

A Heart Collage for Aunt Bobby

by Melody M. Nuñez

Some people are easy to forget. They simply blend in with the many others you've met over the course of a lifetime. My Aunt Bobby was *not* one of those people. She stood out in many ways and has left an indelible mark in the hearts and minds of all who knew her. She's proof that sometimes the strongest family ties have nothing to do with shared bloodlines and everything to do with living and loving well.

Barbara Karen Sutton Laycook, better known as Bobby, married into my family in the early 1980s, though I didn't meet her until 1985. Standing 4 feet 11 inches, her small stature was almost laughable given her abundant personality. She had spunk, love, kindness, and motivation galore, and was always looking to help others in any way she could. That was a lucky thing for me, given the difficulties my immediate family was facing when we first met and for some years after.

My Aunt Bobby and her husband, my Uncle Tom, helped my mother, brother and me in so many ways during those years that you simply couldn't

keep count. Aunt Bobby was like a second mother, and what a difference she made in my life. Not only did she do things like take me shopping for my prom dress, but she and my uncle also provided love, stability and the knowledge that I was cared for when almost everything else seemed uncertain.

My Aunt Bobby was not a spectator when it came to life. She got in there and got it done, whatever "it" happened to be at the moment. Whether it was work, play, parenting, or involvement in the community, she never did anything half way. I saw in her a woman who was comfortable in her own skin; she was confident and not afraid to speak her mind. She was her own person, but was always thinking of and helping others – a winning combination.

Since her death in August 2004 I've been thinking of my Aunt Bobby a lot. I've been assessing her profound affect on my life and have finally begun to appreciate her direct contributions to my art as well. Not only did my aunt and uncle buy me my first camera, a plastic point-and-shoot that I had for years, but my aunt played a big part in my going to summer camp up in the mountains. My love of nature grew largely from there, and it's a strong influence in my art and life to this day. Many of my photos are nature-based. Aunt Bobby helped plant the seeds of creativity that I'm harvesting as an adult.

My Aunt Bobby was a little woman with a huge heart; ironically, she died from a fatal arrhythmia. I think I'll always associate hearts with my beloved aunt, and I used the heart shape as a base for the collage I made to honor her. I pieced together a visual vocabulary based on her life and loves, with family at the center. Her legacy is far too rich to capture in any one place, but this piece is a little reminder. It visually references aspects of her life and personality, and reminds me that I simply didn't have enough time with this amazing woman. Her life was a gift she shared with many, and I, for one, am so very thankful. ♡

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