

The Park Road Pulpit
Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church
Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors



A Good Word for Rosella
A Eulogy for Rosella Starnes, April 22, 2014
Russ Dean

“Rosey.” That’s what K.C. Starnes called the love of his life, the woman who was his wife for 54 years, and that affectionate nick name was just right. I chose a tie today with pink in it, because, like everyone else who knew her, a little of her Rosey disposition has rubbed off on me – she just couldn’t help it! Rosella Elam Starnes was a rose, without the thorns. (Amy and I honestly try not to put on “rose colored glasses” for eulogies. We want to paint people as they are, not just tell the good stuff... but, honestly, has anyone ever said a bad thing about Rosella Starnes!?) When we asked the family for the one word that described her best, Lisa said “graceful,” and that is the word that resonated with me. The sweet, graceful fragrance of her life will not soon be forgotten.

Rosella loved to shop. She had a special affection for jewelry, and had to have her hair just right. Just recently as Steve combed her hair in the hospital, she told him, “Now, fix it right... push it in a little over here!” She loved getting her nails done, and she and her granddaughter, Taylor, loved pink. All that might make you think of a Southern Belle, dainty and demure, maybe more than a touch superficial or a bit pretentious. Well, let me introduce you to Rosella Starnes, who also owned her own bowling ball, and who never missed a Wednesday, rolling strikes with her team, called the “Rolling Stones.” Her best score topped 200, and she kept up this weekly routine until last year. Let me introduce you to Rosella Starnes who pumped

her own gas¹ and who was an avid fan of the National Football League. Despite a deep, long-held family loyalty to the Washington Redskins, Rosella was a Tom Landry, Roger Staubach fan – which made a couple Sunday afternoons every fall pretty interesting on Wellston Drive! She also followed the Atlanta Braves and pulled for the Blue Devils in college basketball. I watched the last three minutes of this year’s ACC Championship with her, and it was the most enjoyable three minutes of ball I’ve seen in a very long time. Let me introduce you to Rosella Starnes who loved to hike with Casey and Lisa, and who wasn’t afraid of a little adventure – riding that chair lift at Tweetsie Railroad, or taking a helicopter ride, and one of whose favorite meals was a Texas Roadhouse steak, after a good long walk on the beach. Rosella didn’t swim, but loved their house at Surfside Beach, “Rosey’s Way,” they call it. She loved to wade into the water to jump the waves; Dennis said occasionally said she’d wade out till the water was over her head. (And did I tell you she didn’t swim!?)

If you think pink means prissy, let me introduce you to Rosella Starnes, who was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 2002, and who fought every step of the way. She spent seven grueling weeks in the hospital last year. Amy and I thought we’d never see her at church again, but Rosella fought her way back until she could get behind the wheel again, and drive herself back to Tuesday morning Bible study, to church on Sunday... and to get her hair done!

The boys say their dad was the strength of the family. Though he’s been gone nine years, Rosella continued to call on that strength, even in this last stay in the hospital. Lynn asked her several times, when she faced specific challenges, “What would Keith say?” And through her ever-present smile, Rosella would respond, “You can do it!” KC was their strength, but Rosella

¹ I suppose everyone pumps their own gas these days, but in the good old days, Keith always did it for her!

was “the soft part of all of us,” Casey said. For Rosella soft never meant shallow, and it never meant weak, and taking care of your hair and your nails never meant the surface was more important than what is in the center.

For 60 years there have been children in the Starnes house. Four sons, spread over 18 years, meant staying young for a long time. And as soon as KC and Rosella had an empty nest, the grandchildren started rolling in, and then the great grands. She loved them all, and, as you might understand, the one with her name, Ella Rose, was extra special. All those babies meant a lot of needle work, because they all got a hand-made blanket from Grand Mommy or Nanna or Gigi as she was known. The daughters (well, she treated them all like daughters!) all got one-of-a-kind scarves, and her finger-work didn't stop with just family. There are many stiches of prayers spread around the country, through the prayer shawls she has made with our Needlers' group, every Tuesday, and there are all the little toboggans for premature babies at the local hospitals. Taylor wrote about her grandmother that even in the hospital, she was looking out for others. One of those other one-word descriptions of Rosella: true mom. One word: TrueMom!

For Rosella life revolved around family and church. There was always room at the Starnes' dining room table – and always enough to go around. Her Thanksgiving dressing was famous, and the beef pot roast and gravy was “to die for,” says Casey. She also made a mean pork roast, and her pound cake was always a top seller, bringing big bucks, at our annual youth auction. On Sundays she cooked for the whole family, even as that family grew, and friends were all included. And they always spent all day together. All day, together. It was a tradition: eating, talking, watching sports. They never missed a Sunday

Never missed a Sunday. Not there. Not here. Rosella was one of 197 charter members of Park Road Baptist Church. She joined on December 2, 1951; Keith just missed the cutoff for charter members due to his military service, he but joined on December 23, and Rosella and he had been here nearly every time the door was open ever since. She's cooked Wednesday night meals, played Mary in the Christmas Tableau, licked more stamps and folded more newsletters than you can count, given comfort through our care teams, make all those prayer shawls... And she's just been here. Faithfully. She's been here.

This morning I re-read the eulogy I gave for KC back in 2005. Let me share the last paragraph:

Steve said to me, "You know, my dad was... 'old school...'" I have the greatest admiration and respect for the best of what this means. But for a pastor who is decidedly not old school, K.C. Starnes was a gracious new student. He doubtless did not always agree with my opinions, but his eager mind was always open, always listening, always reading his young pastor's thoughts and ideas. A world that is ever-new can live with that kind of adherent to old school thinking.

Some people just cannot hear "new," when it comes to religious ideas, thoughts about faith, but just like Keith, Rosella was open. She's been coming to my Tuesday morning Bible study from the very beginning, and she's asked a lot of questions, she's furrowed up her brow more than once, disagreeing or struggling to understand – but she never quit listening, never quit trying, faith matters never ceased to be important to her, and she never quit coming.

In the last few weeks she and Amy talked about dying, and she said, "I'm not afraid... I just don't want to miss anything!" That says so much about her, doesn't it? Her life and her faith: she didn't want to miss her family... her bowling game... the next hair appointment... Tuesday Bible Study... but, because Rosella was a woman of sincere faith, she had no fear. That being the

case, I don't think she missed anything, and I don't think she ever will. Yesterday. Today.

Forever.

For Rosella Elam Starnes, who was soft on the outside and solid to the core where it counts, thanks be to God! Amen.