

In Memory of Connie, by her Husband, John W. Toigo

Connie Knott Toigo, 03 March 1962 – 30 December 2009



Connie was born as Constance Marie Knott in Pontiac, Michigan. Daughter of Joy and Gordon Knott, Connie lived out the bulk of her early years in the rural settings of Howell, MI. After graduating in 1980 from Howell High School, Connie went earned her BS in Child Psychology and MS in Child Development from Eastern Michigan University. Connie's classroom work and her work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in EMU's Child Development Laboratory prepared her well for her career. After graduation in 1986, Connie took a position in Washtenaw County Head Start as a Home Base Teacher where she worked with low-income parents and children in their homes and collaborated with social service agencies to meet family needs.

Raised in modest middle income surroundings herself, it was Connie's experience at Head Start that first opened her eyes to the educational and social inequities brought on by poverty. Closing the gap in educational opportunity for the poor and the socially or physically disadvantaged were later to become Connie's life passion and her crowning achievement. Connie's early preparation for her final achievement was rounded out with positions as a

Research Assistant for the High Scope Educational Research Foundation and then as a Master Teacher at the University of Michigan International Student Services Pound House Children's Center. It was at Pound House that Connie cemented another of her skills that enabled her to contribute so greatly to the field of early childhood education - teaching adults how to teach children. This latter skill was put to good use in subsequent leadership positions that she assumed in some of the state's noteworthy early childhood education centers. As its Assistant Director, Connie was instrumental in opening and establishing the early excellence of the University of Michigan Hospital Child Care Center. Then, Connie applied her considerable skills to rebuilding the programs for children ages 0 to 10 years at the Educational Child Care Center in Lansing, one of the state's earliest model child care centers. Connie then took her skills state-wide as an Educational Consultant for the Kaplan Company. In that capacity, Connie consulted with early child hood programs throughout State of Michigan on quality programming and educational products and resources, and implemented professional development programs for staff working with at risk children. Connie was an outstanding trainer, and under her leadership the value of Kaplan's services in the state soared to record highs. Finally, then, Connie set her sights once again on SE Michigan in the Ann Arbor Public School (AAPS) District that was to become her professional home for 12 years. After spending part of that time as AAPS Community Education Coordinator, Connie took on the challenging assignment as Principal of the District's Early Intervention Programs.

Connie's skills and career experience were perfectly matched to the challenge. She was the preschool is just completing NAEYC accreditation, and since Connie had previously led other schools to accreditation, she planned for that success in Ann Arbor also. It has grown, under the guidance of Connie, to be a world class preschool that impacts hundreds of needy kids in Ann Arbor each year. It houses both Head Start and the Michigan School Readiness Program, as well as many classrooms that serve students with variety of special needs. This program has been her life, and her dedication was unmatched. She had a clear vision about what our neediest students deserved in terms of preschool, and she fully implemented her plan. The preschool is located at the former Balas 2 and 3 buildings. This beautiful facility is the culmination of many years of her work. She included many in her quest to create this program within the Ann Arbor Public Schools. She worked with her staff, federal, state and county organizations, families, both EMU and UM, and others to establish an incredibly successful preschool.

Those who knew Connie best, knew this petite and beautiful woman as a dynamo both at work and in her home life. Connie was married to John W. Toigo, and together they enjoyed an active life filled with outdoor sports such as hiking, biking, cross country, downhill, and water skiing from their home base on the Huron Chain of Lakes in Pinckney. -They enjoyed almost 20 years of marriage, companionship and adventure. Connie, together with John, loved to travel. She especially liked visiting other cultures, where together they chose the "road less traveled" over the well worn tourist paths. Along with John, Connie played a big role in raising John's two children from his first marriage; John Vincent Toigo and Lisa Marie Toigo. During the early years of their marriage, neighborhood children seemed to gravitate to the Toigo home where Connie used her gift of guiding and teaching others to mold all of their young lives. In later years, with children moved successfully off into college, Connie and John built their present dream home on a few lush acres covered with trees, gardens, an orchard and a vineyard on Little Portage Lake in Pinckney. There, Connie and John looked forward to many more years of active life and quiet moments together working in their gardens, enjoying the lake and surrounding woods, and reading. Yes, Connie was also a voracious reader.

Regrettably, Connie was diagnosed with advanced cancer in September of 2009, and that led to her untimely departure from this world where she had achieved so much good in such a short time. Connie is survived by her loving and eternally dedicated husband, her two step children now successfully engaged in their own careers. She is also survived by her brother Mike Knott and sisters Cheryl Willacker and Patricia Turner of Central Florida, and Vickie Britz of Brighton, Michigan. Connie also leaves behind a host of nieces and nephews, and a legion of adoring children from all walks of life who have prospered because of Connie's dedication to early childhood education and equity in education for all.

Rather than Principal, Connie was known by some adoring children as "Princess of the School". Her dear closest female friends extolled her to be "Queen" - sometimes in the realm of designer shoes and always in the realm of chocolate. Through her virtuous work and her courage in the face of any adversity or challenge, she passed peacefully in her husband's arms. Surely Connie must reside in the next realm as a Guardian Angel to children.

To perpetuate Connie's work with special needs and at-risk children and their families, her husband John has committed with her Alma Mater, Eastern Michigan University, to establish the Connie Knott Toigo Endowed Graduate Scholarship in Early Childhood and Special Education. In lieu of cards or any other form of condolences, John would prefer that even the smallest donation be sent to the attention of Kelly Simpson and in the name of Connie's scholarship fund to the EMU Foundation, 1349 S. Huron Street, Ypsilanti, MI, 48197. John is incredibly grateful for all of the support that he and Connie have had from family, friends, and the Ann Arbor Public Schools during this tragedy.