



Belton Mae "Bel" [Hinton] Brennan

September 2, 1942 - August 23, 2020

Obituary of Belton Mae "Bel" [Hinton] Brennan

On the 2nd of September, 1942, Bel was born just a few miles North of Chidester, Arkansas, in her maternal grandparent's home that was part of the Red Hill district. She was the youngest of four. She became a Licensed Practical Nurse and eventually moved to Chicago, where she worked at Cook County Hospital among others. Bel was a Claims Examiner under the first ever Medicare contract. She became the "Mother" of a group-home for six teenage boys who were wards of the State or of the Court in Chicago, serving 24 x 365 for two years. Some years later, Bel again became the "Mother" of a group-home, but this time it was in Atlanta for a group of eight adults suffering from schizophrenia.

Bel visited refugee camps in the deserts of Somalia and the principal hospital in the town of Kinshasa, Zaïre. She stood before the sphinx and pyramids at Giza in Cairo, Egypt. The family visited the Delphi Temple in Greece where Bel's sons and husband raced with each other the entire length of the stadium. While visiting the White House – both the residence and the "West Wing" – Bel had occasion to use the "facilities" just across from the oval office.

One of Bel's proudest voluntary activities was serving as the first overnight care-giver at the "Gift of Grace House" that is run by the Missionaries of Charity (an order of religious sisters founded by Mother Teresa). The center serves indigent women who suffer from AIDS, many of whom eventually die

there. The very first patient at the House was from Kinshasa, and Bel recognized immediately the Zaïrian music that she played. Bel was glad for the happy rhythms of the music and the intimate conversation that the two ladies were able to have. As a result of this giving of self, Bel met Mother Teresa during the dedication ceremonies for the center. Bel's five minutes with the diminutive Mother Teresa was a splendid moment for her. Our boys still carry the medals given to Bel that day by Mother Teresa.

Bel died on Sunday, the 22nd of August 2020, 10 days short of her 78th birthday and 6 months short of her 49th anniversary.

Bel is preceded in death by her parents Charlie and Althia Mae [Bailey] Hinton of Decatur, IL, sister Earmie L. [Hinton] Andrews of Chicago, IL, brother Raymond Hinton of Winston-Salem, NC, sister-in-law Carolyn F. [Kimmell] Brennan of Kirkland, IL, and niece Maureen A. Brennan of Viola, WI.

Bel is survived by her husband John-Paul Brennan of Atlanta, GA, son Jason Paul Brennan and wife Hwa Mei Hsiang of N. Bethesda, MD, and son Duncan Patrick Brennan and wife Kerry Boyd of Marietta, GA; by sister Celeste [Hinton] Oliver of Chicago, IL and sister-in-law Sandra D. [Sheppard] Hinton of DeKalb, IL.; in-laws M. Kathleen [Brennan] Ronan of Milwaukee, WI, Patrick J. & Joan [Vandre] Brennan of Kirkland, IL, Michael W. & Adrienne M. [Smith] Brennan of Santa Fe, NM, Mary Ann Brennan of Cleveland, OH, Thomas J. & Jane M. [Betthausen] Brennan of Viola, WI, and William R. & Josephine A. [Finn] Brennan of Santa Fe, NM, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Eulogy for Belton Mae "Bel" [Hinton] Brennan

Bel was beautiful on the inside as well as on the outside. She had a regal

bearing and a profound ability to connect to others. Her skin was remarkably soft and her hands were gentle and loving. When she caressed you, her Spirit flowed through her hands into your being. She did not suffer fools or foolish behavior for more than a minute, and that included me. She was aware and engaged in the world around her and was a wonderful intellectual match for me. She stood her ground with vigor and also gave ground that the family might prosper.

Bel and I met in Chicago on a cool October day in 1970. More properly said, "We ran into each other." Yes, I was wandering in the hallway - not paying attention. Around the corner came a blur and then a collision. It was Bel on her way home from work. She was moving with such verve that she nearly knocked me down! I immediately noticed the very carefully coiffed, short "fro" with the hexagonal green-tint glasses sitting askew on top. Bel was wearing a black maxi-coat against the chilly Chicago wind. What was not "maxi" – by any stretch of the imagination –was the cute dress that she was hiding underneath that coat.

I apologized immediately for not paying attention and we were quickly on our separate ways. I tarried just a moment so as to learn which apartment she would enter. In my apartment, I stewed and fretted about what course of action was appropriate and considered how she might respond to an overture, if I were to make one. It was heady stuff ... and lasted all of 15 or 20 seconds! I tapped gently at Bel's door and she opened it almost immediately. She told me that she thought I might come tapping at her door. I asked whether she had eaten and, when she said no, I invited her to dinner. Where, she said, hoping that I would name one of the finer Chicago dining spots? I proposed "my apartment" in about 30 minutes. Much to my surprise, she accepted. When she arrived, I offered her a bologna sandwich and a bowl of tomato soup. I had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to go with the tomato soup, as

the last of my bologna was in her sandwich. Nevertheless, we married 16 months later.

Twenty-two years after that fateful collision, Bel and I told this story as part of our “Time, Treasure, and Talent” presentation to our church community. We had one remaining segment of the presentation to make, but Bel stopped cold right in the middle of the presentation. She stood up to the microphone, adopted the well-known woman’s stance of challenge (leaning back slightly, back of hands firmly on the hips) and with a smile beginning to beam all across her face announced: “You know – with a dinner like that – his intentions HAD to be honorable!” There were no injuries amongst the congregation, but it did take several moments for the laughter to die down.

Our 48 years together were unusual by most standards, but then the fact that we were married at all was unusual in February 1972. At that time, there were still two states that had yet to come into compliance with the June 1967 U.S. Supreme Court decision in the “Loving v Virginia” case. We lived in 26 “permanent” abodes, lived in Africa for a total of four years, were “group home parents,” counseled couples who were preparing to marry on the realities of “living together as one,” made lots of friends (almost always through Bel), and enjoyed our children and our life. It was, to be honest, not perfect. But the balance sheet was so heavily weighted in the “good” column that the content of the “bad” column simply does not deserve mention. We were deeply blessed.

At the top of Bel’s list of most cherished compliments over the years were these.

Her two precocious and energetic sons – Jason and Duncan – grew into men who, each in his own way and in his own time, acknowledged in word and deed what a splendid mother and teacher Bel had been and how much they respected and loved her.

In both of her overseas postings (Somalia and Zaïre), Bel was invited to become part of the team known as the “FLO,” short for Family Life Office. The FLO was the place to seek unofficial counseling for all manner of difficulties associated with living in a State Department “hardship post.” Bel did not have all of the normal qualifications for such a position; however, her spirit of compassion, the trust that the community members themselves had in Bel, and her uncanny ability to “hear” accurately what people were feeling and provide useful feedback and strong encouragement made Bel an indispensable asset.

After 15 years of marriage and in the middle of our assignment in Zaïre, we were home for “R&R.” I had to travel to a meeting, so Bel and the boys stayed another week with my mother. A few days prior to Bel’s return, my mother told Bel: “I wish that my husband and I had had a relationship like the one you and your husband have.” Praise God for such wonderful gifts.

Bel, when I come to join you, I fully expect that they will announce my arrival as “Bel’s husband,” just as the folks in Zaïre did. Thank you for sharing this life with me. Please, do tell the Boss that he made a spectacular choice for me when he sent you, and I do appreciate it.

Tribute Wall

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“ *Our love, hearts and thoughts go out to the family of Bel. She was a true and worthy friend and she will forever be missed.* ”

Bernice Frankl - May 08, 2022 at 07:08 PM



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Gregory B. Levett & Sons Funeral Homes & Crematory, Inc. - August 29, 2020 at 12:09 PM