

The South has lost one of its finest magnolias.

by

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Dixie Carter died on April 9<sup>th</sup> at the age of seventy. Not since Scarlett O'Hara has there been such a stellar example of a Southern belle—and in a showdown, my money would have been on Dixie. Smart, sassy, elegant, gracious, talented, and tolerating no fools, Dixie Carter made everybody proud, from her Hollywood peers to her beloved daddy.

I met Dixie once when she autographed a book for my sister. Having already signed dozens of books, with dozens more people waiting, Dixie chatted with me like we were old friends. "Tell me about your sister," she said as she signed. "Does she live here? What do y'all like to do?" It was a quick exchange, probably no more than a minute at most, but she managed to give me a little piece of herself. Not all authors do that.

A few years later when my book *She of the Rib* was coming out, I decided an endorsement from Dixie was the highest praise I could hope for. I contacted her agent, got permission to send my manuscript, and crossed my fingers. When several months passed with no response, I e-mailed the agent to make sure the manuscript arrived. He e'd me back to say Dixie had sent me a "blurb" (a quote for the cover of my book) weeks earlier. For whatever reason, I never got it. The next day, I was at my hometown airport, getting ready to board a plane, when my cell phone rang. "Jayne? This is Dixie. I'm just sick! I loved your book and I wrote something *fabulous* about it and e-mailed it to you, but now I can't find a copy of what I wrote and I don't think I can remember what I said. I feel just *terrible*, because it was the perfect quote!" I assured her I felt worse than *she* did about the mishap and told her not to worry about it. "Oh, no, I'll write something else right away," she

said, "but it's not going to be nearly as good, because that first quote was just *brilliant!*" She laughed merrily and went on to comment on several of my poems she had particularly liked, chit-chatted about the trials and tribulations of an author's life, asked me to be sure and send a copy of my finished book, then told me what a pleasure it had been to talk with me. I clicked off my phone and smiled for a week.

The quote never made it onto the book; there's a big empty space on the back cover where it was supposed to have gone, because my publisher (who had never heard of Dixie Carter; that should have been my first clue to snatch back my manuscript and run far, far away) got tired of waiting. I sent Dixie the book anyway, and got back a lovely thank-you note reiterating how honored she was that I had asked for her opinion.

This, boys and girls, is the definition of true gentility. Here is a woman who was a star by every measure of the word, thanking *me* for using up *her* time and making it sound like it was her great *pleasure* to give it up!

There's something else I admired about Dixie; she was unapologetic about her faith. She didn't go around smacking people on the head with a Bible, she just lived a life that reflected her values. While I'm sure she made mistakes and bad choices like the rest of us, in her professional life, she made a concerted effort to stay true to those values. Dixie said it was no big deal; when a role presented inappropriate lines, she simply asked for the offensive material to be removed or rewritten. Surely other actors/directors/writers could do the same; why don't they? Julia Sugarbaker proved time and time again that it takes creativity, not profanity, to deliver a scathing put-down!

There is much we can learn from Dixie Carter's humility, candor, sense of humor, kindness, and grace. I am grateful for the tiny piece of herself that she gave to me and hope her family and friends can find comfort in knowing Heaven welcomed her with open arms.