

# The Oak Leaf Fell

An oak leaf finally fell from its tree this week, and the event brought sorrow and tears to many.

Ruth Wilene Kirby, 78, a faithful member of Bowman Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church and a 36-year fixture at Life Care Center of Cleveland, Tenn., was buried Wednesday.



And while she would disdain the comparison with an oak leaf, the symbolism does fit her. She even wrote about the foliage that dresses the oak, expressing her admiration for it. Writing, it seems, is a talent that few knew about. Dwight Herod, senior pastor, and Ted Dubs, associate pastor, of Bowman Hills, acknowledged their surprise at this gift as they conducted the graveside service. Herod read her composition on oak leaves, and it inspired those who had gathered in and around the tent to say goodbye to Kirby. She wrote:

*The beauty of fall is breathtaking! All the trees show their best colors; there are brilliant splashes and more subdued shades – their splendor is enjoyed by millions for a few brief days and then it is just a memory, except for one – the seemingly dull brown oak.*

*Think about it for a moment. All the other lovely leaves are gone, raked up and burned. But for some reason, the oak leaves stubbornly remain on the branches. Are they too lazy to fall? Do they fear being caught up in the flurry of temporary excitement and then suddenly destroyed? Or are they just unwilling to let go, to give up? Perhaps they feel committed to stay at their post faithfully until spring comes and they are assured of new growth replacing them.*

*People are much the same. Many revel in the temporary praise and glory of some short-lived fantasy while others, in the opinion of some, hang on to their seemingly drab, not-too-exciting post of duty and faithfully stay there without praise or flattery. They never drop from their place until they feel sure they have done what was required of them and that someone else will follow with that same commitment.*

*Is there not a lesson in the steadfast oak leaf?*

The answer is yes, and Kirby set the example.

(more)

Her work at the church and at Life Care became the evidence. At Bowman Hills, her commitment was lived out in her roles as Sabbath School leader, member of the choir and as chairman of Advent Home, a youth group for troubled teens, for 12 years. At Life Care, she had been a hydration assistant, admissions director, activities director, social worker and medical records assistant. Esmerelda Lee described her as “the mother of our facility. She was a servant to others, and a friend to everyone.”

Kirby’s compassion for those she served was demonstrated by her practice of reading to at least seven residents on her own time before she left work each day, and visiting with them on her days off and on weekends. Her genuine love and concern was felt by thousands of residents, family members, volunteers and associates across the years.



When a certain resident arrived at the facility one day, near death, refusing to eat or participate in any social aspects, Kirby took him under her wing. She befriended him by cooking food he liked, even though he was on a special diet. She looked up unique recipes he enjoyed. She wrote letters on his behalf to his family, and called family members often to update them on his progress. When he left the building, he walked out, and everyone at the center believed that it was Kirby’s faith and love – when his was absent – that pulled him back to life. Even after he went home, Kirby volunteered to take him for doctor’s visits and cook for the entire family.

The oak leaf fell. New growth is in place. And her commitment will continue to instruct and encourage those who come after her.

– Beecher Hunter