Tribute to Barbara Link

On November 1, 2003 (the Feast of All Saints and All Souls), the Law School family lost one of its dearest members. Barbara Ann Link, wife of Dean Emeritus David T. Link ’58, ’61 J.D., died peacefully at her home in South Bend, surrounded by her loving family, after a courageous fight against ovarian cancer.

Barbara was born on September 8, 1937, in Sandusky, Ohio. On July 12, 1958, she married Dave Link, her high school sweetheart. Their 45-year marriage has been a lifelong testament to friendship, devotion, and faith, and an inspiration to friends and family alike. She was a loving and devoted mother to her four children—David, Mary, Maureen, and Teran.

After the birth of her fourth child, Barbara resumed her education and was one of the first female graduates of the University of Notre Dame, receiving her degree in anthropology summa cum laude in 1975.

Barbara lived an amazing life full of faith and service to the church community. She was very active in her parish—Little Flower, in South Bend—and served the University and Law School communities as well. She was credited with being the driving force behind her husband Dave’s work, especially at the South Bend Center for the Homeless.

Here, we pay tribute to this amazing woman by sharing some thoughts and reflections from her family.

When considering what to say today, three things dominated my thoughts about Mom. The first was “celebration.” Celebration, because this world and each of us that she has touched is better because of her. I think it is important not to let any of the grief we feel mask the wondrous gift that God provided to us every day for 66 years. And when we think of my Mom, truly think of who she was, it is impossible for those thoughts to be anything but happy and the gift renewed.

Second, I thought of “goodness”—because Mom was simply a very good person. She exemplified goodness in friendship and in charity, and her goodness was an inspiration. Over the past few days, as people have called or visited, I have been struck by the number of extraordinary friendships my Mom made. They were extraordinary because they were built on the strongest of things: faith, trust, admiration and, above all, very sincere love. It is wonderful to see that the simple goodness of a modest woman has become greatness through the love of her friends.

She had goodness in her charity. She gave of herself: not out of duty or obligation, but because that was her nature and her heart. I have never known anyone who approached issues with such sincerity or individuals with such compassion. The lesson for us in her charity is shown by the fact that so many that she cared for became her friends—and cared for her right back in her time of struggles. And she gave quietly. My Dad tells me that she contributed to over 300 charities last year. But the most remarkable works of charity were those she gave with her time, her hands, and her heart.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Mom’s goodness to me personally was the inspiration she provided. When asked to describe my heroes, I have been blessed to be able to say, with all candor and sincerity, that I have never had to look farther than my mother and my father for heroes. When I look for shining examples of success, I look to my parents first, for they have helped me to define success beyond riches and position. When I look for inspiration in my marriage, I also don’t have to look any farther than my parents, who were high school sweethearts whose love only grew stronger as my mother’s
struggles became greater. As a parent, I continue to be amazed by the
trust and courage Mom and Dad gave to my sisters and me while we
were growing up. Without Mom, I would never have understood the
courage that loves takes.

Mom’s inspiration was strongest, however, in her faith. She had
the rare gift of believing in the teachings of her faith so deeply that
she had the strength to live by them. In the last week, our family has
been given a gift few families get. We were given time together so that
my mother was able to tell each of us that she was ready for Heaven
and we were able to tell her that we were happy for her. And she was
happy. I spoke to her about her faith and she was able to tell me of the
comfort it gave her—the comfort she had from knowing, and believing
more confidently than most of us will ever believe, that this week for
her was not the end of a journey, but truly the beginning of a new and
glorious one. Of all her inspirations, I hope this is the one I can be
brave enough to take to heart.

Finally, as I thought about Mom, I thought about family and
friends. As I look at my father and my sisters, sons, nieces, and
nephews, I think to myself, “Mom, you did pretty well.” Over the past
two days, so many of my Mom’s friends have said such kind things.
I have been dazzled by the impact Mom had on the people around
her, on her church, and on her community. When my sisters and I
were trying to find readings for today that helped to share how we felt
about my Mom, Teran and I talked about the story of Jesus and the
loaves and fishes and I thought how Mom was able in her life to take
just a little bit of love and share it with those around her. And that love
multiplied and multiplied until we all had our fill.

We loved her and will miss her. But we will always have the
inspiration of her goodness and the strength of her family and friends
to carry us on. And because of these gifts, although none of us wanted
to gather here today, today really is a celebration. Thank you, Mom,
and thanks to all of you who have been a part of her life.