



*A Good Word for Diane McGowan*

May 25, 2017

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Someone said I couldn't say this in church, but Bob McGowan knew her best and loved her most, and he said, especially in her younger years... Diane Woodside was a hellion! He said she would climb out the windows of her parents' home. I wonder who she was slipping out to see, Bob? I'm guessing she made that little night escapade more than once to rendezvous with a high school sweetheart – and if you get to spend a half-century together, building a life and a family with the boy of your dreams, what parents couldn't forgive a little covert misbehavior!?

In that same vein of doing bold and audacious things, they said on a snowy day she slid down that ski slope steeple of Sharon Methodist Church on a lunch tray. That's hard for me to believe... but I'm just telling what they said. Maybe hellion is the wrong word, even though Bob spoke it with such affection, and even though Bill and Rochelle smiled a curious smile that said maybe they, too, knew there was a mischievous spirit that infected their mother with a daring enthusiasm for life.

After their high school years, Diane got a degree from King's Business College, and she used that degree and her keen eye for keeping the books to put Bob through graduate school. She put that mathematical precision to good use for many years as the bookkeeper for her beloved Junior League; she kept things in order at the McGowan Painting Company, and until she died she paid the bills and kept the house on Overhill Road in good financial order. Bob asked her recently if he needed to take that duty off her hands, but she brushed him aside: "Not yet."

She could have excelled in a career using the discipline and precision that good accounting requires. Instead, she excelled as a mother and friend, a “Grandee” befitting that wonderful nickname. The kids remember the little sign hanging in the kitchen that said, “If a woman’s place is in the home, why am I always in the car?” I didn’t know Diane well, but I am pretty sure that submissive image, implied by the words “a woman’s place is in the home” did not apply to her! She was, however, willingly submissive to the demands of being a good mother. Her children praised her devotion to them as “selfless.” As she had cared for her own mother in those last years, and for a sister who died prematurely from cancer, Diane cared for her children. She was always in the road, between swim team and children’s theatre, practices and parties and performances –a triple share for Diane’s busy calendar. Every weekend during those early years she was in the car with Rochelle at 4:30am, headed out for a swim meet. She did it all.

She was devoted to her family, but that did not keep her from being a loyal friend. For all her life she kept in touch with her group from Myers Park High school. She had close friends from the racket club and the Cotswold neighborhood. She treasured her Junior League relationships. Henry David Thoreau famously said most people lead lives of “quiet desperation.” Diane had a wicked sense of humor and more friends than you can count. There was the monthly Bridge Night, the Junior League monthly lunches, almost 20 years of summer beach trips with those high school friends.

And when she wasn’t enjoying life with a roomful of close friends, you might have found her in an arena of crazed fans. She was one of the Original Hornets’ fans, a Honey Bee in her own right, and when the Panthers came to town, at Diane’s insistence, the McGowans were some of the first on the list for PSL’s and season tickets. And you didn’t even want to get her started about her Tarheels. Diane understood style and class... and she knew how to cheer for her team!

Beyond those outward expressions, the humor, the stylish social grace, the avid sports fan... there was a deep, still resolve. She could stay on the beach all day, enjoying the sun, the sand, her own inner thoughts. She was strong, which is sometimes just a euphemism for stubborn. She had an intense private streak – which was not a cover for insecurity or vanity, but an indicator of a quiet strength that ran true to the end. The day before she died she enjoyed the company of her family, and then, her family said, she died on her own terms. Who would expect anything else?

In the confidence of a quiet faith we give thanks to God who breathed all the life into her, and who now holds her fast in the arms of eternal grace. For the mischievous outward spirit and the quiet inner strength of Diane Woodside McGowan, thanks be to God.

Amen.