

Bonnie Sue Fitterling Braun

Bonnie Sue Fitterling Braun, visionary leader and trailblazer born on September 27, 1947, departed this world on November 5th at her beloved historic farm outside Gettysburg, PA. Her journey began in the humble rural setting of Chilhowee, Missouri, where the foundation for her life's mission was laid: understanding and improving the lives of families.

Bonnie's thirst for knowledge, and her leadership skills were apparent from an early age. As a youth in Missouri 4-H she met a fellow competitor, William (Bill), whom she would date starting at 16, marry at 20, and partner with for over 56 years. 4-H was one of the first avenues through which Bonnie began impacting the community around her: implementing roadside picnic tables for travelers to the Ozarks, building hiking trails at a 4-H camp.

A Family Living class she took as a highschool junior in Sacramento introduced her to the field of home economics—an epiphany that ignited her passionate pursuit of the field and her service of families. This propelled her to pursue bachelors and masters degrees in Home Economics Education at the University of Central Missouri (formerly CMSU) and a doctorate – Dr. Mommy, as her daughter called her – in Vocational Education from the University of Missouri at Columbia in 1979. During college, she was inducted into Kappa Omicron Nu, an honor society in the field of family and consumer sciences and presided over the student unit of the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) which would launch her into leadership on a national level including as the President of the American Association of Family Consumer Sciences (AAFCS).

Bonnie honed her teaching skills as an instructor at her alma mater where she implemented student-centric teaching techniques long before they were in vogue. These teaching methods, combined with her career contributions, would garner her recognition by this institution, in 1991, as a distinguished alumna – small town parade and all!

Bonnie believed Confucious' guidance that "knowledge without action is useless". Public policy became a cornerstone of her career. Her advocacy led to impactful policy changes for the well-being of rural families: from influencing Virginia's phosphate detergent use policies in 1987 to preserving essential benefits for Maryland seniors affected by the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003.

Bonnie was renowned for her visionary, and spunky, leadership. She helped to shape the future of Extension programs – a concept of extending the resources and academic findings of a university into communities in practical, beneficial ways.

At Oklahoma State University, she became the first Extension appointee, in a faculty department, on a tenure track—which she would deftly complete—as the newly-created Family Resource Management Specialist. Bonnie's remarkable career continued to unfold when she was chosen as the first Associate Director of Virginia Extension. She worked collaboratively with the University and the National 4-H Council to create the Virginia 4-H Foundation. At age 38, she was selected to participate in the W.K. Kellogg Leadership Fellowship for three years, where she traveled the world finding ways to apply international learnings toward community improvement on her homefront.

Under the Reagan Administration, Bonnie accepted the appointment of Interim Extension Deputy Administrator for Home Economics and Human Nutrition at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), collaborating on such projects as development of the USDA food pyramid and healthy school lunch

nutrition policies. She and her team supported affordable scaling of microwave technology into everyday homes as a nutritious oil-free cooking method. She advised the Secretary of Agriculture, and the US Congress, on family-related aspects of "The Farm Bill", including Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and food stamp benefits.

Bonnie embarked on her role as the first Associate Dean for Outreach in the College of Human Ecology at the University of Minnesota. She envisioned Family and Consumer Sciences degree programs delivered through internet technology—an innovation that would reshape the landscape of continuing education.

One of Bonnie's most enduring contributions, during her leadership at the Distance Education Consortium (now ADEC), included spearheading the 1989 "Going Global" initiative, aimed at selling agricultural and home-based business products through the nascent internet.

In her role as the first Extension appointee in the Department of Family Science at the University of Maryland, Bonnie conceived, garnered funding for, and helmed a nearly 20-year, longitudinal, multi-state study focused on the well-being of rural, low-income families. The "Rural Families Speak" study was launched in response to welfare reform and became one of her most significant contributions. Alongside her colleagues, Bonnie influenced public policy and produced over 150 research articles, a book, and interactive teaching activities.

During her nearly 15-year tenure in Maryland, Bonnie held administrative positions within the School of Public Health and the University of Maryland, signifying her versatility and impact in academia. Her career culminated in her appointment as the first Endowed Chair and Founding Director of the Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy. Her expertise with family and consumer science, rural health, Extension programs throughout the US, policy development and strategic planning provided a strong foundation for this School-wide center, the first academic center devoted to health literacy nationwide, and the first such center launched at the same time the School of Public Health was created. This period marked the inception of the statewide Health Literacy Maryland Coalition, a leading-edge initiative to improve individual, family and community health literacy; the creation of inaugural health literacy academic courses at the University and beyond; and established the Center as a valuable partner to the public health activities conducted through local and state health departments, Extension and rural health programs. An example of one of Bonnie's timely and consumer-centered initiatives includes the creation of Smart Choice and Smart Use, an ongoing health literacy initiative designed and led by Bonnie to enable consumers to take advantage of health insurance benefits offered as part of the Affordable Care Act.

Upon her retirement from full-time work, Bonnie was appointed Professor Emerita and became a consultant for the University of Maryland Extension and various other institutions, including the Kettering Foundation. She became active in the Historic Gettysburg Adams County Preservation Society (HGAC) and identified a need to have a new generation of youth trained in the trades required to continue preservation of the national treasure barns and buildings in the area. Her vision came to fruition through development of the "Investing in Youth" initiative and its educational Learning Lab. She was also an engaged member of the Wesley Chapel of Fountaindale, Pennsylvania, where she enjoyed facilitating the Vacation Bible School program – having a particular focus on providing dietary-need sensitive snacks given her long struggle with food intolerances through years where there was minimal awareness.

The list of Bonnie's national awards, enduring publications, selfless board positions, personal philanthropy contributions, and professional accolades are many. A few highlights include: a charter inductee into the

International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame, the USDA Honor Award for Nutrition Education for Diverse Audiences, George F. Kramer Practitioner of the Year Award from the University of Maryland School of Public Health, selection as the National 4-H Council Annie E. Casey Foundation Distinguished Lecturer, Farm Foundation Outstanding Public Policy Issues Education Award, and the AAFCS Chalkey-Fenn Public Policy Scholar and Leader Award. Even a complete listing would fail to encompass Bonnie's "secret sauce" – a unique combination of energy, personality, positivity, work ethic, and innate leadership that she embodied without fail. She was much less intimidating in-person than her resume would suggest: she saw profound meaning in butterflies and their metamorphosis, was one of Tom Clancy's biggest fans, a popcorn lover, a sorbet connoisseur, and a travel enthusiast with an uncanny ability to navigate you, directionally, in any city of the world. Additionally, there is no index that can do justice to the mentors and colleagues she was inspired by, learned from, and took such joy in partnering alongside.

In reflecting on her career, she stated that true leadership requires engaging others in converting vision into action. Upon completing her Kellogg Leadership Fellowship, Bonnie was asked to define her leadership style: she coined the term "sheepdog style," explaining it as gently guiding from behind while encouraging others to lead the way, much like a sheepdog herding a flock.

Bonnie's contributions to families included creation of her own – never missing the chance to chaperone a school field trip and being famous for leaving her children bespoke treasure hunts or pillowtop letters before each professional departure. It was through her adaptable and close-knit family's support, that her exceptional career was made possible. Bill and Bonnie acknowledge their lives have been richly blessed. Bonnie is survived by her husband Bill, sister Cindy Fitterling of Holden, MO; two children: Joel Braun of Frederick Maryland, Jennifer Braun (Matt Johnson) of Lancaster Pennsylvania; four grandchildren: Brandon and Megan Braun (22,18), Nora and Henry Johnson (8, 6); and a devoted schnauzer, Schnapps.

Bonnie's legacy will live on in the families whose circumstances have been improved through her mission, the wealth of academic writing and research she has published, the achievements of those who have mentored under her, and in the pursuits of the resilient family she reared. May she be an example of how to live life with curiosity, to greet every stranger as a neighbor, to lead when no one else is willing, to work tirelessly toward your passion, and to leave the world behind a better place. As her favorite philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, wrote, "If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected."

Despite clear scans, Bonnie was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer in July of 2022. She beat the statistics and persevered for another 15 months. In accordance with her wishes, Bonnie will continue teaching: her body was donated to the Penn State College of Medicine.

A memorial celebration will be held on Sunday, November 26, 2023 from 2:00 - 4:00 pm at Hauser Hill Event Center, at 410 Cashtown Road, Biglerville, PA 17307. Donations in her honor may be made to the Historic Gettysburg Adams County Preservation Society (HGAC), for which Bonnie has been serving as Vice President of the board, in order to preserve the national treasure she has called home since 2008. HGAC is establishing an endowment for their Youth Initiative Learning Lab in Bonnie's name. Questions and condolences may be relayed by text or phone to 301-335-4335.

Much of her obituary is based on this write up about her from 2015 which provides more chronological professional career information and may be a good reference for the university announcements: [Braun Final 5-31-15: Creative Futurist.docx](#)