

## Family gatherings brought joy to Gerry Foley

Stouffville United Church pastor Vicki Cousins conducted the service from the O'Neill Funeral Home, Nov. 2, celebrating the life of Gerald 'Gerry' Foley, following his passing Oct. 28 in Markham Stouffville Hospital.

Mr. Foley died following a courageous 20-year battle with cancer. He was 73. Born at New Liskeard, Ont., he moved to Toronto with his mother, his stepfather and two stepbrothers at age 10. He attended Kew Beach Public School and Agincourt High.

Following their marriage in 1956, he and his wife Jean came to Stouffville. They had two sons, Douglas and Tim, and two daughters, Cheryl and Debrah. Cheryl died in 1958 and Douglas in 1967. Debrah (Mrs. Bill Graham), resides near Whitby. Tim and Denise live at Innisfil, near Barrie. There are four grandchildren, Paige and Danny Graham, and Mitchell and Connor Foley.

Gerry and his yellow dump truck, bearing the name 'Miss Debrah', were common sights in and around Stouffville. Later, he served as dispatcher with the firms of Lee Sand & Gravel, Pit Haulage and C & G Haulage. He retired in 1999.

In his youth, he was a good hockey player and an excellent swimmer. After moving to town, he joined the Stouffville Kinsmen Club.

While the untimely deaths of his son Douglas and daughter Cheryl, and

later his wife, Jean, were devastating, daughter Debrah and son Tim helped bridge this gap. Grandchildren Paige and Danny, Mitchell and Connor also brought him great joy.

In a moving eulogy, Debrah described the memorable times that brought her dad so much pleasure and satisfaction - Christmas get-togethers, family picnics, ball games, barbecues and cottage holidays. She described the close connection her father had with neighbours on Fairview Avenue, Stouffville, including Dave Parcels and Denny Patrick. She also mentioned specifically niece Carol Heaton who often made suppers for her father. During the glad times and the sad times, they were always there for her dad, she said.

Gerry was first diagnosed with cancer in 1987. Following surgery, the disease returned and steadily worsened. While on experimental drugs, he lived with daughter Debrah and son-in-law Bill, then returned home to Stouffville.

"He loved feeling part of our family," Debrah said. The O'Neill chapel was filled for the service and the floral tributes were beautiful. Interment was made at Stouffville Cemetery.



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## Merry UnChristmas

By Anne Houle

In the book "Merry UnChristmas", by Mike Reiss, in which people celebrate Christmas 364 days a year in Christmas City, a little girl called Noelle opens her presents on Christmas morning. Receiving a new doll, dollhouse, ice skates, roller skates, a computer and a bike and oh yes, a pony, she says, "Gee thanks," with a yawn and then puts her gifts away with all her previous bikes and ponies in her back yard. Sound familiar?

These days it seems to me the gift part of Christmas happens a lot more than once a year. Most of us don't have to wait to receive that special gift or cook a nice large meal. We have our own excess money with which we buy the best food or the newest electronic toy at any time during the year. People have become used to having immediate access to everything. It doesn't matter if it's June or December. Why wait for Christmas?

So, once Christmas does roll around we still seem to concentrate on the gift part of the season and when we find ourselves unwrapping presents under the tree Christmas morning, the excitement and the appreciation is non-existent. Kids, especially, have

so much these days that the thought and effort of that special gift at Christmas doesn't mean much. Just like Noelle in the story, it's ho hum, not too special.

She appreciates more the one day of the year when it's not Christmas, when she can eat regular dinners, watch shows like Oprah instead of the Grinch, enjoy the extra space in her house without a tree in the living room, go to school and look forward to the arrival of the mailman, who can only bring bills instead of Christmas cards on the one non-Christmas day. Even the de-lighting of the Christmas tree downtown is cause for celebration as it becomes so dark that people can see and appreciate the many twinkling stars in the sky.

Perhaps if we shifted our focus away from the gifts at Christmas we, too, would appreciate the ordinary, humdrum special gifts that we encounter every day. But every year I, like everyone else, buy too many gifts for my loved ones in the name of Christmas. This year, however, I think we all need to take a moment or two to appreciate what we already have in life and stop, look and notice the twinkling stars.

Anne Houle is co-ordinator of children and youth services at Whitchurch-Stouffville Library.

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