

Mary Varley's letter for Joan

Until October 26 2006, I had been blessed with two very beautiful daughters. Two "lights of my life." After that horrible day, the younger one is now gone forever from this world.

Joan was born on Valentine's Day which seemed to suit her perfectly. She was a very loving, compassionate, kind and gentle soul. Joan always saw the positives in life, and if they didn't exist she would still find some positive aspect in any situation.

From the age of fifteen until the day she died, Joan contributed to every community where we lived. We were an Air Force family so we moved frequently. Joan made and kept good friends in each area. Several of her childhood friends flew across country for her funeral. Joan began her volunteer service by serving meals at Martha's kitchen in San Jose, CA. Over the years she helped at Homeless Shelters, senior homes, church programs and Veterans Services. She was recognized for 1200 hours of volunteer service by the Military Order of the Purple Heart in San Jose. She worked with both homeless and hospitalized veterans in Palo Alto, Menlo Park, San Jose and in Reno when she first moved here. She also categorized and arranged over 2000 books for Grace Community Church for their library and Christian book store. This took all her evening and weekend time for a couple of months. At the time of her death Joan had been a volunteer for Prison Ministry and had been going with the group to the Carson City Prison for five year.

Joan was bright, articulate and creative. She was fun loving and had a terrific sense of humor. She graduated from San Jose State University with honors and received her degree in Broadcasting and Communication. She also enjoyed performing and all during her college years she performed and helped with the Opry House troop in Almaden Valley. After graduation, she moved to Los Angeles and acted in a number of plays for Calvary Bible Church. She held various jobs while auditioning for parts and comedy sketches. She worked as a production assistant for Warner Brothers for about four years. She finally tired of the LA life, the sixteen hour days at Warner Brothers and refused to audition for parts which were in violent or really off color productions. She then became a licensed substitute teacher in California.

In June of 2001, Joan moved to Reno and worked in a Real Estate Company and developed an interest in this field. She also qualified and obtained her teaching license in Nevada. She always loved children and they loved her. Joan also found the Reno Little Theatre and joined their group performing in some plays and enjoying stage

management, too. She began taking real estate courses and seminars and when I moved here in 2003 she invited me along with her to seminars. That's when we became involved with REMCOR who sold us River's Edge in October of 2004. Both Joan and I considered it and it seemed a decent opportunity to offer safe, clean and low cost housing to tenants which would allow them to save money and eventually move on. Joan had a beautiful letter from one of our male tenants thanking us for the opportunity. He moved out of River's Edge after living there three years and said it gave him the opportunity to save his money and buy his own home. Joan and I both invested our money into this project but Joan invested her heart, soul and mind as always to help others.

By February of 2005, we knew we were in over our heads. The second manager we hired had taken off with \$1400 and all the tools we owned. We then hired a third manager who had been highly recommended. He was a parolee who seemed to have turned his life around and did very well until June of that year. We had to evict a couple for drug problems and non payment of rent. Unfortunately, this manager took in the wife of the couple who had a drug problem and it was all downhill from there. We finally fired and evicted both manager and the previously evicted woman in January of 2006. It was then that Joan insisted we run it ourselves. No more problem managers. I tried to discourage her but she would not relent so we did run it. Although we were partners, Joan did most of the work. She would teach during the day and stop by River's Edge after school to see what was needed.

Through the third manager we received referrals from HOPES. Eventually we discovered that too many parolees knew each other from prison and reverted to criminal behavior. To be fair, a few did seem to rehabilitate and move on. The defendant in this court room did not.

Joan's senseless and brutal murder totally devastated me, her sister, brother in law, nieces, family and friends. For months after and even now, people we did business with in the community cried with me for her loss. I had a note from one of our tenants telling me that Joan had taken her to her job interview and helped her get there until she knew how. She ended her note with "I will never forget your daughter's kindness." Other tenants told me how she always encouraged them and one who feared not getting a job said she helped him with what to say and he got his job. He was a parolee who, at last report still held this job and was doing well. On May 25, 2007, we received a message on the internet from one of our former residents, a parolee.

I quote this: “My name is Chuck and I lived at River’s Edge with Joan for awhile. She did nothing but make my life better and tried to help me anyway she could. If it wasn’t for Joan, I would not be where I am now but I would be back in prison. She showed me a new way to live. Thanks to her, I am back to teaching kids about HIV and my life is a lot better. I don’t know if I could have done it if it wasn’t for her. My blessing to her family and Joan will always be in my heart and part of my life.

After her death, I received a beautiful card signed by 28 inmates from Carson City Prison appreciating her help and visits and positive support. In addition, we received at least a dozen letters from several teachers and Joan’s friends. Her influence has amazed many. She has left a valuable legacy to all she touched in a short life span.

After her death, I had to work out of the office where she was murdered. This truly was an absolute hell for me. For months I was deathly sick to my stomach before dragging myself over there and I continue to thank God daily for Ed, one of our tenants who came forward to help me. He stuck by me out of the goodness of his heart and I do not think I would have survived without his help. Joan had told me he had been helping her after we had fired the third manager.

Words cannot fully describe the devastating loss of Joan. She was truly an exemplary young Christian Lady. Joan didn’t just talk the talk. She walked the walk. Joan loved her sister and brother in law and their beautiful daughters with all her heart. Her nieces will no longer have their doting aunt in their lives. Her five year old niece and sister visit Auntie Joan at her grave. Her senseless and brutal murder outraged many and broke our hearts.

At one point during this trial this cowardly inhuman predator stated he didn’t know God. Ironically, the defendant murdered one of the best sources of help in this area anyone could have had. I pray this predator will receive the most severe sentence possible. I do not want to see any other family have to endure the agony of losing a loved one.

I want to thank the court and the jury for being here for this trial. I realize jury duty is not easy and very much appreciate your time with this case. Thank you so much, I am very grateful to all of you.

“Some people come into our lives and quickly go; some stay for a while and leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never the same.”

This quote describes our beautiful Joan—perfectly.