

For the Memorial Service for Georgina (Tootie) Lange Benson

*R*emembering “Aunt Tootie,” Mother, Grandmother, Friend,
and Beloved Wife of Calvin James who preceded her to
heaven on June 26, 2019.

When I was a little girl my Uncle Cal had a beautiful girlfriend.
Her given name was Georgina, but everyone called her Tootie.
I remember she had brown hair which hung long and shiny
past her shoulders. Her eyes were blue-green like the sea on
a sunny day. Tootie was full of energy and verve, athletic,
strong, and looking back, very brave.

These were World War II years, years of uncertainty and fear.
Cal was in the Air force, stateside still, serving as a gunner in
the belly of a B 29. Tootie’s older brother Fred, whom
everyone called “Freddie,” was stationed in the South Pacific,
drafted as were so many young men in the middle of his
sojourn at Wheaton College. One day when Tootie was
eighteen, home alone in her house in Evanston, a uniformed
messenger knocked at her door. In his hand was the news
that Freddie, the dearest brother a girl could ever have, had
been killed. I remember hearing that story as a child and then
often from Tootie over the years. Every time she told it, or
spoke of Freddie, she cried.

Tootie attended Wheaton College and graduated as an
English major. I’ve seen pictures of her then. Strong-featured,

smiling, palling around with her best and life-long friend Marilyn. Then, in 1948, on June 12th, Cal and Tootie were married. I was honored to be their flower girl, walking down the aisle of Evanston gospel chapel, a petite Williamsburg-like venue, all blue and white and filled with flowers. I was flowery too, flowers in my hair, dropping petals seriously and with great care from my basket. They were a picture-perfect couple, tender in their youthful love. Who would have known this marriage would last for 71 years?

I never really wondered where or when Tootie learned to play the piano so well, nor if she had voice lessons to train her lovely soprano. I only knew that music and singing and grouping around a piano singing hymn after hymn was a wonderful ritual. There was Tootie at the keyboard, Cal beside her, the rest of the couples, my mom and dad, Paul and Beth, leaning in to the music, to the words, for one more and then just one more hymn.

As a child I relished those times, loved hearing the voices of my aunts and uncles and parents harmonizing, loved being nestled in a clutch of people who loved me and encouraged me to sing along. Tootie could pound out "Wonderful Grace of Jesus" with the best of them, and I could hardly wait for the last crescendo, "Oh magnify the precious name of Jesus, praise His name!"

In 1953 when Cal and Tootie moved to California and my parents with them, a new era of knowing ensued. Tootie was like my big sister, and they were cool, a fun couple! Cal had a

Ford Model T with a rumble seat in the back where I sat, California sun and breezes gracing us all as we attended youth group beach parties up and down the Southern California coastline.

And then there was Joy and Jon and parenthood. No one ever loved their kids more than Tootie and Cal. These two literally filled their parents' lives to the brim. A well-known psychologist once said "every child needs at least one person who is irrationally crazy about him or her." And that is what Tootie's love for her children was all about, irrationally crazy and unconditional. When Cameron and Ian came along Tootie's love just spread a little wider, and they too were the recipients.

When you live a very long life as did Tootie and Cal (he died just two days after his 94th birthday, and she would have been 94 on June 18th of this year), it is best to be brave. Tootie had a lifetime of exercising that bravery, the kind that she needed for her mother's death when she was only six, the profound loss of her brother Freddie in World War II, the long wait to be a mother herself, the loss of her father Fred and her step-mother Alice, many friends and family who preceded her in death, and finally the passing of her husband of 71 years.

What sustained her? My experience is that her first love was Jesus, her Savior and Lord. He gave her courage, perspective, peace in the toughest of circumstances, hope, joy, and a knowledge that this earthly life is not all there is. I love to

think of her now with Cal. Their last years were ones of decline and decay as we may all experience. Every day it was often challenging just to live. Now these two lovebirds are reunited, whole, joyful, secure in the presence of the Lord they served all their lives. And who knows? Even now they may be harmonizing in voices more pure and sweet than they ever were on earth and singing the chorus of “Wonderful Grace of Jesus”, which goes like this:

Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea,
Wonderful grace all sufficient for me, for even me.
Broader than the scope of my transgressions,
Greater far than all my sin and shame,
O magnify the precious name of Jesus, praise His name.

March 19, 2020 