



Anne Hughes in Memoriam (1933-2013)

As I reflect on the passing of a dear friend, I could think of no better words to describe what a wonderful, caring person Anne Mason Hughes was than the eulogy given by Anne's daughter, Mary Anne Creech, at the funeral on Friday, March 15, at St. Bernadette Catholic Church in Springfield, Virginia.

-- Dixie Collins

I am Mary Anne Hughes Creech; Anne Hughes was my mother, and the complexities of that relationship could enthrall a psychiatrist for years.

But Anne was also my mom, and the simplicity of that relationship is easy to understand. I loved her. I will always love her.

Mom grew up in Chevy Chase – in a much different era. She was a statuesque, comely blonde – I have photos of her from those days – WOW!

I know that was my Dad was drawn by her looks, but I'm just as sure that it was her lively spirit and giving nature that made him fall in love. She was outgoing and sociable, just fun to be around. She was always ready to make friends and always ready to be a friend. She enjoyed being connected, being involved, being in a position to help, and to get things done.

One day, when I was in the third grade at St. Bernadette's, I came home from school and told mom that we didn't have a music teacher and that the nun who ran our class was a really lousy singer. The next day, Mom showed up at school and volunteered to be the music teacher. She kept that position for the next 15 years.

Mom was talented; she played piano and guitar and had a lovely singing voice. I remember how she taught me to harmonize – believe it or not, she used the vacuum cleaner. She flipped the switch and let the drone of the machine take the first part, she took the next higher part, and I followed the next one up.

She brought that kind of eccentricity and enthusiasm to the classroom – she made music fun.

Later on, Mom ran the St. Bernadette's CYO. That was a mixed blessing for me and my brothers because it meant that she went on all of the field trips, attended all the one-act plays, and, of course, chaperoned all the dances. Having a mom around can really cramp a teenager's social opportunities and is almost guaranteed to provide at least a few embarrassing moments and an awkward situation or two. I can think back on that with a smile now, but the angst at the time, not to mention the missed opportunities, was excruciating.

She continued to run the CYO even after John, Willie, and I had graduated, but it was not long after we'd moved on that she, too, embarked on a new defining activity: volleyball.

A lot of you knew our dad, Winkie, as "Pops" – it was a nickname that he had for much of his adult life, for almost all of his volleyball life. Well, Anne was just as definitely "Mom" to the volleyball world.

She was a member of the Chesapeake Region Board of Directors for decades, the Men's AA tournament coordinator for several of those years, and eventually region commissioner. She worked non-stop, both locally and nationally, for the spot and the people who played it. She was energetic and diligent in everything she did for volleyball; but maybe more importantly, she was a fixture at tournaments and events. She was a familiar face and approachable personality to volleyball players, coaches, officials, tournament directors, and administrator around the region and throughout the country.

My brother, Willie, told me earlier this week about a team captain from a different region that wanted to get his team into the Maryland Extravaganza and, wondering who he needed to get in touch with to apply for the tournament, asked Willie for information. Naturally, Willie told him, "Just call Mom." She needed no further introduction.

Mom loved to help and was profoundly devoted to her friends. I will never forget her trips to Laurel to be with Nancy Sharpless as Nancy battled cancer. Mom hated driving but for many months made the commute from Springfield to Maryland twice a week to offer support and companionship through an ordeal that nobody should ever face alone. Although she and Nancy had been cordially acquainted before the illness, Mom recognized that Nancy needed something more, a real friend, to help her during a dark time.

The kindness of my mother and the bond that developed between her and Nancy is beautiful beyond words and will stay in my hearts and thoughts forever.

I remember warmly the hospitality of our house on Julian Street – particularly during holidays and school vacations. If Mom had anything to say about it – and she certainly

did – our friends had a home with us whenever they needed one. For many happy years, we always seemed to have a guest or two staying with us or sharing a holiday ... a guest who invariably became another member of the family. Mom embraced all who spent time with us ... adopted them all ... loved them all. Alan Wolf, Chris Warshaw, Bunky Dukes, Margie Reusche, and others became sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, under the Hughes' roof. These were the best of times ... no doubt, the very best of times.

Mom and Pops were delighted when they became grandparents. Sarah, Samantha, Willie, Johnnie, and Jenny provided brightness and warmth to their last years that would be impossible to describe without becoming too sentimental or effusive.

Since we lived nearest to Springfield, when Sarah and Willie were younger, they had almost a second pair of parents – parents who took them out for ice cream after school, took them to the park or to play, and indulged them in ways that their “other parents” quite frequently did not.

Time and age are as unkind as they are inevitable. When Winkie died, the effects on Mom (beyond the natural grief) were not immediately obvious. With her husband of 50 years gone, her health and her memory started to fail before we realized that it was happening. By the time we did understand, she was no longer able to care for herself. But she was independent, proud, and probably a little frightened. She did not want her children or the world to regard her as diminished or to “meddle” in her “private” affairs.

Eventually my brothers and I had to move her into an assisted living home. This was one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do; I felt sad and guilty. But she settled into her new residence without missing a beat and we were relieved to see that her innately gregarious nature had once again kicked in. She made friends (her best buddy, Natalie, is 90 years old and bright as a sunbeam); she entertained the other residents by playing the piano and singing with a folk group; and ... her health improved. She regained some of the happiness and vitality that we feared she'd lost forever.

The heart attack that took Anne's life was sudden and unexpected. Now her voice is stilled and we are saddened by the loss of our mother ... of our friend.

For me, however, the best of Mom will live on in all those thoughts of her that bring me a smile, in the sound of laughter that evokes the memory of her smile, in a tune that was one of her favorites, in the myriad small things that are part of my life because she was part of my life.

Goodbye, Mom – I love you ... I will always love you.