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Joan Beverly Kroc

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KROC, JOAN BEVERLY (b. 27 August 1928 in St. Paul, Minnesota; d. 12 October 2003 in Rancho Santa Fe, California), peace advocate and philanthropist who was the third wife of McDonald's Corporation founder Ray Kroc.

Joan Beverly Mansfield was the elder of two daughters of Charles Smart Mansfield, a railroad telegraph operator, and Gladys Bonnebelle Mansfield, a housewife and accomplished violinist. Although her father was frequently out of work during the Depression, Joan was still able to take piano lessons, and began teaching piano at age 15, eventually having over 35 students. She was also an avid ice skater, and dreamed of becoming a nurse or veterinarian.

After graduating from Humboldt High School, Joan married Navy veteran Rawland F. Smith in 1945 at age 17, and their daughter Linda was born two years later. "Rawlie" worked as a railroad engineer, and Joan played piano and organ in local restaurants. While playing at St. Paul's Criterion Restaurant in 1957, she met Ray Kroc, who was meeting with the restaurant's owner, Jim Zien, about starting a McDonald's franchise. Although married at the time, Kroc later wrote in his autobiography, "I was stunned by her blond beauty." In 1958, Zien hired Rawlie Smith to manage his first franchise in Minneapolis. One year later (1959), Rawlie and Joan moved to Rapid City, South Dakota, to run a McDonald's restaurant that they co-owned with Zien.

Ray Kroc frequently spoke to Joan (whom he called "Joni") by telephone about business matters, and was still smitten by her. After divorcing his first wife in 1961, Kroc promptly proposed to Joan, who was still married (and twenty-five years younger). She accepted at first, but then changed her mind after consulting with her mother and daughter. While attending a McDonald's convention in San Diego in late 1968, Joan met up with Kroc once again. They played songs on a piano in his hotel room and talked all night, and he proposed again, even though he had since married his second wife. This time Joan accepted, they both obtained divorces, and were married on 8 March 1969 at Kroc's ranch in Santa Ynez, California.

Ray Kroc battled an alcohol problem for many years, and Joan even filed for divorce in November 1971. However, they reconciled after a one month separation. The Krocs moved from Chicago to San Diego in 1976, two years after Ray's purchase of the San Diego Padres baseball team. When Ray died in January 1984 at age 81, Joan succeeded him as Padres owner, and the team went to its first World Series later that season, losing to the Detroit Tigers. She sold the team in 1990 for \$75 million.

Ray Kroc had established the Kroc Foundation in 1965 to support medical research, and Joan's first

philanthropic endeavor was Operation Cork (“Kroc” spelled backwards) in May 1976, an alcoholism educational program which focused on family members of alcoholics. In 1989, she established what is considered to be the first employee-assistance program in Major League Baseball, for Padres players and staff with drug problems.

When a gunman killed 21 people at a McDonald’s in San Ysidro, California in July 1984, she donated \$100,000 to establish a fund for the victims’ families. Shortly thereafter, Kroc attended the National Women’s Conference for the Prevention of Nuclear War in Washington, DC, and quickly became a peace activist, spending \$3 million on disarmament issues in 1985, which included reprinting Helen Caldicott’s book *Missile Envy*, and the running of newspaper ads in major newspapers pushing for disarmament. Conservative syndicated columnist Cal Thomas called her a “McNut,” and wrote, “The Pentagon doesn’t make McNuggets and Joan Kroc ought not to be trying to make policy on nuclear weapons.” The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies opened in 1986 at the University of Notre Dame following her \$6 million contribution. While Ray Kroc had been a Republican (and had even donated \$250,000 to Richard Nixon’s 1972 re-election campaign), Joan was a registered Independent who supported liberal Democrats, and she gave \$1 million to the Democratic National Committee in 1987.

Kroc did not listen to solicitations from fundraisers, and those who asked for money did not receive it. Like the name of her yacht (“Impromptu”) implied, she often gave money after reading or hearing a news report, and the recipient often had no idea that a donation was coming until it arrived. When she read about a 12-year-old hemophiliac with AIDS who was going to lose his private teacher because of budget cuts, she sent \$235,000 to balance the Tennessee school district’s budget. On her way to visit her father, who was dying in a Minneapolis hospice, Kroc met a doctor from the San Diego Hospice on an airplane, and went on to donate \$18.5 million to build its new campus and palliative care center. The St. Vincent de Paul Joan Kroc Center for the homeless opened in 1987 after her \$3 million donation, and she anonymously gave \$7 million to build an AIDS wing at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in Bronx, New York, in the late 1980s.

In 1993, Kroc donated McDonald’s stock worth \$60 million to the Ronald McDonald House Charities, and two years later donated \$50 million to Ronald McDonald Children’s Charities. Her \$15 million donation to the victims of the 1997 flood in Grand Forks, North Dakota and East Grand Forks, Minnesota was anonymous until a local newspaper publicly identified her. Other major gifts were \$25 million to the University of San Diego (USD), which opened The Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice in 2001, and \$87 million to the Salvation Army to

build The Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center in Rolando, California, a 12-acre facility designed to expose children to the arts, educational programs, and sports, including a skating rink. While Kroc preferred not to have her name attached to these projects – the Peace Institute at USD was originally to be named for Mohandas Gandhi – the recipients often insisted, hoping to attract new donors.

Joan Kroc died of brain cancer at her home in Rancho Santa Fe, California, on 12 October 2003, at the age of 75, and was buried in El Camino Memorial Park in La Jolla, California. Kroc left a \$1.7 billion estate, and among her bequests were over \$60 million to Ronald McDonald House Charities, \$50 million to Notre Dame's Kroc Institute, \$10 million to the Zoological Society of San Diego, and \$200 million to National Public Radio. The largest bequest was \$1.5 billion to the Salvation Army for the development of community centers across the United States. Although Kroc was raised a Lutheran, she did not consider herself a member of any organized religion, and her ongoing support for the Salvation Army had more to do with their services and management than with their evangelism.

A chain-smoker who eschewed the spotlight, many of Joan Kroc's donations were never publicized. She was dubbed "Saint Joan of the Arches" by the former Mayor of San Diego, and once summed up her philanthropic philosophy by saying, "The things I believe in, I'll spend money on."

[A profile of Joan Kroc ("Dismayed by Nuclear Arms Race McDonald's Fortune Fuels Joan Kroc's Peace Effort") by Scott Harris is in the *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Oct. 1985. Useful articles about her philanthropy are "Millions Given Quietly: The Rich Legacy of Joan Kroc, a Very Private Person," by Jeff McDonald, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 19 Oct. 2003; "Philanthropy That Was Deeply Personal: Joan Kroc Chose Her Projects Carefully and Strove for Top Quality, Regardless of Cost," by Tony Perry, *Los Angeles Times*, 31 Jan. 2004; and "Billions Served: McDonald's Heiress Joan Kroc Took Her Philanthropy and Super-Sized It," by David Montgomery, *Washington Post*, 14 March 2004. Ray Kroc's autobiography, *Grinding It Out: The Making of McDonald's*, written with Robert Anderson (1977), contains information on his life with Joan, as does *McDonald's: Behind the Arches*, by John F. Love (revised edition, 1995).

Obituaries are in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Oct. 2003.]

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