

away, she animatedly debated politics with us and grilled our teenage boys on their interests and ambitions. Her joy and pride in us was palpable and made us want to be our best selves.

May her memory be eternal!

"Joy is an effort, a daily exercise of seeing the beauty of one's life, through thick and thin; of singing 'Alleluia!' on a happy day as well as on one's dying day ... Joy then becomes a habit, an attitude, a state of being." —Juliana Schmemann¹ ❀

¹ Juliana Schmemann in Masha Tkachuk, "Joy, Gratitude, Freedom: An Interview with Juliana Schmemann," *St. Nina Quarterly* 2:4 (Fall 1998).

Juliana Ossorguine Schmemann, 1923–2017

Masha Schmemann Tkachuk

My mother was blessed with a long, productive and fruitful life. However, her last years on earth were difficult because she had a serious illness which weakened her progressively. For an energetic, vibrant personality, this weakness was a challenge. Nevertheless, Juliana was not one to give in easily. She fought every step of the way and refused to curtail her activities. She wrote two books when already quite ill.¹ She continued to be interested in all aspects of life: politics, the Church, her large family, and her circle of friends, who sought her out and enjoyed many cups of tea in her cozy Montreal apartment.

I was blessed to spend ten years next door to my mother. She came to Montreal when it became clear that she should live close to someone in her family. And when I look back on those years, it was truly a blessing. When she first came, I was working full time as a teacher. I would come over for tea after school and tell her about my day. She was always interested and enjoyed listening to my stories.

She loved being part of our parish, The Sign of the Theotokos. She participated fully in parish life, attending most services, taking part in community events, and speaking at assemblies and conferences. She was a great support to my husband, Father John, encouraging him in his service, especially when faced with difficulties.

In time her illness weakened her, and she had to accept that she needed more help on a daily basis. So the time came for her to live in an assisted living home in New York, close to family, and finally in a nursing home where she ended her days cared for by a wonderful team of caregivers.

So far I have discussed my mother's twilight years. Now I would like to move back in time, when a young woman had the courage to follow her husband to North America, leaving most of her family behind. She had to learn a new language, find a job as quickly as possible, and place her three children in schools. She accomplished these tasks with remarkable

¹ Juliana Schmemann, *My Journey with Father Alexander* (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2006); Juliana Schmemann, *The Joy to Serve* (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2009).

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speed, and her children were enrolled in New York's finest educational institutions. She taught French in three different schools, and was still teaching full-time after my father's death, when she was way past retirement age. She loved teaching and her students and colleagues loved her. It did not come as a surprise when she was asked to become head of the Spence School, a private all-girls school in New York City. My father loved this period in their lives since he was able to spend some time in the city which he loved!

After our father's death, she started traveling all over the country, sought by parishes and women's groups for retreats and lectures. Her book *The Joy to Serve* reflects the experience of listening to people all over the country and learning about the challenges of being an Orthodox Christian in our modern world. She maintained contact with many people who wrote to her and called her. She always responded,

and found much joy in giving advice or simply being a listener and a friend.

If we go back even further in time, we will see a young woman growing up in France, brought up in a church community, never missing services, and accepting the gift of her faith. She met her husband, Father Alexander Schmemmann, when they were both very young. Their courtship took place during World War II, and my mother often told me that the enforced simplicity of life because of the hardships of wartime was actually a gift. All activities were special, and social life, though very simple, was a time for wonderful friendship and fun.

Our parents had very little in their early married life on the outskirts of Paris, but they met the challenges of keeping warm, feeding three young children, and continuing their education with light hearts that acknowledged no hardships. Surrounded and supported by a loving family on both sides, they managed not only to get by, but more than that, to lead a life filled with joy.

So now, dear Mama, you have gone on to spend eternity with all those in your life whom you loved. Pray for us, your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren! You have done so much for your family, your friends and those who passed through your life. You have touched so many lives with a generous spirit. And now you can rest in peace where there is neither sickness nor sorrow nor suffering, but only life everlasting. ✱