

Celebrating the Life of
Squire John Leighton Briggs



Brian Cornelius Presiding

We Gather to Honour John Briggs
March 8, 2008

Processional

God it was you who created my inmost self, and you did weave me in my mother's womb. For the wonder of your works, for the wonder of myself, for all these mysteries, I thank you. You know me through and through having watched my bones take shape when I was being formed in secret, knitted together in the womb

And in the words of Meaghan Elizabeth Rothwell when she wrote the following poem for John called:

We Will Remember You

The light in your eyes, the smile on your face.

Your heart on your sleeve.

The friendship you gave.

You were one of a kind, a gentle spirit loved by many.

You could make people laugh and smile with the words you spoke.

Your voice like a comforting hug when there was something wrong.

When you sang you made the world glitter with positivity.

You were a bright spot on an otherwise dark world.

You will be missed John, and we will not forget you.

Gathering to Celebrate and Remember:

It is our love and friendship for John which has drawn us to gather this day. Within each of our own hearts we know the song that John made come alive in us. We are glad for that song, even as on this day we weep. We weep because even though the song within our heart will always be, we mourn the loss of being able to physically experience John's song-making ways, those song-making ways combined with a smile which could brighten a day, and a mischievousness that sparkled in his eye. We celebrate John's song-making life even as we weep because of a hole that is left in our hearts.

This afternoon, we gather to sing and to speak carefully, humbly, honestly, compassionately as we tend to each other's spirit and most importantly as we honour the wonder of the unique person John has been, still is, and will continue to be. We speak our grief because we will deeply miss John and all he brought to our lives and to our world. Yet we also speak our gratefulness for his life, for his willingness to share his person as gift to family and friend and to our world.

We gather in compassion and tenderness so that we might also create a path for John's spirit-journey from this life into the life beyond this life, a journey we honour as Harmonic Generation comes and sings "*Lullaby*" by Billy Joel.

Harmonic Generation – "*Lullaby*" (Billy Joel)

Goodnight my angel,
time to close your eyes
And save these questions for another day

I think I know what you've been asking me
I think you know what I've been trying to say
I promised I would never leave you
And you should always know
Wherever you may go, no matter where you are
I never will be far away

Goodnight my angel, now it's time to sleep
And still so many things I want to say
Remember all the songs you sang for me
When we went sailing on an Emerald Bay
[Goodnight My Angel (lullaby) lyrics on <http://www.metrolyrics.com>]

And like a boat out on the ocean
I'm rocking you to sleep
The water's dark and deep inside this ancient heart
You'll always be a part of me

Goodnight my angel, now it's time to dream
And dream how wonderful your life will be
Someday your child may cry, and if you sing this lullabye
Then in your heart, there will always be a part of me
Someday we'll all be gone, but lullabyes go on and on
They never die, that's how you and I will be

Lighting of the Candle of Life:

This afternoon we stand before the mystery and beauty of life as well as the complexity and riddled paths of life. This world and our lives have been graced with the light of John's life—a light that was first experienced by his family. Coming to light a candle in honour of John and to represent the family, is John's older brother Kelly, and as the light of John's life comes to flame, his younger brother, Alastair will play "*Amazing Grace*" on the bagpipes.

Bagpipes by Alastair Briggs: *Amazing Grace*....

Gathering Prayer:

Loving God, your embrace supports us in life. Your spirit watches over us in death. God of compassion, in whose love the world took shape, in whose love we are born, our lives are lived, and we die. Grant us now the silence of the heart so that we might recall that we are never separated from the love which created us, not from the love that continually surrounds us. In our sorrow may we experience comfort, in our loss may we see traces of hope, and in death may we speak of resurrection. Bring us into your presence and let us be nurtured. Amen.

Our Tributes to John:

Honouring John's life – Brian Cornelius

I met John as a pool party last summer. That party was to be his first of several that day. He was just dropping by, but after a few beers, lots of laughter and play, John just kept staying and staying...our apologies to the other parties. Between cigarettes and banter, I began to see the John so many of you know here so well—the John described in shared conversations over the past few days, and the John described so vividly and poignantly on Facebook.

Today we gather to pay tribute to a life we cherished and loved—we gather to honour John, and to celebrate his flamboyant, “out of the box”, colourful and even provocative approach to life.

We honour the two year old boy who ate peanut butter directly out of a can and by the spoonful, a trick he learned while still in his mother's womb...for eating peanut butter out of the can with a spoon was a common occurrence during Connie's pregnancy with John. John still speaks of what he learned from his mother...*an appreciation for the arts, education, and life in general...he loved her stories of Europe and adventures traveling around the world.*

We celebrate John's boyhood love of animals—he wanted the family home to be zoo-like, we celebrate John's mandatory piano playing...no one has played “greensleeves” more, and we celebrate the impeccable manners he learned as a boy.

We honour John being “one of the girls” with Nicole and Michelle, when they were all in high-school, and their threesome “date” to prom.

We celebrate the moment when Kristen's son was born, when John's nephew came out into this world, John came out into the gay world. “*You're an uncle, I'm gay*”. John was always so subtle, he was just as subtle with his younger brother, and you can ask him about that later.

We honour John's love of tending bar, a skill he learned at Boots and Saddles, and a skilled he developed from both sides of the bar. John knew how to enjoy the spirits of life. An accomplished mixer of drinks, John also had the ability to grace the consumer side of the bar...engaging in unending conversations and laughter that went on day after day after day after day.

We celebrate the new horizons followed in moving to Ottawa...the boyfriend only lasted for a month, but Ottawa became home...John spread his wings to find his own path. So from Kentucky Fried Chicken to studying computer technology while working weekends at a Hooker Hotel, on through other employments and activities and right into Real Estate, this was all a part of his sojourn in this capital city.

Throughout this sojourn, we can hear ringing in our hearts his many karaoke renditions... especially some of his standby favourites like Unchanged Melody and Under to Boardwalk. John's love of song-making is legendary and he was someone who seemed to know every word of every song,

We honour John's tenor voice and his participation in the Ottawa Gay Men's Chorus. We honour his involvements with Orpheus and Suzart, and his insistence on wearing a dress to the Victor Victoria banquet.

We celebrate John's ability to make friends. On an excursion out to buy a suit, John ends up asking the salesgirl for a date, confesses his orientation, she still goes, and Angi and John become and remain best of friends.

We honour the loves of John's life...his relationship with Mark and their many travels, cruises, and convertibles. We honour the times that John shared with Lawrence.

We celebrate John's quirky Monty Python humour...that sense of humour which could be oh so "naughty". We celebrate John's willingness to drink shooters off the floor, to strike a Charlie's angel pose, and, even try a double pirouette.

We honour John, even in his faults and foibles, he, like all of us, had them. We also honour the places of darkness and doubt that lived within John and that John was so intimately acquainted. There is much that we don't understand, and we are left only to create a space of compassionate acceptance.

In our loss and even as we honour how John experienced his own losses, we cannot forget how much light and life John brought to us. We saw and knew goodness in John...a goodness shared frequently in the home of Bill and Barb Moore along with their children, Kelson, Cathan, Caitlin and Kayleagh.

Barb and Kayleagh come to honour John by singing a piece from the musical *Wicked*, called "*For Good*". You see, knowing John has changed us all for good.

Song “For Good” -- Barb and Kayleagh Moore

ELPHABA

I'm limited, just look at me I'm limited and look at you you can do all I couldn't do Glinda now it's up to you (spoken):
for both of us (sung): now it's up to you

GLINDA

I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason bringing something we must learn and we are led to those
who
help us most to grow if we let them and we help them in return and we are led to those who help us most to grow if we
let
them and we help them in return now I don't know if I believe that that is true but I know I'm who I am today because I
knew
you... like a comet pulled from orbit as it passes the sun, like a stream that meets a boulder halfway through the wood...
who can say if I've been changed for the better? But because I knew you I have been changed for good

ELPHABA

It well may be that we will never meet again in this lifetime so let me say before we part: so much of me is what I have
learned from you you'll be with me, like a handprint on my heart now whatever way our stories may end I know you
have
rewritten mine by being my friend... Like a ship blown from it's mooring by a wind off the sea like a seed dropped by a
skybird in a distant wood who can say if I've been changed for the better? But because I knew you... I have been
changed for
good

GLINDA

Because I knew you...

BOTH

I have been changed for good

ELPHABA

And just to clear the air I ask forgiveness for what you blame me for...

GLINDA

Well I guess there is blame to share...

BOTH

And none of it seems to matter anymore

GLINDA (same time as Elphaba)

Like a comet pulled from orbit as it passes the sun, like a stream that meets a boulder halfway through the wood

ELPHABA (same time as Glinda)

Like a ship blown off it's mooring by a wind off the sea, like a seed dropped by a skybird in the wood

BOTH

Who's to say if I've been changed for the better?

GLINDA

because I knew you,

ELPHABA

because I knew you

BOTH

I have been changed for good

Words from Friends – read by Jacques LaRose

From Mark Rehjon :

This euology is conveyed by Mark Rehjon and Alain who after much soul searching decided to honour John by continuing to chase one of their dreams to travel the world: Mark and Alain are currently in South America.

Our beloved friend John came into our life in so many ways: His beaming smile, his bright blue eyes, his zany humour, his talents in song and theatre. John had so many ways of touching us it would be impossible to express these as he had a knack of getting our attention and love.

I, Mark had the chance to share my heart and part of my life in a special way for a couple of years. Though this had an end, John remained a best friend, a roommate, a confident, a soul I wanted to be part of my life forever. Part of me has now past.

I, Alain met John in just the last 2 years. At the beginning he was Mark's elusive roommate that was always gallivanting in and out of their apartment because John was such a busy guy doing one thing or another however he always had a moment to share his, our thoughts. In time, we would spend hours over a glass of wine discussing our life experiences and sharing our deepest of thoughts. We struggle together with the meaning of life.

Mark and Alain, away from the support of their friends and family, however with the support of each other, have in their own way honoured our beloved friend John with memorials throughout their voyage. One of these is an inukshuk built at a lake in Bariloche, Patagonia. These can be seen on the facebook memorial online. Mark has also contributed lovely shared moments with John in the form of pictures that have been printed and given to John for his last resting place.

John, as he watches above us all would surely want us all to live, love, be strong and free.

John we love you.

From Sue Dacey :

John was an active and supportive part of our musical theatre company, Suzart Productions. He appeared (albeit with much coaxing) in our home-grown show, Songs of The War Years as a soloist in November of 2006. It was then that Barb Moore convinced him he could do a smashing rendition of the crazy dentist in our

February 2007 production of Little Shop of Horrors. And, that he did. He was fabulous. He had just started out in real estate and placed an ad in each of our show programmes last season. We loved him dearly. We just closed our show, Godspell, on Sunday afternoon. And we all did it for John. We will really miss him; his fabulous smile; his addictive laugh; and his great big hugs.

Sadly, my partner Elaine and I will be leaving for a much-needed holiday on Friday, March 7 and thus missing our opportunity to say a final farewell on Saturday.

From Elaine McClausland :

As Audrey II, the plant in Little Shop, John was the first person I got to eat! During the show, he was in my tummy, but he will be in my heart forever. As this is being read, Dave, Kateri, Sue and I will be wearing wigs and toasting John on the beach. May God bless, my friend. Love Elaine

From [Kelleagh Emma Anne Moore](#)

I Will Be Missing You

You were so full of life,
Always smiling and carefree.
Life loved you being a part of it,
and I loved you being a part of me.

You could always make anyone laugh,
If they were having a bad day.
No matter how sad I was,
You could always take the hurt away.

Nothing could ever stop you,
Or even make you fall.
You were ready to take the world on,
Ready to do it all.

But God decided he needed you,
So from this world you left.
But you took a piece of all of us,
Our hearts are what you kept.

Your seat is now empty,
And it's hard not to see your face.
But please always know this,
No one will ever take your place.

You left without a warning,
Not even a good-bye.
And I can't seem to stop,
Asking the question why.

I didn't see this coming,
It hit me by surprise.
And when you left this world
A small part of us died.

Your smile could brighten anyone's day,
No matter what they were going through.
And I know every day for the rest of my life
I will be missing you.



From [Theresa Cillis-O'Meara](#)

So sorry and completely shocked to hear of John's passing. I knew him through the OGMC and thought the world of him. My deepest condolences to John's family and friends.

Our loss is heaven's gain.

From Ashley L (Australia)

Wow is all I can say and I still can't believe it's real. John was such an amazing person and you were a better person having met him or even seen him smile. I miss him so much already and although I am in Australia and can not make it back if I could I'd be on the next plane out, so instead I would just like to give my deepest love and sympathy to all his friends and family.

John my dear friend, you will be missed and heaven is a better place now that your light is shining down.

Song “Close Thine Eyes” – performed by friends from OGMC

Close thine eyes and sleep secure, Thy soul is safe, thy body sure;
He that guards thee, he that keeps, Never slumbers, never sleeps.
A quiet conscience, in a quiet breast, Has only peace, has only rest:
The music and the mirth of kings Are out of tune, unless she sings.
Then close thine eyes in peace, and rest secure,
No sleep so sweet as thine, no rest so sure

Stories by Friends (invite Friends to come up and reminisce.)

We are creating a couple of moments for a few of us to share a story or memory of John.

Words by Lawrence Evenchick

So. This is a Celebration of Life. I first met John about 7 or 8 years ago at one of Fiona's Famous tree trimming parties. Well, I didn't actually meet him...I kind of watched him from across the room. That smile. That energy. That ability to attract people to him, and be at ease with anyone. He later admitted to me that he really didn't like me back then...thought of me as a theatre snob. But he eventually became part of that scene himself.

We would run into each other once in a while..at Polo, or at Fi's. Usually Fi's. I have so many fond memories of John, they are too many to go over. Skiing at Le Massif, hiking in Jasper and Banff, sea-dooing in the Carribean, New Year's Eve all-night Disco on the cruise. West Side Story, Victor Victoria, and of course Little Shop of Horrors. One joke we used to share...when people asked us how we met...the answer was always that I picked him up at the airport. An it's sort of true. In the summer of 2005, John and I got together at a party at Fiona's, then headed downtown to celebrate the last night of Pride here in Ottawa. The next day he went down east for a week. I insisted on picking him up at the airport on his return. At 8 am, after a very very late night. We spent the whole day just walking and talking. Had breakfast together, and lunch, and then dinner at Fiona's. And that was it. We were both hooked.

So. I will share two specific stories with you, because they are linked to today. The wigs. We do a karaoke night once for each Orpheus production usually a couple of weeks before we open. For Victor Victoria, John suggested a Gender Bender theme. That idea was nixed, because someone thought it might offend some people. John was like "what?? This is musical theatre. Some of the cast are gay, the show is about a woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman...what's the problem??" Well, those weren't his exact words...Johns language could be very colourful sometimes. So, at the banquet, a week after the show closed, he did a totally John thing, and showed up in drag, just to piss

off whoever it was that vetoed the karaoke theme. Make your statement, loud and clear. That's the picture on Facebook with the red tinsel wig.

The other memory is about painting. John was always after me to do things around the house. You'll be glad to know, John, the basement is finally being renovated. Slowly, but it's being done. Anyhow, we decided to paint one of the walls in the living room. We learned the hard way that if you paint with sand textured paint, it's best to do the trim first.. the painter's tape wont stick to the textured paint. We ended up having to do all the trim free-hand...door, baseboards, two large windows... took us the whole day. We laughed so hard at our own stupidity. And we played music all day. We have to remember John for his music...think of him when we hear Under The Boardwalk, or Unchained Melody, or any of his karaoke favorites. That day, he sang In The Arms Of An Angel over and over again. It actually got a bit annoying after a while. But that song sums up so much about John. So Guylaine Roy, who met John while working on West Side Story, is going to sing it for us, and for him.

Words by Guylaine Roy

I have known John since 2005, when we were both involved in the Orpheus production of West Side Story.

People have always said about John that he had lots to say, and as we all know always had a smile on his face from ear to ear.

For those who know me, you may be aware that I tend to be an open book at times. That can be a good thing, and sometimes not so good. John soon became a "victim" to my babble. But he was so patient and kind ... he always listened, always smiled, never complained ... well not to me personally anyway!

There is a reason I'm talking about this today...talking about John's beautiful smile and demeanour.

You see, I have suffered from chronic depression for the better part of the last 40 years. Part of this depression is wearing a mask, a façade. Everything seems cool on the outside, but it rarely is on the inside. You pretend to be something you're not. There is nothing more exhausting to a human being. Sometimes you put your foot in your mouth ... Sometimes you say things that are completely out of place.

Society is changing and evolving. Public awareness about depression, its causes and symptoms, has greatly increased. It is not, as one may have believed some

years ago, a personality flaw, or lack of will power. Depression is a mental and physical illness.

In the past 6 months, the Orpheus family has lost two members to depression. That is two, too many.

I implore all of you here today.

If you know of anyone who lives in darkness, who cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel, go to them, offer your understanding and support.

There is help available. It takes times. There is no happy pill. Medication helps maintain a level of chemical in the brain much in the same way as insulin helps diabetes sufferers.

Help comes in the form of therapy, where patients learn to use tools that, in time, will help them deal with life's challenges. It is not an easy road ... it is long traveled ... but it is attainable.

Let us not give up ... and let us help each other...please.

One of my great loves at Orpheus is Lawrence Evenchik. I was in contact with Lawrence about singing a song for John ... He told me that one of John's favourite songs was ANGEL ... He used to sing it at Karaoke ... And when they were doing some painting, John kept singing it out loud.

So, since John is where he has chosen to be, this song is for everyone who misses him.

“Angel” (Sarah Mclaughlin) – performed by Guylaine Roy

Lyrics

Spend all your time waiting
for that second chance
for a break that would make it okay
there's always one reason
to feel not good enough
and it's hard at the end of the day
I need some distraction
oh beautiful release
memory seeps from my veins
let me be empty
and weightless and maybe
I'll find some peace tonight

in the arms of an angel
fly away from here

from this dark cold hotel room
and the endlessness that you fear
you are pulled from the wreckage
of your silent reverie

you're in the arms of the angel
may you find some comfort there

so tired of the straight line
and everywhere you turn
there's vultures and thieves at your back
and the storm keeps on twisting
you keep on building the lie
that you make up for all that you lack
it don't make no difference
escaping one last time
it's easier to believe in this sweet madness oh
this glorious sadness that brings me to my knees

in the arms of an angel
fly away from here

from this dark cold hotel room
and the endlessness that you fear
you are pulled from the wreckage
of your silent reverie

you're in the arms of the angel
may you find some comfort there
you're in the arms of the angel
may you find some comfort here

We Listen to Words of Comfort:

As we prepare to leave this place, and continue to walk on the path of honouring and grieving John, John noted that his 33 years of life coincided with the life of Christ. As I listened to Guylaine speak and sing, I was reminded of the words of Christ Jesus when he cried out, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often have I longed to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

These words came at a time in the life of Christ where Christ was trying to bring healing and change to a hurting world while even facing his own death. There is much we do not understand, life is riddled with mystery, yet we are invited to find shelter beneath a sacred wing, within sacred arms—a shelter which offers comfort and strength and wisdom.

This sacred wing, these sacred arms are known through the songs deep within our own hearts, can be found in family and friends and community and faith. We are invited to seek them out. The irony is that, even in his dying, John in his own way, offers to us and invites us to find shelter beneath the sacred wing.

This is a difficult time for us all. As we walk forward with our hurts, our wonderings, our “what if’s”, and “if only’s”, let us also walk forward with compassion, holding tenderly the gifts of John’s life and the questions we carry as we respond to the invitation to be sheltered beneath holy wings and within the arms of angels.

Prayer :

God of us all, you who gave us birth
You are ready to hear us when we pray
You know our needs even before we ask.
Give to us now your grace
That as we shrink before the mystery of death
We might see the light of life beyond death.

To those mired in doubt, give light
To those overcome by weakness, give strength
To those lost in sorrow, give comfort.
And keep true in all of us your love.

God of compassion we pray for John that he who knew creative labour, joy, and suffering here on earth, we pray for him even as he shares life in the mystery that is beyond this life.

God of all time, we remember with thanksgiving your faithful ones in every generation, especially those whom we love but live on this earth no longer. Grant them your peace and may your light shine on them forever even as John is welcomed among their number.

God of compassion, we pray for John's mother Connie, for Kelly, Stephen, Kristen, Timothy, and Alastair. We pray for his closest friends, and for all anywhere who feel his loss this day. May your spirit of comfort, courage and strengthening love hover over us all. And now loving God lift us by your Spirit out of the shadows of uncertainty into the light of your hope as together we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us,

Our father who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses
 as we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever

A Special Thanks to:
by Jacques LaRose

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has made today's celebration so special: to Lawrence Evenchick, Ann Ricard, Lynn Thomson and Nancy Solman for providing the food; thanks to Danine May, Sylvain Roussell and Gerry Jacques for setting-up the hall. John was loved and brought happiness to so many as we witnessed while preparing for today's celebration. He will leave a lasting impression in our lives that will remain in our memories forever.

For those wanting to do so, donations can be made in John's name to the Ottawa Gay Men's Chorus or to Orpheus.

Everyone attending is invited to the reception that will be held in the hall immediately following.

Benediction:

Loving God, look kindly upon us in our sorrow
As John has been taken from us
Gather our pain into your peace
Bring healing to our hurting
Strengthen our memories
Be present to our grieving
And as we are able, teach us the lessons of life
That can be learned in death.

In our hearts and in our homes, blessing
In our coming and our going, peace
In our life and our living, love
At our end and at our beginning, the welcome of God

Song "Fare Thee Well (Rankin Family)" –

performed by Jacques La Rose and Daniela Pluma

Fare thee Well, love
Fare thee Well, love
Far away, you must go.
Take your heart, love
Take your heart, love
Will we never meet again no more?
Far across, love
Far across, love.
O'er mountains and country wide
Take my heart, love
Take my heart, love
No one knows the tears I've cried.
So I'll drink today, love,
I'll sing to you, love

in pauper's glory, my time I'll bide
No home or ties, love,
A restless rover, if I can't have you
by my side.
Oh come back, love
Oh come back, love
The sun and moon
refuse to shine.
Since I've gone, love
Gone away love
this lonely girl has had no peace of mind
So I'll drink today, love,
I'll sing to you, love
in pauper's glory, my time I'll bide
No home or ties, love,
A restless rover, if I can't have you
by my side.
Fare thee well love, fare thee well love Fare thee well, fare thee well
Far away, you must go. Far away you must go.
Take my heart, love Take my heart
Take my heart, love Take your heart
Will we never meet again no more? Will we never meet again no more?
Will we never meet again no more? Will we never meet again no more?

Recessional & Blessing:

And now may the face of God be turned towards you
May God's face shine upon you and give you strength

May the wind be always at your back
May the road rise up to meet you
May the sun shine warm upon your face
The rains fall soft upon your fields
And until we meet again,
May you be held in the hollow of the sacred hand.