

Author, Dianne Lami

My Sassy, Saucy Spiritual Mom!

Doris barged into my life minutes before lunch hour one hot summer July morning at the church in Houston where I had recently been hired as the Pastor's secretary. Wearing bright white slacks and a colorful summer blouse, she carried an oversize patent leather white purse over one arm and an open can of Pepsi in the other. Her shock of white short hair going in every direction, with huge square framed glasses over a very determined look startled me at first. She had heard a women's retreat was scheduled for September and I was charged with searching for a keynote speaker. I told her the topic was prayer. "Heavens, people don't know the first thing about how to pray," she sighed heavily. "Would you teach us?" I asked. "Let me go talk to my husband. Bye." Literally, that was my initial introduction. She left as abruptly as she had entered. Before the week was out, she called to say in her husky gravelly voice, yes, her husband had approved for her to be the speaker. Then hung up! Little did she know taking that opportunity would save a misdirected young woman's life.

Doris and her husband Bill were not of the typical straight-forward conservative church crowd. Legalism, denominational nuance, was not on the agenda. They lived strictly hands on, applying of the Word of God to individual lives. Not exactly what I grew up with, no, this couple was more interested in one-on-one discipleship long before it became the mainstay of many evangelicals.

Doris led that small women's retreat, tenderly and lovingly as a mama loves her children. I sat mesmerized as she allowed us to enter the private space between her and her Savior when she prayed. Praying just above a whisper, she delighted in conversing with her Lord, not even aware of the rest of us.

My marriage, recently disintegrated, forced me to put the pieces back together. I was not about to sit around feeling sorry for myself. I had walked in to this church that July morning looking for a healthy single adult group to join. By divine appointment, after a few minutes of inquiry, the receptionist offered me a secretarial position for the summer since the current secretary was out on medical leave. Immediately I was thrust into a new learning mode, including looking for a woman to speak at that women's retreat!

The Lord brought this quirky middle-aged saucy lady in to my life when I was in a hard season, desperate to hear Truth. Doris applied her Christian education degree in leading a women's Bible study implementing *The Basic Bible Studies*, a simple book teaching the doctrines based solely on the scriptures by Francis Schaeffer. No personal stories or illustrations: just the Word. Her unashamed deep love for her Lord who was most real to her along with her passion and drive to teach hungry hurting souls the Word of God kept me riveted. She would often say she stole from everyone and gave no one credit, but the narrative was all her own. She didn't care about having a meal at Bible study. We're here to study God's word, "eat somewhere else and some other time", she would say. "We have work to do."

Taken by her quiet authoritative style, I called my dearest friend, who was also struggling in her marriage at the time and invited her to join us. Almost overnight Susan was also "adopted" as one of Doris' spiritual daughters. From then on, Doris was forever calling me Susan!

Raised in a Godly Christian home where my brother and I went to church twice weekly, we experienced a genuine love from our parents and them to each other. The shock of a broken marriage, broken promises and broken plans truly had me reeling and ready to find again that genuine love that can come only from God. Aside from the Bible study, Doris and I hung out

together. We enjoyed spontaneity sprinkled with laughter over the ridiculous! She loved the irreverent “Roseanne” and would have Susan and me over for TV night. Doris even treated Susan and me to the two man play "Greater Tuna" at the historical Alabama Theater! We never laughed so loud and long in our lives! Doris was hilarious! Such rowdy joy! My own “tight wad” was loosening up!

As I became involved in the single’s activities at church, I met a young man who wanted to go out with me. Though we dated once, I knew I was separated. I gave Doris a call. She invited me to come over. Together with her husband, Bill, the two of them explained God’s design for marriage, man’s hardness of heart through divorce, and God’s definition of remarriage, taking me to passages from Genesis to Revelation. Even though I needed to abstain from dating this young man and anyone else I was satisfied. Now I was committed to following God’s plan. My relationship with My Savior was much more important than relationships with others.

Over hamburgers one afternoon at Swenson's Ice Cream Parlor Doris shared with me how she finally understood exactly what the Lord had done for her on the cross. She realized she had been teaching Sunday school for years without grasping what Jesus did for her. When she considered that Jesus' death on the cross accomplished everything needed to have eternal life; that all the good things she did at church or in her everyday life had no bearing on her eternal destiny, she crumbled in a pool of tears and gave her life to Jesus right then. I’m amazed, she told me that day, that He even uses me to do anything for Him.

Doris and Bill had no biological children and chose not to adopt; instead, they gave their energies to discipling both single and married young adults in their daily Christian walk. Her skill and heart were again put to the test over a year later following my divorce when I found

myself slouched on her bright orange couch confessing my guilt over a relationship that nearly went too far. Doris saved my life again that afternoon as she listened to my hurting heart. Quietly she shared the truth that Jesus still loved me. His love would not change. The unavoidable gnawing in my gut was the Holy Spirit, nudging me to move on and let this man go. Jesus had something better for me. Himself.

What impact did Doris' life have on me? Doris lived life to the fullest and without apology. She lived and loved, full and vibrant. Her near reverence for her husband; her soft spoken tone in front of him; the way she deferred to him in respect and honor spoke volumes to me. Their mutual respect and love for one another was the perfect picture of Christ loving His bride the church.

Three years after my former husband had remarried, the Lord brought a God-loving man into my life who loved me in spite of my failed marriage. Doris served the punch at our wedding!

Doris' legacy was passed on through a single mom ministry at my church when the Lord led me to an opportunity to mentor several moms. Her love of scripture, women, life, and most of all, her Lord, reminds me of the value of a strong mentoring mom. I'm forever grateful the Lord introduced me to this sassy, saucy woman with a passionate faith and unbounded love for life in all its colors!

In Doris' last years, as her memory faded, Bill would take her to Wendy's, her favorite restaurant for lunch. While standing in line to order, another customer would walk up behind them. "Do you know the wonderful love of my Savior, Jesus?" She asked with the confidence of one who knew Jesus as her best friend. As Bill later relayed the story in their modest home, a

smile spread across his weary face. “She was unafraid of the response by that time in her life.”
The answer would usually be, “Of course!” followed by a knowing smile.

In January 2003 Doris met her precious Lord at the age of eighty. In her last days she didn't know me but she knew the song I sang to her. She looked in my eyes and sang, “Jesus loves me, this I know.”