

2008 Linda William Schopp - Citation for Long and Valued Service to the Assembly

Linda Williams Schopp, August 3, 2008



We on the Citations Committee have the annual good fortune to recognize the extraordinary volunteer service of one among the many who make the Congregational Summer Assembly the place that it is. How many of you – who love where you live during what we think of as the “off season” – find yourselves saying at one time or another “But this is really home” – as you enjoy an activity that brings back powerful memories from the past or walk the paths and beaches and are grateful that they are as wonderful as you remembered. One reason we can all enjoy these things is that others who also feel this is “home” have volunteered their time and talent to maintain our shared Assembly home and its traditions. And for some people you could say that giving back to the Assembly is truly “in their blood.” I think you’ll agree with me that this is true of the 2008 recipient of the Citation for Long and Valued Service – Linda Williams Schopp.

It can’t be easy being the eldest child of a legend. And being the eldest child of two legends must have been even more challenging. Both of her parents, Tom and Emilie Williams, received the Citation in separate years to honor their individual contributions. From the day Tom Williams came to the CSA in 1946 as Recreation and Music Director the spotlight was on the four Williams children. Linda was always expected to do better, to do more, and to behave herself. Well, I can speak from a life time of observation, that she did do better – at swimming, tennis, singing, for example – and she did do more, because her involvement was always simply a given. Let’s not speak of adventures like walking across the wet clay courts after a rain or trying to swim in from a becalmed sailboat in mid-lake (definitely not proper procedure). Shall we just say that “good behavior” is in the eye of the beholder.

It was well known that Tom and Emilie had what could be described as an “anti-nepotism” policy, which basically meant that family members really had to prove themselves to get jobs or roles in shows if Tom and Emilie were in a position to do the selecting. So when Linda was in high school and was hired to teach swimming and to be a lifeguard it was the Board of Trustees who had to hire her – Tom wouldn’t do it because he didn’t think it would “look right.” She has powerful memories of those years – especially of being required to go to the beach on bad days and having to clean the beach if there were no lessons or lifeguarding duties, even if no one else had to be there. During college her voice teacher told her not to teach swimming because she’d ruin her voice – Linda had learned to teach using the powerful “Williams yell.” So she went to Interlochen to work for two summers, and ended up teaching tennis – not quietly.

Linda grew up in Galesburg, Illinois, and went to Illinois Wesleyan where she majored in music education. She met Tom Schopp there and they were married in December of 1961 by Jesse Peirce – another long time Assembly connection. Her ability to be flexible and her total honesty about herself are captured in a story of her early teaching years. She was going to be teaching vocal music 4 days a week in Atlanta, Illinois, which was near Lincoln where her husband Tom was teaching. To fill the 5th day she interviewed in New Holland, IL, where they wanted her to teach ½ day of vocal music and ½ day of band. She said “I don’t do band.” They said “We need to have you do band.” Linda said, “You’d have to be desperate to hire me to do band.” They said “We are.” She taught band.

After a number of moves Linda and Tom ended up in Saginaw, MI, partly because she wanted to be closer to the lake. She taught K-12 vocal music and was known for her work with small singing groups. Also, during some years of budget cuts, she taught math, phys ed and did library work in the schools – and she did them all well – even when she was just a day ahead of the math class! When she got her Masters in the mid 80's she decided not to go to the commencement but had a “graduation ceremony” here on the CSA ballfield. Her mother played the old portable pump organ, her many friends raided the costume room, and everyone around came and sat in the bleachers. It was memorable.

So you would not be surprised that music at the CSA has formed a major part of her life here – from her first big role as “Jillie” in “Out of the Sea,” she has been involved in nearly every operetta and musical we have put on. She has played lead roles and specialty roles (Katisha in The Mikado, tipsy Arabella in Smoky Mountain, Iolanthe herself in Iolanthe, Mrs. Bumble in Oliver). Two years ago she was one of the 5 who produced and performed in Nunsense. (Note: In 2009 they will put on a sequel – not to be missed!) She has been music director of countless shows and she has helped with anything else that needed to be done for them. Always, every year, she has sung in the choir and she is responsible for maintaining the music library – putting out the music each week for rehearsal and church and collecting and filing it away after the service each Sunday.

So you would take her involvement in our music activities as a given – using her talents for our benefit. What you may not know about her is how very much of her time she has given to the Assembly over the years in ways that are totally unrelated to music. I keep track of these things, and even Linda was surprised with the quantity and variety. Her belief is “If you're up here and not active it's not as much fun.” If that's true, then she must have been having a lot of fun! She has been on the Women's Association Board and served as Secretary in two separate terms 20 years apart; she has been a Trustee and also served as Secretary to the Assembly for 6 years; she chaired the Nominating Committee for several years and was on the Athletic Committee (which became the Tennis Committee). She was on the Citations Committee for many years, is on the By-Laws Committee and currently chairs the Calendar Committee. And she is a mainstay of the Membership Committee, even making a special trip to Frankfort this past January to help with the Associate Membership mailings.

It has always been Linda's willingness to use her time here in ways that benefit all of us that give her service special meaning. Her contributions would have been extraordinary if they had never ventured beyond using her musical gifts. But the same person who told the New Holland schools “I don't do band,” and then went ahead to “do band” said to me “How could I have been Secretary so much? I don't even write letters.” But a Secretary was needed so she went ahead and did it. She will do just about anything the Assembly asks of her – as long as it doesn't interfere with tennis.

Linda, I'm delighted to present this Citation to you. Your name has been engraved on the Citation Plaque at the back of the Meeting House and I know that everyone looks forward to thanking you personally after the service.