



January (2020 #01)

Special Tribute to Marjorie Paisley

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory and in celebration of the life of Marjorie Doreen Paisley, and more specifically her dedication to the people and projects associated with Rayjon Share Care – but of course, with Marj it was all about the people.

As one of her friends remarked, “I was taken aback and saddened by her sudden passing. She was one of those resilient people who you never thought of as being too old.”

Marjorie was one of 26 participants on Rayjon’s first Awareness Trip to Haiti in January 1986 which was led by Ray Wyrzykowski and John Barnfield. The group met many times prior to the trip and they were advised of the “dress code”: no shorts for the men; cotton skirts and blouses with sleeves, and no slacks for the ladies. Marj’s solution was “Let’s go to Goodwill.”

During the trip she was always quick to respond to a situation. When the team visited a children’s hospital she was the first one asking, what do we need to do when we go home? - always working out in her mind what the next thing to do had to be. Upon her return to Sarnia she and others from trip started gathering items that the hospital needed: medications, first aid supplies, baby cereal and formula, non-disposable diapers, clothing, shoes, school supplies, or whatever to be collected, packaged and sent to Haiti from the UPS Store in Port Huron. She also kept busy with all the fundraising efforts, such as the vanilla sales project.



Something about that first trip had obviously resonated with Marjorie because she went on a work group trip the very next year to Brother Marcel's boys home just outside Cap-Haitien. One unforgettable story about that trip was that Marj's luggage didn't arrive at Port-au-Prince airport. She ended up borrowing clothes from other trip members, including Maggy Barnfield. She wore a wrap-around skirt of Maggy's all week! It was during that trip to Cap-Haitien that Marj established a long-lasting and very special relationship with Sr Rosemary Fry and the work she was involved in.

Marjorie continued to participate on workgroup trips to Haiti. The teams always depended on Marj's nursing skills on their trips. She was in charge of the first aid kit. After every trip Marj would restock the first aid kit to refill her favourite medication, Pepto-Bismol.



In addition to her devotion to the clinical work and care provided by the team, one other thing that stood out about Marj was her devotion to commemorating Remembrance Day. Marj's husband Jim was a WWII veteran serving with the First Hussars, 2nd Armoured Brigade. Many of the Rayjon trips took place in November. As a result, Marj was often not home to recognize Remembrance Day in Canada, and so she would lead a Remembrance Day service for her Rayjon travelling companions and provide poppies for everyone on the team to wear. On November 11, at 11:00 am, we stopped whatever activity we were engaged in to pay tribute to those who served in the military. Often these ceremonies included members of our host team and raised awareness with them about Canada's war history. This past November, the eyeglass team was in the Dominican Republic on November 11. Theresa van Koeverden took up the torch from Marj and led the group in a Remembrance Day service.



Marj and Jim owned a cottage North of Goderich on the shores of Lake Huron. Occasionally, Marj would invite her Rayjon travelling companions to the cottage to reflect on our trip experiences. Both Marj and Jim were avid readers and enjoyed the solitude of the cottage to immerse themselves in their favourite pasttime.

She remained a dedicated member of the eyeglass program and never turned down an opportunity to participate. Records show that Marj was on a total of 48 Rayjon trips – many of which were with this group of volunteers. Many of the eyeglass clinic trips were to Latin American countries, so Marj took it upon herself to learn to speak Spanish (at an early age she had lived in S. America for a few years). Her Spanish speaking skills were put to good use in her role for testing patients near vision. She also put those skills to use back here in Sarnia – for example, she provided Spanish lessons to the 1996 March break DR Awareness Trip group during a series of pre-trip meetings.

On some trips the eyeglass team would find some type of adventuresome activity to do in their off time. Marj always took part: whether it was climbing to the rim of a live volcano in Guatemala, white water rafting in Belize, or sailing the rolling seas to the Galapagos islands - truly a daring, adventurous, high spirited woman.

Marj was a bit of a risk taker in some regards. For example, she would fly by herself to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, then travel 6 hours over-land to visit her good friend Sister Rosemary in Cap Haitian. Thankfully, she eventually found a mission flight that flew from Florida directly to Cap Haitian.

Marj always brought a set of dice on every Rayjon trip and led the team in a game she called “Bones”, after the evening meal. Marj earned a reputation for allegedly inventing or changing the rules in her favour.

Marjorie was also known for her “signature hat”, a hand-crocheted granny square cap that she wore on every trip she made to Haiti.



The following story was shared by a member of the eyeglass team about one adventure Marj had during her time in Belize.

On that particular clinic a small group from the team decided to go river cave tube rafting at a location outside of Belize City on one of their R&R days. At the time, all they knew about the tube rafting excursion was that they would be floating down a river, which at various points along its course would take them through a series of caves. Only four were game to give it a try and Marj was one of them.

They departed at 7 a.m. for the approximate two-hour drive to the location. Upon arrival, they learned that in order to float down river they first would have to hike up river with their gear, which included a helmet equipped with a miner's light, a life jacket and an inflated truck tire inner tube. It was a tough climb made more challenging by the fact that at one point they had to traverse the river on foot to the opposite side to reach the kick-off point.

The kick off location turned out to be a rocky outcrop where the water was shallow enough to stand in and the current somewhat reduced. The guide explained that they had to make a chain of 5 tubers with him at the front and in that formation they would travel down river under his guidance. Sounded simple enough. What they didn't know at the time was that, due to heavy rains, the river tube rafting had actually been shut down the day before due to high water in the caves. With the higher water and swifter current, just standing up was difficult let alone maneuvering an inner tube and trying to get on top of it. With the guide's help and between tip overs and bouts of laughter they managed to get seated in their tubes with their feet locked under the arm pits of the occupant of the tube ahead. Off they went.

Initially things worked well and once inside the first cave it was very captivating and peaceful. As one might imagine, trying to keep in a straight chain, while floating on inner tubes with virtually no navigational properties in swift current conditions, is next to impossible and soon they were looping around and around each other, traveling backwards at times and occasionally bouncing off the cave walls. Trying to keep their speed down was impossible and as they exited the last cave their chain came undone and Marj tipped out of her tube.

There was Marj floating downstream separated from her tube, the tour guide in hot pursuit of her and the tube and the rest of the group still connected and trying to stop from going down stream alone by desperately grasping thick rope-like vines hanging from the trees along the bank. It should have been a scary situation but all everyone could do was laugh uncontrollably watching the tour guide rescue Marj and repeatedly try to get her back on her tube, while shouting "Stand up mum, stand up mum."

Obviously they survived the adventure and had many good laughs for the rest of the trip and every time they met thereafter about this and several other memorable moments on that excursion. By the way that Belize trip was in 2005 and Marj was a novice 75 year old river cave tube rafter!



Marjorie (right) with Sheila Tiernay: This picture is from the 2005 eyeglass clinic in Belize. It was raining in the morning on the way to the eyeglass clinic so Marj made a hat out of a plastic bag, so she could keep her hair dry.

Marjorie's last Rayjon trip was an eyeglass trip to Guatemala in November 2018. She was 88 years old. Her job with that clinic was performing short range vision testing. It was very helpful that she spoke enough Spanish to get by without a translator. Everyone on the team was amazed at Marjorie's resilience for her age; each of them saying or thinking, "I hope I'm able to travel like Marj at 88."

Marjorie passed away at home on Thursday November 7, 2019 at the age of 89 years. Marjorie, we miss your smiles. your laughter, your audaciousness, and your fortitude. *Requiescat in pace.*

And for most folks, that would be it – but, because of who she was it seems only fitting to afford Marjorie the honour of the last word – from a reflection she wrote in 1996: *The roller coaster of emotions never leaves and the determination to do what I can never really stops. On every trip I learn so much more about Haiti and her people and I thank God for giving me a wonderful Rayjon family – I love you all.*

(Grateful acknowledgements go out to Bob Topliffe, John Tiernay, Marilyn Palmer, Jean Knight, and John Barnfield for their contributions to these memories of Marjorie.)

REMEMBERING THE PAST:

This year, 2020, is the 10th anniversary of the Haiti earthquake. We remember. Please visit our tribute at <https://rayjon.org/remembering-the-2010-haiti-earthquake/>

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