



Betty Jo Merrell

February 16, 1928 - January 21, 2019

Betty Jo Merrell went to Heaven at 3:20am on January 21, 2019 while in the loving comfort of the home of Dan and Debbie Merrell of Franklin, TN. After battling Alzheimer's for nine years, Betty stopped swallowing food or drinking water a few days before her death. She had around-the-clock care during that time to make her last days as peaceful and comfortable as possible.

When she breathed her last early that morning, I, Dan Merrell, her oldest son, cradled her in my arms, held her hand tightly and laid my head on her shoulder telling her how much I loved her and how glorious her afterlife would be. She listened, relaxed, stopped breathing and left this earth as peacefully and quietly as any son could hope.

I believe she was transported immediately in the arms of the angels to meet her Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in person. I am sure it was a glorious greeting that awaited her, because she lived an exemplary life for the Lord. She was the strongest person I have ever known. As I watched her life play out before me, I was constantly amazed at how brave, loyal, talented, loving and joyful she was. I pray I can someday be just like her. I have along way to go.

She was born Betty Jo Caughron, February 16, 1928 in Tulsa,

Oklahoma. She was the eldest daughter of Fred and Anna Caughron, a very devout Southern Baptist couple. She had one sister, Lucille, who was two years younger and a brother Rex, sixteen years younger. They are both still living.

After graduating from Webster High School in 1946, Betty met Rondal Dan Merrell of Jenks, Oklahoma and the two were soon married. They went to college together in Arkansas, and began working full time in the church. Ron was a pastor/preacher, and Betty played the piano, led the educational side of things and sometimes directed music. She was supernaturally gifted at the piano and had an incredible whistle that amazed everyone who heard it.

A dozen or so years after their marriage, they had their first son in Meridian, MS on Groundhogs Day, 1960 - Rondal Dan Merrell Jr. (that's me). Two years later, they welcomed Timothy Edward Merrell into the world. Two years after that (in 1964), they accepted a call to the mission field and moved to South Vietnam as Southern Baptist Missionaries. Yes, THAT Vietnam. Talk about bold faith.

Betty would serve in Vietnam eight years during the war in the sixties and seventies. She was a wife, mother, language student, Bible teacher, cook/hostess to the local G.I's and a writer/editor of faith-based material created to spread the Gospel in Vietnamese. She spoke the language fluently all the way into her 80's.

After Vietnam, the Merrell's moved to Maryland, on the outskirts of Washington DC, where Ron pastored Temple Hills First Baptist Church. Betty went to work for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in downtown DC while helping in the church and guiding her boys safely through middle and high school.

When I went to Baylor in 1978, and Tim followed two years later, mom and dad moved to Livingston, Alabama where Ron pastored the First Baptist Church. Soon after the move, Betty began commuting to Birmingham, Alabama to work at the Women's Missionary Union. While there, she served as the editor of The Royal Service and Prayer Patterns Magazines and led a large group of Baptist women on a Lottie Moon tour to China.

Betty and Ron then moved to Birmingham when Ron became pastor of Fultondale First Baptist Church on the outskirts of the city. Betty continued working at the WMU and stayed busy supporting her husband at the church.

Between 1991 and 1995 she and Prissy Tunnell compiled and edited a book of stories about the missionary women who served in Vietnam called *STORIES THAT WON'T GO AWAY*. If you want to really know my mother and other women like her, get that book. It's a quick and captivating read.

In the late 90's mom and dad would move to Forney, TX to be near my brother and myself in Dallas. Officially retired from the ministry at this point, Betty immersed herself in speaking about missions across Texas and started a mid-life singles class at Forney First Baptist church. Like her mother before her, Betty was an excellent teacher/shepherd and the class grew quickly under her leadership.

Betty became a grandmother in 2008 when Lauren Diane Merrell was born to Tim and Dawn Merrell. Betty loved her granddaughter wholeheartedly and gave her what might turn out to be her greatest gift - a talent for storytelling and writing. Just a few years after Lauren's birth, Betty was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and was forced to give up her role as speaker,

writer and teacher. She was now going to face the biggest challenge of her life.

The family buckled in but the disease was swift and brutal. Of all things, Betty lost her ability to communicate ("aphasia") as the disease ravaged her internal organs causing her to drop over half her weight in a year. My dad managed her care as we added full time caregivers to help us take good care of mom. Betty went on hospice in 2012 and was helped greatly by the service for six years. That should tell you how strong she was. No one gets on hospice unless they are diagnosed with a terminal disease that will take their life within an estimated six months time. My superhero strong mother beat that estimate 12 times over.

Though her body withered away and betrayed her in every way imaginable, she never completely lost her memory function and I believe knew who I was until her last breath. During these last years, Betty brought laughter, joy and love to all of us who were responsible for her care. She was beloved by nurses, nurse's aids, chaplains, social workers and the private caregivers who had the pleasure to help her. In the three years I oversaw her care, over 100 people participated in the care of my mom. A few of them were angels from Heaven, none more so than April Potts, who cared for Betty nearly six years non-stop.

Betty lost her husband to a fatal heart attack August 19th, 2016, and her youngest son Tim to a crippling nerve disease just one month to the day later. My mother and I have faced this murderous disease together every day since their deaths, two years and five months ago.

I am leaving out so much for a woman who lived 90+ years, and these recollections are a mere hint of the highlights. She

gave everything she had to God's call on her life. She was the world's greatest mom, a faithful wife, a fearless warrior in the Lord's work, and a skilled communicator of both the written and spoken word (in two languages!).

I think if you had asked her what she would most want you to know about herself, she would say...

- She loved Jesus;
- She loved her sons, along with their wives (Dawn and Debbie) and her granddaughter Lauren;
- She loved her husband Ron;
- She loved her sister Lucille and Brother Rex and their extended families;
- And loved her work for the Lord with all her heart and soul.

While she loved us all well, I can also add that there were untold hundreds of others scattered across the world that experienced God's love for them personally through Betty Jo. She was tireless in her work for Him for 70 plus years. I imagine the place Jesus has prepared for Betty in Heaven is pretty special. I can hear his words to her when her spirit reached him just a few days ago - "Well done Betty Jo, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your Master."

I miss her greatly already, and long for my reunion day with her soon in God's perfect timing. Until then, thank you Mama for showing me how to live a blessed, servant-hearted life no matter what cross you are asked to bear.

Betty's celebration service will be held at 2pm on Saturday, January 26, in the chapel at Forney First Baptist Church, Forney, TX. We will broadcast on Facebook live for those who can't attend. There will be a reception after with snacks and drinks afterwards so we may spend more time together

recalling this marvelous woman's life. The graveside service at Hillcrest Cemetery will take place after the reception.

Cemetery Details

Hillcrest Cemetery

401 W Broad St.
Forney, TX 75126

Previous Events

Funeral Service

JAN 26. 2:00 PM (CT)

First Baptist Church of Forney
1003 College St.
Forney, TX 75126

Tribute Wall

RL

“ My mother really liked Mrs. Betty. We lived in Livingston, AL and pastor Ron was called to preach at first baptist church of Livingston, AL. I got to know her in my youth as she was head of the youth group of the church. I recall I was drafted to preach and was a new Christian. I didn't want to do it but I did anyway and it was a blessing. Betty and Ron meant so much to my family. Words could not express my gratitude and sadness to hear of both of their passings. With love and til we meet again in Heaven. You are solely missed on this earth but rejoicings will take place again when we meet in Heaven.

Respectfully,

Robert Scott Leitch

Robert Scott Leitch - October 22, 2024 at 12:22 PM



“ *Betty Jo Merrell*

October 08, 2023 at 07:43 PM



“ *Gracious Lavender Basket was purchased for the family of Betty Jo Merrell.*



January 24, 2019 at 04:41 PM



“ *Lavender Reflections Spray was purchased for the family of Betty Jo Merrell.*



January 23, 2019 at 04:41 PM



“ *I had the pleasure of being Betty's hairstylist for her entire time here in Forney until she was too ill to come. She was my mentor and friend more than anything. She loved the Lord and her family. She shared so many stories from her missionary days in Vietnam and gave me many books to encourage me along my life's path. I cherish those days with her! She autographed every book she ever gave to me with her beautiful words and always a bible verse. She had a special way of touching my heart. I saw a change in her in 2010 but refused to believe it in my heart. Such a prolific speaker, educated and dedicated to God's work. She was a fine steward and example to follow . I have missed her, the Betty I knew, but now rejoice knowing that she is whole again, pain free and so happy to behold our Savior. I've missed my sweet friend, Love to all the family and sending my prayers 🙏 Much love, Annette McMurrrian*

Annette McMurrrian - January 22, 2019 at 08:47 PM



“ *Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of Betty Jo Merrell.*



January 22, 2019 at 04:36 PM



“ 1 file added to the album *Memories Album*



Max Slayton Funerals & Cremations - January 21, 2019 at 03:31 PM