

A Good Word for Bettye Baxter Mott  
December 19, 2006

We live in a society that is fascinated with celebrity status, obsessed with fame and fortune. I suppose we are not different in that regard from any other people, in any other time, yet this obsession fuels, to a truly obscene proportion, the passions of so many who clamor for stardom. The “American Idol” phenomenon is perhaps just the latest evidence of our national fixation for the limelight.

Bettye did not live a life outside of her share of the limelight. She had a love of music, and a voice, I am told, which matched her devotion. A degree in music from the Greensboro Woman’s College and many years of the practice that makes perfect put Bettye in the front of more than one choir. In the limelight. She sang the music of our faith, and as she did, her interpretation of scripture and inspiration led many in the worship of God. Someone has said that “she who sings prays twice.” So, Bettye’s voice, which was a gift of God, was a gift used in the service of God, as prayer and praise. But it was not her life as a musician that I think best characterizes her.

Betty’s love of music reflected a deeper love of beauty. That beauty could be seen in the floral arrangements which she crafted for many years. Have you watched someone work, who really knows flowers? They stand back and stare at that empty space above the container and slowly art takes shape in bud and blossom. Unlike the sculptor who sees the subject of his artistry locked within the stone or wood, who regards his task as freeing that subject from its prison by simply removing all that does not belong, the florist begins with nothing. A leaf here. A twig there. A blossom placed strategically, and the beauty which is in the eye of the florist becomes beauty in the eye of every beholder. Bettye obviously had a deep love of beauty, but I do not think it was her artistry that best characterizes her.

From my conversations with David and Jimmy, it seems to me that that which best captures her heart and soul is that simple, three-letter word, “fan.” Short for “fanatic,” Bettye was just that. She loved NASCAR drivers Ricky Rudd and Kenny Wallace, and #5 Albert Pujols of the St. Louis Cardinals, mainly, says Jimmy, because she thought they were all “good looking.” But her main love was the Charlotte Knights. I’m sorry that I hardly knew

Bettye, but I knew of her devotion to our local baseball team. The Knights would love a few more fans like Bettye. Wouldn't every organization? Following takes a certain discipline and devotion that not everyone has.

Bettye Mott was a fan.

The word, "fanatic," itself has a religious connotation, as it was originally used to describe the extreme devotion of pagan worship in ancient temples. True fans still display the religious heritage of their name, giving devoted, loyal, yes even "religious" allegiance to their driver, their player, their team. And I think that's, ok!

But perhaps in that word there is another key to Bettye's life. As a fan for life, Bettye expressed one of the truest elements of our human nature. To be human, in the final analysis, is not to live for oneself, but to devote oneself to another. Every one of us needs a few fans in life to help us get along. Someone who believes in us, who trusts in us, who encourages us, someone who will cheer us through the slumps and losses, and celebrate with us the victories. We each need some fans and we all need to learn the

devoted lesson of the fanatic, for that impulse is, I believe, deeply human and, therefore, an intimately spiritual one.

Bettye created beauty and sang in devotion to the God she loved. And, as she cheered for her Knights, for her drivers, her players, and for her sons and all her friends, I believe God was cheering for her as well: "Live well," God says to each of us, "drink deeply of life's good moments – all the ballpark hotdogs and Cracker Jacks we can stand – live and love, be and do, cheer and be cheered for." I believe God beckons us each to so live our lives that when our breath here is complete, we may hear the greatest cheer of all, that we may hear God speak to us those same words which Jesus heard at his baptism, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

For Betty Mott, daughter, mother, friend, fan of baseball and of life, thanks be to God.