

Eulogy for Milka Koščak – Prepared by Millie and the grandchildren.

Thank you for joining us this morning. After mass we will be going to Mount Peace Cemetery on Cawthra north of Dundas St., then back to the hall where you are welcome to join us for lunch.

Milka was born August 20, 1925 in Hrusevje, Slovenia. Because the family was very poor, when she was 12 years old, she had to go to the neighboring town to work as an apprentice in a store while completing grade 7 at the same time. In 1943, the store was burnt down and at 18 years old, she went back home. However, in 1945 at the end of WW2, Milka's mother encouraged her to flee to Vetrinje, Austria, along with thousands of other people escaping the shooting and bombing. After 3 weeks in the open field, they were moved to a camp in Lienz, Austria, which is where she met her future husband, Frank. Along with a few other refugees, they decided to move to a camp in Barletta, Italy, where they were married on December 8, 1947.

In the refugee camp, she served food in the officers quarters. Taking left-overs was strictly forbidden. However, she would hide the food and sneak it through the shrubbs to others who had no food. A military superior officer caught her and forbade her to do it again. She told him that she knows what it feels like to be hungry and it would be a sin to throw it out. Being the empathetic person she was, she went on doing it anyway. She was always thinking of others and helping those less fortunate.

In 1948 they emigrated to Canada since Frank's father was already there and he was able to sponsor them. The already turbulent boat ride across the Atlantic was magnified, as Milka was pregnant at that time.

Once in Canada, Milka and Frank embraced their adoptive country. Milka was resourceful, learning English by reading the Toronto Star daily. She was an avid reader throughout her life. Millie would give Milka her John Grisham and Danielle Steel books to read in English, and she would devour them. In the last few years however, it became too much of an effort to read in English so Laurie ordered her Danielle Steele in Slovenian and she read it immediately.

Throughout her life, Milka was up to date with current events. She had read about the creators of Google and couldn't wait to talk to Bobby about them, since she knew he worked "with computers" and he would know all about it.

She followed the Toronto Maple Leafs and could easily carry a conversation about players, wins and losses. She always waited for her son Carl to come home from Leaf games to cheer with him if they won and comfort him when they lost. She always knew the score because she had the game on while mending or doing other chores. If the kids slept over after the game, they'd enjoy Lucky Charms with warm milk for breakfast, and staramama would talk to them about the previous night's game.

Milka was a compassionate caregiver. She took care of her father-in-law when he was sick, and lovingly took care of her husband, Frank, throughout their 66 year marriage, nursing him back to health multiple times. Her nurturing didn't end there.

Animals and people alike were drawn to Milka's calm and supportive personality. When she left Slovenia, she left behind her family and her cat, which waited faithfully at the corner for her return. She looked after injured birds at home and enjoyed hearing the frogs sing to one another at the Slovenian farm. She lovingly fed and talked to all the chipmunks that came to her cottage.

The Slovenian community was of utmost importance to Milka. She was always helping within the community including 20 years volunteering at Dom Lipa. She was also an active member of the Slovenian farm where she spent all her summer weekends with her family and friends. She loved chatting at the balina courts and joining in campfires, where she and her friends would sing songs from their youth. She knew all the words to every song. Our interests became her interests so there was always something to talk about. Even now she still recognized songs by the Beatles, Elvis Presley, and many others, She'd also find a way to relate to the kids, based on her own experiences.

She was a loving/caring pillar of the family. She went to all parent teacher meetings and followed their advice. She was our sounding board when things happened in our life and always knew just the right words to make us feel better. She helped with homework and especially devoted her life to making Carl independent so that he was able to work and eventually retire with a pension. She was always worried what would happen to him if she wasn't here. When Milka couldn't manage to look after herself and Carl at home anymore, it was her decision to move them into Dom Lipa Retirement. It was a huge struggle for her to convince him. Only once he was there, did he slowly adjust. Milka was fiercely supportive of people with special needs, empowering Carl to be the best he could be throughout his life.

When her grandchildren would visit either their cottage at the farm or their home, staramama would make them some caj, and of course, always had fresh-baked pecivo on hand. She always took time for a chat and was an active listener, genuinely interested in what they had to say. Milka was always invested in her family and was up to date on the goings on in their lives. She would always follow up to see how things turned out and kept us all in her prayers to support us. Even when our kids were adults, staramama would always be sure to send them home with custom made doggy bags after a visit.

She treated any friends the grandchildren brought to her cottage or her home as her own, and was quick to offer something homemade. She became everyone's Staramama.

She believed that a shot of jager helped all ailments and would always have some on hand in case someone dropped in.

Her generosity was evident up until her last days. On Thursday evening, her last words to Millie were not to forget to bring more Brandy Beans for staff, because she only had 2 left. All the nurses and personal support workers knew they would be offered a brandy bean chocolate when they came to care for her. She would save all her Kit Kat bingo winnings for her great-grandchildren ready for when they visited. And of course, she always had napolitanke for all!

During Covid, when we couldn't do indoor visits, we would be outside her window talking to her on the phone, while the great grandchildren would run and chase each other in the fresh snow outside her window in the backyard of Dom Lipa. Just last Wednesday, she said how much she enjoyed watching their snow

ball fights, snow angels and other antics. Her face would break out into a huge smile remembering those times.

Her culinary legacy has been left with us, most notably: making klobase, though we have upgraded from the authentic manual meat grinder to an electric one, potica, stuffing for turkey, pasta with buttered bread crumbs, bacon wrapped hot dogs, peanut butter chip cookies, struklje, preserving peaches, making jam and her famous coleslaw which took a couple of hours to make because there were probably eleven or twelve vegetables in it, all meticulously cut by hand. She could make soup out of anything. When asked for a recipe, she would happily share it but would say add a little bit of this or a small spoon of that and inevitably end with “you will know it’s right when you see it” - “saj bos vidla!” Other favourite sayings were: to je za eno figo, pejt se solit - who knew what that meant?

She was a person that stood for good Slovenian grammar, but was one who was able to correct you respectfully if you conjugated incorrectly or stressed the wrong part of a word. She was always kind about it and only wanted to help us learn.

She was a humble soul, devoted to the Church. While in Dom lipa, she went to mass daily, even if she didn’t feel up to it, When Millie told her not to go if she didn’t feel well, she would reply, I couldn’t go in earlier years so I should go now, When she really wasn’t well, the staff would bring communion to her room.

Milka was a strong, selfless and admirable woman. She was loyal and fiercely supportive of those she loved. We have all learned so much from our Mama/Staramama/Milka, and are so blessed to be able to continue her legacy. We love you - pocivaj v miru.