Kathleen Ann West



DECEMBER 24, 2016

On the morning of Christmas Eve, Kathy West passed away peacefully at home with her long-time friend and nurse, Brian, at her side. Kathy was born in 1954 to Robert and Sylvia West. Because of serious health concerns, Kathy moved to Woodlands Institution in 1958 and lived there for 33 years. When Woodlands was due to close, Kathy came to live in the community. Her first home was in Fort Langley with some of her friends from Woodlands. In 1995 Kathy moved into an apartment with her friend Connie. In 2011 Kathy and Connie moved to Ferguson Home and welcomed Patty and Nick to their family. Over the years Kathy developed many friendships. Her cheeky character and fun loving disposition helped her overcome many of the physical difficulties she faced. She worked at Muggs Coffee Shop, Roger's Video, and Freeway Communications and volunteered at the SPCA. Kathy traveled to Los Angeles to see her favorite TV personality, Bob Barker, and to be on the Price is Right show; she saw Celine in Las Vegas, and took a cruise to Sitka Alaska. Kathy loved to sing karaoke with all the gusto of a Diva, she supported several women through their pregnancy as a self-appointed labor coach, she ran 10 kilometers in the Sun Run making sure she was in her target heart rate zone even in her wheelchair, and she completed a Richard Simmons work out twice a day without fail. Kathy touched the lives of her caregivers, many of whom feel that they would not be who they are today if it wasn't for the things Kathy taught them. Kathy lived life to the fullest. Her peace came from her relationship with God. She loved unconditionally and deeply. Kathy will be missed by her two brothers, Brian and Bob, and her sister, Barb, her nieces, nephews,

great nieces, her friends, and her room mates. Kathy will be remembered by those who lovingly cared for her needs and supported her during the course of her lifetime.

There will be a celebration of Life for Kathy on Saturday, January 28th 2017 at New Life Community Church (35270 Delair Rd, Abbotsford) at 1:00pm. There will be refreshments to follow.

Messages of Condolence

Some have asked me for a copy of the Eulogy:

How do you chronicle the life of someone as unique as Kathleen Ann West? She was an amazing woman that had a profound impact on most everyone who took the time to get to know her. I can only accurately recount the Kathy I knew in the 17 years that I walked though life beside her. Others will tell completely unique stories from their time shared with Kathy. I am hoping that during this moment, you will catch a glimpse of just how incredible Kathy was…

Kathy was born in1954 to Robert and Silvia West. She had an older sister and two younger brothers. Because of great medical difficulties, Kathy's parents were encouraged to place Kathy in medical care as her health concerns would require more care than they would be able to provide. They were told that Kathy's life would be brief, not more than 4 or 5 years. Kathy was placed in Woodlands Institution at the age of 3 where she began her 33- year stay. We don't know much about Kathy's years at Woodlands. Her family visited her there when they could. She participated in their work programs making plastic flower arrangements and made friends that she kept in contact with most of her life. In the 90's, when Woodlands was slated for closure, Kathy came to live in community. She moved to a group home in Fort Langley along with some of her friends from Woodlands. In this environment, a whole new world opened up for Kathy. When she met Connie, they decided to set up an apartment of their own and moved to Abbotsford. There, Kathy worked at Roger's Video, Freeway Communications, and Mugg's Coffee Shop. She volunteered at the SPCA and was part of an advocacy group for those living with disabilities.

Kathy faced incredible challenges but she had the sort of disposition that never let those challenges stop her from living her life to the fullest. She travelled to Las Angeles to see her favorite TV personality, Bob Barker and be on the Price is Right game show. She took a cruise to Alaska, she travelled to Las Vegas to see Celine Dion and "help her sing".

Kathy made herself a place in the lives of the people who came to her as caregivers and took it upon herself to contribute. For example, if you came in for work wearing something bright and colorful, she became your self- appointed clothing consultant, exclaiming, “I could see you coming a mile away!” but if you came in wearing something dowdy and grey, you’d get, “I couldn’t see you coming at all!”.
OR She was a self-appointed hair consultant, “What did you do to your hair?!?”
She was a dietician,”Noooooooooooo! Don’t eat that cookie!!!!!!”
A Matchmaker, “See that guy over there? He wants to kiss you!... Ohhhhh Lovey Dovey!”
The self-appointed labor coach to many expectant mothers, ”Don’t worry, I’ll help you grunt that baby out!”
And she was the surrogate mother to her “Kids” (Ashley, Jordan and Mandy) as well as to countless younger caregivers who somehow found themselves calling her ”Mamma”. She loved that!
She was always a Diva. She would sing with such abandon – head back, eyes closed, face aglow, belting out the words to every song by heart or sometimes changing the words to suit her needs. Shania Twain’s, “I’m keeping you forever and for always” became, ” I’m keeping you forever in the hallway!” because, “that’s a good place for him!”
Kathy also became a self-appointed fitness coach. She took fitness very seriously. She faithfully completed a Richard Simmon’s routine twice a day without fail, always making sure her heart rate stayed in her target zone by taking her pulse carefully and counting to 10. When Mikki, one of her caregivers, decided to train for a half marathon, Kathy took it upon herself to be her coach asking her every time she came in the door, “Did you do it? Did you run it all?” hanging on Mikki’s every word and reprimanding her if she didn’t quite measure up. When the day came that Mikki asked me for a day off to run her marathon, Kathy insisted that she take her with her, “I’m her coach! She can’t do it by herself. I have to help

her!”

We had to take that seriously or we would never hear the end of it so we decided to take Kathy on the Vancouver Sun Run. In anticipation, having never run in my life, I trained till I could run 3 KM without stopping but I felt that surely Kathy would love to stop along the way to listen to the entertainment provided at rest stops. We stood in line at the rear of a massive crowd of 10,000 people awaiting our turn to cross the start line. When we finally got there, Kathy started yelling at the top of her lungs, “GET OUT OF MY WAYYYYYYYY! I have to win!” We started running with her chair and she wouldn’t let us stop. Every time we suggested resting, she would yell, ”We can’t stop! I have to win!” We ran, pushing her chair for the full 10 kilometers, passing more than 5000 of those 10,000 people. The Sun Run photographer captured the moment of us crossing the finish line, Mikki looking breezy, having trained under the best coach ever, me looking beet red having never run more than 3 kilometers in my life, and Kathy, intently checking her pulse to see whether she was in her target heart rate zone…in her wheel chair! It was incredible to give her that experience but she gave me one of the richest moments of my life. It was so much fun that we decided to do it again the following year, this time with Marie, but as we ran over the Granville Street Bridge, 5km into the race, the front wheels of Kathy’s chair caught into an expansion groove in the bridge and we all fell upside-down and over in a heap. 911 was called and paramedics came but Kathy’s chair fit her like an exoskeleton, she had an abrasion on her forehead and she was shaken and slightly miffed that her race had to be halted but otherwise she seemed okay to me. It was quite another experience for those paramedics however, who took one look at Kathy and thought the worst. Of course Kathy used this to her full advantage. From my place in the front of the ambulance as we rushed to St.Paul’s, light flashing, sirens blaring, I could hear her interacting with the paramedic.

“ Kathy,” says the desperately concerned Paramedic, “Can you count to 10 for

me?”

And Kathy, using a strangely wistful damsel- in- distress voice that seemed to be oozing with the hope that the paramedic would think she needed immediate mouth to mouth resuscitation, said,

“ Ohhhh 1, oohhhh 2….” And I had to roll my eyes and yell from the front of the ambulance , “She’s fine!!!!!” Then 5 hours later, after countless tests, they released her from St. Paul’s sporting a huge white bandage on her head, having come to the conclusion that she was, in fact, fine. As we emerged from the hospital, Kathy asked me, “Where are we going now?”

“Home”, I said.

‘Are we going in that bus?” asked Kathy?

“No, we have the van right here.”

“I want to go in that bus.”

“What bus?” I asked, confused.

“That bus with those guys.” She said, hopefully and it dawned on me that she wanted to go home with the paramedics in the ambulance!.....Kathy!

As Kathy began to age, her care became more and more complex. She began to experience what seemed like pain but even the strongest pain meds wouldn’t help at all. She would moan and her face would reflect something deep and full of despair. We took her for tests but could not find the source of the discomfort. During that time, I had three evening shifts a week working with Connie and Kathy by myself. Sometimes her moaning would be so pronounced that I had to hold her hand to help her feel any comfort. I would often find myself holding her hand with one hand and stirring a pot on the stove with the other in an effort to complete my duties. After one particularly difficult shift of trying to comfort her, I drove home crying because I didn’t know how to help her. That night I dreamt that I had made a huge Richard Simmons rag doll, big enough to hold her hand so that I could cook and she would still have a hand to hold when she needed one. I woke up and

immediately went about sewing this doll. I brought it to her and for a while it worked, she would hold the doll on her shoulder with her head cushioned by it's head, holding the hand of the rag doll. Later we discovered that the moaning was not really physical pain but more emotional, as she had completely lost what remained of her sight. That rag doll paid off though. We sent Richard Simmons a photo of Kathy holding her Richard Doll and told him the story behind it. Richard Simmons promptly sent Kathy an 8x10 glossy of himself complete with an autographed message to her! Kathy was over the moon and I was secretly glad that he was wearing spandex biking shorts instead of the striped short shorts he usually wore. " Kathy! Tell that man to wear longer shorts!" …"No Way!"

In 2012 Kathy ended up in the hospital for more than a month to treat pneumonia. We came very close to losing her. After that point, Kathy bounced back but never to the same level she had been before. Her world became very small, it was harder and harder to reach her, she slept a lot and her cheeky words were reduced to solitary sounds. Yet, in spite of all of this, Kathy still found ways to be cheeky, to convey her needs, to show her character and get her point across and sometimes very emphatically. Kathy was very excited when she found out that Jordan and Carmen were expecting their first baby! It very quickly became apparent that Kathy wanted to do something special in anticipation of her great niece. We decided to help Kathy put a shower together before the baby arrived. I suggested that Kathy could put a basket together for the baby since she was an expert on the things a baby needs. When it came time to help Kathy make the purchases for this basket, I waited for a wakeful time with Kathy and sat with a clip board to take notes. Over the course of the morning Kathy told me exactly what to include and not to include in that basket. It was a morning full of fun for me as one by one the off-the-wall, quirky answers came to my question, "Kathy, what does a baby need?". Two of those answers stood out as particularly and beautifully "Kathy". I had suggested putting a stuffy in the basket for the baby. She immediately started

shaking her head in huge “NO WAY!” gestures. I was confused. Surely she would want the baby to have a cute, cuddly teddy bear. But Kathy continued with her insistent head shakes. I thought maybe she would want the baby to have a more unconventional stuffy so I began to list animals like a monkey, a racoon, an armadillo…after all, Kathy was always unconventional….but Kathy just kept shaking her head as I rattled animals off. After I had exhausted every animal I could think of, I exclaimed in exasperation, “Kathy, then what is the baby going to cuddle with is she doesn’t have a stuffy?!?” She just said, “Me!” as she looked at me very calmly. Here eyes were saying that I should have known all along that the baby would never need a stuffy to cuddle with when she had Kathy. Of Course! But the most profound answer she gave me for my question, “What does a baby need?” was her very first answer. This one word summed up in Kathy’s mind, everything a baby needs. Do you know what that was? “Bob”. She said, “A baby needs Bob.” It was simple. I knew what she meant. It was her answer for everything. It was her default. She needed Bob, as in Bob Barker, as in, The Price Is right. And because it was Kathy’s standard answer, I kind of brushed it off, “Yah Kathy, the baby needs Bob. What ELSE does she need?” but as I reviewed my notes afterwards to make my list of items to include in the basket, it suddenly dawned on me. A baby does need Bob! I went back to Kathy with excitement! I know what you mean now. I finally get it. A baby needs Bob! Bob covers all of the basics! He teaches numbers…all those prices! He teaches colors, just think of all of those colorful signs! He teaches letters. Well, what does C…A….R spell? He teaches the full range of emotions… happy, disappointed, sad, exstatic…Bob teaches you how to run and how to jump up and down. He teaches you how to follow instructions….you know, “Come on Downnnnnnn!” In the hour that followed, Kathy wrote a beautiful children’s book called, “A Baby Needs Bob”. It too was added to the basket and lovingly given as Kathy’s legacy to her great niece.

Kathy was deeply spiritual. She had a strong connection to God that gave her

unique insight in how to pray and how to worship God. She spent her life looking forward to the day when she could go to Heaven and be whole but she also spent her whole life doing her best and giving her all for His glory. Kathy died peacefully on the morning of Christmas Eve. It seems incredibly fitting and even the gentleman from the funeral home called her a Christmas Angel. It was like she chose the time herself, like she just went home. I believe she is somewhere up in Heaven conducting a choir, or better yet, leading a whole troop of angels in a Sweatin' To The Oldies routine. She's having a blast. I know it!

Working with Kathy has been the most rewarding work of my life. I have learned so much in the years I spent with her. The impact she had on my whole life view has changed me forever. These are some of the things she taught me and what I believe she would say to you if she had the chance…

Love unconditionally and without expectation and you will never be disappointed.

Be yourself without pretense.

Drink Mochas.

Look for the good and the fun in life and live it.

Be contagious.

Embrace what you have been given and make something beautiful out of it so that in spite of your hindrances, people can see LIFE in you and come to seek after the source of that LIFE and peace and contentment, and learn how to laugh and how to play and how to find life from your example.

Kathy knew how to really live. I am thankful for every moment that I had with her.

She will be missed.

By her family. By her friends, By her room mates,

and by those who walked alongside her as caregivers.

She lives on in every one of us and the cherished memories we carry.

— Karin Olsen

Alternatives
FUNERAL & CREMATION SERVICES

https://www.myalternatives.ca/obituaries/west-kathleen-ann

Printed on November 24, 2026