

# Jo's Dedication

by Patrick M. Johannes, M.D.

It was inevitable that whoever was asked to speak at this morning, that individual would be wholly inadequate to the occasion. But I will try my best.

Many wonderful things have been said and shared about Joanne Asselin: during the course of her illness; through the letting-go process of dying; at her memorial service. And even more has been shared since. But while it is wonderful to reminisce about every aspect of Joanne's life and how that special life affected ours, the purpose of this dedication today is to memorialize one specific part of her life -- that of nurse. She continues to cast a long shadow over our Emergency Department.

When I tried to imagine what Joanne would want this dedication to be about, I couldn't help but think it would be about one thing: excellence in nursing. I believe she would want that the **Joanne Asselin Memorial Nurses Station** be less about remembering her and more about inspiring others to attain what she did. I can think of no better role model to point to when a new, just-out-of-school nurse wanders into our department, wanting to know what it takes to become an exemplary nurse. As I've said before, Jo was a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Florence Nightingale.

There are nurses who do what they do because it is a job. But to Joanne, nursing was not a job - it was a profession. Therefore, this memorial must be about the profession of nursing. Simply put, Jo was the most professional nurse I have ever known.

The definition of a profession goes well beyond that of career or vocation. It is a life calling, a commitment to a set of virtues that set it apart from those of contemporary culture. A true professional aspires to a higher purpose than a simple employee.

So what virtues did Joanne manifest that encompass the profession of nursing? There are probably many, but I can think of six. The following is a collage of quotes-from coworkers who, like I, saw Joanne live out these six virtues every day within the walls of our Emergency Department:

## **Integrity**

Not many people exist in this world today who possess the character and integrity that Joanne did. Joanne was one of the most principled nurses I've ever known. The reason Joanne was special is because of her underlying principles, values and ethics. She was always the voice of reason, easy to talk to and she did the right thing. If I was ever unsure what to do, I would ask myself "what would Joanne do?" and then I knew I would probably make the right decision. She didn't mind saying she disagreed with someone but she did it with style, grace and an explanation.

### **Dedication**

Joanne was extremely dedicated not only to her own, family but to her co-workers whom she referred to as her extended family -- her emergency department. She would usually be first in line volunteering to stay late or come in on a day off when there was a hole in the schedule.

### **Compassion**

She dealt compassionately with all those in need and was guided by a strong sense of discretion which enabled her to understand how to handle challenging cases. Joanne had a soothing effect on her patients and her peers. She was never gushy with her patients but gained their respect by her professional care and genuine concern for their wellbeing.

### **Selflessness**

Joanne was so appreciative of all you did for her. She always thought more of others than of herself and was never judgmental of others. I didn't know her in a personal way, we were not best friends. However, I saw in her something that continues to encourage me. I saw a very strong, independent, caring and selfless woman. (During her illness), she was here at OMH caring for others, when she, herself needed caring for. This, by itself, showed me what kind of woman she really was. Just by seeing her and watching her during her well times and her sickness, leads me to believe that she has left a wonderful legacy for all of us.

### **Encouragement**

She inspired me because she was such a strong person, always looking at the positive. Her positive can-do attitude was infectious. She was enormously proud of the Emergency Department. She had little patience for petty whining and gossip, and encouraged others to help solve problems and make the department better.

### **Mentorship**

She was a natural teacher and I learned so much from her. She moved towards tragedy unflinchingly and without fear or panic, and as a perfectly trained professional, she immediately began delivering needed, critical interventions while at the same time calmly instructing the less experienced nurses around her. Joanne's legacy lives on in all of us through what she taught us, not only as nurses, but as human beings.

And one last quote: "Joanne's life was and is an inspiration to all those who knew and loved her. She was a calming, sincere, joyous friend. She loved direct patient care. She knew her nursing skills would take her anywhere she wanted in the nursing field, but her true love was caring for patients."

I believe Jo's ability to save the lives of her patients was eclipsed only by her ability to influence the lives of her co-workers. May the **Joanne Asselin Memorial Nurses Station** inspire all nurses to live the virtues of the profession of nursing, those of integrity, dedication, compassion, selflessness, encouragement and mentorship.