

## Good Afternoon And Welcome

My name is Harold Desmarais and I have the privilege and the honour of acting as the Master of Ceremonies at this, a

## Celebration Of The Life Of Nitto Marquez

I first met Nitto in 1981 when I became involved in a group whose primary purpose was to “expiate guilt” and to “promulgate joy”!

Joy – that’s what this celebration is all about. We are here to celebrate the life of a very special and very unique individual named NITTO MARQUEZ.

We are here to share the joy, the laughter, and the pleasure that Nitto added to our lives.

I wanted to set the tone for this event, so I’m going to share a story with you about Wilbur and Edna. Now they were a retired couple that lived in Iowa and the highlight of their year was when they went to visit the State Fair. They spent a whole week there and they saw everything and did everything. Well, almost everything.....

\* \* \*

Yes, \$150.00 is still \$150.00 and laughter is still such wonderful emotion. Over the next little while, I think that we’ll experience a lot of emotions as our speakers share their impressions, their feelings and their own special moments and memories of Nitto.

Our first speaker is Murray Jose, the Executive Director of the PWA (Toronto Persons with AIDS Foundation”. Please give him a warm welcome.

**(comments by Murray)**

Thank you Murray.

When you experience the loss of a friend like Nitto, you are knocked over by sadness and by a sense of loss that just overwhelms you. I wanted to share a story that demonstrates that how you handle life’s problems and sorrows is a personal choice.

### A Carrot, An Egg, And A Cup Of Coffee

A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as one problem was solved, a new one arose.

Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to boil. In the first she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil; without saying a word.

After several minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl.

Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, "Tell me what you see."

"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," she replied.

Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. The mother then asked the daughter to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg.

Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she savoured its rich aroma and enjoyed its flavour. The daughter then asked, "What does it mean, mother?"

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same

adversity: boiling water. Each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened.

The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water.

"Which are you?" she asked her daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?"

Think of this: Which am I? Am I the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity, do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength?

Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit, but after a death, a break-up, a financial hardship or some other trial, have I become hardened and stiff? Does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and hardened heart?

Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavour. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around you. When the hour is the darkest and trials are their greatest, do you elevate yourself to another level? How do you handle adversity? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?

May you have enough happiness to make you sweet, enough trials to make you strong, enough sorrow to keep you human and enough hope to make you happy. May you have enough.

The happiest of people don't necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the most of everything that comes along their way.

Our next speaker is Nitto's sister, Josie Fernando. Please put your hands together and help me welcome her.

**(comments by Josie)**

Thank you Josie.

At this time, I wanted to share a poem that was written by Mary Elizabeth Frye (1905 - 2004). I believe that anyone who lived for 99 years must have gained some insight into life.

### **Do Not Stand At My Grave And Weep**

largely considered to be written by [Mary Elizabeth Frye](#) (1905-2004)

Do not stand at my grave and weep

I am not there.

I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow.

I am the diamond glint of snow.

I am the sunlight on ripened grain.

I am the autumn rain.

When you awake in the morning hush,

I am the swift uplifting rush

Of birds circling in flight.

I am the stars that shine at night.

Do not stand at my grave and weep.

I am not there.

I do not sleep.

Our next speaker is Nitto's friend and former supervisor at PWA Toronto. She is currently the Executive Director of the North York Women's Shelter. Let's hear it for Charlene Catchpole.

**(comments by Charlene)**

Thank you Charlene.

Sometimes a poet can speak so eloquently about what is really important in our lives. Winston Abbot is one such writer and I wanted to share his words with you now.

## **Come Walk Among the Stars**

By Winston Abbott

For years I never knew whether the twilight was the ending of the day or the beginning of the night. And then, suddenly one day, I understood that this did not matter at all, for time is but a circle, and so there can be no beginning and no ending, and this is how I came to know that birth and death are one, and it is neither the coming or the going that is of consequence.

**What is of consequence is the beauty that one gathers in this interlude called life."**

Our next speaker is the son of another of Nitto's sisters, Priscilla Ilagan. Please join me in greeting Nitto's nephew, Jamie Ilagan.

### ***(comments by Jamie)***

Thank you Jamie.

While we are celebrating Nitto's life, that celebration is inexorably intertwined with our sense of loss. An English writer, named David Harkins, lost his true love when he was only 22 years old. He showed a remarkable maturity when he wrote "She is Gone". I've changed the gender but the sentiments he expressed ring just as true.

## **He Is Gone**

written 1981

David Harkins 1959 -

Silloth, Cumbria, United Kingdom

You can shed tears that he is gone  
or you can smile because he has lived.

You can close your eyes and pray that he'll come back  
or you can open your eyes and see all he's left.

Your heart can be empty because you can't see him  
or you can be full of the love you shared.

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday  
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

You can remember him and only that he's gone  
or you can cherish his memory and let it live on.

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back  
or you can do what he'd want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

Our next speaker is the Executive Director of the Asian Community AIDS Services. Nitto was one of the founders and a past president of this group. A warm round of applause please, for Noulmook Sutdhibhasilp.

### ***(comments by Noulmook)***

Thank you Noulmook.

Others have mentioned The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group dedicated to the promulgation of joy and the expiation of guilt. That was the group where I met Nitto back in 1981. You see, while Nitto was one of the original founders of the group, I was their first recruit. I felt that there was absolutely no way that I could participate in a

Celebration of Nitto's life without including a "Nun" story. I think that I found the perfect one and want to share that with you now.

## **The Holy Prostitutes**

A man is driving down a deserted stretch of highway in Nevada when he notices a sign out of the corner of his eye..... It reads:

**SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS  
HOUSE OF PROSTITUTION --- 10 MILES**

He thinks this is must be a figment of his imagination and drives on without second thought... Soon he sees another sign that reads:

**SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS  
HOUSE OF PROSTITUTION --- 5 MILES**

Suddenly he begins to realize that these signs are for real. When he drives past a third sign saying:

**SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS  
HOUSE OF PROSTITUTION --- NEXT RIGHT**

His curiosity gets the best of him. He turns down the road and pulls into the drive. On the far side of the parking lot is a stone building with a small sign next to the door reading:

**SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS  
(CLIENTS' ENTRANCE)**

He climbs the steps and rings the bell. The door is immediately opened by a nun in a long black habit who asks, 'What may we do for you my son?'

He answers, 'I saw your signs along the highway & I was interested in possibly doing some business with you.'

She says: 'Very well my son. Please follow me.'

He is led through many winding passages with several twists and turns. Soon he is quite disoriented. The nun stops at a closed door and turns and tells the man, 'Please knock on this door.' And she leaves.

The man knocks and another nun in a long habit, holding a tin cup answers this door. This nun says to the man: 'Please place your \$100.00 DONATION in the cup. You may then go through the large wooden door at the end of this hallway.'

The man puts \$100.00 in the cup, and then eagerly trots down the hall. He slips through the large heavy door hearing it shut behind him. The door locks, and he finds himself back in the parking lot.

Facing him is a large sign that says:

**GO IN PEACE!**

**YOU HAVE JUST BEEN ROYALLY SCREWED BY THE  
SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS.**

**IT SERVES YOU RIGHT, YOU SINNER, YOU!**

Our next speaker is one of Nitto's friends who is a Case Manager at PWA Toronto. Please say hello to Claudia Medina and help me make her feel welcome.

**(comments by Claudia)**

Thank you Claudia.

Back in 1987, a woman by the name of Colleen Corah Hitchcock wrote a poem about death and loss that I wanted to impart to you now. It's called "Ascension"

## Ascension

And if I go, while you're still here  
Know that I still live on.  
Vibrating to a different measure  
Behind a thin veil  
That you cannot see through.  
You will not see me  
So you must have faith.  
I wait the time  
When we can soar together;  
Both aware of each other.  
Until then, live your life to the fullest,  
And when you need me,  
Just whisper my name in your heart,  
**I will be there.**

By Colleen Corah Hitchcock ©1987

Another of Nitto's Co-workers wanted to share some of her memories of this special man. Wendy Robbins is the present Volunteer Coordinator of PWA Toronto. Give it up now for Wendy.

### *(comments by Wendy)*

Thank you Wendy.

I recognize that this Celebration has had a distinctly "secular" tinge to it and I also recognize that many in this gathering hold very deeply felt religious beliefs. I wanted to remind everyone that religion is one of life's smorgasbords. Your choice can range from Anglican to Zoroastrian. You may also choose not to go to the table at all and develop your own spirituality based on the principles and values you use to guide your life. However, I did come across a story that I think will amuse everyone regardless of religious affiliations.

## The Atheist and the Bear

An atheist was taking a walk through the woods, admiring all that evolution had created. "What majestic trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!" he said to himself. As he was walking along the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. When he turned to see what the cause was, he saw a 7-foot grizzly charging right towards him.

He ran as fast as he could. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the bear was closing. He ran even faster, crying in fear. He looked over his shoulder again, and the bear was even closer. His heart was pounding and he tried to run even faster. He tripped and fell on the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up, but saw the bear right on top of him, reaching for him with his left paw and raising his right paw to strike him.

At that moment, the Atheist cried out "Oh my God!...." Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest was silent. Even the river stopped moving.

As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky, "You deny my existence for all of these years; you teach others I don't exist; and you even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to now count you as a believer?"

The atheist looked directly into the light "It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask YOU to treat me as Christian now, but perhaps could you make the bear a Christian?" "Very well," said the voice.

The light went out. The river ran again. And the sounds of the forest resumed.

And then the bear dropped his right paw ..... brought both paws together...bowed his head and spoke:

"Lord, for this food which I am about to receive, I am truly thankful."

Our next speaker is another of Nitto's 17 nieces and nephews, Maricar Marquez. The family all refer to her as "Richie". Richie and her husband, Don Horvath, traveled here from New York City in order to share her feelings. Since Richie is deaf and partially sighted she has enlisted a "team" to give herself a voice we might hear. Katherine and Diane are "Interveners" who will interpret Richie's statements and allow us to hear her words. Please join me in welcoming them.

### **(comments by Richie)**

Thank you Richie, Katherine & Diane.

The remarkable experience we have just been a part of reminds me of a song that was made popular by the singing group "The Flirtations". It was written by Fred Small and is called "Everything Possible". I want you to listen to the words of the Chorus of that song.

## **Everything Possible**

by [The Flirtations](#), words and Music by Fred Small

We have cleared off the table  
The leftovers saved  
Washed the dishes and put them away  
I have told you a story  
And tucked you in tight  
At the end of your knock-about day  
As the moon sets its sail  
To carry you to sleep  
Over the midnight sea  
I will sing you a song  
No one sang to me  
May it keep you good company

You can be anybody that you want to be  
You can love whomever you will  
You can travel any country where your heart leads  
And know I will love you still

You can live by yourself, you can gather friends around  
You can choose one special one  
But the only measure of your words and your deeds  
Will be the love you leave behind when you're gone

Some girls grow up strong and bold  
Some boys are quiet and kind  
Some race on ahead, some follow behind,  
Some grow in their own space and time  
Some women love women  
And some men love men  
Some raise children, and some never do  
You can dream all the day, never reaching the end  
Of everything possible for you

Don't be rattled by names, by taunts or games,  
But seek out spirits true  
If you give your friends the best part of yourself,  
They will give the same back to you

**You can be anybody that you want to be**  
**You can love whomever you will**  
**You can travel any country where your heart leads**  
**And know I will love you still**  
**You can live by yourself,**  
**you can gather friends around**  
**You can choose one special one**  
**But the only measure of your words and your deeds**  
**Will be the love you leave behind when you're gone**  
**Oh, the love you leave behind when you're gone.**

Since we are a little ahead of schedule, if anyone in the hall would like to share his or her own special memories of Nitto, please come forward.

Please welcome a long time friend of Bill & Nitto's, Daniel Parkinson.

### **(comments by Daniel)**

Thank you Daniel.

Keith Wong is the present Executive Director of the Peel HIV/AIDS Network. He has known Nitto since 1988 when he was the E.D. of Asian Community AIDS Services and Nitto was on the Board of Directors of that organization. Slap those palms together and say hello to Keith.

### **(comments by Keith)**

Thank you Keith.

A celebration like this doesn't just happen. It takes a lot of commitment, planning, hard work and dedication to pull it all together to make the event flow seamlessly.

The lion's share of the credit for taking this celebration from a concept to the reality that we all shared today belongs to Nitto's partner of 24 years – BILL EADIE.

I would ask you to join me now in acknowledging him for making it possible for all of us to have had this experience.

Bill has asked me to also publicly thank

1. Wendy Robbins for a lot of logistical support especially with the arrangements and the food.
  2. Katie Hansen for all of her advice, help and support
  3. The PWA Foundation for the loan of a computer and the projector.
- Please join me in showing our appreciation to all of them.

It was over 126 years ago that a much wiser man than I shared what he considered to be success. His name was Ralph Waldo Emerson and he said:

## **Success**

To laugh often and much,

To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty;

To find the best in others;

To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;

To know even **one** life has breathed easier because you have lived.

This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

May 25, 1803 – April 27, 1882

Using these criteria, there is no doubt that Nitto Marquez made a magnificent success of his life.

Thank you all for coming!