

# Read Pat Boone's Touching Spiritual Tribute to His Wife

How do you describe a woman like Shirley Lee Foley Boone, with all her accomplishments and talents and considerable impact on so many lives? Especially when King Solomon already described her to a T in Proverbs 31?

It's the last part of the book of Proverbs, believed to have been written as his "sign off" by a man who had 700 wives and 300 concubines, a man whom God allowed to experience such things (though He didn't approve them) and could tell other mere mortals what really counted in a woman and what to search for, perhaps in vain, in a prospective wife.

I married that woman.

And the old king was right as he described "a virtuous woman" (Prov. 31:10a). "Her worth," he wrote, "is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so that he will have no lack of gain. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov. 31:10b-12).

Shirley and I started holding hands the moment we met at David Lipscomb High School in Nashville when we were 16. Though we were both popular, active and healthy young kids, and I was strongly attracted to her, we didn't kiss for nine months. I knew even then she was so special, and I didn't want to mess it up with something superficial and too soon.

Tentatively, after a romantic school hayride in the fall of our junior year, I leaned in at her front door and kissed her gently for a second.

I never recovered.

I was hooked forever. She told me later she went in and asked,

"I waited nine months for that?" She had expected more, she told me, but we began to make up for it from then on. We married at 19, with the consent of her dad, Red Foley (he bought our rings) but didn't consult my parents, who I knew would try to dissuade us in favor of finishing college first.

She dropped out of nurse's training, and we moved to Denton, Texas and North Texas State College, so we could literally be on our own while I prepared (I thought) to be a teacher and preacher like my role models at David Lipscomb College.

We dreamed we'd have a quiet, useful life in a cottage with a picket fence, two or three kids, and I'd teach English and preach on Sundays. But God had different plans for us, more different than we could ever have imagined.

Barely four years later, I graduated from Columbia University in 1958, *magna cum laude*, with a Top-10 music variety show on ABC-TV (on the cover of *TV Guide*), six million-selling records, three hit movies, the No. 1 best-selling nonfiction book of advice for teens, and Shirley and I had four little girls.

And we were 23 years old.

What 19-year-old bride could have coped with all that? Handling all the crazy excitement, demands, unexpected responsibilities, four pregnancies in three 1/2 years, with four kids to raise, a husband in college, and movies and television all at the same time.

Only one in all the world. Shirley Boone.

Somehow, with God's help, we navigated through my early career as our little girls grew up, and we stayed faithful in our church involvement while I made more movies, hosted my own TV series, traveled the world, sometimes with my wife, sometimes leaving her at home with our active, popular daughters.

Shirley grew wise to the world of show biz and blended in with me when she had to, but she was always my anchor spiritually. She never lost sight of what was really important, to us and our girls, and in spite of the money and fame and countless opportunities to lose our way—she always reminded each of us that God had blessed us and had His hand on us for His purposes.

We invited Him to live in our house, our home in Beverly Hills, and He did. Over all the 58 years we've lived here, people would frequently tell us, "I feel something different in your house when I come over ... what is it?" And Shirley would smile and say something like, "Well, we asked God to make His presence felt in our home, and He does." There was no pretense or "religiosity" about it; she was just answering the question.

There was something different about her, too, and it was the same thing: the evidence of God in her life, her character, her honest love for others and her overflowing generosity.

In 1979, during the concentration-camp catastrophe in Cambodia, when media all over the world were showing the helpless mothers with starving babies in their arms, Shirley said "Pat, we've got to do something!" I reminded her it was an international crisis half a world away, but she mobilized a pre-Thanksgiving event in our home, enlisting our son-in-law Dan O'Neill to contact prominent TV ministers, the heads of existing hunger relief organizations—even a representative from the Carter White House—and we fed them a "Cambodian Thanksgiving dinner" of dry fish and rice on paper plates and water in clear plastic cups. We prayed and plotted and came up with a 10-point plan to mount a volunteer, private-sector Christian offensive to raise money, food and other help for those Cambodian mothers half a world away.

Though Shirley normally shied away from going on TV, together, we quickly appeared on CBN, PTL and other Christian TV

outlets. In a week or two, we had raised over a million dollars for Dan to use in collecting free foods, medical supplies, air travel and a few anonymous helps from the government side—and the program we called “Save the Refugees” literally did that, saved thousands of lives a half world away.

Dan had put together a lean, mean rescue machine—so Save the Refugees morphed into Mercy Corps in 1981, and today, it’s a very efficient humanitarian hunger relief program, often operating in 40 countries alongside Red Cross, World Vision, Samaritan’s Purse and other long-recognized agencies, currently with a \$600 million annual budget, over 90 cents of every dollar going directly into the needed relief all over the world.

And this was just one of Shirley Boone’s creations. There’s the Shirley and Pat Boone Life Center in Tanzania, built with GodTV: an 80-foot freshwater well, a small medical facility mainly to help birthing mothers and a wood-frame school built to facilitate educating Masai children to eighth-grade literacy level.

And we insisted on a Shirley Boone vegetable garden to grow mineral-bearing veggies they knew nothing about.

There’s the Shirley and Pat Boone Center for the Family at Pepperdine University—college courses for credit that teach young collegians how to build moral relationships leading to marriage and building families. We know of nothing like it anywhere, but other colleges and universities are inquiring into adopting the curriculum developed by the Boone Center.

Shirley’s first book, written while raising our daughters in their teens, was *One Woman’s Liberation*, presenting her concepts of liberation through marriage and motherhood, doing things superbly that only women can do. It was the No. 1 nonfiction best-seller the same year as *Jonathan Livingston*

*Seagull* and sold 600,000 copies, but *The New York Times* considered it “religious,” so it wasn’t listed.

Shirley went on to help me write *The Honeymoon Is Over*, subtitled *But the Marriage Has Just Begun*, which so many have told us helped them cement and grow their own families. And then she founded her own ministry, WEWIN—Women Empowering Women in Need—which went “online” and into teaching seminars, when she was able, to personally share her experience and wisdom with other women (and sometimes their lucky husbands).

In her more recent later years, she was often physically limited but instituted what she called “the church on the chair,” inviting many women of many ages to come and sit with her to pray and study and find answers to their varied problems, always with her worn, much-studied, underlined and highlighted Bible in her lap to refer friends to.

Don’t get me wrong; as I describe her activities and convictions, I may not be giving a clear picture of her personality and vitality and cheerful manner. She always found the humor in things, and her laugh was highly contagious; her love and genuine concern for others wasn’t stifling, it was warm and real and never “super religious” or “holier than thou”—it was understanding and practical and wise. It made others happy, not judged or condemned. You wanted to be like her, to be near her.

As I did.

It’s frustrating; I’ve only scratched the surface. I said at the beginning it’s hard, maybe impossible to adequately describe a Proverbs 31 “virtuous woman,” one who has managed to positively impact the lives of several million people in various ways, big and small—and yet make one man, her life companion, feel he was the most important man in her life.

But Shirley Boone did that.

And how I thank God He put us together for 65 years. I miss her terribly and will the rest of my days on this earth. But I'm already looking forward eagerly for our reunion in that mansion Jesus has prepared for us, as she echoes His very words "that where I am, there you may be also."