

David Goicoechea, October 25, 2003

FOR VALERIE

Your Excellency, Bishop O'Meara
Right Reverend Monsignors
Holy, Fathers, Sisters and Brothers
Dean Rosemary Hale
Honorable Dignitaries
Cathy and Jerome
Elizabeth, Joe, Carla and Greg
Jeanette, Zygmunt, Charles, Valerie and Chris
Arlene, Celeste, Cynthia and Zenon
all of Valerie's extended family
all the Konopkas and Bulandas
Valerie's friends, relatives and neighbours,

We are gathered here in grief and sorrow
at this church of
Our Lady of Perpetual Help
where Valerie has prayed and played
such a vital role throughout her life.
We are in sorrow but we know how Valerie
would want us to approach this sorrowful mystery.
We know how she always took every sorrow
and through the mystery of glory
let it be transformed into joy
even though, of course, it was still sorrow.

Valerie was always an especially
beloved daughter of God.
The Holy Spirit Breeze
that blew through the heavens
giving birth to the stars
came to breathe her into being too
and has always remained
pulsing through her blood
her honourable Canadian blood
her wise human blood
her courageous Polish blood
her humble woman blood.

VALERIE LOVED HER GOD

Valerie was born into a world that
broke out into war before she was two.
She with her father, mother
two sisters and brother dear
were taken as prisoners into Siberia.
From Siberia they made the long trek
through Uzbekistan, Iran and Pakistan
to East Africa where they stayed for six years.
Then to England and finally to St. Catharines
they fled and finally found their home
staying at first at the farm of the O'Meara's.
They had lived on the edge of survival,
in terror, horror and constant anxiety.
They prayed to God for his little mercies.
They thanked Him for each narrow escape.
Our Lady watched over them daily.

From out of their anxiety
suffering, sorrow, terror and lostness
Valerie's parents were given
the gift of prayer:
the daily morning and evening prayer
the sacrifice of the mass
the prayers at meals
the Jesus prayer and
the joyful, sorrowful, glorious rosary.
In the spirit of this prayer Valerie
was conceived, was born, was raised.
The wind that shaped the stars
brought forth the rhythm of her prayer:
the supplication of her begging
the thanksgiving of her joy
the repentance of her sorrow
the praise of God's glory.

Valerie was called to be a teacher
and early in her youth she helped
to teach the children their catechism.
And she asked: "Why did God make you?"

And they answered: “To know Him,
to love Him, to serve Him and to be
happy with Him forever in heaven.”
Her prayer became her teacher
as she learned in teaching others
to know, love, serve and be happy.
In her morning and evening prayer she prayed:
“Our Father, who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name
thy kingdom come.”
That was the request of her invocation.
She prayed that the kingdom
of love, justice and peace might come.
“Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.”
That was the wisdom of the sacrifice
which could take all that came her way
and offer it to God.
And it would be consecrated
and the body and the blood
would be separated
and her will would be sacrificed.
But then there would be communion;
the communion with the angels and the saints.
“Give us this day our daily bread.”
And the kingdom of love-justice-peace
could only come if there were social justice
and daily bread for everyone
that they too might be thankful
as Valerie’s family had been thankful.
“And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.”
And this was the secret
of the Jesus prayer.
And Valerie learned that by taking
any negative thought or feeling
into the Aura of the Divine Name
she could flow into God’s complacency
and love the good
in any person, place or thing
in any event of suffering or of fright.

“And lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil. Amen”
 And she prayed “The Hail Mary” in Polish
 and she was taken into glory
 into a heartrending glory of courage
 that would free her from any temptation
 in a star shower of Chopin beauty.
 And she prayed “The Hail Mary” in Latin
 and she was touched by a Schubert sorrow
 that assured her that The Mater Dolorosa
 would be with her at the hour of her death
 in a wisdom of anguish for others.
 And she prayed “The Hail Mary” in English
 and she honoured the honour of Canada
 and of her community and of the earth
 in a joy that was beyond Good and Evil.

In her prayer Valerie knew
 her Holy Mother, her Holy Father
 her Holy Brother, her Holy Sister.
 She knew God as the love between them.
 She spent her life as their
 daughter and sister and beloved
 seeking to teach others of their love.

VALERIE LOVED HER FAMILY

Family life for Valerie was
 an activity of creative passion:
 of the humble passion for the Holy
 that touched her with omnipotence,
 of the wise passion for truth
 that guided her firmly on her way,
 of the courageous passion for goodness
 that freed her to fight for liberty,
 of the honourable passion for beauty
 that inspired her with divine madness.

Elizabeth, Jeanette, Zenon and Valerie
 were given vocations to be true
 to the quest of their parents
 to the heritage of the Polish people

to the plight and possibilities of humanity
to the whole Copernican world
of nature, earth, stars and galaxies.
They were a family of passion:
a passion born of suffering
the suffering of the Poles and Russians
and Germans and of all peoples,
a passion born of possibilities,
that that suffering could be transformed
into a new and greater life.
They could not let that suffering go to waste.
It was their call to creativity.

The Konopkas lived in a passion
for nature and for culture.
Farmland fields and animals
fruitland groves and vineyards
the ancient rhythms of the year
planting-tending-harvesting-waiting.
The lakeforest cottage
with boating and with fishing
the trips, the fun, the food, the drink
the laughter, the leisure, the communing.
They knew the dearest freshness deep down things.
The languages, the reading and writing
the speaking and the listening,
the dance, the music, the painting
the poetry, the history, the philosophy
medicine, law, theology, politics
they lived in their world of
artists, scientists, heroes, sages, saints.

When Val and Cy found each other
it was the Lion heart
finding his Lady love,
it was the moon finding her sun.
And a moonbeam came forth as Cathy
and sunshine as Jerome.
And Jerome is the Lion heart of his father
and the sweetheart of his mother.
And Cathy is the Lady love of her mother
and the kindheart of her father.

And who could ever begin to say
 even though we all know
 how Valerie and Cyril loved
 their moonbeam and their sunshine
 their kindheart and their lionheart.
 All the passion of Cy and Val
 brought them together in creativity.
 And now the world can be blessed
 with their lovely Cathy and dear Jerome.

Valerie's nieces and nephews
 know how she loved them
 with a care and a support
 that looked always after their
 personal growth and success.
 Each of Valerie's relatives is proud
 of her and to be related to her.

VALERIE LOVED HER COMMUNITY

By the time she was only seventeen Valerie
 was already a cub scout den mother
 and a leader of the girl guides.
 She loved them and still today
 she knows each and each knows her
 with affection and thanksgiving.
 Right after High School
 she went to teacher's college
 and she has been a teacher
 of thousands of devoted students
 because she was devoted to each of them.
 She has always worked in St. Catharines
 on health, education and welfare.
 She has been an insider
 at the Hotel Dieu Hospital
 and has served on key committees
 especially over the last twelve years.
 She has been active in promoting music
 in the Symphony Orchestra and the Youth Orchestra.
 She has been there for mayors
 for council persons, for MPs and MPPs.
 Twenty years ago she was a founding member

of the Brock Philosophy Society
and she was first its Vice-President
and then for half that time its president.
She and the Society raised over
one hundred thousand dollars
for scholarships and sponsored
more than fifty international conferences.
She and the committees and societies
she has worked with have been
unbelievably successful and most of all
have worked together without negativity.
When the Holy father came to Toronto
for the world youth assembly
Valerie was asked to arrange the lodging
for 3000 students from foreign countries.
The authorities knew who could do the job.

How did Valerie do it?
What was her secret?
She found the answer to those questions
as she studied philosophy.
As soon as Brock University came to town
Valerie knew that it was for her.
Valerie was a thinker. She imagined
the detail of each task and she executed.
She mastered the receptive liberal arts
of listening and of reading.
She mastered the productive liberal arts
of speaking and of writing.
She knew from the beginning
that she was called to study philosophy.
With Plato she learned of the Philosopher King.
He had learned the traditions of his people.
He had learned music and gymnastic.
He had learned mathematics and science.
He had learned to abide in the realm
of beauty-goodness-truth-holiness.
With Aristotle she learned of
how to actualize potentialities
by using the right means
to reach right and ordered goals.
She learned of the golden mean

between extremes and of its power.
 With Augustine she learned of the Suffering Servant
 and of how two loves have built two cities.
 She learned of how to live in the city of God
 that she might build the city of man.
 With Aquinas she learned of the three loves:
 of erotic concern that desires self perfection
 of agapeic concern that desires perfection for others
 of complacency that delights in each singular being.
 With Kierkegaard she learned of
 the stages on life's way
 She learned of the leap of faith
 that in absolutely loving the absolute
 then relatively loves the relative in
 the aesthetic-the ethical-the religious.
 With Max Scheler she learned of values
 and of how we relate to them in our
 altitudes-preferences-feelings
 in our thoughts-words-deeds.
 And she learned of model persons
 who gift us with their attitudes
 that our attitudes might be transformed.
 With Carol Woytiya she read of
The Acting Person and it was as if
 he had written the book just for her.
 And who could ever know of
 the pride with which Valerie loved
 her Polish Pope and philosopher.
 And so if you want to know
 the secret of Valerie's
 thinking active love
 then all you need to fathom
 is the secret of her Polish Hero's
 thinking active love.

Cathy, Jerome and Valerie's beloveds.
 Fifty times a day for fifty years
 Valerie prayed the "Hail Mary"
 and she became an angel
 with the angel Gabriel
 in his joyful annunciation
 with those words:

“Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.”
And every visit that Valerie made
was a joyful visitation
just as was that visit when Elizabeth said
“Blessed art thou among women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.”
And right in the middle of
the “Hail Mary” prayer
is the Jesus prayer
which in nativity joy
formed Valerie’s every in-breath
formed Valerie’s every out-breath
that everyone and all might always
be reborn and renewed.
And with our Holy Father
who lost his mother there in Krakow
when he was but a boy
she prayed in presentation joy
as he made his presentations
across the face of the Earth
and as she made her presentations
“Holy Mary, mother of God
pray for us sinners now.”
And then in the joyful mystery
of the Finding in the Temple
she prayed: “And at the hour of our death”.
And Valerie’s prayer was answered.
And she had a long hour of blessed death
in which she could offer all of her suffering
with Jesus in his suffering for each of us.
And she was an exemplar of humility
courage, wisdom and honour.
And she may seem lost
and we may seem lost.
But when someone or something is lost
only then can they be more fully found.
Valerie is no longer separated from Cy.
She is no longer separated from Zenon.
She is no longer separated from
her father and mother dear.
And you know Cathy and Jerome

that she is no longer
separated from you
for she is with you
in your every in-breath
in your every out-breath
in that breath that shaped the stars
in that breath that comes forth
in a moonbeam and in sunshine.

Valerie, pray for us. Amen.