



John Everett Phipps

October 16, 1944 - July 23, 2018

PHIPPS- On July 23, 2018, John Everett Phipps, attended by his wife and children, died of acute gastritis after two and a half weeks in the hospital. He was seventy-three years old.

A memorial service will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday August 11, 2018, at Plainfield Christian Church, 7255 Pine Island Drive NE, Comstock Park, Michigan 49321.

The family does not wish to receive flowers, and suggests that those who would like to make a memorial gift donate to the Plainfield Christian Church to benefit the music ministry, to which John dedicated eighteen years of service as worship leader and choir director, or to the American Kidney Foundation, or to the Lemmen-Holton Cancer Pavilion.

John Everett Phipps was born on October 16, 1944, in Kendallville, Indiana. His father, Donald Phipps, was a Church of Christ minister who served a series of congregations around the northern part of the country. As a result, and suiting his sense of adventure, John grew up in many places, including Algonac, Michigan; Buffalo, New York; Dayton, Ohio; Green Bay, Wisconsin; Long Island, New York; and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. During his high school years, he attended Coldwater High School in Coldwater, Michigan, where his interest in journalism and photography began. He graduated in 1962.

John met his wife, Melanie Lee From, at Coldwater High School, quietly admiring her from his assigned spot next to her in the Balladiers choral ensemble. One day, the ensemble, discussing the recent divorce of Hollywood couple Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher, teasingly suggested that the director get one too, since it seemed to have become the fashionable thing to do. John turned to Melanie and said, "Wanna get a divorce?" and Melanie responded, "Sure, why not?" and the ice was broken. John and Melanie married on August 4, 1963, in the First Baptist Church in Coldwater. John's father officiated.

John began his journalistic career after high school when he landed a job at the Coldwater Daily Reporter. When asked during his interview whether he could type, he said yes, and

then spent the weekend learning how. His first duties included writing news stories and taking photos of the scenes of automobile crashes and of newborn babies in the Coldwater hospital, including his first child. He later worked as a sportswriter for the Midland Daily News, leaving that paper when his surviving an automobile crash convinced him that God wanted him in the ministry. He served as the minister of the St. Johns Church of Christ for two years, after which he returned to journalism, working for a quick succession of small weeklies around Michigan before landing a job as a humor columnist and features writer for the Saginaw News. After a handful of years there, during which he also enjoyed reviewing symphony orchestra concerts and won awards for his column writing, he transferred to the Grand Rapids Press, where he worked the rest of his career as a copyeditor of the Flair section.

John pursued a wide variety of interests and activities over the years, including photography, camping, speedskating, racquetball, acting, church-league softball, cycling, scriptwriting for training videos, graphic art, songwriting, freelance book editing, and kayaking. He worked briefly as a radio deejay for WWRM "Warm Friendly 107" in Gaylord, using the handle John Alexander, and he was involved in community events in Saginaw, including stints emceeding the annual Chesaning Showboat, and the Miss Saginaw County pageant, and playing the role of Teddy in the play Arsenic and Old Lace with Saginaw's Pit and Balcony Theater. He had an entrepreneurial spirit and was always brainstorming ideas for freelance income, though he never did get around to producing his calendar for procrastinators.

John had a keen sense of humor and a ready laugh and enjoyed wordplay. He loved "the big water," as he called the Great Lakes, and he loved northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. He was convinced that the family car always ran happily and more smoothly when it was pointed north. On autumn outings, while everyone in the family bundled up in jackets and hoodies and jeans, John was most comfortable in a T-shirt and shorts.

Of all John's interests, his most abiding were photography, cycling, and music. He photographically recorded every family gathering, documented his grandkids' sports and music performances, loved photographing natural scenery, especially of the Great Lakes, and after retirement began a line of greeting cards using his photos and text, which he sold locally.

John was a lifelong cyclist, beginning with his high school bike rides from Coldwater to the From family farm to visit Melanie. In his middle years, he enjoyed riding from Grand Rapids to the lakeshore, where Melanie would pick him up for the return trip. Though he

was less able to ride in his late sixties and early seventies, he continued to get out on his bike when he could.

John's love of music began as a boy singing in church, and developed in high school as a member of the choir and as a cast member in summer stock musicals. As a young man, he taught himself to play guitar. Throughout his adult years, he served the church through music in various roles, including as a song leader, a soloist, and a choir director. For a time in the late seventies and early eighties, he was well-known in parts of the statewide network of Churches of Christ/Christian Churches for his special brand of songwriting, which combined humor and a folksy/jazzy/country guitar style to make a serious point. Among his songs were "The Aardvark Song," "Nothin' Rhymes with Orange," "Spoons," and "The Geriatric Stomp." He loved to include audiences in his performances, and he wrote some of his songs with audience participation in mind. In addition to his music ministry, he served the church by teaching Sunday school classes while his children were of school age.

John's greatest interest, though, was other people. He loved to talk and was always curious about other people's interests, regardless of how far afield they were from his own. While conversing with him, it wasn't unusual to feel a little as though you were the subject of a feature story he was writing, such was his engagement with others. His children remember him as always being the last to leave any gathering because he was still talking. Often conversations with John didn't really get started until you were on your way out the door.

In retirement, John looked for additional ways to serve people, volunteering to deliver food for Meals on Wheels, occasionally performing for seniors groups, and reading books for the blind, even while undergoing his own chemotherapy treatments.

Ever positive, John was a caretaker and a provider and an encourager. He gave steadfast and loving support to his wife, he was proud of his children and their families and their accomplishments, and he loved to spend time with his grandchildren. Even in his last days in the hospital, he was concerned more about others than himself and was continually introducing the nurses to his family and telling them all about them. He remained in good spirits and retained his characteristic optimism and sense of humor until the end. Though he regretted leaving Melanie, he was prepared to enter eternity. He was a kind and upbeat person who was well-liked by everyone who knew him.

John was preceded in death by his parents, Donald and Bonnie Phipps, by his father- and mother-in-law, Wesley and Alvaretta From, and by Roger King and Len Harrington,

husbands of sisters-in-law. He is survived by his wife of nearly fifty-five years, Melanie, brother David (Amy) Phipps, sister-in-law Karlene King, sister-in-law Judy Harrington, brother-in-law LaMar (Linda) From, brother-in-law Marc From and Teresa Anderson From, and sister-in-law Gina (Steve) Allender; by his children, Brian (JoAnna) Phipps, Aaron (Sharon) Phipps, Jesse (Tonya May) Phipps, and Amber (Tom) Williams; by his grandchildren, Garrett (Racheall) Phipps, Elliot Phipps, Emily Phipps, Chloe Williams, Cameron Williams, Everett Phipps, and Brendan Phipps; and by numerous nieces and nephews. To share a photo, memory, and sign the family's online guest book please visit www.stegengafuneralchapel.com

Comments



“ Though I worked with John only a short time when he joined the Saginaw News, I’ve thought of him often since then. He was a sweet, kind man. In a cynical, disgruntled newsroom, he stood out as a calm and gentle presence.

John Kroll - August 09, 2018 at 09:41 AM



“ Melanie and family, So very sadden to learn of John's passing. He was an amazing person. We were so glad to be able to call him family. Please accept our deepest sympathy as he will be so missed.

Elaine Wahtola - July 31, 2018 at 11:02 AM



“ Sorry to hear of his passing..what a very good, genuine man! He will be missed!

Mandy - July 30, 2018 at 10:48 AM



“ When John was the music and choir director at Kentwood Christian Church in the 1980's and 1990's, there were over (60) choir members who looked forward to rehearsals every Wednesday. John had a way to make the rehearsals fun and humorous. In early August he began his weekly announcements to recruit choir members to begin rehearsals in September. The content and deliveries were typically creative and humorous. John enlarged his musical role at KCC by preparing and presenting cantatas at Christmas and Easter. My favorite song was sung by John and a few other male choir members. It was a bouncy Jewish ballad which John and the others belted out with great enthusiasm. We missed John in a big way when God led him to Plainfield Christian Church to share his talents.
-mark etheridge-

Mark Etheridge - July 30, 2018 at 08:14 AM



“ It’s always with mixed feelings to see a Christian pass into eternity, happy for them, but sad for those left behind, dealing with the pain of loss. John lived a vibrant, and full life, and his love for the Lord was evident in everything he did. I met John when I came to Plainfield Christian Church, 17 years ago. I immediately, and happily joined his choir. One of my fondest memories was when the trio I sang in (Tapestry) asked John to accompany us on a song that required him to just snap his fingers. Tapestry did mostly a Capella music, and this particular song only had fingers snapping to

keep the slightly bluesy beat. John graciously agreed. So there we were, Chuck, Linda and I singing, John sitting on his stool next to us, snapping his fingers into a microphone, black shirt and pants, looking very much like a beatnik! Something we all laughed about, he so loved to laugh, and it was infectious. It was endearing, and we loved that he agreed to add that dimension to our song. He was like that. He loved being involved in any way he could when it came to music. I have many fond memories of John, and know that he will be greatly missed by all who knew him. My prayers and condolences to his family.

Sandi Quinn - July 28, 2018 at 06:25 PM



“ Some of my family’s sweetest memories of John (and Melanie) are being neighbors to a very precious couple! We all loved John and will miss him!

Warren and Shelley Hill - July 27, 2018 at 09:51 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Shirley Maybrey - July 27, 2018 at 02:31 PM



“ I first remember John when I was a teenager. He and Melanie came to the Charlotte Church of Christ where I attended. He was our first youth minister. He taught us some cool songs, and I loved that he played guitar. I was a guitar student myself. We lost touch with John and Melanie over the years, but were reunited again in 1992 when we (Jim and I) moved from Owosso to Grand Rapids. We lived in Kentwood, so attended Kentwood Christian Church where John served as choir director (no surprise). We immediately joined choir. Oh, that 60+ voice choir was indescribable under his direction.

John has been an inspiration to us and so many. One thing that I remember about John is that when a mistake was made, he took the blame....even if it wasn't his error. His humble nature was beyond compare. I also loved his love of music. Being in his choirs was a blessing for me. I could see that music was his life (after God). I saw it bring him to tears. I saw it make him laugh, uncontrollably. He was a special man on so many levels that it's impossible to mention them all. He will live on in his children and in the hearts of all those that knew him.

Happy heavenly choir directing, John!!

Linda Wilson - July 27, 2018 at 12:17 PM



“ Words cannot express our grief and condolences for you all. Know that you are in our prayers. You are loved!

Jim and Linda Wilson - July 27, 2018 at 12:43 PM



“ John was a musical mountain, and I was blessed with grazing the meadows of his slopes. In his choir at PCC for 17 years, I was doubly blessed to have played our hymns next to him for over the past 9 years on drums, bass, and finally guitar, trading lines and blending my electric with his acoustic with which we achieved a workable balance. I will greatly miss his warm smiles and acceptance of me, unworthy to be on stage with such a man as he was. Being a writer, he proof-read a book I have written on the history of baptism, and he gave me some very sage advice which I continue to heed as I edit. The last time I saw my friend was at a quartet rehearsal, the piece a bit complex. I had always hoped to join the guys to sing a hymn, and finally had a challenging invite to unite in praises with them sometime in August...singing with John on this plain was not meant to be though, and I look forward to the day when I can sing finally with my mentor in Heaven, a new song that will last evermore. May God rest your soul firmly in the arms of Jesus John. You changed my life, and I'll never forget you.

Henry - July 31, 2018 at 07:45 AM