

In Memory of Fran Jones

FRAN JONES, 1954 - 2022

On Friday, December 8, I was working at the store as usual, and Bill and Jan Lembright were taking their day of rest, also as usual. They had planned to go on an exploration tootle with Todd Jones and Zack (who works at the park). Somehow I overheard pieces of remarks about one of the guys cancelling the tootle due to a family situation that required them to call family members together.

I wrongly assumed that the one who had to pull out was Todd Jones, since his mother, Fran, one of our dearest friends, was in her last days of a grueling fight with cancer lasting many years. So naturally I put two and two together, thinking that something was up with Fran, and Todd was calling the family together.

As a result, much of the day Friday I thought about Fran, talking to God and asking Him for His strength and for Him to relieve her of her pain, which she rarely admitted to folks like me, although her sons would tell us more of the extent of her suffering. I wondered if Bill knew something of Fran that I didn't and was withholding from me, by request of the family.

The next morning (Saturday), it was my turn to sleep in and take a day of rest. The thought of Fran still filled my spirit, so again I prayed to God for her, for Todd and A.J. (the sons), for Dave (her husband), and for the McDougalls, her 100-year-old parents. I even ventured to talk to Fran directly, by way of a tearful prayer: "Fran, if you have passed on to be with our Father God, please say Hi to God for us!"

At 10:37am, I thought, I'll text Fran, and if she answers (she always did, promptly!), I'll know she's still with us. There was no answer. So at 10:46am, I texted Bill: "What do you know about Fran?", my concern for her now growing more serious. Bill also never answered since he was busy at the store and didn't hear the text notification.

Bill and Jan came home for lunch at 12:30, and when the others had finished and left the room, I asked Bill if he had gotten my text. "No". Interestingly, he also had been thinking of Fran that morning, so he called Todd right then who, after seeming reluctant to speak, said that Fran had passed on yesterday (Friday). Our jaws dropped, not that we were surprised that Fran had passed on, but that we had experienced such a strong spirit, and Holy Spirit, communication from and about her. I felt almost as if she sent me a message that she was going home to be with the Lord, so that I replied with my little prayer.

Bless Fran's heart! Nearby are three short accounts about what Fran meant, to Kathryn, a key staffer here in our back office, to Bill Lembright, and to Debbie Schultz. We all loved her much, although I feel unworthy of the friendship she extended to me. I was never willing to cut short the time at the store, or to interrupt the day of rest (aka "Sabbath"-type day, meaning holy unto the Lord), to take more time to visit Fran, so I feel very sad about that.

Fran was a McDougall, daughter of Bob and Gert McDougall, who came to this Valley in the forties, after the Second World War and who founded McDougall's Well Drilling, one of the building blocks of our wonderful Valley. We were relative newcomers to the Valley when we came in 1975 to buy Leo's Market and turn it into Lucerne Valley Market. Fran was one of our earliest staffers, who worked produce until she became pregnant with her first son, Todd. Even 'way back then, Fran loved to be different, teasingly butting heads with Gommel, my dad, about strange colors and shapes of tomatoes, squash and other vegetables.

Fran "retired" from the store work then to raise her two sons, but at the same time she was very busy with her garden, making candies, taking care of her parents in their later years, and so many other things. Every Christmas Fran brought to our house a rum cake (m-m-m-m-m), eggnog pie (more m-m-m-m), homemade candies, cookies, and all sorts of goodies.

As long as we knew her, the full 48 years we "newcomers" have been in this Valley, Fran has been busy and quietly involved in things that supported the community, individuals, her family, and even us rubes at the store. One such thing: on the south lot by the bank at our shopping center, there are two trees planted there: a crepe myrtle with gorgeous deep red flowers (a bush, really), and a mimosa, which, typical of Fran, has white blossoms and brownish leaves instead of the standard pink blossoms and green leaves. Fran planted them there in memory of Julia Bell and my dad, who passed in 2012-2013, within months of each other.

Bill's writing nearby tells of Fran's story of how she came to know God through Jesus and to give her life to Him. We were so thrilled that she had come to have that relationship with God, and that she had an eternity of being with the Father, in the peace and joy available only from Him. She is now free of the pain of that devil-disease, cancer, and she no longer has to keep herself alive by strength of will, for the sake of her family, who were so dear to her.

Why is Fran so special? Why do we write all this? It's a mystery, a mystery of God's Holy Spirit and His involvement in her life and ours. Somehow He wanted this written.

Rest in peace, Fran Jones, free as a bird, and released from this earthly mess of darkness and evil. Enjoy God's light of life, real life, and may we join you in the not-too-distant future! And please, say hi to God, and oh, by the way, please say hi to Gommel, too!

Debbie Schultz: I have known Fran since 1977 when I started working at the old LVM. She was the Produce Manager and she trained me in that department. That was during the days when I didn't even know what a Zucchini was! At closing, we would put soaked mattress pads on the lettuces to keep them moist overnight. One morning at opening, I asked her what to do with the mattress pads and she told me to put them to soak in the giant tubs of water that were in the back room on the gas burners to keep them sanitized. I spent a lot of time looking for the gas burners until I asked her why we would put boiling hot mattress pads on the lettuce? She laughed at my gullibility, and I laughed. I'm still laughing to this day.

A couple of months ago, I went to visit Fran to ask her questions about gardening, since I was doing my first spring garden. She shared so much with me -- she gave me many years of knowledge and said she learned it the hard way, gaining many years of practice! She was known for her strange and mysterious looking veggies and what's more, she knew all there is to know about growing stuff in Lucerne Valley!

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Bill Lembright:

As her health slowly worsened, we started asking God to help her in special ways. We let Fran know that our mighty-mini church was praying regularly for her spiritual and physical health. Two years ago, she asked to meet with us and excitedly related an event that happened at the Loma Linda Hospital just days before.

In her car she asked God for a sign that He was with her. As she walked toward the hospital, a shiny coin on the pavement caught her attention, and it occurred to her that God put it there and let her notice it as a means to get her attention. Once inside the facility, she was assisted by a staffer by the name of Todd, the same name as her first-born son. Next, she was assisted by another staffer named Adam, the name of her other son. That's all it took. The third time was the charm! Fran was convinced that God was with her and she is His child.

Since that day she has had a peace and joy about her relationship with our Heavenly Father. This has assured and convinced me that she is safe with Him now and freed from her former suffering.

When Fran told us her story, true to her habit of caring for others as much as she cared for herself, she asked us to pray to God to secure the spiritual safety of her family as He had secured hers. We gladly continue to do that weekly in memory of our much-loved sister, Fran.



Fran with young Todd in the 70's.



Fran and her sons, Todd and AJ



Fran and her husband, Dave

Todd Jones says, "She is survived by Bob and Gert McDougall; Todd and Jen; AJ, Lisa, and Andrew; and her husband of 50 years, Dave."

Linda Gommel

Kathryn:

I got to know Fran many years ago when she would bring her home grown vegetables to the store for us to sell. I'm pretty sure I was the best customer of her veggies. I grew up eating vegetables my family raised at home and so really treasured how much better they taste. Fran also brought in home-grown grapefruit that her sister, Sharon, brought from trees in Coachella Valley. Fran convinced me to try them, since I had not eaten any since I was force fed them as a kid. What a difference! These were wonderful. After Fran stopped bringing vegetables to the store, she would call me to stop over and get some. Every summer I could look forward to BLTs with Fran's homegrown tomatoes!

Fran was very artistic with both food and crafts. She made some beautiful Christmas trees from tumbled glass that lit up. For her next Christmas tree, Fran had me look for thinly cut agates so light could shine through. I polished the agates and gave them to Fran along with a bunch of other interesting stones for her next masterpiece.

Fran and I were happy to do things for each other. I already miss Fran always having the last word when we messaged back and forth.



One of Fran's glass Christmas trees



Young Fran. How many animals do you see?

