Losing a dear friend
What I learned from Katie’s funeral

By Tracy Flanagan

Katie Bochek became my friend about 10 years ago. She was beautiful and had an infectious smile. She made friends easily and I felt blessed to have become part of her large extended group of friends. We all loved Katie and we had so many good times together. Everyone would agree that she was the glue that held us together for so many years. She had a remarkable zest for life.

In 2011, at age 33 years, Katie was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a terrible shock to everyone, but she handled the news, and the surgery and treatment that followed, with grace and humor. She eventually went into remission, but two years later, the cancer had returned and had moved to her lungs. The prognosis was not good.

By then, Katie had to quit her job but continued to maintain her independence until she moved back home with her parents in Lakeville. Through all those painful months of further treatment that followed, she showed great courage, never giving up as she battled the disease. She never felt sorry for herself. If one of us would be weeping, she’d be upbeat. When one of us had a bad day, she’d be there consoling us.

Katie’s illness brought us all closer together and we rallied around her, planning activities and get-togethers. She was always up for doing something fun, even when she didn’t feel good. One year, we put together a benefit for her, including a silent auction, to help cover medical expenses. The best seller? A dinner date with Katie, complete with door-to-door limo service!

As it became clear that the disease was terminal, Katie and her mother together made funeral arrangements at their church, All Saints Catholic Church in Lakeville. Katie was able to make her wishes known — for example, she always loved the song, Amazing Grace, and wanted it to be part of the service. She wanted to be cremated, but they decided that would come after the funeral.

As Katie neared death, I stopped by one day to see her. We talked and I held her hand. I’m so grateful I had that special time alone with her to say goodbye. She died several days later.

A week after her death, a four-hour visitation was held at the funeral home. So many people came, including all of our friends. There were prayers, tears and laughter. We shared stories and looked at photos and I didn’t want to leave. Near the end, our group of friends gathered around Katie’s open casket, our arms linked in sorrow for our beautiful friend. It was a very powerful and healing moment for all of us.

The next morning, an hour-long visitation preceded the funeral service at All Saints. It turned out to be another extremely meaningful time to be with Katie’s family and friends. I brought my daughter with me, and the two of us had the opportunity to kneel and pray in front of Katie’s coffin. I never would have thought I needed to do that, but it brought me such comfort.

The funeral mass, presided over by Father Tom Wilson, included a procession with the casket brought forward by family members and friends. During the mass, there were prayers, music and scripture readings. The tradition and formality of the mass were so beautiful and I felt such comfort from the ritual and traditions.
Partnering with The Catholic Cemeteries
His music is a ministry to those suffering a loss

Reflecting on the fetal prayer and committal service they attended at Resurrection Cemetery following their miscarriage, Kim Lee and her husband Andy appreciated all the elements of the service, but most especially the music offered by singer-guitarist John Evans.

Music is woven throughout the service, which is held four times a year in the Chapel Mausoleum, and includes solo guitar selections by Evans such as Amazing Grace, How Great Thou Art, I’ll Fly Away, and Ode to Joy and accompaniment to hymns including Be Not Afraid and By Name I Have Called You. Once the families have processed to the cemetery’s children’s section, he plays songs such as Jesus Loves Me as the small white caskets of fetal remains are placed in the ground.

“John’s music was able to speak the words that could not be expressed at such a difficult time, and it provided a way for us to seek comfort in what we were feeling,” said Lee.

Evans has been performing at these special services for bereaved families since they were initiated by The Catholic Cemeteries in 2007. In addition, he has been providing music at Memorial Day masses and other services of remembrance at Resurrection Cemetery for more than 20 years.

“Sharing with those experiencing the pain of loss is a heartfelt ministry for me,” said Evans, a church musician at his parish St. Mary of the Lake in White Bear Lake.

John Cherek, director of The Catholic Cemeteries, is deeply appreciative of Evans’ long-standing partnership with the cemeteries. “John touches the lives of so many grieving families with his enormous musical talent and sensitivity. We are truly blessed to have him as part of our team.”

At St. Mary of the Lake, where Evans served as parish administrator from 1993 to 2005, he plays at weekly masses with other musicians. He regularly plays at weddings and funerals — he estimates he has played at least 500 funeral services over the years.

In his free time, he is part of a musical duo with singer-guitarist Dan Perry (recently retired music director at St. Odilia Catholic Church in Shoreview) that performs at local night spots. He has also led The Spaceheater Band, another longstanding local group playing rock and pop music.

As a young man, Evans served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War and was assigned to death notification duty. Nearly 50 times, he had to make the call that every soldier’s family feared above all else. As he looks back today, he believes that difficult duty is what drew him to use his musical gifts to ease the grief and sorrow of people who have suffered a loss.

“Partnering with The Catholic Cemeteries has been a good fit for me,” he said. “I don’t believe you can overestimate the healing power of music.”

Like father, like son

Cemetery groundskeeping has become a family affair for the Sanchez-Cardoso family. It started when Baltazar Cardoso joined the full-time staff of The Catholic Cemeteries in 2001, working primarily at St. Mary’s Cemetery in south Minneapolis. Earlier this year, his son, Cornelio, 21, became a full-time groundskeeper, working at both St. Mary’s and Resurrection Cemeteries. Cardoso’s wife and daughter also often help out at St. Mary’s. Said Cornelio: “My dad taught me everything I know. I love working outdoors and I like helping people at the cemeteries.”

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For one thing, I realized how meaningful it was to have the body present at the visitation and mass. I was surprised how much I needed that and how it has helped me in my own grieving. For myself, I had concluded a long time ago that I wanted to be cremated. I still want that but I can’t imagine not giving my family and friends the same opportunity as I had at Katie’s services.

Another thing I’ve learned is the importance of giving people multiple opportunities to process the loss. The visitation the night before was such a powerful and meaningful evening. The brief visitation before the service gave me another opportunity to be together with friends and family in my grief. The funeral mass touched me on so many levels, and offered such comfort. And the celebration of Katie’s life that followed will be something I will never forget.

The bottom line? I learned how vital it is for us to slow down and really take time to pray, listen and share in our grieving journey.

Now I am helping Katie’s family design the memorial marker for her grave. I know in the months ahead how important visiting her grave will be for me and for so many other people who cared about her — providing another opportunity to stop and remember our beloved Katie, whom we will always hold in our hearts.

Baltazar Cardoso and his son, Cornelio.

Singer-guitarist John Evans performs at many events hosted by The Catholic Cemeteries.
Find A Grave

Volunteer honors the memory of those who have gone before

When Dick Huber was growing up in St. Paul, visiting the graves of grandparents and other relatives at Calvary Cemetery was a family ritual.

These days, Huber still stops by Calvary frequently, mostly as a volunteer — photographing headstones for memorial pages on Find A Grave, an online cemetery genealogy tool.

Find A Grave is a free service aimed at finding, recording and presenting cemetery information — it calls itself “a virtual cemetery experience” for anyone interested in locating the burial site of family and friends as well as those of famous individuals. Find A Grave members set up memorial pages for deceased relatives and submit biographies, pictures and other data.

Five years ago, Huber joined Find A Grave as part of his growing interest in his family’s genealogy. “I found that creating memorial pages on Find A Grave was a wonderful way to build a family history that can be shared online within our family,” Huber said.

With time to spare in his retirement, Huber signed up to become a Find A Grave photo volunteer. It works this way: Find A Grave members can request a headstone photo to be taken for a memorial page, and volunteers like Huber take on the assignment for cemeteries in their zip code. The job involves going to the cemetery, finding the gravesite, taking the photo and uploading it to the site.

“A self-professed “history nut,” Huber enjoys visiting the cemeteries in his area, especially Calvary. “I love Calvary. I’ve been rooted here since the time I was a child,” he said. “There’s so much history here and such beautiful monuments.”

When he receives a request for a Calvary grave, Huber checks in with office manager Linda Radtke to locate the site. With a cemetery map, he heads out to find the graves, often trimming and cleaning the markers before taking the photograph.

Not all graves have markers, especially those from decades past. In those cases, Huber places a temporary wooden cross (or an angel statue for infants) at the grave site for the photo. When the grave is of a former serviceman or woman, he adds a small flag for the photo.

“I try to treat each grave as if it were one of my own relatives. It’s to honor the memory of these people who have gone before us,” he said. “They are gone but not forgotten.”

In his five years as a Find A Grave volunteer, he has fulfilled nearly 490 photo requests and has uploaded 2,485 photos to more than 1,500 memorials.

Radtke said that Huber often goes above and beyond his photo assignment. “He’s out in the cemetery so often with his Find A Grave assignments that when he sees someone who seems to be having trouble finding a grave, he doesn’t hesitate to help them,” she says. “He’s so knowledgeable and helpful.”

The rewards of his volunteering are simple, Huber says. “It’s fun helping others. And I hear back from the majority of those who have requested a photo expressing their gratitude. That’s very satisfying.”

Dick Huber is a photo volunteer for Find A Grave and a frequent visitor to Calvary Cemetery.

To learn more about Find A Grave, go to findagrave.com.

New graves available at Calvary Cemetery

A recently removed roadway at Calvary Cemetery, located just south of the mausoleum area, is now available for purchase of full body and cremation graves. This is an excellent time to consider purchasing graves in this section when the selection options are at their best. Both monument and non-monument graves are available. For more information about these new burial options at Calvary, call 651-488-8866.

Options available at Garden Mausoleum at Gethsemane Cemetery

While sales of crypts and niches in the new garden mausoleum at Gethsemane Cemetery have increased over the past few months, a wide array of options still remain in this new building located to the rear of the chapel mausoleum and the Children’s Memorial area. To learn more contact, Jules Bobst at 763-537-4184.

Severe turf conditions addressed by cemetery staff

The spring and summer of 2016 will be remembered for the high levels of rain which fell on our cemeteries. For the grass this is always a blessing but required mowers going non-stop for much of the season. Unfortunately, a variety of weeds emerged well into July and August. In spite of a spring application of weed control, our field staff fought an endless battle trying to keep up with the weed conditions. Many visitors to our cemeteries commented on this severe turf condition this year. To combat this problem in the future, a fall application of weed retardant was recently completed.

Special Masses to be held in December

Masses of remembrance will be celebrated at Gethsemane Cemetery and Resurrection Cemetery in the chapel mausoleums on Saturday, December 10, 2016. Invitations are being sent out to the newly bereaved. For more information, contact the respective cemetery office at Gethsemane or Resurrection, or visit our web site’s Upcoming Events page.
To receive Heritage by email, go to www.catholic-cemeteries.org, fill out the “Contact Us” form and check the “electronic newsletter” option.

An opportunity to give…

Please join us in supporting the ongoing ministries and beautification of The Catholic Cemeteries. Your tax-deductible contribution can be used to provide for burial of the poor, ministry to bereaved parents and families, and to beautify the cemeteries.

To make a gift:
- Clip and complete this form and mail with your check to:
The Catholic Cemeteries, 2105 Lexington Ave. S., Mendota Heights, MN 55120
- Give online by going to catholic-cemeteries.org and click on Donate.

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