

Andrea Hopf Loth

We are gathered this morning to bear witness to the resurrection, the resurrection of all who are buried in Jesus Christ the Lord and the resurrection of Andrea Hopf Loth. Andrea died a week ago after a long period of declining health related to multiple sclerosis and a short but intense final illness. She was 71.

Andrea was born August 26, 1938, in Lancaster, PA, the younger of the two Hopf daughters. At the time her father was an engineer with the Armstrong Corporation, and also served as the pilot for the company plane. Andrea's mother was an accomplished professional artist, whose work included paintings on the side of Amish barns. As a child Andrea frequently served as a model for her mother's work. The Hopf family later moved to suburban Pittsburgh before settling in West Harford, Connecticut.

After graduating near the top of her class from high school in 1956, Andrea enrolled in Pembroke College of Brown University. Two years later she transferred to the University of New Hampshire, from which she graduated in 1960 with a degree in art. She then took a master's degree in elementary education from Central Connecticut State University before beginning a teaching career in the West Harford Schools.

Within five years Andrea the single young woman was looking for a little more adventure than she found in West Harford, so she took a teaching position with the US Army. She was posted to Baumholder, Germany, teaching the third graders of military personnel stationed there.

One Sunday afternoon Andrea joined the other single women teachers at the local officers' club for lunch. Lt. Rusty Loth joined other single male officers at the weekly lunch, knowing the teachers would be there. One of the women caught Rusty's eye for two reasons: one, she was attractive, and two, she was sitting next to an NC State suitcase. Rusty reasoned, "This is a southern girl, I am a southern boy, I think I will start up a conversation." The conversation went well. By the end of it, the other young women had left the two, and so had the NC State suitcase. Andrea turned out NOT to be a southern belle, but a Connecticut Yankee! No matter, it was a good match all the same. Rusty and Andrea married July 2, 1966, at the Fort Bragg Army Chapel, and shared 43 years of marriage together, and had one daughter, Laura, born in 1972.

After Rusty left the US Army and the couple moved to Richmond, Andrea continued to teach third graders, first at Maybeury Elementary School in Henrico County and then St Michael's, here in Bon Air. Rusty and Andrea then moved to Bluefield, Lynchburg, and Charlottesville before returning to Richmond in 1987. After Laura was born, Andrea stayed home and devoted herself full time to hearth, home, and Laura's upbringing and activities. She later found an outlet for her artistic expressions working at Reese's Fine Gifts when they lived in Charlottesville and Accents Unlimited here in Bon Air.

Although professionally Andrea was an elementary teacher, she never left her first passion – art. She took art classes to advance her expression and to learn new media. More telling, however, was how she saw her world. Andrea saw the world through an artist's eye. She would stop along a road side to admire and perhaps pick some wild flowers and Queen Anne's lace. She would focus on and enjoy the minute detail and artistry of God's creation. For Andrea, it was a confession of her faith and her artistic heart to sing,

*“All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful: The Lord God made them all.
Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings:
God made their glowing colors, God made their tiny wings.”*

Andrea, as you know, was a quiet, retiring, gentle soul. She married a boisterous, outgoing, loquacious VMI Rat. Maybe opposites DO attract. Certainly for them. One incident early in their marriage perhaps explains how they made it work so well. Andrea accompanied Rusty to a VMI game – and took a book to read, oblivious to the frivolity and festivities of the game. Later, when Rusty complained, Andrea replied, “You go to your ballgames and enjoy the guys. I’ll be home for you when you get back.” And that’s the way it was.

Andrea enjoyed traveling. She and Rusty made two trips to Europe, one to visit Laura while she was studying abroad, and another to visit the English Cornwall region.

Andrea was devoted to her daughter Laura. Even the modest Andrea was known to brag on her accomplishments. Whenever Laura moved, Andrea was only content after she checked out her new apartment and neighborhood.

After she was diagnosed with MS in 1992, and as the disease slowly progressed, Andrea cut back her activities. She became active in an MS support group, Positive Thinkers, and made lasting friendships there – including Gale Gilmore who became her close friend and advocate, and Mary Baird Line, one of her former students at St Michaels. Her MS support group friends knew her as we all knew her – as the sweetest and kindest of person her friends had ever known. She was also quite brave in facing her illness. Her smile lit up the room whenever a family member or friend came to see her. She made a visitor feel like the most important person in the world.

Andrea was a deeply spiritual person. She attended Methodist and Episcopal churches before finding a home here in Bon Air Presbyterian in 1995. Here Andrea served on the congregational care division, writing cards and making phone calls, and sharing in the ministry of care within the church. She set tables for Wednesday night dinners. In recent years, as her health declined, she was a grateful recipient of the congregational care she formerly had extended to others.

Andrea was preceded in death by her parents; she is survived by her husband of 43 years, Francis Rust “Rusty” Loth; her daughter Laura; her sister Melinda Adams, of Woodstock, Vermont; her niece, Amy E. Adams of Richmond, Vermont; and by many dear friends. Having gathered for our mutual support and to hear the comfort of the scriptures, let us worship God:

R. Charles Grant
Bon Air Presbyterian Church
Richmond, Virginia
April 6, 2010