



Tom and Norma Klopp - Vancouver Sun photo, 1993

Remembering Norma Klopp

by Christine Gordon

In the summer of 1993, the new package of guardianship laws was about to be put before the Legislature in Victoria. Those of us who had been working from the community's perspective to create these laws were anxious about how this legislation would be presented to the wider public - we very much wanted the citizens of the province to see these new laws as an opportunity to honour individual choices and to value the role of family and friends in helping a person to remain a unique individual to the very end of her life.

We thought that we should try to interest

the media in presenting this perspective and we set about the usual round of press releases and cold calls. I must say that we weren't having a great deal of success in stirring the passions of the media--it wasn't a barn burner of a story. But then we persuaded a reporter to go out and visit Tom and Norma Klopp. She did and when she returned she and her editor decided not only did they have a story--they had a front page story.

What was it, I asked the reporter, that persuaded you? As part of her reply about the warm reception she had received in the Klopp's home she said "you know, while I was visiting, Norma lifted her head and said to her husband, 'Tom, put some cookies out for our visitor.' It hit me then what all of you had been talking about." And so, the *Vancouver Sun* had the best front page in recent memory, thanks to Norma Klopp's grace as a hostess.

The members of our guardianship coalition had many opportunities to meet and know Norma because Tom rarely came to a meeting without her. She was quiet for the most part, but she usually smiled and sometimes joked about the length of our meetings. She and Tom danced together at one of our parties despite the fact, as Tom whispered to me, it wasn't really their kind of music.

When Tom occasionally arrived alone, a meeting didn't seem quite the same. As long as we could see Norma, we knew what we were about. Because, even though we met her at the end of her life when she could no longer express herself as easily as she would have liked, we knew that this was Norma Klopp, the woman with a wry sense of humour, the dancer, the mother, the gracious hostess, the woman who convinced the *Vancouver Sun* that honouring the unique gifts of every individual, no matter how frail, was front page news. □

Tom and Norma Klopp are long-time members of the Guardianship Coalition. Norma died on February 21, 1995.