

Valentin Koncan Eulogy

Good morning everyone. My name is Val Končan, I am the eldest of the four siblings, the others being Mojca (or Maria), Klaudia and Tom. On behalf of all of us, I'd like to thank you all for being here. It means everything to us to have you all here to wish our father a final farewell. And I know that he appreciates it too.

My father, or Ata to us, was born in Slovenia in 1932, at the time a part of Yugoslavia. He was second in a family of 13 children, 9 of which are still alive, and all of them living in Slovenia. Life for many people in those years was difficult, and the onset of World War 2 made it worse, so much so that he was forced to drop out of school after grade 3. He grew up like many of his generation, working on a farm and herding cows and sheep into the hills as a young boy. He was eventually trained as a blacksmith, a very respected profession at the time, but one that really didn't pan out in the long run.

In 1957, at the age of 25, he and his brother Pavle hopped over the border into Austria, eventually settled in Germany, working in the coal mines. He managed to find a blacksmithing job in a local factory where he lived. My mother, whom he had courted while in Slovenia followed him to Germany where they married in 1960. Three children were born in the next five years. Germany didn't seem to hold a future for my parents so by 1967, with three of us siblings already in the equation, my parents made the decision to emigrate to Canada. And on July 1 of that year, my parents landed in Canada with a bunch of suitcases, three small children, a little bit of cash and a lot of hope. To this day, I admire his courage in pulling up stakes and settling in a foreign land, not knowing a word of English and only knowing a handful of people in this country. Ata did however know Gospod Kopač, and he had a couple of other contacts that helped in bringing the family to the Alderwood area.

I don't know how many of you remember this, our family first rented the house that is now the Moya Financial Retail office. After a couple of months, we moved next door, occupying the upstairs of the house in the middle of the church parking lot. And a year later, in 1968 my parents managed to scrape together enough financing to purchase a house down on Foch Ave, the same house that is still our homestead today.

In 1972, my father took over as care-taker of the church hall. At that time, the hall was extremely busy, having just been expanded to its current size, and with all the young families of parishioners coming to age, a slew of weddings and banquets began happening every weekend of the year. He stayed as caretaker for 25 years until his retirement in 97. For him, it was a job that he embraced totally.

During those 25 years, Ata got to know just about every Slovenian that existed in the Toronto area, or at least that's how it felt. And based on the number of people that came through last night to pay respects, I'm probably not that far off. Young and old, everyone seems to have a story. Many recalled times when they were causing trouble and were caught by him and quickly disciplined. Others recalled times when he allowed them to sing around the table after a banquet long after everyone else had left.

In addition to his time at the church hall, Ata joined the board of the Slovenian Credit Union, initially as a member of the credit committee, and then when the bylaws were changed, as a full-fledged director. Ata served as a director for 18 years, proving that a lack of formal education doesn't automatically disqualify you from participating on something that might otherwise seem out of reach.

Ata had a good long life. He was an honest man, generous, hard working, faithful and always lent a hand to anyone who needed his help. He was also a critical man and if he didn't agree with you, he would let you know.

As a father he was a disciplinarian, but also had a gentle side. He loved to laugh, he had a great sense of humour and shared it with us often. And he loved music, especially the spontaneous singing that usually took place at the end of a banquet.

He loved his family and was proud of his kids. He took great joy in being with his grandchildren and great grandchildren.

When mama got sick, he stepped up and took care of her tenderly. She died in 2016, after which he lived alone in the house on Foch Ave.

More than anything, he loved spending time at the Slovensko Letovišče, and the cottage he built back in the early 70s was probably his favorite place in all of Canada. After retirement, he spent a lot of time at the Letovišče, often helping out on whatever project was happening or relaxing in the pool.

He also loved going to mass, doing the readings and was probably the oldest alter server this parish ever had. He enjoyed fishing and visiting friends. There were a few visits to Slovenia where he would visit his numerous siblings and relatives. And he loved to host them when they visited here, taking them on long road trips through Baragova Dežela and other exotic places.

In 2018, Ata suffered a stroke a few days before his 86th birthday. He spent a couple of months in the hospital but the effects of the stroke were permanent. While he managed to live independently for a short while, he suffered a setback in August of that year and it was clear he couldn't live alone anymore. The Dom Lipa Retirement wing had openings, and he was agreeable to moving there. And when space was available for him on the Long Term Care side, he was moved there so that he had access to 24 hour care.

His final years at Dom Lipa were difficult for him. He could not walk and was confined to a wheelchair. Losing his independence was especially hard. But he really lit up when he got visitors or spoke with relatives.

We'd like to give a special shout out to the staff at Dom Lipa who were always there for him and the other residents. Despite everything that has happened in recent years, Dom Lipa has remained a vibrant community for the elderly. I would say this, if you have a loved one or have an older friend living at Dom Lipa, make the effort to go and see them. You'll brighten up their day, you'll be their hero.

Ata, we hope your final journey was beautiful. We are grateful for the years we shared with you. May God wrap his loving arms around you and give you eternal rest in heaven. You will be in our hearts forever. Z Bogom.