

Eulogy for Stacie “Swanny” Swanson

By Bill Hoskyn

My name is Bill Hoskyn or “Billy” as Stacie called me. Spoiler alert: there will be many Stacie impressions during this reflection. Many have remarked over the past couple weeks how Stacie was one of a kind. There’s no one like her. But after much reflection, I don’t know if that’s true. I think there is one person that we can compare Swanny to, and that’s...Miss Piggy. I mean that as a compliment. And I don’t think Stacie would be upset by that analogy. Stacie never really seemed to pay much attention to what was on the TV, but if the Muppets were on, you could reliably hear her in the living room say, “Hoo! How bout Piggy?” She saw a kindred spirit. Stacie was as fiery and sassy and strong-willed as Miss Piggy. Stacie knew what she wanted, and she would make sure she got it, staging her own sit-ins and mini-protests in cars, Costcos, and TSA checkpoints across the country. They each had their own catchphrases: Miss Piggy had “moi” and “hiiiiya!”. Even with her limited vocabulary, Stacie had many catchphrases. **What were some of Stacie’s catchphrases?** Like Miss Piggy, Stacie also knew a little karate: when she was done holding your hand—excuse me, *death gripping* your hand—she would karate chop your wrist and say “let go!”—really loudly—even though she always grabbed your hand first! She and Miss Piggy also had a very healthy self-image. Just as Miss Piggy thought she was the most beautiful creature in the world, after a shower, Stacie would stare at herself in the mirror completely nude and give herself a little smirk and a shoulder shimmy, all while Madonna or Michael Jackson was blasting on the boombox. They also had a strong sense of personal style and fashion; Stacie of course known for her signature bucket hats, dresses, and Mary Janes.

But the biggest similarity between Swanny and Miss Piggy is how fiercely they loved their people. Miss Piggy, of course, had Kermit, whether he liked it or not. And Stacie had Bobby, whether he liked it or not. Stacie used to get on the mat with Bobby. Every now and then, she would lick Bobby’s forehead with her big tongue. We would of course chastise her, and then she would do her signature performative laugh. You know the one: the laugh where she’d put her fists up next to her face, turn her head to the side, and guffaw. **Do it with me.**

But, as we all know, Stacie’s love wasn’t only directed towards Bobby. She loved all of us, and she had a big soft spot for babies. Instead of words of affirmation, Stacie’s love language was physical touch. She showed her love with hugs, holding hands, putting her forehead against your forehead and inhaling sharply, eskimo kisses, and gently stroking your eyelashes. She had a sixth sense for knowing when you were hurting, and she would comfort you. I remember my last evening routine with her as an assistant, and when it came time for prayers in bed, I just

started sobbing. She immediately pulled me towards her and held me in her arms, rocked me, and said “it’s okay” while I cried.

In addition to being a Miss Piggy impersonator, Stacie was also an excellent teacher. There are 4 main lessons that I learned from Stacie. The first was to slow down. Pity the fool that ever tried to rush Stacie in anything. If you tried to gently pull her to walk a little more quickly, she would just stop walking! Stacie, Abby, and I missed a connecting flight once because of this. Stacie moved at her own pace, and she made sure you moved at that pace, too. But in doing so, she made you be more present and savor the moment. Except with eating. The only thing she *ever* did quickly was eat, choking hazards be damned. Thank God for cocktail forks.

The second lesson Stacie taught me was to celebrate. Yeah, when Stacie was upset, she would *GET* upset. But when she was experiencing joy, that joy was contagious. She taught me to celebrate the little pleasures of life, like mochas and dressing up. She was a prankster that loved to laugh and add levity to situations by giving noogies and calling people “weirdo schmeirdos.” One of Swanny’s other joys was dancing. It was always an event when she went out on the town. It was awe-inspiring to witness her fearlessness and sense of abandon on the dancefloor. Stacie was a local celebrity at many bars like Bob’s Java Jive, Club Silverstone, and the Flying Boots Café. It’s because of these moves that Stacie was invited to so many former assistants’ weddings across the country.

One of my favorite celebration memories of Stacie took place on Palm Sunday about 20 years ago, which just happened to be my birthday. I shared this story at her vigil. We were at St. Leo’s, which had a tradition of having people march around the building waving palm fronds and streamers and then re-congregate inside and sing together. Stacie was asked to help lead the procession, and she was given a dowel with some ribbons attached to wave around. But for whatever reason, Stacie was a little pissy that morning. I would encourage her to wave the ribbons around, but she’d say “no!” and jerk her hand back hitting the poor soul next to her. I quickly realized the dowel had become a weapon, so I took it away and gave it to someone else. Stacie and I still did the procession around the building, but of course, at Stacie’s pace. By the time we made it back inside, the rest of the congregation was already in their seats singing a loud, celebratory song. In the middle of the church, the folks with the streamers were standing around the altar waving their ribbons back and forth. But Stacie wanted to join the party, so she ran up to the altar, snatched the streamers out of someone’s hand, and danced and waved the ribbons back and forth while everyone cheered. It took a little effort for me to convince her to sit down again, but it was still the best birthday ever.

The third lesson: Stacie also taught me to be myself and to love myself. Stacie was at all times unapologetically herself. Yes, she was a lover and a prankster and a comedian, but she could also be a real pill sometimes. But she didn’t care. She wanted what she wanted and didn’t

apologize for it. She may not have met the conventional beauty standards, but she *felt* herself after bathing or after putting on one of her favorite dresses. She would fart loudly...in wooden pews...in public. She would blame someone else of course (“Not me... the priest did it”), but she knew that we knew the truth. She was 100% of the time true to herself and lived with a deep sense of self-love and without shame. She taught this scared, insecure, gangly newly out 22-year-old to embrace and love himself.

Finally, she taught us how to trust and deeply love others. Because she was always authentically herself, you knew that her love was authentic, too. She was never faking it. What made the challenging moments so bearable was that you knew there was a big hug waiting on the other side. Her love for mochas was just as stubborn as her love for her people. But Stacie demonstrated that to foster those deep connections with others, you have to be vulnerable. She trusted countless strangers to come into her home and help take care of her. I’m sure she’s interacted with hundreds of assistants over the years, and I know she loved all of them. She was a model of vulnerability and trust, which are required to foster community. Stacie truly was the embodiment of the values of L’Arche. Everyone that comes to L’Arche is broken in some way, looking for a place of belonging by entering community. By being vulnerable and loudly loving others, Stacie made so many people feel seen, valued, and beloved like they never had before. I think it’s safe to assume that what most of us will miss about Stacie is her love.

So may this be a call to action: As we mourn the loss of Stacie, may we honor her memory by following her example. By slowing down. By celebrating the big things and the little things. By being true to ourselves and loving ourselves. And above all, by authentically and deeply loving others.

One final thought as we celebrate Stacie’s life... There are many things I will miss doing with Stacie, but what I will miss most are her bedtime prayers, a sacred ritual for her. She would sit crisscrossed-applesauce on her bed with her blankets *just so* over her lap, and then her buddy for the evening would sit on the bed facing her, hands in hands. First, you’d “pray for...” her housemates and special people. Then after reciting the Lord’s Prayer, we’d sing a few songs. During my years with her, “Hallelujah,” “He’s Got the Whole World” and “This Little Light of Mine” were perennial favorites. **“Hide it under a bushel? NO!”**

But Abby, Julia, and other housemates and I taught her another song: “Seasons of Love” from the musical *Rent*. It asks how to measure a year—or 525,600 minutes—of life. Do you measure it in daylights, sunsets, midnights, or cups of coffee? (Stacie always remembered the “coffee” lyric.) But the song concludes in the chorus: How about love?

And I think we should do the same with Stacie’s life. Not the number of times she listened to Madonna’s *The Immaculate Collection*, or the number of mochas she drank, or the number of

weddings she attended. Instead, we should look at the number of broken spirits she healed, hearts she burst open, and lives she forever changed. So how do you measure Stacie's 59 years or approximately 30,816,000 minutes on Earth? Hooo, hooo, how 'bout love?