the curb so we all sat on the curb and ate our pies for lunch. I then dubbed us the Pie for Lunch Bunch. Our group grew to 7 couples... and some faction of our group has travelled every year together... We always had wonderful times and get

along great. But we were born out of three couples sitting on a curb in Western PA eating pie for lunch because Lois had insisted we had to have pie.”

There is much more to say about Lois’s life, which I will leave for others to share. I would like to add that she and Bill had some wonderful travel experiences in the later part of life, including a river cruise in Germany, a trip to England, a visit to the Passion Play in Oberammergau, trips to National Parks and a trip to Italy. In hindsight, one can only say, it’s nice they were able to do those things together before her health deteriorated.

Lois did not save the best for last. She left her best out on the field – on the baseball field, on the field of church ministry, and certainly on the field of family life. Those are not bad places to devote your energy to. In the scheme of things, her last years of great suffering are only footnotes in a life well lived. She was called home by her Savior a week ago, on August 18, 2021. And for all of us who saw her and visited her in recent weeks and months, we know: she was ready for that last journey. She had left it all out on the field. And now it’s time for her to cheer you on from a better place. Good bye, Lois! We love you, and thank you for all you did!

Amen.