(Oct. 6, 1942- Feb 3, 2015)

Cheron passed away on Feb 3, 2015. She was born on Oct. 6, 1942, in Seattle, a city she truly loved. She attended John Muir Elementary School and graduated from Franklin High School. She attended Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, and graduated in 1964. She loved her college life and all of the deep, lasting friendships she made at Pacific University. Her college experience opened the world to Cheron, and she cherished that. She also felt that she should try to help others in the world and her life followed that path.

After graduating from Pacific with a degree in Sociology, Cheron volunteered for the Peace Corps and served in Honduras from 1964-66. There, she and her co-worker developed a nutrition and educational program for Lenca Indian Children. This greatly improved the health of many young children in the village they served.

Following her Peace Corps experience, Cheron attended Ohio University, graduating with a Masters Degree in Human Relations 1968. She met Bill Mayhall in 1967, and they married in Seattle in 1967.

Moving to Galveston,Texas, in 1967, she worked as a Medical Social Worker in the Home Dialysis Program. In 1970 she moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she worked as a Social Worker at University of New Mexico Hospital. Her talents and compassion were employed as a Medical Social Worker with critically ill kidney patients, a counselor/instructor for minority college students in New Mexico, and co-director of a career counseling program for Navajo and Zuni high school students in Gallup.

In 1975,
after Bill's completion of Internship and Residency on Orthopedic Surgery, Bill and Cheron

moved to Salem, Oregon. There, Cheron enrolled in Oregon State University as a PhD candidate.

Cheron was blessed with four children: Phillip, Scotty, Laura, and Katrina. As an OSU doctoral student, and after Scotty's death in 1977, she formed chapter of Compassionate Friends and dedicated her research efforts to assisting families surviving the deaths of their young children. Prompted by the demands of her three special needs children in 1983, she wrote a successful grant for federal funding to establish a statewide program providing education and support for families raising children with disabilities (Coalition in Oregon for Parental Education-COPE), enabling them to become meaningfully involved as partners with educators and health professionals.

In 1983, Cheron graduated from Oregon State University with a PhD in Educational Psychology.

After 14 years as Executive Director of the Oregon COPE Project, Cheron retired to pursue volunteer work and leadership with other family support programs. She was a founder of Habitat for Humanity in Port Townsend, Washington, and served as President the American Society for Deaf Children 1999-2002, and participated in her church's mission project to build homes and upgrade the standard of living for citizens of a remote "sister" village, Santa Elena, in El Salvador.

In 2004 she published her first memoir (*The Bridge Is Love: A Journey Through Grief to Joy After the Death of a Child*), created to assist and inspire bereaved parents, followed by a second memoir in 2008 (*Marshaling Support to Survive Breast Cancer: Self-talk, Girl-talk, Doctor-talk*) which focuses on surviving and thriving after breast cancer.

After moving from Port Townsend to Tucson, Arizona, in 2009, she involved herself in church activities at Mountain Shadows Presbyterian Church where she led an affiliate of the Prayers and Squares group she founded to provide comfort and joy to people suffering from illness and sorrow. She volunteered as a counselor at the Tu Nidito program in Tucson as a grief support group facilitator for families who struggle after the death of one of their members. She was proud to have been named a "Remarkable Mom" by Tu Nidito in 2010. She received many other awards and was honored by the National Parent Network, by Pacific University as an Outstanding Graduate in 1986, and was honored by Oregon State University Department of Education with the College Award for Creativity, Connection, Culture and Caring in 2010. She co-chaired her 50th college reunion and was grateful for having been able to attend that event and being inducted into the Golden Oak Society.

Cheron loved travel and visited all 50 states, all seven continents and 83 foreign countries. She enjoyed reading, writing, hiking and walking. She developed a passion for exercise and

walked 35 half marathons. After her diagnosis in Oct, 2011, of Stage 4 breast cancer she walked the Las Vegas Rock and Roll 1/2 marathon, hiked in and out of the Grand Canyon, completed the Komen 60-mile charity walk in Seattle, and completed a 90-mile pilgrimage across Spain's Camino de Santiago. She was grateful for having been given the time to visit Southern Africa and go on safari there.

Cheron was dedicated to her church work and always was grateful for the opportunities she had been given to travel and experience the world.

She is survived by her husband of 47 years, Bill, her children Phillip, Laura, and Katrina. She especially loved her grandsons, Jeremy, Christopher Jr, Cedric, and Gabryel, and her granddaughter, Gratia.

Cheron's memorial service in Tucson will be at the Mountain Shadows Presbyterian Church at 4 PM Thursday, Feb 12. She preferred no flowers, but suggested any donations be made to Habitat for Humanity in Tucson or East Jefferson County, Washington, Pacific University, Forrest Grove, Oregon , or Mountain Shadows Presbyterian Church.

From Cheron:

With Jesus as my Yardstick, Whom Should I Fear? 10/10/09

I have had several "mountaintop experiences" and "ah-ha moments" in my lifetime, but only one spiritual encounter I think worthy of designating as an epiphany or religious experience. I didn't come to it with a load of baggage from my sinful youth, or a desperate need for repentance to get me back on track. In fact, I was still a youthful, 19-year-old college student at Pacific University, loving most everything about the stimulation and challenge of collegiate, academic life. I had started my freshman year as a journalism major, but switched to sociology and psychology as a sophomore, and particularly enjoyed religion classes and my involvement in chapel, the UCC church across the street, and singing sacred music with an excellent college choir. It was important to me to live my faith, but I was still actively seeking an understanding of God's plan for my life.

It happened this way: While studying at my desk in the dorm, with my roommate puttering around in the background, in a momentary vision the meaning of God and the meaning of Life came to me clearly. I glanced down at my hand to see the base and its five appendages as the essential representation of God and the core substance of human

existence. In what seemed an instantaneous flash, all the complexities of the world diminished and the primary knowledge emerged simply and vividly. In a few uncomplicated and logical thoughts, as it came to me, this is the content of my vision:

God is a Spirit. God is Love. God is the Spirit of Love. God is the indwelling Spirit of all Life. The essential meaning and purpose of Life is Love. To Live is to Love. To Love is to experience God. The person who lives by Love enriches God and the Life of Mankind, simultaneously enriching his own Life by realizing and fulfilling its purpose. When Life is over, the individual Spirit remains a part of the Whole. The Whole Spirit – the ongoing Life of Mankind – is significantly increased or decreased, improved or impaired, in direct proportion to the amount of Love that has been given and received in the living of that one Life.

As I looked at my hand, its form represented the basic and extending Spirit of Love. The hand was the base or Godhead, and each finger an extension of that base through which the Spiritual Essence flowed into individual beings. Each finger represented an individual life, never disconnected from the totality of the Spirit. This unity of Man and God, Life and Love, came to me as the elemental Truth and Ultimate Answer to every important question.

In all the intervening years of my life, nothing has detracted from the credibility of my vision. On the contrary, it has been expanded by the increase of my knowledge and experience. The more I live, the more I learn what it means to love, and vice versa. The great task has been, and continues to be, in defining and enlarging "Love", realizing the full potential of its dynamic power.

Not much in life is clear and simple, but knowing God is the Spirit of Love works for me! I have needed to pare down my belief system so that religion works as an active force in my life, not a confusing tangle of mandates or dictates demanding I believe one way or another. Yes, there are still mysteries and miracles in my belief system, but essentially there is God as the Loving Spirit that unites me with every other living creature, and there is Jesus as the supreme example of how to live a meaningful life. Christ is my yardstick!

I don't think I believe in virgin birth. I don't think I believe in bodily resurrection, although I have a vivid and hopeful imagination that has allowed me to construct a beautiful afterlife in my book, The Bridge Is Love. I can't conceive of what "hell" might be, and I am troubled by our creed that says Christ "descended into hell." I don't think we die into a purgatory, waiting around until Christ comes back to "judge the quick and the dead." I take issue with the literal interpretation of Psalm 139 that tells us God has everything under complete control from the beginning of time and through all eternity. If I believed that God had planned for my little boy to die a violent death, my soul surely would have shriveled in anger and bitterness long ago! When novelists like Dan Brown or Nikos Kazantzakis hypothesize that Jesus married and fathered one or more children, my response is, "How cool is that?!" Why would critics think that this would diminish the perfection of Christ as our supreme example? To my mind, it rather enhances.

Blasphemy! Heresy! Hypocrisy! If I doubt any or all of these tenets of the faith, am I unworthy to call myself a Christian? I know some would judge me so. But I can live with their judgments if I can remain true to my calling to live after the example of the Christ in order that God's Spirit of Love will grow and, hopefully, someday prevail on earth. I know that I am imperfect – a sinner – for we all, save Jesus, fall short of the glory of God. But I believe intensely in the power of forgiveness. To quote a verse of scripture that guides and propels me: "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control." (II Timothy 1:7) I believe I am supposed to continue to question and test the parameters of life for as long as I live. I am forgiven for my missteps.

I still love the Bible stories and the Judaeo-Christian tradition on which my faith is based. I love singing hymns and anthems. These are important to my intellect and my passion. They figure in my prayer life, which to me means living life as a prayer, with an attitude of gratitude and deep desire for the goals of love and justice. To "pray without ceasing" is to live as the loving, compassionate creature God intended. I don't routinely and ritually pray with bowed head or bended knee, nor do I read my Bible everyday, but I DO seriously contemplate God, and try to live in concert with the Spirit of Love, everyday.

To reiterate in closing, I strongly believe in miracles and mystery. I certainly don't have all, or even most, of the answers. I know I must be content to do my best, as I feel guided by God, and not struggle incessantly against the unknowable. My life journey continues to

require those successive “leaps of faith,” but it is a wonderful journey, with Jesus as my yardstick. Life is good, God is good, and I believe His Spirit guides my path.

A Verse from 1967:

Encountering Life

This day awakes like any other day,
the sun brings light and warmth for life’s demand.

But man must meet the hours without delay,
for each new dawn holds magic in its hand

for man to capture.

The magic of life:
An increase of knowledge or new-found strife.

A choice is here for each of us to make:
To live the hours or watch them pass us by.

Shall we grab the off’rings and thus partake
of the love and joy and treasure which lie

between heav’n and earth?

Or fearfully hide
and see our hopes and desires denied?

Should we open wide and lay ourselves bare to the pain of loneliness and sorrow?

Or should we easier deny such care
in the hopes it will fade before tomorrow

with all the suff’ring?

But, wait! Will it fade
if actions to meet it are this delayed?

I have not found that pain is overcome
when I shrink and feign not to see it there.

But anguish devours us if we succumb, instead of trusting our powers to bear

the burden it brings.

By facing our strife
we are surely among the victors in life.

One magic and inspiring thing I've found:
That faith in one's self is a pow'rful aid.

Faith can dispel any fears that surround,
and give us new strength when we are afraid

of what life demands.

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Stretch out each arm,

and you frighten away foreboding harm. What's more important, I have also found

that loving life fully brings only gain. Each moment or incident will abound

in benefits if we can but sustain our desire to live.

To live is to love,
They go together like the hand and the glove.

By meeting each day and all that it brings with enthusiasm, trust and respect,

We'll increase our love and knowledge of things that make life worth living, and, we'll elect

to taste life fully.

There's so much in store
For he who loves, each day, a little more.

~ Cheron Messmer Mayhall May, 1967