

(Biography given by Rev. Dawn King, Pastor, First United Methodist Church, 2116 Sierra Ave., Fontana, CA 92335, at Bobbie's funeral, May 8, 2006)

## Verna Mable (Bobbie) Elliott

June 20, 1915 – May 2, 2006

Verna Mable Graunke was born on June 20, 1915, in Kenmore, Ohio, before it was known as Akron. She was the daughter of Harry William and Lila May Graunke. Verna's father, Harry, was a Methodist minister in the time when the Methodist bishops moved pastors from church-to-church as often as every one or two years. So, Verna and her two sisters and one brother, like so many "preacher's kids," grew up moving from church-to-church and city-to-city. After Kenmore, the family lived in Cleveland and then in Des Moines, Iowa. In 1921 they moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, and it was there that Verna was graduated from high school in 1933. Verna had two sisters, Lucille and Merle, and one brother, Lloyd, who have all preceded her in death.

Verna was accepted into the prestigious Anker Hospital School of Nursing. In those days each school had its own cap, folded and decorated in a unique way. Upon her graduation in 1937, Verna knew she had received excellent training, and she always wore her Anker cap with pride as she entered into her vocation of nursing. Verna's two sisters both became nurses, also, and her brother pursued a career in education, retiring as the superintendent of the school for the deaf in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Verna moved to California in 1938 and to Fontana in 1952. She went to work at the fast-developing Kaiser Hospital where she stayed until her retirement in 1977 as Nursing Supervisor for Clinics. Around the hospital Verna was known as a tough, but fair, supervisor who kept the needs and well being of her nurses and patients foremost in her priorities. Her efficient and compassionate touch around the hospital earned her the respect of employees and patients alike. Verna knew that the everyday worker could sometimes be lost in the shuffle when management was obsessing about the bottom line. She tended to side with the union in most controversies for her employees' good.

Verna was the proud mother of her "three boys," William (Bill), Lawrence (Larry), and Grant. Larry passed away in the year 2000, and the loss hit Verna hard. She had spent many years blessed by the love of three strong sons and their wonderful families. As the boys were growing up, Verna supported and cheered them on in their pursuits. She followed FoHi football for her boys and then for her grandson, Jon. Her other sports obsession was collage basketball. She had "March Madness" games going on the TV during her last hospitalization at Kaiser this spring.

Verna was 63 years old by the time all of her grandchildren were born. Some would call that "old," but certainly not Verna. She had plans for all of her grandchildren. She couldn't take them around the world, but she made sure they saw the sights in Southern California. Every summer Grandmother Verna bundled the whole gang off to places like the L. A. zoos, Sea World, or the Crystal Cathedral. She took them to the Russian, Japanese, and Ringling Brothers circuses, and many of the trips were capped off with a stop at Fur's

Diner in West Covina on the way home. Verna had taken her boys to the beach at Oceanside when they were growing up. She continued the tradition with her grandchildren.

The grandchildren looked forward to Verna's tours of the Christmas lights each December. All in the family treasured time together with Verna as the head of the clan. Each Thanksgiving, everyone possible would gather at Grant and Kathy's home to celebrate. Verna's Thanksgiving specialty was the bread stuffing; at Christmas she made her famous sticky buns. She made the family-favorite, corned beef and cabbage, for St. Patrick's Day and the much anticipated sauerkraut and pork with dumplings for New Years. Verna's gravies were renowned and all her recipes were coveted far and wide. Each Christmas she would make peanut clusters for friends and family. These were a legacy from Verna's childhood. Her father made them to sell for extra cash during the Depression. Verna remembered him and gifted her family with the same tasty treats each Christmas.

When Verna retired from Kaiser Hospital, she quickly discovered that she wasn't ready for a slow-paced or sedentary life. With friends, she founded the Fontana Tour Club and spent twenty years as a volunteer, planning and supervising tours, until the club finally closed in 1999. Many of you know Verna through the club. In the course of this work, Verna became a world traveler. She loved to reminisce about the White Cliffs of Dover, and trips to China, Italy, Spain, and elsewhere. She loved Australia and New Zealand. Verna would tell you that she had been everywhere in the world except South Africa, South America, and Russia.

With the Tour Club, Verna made many fast friends, including her two favorite bus drivers, Roland and Danny. Verna praised them for their care and efficiency in making the club's road trips run smoothly. Of course, there were a few misadventures, like the time Grant got an urgent phone call from his mother one evening just as he was getting ready to go to work. Verna informed him that she needed a ride to San Bernardino immediately! After questioning, she told him that she had picked up the wrong suitcase after the tour. Despite all of Grant's pleadings that the chore could wait until the next day, Verna still insisted. They got to the bus park in San Bernardino, and Danny was faithfully waiting. Verna secured her suitcase and she and Grant started for home. Grant pressed his mom further. Why in the world did she have to make this trip right at the time he was supposed to be driving to work? It was only then that Verna revealed that the particular suitcase in question contained \$5,000.00 that she had won on the trip to Las Vegas.

Verna was always full of life and could be ornery. She had a phenomenal memory and loved a controversy. She followed the news closely and was filled with concern for people around the world. Verna's home was filled with atlases and reference books for looking up the facts. Books of poetry were interspersed among them all. Verna's love of learning and a spirited discussion inspired both her children and grandchildren to value learning and to pursue a solid education. She passed her joy in the world that God had created and her love of people and compassion for their needs on to her family and friends.

During her full and generous life, Verna kept her ties with the United Methodist Church strong. She served in many, many ways in this congregation with the United Methodist

Women, singing in the choir, with "Fontana, We Care," and with the Outreach Committee. Her compassionate nature fired her passion for all who were abused or suffering.

Verna had a very big, very soft heart. She knew how to love truly in word and in deed. Until the very end of her life, Verna knitted soft caps for the newborn babies at Kaiser Hospital. Many a time when I would visit her, her flying fingers were at work on yet another cap. Her children and grandchildren would deliver them to the hospital nursery for her in recent years. Verna was extremely proud of her beautiful great-grand children, including the one who is still on the way. The knitting needles clicked on their behalf, also.

Verna Mable Elliott was the kind of person who gave herself joyously and fully to life, to her family, her work, her church, her community, and to her friends. All of us will miss her, sorely. But she was also the kind of person who passed on her zest for life and her faith in God to the rest of us in a way that strengthened us even as she was propping us up. We commend her today to God's good care, which she trusted until the very end. Her family heard her whispering when she was very near death, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you." We who hold her dear now give God thanks and praise for the gift of Verna's life. Amen.