

Eulogy for Susan

(given by her brother, Bill Carico, 1/9/10 to about 600 people at the celebration of her life at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Roanoke, VA)



What if everyone was required to wear a warning label, so we would know what to expect before getting to know each other? I was speaking with my oldest daughter, Katie, yesterday and she said her own warning label would read, "Katie Hyatt: Control freak" and her husband Grady's would read, "I'm happier than I look."



So, I was thinking, what would have been an appropriate warning label for Susan, mi hermana mayor (my big sister), Ms Kern (Profesora K)? Considering how she did so many things with such great flair, how about, "Beware of flair!"

But since she so profoundly touched the lives of so many people, I think a more appropriate warning label would be, "Brace for impact." Those who got to know her were likely to be changed.

Susan Leigh Carico Kern repeatedly defied the odds. This is a common thread that ran throughout her life.

For example, what were the odds she would turn out to be such a versatile

individual who excelled at everything that mattered to her? A person who was both pretty ... AND smart. Susan was so very clever and had mastered the ability to come up with just the right word or phrase at just the right moment, often mixing words from other languages.

What were the odds Susan could go through her entire life having never lost an argument to either of her two younger brothers? Susan was witty, enthusiastic, charming, and lived her life with flair.

She defied the odds from the day she arrived to the day she departed.

The day Susan was born, what were the odds that her mother, Louise, would go into labor without a name picked out? As Dad was driving Mom to the hospital at 1 p.m., they passed the movie theatre, and Mom noticed Susan Hayward and Janet Leigh's names on the marquis. The "Susan" was just above the "Leigh" and Mom liked how they looked together. What were the odds her doctor would be visiting in Bluefield, WV, that same day, and in 1949 took off in an MG to race back to Coeburn? He got back at 8 p.m., and Susan Leigh Carico arrived 20 minutes later.

Carico, by the way, is Italian and actually means "to carry the burden."

Did you know Susan had a phobia? What were the odds that a young girl would be walking through a doorway inside our Mamaw's house, just as a very tiny mouse runs from behind the piano and underneath Susan's foot so she would step on it and flatten it? As I was helping Dad unload the car, we heard this blood-curdling scream so I ran into the house to find Mom trying to console Susan as she was still screaming and running around the kitchen. Then I noticed something on the floor in the middle of the doorway that from across the room looked like a maple leaf with jelly on it. And what were the odds ... that years later, her daughter Whitney would find brownie mix scattered all over the back steps and driveway leading to their kitchen door? You know how much Susan loved brownies. Well, it turns out Susan opened up a store-bought box of brownie mix and found a dead mouse inside. She was traumatized ... We're not sure, but we suspect the reason Susan was slow to embrace computers was because to move the cursor she had to use a ... mouse!

What were the odds she would literally dodge a bullet when she was seven? I'm five and don't know any better than to take a real bullet from Dad's sock drawer and drop it down the barrel of my TOY rifle. If you are a male of a certain age you will recall that some toy guns had firing pins. Susan sizes me up and immediately begins evasive maneuvers, hightailing it around the corner. She was not only pretty and smart – she was quick!. I knew I couldn't catch her. So, I just pointed the gun at the ground and pulled the trigger. The bullet went off and brought all of the neighbors out of their

houses. The gun barrel smoked quite a bit, but not nearly as much as and seat of my pants began to smoke shortly after Mom arrived on the scene.



What were the odds she would come within a few inches of stepping on a copper head snake and not be bitten? Our maternal grandparents lived on a farm in Kentucky, and one day she and her granddad, whom we all called by his last name "Kilgore" were walking through a field behind the house. The grass was knee high, and Kilgore had his arm around her as they walked. Just as Susan's foot was coming down, he noticed the copper head crawling across her path, and he was able to quickly pick her up with one arm just as her foot was about to come down on the poisonous snake. *(photo on the left is from 1953 visiting Ginny and Kilgore in London, KY. bird dog pictured is "Jackson")*

What were the odds that at age 10 she would pilot, crash and then walk away from a runaway car? I hear Mom scream. Susan is behind the wheel and has put the car in neutral and the car is starting to roll downhill. 36-year-old Louise is giving chase in high heels, trying to leap into the car with an action hero move. But she can't, and if Susan keeps going she drops off a cliff in about 25 yards. Louise is screaming, "Step on the big pedal, step on the big pedal,". Susan is pumping the gas as hard as she

can. She may be smart but she is ten. Mom changes plans, "Turn the wheel! Turn the wheel!" Susan does, ramming into a lone parked that was the only object that could have stopped her descent. Susan escapes no worse for the wear. Mom takes us straight home, and as soon as she sees Dad she finally breaks down crying. After a few minutes, Mom finally composes herself and explains, but Dad just bursts into relieved laughter. He'd figured that Mom's sobs meant his father must have died.



What were the odds? It's 1965, and Susan is 16. Uncle John's two day-old turquoise Chevelle breaks down on a scorching day, out in the middle of nowhere, nothing around but tobacco fields. Within minutes Susan flags down an improbable stretch limo and charms the driver into turning around and taking the family back to Richmond. What was a stretch doing in the middle of nowhere? Why just then? It turns out that the driver's last gig was ferrying the Rolling Stones who had just visited Richmond. Susan could not have been more excited about it. After all, it was 1965. The Rolling Stones were the Rolling Stones and Susan was 16.



Susan really loved her school years. She was head majorette in both junior high and high school. She was also an accomplished clarinet player and won all-state band honors, usually fighting John Greer for first chair. Since she

never lost at anything, sometimes I was tempted to root for John Greer just so Susan could know what it was like to lose at something.

So, what were the odds that a high school student would fall in love with her chemistry teacher and marry him? Susan and Skip started dating while she was still a senior in high school. Well, this put his job at risk, and Skip said that shortly after their first date the rumor mill started. When the rumors reached the principal, he immediately asked Skip to come into his office. Skip was convinced he was about to lose his job because he was determined to tell the truth. The logical question to ask would have been, "Are you dating a student?" Instead Principal Coulter asked, "Skip, are you dating Rita Triantafel las?" What are the odds? And Skip replied, "No, and I never will." And that was it. So, the romance continued and they were married after Susan's freshman year at Radford College.



Susan and Skip had three children. During three pregnancies she was hospitalized for dehydration. All three kids were born on the 27th. All three kids turned out great and made her very proud. But what are they odds that they would have the same appreciation, admiration, and affection for their Mom they she had for them? Really, considering today's battle between children and parents, what are the odds?



Susan was the perfect fan for her kids. What were the odds she wouldn't miss a single game for all three kids? Susan was always the encourager; Wally said that no matter how well he played, she always told him afterward how awesome he played.



She also loved to watch sports. One of her great memories of attending an ACC tournament (what were the odds of getting tickets?) was that Susan got to see her two favorite teams play -- Va Tech and Duke. Just this past year she watched Va Tech play BC from the club box with all its creature comforts, and said, "If heaven is anything like this, I'll be in fat city!"



At Christmas a year ago, Susan would reach a decision that she would keep it private should she ever become seriously ill? What were the odds her battle with cancer would become one of the most publicized illnesses of anyone I've ever known?



So, what were the odds that early detection would fail to detect one of the rarer forms of breast cancer, lobular cancer that coated the outside of her organs like someone had painted them with a brush? That's what caused the abdominal fluid, but it wasn't until the cancer had spread all over her body did she learn of it and begin her fight. At the time, she didn't think she had what it took to fight it, but the kids encouraged her to fight back. What were the odds she would not only fight it, but even return to work that fall?

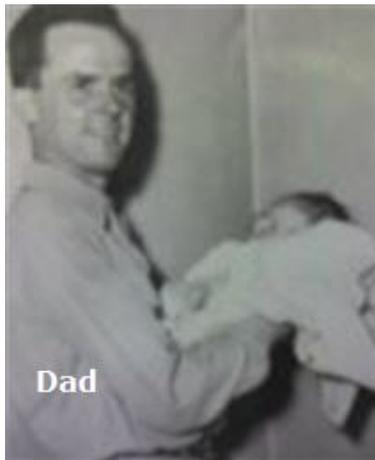


What were the odds that oncologist, Dr. Mark Kokenderfer, would have just moved into the area and that he could win Susan's confidence, and help her in her fight even while insurance companies were denying certain tests and

procedures? What were the odds he would even come see her at her home? A doctor in Roanoke making a house call? Not likely.



Our friend Gerald McDermott told us what theologian Jonathan Edwards once said, "As our time draws near, God has a way of making heaven more and more attractive, and this world less and less." When I saw Susan in early December, I was taken back at how she had declined in a week's time, and her first words were, "I think I'm ready for heaven ... I hope you're not too disappointed."



Susan told me she was looking forward to seeing Dad, our grandparents Ginny and Kilgore, Mamaw and Papaw, Aunt Carolyn and Uncle Paul, Mamaw Ko and Papaw Ko (our great grandparents).

What were the odds that on the day she left this earth, she would have spent her last 24 hours with no blood pressure? She indeed baffled the hospice nurse. But as it turns out, she waited until we were all gathered, and after Mom arrived on Thursday, Susan left us shortly thereafter.

Susan had several favorite bible verses. I was talking to her on the phone,

and she said, "Billy, that bible verse you gave me has really meant a lot through all of this." The verse is Romans 12:11-12 and it talks about being patient in affliction. But I couldn't remember, so I asked when I gave it to her? She said it was in an article I had written and sent her titled "Look Upward Not Inward." She was referring to something I had sent her back in 1983!

Susan's life verse was, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This indeed was her real "warning label." She told me she was quoting this verse the day she tied a rope around her waist and the other end to the bed post before climbing out the window and onto the roof to clean her gutters! What were the odds she didn't kill herself? Susan laughed at how one of her neighbors who had seen her "almost had a cow!"

Back in May, Susan and I had a long discussion about the faith we share. One of the things we discussed – of all things - was a situation that arose in 1830 in the case of the U.S. against George Wilson and John Porter. Both men were tried and convicted of robbing the mail service and wounding the mail courier. Both men were given the death penalty. Porter was executed, but for whatever reason, President Andrew Jackson pardoned Wilson.

Surprisingly, Wilson refused the pardon. What were the odds, indeed? This raised a new legal question never before posed. Which prevails, the pardon or the rejection? The case went to the Supreme Court, which ruled that a pardon only has value if it's accepted, so Wilson won the argument and lost his life.

But I wonder if Wilson would still have rejected the offer if President Jackson had offered to adopt Wilson and become his lifelong personal friend? I'm talking about a full adoption, making Wilson a legal heir to Jackson, thus giving him access to all of President Jackson's resources. But even if Wilson became a child and heir of Andrew Jackson, he still may never have had a chance to spend any time with the President and really get to know him personally. So, the offer of lifelong friendship would be to assure Wilson he would have a close personal relationship with Jackson and have unlimited access to him. Would anyone in their right mind reject such an offer?

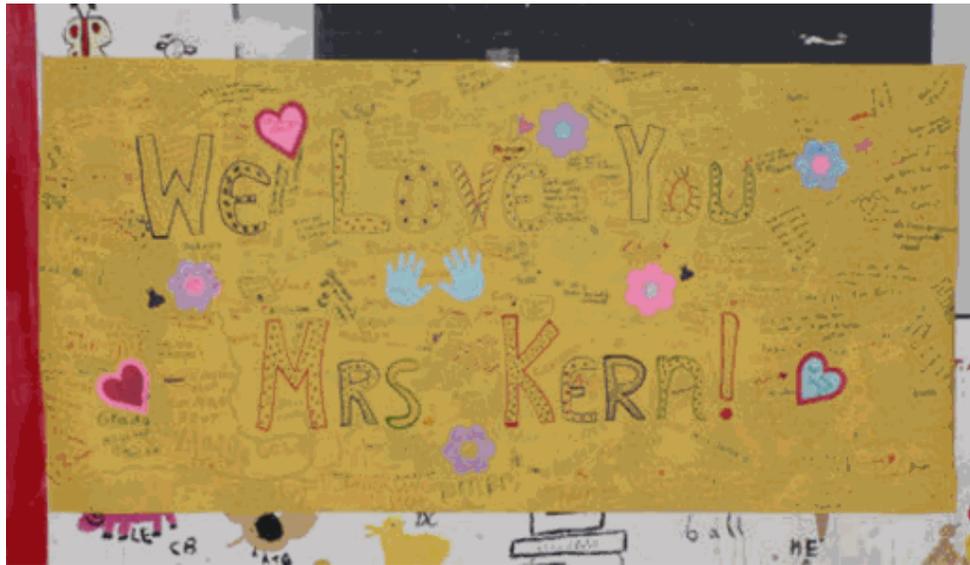
As good as Jackson's offer might sound, it falls far short of what God is offering each one of us: eternal life through faith in Christ. God's offer of a full pardon, full adoption, and personal friendship with Jesus is just part of what the Bible calls the Good News. Christ also desires to live in us and through us. Why would anyone reject this offer? God's offer only has value to us if we receive/accept it. If you're here today and haven't received this offer, I encourage you to trust in Jesus and receive Him as your personal Lord and Savior right now. Seek truth. God rewards those who earnestly

seek Him.

Susan assured me she trusted completely in Jesus and wasn't trusting in her good works to get her to heaven. Just four days before her departure, I asked her if she really believed God raised Jesus from the dead, and she softly but confidently replied, "Absolutely." Turns out Susan was not only pretty and smart, but wise too.

Susan taught her children many things, one of which is her teaching that attitude is contagious. Susan always had a beaming glow about her; everyone loved her and were happier by being around her.

She also taught her children that good people surround themselves with good people. She practiced this herself, as evidenced by looking at the people gathered here to celebrate her life. Susan loved each and every one of you, and she asked me to tell you so. As our mother Louise so aptly stated just after Susan left us, "Susan is worthy of our tears."



See other tributes, slide shows, and songs online at
www.x4.com/susan

contact info for Bill: bill.carico@gmail.com phone: 434-426-2287