

## **Life Review – Mary Keppen Memorial Service; October 28, 2015**

Mary Wilkinson was born on November 12, 1924 to Randolph and Evelyn Wilkinson at St. Louis, Missouri. Her father was from St. Paul, Minnesota and her mother was from Chicago, Illinois. Mary had a younger brother, James.

Mary attended school in Chicago, Illinois and graduated from Our Ladies Academy in Mantino, Illinois. She moved to Chicago, and it was there where she met her future husband, Claire Keppen. Claire was from Orland, South Dakota. His parents moved to Orland in 1938. There were three children in that family – Claire, Blaine, and Elaine.

Mary and Claire were married in Chicago, Illinois on June 1, 1945. Claire was serving in the US Navy at the time. Mary was 20 years old when she and Claire were married. By the time Claire had completed his military service, he and Mary had added two children to their family. Claire yearned to return to his South Dakota roots and work on the Keppen farm.

The Keppen family did relocate to Orland and Claire took up farming along with his father and brother. Mary left her nice Chicago home and now cared for her two children and husband in a house without electricity or running water. Eight other children would be added to the Keppen family for ten in all – Lynne, Randy, Donna, Steve, Ray, Jim, Beth, Charles, Katie, and Robin. Mary would eventually get running water to the family home in 1965.

Mary was a devoted mother to her children. Her son Jim, shared at her funeral that “You could always talk to Mom – you could sit and talk with her and she never would judge you”. He said “she made do with so little” in trying to raise ten children in a little house, and feed twelve meals three times a day. Yet, Mary would have time for herself as she joined other ladies who sang in a woman’s group; or she would go to the Orland Store, to visit other lades and have coffee (or something like that) with her neighborhood farm women. Often, the ladies would play cards together. Jim said “Mom would drag us kids with her off to church each Sunday, and we went, whether we wanted to or not”. He said that after her children were all grown, if she met someone who had nowhere to stay or no food – they were always welcome to stay at the Keppen farm home. Even the children’s friends – before they left the Keppen home to return home – were given homemade cookies to take home.

In 1970, Claire and Mary moved off the farm and to Sioux Falls and later Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 1985, Claire retired and he and Mary continued to live in Minneapolis. By now, they had also purchased a lake cabin at Clam Lake, which is located in south central Minnesota, south of St. James, Minnesota. That lake home would later become the main summer home for the entire Keppen family & many family memories were made at that special setting.

In 1985, Claire and Mary would move to Madison. Claire Keppen died on July 19, 1994. He and Mary would be married for 49 years. Mary was now a widow at the age of 69. Mary would continue to live in her home on SW 1<sup>st</sup> Street, and relied on her daughter, Donna, for many little things – since Donna and her husband, David, lived close to her in town. Mary kept busy with her gardening, sewing and reading. She also was a member of the Ladies Altar Society.

Mary began having falls while in her home. She went to the ER at the hospital on March 6, 2013 and returned home the same day. Two days later, Mary returned to the hospital and this time was admitted into the hospital. Her physician determined that she was too weak and unstable to return to her home, so Mary continued to be in the hospital for another week.

Mary Keppen entered Bethel Lutheran Home on March 13, 2013 for a short-term stay, focused on physical and occupational therapy. Her goal was to return home or move into assisted living. Mary worked hard during her stay at Bethel Home – she went to her daily therapy sessions, all the while, working to increase her strength and stability. She enjoyed being in her room, often watching TV sitting in her recliner, and liked the Turner Classic Movie Network. While Mary was with us, she did become involved in coffee hour, playing Jeopardy, and bingo. Her family were faithful in coming to visit her.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, Mary's physical and occupational therapies were done. Her physician said that she was now strong enough and stable in her walking – she was suitable for assisted living. She was so excited about moving to assisted living, that she went over the Bethel Suites one morning and told them that she was moving in on June 1<sup>st</sup>. She caused quite a stir in the dining room, as there were no vacancies in the assisted living center at the time & immediately people were wondering if they were going to “be kicked out”. We had to assure some folks that no one would be “kicked out”, but that when an opening did occur, Mary Keppen would be moving from Bethel Home to Bethel Suites.

After a stay in Bethel Home of three months and seven days, Mary Keppen did transfer into Bethel Suites for assisted living care, on June 21, 2013.

Mary was very content to live in her suite, which was now four times the size of her room in Bethel Home. She did come out occasionally for bingo, coffee hour, bible study, or devotions. She would come to this chapel for Rosary and Catholic services. She enjoyed going on outings with her neighbors – like to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Diner. She did not regularly come to the monthly resident meetings – but I remember at one meeting, Mary stood up and said “My son is building the new apartments and patio homes on the south end of Bethel – I just want everyone here to know, that I am not responsible if there are any problems or for what my son has done”.

She was asked by our staff when she moved into Bethel Suites, what she was the most proud of in her life – her family. Your greatest accomplishment – her ten children. Favorite season. Spring – because everything starts fresh all over again. If she could do anything in her life, what would she do? – raise horses on land out by Lake Madison.

At times, life in Bethel Suites was too quiet for Mary, when compared to life in Bethel Home. She also had to walk more to and from the dining room and missed the extra help that she had grown accustomed to in the Home. She often ate breakfast in her suite, and needed encouragement to come out to the dining room for supper each evening.

In July 2014, Mary was complaining of increased pain in her shoulders. She said she “wanted to live in the nursing home because they help me over there – more than they do here (assisted living)”

On August 13, 2014, Mary fell in her suite and was taken to the hospital. There, she was diagnosed with a fractured right wrist. She had surgery on her wrist. Now unable to return to assisted living Mary moved into Bethel Lutheran Home on August 22, 2014. Five days later, Mary was readmitted into Avera Hospital for an infection and had a second operation. She then returned to the nursing home, now with MD orders for physical and occupational therapy.

Mary wanted to return to assisted living, but we knew what she had expressed while in Bethel Suites – she really wanted the care and services of the nursing home, when compared to what was offered in assisted living. She now ambulated all over Bethel Home in her wheelchair. She came out for the daily coffee hour; her neighborhood meetings, and yet knew when to stop and take a rest during the day. She was assisted with one staff in her transfers, and did her upper body exercises each day in the therapy room. She also worked to keep her shoulders from pain as much as possible.

She celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday with us at Bethel and her son & family took her out for dinner that evening. Her family was a presence in her life, whether she was in the assisted living center or here in the nursing home.

This past May, Mary complained of severe pain in her hip and back. She was taken to the hospital for X-rays, but nothing could be seen that was causing a problem. The next month, Mary fell while in her bathroom, and was taken to the ER at the hospital. Mary had fractured her ribs.

Last month, Mary had increasing pain in her hands, and she quit playing bingo because of the pain. On September 20<sup>th</sup>, she was taken to the Madison Community Hospital for severe abdominal pain. She was transferred to Avera Hospital in Sioux Falls for surgery. She returned to Bethel Home on September 24. She saw her MD here at Bethel the next day.

That same day, Mary began to experience abdominal pain once again. She was taken to the Madison Community Hospital and referred to Avera Hospital. She was diagnosed with a severe internal infection and became unresponsive while at Avera. On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, she was transferred from the hospital to the Dougherty House; Sioux Falls, for 24-hour hospice care. Mary was discharged from Bethel Lutheran Home on October 7, 2015, after being cared for in Bethel for two years and nine months.

Mary Keppen died on October 21, 2015 at the Dougherty Hospice House at 90 years of age. She would have been 91 next month. Her funeral was held last Saturday, October 24, 2015 at the Weiland Funeral Chapel, with her burial at the St. Thomas Cemetery. Mary was survived by her ten children: Lynne, Randy (Kathy); Donna (David); Steve (Myrna); Ray (Pam); Jim (Patti); Beth (Joe); Charlie (Michelle); Katie (Chris); and Robin (Pat); 28 grandchildren, 39 great grandchildren, and 3 – soon to be 4 great-great grandchildren.

May God Bless our Memory of Mary Keppen.