

Evelyn Gabriel

Evelyn Gabriel was, to use a good scrabble word, a Quintessential Teacher. For more than thirty years, she gave her life to children, not her own, in order to give them the foundations they needed to create good lives for themselves, to become productive citizens, to grow in maturity so they could give something back to the world. The dedication of teachers is sorely under-appreciated. They are usually overworked. They are always underpaid. Their importance is rarely acknowledged as the backbone of our nation's character. Teachers have made us who we are in technology, in economic capacity, in intellectual freedom, in moral integrity.

I cannot say that I knew Evelyn Gabriel, but I am no less indebted to her for the gifts she gave as a teacher – for teachers touch the whole world. I have no doubt, that if I could trace all of the stories of all of the lives of all of the children she has taught in those thirty years, along the way, somehow, at least one of them, directly or indirectly, has influenced my life. Can you think of that? Nearly a thousand adults I estimate, now spread across the land, who were touched by her teaching, are now giving to the

world in ways that we do not know, but whose productivity in their given careers without a doubt casts a web of influence from which we all surely benefit.

What a tremendous contribution teachers make to our society. Evelyn was a Quintessential Teacher.

I use that high-powered scrabble word not in empty flattery, but because what I've been told of her life indicates that it is true. The quintessence of something is "the pure, highly concentrated essence of a thing." The essence of teaching is knowledge, and even on the last night before her hospitalization, Evelyn went to bed, as she usually did, reading. Her love of books indicated that essential thirst for knowledge which undoubtedly made her a good teacher. Jim tells me that she loved to read history. Now tell me that's not a teacher – always wanting to know more about the real world. Reading was a quest for knowledge for her, not just a flight of escapism and pleasure.

Her love of words and the intellectual challenge of strategy made Scrabble, to which I have alluded, her favorite game. From all of her hears of teaching, and all of the history she had read, I have no doubt she was an excellent player. Scrabble is a wonderful

game which takes not only a sure foundation of knowledge (the words themselves), but also enough cleverness and skill to know how to put them together in a patchwork puzzle of increasing points. It's a fitting game for teachers to play!

In their retirement, Evelyn and Jim enjoyed traveling. No doubt, another indication of her desire to learn more, to know more, to see more, to continue growing. Those trips provided much pleasure for them, and they will continue, Jim, to provide joyful memories of your years together.

Evelyn also loved things of beauty. This is obvious from looking at her well-kept home. And from her love of quilts and roses. Quilting is no easy hobby. It takes patience. It takes skill. It takes creativity. All, marks of a teacher. And it is a hobby which produces a product that is both practical and beautiful. How fitting.

Evelyn loved the simple beauty of a rose. Their velvet petals; their fragrant aroma. But a rose, beautiful as it is, is a highly evolved and highly complex creation -- its mixture of bloom and thorn make it a wonderful metaphor for life itself. In a song made popular a few years ago, we learn some of the lessons of this

complicated, bitter-sweet life we live. Though it is probably too-often quoted, let me share a few of her lines:

It's the heart afraid of breaking
That never learns to dance
It's the dream afraid of waking
That never takes the chance
It's the one who won't be taken,
Who cannot seem to give
And the soul afraid of dying
That never learns to live

Just remember in the winter
Far beneath the bitter snow
Lies the seed that with the sun's love,
In the spring, becomes a rose.

Though I did not know her, personally, I believe that the rose, which Evelyn loved so well, is an appropriate description of her own beauty.

Jim and Evelyn Gabriel had nearly 63 years of life together. Jim, I'm sure that during that time there were a few "thorny" moments. Relationships are just so! And yet in the end, what a beautiful gift. What a beautiful gift, Jim, to your family and to this world. Six decades of life and love. The country singer asks, "if love don't last forever. Then what's forever for!?" This love, which blossomed in a few short months in 1941 has lasted for an

earthly “forever.” And of this I am certain, Jim. As the Apostle Paul said it, “Love never ends.” Your love will continue to last. It will continue to give, even through your own family here, who has been influenced by your example.

There is one final word I share with you today. I used the word “quintessential” to describe Evelyn. And after I had written that sentence, I learned something in my dictionary. In ancient and medieval philosophy, the world was understood through four principle elements: earth, air, fire, and water. But they knew there was something more to this life. The ancient philosophers called this “more,” the fifth essence, (a *quint-essence* in their language). This *quint-essence* spoke of the substance of heavenly bodies, which was latent in all things. In other words, “quintessence” refers to the things of the spirit. To matters of faith. So when I called Evelyn a “quintessential teacher,” I was saying more than I originally knew. For her teaching and her life were under-girded by her faith. By a fifth-essence. It was surely who she is. It is why we gather this day, not to mourn, but even amid our tears, to celebrate. For our Christian hope calls us to say that in ways that

this earth cannot know, Evelyn is even more alive today than she has ever been. Her essence still lives in the memories of those who love her. Her spirit still lives in the heart of God.

Evelyn Gabriel was a Quintessential Teacher. Thanks be to God.

Teach us to apply our hearts to wisdom
Which Evelyn knew:
Wisdom of care, patience, beauty, faith...

Jesus as teacher: Abundant Life

Graveside:
Jim – time.
More slowly now, but deeply meaningful because of your time together.