

SERVANT LEADERS

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Bunky



by Sara Tusek

In April my husband received a very sad phone call. Our friends of many years, Bruce and Susan Bassity, had experienced a tragedy in their family. Their oldest daughter Bunky (Sarah) has been in a fatal auto collision. Bunky's life was ended in an instant at the age of 33. For her husband John Carter and two young children, Madeleine and Samuel, and for all of her family members, life would never be the same.

A Beautiful Baby

Bunky grew up in the quiet stretches of Northern New York, where cold winds blow six months, mud takes over two months, and people cram a year's worth of enjoyment and relaxation into two glorious months of summer. I knew Bunky all of her life; in fact, I knew her before she made her earthly debut. I met her parents when we were so very young, just starting our adult lives, full of hope and the desire to build strong families.

Bruce and Susan were living out the prototypical "back-to-nature" life, in a small cabin on a big swamp reachable by canoe in the warm months, or snowshoes after "freeze-up." Bunky was born in a hospital with good medical care, and then was whisked away in her parents' arms to the snug cabin that would be her home for three years.

In that cabin was love. You could feel it when you walked in—this was a family. From the animal furs drying on their frames (trapped by Bruce on his daily rounds) to the delicious smells from the wood stove, entering Bruce and Susan's home was like returning to the past, into a dream of

the good life before DVD's, microwaves and cell phones took our attention away from what matters most.

I loved to visit the Bassitys in that cabin (though it wasn't exactly the kind of visit you'd do on the spur of the moment, as it involved either a two-mile canoe trip or a mile-long hike in snowshoes or rubber boots that might drop through the thin ice of the swamp at any minute). I remember one March when Susan and I walked back to the cabin from the highway. It was a windy day, with great gray clouds whipping over the horizon. I was scared, but could never have admitted it, as Susan was as nonchalant as if we were strolling down a city street. Of course one of us went through the ice (probably me, though I don't remember) and the other began to pull her out, then crashed through the ice also. Luckily the water there was only deep enough to fill our boots, but not drown us. We laughed and laughed—that was one reason I liked to visit Bruce and Susan, as we could get a week's worth of laughter in one afternoon with them.

Toddler and Schoolgirl

Bunky was a baby in that cabin, then a toddler. She had dark brown hair that grew thick and wavy. By the time she was about three, it was down to her waist. Strangers would get all excited about her beautiful, plentiful hair. She would twist away, trying to avoid the attention, with her china-doll face scrunched up in embarrassment. By that time, she had a baby sister, Corina (Rena), and later on two more sisters, Elizabeth (Lizzie) and Katherine (Katie).

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Bruce and Susan moved out of the little cabin onto the main highway, to be able to introduce their daughters to the bigger world. From there, Bunky was launched into church, school, ballet lessons, Brownies, ice-skating lessons and all the typical activities of a young girl growing up in Northern New York.

A Special Girl in a Special Family

However typical Bunky's life may have looked, though, she always had two things that made her unique: her memories of a very different life in a small cabin, and the unconditional love, support and friendship of her parents and sisters. Their family sing-a-longs, swimming parties, and church musical contributions are legendary in Northern New York. As she grew up and made the decisions all young people must make about school and careers, Bunky was drawn into a life of service. She became a registered nurse, a reflection of the emphasis on serving people's health needs that has become evident in her whole family, and springs from their steadfast love for God.

Perhaps it was Bunky's earliest experiences that called her to a life of service in a most remote area—Kotzebue, Alaska. On the icy shores of the North American continent, Kotzebue is about as far away from "civilization" as you can get and still be in the U.S. There she met her husband John and began her family. She had recently moved back to Northern New York with John, Madeleine and Samuel to obtain her degree as a nurse practitioner. Her family was so happy to have her nearby after many years in Alaska, and welcomed her husband and children into the family.

All of these more recent things I learned about Bunky mostly from hearsay, having moved away from the wilds of Northern New York twenty years ago. My daughter Melissa, a big fan of the Bassity family, always gave me the latest news on their far-flung activities.

A Servant Leader

Bunky's life was one of Christian love—but not merely "love talk." She was a quiet baby and a quiet woman, not given to gushing over people and working the crowd at social events. Most of the time she was off to the side, watching everything carefully with her mouth upturned in a slight grin. "Life is entertaining," she might have been thinking, "and I like to see just how entertaining it can be."

Her love was the kind we have been describing in this newsletter from the beginning. She expressed her love through caring for sick people, comforting them, maybe getting a smile or laugh out of them when they were hurting. As her obituary puts it, "She was a devoted mother and nurse. Her loving concern and gentle smile were appreciated by all who knew her." She was truly an exemplary servant leader.

We Will Miss Her

There are no words to express the sorrow I feel over Bunky's death. It is impossible to imagine any human reason for such a loving, godly life to be cut short. Yet we know that death is not the end for a Christian, but is the beginning of a perfect life, free of pain, lived in the light of the Eternal City of God.

At the funeral last week, the Bassity family stood with the Carters to sing "I'll Fly Away." As they sang, "when I die, hallelujah, bye-and-bye, I'll fly away," we all prayed hard for the grace of God to accept that Bunky is with God now, as we'll be one day. Bunky was a giggle-box as a toddler, a little mother to her sisters (and my kids, too), an angel of mercy to the sick people she nursed, a loving wife and mother, and a devoted daughter. We will indeed miss her.

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