

The First Noël: Remembering Noël Pedrotty

Noël Pedrotty was the first “Noël” I ever knew. Her name evokes images of music, angels, and joy. Noël lived up to that lovely name. She had a halo of blonde hair, sparkling blue eyes, and a winning smile. Oh, and that laugh that was as musical as a wind chime!

The first time we met in small group, Noël informed us that there were those two dotty things over the e in her name (called diaeresis, a word that is decidedly not lovely) in the nicest way, and I concluded that this was a woman who knew who she was and owned it.

The *Women Writing* circle is an express lane to friendship, and I felt instantly connected to Noël. I didn’t know her when she was a little girl at Camp Laughing Waters Girl Scout Camp. I wasn’t aware that she had attended St. Helena’s Grade School in Philadelphia. In fact, I knew almost none of the trivia one usually catalogues in forging a friendship. Through her writing, though, I knew her essential self: her values; her priorities; the source of her light.

When we met, she had just returned from a trip to Italy with a friend. She was bursting with impressions and memories and love for the Latin sun. Her writing about her trip was a sensory cornucopia, and her words fairly jumped off the page.

As Christmas approaches, I remember a piece she wrote about a man, down on his luck, who went to the jeweler’s to look at the necklace he had put on layaway for his wife. After the man left the store, Noel questioned the jeweler and learned that the gentlemen would never be able to complete his payments in time for Christmas. Noël paid for the piece, a quiet act of compassion.

The Tuesday morning writers will never forget Noël’s Greenbook. She wrote about about a trip to Spain to nanny decades ago and her youthful fling with a swarthy Spaniard. The circle is a confidential space, so I won’t name names, but some of the women were swooning!

Noël was passionate about her work at Healthy Moms and Babes. She loved her own daughters, Brianna and Erin, and had empathy for mothers who struggle to take care of themselves and their babies.

Noël taught us how to live and how to die; I think she would say those two things are the same. When I expressed my concerns about her deteriorating health, she said, “This is my journey. Cancer will win.” She said this with no self-pity, no

fear. She said it with acceptance of the cards she was dealt. In the last couple months of her life, I sent flowers, cards, emails, and Facebook messages, but I didn't receive any response for a long time. Finally, Noël sent this message: "I am praying for you and your family." It was such a stunning response. She was praying for *me*? Wasn't that what I was supposed to say to *her*? I puzzled over her words for days, and then I got it. We're all on life's journey with an inevitable end, and she was saying that everyone has struggles and questions along the way. She had faith in God, and she lived her life true to her convictions.

Noël was a gift to me. I would not have met her had it not been for *Women Writing for (a) Change*. At the wake, Noel's daughters and friends told me how much Noël loved Women Writing. And we loved her.

Women come here to write, but they stay for the community. This is a place where amazing women gather and connect through their words. Noël was a gift to Women Writing for (a) Change.

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