

# Erlene Goertz

Article from **The Smithville Times**, by Mark Gwin

**Erlene Goertz**, Rockne's Roving Reporter and the self-titled *Queen of Rattlesnake Hill*, died Tuesday [Ed.note: November 27, 2007] morning after a brief and courageous battle with cancer.

She worked for **The Smithville Times** as a columnist covering all things Rockne, and was at every event with her camera and notepad to record the events of the community where she was born and raised. But as anyone in the community can tell you, she was so much more than that - she was a friend to all and reached out to everyone she met with her smile and kindness.

"*She was the Mother Theresa of Rockne*," said **Father Chris Bugno**, pastor of **Sacred Heart Catholic Church**, which was always at the center of Erlene's life. "*The entire mystery of Erlene is her big heart. Through her continuous charity, she was a living example of the Gospel*," Bugno said. "*She exemplified the calling for all of us*."

When Bugno first arrived to Rockne from Poland four and a half years ago, Erlene was her open door into the community.

"*My introduction to the parish was in her backyard*," he said. "*Her home and yard were a gathering center for the community, where everyone was welcome and people came together*."

She was an example of love and laughter not only for the community, but for her family as well. She married **Arthur Goertz** on Aug. 25, 1951, and to hear Arthur tell it, she didn't have to work hard to gain his attention, but she did anyway.

"*When I was working at the shop, she would walk by once or twice just to make sure I got a good look at her*," he said with a smile. "*She walked by so many times that my dog ended up following her home. She fed him just to make sure the dog would stick around so I would have to walk over to her place just to get him back*."

Together, the couple raised five children: **A.J., Kerry, Marilyn Miller, Lester and Julaine**.

Erlene was always proud to tell people she was born in Rockne, and depending on the circumstance, she would tell you that she was born in the back of a grocery store or a beer joint. The utilitarian building was actually both. Erlene, who graduated at the top of her class in Bastrop, passed up a college scholarship because she didn't want to leave Rockne.

She worked a variety of jobs in her day, starting off as a housewife, though that's not to say she took it easy. In one summer alone, she canned 1,200 quarts of vegetables.

"*The only things we used to eat were things we raised right here on the farm*," said daughter Marilyn.

Erlene also drove the blue van that served as the **Rockne Catholic School** bus and was also the custodian. She worked auction sales across the area, sold chickens and eggs door to door and also picked pecans.

Then she ended up doing dirty work for newspapers. She started in advertising sales at **The Bastrop Advertiser** but her quick wit and pride in her hometown quickly transformed her into *Rockne's Roving Reporter*, and she traveled everywhere with her camera (though not always with film ...), highlighting the accomplishments of the town she was so proud to call home.

Helping her in the career that she would continue for the rest of her life, even more than her photographic ability, was her ability to talk - and listen - to people. "*She made friends right off the bat with everyone*," said Julaine, "*and she always listened to other people's stories*."

By her second visit to MD Anderson in Houston for treatment for her cancer, she was friends with the doctors, nurses and everyone, Julaine said. Her family described Erlene's battle with cancer as courageous - she never once complained throughout the ordeal. Even at the end, when the pain was intense, she would, as always, turn to a prayer before a curse word, her son Kerry said.

Lest you think that Erlene was a saint whose feet never touched the ground, it should be said that Erlene knew how to enjoy - and share - a good time, particularly through dancing. "*She was the only person I've ever seen who made the chicken dance look good*," said her son Lester. Even when her knees and health were failing her, Erlene made it a point to get on the dance floor. "*Her last dance was Sept. 15 at Watterson Hall, and now she's dancing with the stars*," son A.J. recalled.

A.J. also still remembers the road trip through Texas with his mother, who could point a finger toward every dance hall in every town and remember a night of revelry.

Erlene also gained notoriety for her many Rockne "roasts." As readers of her column can

attest to, she had a sense of humor that included herself and everyone else, all in good fun that left you happier and feeling better, even when you were the butt of the joke.

Her home was famous as a gathering place for many parties and events, including the much loved full moon parties. But whether in a crowd or just sitting with another person, she always appreciated just passing the evening with someone to talk to after a hard day of work.

Her children never knew who might show up for Sunday supper, but they could count on a new face at the table courtesy of Erlene's generosity of spirit.

That generosity was shared with the entire Rockne community, both young and old. She attended every event in the community she could, often ending up with five different places on the same day.

She added a few events to the calendar, too. Her husband and she added the auction to the **Rockne Homecoming Bazaar** and she started the **Rockne WOW (Wonderful Old Women) Club**, and graciously agreed to add **WOM (men)** to the weekly gathering.

"*She was definitely a saint for our town,*" said **Brenda Meuth**, who taught religious education classes with Goertz at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Goertz taught high school students, and was always presenting students (and visitors to her home) with religious gifts and icons, particularly a painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to protect and inspire them on their way through life.

"*Her activity inside and outside the church gave her a tremendous connection with young people,*" said Bugno. "*She was a role model who crossed generations effortlessly.*"

Her husband Arthur agreed, noting that she had an ability to bridge generations and bring young and old together. "*She was always gathering up children of all ages to do good deeds in the community for those who needed it, whether it was a food drive or yard work,*" he said. "*It was a good deed for everyone.*"

"*She didn't just know about who was in need, she was always organizing something to help them out. No matter what their religion or circumstance, she was there for all people,*" Bugno said. "*She transformed the community with her involvement. She was for everybody.*"

Erlene's weekly visits to The Times' office will be sorely missed. She arrived with a fresh stack of pictures and a bevy of stories - from first communions to backyard parties to a group of students who helped their neighbor. If she could get her computer to work, it was perfectly typed. If not, handwritten did the trick just fine. She was also not one to let the newspaper be used for mopping up after puppies. She created many scrapbooks over the years to catalog all that happened in Rockne - most of which she had written.

But Erlene's legacy is so much more than the uncountable articles and photographs and clippings. A lifetime of love and laughter echoes still from the top of Rattlesnake Hill. For those who would mourn, remember these words from her final column with The Times:

*"In addition to being the RRR, Rockne Roving Reporter, I have also been the RR, Rockne Rebel, all of my life, and I have had more fun for 76 years than any other woman in Rockne ever had. Arthur and I have been so fortunate to party every weekend for years with family and friends. I hope that the many people I roasted and made fun of will forgive me. But if I had a chance I would do it all over again!"*

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