

Celebration of the Life of Jon Graham Stahl

Good afternoon, and welcome to this place made sacred by the presence of everyone here. I am Karen Stovell, a former Lay Chaplain at the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara which Jon attended. With me are Desmond Sequeira and Doreen Peever, lay Chaplains here at UCN. It is our privilege to be with you to celebrate the life of Jon Graham Stahl. As a community of family, friends and neighbours we are drawn together by the death of Jon. We share our love for him and for one another and celebrate his spirit which will continue to live on in our hearts.

I ask Charlotte Gain, Jon's sister, to come forward to light a candle while I read our opening words:

Life is like a Candle

I think a human life is like a candle whose flame, while it burns brightly whether for a long time or briefly, sends out a circle, a glowing halo, if you will, of warmth and light in all directions. When the candle is snuffed out, the memory of light and its brilliance continues to glow in the mind's eye. So a human life when it is ended is remembered in the heart's deep core. The fire of its brilliance continues to warm our spirits with love, to illuminate and influence all that it has touched.

To our friends and loved ones we shall give the most worthy honour and tribute if we never say that they are dead but rather that they have lived; that thereby the warmth and flow of Jon's actions, work and of him just being may be carried over the gulfs of death and be made immortal in the true and earthly life which he has lived.

The dead are not dead if they have been truly loved. In our own lives we give them immortality.

Eulogy

Jon Graham Stahl was born in Timmins Ontario on December 7, 1933. He grew up, the eldest of 4 children. He was always a big boy, always thought and spoken of as a "Big Fella". The family spent summers at Windemere House in the

Muskoka's where he was an avid fisherman, a swimmer and a lover of many sports! His father would often take him fishing in Algonquin Park. A Scottish lady named Mary who worked at Windemere once told the story of Jon eating 12 pancakes for breakfast one day. Jon was always a great eater. There is a family story told that in later years, Jon was invited by 3 different friends to 3 different Christmas dinners and he managed to make it to all of them and eat all three turkey dinners with all the trimmings in one day!

In 1951, his father took over a medical practice in St. Catharines and Jon began to attend Ridley College. He was involved in 22 different sports during his 2 years there. His nickname there was "Boxcar". Although he met many boys who were international students from all over the world, he complained that he had made no friends in St. Catharines itself. His parents then agreed to his finishing high school at St. Catharines Collegiate.

In his teens, he became interested in the statistics of baseball and hockey. He and his father shared an interest in runs, hits, errors, RBIs, goals and assists and all of the others details of the games. He carried that interest all of his life and could tell you about different players strengths and weaknesses to the number. His favourite teams were the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Boston Red Sox. He and his father sometimes flew down to Boston for games and Jon's love for the Sox was begun.

In the 1960s, Jon lived with his brother Chris and a friend Bill Horan in North York while he worked for Crown Life Insurance. Terry Gain came to make it a foursome. Terry met Jon's sister Charlotte through the brothers and ended up marrying her.

Although Jon was a quiet boy, he loved dancing, swimming, canoeing, playing bridge and good grammar! He finished the Toronto Star crosswords quickly and efficiently right up to his death. He also loved to travel and he and his second wife Sheila joined the St. Catharines Travel Club where they hosted people from other clubs around the world and then were hosted in their homes in other countries. They went to Colorado and to Belgium numerous times as well as taking a river cruise on the Rhine.

During his adult life he had different careers in different fields. As mentioned before, he worked for Crown Life Insurance in their head office in Toronto. He

attended Ryerson but completed his BA at the University of Waterloo. He also taught, first in Shelbourne Ontario, then for Lincoln County Board of Education and later for Niagara South Board. He taught high school English and geography, but always wanted to continue in the field of guidance. He was quite active in OSSTF and their political side. Later in life, he got into real estate and worked for Royal LePage.

Jon had a dog he named Wendel after one of his hockey heroes, Wendel Clarke. He loved the little Shiatzu very much but found it difficult later as his illness progressed to take proper care of him.

Here at UCN, Jon was quite involved in the Non-Threatening Bridge Club and was an avid player. My husband met him sometimes at the Bridge Centre on Tremont Drive right beside our apartment building. He played bridge in his later years with many different groups in many different places. He attended the meetings of the Niagara Secular Humanists here as well as our Sunday morning services when he could. He and his wife Sheila were very involved before her death in 2006.

Jon was not the most patient of men, however. He loved watching his beloved Maple Leafs either in person or on TV. However, if they started to lose, he would get up and turn off the TV and not watch the rest of the game!

I will end with a personal story of my time with Jon. I went to visit him when he was in St. Catharines General on Fourth Ave. When I arrived one day, he was visiting with his friend Joe. He, along with other friends from Timmins would often meet at the Fairview Mall for coffee and stories. Joe had brought him a Nutty Buddy ice cream cone which he was thoroughly enjoying. Just as I arrived, they came to take him for an ultrasound. I said I would go to visit Ed Gilbert and come back after his ultrasound. When I came to see Jon again, the nurse informed me that he had just left. He wouldn't let them take him until he finished every delicious lick! He really loved chocolate!

Jon will be missed by his friends and family and all those who have gathered here today.

Hymn Spirit of Life, come unto me.

Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.

Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

Psalm 23 – Desmond Sequeira

A human life is sacred.

It is sacred in its birth.

It is sacred in its living,

And it is sacred in its dying.

Our experience will be unique, different for each one of us here. We may feel angry, hurt, abandoned, resentful, afraid or alone as well as sad and bereft. Painful as it is, I urge you not to avoid, deny or turn away from your grief, for it is as human to grieve as it is to love. Indeed, the two are inseparable from the joy of sharing our lives with one another. Rather, I urge you to let it wash over you and recede again like a wave, sometimes full force, and sometimes gently, like the tides on the ocean or on a country lake. And in your grief, I urge you to turn to each other for comfort, as members of a special community who share the loss of this man, Jon Stahl.

Words from others:

Reading – Doreen Peever

Life is a fragile gift, and death is one of its deepest mysteries. If we do not fear the mystery out of which we were born into this world, why should we fear the mystery into which we return when life is ended? For though we experience death as an interruption of life, it is but a natural part of the cycle, as is birthing and nurturing, sickness and health, breathing and growing.

In loving memory, we have celebrated the gift Jon has been to us, with memories spoken and silent. His gracious spirit will live on in our hearts and in the stories of him we will continue to share with each other. May Jon's abundant life and vibrant spirit remind us to live our own lives being fully alive. May his death remind us to be grateful for our brief time on this earth. And especially in the days ahead, may we find comfort and support for our grief among the members of this loving community who have gathered in his name.

Tim, Jon's brother, please extinguish the candle after I read these words:

Jon, you are remembered in love. You are part of the now in us. All the good, all the love, all the comfort a person can give is remembered and repeated for your sake. Time changes, everything passes - but not love.

Jon, may peace abide with you.

BENEDICTION

Spirit of life, I pray that you bestow on Jon's family and all those who grieve him, compassion and gratitude for his gifts - gifts that live on and on through his loved ones. By enacting kindness, we say hello to the living as we honour them. Let us resolve to honour Jon by searching our own hearts, and uprooting any barriers that keep us from loving freely. Let us leave this sacred hour a little more compassionate and peaceful, and more open to others in our lives. Let us lift up our hearts in gratitude for his life. Let us resolve to honour his living spirit by seeing more clearly the beauty in the natural world, in food, in the abundance of all things - and especially in one another. May the love we feel in our hearts at this moment help us to join together in richer ways than before, and in time, lead to a peace that surpasses understanding. I know that Jo's spirit will always embrace you - for his love for you and your love for him will never die. Amen and Amen

Please join Charlotte and Terry, Tim and Erin for further memories and stories about Jon's life while you enjoy refreshments.

