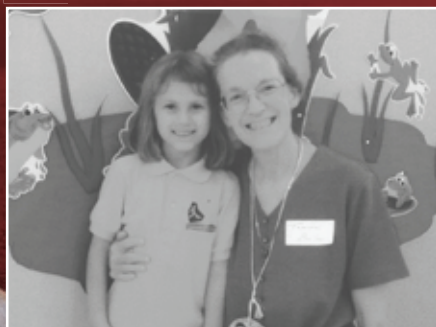


Tamara Ballen

November 29, 1948 - December 29, 2010



Tamara's Life Story

Describing in mere words a life that was vibrant and brilliant in so many ways can never really do justice to that life. Given a first name that means many things in different languages such as palm tree, lotus flower, and spice, Tamara Ballen was an extraordinary woman. She lived fully and loved deeply with every breath she took. Tamara was immeasurably gifted in so many ways, and she used her gifts to enrich not only her own life, but also the lives of those around her. She had a thirst for knowledge and was highly accomplished in many areas. The level of achievement in any one of these areas was something of which anyone could be proud, but none was of greater significance than the legacy she left in her roles as mother and grandmother.

As America was shifting from a nation at war to a nation at peace in the aftermath of WWII, life was forever changed for one young couple in Detroit, Michigan with the birth of their second child, a healthy baby girl. Tamara Grace was welcomed into the world by her parents, Harold and Ada Grace Hessler, and her brother, Jan Paul, on November 29, 1948. She was baptized on Sunday, December 12, 1948 at Our Savior Lutheran Church.

As a young girl with long, flowing hair, Tamara exhibited a certain sparkle even in her earliest years. By the time she was five years old, she was playing the piano. She disdained learning methodology in favor of teaching herself how to make music, and her great love for music continued to blossom throughout her life. She also developed a love of nature, an appreciation for different cultures, and an very creative and active imagination. Tamara's fascination with art increased all during her formative years, evolving into a passion for ancient Egyptian art and history. She learned all she could, and early on honed her ability to think for herself.

Tamara attended East Bethlehem Lutheran School, where her vocal skills were first noticed. She went on to Von Stuben Junior High for 9th grade, and then to Osborn High School. Tamara not only excelled in the choir there, but also was encouraged by the choir director to spend a summer at the prestigious Interlochen Center for the Arts in Michigan. Following this experience, Tamara decided that she wanted to sing with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Notably, right after singing some preliminary scales just before she was to audition, she was invited to join the group by the director himself, who happened to hear her warming up. Tamara pursued her vocal talent; among other noteworthy experiences, she sang under the direction of Robert Shaw, one of the most influential people in American choral music.





As important as her education and music during her youth was the budding relationship with a young man named Harold Ballen. The Hesslers and Ballens both attended Our Savior Lutheran Church, and had known each other for what seemed like forever. Although each attended different schools, Tamara and Harold attended each other's activities and had their first official date in 1962, the beginning of an enduring, lifelong love.

After high school graduation, Tamara and Harold attended different colleges for a time—Tamara pursuing an art history major at the University of Michigan, and Harold studying engineering at Wayne State University. Both were unhappy with the separation, and Tamara transferred to Wayne State. In 1968, while attending the wedding of

Tamara's brother, Tamara and Harold announced their engagement. They married a little over a year later, on August 24, 1969. The newlyweds enjoyed a marvelous honeymoon in Italy, a wedding gift from her parents.

Not long after graduation from Wayne State in December of 1969, the couple was elated to learn that they were expecting. On February 1, 1971, Sean Christen Ballen was born. He was a full term baby, but unfortunately died shortly after birth. Devastated by this terrible loss, the couple was soon focused once more on hope and joy when they learned that they were expecting again. During the pregnancy, Harold was laid off and found a new job with a company in a northwest suburb of Chicago. They celebrated the birth of their healthy son, Todd Adrian, on December 30, 1971, in Chicago.

In order to be closer to family, Harold secured a job with the Upjohn Company in Kalamazoo, Michigan in September, 1972. The couple soon settled into a house on Oakland Drive which they meticulously and beautifully renovated and redesigned over the next several decades. Their desire to expand their family lead to the adoption of a six year old Korean girl who stole their hearts. They named her Andrea, and although she spoke no English when she arrived, the family did learn to communicate—some more quickly than others!

Tamara had expressed her desire to be a mother even when very young, and indeed this role seemed tailor-made for her. She willingly always put the needs of her family before her own, and shaped the lives of her children in countless ways. Just one of her many strengths was her endless patience, as exemplified by her many nights on the bedroom





floor of her newly adopted daughter, calming the child's fears of sleeping alone and in the dark in an unfamiliar environment. Tamara started family traditions such as gifting each child with a new ornament (for them to have in their own homes later) every Christmas. The holidays were always a very special time in the Ballen house. One year she orchestrated for her family a complete and authentic twelve course medieval dinner! She baked countless varieties of Christmas cookies, and one year even did a real gingerbread house from scratch, involving the whole family in the decorating—an special memory still treasured by the family to this day. In fact, every day was a day to celebrate life in Tamara's home and for that, her husband and her children are so very blessed. The family took fun-filled, educational vacations that often simultaneously fed Tamara's love for plants and landscape design.

Tamara continued to celebrate each day throughout her very full life. She was especially delighted to see both her son and daughter happily married, and she relished her role as grandmother to three wonderful grandchildren. Tamara studied "A Course in Miracles" and became a discussion leader as well. After Harold retired in the nineties, they started an alternative health business, Living Well. During its fourteen years of operation, Tamara helped a great number of people in very positive ways. Tamara and Harold also enjoyed traveling on some wonderful (and adventurous) vacations, and visited their children frequently.

Although the family and friends of Tamara Ballen now say goodbye, they find comfort in knowing the words of the belief she embraced as expressed in The Course In Miracles, "I am not a body. I am free. For I am still as God created me." She is deeply missed.

Tamara Grace Ballen died Wednesday, December 29, 2010. Tamara's family includes her husband, Harold; children Todd A. (Karen) Ballen of St. Paul, MN and Andrea (Richard) Girard of Honolulu, HI; brother, Jan Paul (Nancy) Hessler of Downers Grove, IL; three grandchildren: Gregory and Stephanie Ballen and Aylaa Girard. A memorial service for Tamara will be held Saturday, February 26, 2011 at 12:00 noon at Unity Church of Kalamazoo, 1204 Whites Road, Kalamazoo, MI. Arrangements by Life Story Funeral Homes Portage, 5975 Lovers Lane (phone: 344-5600) Please visit www.lifestorynet.com to archive your favorite memory of her.



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