



*A Good Word for Bobbie McDonald*

December 29, 2015

Like many woman of her era, Bobbie McDonald graced the world with too many gifts to count, a keen mind and a sharp wit, and without the benefit of a college education. More important at the time was for her to graduate from Central High School and get a job, and Bobbie always did what was most important at the time – for everyone else – so she graduated and went to work, and everywhere Bobbie worked, for a salary or as a volunteer, she excelled. Everywhere she served, people loved her. Even years after George had retired from the S.L. Bagby Company, Bobbie was still working for them – not for a paycheck, but because they continued to seek her counsel, and because Bobbie hardly ever said no to anyone who needed her.

Bobbie had a slightly gruff exterior. Terry said she had a “poker face,” and that is an apt description: she watched closely, evaluated every move, practiced critical discernment, but in a flash, that stern look would give way to her broad, beautiful smile, and a laugh that could set a room at ease. Those who knew Bobbie knew she wasn’t being judgmental (she wasn’t judging you), she was just practicing good judgement – in order to practice the right kindness for the right moment.

Susan says Bobbie was obviously called to be a teacher. It was evident in all she did. Bobbie prepped for her 4<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday school class for hours and hours, and long before most

folks had given a thought to inter-faith dialogue, she was at the Temple, taking Torah classes so she could better understand Judaism, and Jesus – and better teach the Old Testament to her fourth graders, who loved her classes and who their teacher. In the turbulent 1960s an iconoclastic minister was bringing challenging, sometimes controversial sermons from this pulpit, and Bobbie often got there before many others did, so, being the teacher, sometimes she became the interpreter of this new theology for this new day, for her friends and family. Terry said his mother sometimes helped his father draw new, important lines, in the difficult conversations of that era. We all need someone like that. In a Tuesday morning Bible study, I came to appreciate Bobbie's quiet listening. She didn't speak often, but when she did, it was always evident she'd been listening, and she was often prepared to challenge the teacher with her own insights and lived wisdom.

Bobbie liked the challenge of a thinking faith, was not comfortable with the either-/or-ness of dogmatic certainty. And she never quit studying. She was an avid reader, and she worked the daily crossword puzzle until a few days before her death. For years she and Jenneane took in a weekly matinee movie, which was just another way for her to expand her horizons. She never missed "Jeopardy" or the "Wheel of Fortune" – because she knew many of the answers before the contestants did. She loved to read out loud to her children and grandchildren, which was the best way she knew to pass along her appetite for knowledge to them.

Bobbie had a love of literature and a keen sense for the theatrical. Back in the day, the stage of what is now Milford Chapel was a common venue for shows and skits, dancing and singing and laughing, luaus and pageants of all kinds, which were produced to teach and

entertain a growing church family – and Bobbie was a ring leader. If there was a show to be scripted or a backdrop to be created, you could count on Bobbie to be behind the scenes. She was instrumental in all of those, and in the creation and development of “The Judean Hills, a Living Tableau” – that living Christmas nativity which was this church’s signature to the community for almost 60 years. For most of Park Road’s 65-year history if something was happening on the corner of Park and Ashcraft, Bobbie and George McDonald were in the thick of it.

Nowhere has “church” ever been exemplified better than it was for Bobbie and George and their friends at Park Road. They laughed together and loved together. They argued about important matters of theology and cared about important issues of faith. They studied and sang and shared and served together. It is a model of church that is foreign to many, and one that is unfortunately a dying art. I’m grateful for the way the McDonalds and Blankenships and Morrisons and Kinnairds and Helts, and so many others, modeled church for us, even though we have only seen a glimpse of what really made church great for them.

Just as she made things happen at church, she was also the main excitement in the house, especially for the three who knew them as “MacMac” and “Grand-Bob.” Don’t you love that name, Grand-Bob? How appropriate! Sam, her youngest, told us last night how she taught him to ride a bike and that she always had a deck of cards ready for hours of “Go Fish.” Clays said she made sure there was always enough to eat – and that was no easy chore for three grandsons! And she made sure they were always well-dressed and ready for every occasion. Jay said “You didn’t know she was doing stuff, but she was. She didn’t want you to know.” She was always behind the scenes, making sure every show, whether on stage or in her home, ran without a hitch.

Her need to make everything just right and to make everyone happy was highlighted during Christmas, which Jay said was her “Super Bowl.” She spent all year getting ready. She looked for sales, for just the right gifts for everyone, and she put them aside in a closet that was off limits all year. Though this Christmas has ensured that all future Christmases will be tinged with a new sadness, remembering her loss, it will also be appropriate that in future years as the season she loved rolls around, it will be then that they think of her the most.

Someone said that she was the kind of woman who made true the statement, “Behind every good man is a good woman.” In all of George’s years of service and all his accolades, in his work and in his service to the Shriners, Bobbie was there, but always in the background. For 65 years she was there. Susan said their song was “I Love You Truly,” and she truly did, and after he died Bobbie sometimes said, “I just don’t want to go on without him anymore.” Susan called theirs a classic romance. What a beautiful description of their life together.

Bobbie worked with George, served with George, and when he began to falter, she stood by him, giving him the grace to go on being George, giving him the respect he deserved until his last day. And then when George died, she turned her full attention to her sister, Shirley, whom she cared for just as kindly.

Amy said last night that Bobbie gave so much, she finally just gave out. I can’t think of a better accolade. She gave all until she just gave out.<sup>1</sup> Jesus said to his disciples: *The greatest*

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<sup>1</sup> I’m sorry I did not remember this quotation from George Bernard Shaw when I gave the eulogy: “I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die.”

*among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted (Matthew 23.11-12).*

For a lifetime, Bobbie McDonald humbled herself to the role of servant. In every show, she was working, but behind the scenes. Today, we exalt her, holding her up for her selfless example, holding her up to God, who we can trust to hold her in the eternity of Divine Love, forever.

For Bobbie McDonald, friend and servant, thanks be to God!