

7/27/13

~~Dear Mayor Holic,~~
Fran's daughter Shari writes: ' "

When I was young, I always thought it would be my father's coattails that I would be riding as I grew into adulthood. I would have never guessed that it would be my legacy to follow my mother, Fran Valencic, in many ways. "

The Valencic Family

~~Our family~~ ^{they} has resided in Venice since 1982. When ~~we~~ ^{they} first moved from Ohio to Florida, ~~we~~ ^{they} lived in Englewood for one year. ~~The friendships I had made at Epiphany School prompted my mom to seek a home in Venice after my parents' divorce in April, 1982. She chose a tranquil, lakefront lot on Waterside Lane in Pinebrook South. She loved the views of the wildlife and sunsets over the littoral lake, and as she became an empty-nester, made many friends with whom she is still close in the neighborhood. Chief among these are Ron Grens, our across-the-street neighbor who was her #1 spider-killer; and Senator Nancy Detert.~~

Fran

~~My mother~~ returned to college in 1980, after a 20-year hiatus after graduating from Marymount High School in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1960, ~~as she anticipated the end of her marriage.~~ She attended Lorain County Community College in Lorain, Ohio, and is still in close touch with her "favorite teacher ever" from there, Howard Ellis. After moving to Florida, she completed her associate's degree from "the Brickyard," Manatee Junior College, and then fulfilled her lifelong dream of becoming a teacher at the age of 42 as a graduate of the University of South Florida.

Fran's

~~My mother's~~ foundation of her community pillar is surely her role as a veteran teacher in the area. She taught at North Port Glenallen Elementary School from 1984-1990, and then helped open the "new" Taylor Ranch School during the 1990-91 school year. Her 20 years of dedication to area school children is still recognized on almost a daily basis here in Venice, as scores of her former students, mostly 5th graders, continue to supply her with hugs, family happenings, and job successes. She has been most proud of former students who have, in turn, become teachers themselves, and credit their experiences in her classroom as the inspiration for their career choices. ~~My mom~~ ^{FRAN} was named Taylor Ranch School's Teacher of the Year, the Venice-Nokomis Rotary's Teacher of the Year, Sarasota County Social Studies Teacher of the Year, and the Venice Gondolier's "Best Teacher" award during her tenure at Taylor Ranch. In addition to these more formal accolades, she continues to have journals, scrapbooks, and boxes of notes of appreciation from her former students and their families. One of her prized possessions is ^a baseball that her entire 5th grade class signed for her one year. That year, she earned "the game ball" from them.

Fran's

Another layer of ~~my mother's~~ community pillar is her role as a community writer. My mother has been the Venice Gondolier Sun's social columnist for over 20 years. Her work began as an

"Upbeat in Venice" weekly column, and has since evolved into the most-read page of Wednesday's newspaper edition. Her hallmark has become her recognition of a fellow community member as a "Special Person" of the week. There is virtually no where you can accompany ^{FRAN} my mother within our city where she is not met with warm appreciation and praise from those involved with community charities, civic organizations, church affiliates, art and music supporters, and, of course, teachers and their students, about whom she was written in the newspaper. She is a recipient of the Venice Symphony's "Muse" award for her support and feature of their group through her work.

^{FRAN'S} My mother's penchant for writing has extended into her volunteerism with Venice's Senior Friendship Center, a pursuit which she dearly loves every Monday. She has taught a life writing course for many years at the Center, and is always eager to share stories of her students ...some of whom are nearly centegenarians! ... and the words which paint their lives' events. ~~She continues to correspond with many of these students when they venture back north for the summer months.~~

There is likely no more school-spirited Venetian than ^{FRAN} my mother, and her long-time following of many of Venice High School's sports' programs ... especially baseball and volleyball ... certainly adds some more décor to her community pillar. ^{FRAN} My mom has been a faithful follower of both teams for over 20 years. She prides herself at having been at every state championship game in which the high school has been involved. ~~She has developed close relationships with most of the coaches and players over the years,~~ and always comes to sporting events dressed in Venice Indian green and white. My mother's devotion to sports is genuine, as most who know her well also know that she is a die-hard Cleveland Indians, Cleveland Browns, and Tampa Bay Rays fan as well. She was named the "Senior Prom Queen" at a Tampa Bay Rays game for two years in a row, ~~and is never shy at appearing on the jumbotron at Tropicana Field. She was also the President of Venice's Browns Backers Club for many years.~~

With irony that is only known to those who have fought the battle, ^{Fran's} my mother's greatest influence in the Venice Community, to date, certainly has been her amazing fortitude and matter-of-factness in dealing with cancer. It is to this end that her stature as a Pillar of the Community will undoubtedly leave its most vivid legacy. ^{Fran} My mom was diagnosed with uterine cancer in 1999. Her very long and tumultuous journey with the disease, which included rendezvouses with medication, radiation, and chemotherapy at many junctures, met its greatest challenge in 2009, when she made the very brave decision to have a radical amputation of her left arm and shoulder to stop a hellaciously fast-growing tumor that was invading her ribcage. When ^{Suzi} I meet people who inquire about ^{my} mother, they inevitably will offer their well wishes and tell ~~me~~ that "I must be such a huge help to her." My reply to them is always the same: I am no help to my mother. For the 4.5 years since her amputation, I think my mother has, perhaps, asked me to open a bottle of wine once and to change a battery in her fire alarm. That's it. It has been dumbfounding for me, our family, and our community to watch

what she has proved capable of someone who is missing an entire side of her body. She drives, cleans, irons, writes, types, takes photos, travels, cooks, bakes, wraps gifts, paints, and does absolutely everything that you could imagine a two-handed person performing ... and actually, my guess is with probably greater dexterity. She tells me that the only things she has not been able to figure out how to do yet is to tie a shoe and paint her fingernails ... but she also tells me she'll figure that out, too.

~~My mother~~ ^{Fran} is especially recognizable, now, within our community. We have informally concluded that she must be the only one-armed woman in Venice. She wears her experiences with cancer ... the good, the bad, and the ugly ... on her sleeve, and is always willing to share her story with those who ask; and even with those who just stare. She is especially awesome at helping young children ... ever the teacher ... to understand why she only has one arm. She has been an active participant in area Relay for Life events, and this year was especially proud that her oldest granddaughter, Tali, was at the event working for Venice High School's Key Club. It is always a tearful moment to watch ~~my mother~~ ^{Fran} during the Relay's "Survivor" Walk; but then again, it is really a joyful moment, too. ~~My mother~~ ^{Fran} has been well-recognized and honored for her bravery throughout her journey with cancer, and was especially gratified to receive the American Cancer Society's "Courage" Award several years ago.

Shortly after her amputation, with a smile as she struggled to relearn how to do basic things such as shampooing her hair or changing a toilet paper roll, she was having a discussion with her youngest granddaughter, Mariska, about the pros and cons of having one arm ... one hand ... and only five fingers. As Mariska pitched in to help her perform a task, she told my mother, "Well, with me you have three hands. And three hands are better than two."

Whether ~~my mother~~ ^{Fran} has had two hands, one, or a number of hands and arms around her as she is genuinely loved throughout our community, it is clearly evident that she is most deserving to be named as one of Venice's "Pillars of the Community." ~~Thank you for considering her for this honor.~~

Respectfully submitted,



Shari Valencic, Ed.D.

~~Fran's daughter~~