

EULOGY FOR DONNA CROOK:

My big sister.

Donna was born 4 years before me in the hospital at Smithers, B.C. In 1940 my brother Art arrived, so by the time I was born in Ocean Falls in 1942, she really was my big sister. Any discussion of who Donna was has to begin with our wonderful family. We had the best mom and dad in the world. Although they were different in personality types (for example, you could always count on mom to smile in a photo, but not Dad. As those of us who have tried to get a photo of her know, Donna inherited the latter).

Mom and Dad were the most loving, most thoughtful and most fair role models imaginable. Within the family and within the 4 congregations we lived in from the late forties through 1960, they were a team; the kind of leaders who create the best families and church congregations in our society. Donna embodied all of these qualities, creating her own superb family system and with Jim, providing the same loving & nurturing leadership with which she had grown up. I do a lot of family history work on both sides of the family, and Donna has the best qualities of her ancestors. There is one major exception though: her 3x great grandmother (in the Belfry family) had two female family members named "Submit". Donna could never be accused of that.

From my personal point of view, she was a mentor & role model from my first awareness of her. In our years in Trail, B.C., she was the big kid who was always in a higher grade and often in a different school from Art and I. This probably added to the awe which a younger person can hold for an older sibling.

Even in these early years, Donna was a musical influence on me. She was way ahead of Art and me in her piano studies, which were begun by mom and continued with the best piano teacher in town, Jesse Gairns. This was the beginning of her lifelong career: teaching and nurturing generations of piano students who were lucky enough to be her students, being a long-time church organist, and most recently, leading her beloved sing along group. All three of us studied piano for a time. Each of our lessons was graded with a mark out of 10. If we scored a nine or higher we got something special for dessert; usually a can of pineapple. Art doesn't remember this, but he says it's because he never got a 9 out of 10. Frankly, I never saw the fairness of this tradition, since we all got to eat the pineapple, even though only one of us had "earned" it.

Donna had a collection of recordings which she played often in the house. To this day, I can hear the entire Beethoven Emperor Concerto in my head, due to the many times I heard it over the years. (Isn't it wonderful how, as we age, we can remember with great detail things from our youth and yet struggle with the name of somebody we met yesterday!) Donna also engineered a Christmas present of a recording of the Nutcracker Suite which I have to this day. Donna also influenced us with her activities in church groups, most notably the C.G.I.T. At one point she got to go to Ontario for a CGIT conference. When Christmas 1953 came around, she hired a local sound man, who used a wire recorder to record the three of us as a Christmas present for Mom and Dad. On this recording, I played piano and recited from an operetta I had just starred in at my Elementary School, Donna played both violin and piano solos, and Art played and sang an unforgettable cowboy ballad called "Chili and Beans".

In the early 50s, Dad was approached to run for the CCF (now NDP) in the upcoming election. Even though he never wore a clerical collar and Tommy Douglas was somewhat of a hero in

our household, there seemed to be no question in his mind that religion and politics didn't mix. During those years in Trail, we absorbed many social and political beliefs from our parents which have continued to form a significant part of our bond throughout the years.

Donna's sense of humour also emerged during the Trail years. First it was Anna Russell who she adored (and we didn't understand), and later the Smothers Brothers and Carol Burnett. She also encouraged me to do the goofy things that I did at family gatherings like sitting down at the piano and singing Great Balls of Fire or tell the "spittin story" (don't ask!)

Our move to East Burnaby in 1954 was huge for all of us, not the least for Donna. It was a family decision as we kids approached university years, the other choice being Sault Ste Marie. It's hard to imagine our lives if the latter had been chosen. In 1954, Donna entered senior high school at Burnaby South. She had a large circle of friends, and we still have movies of the parties she had at our house. Art and I had 2 reactions to this. The first was the showcase of Donna's emerging social life, but the second was two young teenage brother's somewhat predictable disdain for the activities of an older sister. She was a "girl" after all, and her friends seemed kinda "geeky". This was a period of time about which I hold a fair amount of guilt. When it came time for Donna to get her driver's license, Art and I were merciless in our teasing of our dear sister. The guilt continued when over the years, Donna never did get her driver's license. Once in recent years, I apologised to her for this teasing behaviour, but as it turns out she didn't remember it! Art and I were typical minister's sons at this age (especially me), and we were disciplined accordingly - the rod wasn't often spared. Although in retrospect, Art and I know how richly we deserved these punishments, Donna intensely disliked the tradition, and as in all things throughout our lives, she was our champion.

In 1960, we had all graduated from high school and entered university. Whereas Donna and I had been in high schools at different times, we now had 2 wonderful years together at UBC. Donna got me interested in "Mussoc" (UBC's musical theatre group), and most lunchtimes I would join her in the clubhouse on campus. It was a wonderful milieu, with a group of highly musical people, (a high percentage of whom were gay) and also some of the funniest young people imaginable. We did two shows together: *Damn Yankees* and *Once Upon A Mattress*, me on the stage and Donna playing in the pit orchestra. During this time, my big sister had the greatest influence on me by persuading me to try to get into the Department of Music to pursue a degree there. Up to that time, I had been working toward a degree in chemistry, having adopted the "false wisdom" that there were no real jobs in music. I will always be grateful to Donna for that.

Shortly afterward, Donna made the best choice of her life, when she moved to Prince Rupert, met & married Jim, and later to Germany while I was away in New Haven. Although our paths separated in these years, she was always there to support and champion our family, with my wife Connie and later our daughter Alexis and her family. I thoroughly enjoyed the many occasions we had to share her family at gatherings in Deep Cove. Especially memorable have been the more recent Donna, Arthur, Bruce (and spouses) get togethers (you know the kind without any ankle biters around!) At a 2013 gathering, we re-enacted a Christmas greeting from a recording we made in 1954 - 65 years later. I think it captures our elderly sibling relationship more than any verbal description I can offer. - Play -

My last words to Donna were "you've been in my heart all my life, and you will always be there" Her last words to me were a question "will you come back and visit me"? I said yes - and I will! Bruce More