

Mary Rebecca Kerr

May 5, 1949 – May 4, 2002

Mary Rebecca Anne Lomascolo Kerr, or Beckie, as we all knew her, was a life-long resident of Wyoming Valley. She was born in the Wilkes-Barre General Hospital on May 5, 1949, the third and youngest child of Thomasina and Alexander Lomascolo. She lived most of her first 25 years in Hanover Township on Wyoming Street with her mother, brother John, and sister Sharon. She attended Lee Park Elementary and Hanover Area High School where she excelled as a student, finishing near the top of her class. In 1967, Beckie enrolled in the Wilkes-Barre General Hospital School of Radiological Technology and, in 1969, graduated from the program, finishing first in her class and winning the prestigious Malinkrodt award for excellence. Upon graduation, Beckie began work in General Hospital's X-Ray department as a licensed Radiological Technologist.

As fate would have it, Beckie met co-worker and wheel chair jockey, Bruce Kerr, during the summer of 1969. Loud and obnoxious, and with outstanding rear-wheel wheel-chair balancing skills, Bruce was hard to ignore. And so, on August 14, 1969, she accepted his invitation to dinner and a movie. The night went very well, and a new relationship was born. Although Bruce went away to college in the fall of 1970, the bond between them grew stronger, and on August 11, 1973, Beckie and Bruce were married at St. Aloysious Catholic Church, in Wilkes-Barre, in an ecumenical ceremony led by Catholic Father Hickey and Episcopalian minister David Rivers.

We spent several wonderful summers at our cottage at Harvey's Lake. Our first child, Jessica, was born in May of 1976, soon to be followed by Justin and Jenelle, as we moved from Hanover Township to the current Haddonfield Hills address in Dallas.

Throughout the years, with a few short maternity breaks, Beckie maintained full-time employment, while at the same time tending to the homestead, children and pets. Beckie was clearly respected by her employers, as she moved from technician to office manager. She virtually single-handedly turned around a medical practice from financial ruin to success and ultimately arranged for its sale. She was always extremely conscientious and dedicated to her work. Nothing bothered her more than poor service to patients, or co-workers who were not equally dedicated to the job. If Beckie worked for you, you could rest absolutely assured that the job was being done at its best.

But Beckie found a balance in life between work and family. She was a devoted mother, who never missed a child's performance, game, or parent-teacher review session. She was active in the PTA, in the various soccer associations, and spent countless hours helping the children with homework, reading to them, camping with them, living for them. The family attended the Chapel at College Miseracordia and St. Therese's church regularly and the three children are confirmed catholics.

Beckie lived for her work and for her family.

She has been my best friend since I met her. She's the one person in whom I could confide my deepest, darkest secrets and feelings in absolute confidence that what was discussed was strictly between us. She helped to put things into proper perspective, usually providing sound advice when it was asked for. We shared everything we had, and I never once felt my confidence was violated. I could count on her to fill in for me, to back me up, and usually, to back off when I needed space.

Beckie was a beautiful person. She took great pride in her appearance. She shunned heavy make-up, excessive jewelry and designer clothes, preferring a simpler, subtle, natural/clean image. She never ate or drank excessively, never smoked, and kept her weight at a svelte 115 pounds. She stayed in shape physically through her hard work at home and at work, fast-walks with Mitzie, Patrick and Andi, or hiking in the woods.

But her real beauty was inside. She was first to volunteer to help a neighbor in distress (or see to it that one of us did), cooking meals, gardening, grass mowing, snow shoveling, or just keeping them company. She was active in the various youth organizations, not for a position of power, but to improve the organization. She was gentle and compassionate with her friends, her family, her pets. Beckie was a loving and giving person.

We family-camped for many years; the children enjoy camping, fishing, hiking, boating to this day. Beckie loved to travel both with, and without, the children. Our family spent weeks in New Hampshire, Cape Cod, Ocean City (MD), Orlando, Destin and Salt Lake, just to name a few trips. Beckie and I traveled alone for week-or-longer stays in San

Francisco, Arizona, Utah, Florida, Bermuda and Italy. Beckie wasn't "worldly", but clearly enjoyed adventure to places not yet seen.

Beckie's glioblastoma diagnosis was a shock to all of us. We were already familiar with this deadly cancer after having experienced it with my mother, Mary Zeller Kerr. Mom died after only 6 months, probably due to the location of the tumor and the limits of available technology in 1992. Certainly, her family's love and her faith in God helped her to cope with the impending reality. She did this with incredible strength and grace.

The other great woman in my life, Beckie, endured 2 brain surgeries, 3 major radiation therapies, numerous chemotherapies and other drugs and tests with a similar strength and grace. She never complained about her fate. When confronted with the original, grim prognosis, many of us prayed for Beckie's salvation. In particular, many prayed that Beckie would suffer little physical or emotional pain. I believe our prayers were answered. Perhaps the doctors, nurses and drugs helped her cope, perhaps her faith in God helped her, perhaps the damage that this disease imparted to her brain helped. Certainly, our very good and thoughtful friends, neighbors and relatives helped, possibly in ways they will never understand.

This is a time for thanks. Thanks to God for looking so kindly on Beckie and her family and friends throughout her ordeal. Thanks for a doctor as fine as Dr. Bruce Saidman. Thanks to my boss, Chris Munyan, for being so understanding and considerate in every way. Thanks to Beckie's good friends- and especially Kate Brennan, Allison Maier and Martha Allardyce- for their many kind thoughts and acts. Thanks to her brother John, and to my brothers Brian and David, and sister Mary Lee- and their families- for constantly showing so much love and attention. Thanks to my Dad, a pillar of strength, in whom I hold total respect and pride. Thanks to Jenelle and Justin and Tom for their love and devotion. And most special thanks to Beckie's loving and dedicated sister, Sharon, and to Jessica, who has grown to be a most thoughtful, generous, industrious, dedicated woman- just like her mother!

The period since diagnosis tested many of us in ways we couldn't even imagine. Certainly, there was plenty of stress. But in some ways, the time flew by. We never laughed any harder or enjoyed time with Beckie more. Typical, was a night out for dinner, maybe six months ago, when the waitress asked whether we were ready to order. All, but Beckie knew what we wanted. So we asked the waitress to come back in a few minutes. In the meantime, we worked feverishly with Beckie to make a selection. Upon her return, the waitress asked once again if we were ready to order, and Beckie immediately responded, "Yes we are!" The waitress asked what she wanted, and just a promptly, Beckie brightly responded "I don't know!" After a great laugh, we ordered for Beckie. After the waitress left, Beckie once again laughingly commented that she couldn't be responsible for her actions since she had "half a brain and two holes in her head."

We led a remarkably normal life, with heavy emphasis on the positive. One of Beckie's greatest gifts to us was the 27 month opportunity to let her know how much she really meant to us, and the full opportunity say goodbye. Maybe even more important was the opportunity to thank her for her lifetime of giving of herself to us, as an outstanding mother, wife and friend.

Thanks to God for Beckie, whose presence in our lives meant so much to so many of us.