

January 2021

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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



A Tribute to Joanne Rogers



This month's newsletter is a tribute to our very special "neighbor," Joanne Rogers, who died Thursday, January 14.

As the Fred Rogers Center wrote -

We are heartbroken to share the news of the passing of Joanne Rogers, the widow of Fred Rogers. She was a joyful and tender-hearted spirit, whose laughter and kindness will be deeply missed. Instrumental in the development of the Fred Rogers Center, Joanne served as the honorary chairperson of the Fred Rogers

Center's Advisory Board and was a trusted anchor whose heart and wisdom have guided our work in service of Fred's enduring legacy.

To those of us who worked with Fred on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Joanne was more than Mrs. Rogers. We were a small group, only 12 or 14 on staff, and we worked together for decades. Joanne was so very appreciative of each of us for our deep commitment to supporting Fred's mission and to carrying on his legacy. After Fred died in 2003, we thought of her more like a caring aunt...or maybe like Queen Sara, the kind and nurturing Neighborhood of Make-Believe puppet which Fred named for her (her real name was Sara Joanne).

I also know how much she appreciated the important work you all do in the many ways you care for children. She understood your challenges, and she admired your dedication. She often told me how much she enjoyed reading these newsletters, where I was translating Fred's work on the *Neighborhood* to the work that you all do.

There are wonderful interviews you can find online that can help you feel Joanne's warmth and humor. There's another side of Joanne that I wanted to share with you here. Music was Fred's first love. It was Joanne's, too. She met Fred when he came to Rollins College to study Music Composition. She was a Performance major and

went on to get her master's degree as a concert pianist, studying with the renown pianist and composer Ernst von Dohnanyi.

While Joanne was on the sidelines of the *Neighborhood* when it was in production, she was very much in the spotlight with her duo-piano work, performing more than 300 recitals around the country with her longtime friend from college, Jeannine Morrison.

On this video from 1975, Fred introduces his viewers to Joanne before her piano recital, and the next day he shares some of the recital with us on film. The way Fred helped his viewers get to know Joanne reminded me of the way some of you have talked about your families, even shown photos of them, to help the children in your care connect more with you and know you in the context of a family. This video will give you a chance to meet Joanne as Fred's wife and feel the spirit of her flying fingers at the piano.



Farewell, Joanne. You have truly helped make it a more beautiful day in our Neighborhood – in many ways.

Thank you for being our neighbor,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hedda".

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Timeless Wisdom from Joanne Rogers



"Being Mrs. Fred Rogers has been the most remarkable life I could ever have imagined."

- Joanne Rogers in the Forward of "The World According to Mister Rogers"

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