

Eva Leon

Have you ever met a person and just knew right away that this was a warm and genuine person, someone you want to have as a good friend? Well Eva Leon is just that kind of person. While she may be small in stature, she is huge in holiness, honesty, and humbleness. Born in a small mining town by Nacozari, in Sonora Mexico, Maria Eva Peralta (people call her by both Maria or Eva) had an uneventful childhood there until a fire destroyed the family home and they then moved to Agua Prieta, Mexico, by Douglas, Arizona. As she grew older, Eva remembers “borrowing” an uncle’s pickup truck to drive around, while being only fifteen and no driver’s license or even insurance. Not just in Mexico but also in Douglas after the family settled there. She did have one small accident while driving, but somehow forgot to mention it to her uncle, even after he noticed the dent. That unfortunate fire destroyed any baby pictures of Eva and still today her humbleness keeps her from having only a few pictures of herself, which she does not like to share.

In Douglas Eva met her future husband Robert Leon in September of 1963. The following February they were married and stayed happily married for 54 years. At the time Robert Leon worked at Fort Huachuca and so had a long commute to work and home. So, he decided he and Eva would move to Bisbee. Remember back then Sierra Vista was just a dot on the map with limited public housing, not like today. Settling at the top of a hill on a narrow street in Old Bisbee, Eva was petrified at the thought of navigating the narrow winding roads of Old Bisbee while driving. However, her ever so patient husband encouraged her to get behind the wheel and after a bit, Eva mastered the tiny streets of Old Bisbee. Now their home was at the top of a hill with no parking, so they had to park at the bottom of the hill and walk up to the house, carrying everything by hand up to the house. Growing weary from lugging groceries up the stairs Eva and her husband purchased a home in the Galena area in 1984 and she remains there today. Eva admits that she really loves Bisbee now and enjoys the quiet and peacefulness of Bisbee. Though she does miss all the stores that were in Bisbee during its heyday, being able to shop here for anything you wanted. She even misses Old Bisbee and filling in now and then at Moore’s Grocery Store while Lonnie Moore would walk down to the post office, which sometimes took a while because he knew everyone and would stop to chat along the way.

In 1966 Eva went to work for the nuns that ran the St. Patrick School, working in the Convent. There were four nuns living in the Convent and Eva cooked, sewed, cleaned and she remembers how welcoming they were to her. The first four nuns remained only a brief time after Eva started working at the Convent, then next four were Sister Helen, who was the principal of the St. Patrick School. A Sister Sue, a Sister Louise and then Sister Kit. Kit Hutchinson today is still a cherished parishioner at St. Patrick Church. Once settled in the job, Eva began to answer the phone for the nuns, which helped her with her English. Eva

remembers Sister Louise as being somewhat demanding, in a subtle way, and asked Eva to sew her a new habit, which turned out to be a very demanding project, and the only habit Eva ever attempted to make. Another one of Eva's duties was to cut and comb out Sister Helen's hair, something Eva learned in Magdalena, Mexico while visiting a relative who owned a hair salon. Helping the nuns keep up with the students was another duty as assigned for Eva. One day two mischievous young boys were too busy playing and missed the bus to take them home after school. Sister Helen brought the boys over to the Convent trying to decide how to get the two young mischief-makers home. Eva calmed Sister Helen down and said she would take care of it. Turns out the boys were her nephews and so Eva called their father to come pick them up, their father was not happy at all, but Eva was glad to be of help. Assisting the nuns with the school children always was fun for Eva and one day along with the nuns, watching the students parade out of school they commented on certain students. Eva pointed out one young girl and said, "I'll take the redhead" who turned out to be Elizabeth Lueck (nee Bach), who is to this day a dear friend of Eva.

Having a love of baking, Eva was always impressed with the Christmas Stollen that Sister Louise would bake each year. When Eva asked Sister Louise for the recipe, Sister Louise would give some excuse and not give it to Eva. One day Eva was watching Sister Louise bake a stollen to see if she could learn the recipe that way. Well luck would have it and Sister Louise got a phone call, while she was on the phone Eva quickly wrote the recipe down, she stole the stollen...recipe that is. She chuckled when she remembers the first time, she baked some Christmas Stollens for a Woman's Club Bake Sale and how everyone was raving about how beautiful they were, all decorated with little Christmas Trees, glaze and fruit. All wondered who made them and where did the recipe come from. Eva finally admitted to baking them, but not how she got the recipe.

During this time Mary Carbajal was the housekeeper for the Rectory. Mary asked Eva if she would cover for Mary in the Rectory so Mary could take a well-earned vacation. Eva did and enjoyed working for the priests. Once Father Padilla asked Eva to make enchiladas for him, so Eva did. While Father Padilla was eating Eva asked him how the enchiladas tasted, he replied, "Well they are not like my mother's enchiladas." With a straight face, Eva looked at him and said, "Well next time you want enchiladas, go to your mother's!" Then they both broke out in laughter. Besides keeping busy taking care of the Convent, helping out when needed over at the school, pitching in at the Rectory, Eva still had time to work on ceramics, did lots of macramé, crafts, sewing, and lots and lots of baking for family and friends and the church. Besides running a tight ship at home, always having dinner ready and on the table at 5:00 every evening, or with an exceptionally good excuse if late, Eva enjoyed her quiet private life at home with her husband Robert. You could tell how much she loves him and misses him each time she mentioned any memory of him. Today she stays connected with extended family members who live in various parts of the United

States. Some as close as Douglas, others living all across the United States. She is currently an Honorary Member of the St. Patrick Women's Club, after being an active member for many years. After the St. Patrick School closed, Eva went to work for Catholic Community Services for several years becoming a Certified Nurses Aid (CNA). As a CNA, Eva worked with different health organizations within Cochise County and if you mention her name to any of the nurses she worked with, you will see their faces light up with joy and say only praise for Eva and what a wonderful person she is. As with everything Eva does, she does it with perfection and knows how it should be done. In 2001 she was invited to Mesa to attend a big reception for CNAs but really did not want to go. Her superior finally told her that she had to, it was necessary, so reluctantly Eva went with a group up to Mesa. After dinner there were speakers and accolades to various groups and people leading up to the big award of the evening, CNA of the Year, and Eva Leon was chosen to receive this prestigious award out of all the CNAs in Arizona. When she went up to receive her beautiful certificate and medal, Eva was so humbled and could not speak. With tears in her eyes, she was able to say, "This award is for all the CNAs, who all work so hard and give so much for the care of those in need." When she arrived home her husband was so, so proud of her. Being ever so humble, Eva was even shy to show off her certificate and medal, not even wanting a picture taken of them.

Today Eva is still deeply religious and has a strong Catholic Faith. She does not particularly care about all the new rules and regulations involved with food prep and kitchen use but understands why rules are needed. She loves all aspects of the Church and respects Pope Leo very much. Eva knows that Pope Leo is a holy man and prays for all the world but knows she will never meet him in person. She is okay with that because her faith is extraordinarily strong, she knows that the Lord is with her at all times and this is her comfort and strength. Her holiness, honesty and humbleness speak volumes, and it was an honor to meet with and get to know Maria Eva Leon.

Per Eva's request, no pictures to share.

Written Tom Schelling