

Our Mothers of Faith – God’s Golden Girls

Selections from our Mother’s Day Tribute

Norma Collins lived her entire life in Stamford. She and her two brothers were raised by Emma Hester, a devoted and devout foster mother. Among Norma’s earliest memories are of Emma sitting at the kitchen table reading her Bible as she drank her morning coffee. Norma herself grew up as a tomboy climbing over the fences of Woodside Park raiding apple trees. Today she’s the proud mother of her son Shawn who is happily married to Tiffany. She is also the glowing grandmother of Jordan and Taylor. For fun she enjoys jig-saw puzzles. Norma came to our church family at first because her landlady would bring Shawn to Sunday School. She especially remembers fondly Bob and Judy Bohannon and the adult class Bob taught. These days we are all blessed by Norma’s Sunday prayers. They’re truly spiritual classics, built around Scripture as their reference points and then soulfully crafted and powerfully delivered. Sunday after Sunday Norma confirms the goodness of gender equality in our church family.

Elaine Lechtreck grew up in Queens with no formal religious training but drawn to the reading of the King James Version she heard every morning as a student at Jamaica High School. She’d listen to Billy Graham’s Hour of Decision radio program and when Graham came once to Flushing Meadows Park Elaine determined to follow Jesus. She first attended an elite women’s college in New London, eventually completed her Master’s Degree, moved to Stamford with her husband, taught in Greenwich Public Schools, then raised her three children, Louise, Claire and Adam. Returning to her career, she studied American Studies at Pepperdine University, was drawn to the simplicity of the Churches of Christ, and returning to Connecticut was baptized here at our church and for a time taught at Lauralton Hall in Milford. Later she married Roy Lechtreck and moved to Alabama where she taught World Civilization at the University of Montevallo. She began doctorate work and extensive research into her dissertation on “Southern White Ministers’ Struggle against Apartheid in the Segregated South.” After fifteen years hard work she received her doctorate and is currently working with a publisher to have her dissertation published as a book. To listen to Elaine tell the stories of these brave Southern ministers is to time travel back to an unforgettable time and place where great courage confronted deep prejudice.

Tanya Merritt is one of those women who has truly become a mother to so many of us. She grew up Methodist in small towns in North Carolina. She was a Brownie Scout and she did 4H, all this in the shadow of Kitty Hawk and the lost colony of Roanoke. In her 20s she moved north and began work at the local post office in 1965. She became the address information person which meant she met everyone. Tanya has four children, James, Gina, Dorothy and Sonia, nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, and then she has all the rest of us. She gives great hugs and with them the world becomes a kinder and more loving place for all who know her. Tanya loves people, and she loves her Lord.

Joan Pinkerton – yep, that’s “JoAnne” – became known first to many of us at our church VBSs where she was everywhere, working on set designs, mending costumes, and providing snacks. And really, no matter what time of year, Joan helps out in every nook and cranny of this church. What makes this remarkable and selfless woman tick? What on earth possesses someone

to be *that* helpful? Likely it's her background. Joan grew up in Newgulf, Texas and spent memorable summers on the coast at the house of her grandmother whose positive Christian spirit still lives on in Joan. After she and JG married and a few years passed, the Pinkerton family, now with Mark, Kathryn and Glenn, moved from scenic Moab, Utah and its church of five families to Perth, Australia where Joan taught the women's class. In the 70s she and JG landed here in Stamford with our church family where Joan's been a powerful pillar ever since. When asked to describe where she is in her faith, she replies that it's "feeling love and feeling that I have a solid foundation under my feet – and that takes care of a lot." Today Joan's a grandmother to her own grandkids, to children at church, to the Shiloh staff, and to our entire church family. She's humble, sweet and sharp as a tack. She helps with everything at church from Cradle Roll and shopping for our homeless meal to mailing out bulletins and participating in our Jesus Class and our Readings in Current Affairs program. Most of all though she's Granny P.

Sylvia Smith was here fifty years ago when our church began and except for four years she's been here ever since. She was born in Georgia, the only and very adored child of her parents, going to church every Sunday, with her mother one Sunday to the local Church of Christ and with her father the next Sunday to the town Methodist Church. She was baptized in the Church of Christ but credits her father for teaching her calmness in stormy times and the strength even in dark hours to encourage others. Her family moved to Alabama in her teen years where she met her High School sweetheart, Doug, with whom after a year in college she eloped. Then babies came, Steve, Greg, then Sherri. Meanwhile Doug began his career with IBM, then known as "I've Been Moved," and they landed in Stamford just as the exodus movement planted our church family here in 1966. Then after brief IBM sojourns in Dallas and Maryland, they returned to Fairfield County, this time to the beautiful home in Wilton they still have, but now with Neil added to the family. It's been a good life but not quite "happily ever after." The death of their son, Greg, was a great challenge and loss, but through it all Sylvia has kept seeing life through eyes of trust, openness, grace and love. She's especially grateful that she has been able to grow into deep faith in a loving, gracious, forgiving God. We are all the appreciative beneficiaries of this woman's loving, serving spirit. We all know her to be one we can turn to when care is needed. She makes our church a home and she makes our church body a family.

Gen Zurzola was born on Magee Avenue in Stamford back in 1927 where she played in empty lots and enjoyed local markets where now there are only tall office buildings. There were seven sisters in the family so even if times were hard – it was the Depression back then – life was still fun. They would ice skate and sleigh ride in Cummings Park in the winter or party and dance at the YWCA during World War II. Her father was Catholic, her mother Baptist. Then she married Frank who was a strict Catholic, a strict Italian Catholic, and they now with their children Mark, Jamie and Jeanne would go to St. Mary's. The family would vacation yearly in Wildwood, New Jersey and every Fourth of July could be found at Cove Island picnicking. Then Jamie, living the life Jamie did, found the Church of Christ and though Gen worried that maybe it was a cult she did feel that Jamie's life was changing for the better. So she came, and then eventually Frank did too. Everyone was so welcoming, and Gen came to love her church family deeply and even as she sometimes struggles with her health still loves coming to church every Sunday. She's enjoyed sixty-seven wonderful years married to her soul mate Frank and still feels his presence as her guardian angel looking out for her.

Thanks go to Julie, Art, Laura, Rose, Debbie and Jamie whose interviews and Mother's Day presentations May 8th form the source for these tributes. Also to Gerry Fraioli who did Gen's interview. Jamie gave the presentation. Also thanks to the Jubilee committee whose brainchild this wonderful morning was. Most of all thanks to the six women honored for becoming the mothers of faith they are.