Kristine J. McComis, 1968-2010
Memorial Service, 7:00 pm August 22, 2010
Worthington United Methodist Church

Our hearts are aching, but amidst our sadness, emptiness and grief, let us reflect upon and celebrate Kristine's meaningful life and remember how she enriched the lives of everyone she touched...whether family, friend, co-worker, faculty, student, client, child, animal, visitor or even a complete stranger….she accomplished this through her reassuring smile, daily acts of kindness, sense of humor, polite and professional demeanor, and inspirational and humorous prose.

Kristine first began working at the OSU Veterinary Hospital on March 19, 1993 and worked and served admirably for 17 glorious years. As you'll witness, her fingerprints are deeply embedded within the Veterinary Medical Center, and her DNA is weaved throughout the fabric of the College and across the University where she was a dedicated and passionate citizen and foot soldier.

As my talented and trusted ghost-writer and editor, Kristine knew all too well about my tendency for verbose writing. True to form I wrote volumes and without her careful editor's pen, I tried to emulate her to trim it … finally it became obvious, I don’t have her editorial skills … thus, I chose to not worry about it – there are simply too many remarkable things to share.

I asked some people to contribute their experiences and memories of Kristine to reflect the breadth and depth of her impact.

A University colleague (Karen Patterson) said “The first thing I noticed was her warm smile and friendly demeanor. She once gave me a tour of the Veterinary Hospital, and her pride of the university, compassion for animals and enthusiasm about the doctors was infectious. She was such a joy to be around – professional and competent coupled with a wry sense of humor and tons of patience.”

A faculty member and friend (Dennis Chew) reflected on their many experiences. One such memory focused on their work together on a committee to select artwork for the newly constructed Veterinary Academic Building. The months of labored meetings, site visits and intense deliberations led to selection of artwork named Rod – this infamous sculpture was not particularly related to veterinary medicine, at least in the classical way, and apparently the committee, including
Kristine, had to develop a ‘bunker mentality’ to fend off negativity over its selection. This is but one example of Kristine’s ability to ward off the negative, focus on the positive, and serve the greater good.

A faculty friend and fellow fiction book club member (Steve DiBartola) commented she was quiet and reserved and a good friend. He said “I think I realized we were friends when she came back from a vacation in New England one year with a “House of the Seven Gables” coffee mug for me. We had read that book in book club and I had expressed my dislike for Nathaniel Hawthorne – so it was kind of a “tongue in cheek” gift. I will always remember her for her quiet kindness and the fact I never heard her say anything bad about anyone ever.

A co-worker and friend (Robin Thornton) commented “Kristine was a great friend. If you didn’t know her she would seem quiet, almost shy, and a prim, proper kind of lady. If you knew her, you found she was very outgoing, fun and enjoyed many aspects of the arts. She always found the good side of others. A fond memory of mine will be her sitting on the benches outside during lunch enjoying the summer day with a good book.”

A friend and former co-worker (Melissa Ritchie) commented “I met Kristine when I interviewed for a position. I didn’t follow directions very well and I took a right when I should have taken a left. I ended up in Kristine’s office. When I showed up, Kristine asked me who I was and what I needed. She walked me over to where I needed to be instead of just pointing me in the direction and sending me on my way. This was my first impression and encounter with Kristine, and was one of many instances where Kristine went the extra mile to help people. And it was, as the saying goes … the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”

A faculty, friend and book club member (Shane Bateman) commented “I think that each of us has a small treasure chest inside of us, in which we store our most treasured memories, keepsakes, smells, and sounds of the best moments and the best people from our lives. To my collection, I have added the joyful memory of time spent with Kristine who shared my passion of reading and who loved many of the same authors and books. I believe that people will never walk through the halls of the Veterinary Medical Center at OSU without expecting to see Kristine around the corner, leading another tour, sharing her passion for the profession and the institution that inducts members into the profession. May her smile and gentle words continue to carry down those hallways!”
A friend and co-worker (Lenore Southerland) commented “You could set your clock on Kristine’s trips to get coffee in the morning, usually right after she got to work. I will really miss that because she always had a smile on her face even though things might have not been going well that morning. I remember how feisty she was too. Everyone thought when she started she was this frail little petite young lady, but she was strong. She knew when to bend a little, but she never sacrificed her convictions. She was the strongest person I’ve ever known … and all within such a small frame.”

One of Kristine’s former bosses (Rich Bednarski) commented “No secret here, Kristine was one of the most humble people I ever knew. Never one to seek any of the spotlight, she epitomized the cliché “Wind Beneath Your Wings”. Kristine constantly sought new assignments and projects. Never did I hear her say that she was too busy or had too much to do. She was incredibly loyal to all 4 directors for which she worked. Although all had different styles and priorities, she unwaveringly served each without a hint of reluctance to adapt. I never once heard her make a judgmental remark about anyone or anything. She was the epitome of a truly good person. So much class and elegance! “

A friend and co-worker (Judy Harper) commented “I am not sure Kristine ever knew that many of us referred to her as “The First Lady”, a genuine term of endearment, reflective of her resemblance to Jackie Kennedy, her connection to Massachusetts, and the grace and charm of the Camelot era – she was quiet, unassuming, classy and selfless – she was our Star! We were hooked on her newsletter articles – we could hardly wait to read her writings in the next issue. We’ve lost our timekeeper or family historian – she knew people’s birthdays, the comings and goings of faculty, staff and students, and she had her finger on the pulse of our collective lives. She was always so gracious. An absolute gem! It will never be the same without her.”

In one of the many Retirement Wish columns Kristine wrote, she said “How many people can be so lucky to work with one of their best friends? Of course, she was referring to her ‘Coffee Mate’, Craig Miller. In his reflections, Craig said “Kristine’s and my walk down to Central Supply evolved into a daily ritual. Kristine was the one who coined the phrase ‘Coffee Date’ and that’s how it became known. It allowed for a few minutes to catch up on the last evening’s events for both of us. I would normally stick my head around the corner and ask Kristine if she had time for a cup, then say come on, I’ll drive. If one of us was off work or too busy to make the trip, the other had a lot of explaining to do for our friends in Central
Supply. We always took time for a quick goodbye at the end of the day, even if it was just over the phone.”

In her retirement wishes to Craig, Kristine commented “It is a lonely venture to the coffee pot when Craig is not here….the ladies in Central Supply always ask sympathetically, where’s your coffee date when I am solo”.

I can’t imagine how lonely it will be for Craig and the rest of us at the Veterinary Medical Center without Kristine.

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In that letter she wrote her ‘Coffee Mate’ for his retirement, Kristine said “We see the people we work with more than we do members of our own family. Eight hours a day, 5 days a week our co-workers see us in good times and bad and through sunny days and rainstorms. They are with us through sickness and in health and through the four seasons: football, basketball, baseball and golf. They become our family away from home”.

Kristine was many things to many people – a co-worker, colleague, friend, coffee mate, fellow book club member, role model … and most of all she was our family – this family away from home that she spoke about and cared for so deeply.

June, Janet and Jim...thank you for sharing Kristine with all of us....she enriched our lives and made us better people. Thank you for allowing us the privilege of being part of her family.

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Kristine wrote and prepared the monthly Hospital Newsletter for over 16 years, never missing one starting with the first issue in January 94. This became a must-read staple for everyone. People eagerly anticipated each issue so they could read the useful information, inspirational quotes, poetry, and all of the other wonderful things she packed in each issue.

As I sat down to prepare these remarks, sifting through all past newsletters yesterday, I was reminded how much of her heart, life and soul she poured into the Veterinary Medical Center and the newsletter. While reading her writings along with memories of others, and reflecting on my interactions with her, there were many a tear shed – tears of laughter mixing with tears of sadness and with tears of joy. I wondered when reading these if Kristine knew how respected she was and how appreciative we all were of all she did, and the classy, selfless way she
conducted herself in good times and bad? I sure hope she did. I wish I would have made sure she knew this when I had the chance.

Reading her Animal Anecdotes Column from the first one in Aug. 94 to the last one in Feb. 2007, I learned so much about Kristine. She shared many of her own experiences, her revered New England family vacations, her beloved cats (Silky, Sonnet and Cinnamon), her childhood Shetland sheepdog (Daisy), her pet beta fish (Oscar), her cousin’s dog Midas, her hobbies, recreation, favorite literature, history and more. She wove all of these topics and so much more through her much anticipated essays – they were educational, sometimes thought-provoking, and definitely entertaining!

I learned from her writings that Kristine talked about the Veterinary Hospital and served as the consummate ambassador every chance she had no matter where she was or who she was around – whether at the gym, in her book club, among family and friends, or with complete strangers. She believed the more people she told about the wonderful work done at the Veterinary Hospital the more people would repeat the stories to others, which would spread the word. She was so proud of the place she worked and wanted everyone to know about it.

It would be wonderful to share all her writings. There were so many to choose from. For the sake of time, I chose a few excerpts from her “Animal Anecdotes” to give people a glimpse of her creative talents and remind us of her charm and wicked dry sense of humor.

In her writings in Sept. 2003 remembering Miss Piggy, a Holstein cow that served as resident blood and rumen donor in the Veterinary Hospital for many years, she said “Miss Piggy was famous at the Vet School and in the local community. She was a lifesaver to me when giving tours on a slow clinic day. Miss Piggy gave visitors not only a medical lesson on rumen fistulas …, she provided a bit of entertainment as well. Countless school children wrote me thank you notes mentioning how they enjoyed meeting the cow with a hole in her side. Many had the opportunity to pat Miss Piggy’s head. I showed them how she liked getting scratched under her chin and she would roll her dark chocolate eyes in pleasure when eager young hands reached out to tickle her fancy. They laughed at her protruding, yellowed teeth and hefty girth, all nodding in agreement that Miss Piggy was indeed a fitting name. Miss Piggy liked to upstage me during tours. …….. On one day, I will never forget Miss Piggy gave what could be described as a cow sneeze, blowing bits of hay, saliva and nasal drippings all over me …
and my black outfit. The group of elementary school kids thought this was hilarious, and from the flick of her tail and toss of her head, I think Miss Piggy got some enjoyment out of it as well. I didn’t find it terribly funny, but I couldn’t stay mad at her for long.”

In a story she wrote on Gift Giving, she described experiences with receiving gifts. She said, “Ever since adopting my cat Sonnet 8 years ago, people think I need and/or love everything cat related. I know you’re a cat person, they proudly say as they watch me open the 20th cat pin I’ve received since acquiring her. I never mean to be rude or ungrateful for any gift, but has anyone ever seen me wear a cat pin? I wore one once to church and had a little old lady say to me “Oh, isn’t that pin darling!” I immediately shoved it to the back of my jewelry box. I do not want to be darling! Shirley temple was darling. I wear black! So how do I end up with endless cat merchandise from the Cracker Barrel gift shop? I receive cat notepads with little pink country hearts around the border, cat birthday cards, cat stationery, cat table books, cat picture frames, and cat candleholders. Yes, I love cats, but cringe at being defined by them. It’s as if I’ve been railroaded into being the crazy cat lady down the street that kids will taunt and run from in my elder years. I already have the cat umbrella to shake at them in rage, in lieu of a cane.

In a story about giving tours, she concluded with “I learn something every time I give a tour, even seeing some things for the first time right along with our guests. What I can’t answer, the kids fill in on their own, resourcing their own wisdom to explain the mysteries they encounter. One day a six-year-old boy asked me why a dog he saw was wearing a cone on his head (or an Elizabethan collar). Before I could even answer, his classmate interrupted and confidently explained “That is so he can’t make babies”. The whole class nodded in acceptance, and I held my rebuttal to correct him. Who knows, he could be right.”

In a humorous yet emotional story about windows and how everyone wants one in their offices, she described an instance that to me defines one of Kristine’s many attributes….COMPASSION. She wrote “Not too long ago, a particular incident outside my window affected me in a way no other ever has. A young man in his early twenties was sitting on the bench, sobbing. His friends surrounding him attempting to offer sympathy and support ……. Puffy and red, the young man’s eyes told the story which I feared – his dog had been hit by a car and had to be put down. As I looked at him, I could not control my own emotions as I quickly wiped my eyes ……. Appearance-wise, this guy was slightly rough-around-the-edges, wearing torn jeans, a black t-shirt and smoking a cigarette. Yet the pure
sorrow he expressed clued me in that he was an exceptionally nice guy with a sensitive heart in the right place ……… I felt the strongest pull toward this stranger on the other side of the glass, though we exchanged no words or glances. I believe a pet makes a better friend than any human ever could; my instincts tell me this dog had the same position in this man’s life. I have thought of him every day since, hoping his heart is healing and he has found ways to ease the overwhelming emptiness caused by his dog’s sudden and conspicuous absence. Take comfort dear stranger through the glass – your feelings reveal an admirable strength. And most important of all, know that he loved you too.”

In the October 2001 issue, her writing titled “Anecdote for a Friend” she memorialized her friend and co-worker Alice Ray who died September 8, 2001 from a relentless battle with cancer the day before the tragedy of 9-11. She wrote “Our loss was no less diminished by what happened the next day in New York and Washington. Our attention has been diverted, but a loss is a loss, the enemy of cancer still being a malicious, albeit natural foe that stole an incredibly lovely woman from this life. She worked until the last possible moment, slipping out the front doors one day, never to return except to check in once for insurance reasons. Many of her co-workers didn’t get to say goodbye, but Alice, I know, would want you to remember her healthy and attractive.” … The same can be said of Kristine.

Kristine was a proud and well-deserving recipient of the 2009 College Distinguished Staff Award. Here are excerpts from her nomination letters:

- There is no more loyal employee within the College. She has seen her job description modified and had her office moved and changed numerous times … all the while serving with dignity, class, loyalty and ever-efficient effectiveness. She is the type of employee that every employer hopes to hire…..Kristine is truly a gem – quietly efficient, always accommodating and helpful, and known for getting the job done and done on time … all beyond anyone’s expectations and without any fanfare. She goes out of her way to make the work environment better for us all.

Kristine always looked for the good in everyone, found the good in everyone, embraced the good in everyone, and focused on the good in everyone.

Her physical presence will be missed and yet her spirit will live on as an indelible rich legacy at the Ohio State Veterinary Medical Center. She will be fondly remembered for her pride, commitment, passion and love of the place she
worked, contributed to so immensely, and where she positively and meaningfully touched the lives of so many people and animals for 17 years. We were all blessed by knowing Kristine.

I leave you with the simple yet poignant words of a poem written for and given to her about three weeks ago titled “Kristine”

KRISTINE

KINDNESS AND COMPASSION EMBODY HER
GRACEFUL AND GENTLE AS A KITTEN’S PURR
INNER COURAGE AND STRENGTH ABOUND
RESPECT AND TRUST ALWAYS SURROUND
BRIGHTENS ONE’S DAY LIKE A RISING SUN
SMILES, PLENTY FOR EVERYONE
INSPIRING PROSE FLOWS FROM HER PEN
REASSURING AND CALMING AS HER LIGHT WITHIN

Thank you and God Bless.