

Betty Schmitt, active in renewal groups, social work



Betty Schmitt taking a break during Dimitri House's 1988 Hike for the Homeless fundraiser with her grandson, Dan Deckman, and her guide dog, Otis.

A few weeks before her death, Betty Schmitt and her husband, John, were talking about the future.

Knowing that she was nearing the end of her long battle with cancer, John asked her, "What am I going to do without you?"

Betty Schmitt responded, "Get on with your life."

"Which was her style," John said. "She had a great love for life."

That love for life enabled Betty Schmitt, blind since adolescence, to marry, raise four children, earn a social-work degree and work as a social worker with Rochester's homeless.

She died March 6, 1989, in her home. Mrs. Schmitt was 56 years old.

Born Betty Miller, she was blinded at age 17 as a result of treatments for a skin problem. She nevertheless attended Nazareth College for two years, during which she met her future husband, who was attending St. John Fisher College.

The two married Oct. 9, 1954, and Mrs. Schmitt left school to raise their family.

Frank Payne, who befriended the Schmitt's son, Peter, when the two attended McQuaid Jesuit High School, recalled that she had a gift for accepting others, even teenagers. "She took them seriously, listened, and very obviously cared," he said. This caring spirit extended to everyone she met, he noted, observing that the Schmitt's phone was constantly ringing from people who wanted or needed to talk to her.

While raising their family, Betty and John Schmitt were active with a variety of renewal movements, including Cursillo, in which Mrs. Schmitt served as co-chair of pre-Cursillo; Teen Seminar, for which the Schmitts ran a weekly reality group out of their home; and the parish-based Reconciliation and Renewal program. The couple also represented renewal movements at the Diocesan Pastoral Counsel for several years.

In the 1980s, Mrs. Schmitt returned to Nazareth College to earn her bachelor's degree in social work. After completing the degree in 1986, she was hired as a social worker by Corpus Christi Parish to work at Dimitri House, the parish's food and shelter program.

Christine Garrison, who was then director of Dimitri House, praised Betty Schmitt's ability to work with "everybody who came through the door. She taught me a lot about how to deal with people, how to be accepting," Garrison said.

"I think her own struggle with blindness helped her understand the struggles of other people, particularly the poor and homeless," suggested Father James Callan, administrator of Corpus Christi Parish. Although working with people in sometimes desperate circumstances, Mrs. Schmitt "never let the suffering of the poor get in the way of the joy of the Resurrection... of the joy of living," he said.

Betty Schmitt worked long hours, taking calls at night or on weekends. She and her guide dog, Otis, became a familiar sight in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods, where, despite rampant crime, she ventured without fear. John Schmitt recalled being afraid when visiting one particularly rough neighborhood. But as he watched person after person say hello to his wife and her dog, his fear vanished. "There was no way were in danger," he said. "They

knew her. She was a friend."

In July, 1988, the spreading cancer that Mrs. Schmitt had been fighting for several years forced her to leave her job at Dimitri House. Subsequent treatments appeared successful, and by January, 1989, she was feeling well enough to begin talking about volunteering or working part-time. At that point, however, the cancer reappeared and spread rapidly.

The day before Betty Schmitt died, her entire family gathered to pray. Her son Peter asked her if she wanted to be blessed and if she wanted to be forgiven. She responded "yes" both times. John then asked if she was happy. She again answered, "Yes." It was her last word.

A memorial Mass for Mrs. Schmitt was celebrated Saturday, March 11, at St. Boniface Church, 330 Gregory St. Principal

celebrants were the pastor, Father Richard Brickler, and Father Robert Ring, who gave the homily. Many other priests who were friends of the family concelebrated, and Deacon John Swift assisted.

Betty Schmitt is survived by her husband, John; sons and daughters-in-law, Peter and Ana, Edward and Mary Alice; daughters and son-in-law, Terri Schmitt, Mary Jeanne and Wayne Younge; 8 grandchildren, Daniel, Thomas, Mary Beth and Timothy Deckman, Lewis, Kateri and Joseph Schmitt, and Andrew Younge; also survived by her father, Lewis F. Miller.

Contributions in Betty Schmitt's memory may be made to the Social Work Department at Nazareth College of Rochester, or to a charity which aids the poor or homeless.

— Lee Strong

Father Daniel J. Wheeland, 62

Father Daniel J. Wheeland, 62, a native of Elmira, died in Rochester on March 8, 1989. Son of the late Daniel and Anna Wheeland, Father Wheeland was a graduate of St. Patrick's School, Elmira, and St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries. He was ordained to the priesthood in Sacred Heart Cathedral on June 4, 1955.



Father Wheeland served as associate pastor of parishes in Auburn, Rochester, Corning and Elmira Heights. Although he suffered for many years from the debilitating effects of emphysema, he zealously continued his priestly ministry in a characteristically generous way. Friends remember him as a quiet, reserved person who brightened every gathering with a charming sense of humor. His perception of the incongruous helped many troubled people to smile and relax.

When declining health prevented him from engaging in active ministry, Father Wheeland took up residence at Holy Cross rectory in Rochester, where his limited ministry resulted in a special bond with members of the parish.

Surviving are his sister, Mary C. Whee-

land; two brothers, Father Thomas Wheeland, pastor of Holy Cross Church, and Dr. John F. Wheeland; sister-in-law Jeanne Wheeland; and several nieces and nephews.

Mass of the High Priest was celebrated at Holy Cross Church, Rochester, on March 12. Mass of Christian Burial followed March 13, with interment at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Sister Clare Flora, OLC, 71

Sister Clare Flora of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity died March 3, 1989, at the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Infirmary following a long illness. She was 71 years old.

Sister Flora entered the order in 1939. She taught sewing, housekeeping and gardening at Holy Angels School on Winton Road from 1939 until the school closed in 1975.

Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Flora was celebrated Monday, March 6, in the infirmary chapel. Father Robert Bradler, pastor of St. James Parish, was the chief celebrant. Concelebrating were Monsignors Francis and Richard Burns; Father John Roach; and Basilian Fathers Dennis Noelke, Peter Etlinger, Thomas Miller and John Seniawski.

Sister Flora is survived by a sister, Josephine Flora of Rochester.

Thomas Snowden Bird, renowned lens designer, K of C member, 62

Thomas Snowden Bird dedicated much of his life to helping others see more clearly, even though he was blind for more than two decades of his life.



Mr. Bird, a parishioner at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in Rochester and a member of the Knights of Columbus, died on Feb. 3, 1989. He was 62 years old.

A longtime employee of Bausch & Lomb Optical Engineering Department, Mr. Bird had three optical designs patented and published. He also helped edit a book in optics, *Geometric Lens Design in U.S. Patents*. In addition, Mr. Bird was a lifetime member of the Optical Society of America.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland on July 24, 1926, Mr. Bird was baptized at St. Ignatius Loyola Church in Baltimore. His family moved to San Francisco when he was nine years old.

Mr. Bird attended St. Anne's School in San Francisco before attending St. Ignatius Loyola High School in 1941. He graduated from St. Ignatius Loyola with a scholarship citing his excellence in Latin.

After entering the novitiate of the Society of Jesus at the University of Santa Clara in 1948, he taught Latin and Greek and worked in the university's observatories.

Mr. Bird earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash., in 1950, and pursued his

hobbies of astronomy and lens design.

Four years after being released from his vows as a Jesuit in 1955 because of health problems related to diabetes, Mr. Bird moved to Rochester to work for Bausch & Lomb, Inc., in lens design.

Mr. Bird was an active member at St. Theodore's Parish in Rochester as well. He married Maire Cleary of Rochester on Nov. 25, 1962, at St. Thomas More Church.

In 1962, the Birds moved to Cambridge, Mass., but returned to Rochester in 1965. Mr. Bird began to gradually lose his sight that year, and in 1966 diabetic retinopathy completely robbed him of his vision. He retired from Bausch and Lomb shortly thereafter.

"Tom was working with me when he went blind," recalled Robert McIntyre of Genesee Computer Center Inc. "Being a person of optics, he devised all these schemes so he could still see. That was the amazing thing about him. He was struggling to still be productive."

The Bird family moved soon after to Dallas, Texas, and not one to let his handicap slow him down, Mr. Bird worked as a consultant for the company, later becoming an independent consultant.

A direct descendant of Augustine Washington — the father of George Washington — Mr. Bird was a great inspiration to those who knew him.

The Knights of Columbus next February plan to dedicate a chalice to the memory of Mr. Bird, who kept himself abreast of current affairs of the church through Talking

Books from the Xavier Society in New York City and *America* magazine.

He will also be remembered for his keen sense of humor and his love of puns.

"Tom always had his sense of humor, even about himself," McIntyre said. "He would never leave you without saying 'See you later.'"

McIntyre also was struck by Mr. Bird's independence. "He never would seek out assistance because he was blind," McIntyre said. "His work ethic was his greatest strength and his charity was his greatest virtue."

Mr. Bird is survived by his wife; three daughters, Sheila, Amelia and Rebecca; brother and sister-in-law Brooke G. and

Doris Bird; niece Susan Walters; nephews, Harry and Neil Bird of Calif.; cousins, Rev. Andrew R. Bird; Walter R. Bird of Washington, D.C.; Imogen Preston and John F. Bird of California.

Interment was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Rochester.

A one-month anniversary Mass was offered at Corpus Christi Church at noon on Wednesday, March 15.

A Mass will be celebrated Saturday, April 8, for all friends and acquaintances who sent flowers and cards to the family. The Mass will take place at Corpus Christi Church, 80 Prince St., Rochester, where Mr. Bird frequently attended noon Mass.

— Richard A. Kiley

James V. McKeon, usher at Sacred Heart

Mass of-Christian Burial was celebrated for James V. McKeon at St. Elizabeth Church, Pompano Beach, Fl., on Saturday, Feb. 18, 1989. Mr. McKeon died Feb. 15, 1989, at the age of 74.

Born May 19, 1914, Mr. McKeon was a longtime Sacred Heart Cathedral parishioner. He served as an usher, and was a member of the Notre Dame Retreat League.

Mr. McKeon was a post office employee for 34 years, becoming a supervisor. When he retired, he worked for the Monroe County Courthouse for 10 years. Twelve years ago, he and his wife, Elizabeth M. McKeon, moved to Pompano Beach.

Mr. McKeon is survived by his wife; sons and daughters-in-law James and Nancy McKeon, Patrick and Joyce McKeon, all of Rochester, and Joseph and Beth McKeon of Boca Raton, Fl.; daughter and son-in-law Darlene and James McCulloch of Deerfield Beach, Fl.; 16 grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren; and a sister, Doris Lee of Rochester.

Contributions in Mr. McKeon's memory may be made either to St. Elizabeth's Church, 901 N.E. 33rd St., Pompano Beach, Fl. 33064; or VNA Hospice Unit at North Broward Medical Center, 201 East Sample Rd., Pompano Beach, Fl., 33064.