

**A Good Word for Sybil Brantley**  
**March 24, 2008**

Sybil and I had at least two things in common: 1) our blood did indeed runneth orange and we often found ourselves talking Clemson Tiger talk, and 2) our lives revolve around the lives of our children. It's just that in Sybil's case, she had twice as much to talk about. With Tom and Dave and Meredith and Craig – she had me beat by two children, but it never failed that early on in every visit she would ask about my boys. And that always led us to the topic of baseball which always led us to the topic of reminiscing about her good 'ole days of watching her own children on some athletic field somewhere. Indeed, I believe, those were some of Sybil's best good 'ole days. And almost every visit I've ever had with Sybil has been interrupted with a phone call from one of her children! I do believe it was a sign of what kind of mother she had been for her whole life. She cared for them as they grew up, and they have returned the favor in her old age. Her family was her pride and joy. I feel like I know all of you. In case you did not know –she beamed her genteel smile as she thought of you in all of our conversations. I believe she Raised you all Right – Thanks be to God!

Sybil was a woman a little ahead of her time, I'd say. She was a working mother who made all the necessary sacrifices that simply come with motherhood. And in addition, she found a way to use her gift and love of music to play in the Charlotte Symphony. She was giving and did her fair share of volunteer work – sometimes not by her own choice but by her children's ability to “volunteer” her for their good causes. When a third grade teacher would ask for cupcakes, a Brantley kid was likely to raise his or her hand and volunteer Sybil. She wouldn't even know about it until receiving phone call from the teacher with details about how many cupcakes and when they were needed.

And Sybil would get to baking. Or then here at church, when a piano teacher was needed in the children's Sunday School department, a Brantley kid would likely volunteer Sybil. Though the family didn't tell me this part, I believe it must be true: she must have found joy in being involved in the lives of her children. I know plenty of mothers who would complain or chastise her children for getting her into so much – I'm guessing with four children and working outside the home, on some days baking cupcakes and playing the piano may have seemed like too much. But what Sybil did was make memories. What Sybil did was lead by example. What Sybil did was make a terribly difficult job of parenting not seem like work at all. What Sybil did, with Hoot right by her side, was to make a family – a family who even in her death gathered together to remember her well while stories flowed (most of them not quite fit for telling here!) and laughter abounded and tears were shed. I'd say that what I witnessed with her family on Saturday afternoon was the result of her life's best work. Thanks be to God!

Sybil was patient and calm, selfless and caring, intelligent, musical, and well-read – all laced with a good sense of humor. In one of her nursing home rehab stays, when part of her treatment simply involved her need to gain weight she declared that she was going to “eat her way out of here!” She had a way of putting everyone at ease. When our youth group paid her a visit or two during the time that she lived at Brighton Gardens, she fell in love with them and they with her. And she sent the youth group money and bought them a cake – trying to find ways to stay involved in the life of the church she loved dearly even when she could no longer attend each week. Thanks be to God!

Family. Music. Church. Faith. Those were the things in Sybil's life that received the best of who she was created to be. And her life was accomplished in partnership with

a man who is fitly named “Hoot.” Sixty-two years after a blind date that turned out to be love at first sight, I think we could say that Hoot and Sybil were made for each other. Their love of travel, their dedication to family, their commitment to each other – all testimony to the goodness that was their life. In sickness and in health – for better or for worse – spending a lifetime living out their commitments and their promises to each other. Sybil’s last words to me last week were “I don’t know what Hoot’s going to do without me.” Hoot, I know what you will do. You’ll live out your days in thanksgiving for what you have said was “a wonderful life together.” You will remember well the good times. You will laugh and you will cry. You will call yourself Blessed. Well done, good and faithful servant - not just for the way you cared for and loved her in these last few years, but for the way that you built a life together. Thanks be to God!

I chose the Scripture from Romans and Timothy because they spoke to me about Sybil’s later years and her battle with cancer. That *suffering produces . . . . .* and *fighting the good fight*. Sybil didn’t fight the good fight to the end. She fought the good fight to the beginning. It is fitting that on this Easter Monday morning, the lilies are still in bloom reminding us that Sybil has not finished her race, but today she continues to run the race in the Blessed Hope of the forever presence of God. It is Easter Good News. It is Sybil’s Good News. Forever. Thanks be to God!