

Eloise Miller June 28 1925-October 21, 2010

Rev. Dick Piscatelli, pastor Williamsville UMC

Just the other day Eloise Miller received an invitation to attend a celebration for the Golden Pillars of the Williamsville United Methodist Church on November 14 where those 80 and over will be recognized. However on October 21 she received a different invitation, this time from our great God who gave her an invitation she could not refuse. You see, she was invited to go and celebrate her new life where there is no more pain or sorrow, no more sadness and loneliness, no more illnesses and death. It is a place where there are streets of gold, laughter, joy, peace, happiness and where family gather. That's right, she has fought the good fight...she has kept the faith...she has finished her chores on this earth. It's time for her to rest eternally from all that she was sent here to do on this earth. Such chores like being a farmer, a farmer's wife a mother of 4, grandmother, a worker in the church, a great sister-in-law, a Red Hat lady, a member of the Women of Promise and a person who attended Bible studies, attended things the kids did in school, loved those different kids who rode her bus, and so much more. She can now visit with family, friends, a husband, brother and sister that have preceded her there.

Today we come to remember her life on this earth though it was only 85 short years, but more importantly, we celebrate her receiving her crown and having God say to her those wonderful words, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

So kids, there is some sadness, yes. But there is also joy knowing that mom has done her best to raise you and teach you well. She taught you to be self sufficient and to do the best you can. She supported you in all you did, even when mistakes were made. She protected you like the mother hen she was. Though she came from a humble farm background she taught you all to reach for your dreams.

When she was getting ready to have her surgery in Springfield, one of her requests was to have her family join in praying the 23 Psalm. It was her favorite Scripture, perhaps because it brought comfort before when she struggled with the death of her husband Bill Miller Jr. Or maybe she found comfort when she heard it read when her brother Paul Lugibil went to be with the Lord a few years ago. That scripture touched her heart and her soul. It brought peace, hope and joy knowing that “Because the Lord was her Shepherd she had everything she needed. Because the Lord was her Shepherd she didn’t have to fear death because He was with her every step of the way. Because the Lord was her Shepherd she is sitting at the table of grace with family and friends and the likes of the apostles, great theologians like John Wesley, or Menno Simons who founded the Mennonite Church, or Martin Luther. Maybe she is having tea with Jesus today.

Because the Lord was her Shepherd she has found new joy in fixing up her new home in heaven prepared for her by her Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

So family and friends, that is why she loved that wonderful old Scripture that she learned when a child and had tucked away in her memory. She knew without a doubt that that Scripture would see her through her surgery as it had seen her through other struggles in her life. She also knew it would give you who were there for her operations the hope and courage you needed for that day, and the comfort and strength you need as you faced her death and taking care of all that she left behind. Perhaps she wants you to know that you need not fear death because death is only a vehicle to new life where forgiveness and eternal salvation await those who believe in the Good Shepherd. Her body might be here and soon it will rest beside her husband Bill, but her soul is in heaven from where it came some 85 years ago.

Today we also remember some of the things she did on this earth, the things that touched your lives and your hearts. Her son Bill Dale remembers how mom always thought herself as a farmer, not a farmer's wife. She was perhaps one of the first to drive a tracker in the field around this area. She wasn't just a gofer, you know the one who runs the errands or brings the meals. Bill remembers her working in the field alongside her husband. It was a team effort in those days. I understand she took time out to have a family but when they were old enough she went back to being a farmer. She loved flowers and planting them because they brought

newness to her and the aroma and the beauty that brightened her days. Though her family is diverse in their faith these days I'm sure she gave them the basics. The kids remember coming here to church, going to VBS, even helping from time to time. They remember fellowship dinners, Sunday School and lots more. They remember the 4 H days and the FFA times. They remember how supportive mom and dad were of all they did and one of them; either mom or dad was at each event. Though they might not see their parents, they could feel them there, they could feel mom's eyes watching each move they made. Mom was proud of what her kids could accomplish. She laid the foundation that made them strong to face their own difficult times.

Mom sewed prom dresses, a wedding dress and I'm sure much, much more. In fact her sister-in-law Dorothy told me something that the kids left out. Dorothy said the kids found lots of yarn that Dorothy had given her to help knit the prayer shawls and lap pieces we give to those who are ill so that they would know they were being covered in prayer. One day I suggested to Dorothy to make each one a little bit more special why not knit a cross on them to remind them this was no ordinary piece, but one that was full of God's presence for it had been created with love and prayers. Dorothy asked Eloise how they were going to do it. Well Eloise just said get them to her and she would figure it out. Sure enough, that's what they did. Dorothy said beside the prayer shawls and lap pieces Eloise knitted dish rags...so many that it was almost suggested that they should give out one to each person who came today. But I think they decided never mind.

Dorothy also shared about her sister-in-law that she and Paul were great buddies. Though Paul was a little bit older he took his little sister under his wing and taught her the right way to do things. After all, isn't that what a big brother is supposed to do? He taught her the ins and outs of things, even when it came to driving a school bus. But you know what; when she got older, well let's just say things were different. She loved that older brother and missed him as does Dorothy.

Not only was she a farmer, a farmer's wife, but also a bus driver for the Williamsville school district. In fact everyone in the family seemed to have driven a bus for the Williamsville school district. Her brother Paul drove also, and was the mechanic that kept them running for many years. It also has been said that one day Eloise got stuck on the tracks and a train was coming. She backed up her bus and just as she got off the tracks the arm came down and dented the bus. No one was hurt but she called the school to tell them about the accident and everyone was okay though the bus had a few dents. The principal told her to bring the bus back to the school where he took care of the kids and told her to continue her route. That night a local officer came knocking at her door and he was going to give her a ticket for leaving the scene of an accident but with a few phone calls the officer understood she was just following orders and no ticket was issued. God is good.

I understand she loved to go to Wal-Mart. And I understand the night before she went into the hospital she went out for ice cream, dropped by the football field, drove through the parking lot to check out the

attendance and drove home. She didn't tell anyone she wasn't feeling well, but the next day it was time to go get taken care of, so another friend took her to the hospital where she spent her final weeks and days with a good spirit and knowing if she made it fine, and if not fine, for she would be going home.

Eloise was a delightful person to be around. When I found out she was in the hospital Carole and I visited with her. I thought she was in tough shape, but this day she was cheery and very talkative. We had a great visit. We visited again just before we went on vacation to let her know she would be in our prayers and thoughts as the doctors tried to decide what to do. On that last day she told us not to worry for she had already made her arraignment with the funeral home and she was ready to call it a day. We prayed said good bye and told her a pastor friend would visit while we were away. Just about every day my pastor friend would call and tell me how she was doing. She liked him and thought he and I could be brothers. Curt told me he told her she better not tell Dick because he may not like that. He told me what a delightful person she was and he enjoyed his brief time of ministry with her.

She also had a dog named Rusty that has found a new home. But before he left for his new home the kids snuck him into the hospital so Eloise could see him before she took her trip to Barns hospital in St. Louis to await a surgery that would be her final try to live a better life. But that was not to be, for she had fought the

good fight and the time had come to close the book on her life after 85 years of wonderful living raising a family and having great friends.

When it was time to go to Barns a new experience awaited her. It was her first helicopter ride. But she told the kids that it was difficult because she is claustrophobic, and there was only 6-8 inches between her face and the roof of the copter. They covered her ears and told her not to worry they had delivered many patients to St. Louis so lay there and enjoy the flight. And she did... because something good came out of that first helicopter ride. She got to hold the hand of a cute guy who helped bring her some peace.

Even though I have already used the 23 Psalm I believe it would be fitting for me to repeat it because I am sure Eloise would like it read, not for her sake this time, but for you her family and friends to find the same comfort and peace that it brought to her.

*“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

May that prayer be her prayer for we who are left behind. The Lord is with us this morning offering us his comfort and his peace. Because the Lord is our Shepherd we can rest today knowing he can be our guide as well. And finally, and this is the celebration, because the Lord was Eloise's Shepherd she shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever.

So shall it be, amen.