

## IMA MATTHIES: Celebration of Life

We have come here to celebrate the life of Ima J. Leinweber Matthies...wife, mother, friend, nurse, leader, president, neighbor, confidant, teammate, coach, caretaker, shaker, mover...The list could go on and on. Her family calls her Momma. The rest of us call her Ima. Maybe the important words here are: CALL HER...because we all did, one way and another, and I'm guessing that some of us will continue to call her for some time to come. Ima J. Leinweber Matthies, born in Denver on March 20, 1935 and left this world on March 2, 2010. She was born to the name that fit her perfectly: Leinweber, from the German, meaning: weaver of linen. That was Ima...working on the warp and weft of the fabric of community. Weaving us all together. Making and mending that fabric so that all of us could live a little better, laugh longer, share more, be productive, make the world a better place. Ima. Did you ever wonder about her first name? Ima...it comes from the old German. It's a variant of Emma meaning: Embracing Everything. And she did. Let me tell you a few stories about what Ima wove and embraced.

During junior high, Ima and her brother took up the violin and became part of the Greeley Junior Philharmonic Orchestra. Ima's brother was first chair, Ima fourth or fifth. Jim, her husband says, "What she lacked in finesse, she made up in GUSTO! She sawed hard on that instrument."

Ever wonder how Jim and Ima got together? Well, Ima was in her last year of nurse's training at Presbyterian Hospital in Denver. By her senior year, she had a reputation for organizing and leading, so it was natural for her to be the writer and head of the annual Christmas play the nursing students put on for the staff. Her theme was: Christmas Around the World. All of her life, Ima has embraced everyone regardless of color, religion, socio-economic status--of course this would be Christmas Around the World. Well, she needed a frame for the huge globe she planned to paint as a back drop. Ima went to the maintenance staff and there she met Jim. She talked him into building her frame and got him to run the lights and do other backstage chores. That was the beginning. Ima and Jim started dating and six months later, on July 20, 1956 they were married. Cheryl was born in August of the following year, then Jim Jr. in 1961, Patty in '62, and Jeff in '71.

So, there they were starting a life together in Denver, Colorado, but in 1957 Jim's youngest sister died. Her husband arrived in Denver shortly thereafter with a proposition: "Come on down to Baton Rouge," he said. "Ima can take care of both our girls while you and I finish our schooling at LSU." So they packed up and went south.

Ima and Jim set about looking for a church after their arrival in Baton Rouge. Ima was raised Presbyterian and Jim was brought up in the Mennonite church. So they thought to try the Presbyterian Church on the LSU campus, but they couldn't find the sanctuary, so they walked next door to the Methodist Church and became members. They did everything including helping out at Camp Adventure, the church summer camp, where Ima served as camp nurse. For eight years Jim and Ima were MYF (Methodist youth group) counselors. Ima made such a great impression on many young lives. She was not only a church youth counselor, but also a family counselor, teacher, and role model as reported years later by many of the kids she worked with.

Jim says, “Well, it was lots of work. We quit several times but they’d beg us to come back and we did. One time we quit and the minister called to ask us back.

“Nope,” we said. “We’re going out fishing to Grand Isle.”

“Well,” says the minister, “I’ll pray for the waters to part so’s you can walk right in and pick up all the fish and crabs you want in a hurry and then you can come on back.”

In addition to raising their family and doing youth fellowship work, Ima was a Girl Scout Leader too. Cheri tells about her being chaparone on camping trips and working with the many projects scouting involved.

“Momma didn’t want us working all the time. She thought it was really important to get outside. Momma used to say sometimes it’s like we eat breakfast, clean up, eat lunch, clean up, eat dinner. So she’d take us out back by the creek bed and we’d play flag football, tag, volleyball...all kinds of games so we could run around and get tired. I think she did that so we’d go to bed and then the adults could sit around and smoke and play cards half the night. The Matthies’ were a game playin’ clan. We’d get a new game almost every Christmas.”

Jim and Ima worked together on presents for their kids. Jim would do the woodworking and Ima would do the painting or artwork or sewing, whatever was needed. One Christmas, the girls got new wardrobes for their Barbie dolls complete with a wooden closet for the clothes. “Momma, I was about to give up on Santa Claus,” Cheri told Ima, “but I know he must be real now ‘cause you sure can’t sew this good.”

The head nurse of the Parish Public Health program met Ima in church and talked her into becoming a traveling public health nurse. In Louisiana her patients were mostly poor country black folk who had neither the means nor the opportunity to learn to advocate or demand services for themselves.

About her patients Ima said:

“These were good people in bad circumstances. I grew to love them. Integration was about two, three years off. You know, this was a great time. We all believed in Huey Long’s chicken in every pot. We were all working to make things better. This area in Louisiana? It was the oldest public health district in the United States. It was good.”

When Ima died one of her former nursing colleagues wrote:

Ima was an exemplary nurse and she could be a whole lot of fun. Her vision, knowledge, and concern for patients inspired the discharge planning process in the mid ’70’s...a process far ahead of its time and it became the pattern for all state hospitals.

The Matthies family continued to work and play and grow in Louisiana for 26 years. Jim became a teacher and ran a hands on wood shop class where students actually got to build houses. Ima continued nursing. The kids grew up, went to school and began to build their own lives, but through it all there were volleyball games and basketball, flag football, cards, laughter, togetherness, spontaneous dashes to New Orleans ninety miles down the road getting back home just in time for work, parties and great food.

Ima's brother owned forty acres in Allenspark and Ima and Jim took the family there for a vacation. Their hearts belonged to the mountains. Ima and Jim dreamed about moving back to Colorado and buying property where they could start a woodworking business. At Thanksgiving in 1982 they found the perfect place...The property in Little Valley. They moved in in April, 1983.

The rest of the story of Ima Leinweber Matthies--the weaver of community, the lady who embraced everything--you mostly know. You were all a part of that in one way or another. Ima loved her home and after awhile, she assumed the mantle of leadership here. Her drive and determination has made Little Valley Owners Association one of the model organizations in the state. Our roads, fire mitigation grants and programs, beetle mitigation, covenants...all inspired and won because of Ima.

As she was leaving the Presidency that she held for over 15 years Ima said:

“What I hope is that there has been enough education so that you people will be in control of your own destiny wherever that finds you. Things will change...The new covenants, the ones that just passed, will help protect the whole Association. They are the culmination of all the work we have done.”

We remember Ima as the core, the soul...the beating heart of our community. We hope you will share some of your Ima stories as the afternoon goes on.