

“Don’t touch my left toe!”

(Anecdotes about Mrs. Bonnie Sue Baker.

Prepared for me and for the grandkids on the occasion of her 70th Birthday)

More or less it all started the late afternoon of November 14, 1964 in the parking lot of the Bel Air Presbyterian Church: “ I am not getting into that car and get my Wedding Dress all dirty!” – My Best Man, Dr. Paul Merrifield, forgot to take us to our Wedding Reception and I was stuck with transporting my Bride in my used (“pre-owned”) Porsche – as they say “Girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice and Boys are made of snips and snails, and puppy dog tails.” Well Boys are also rather messy and, yes “dirty” and Girls (especially those having Norwegian lineage) are neat and very “clean.” A few years later this difference became abundantly clear when we were on our way on highway 5 to San Francisco. There was a thirty mile stretch of road with no gas stations and in the middle (point of no return) we had a flat. Well we were in a car with what are called “skirts” around the tires and they are difficult to change. After a frustrating time I started to enter our car where Bonnie was busy painting her nails in anticipation of our evening in San Francisco. She turned to me -- my hands were very grimy from the tire – and said: “You are not getting in this car so dirty!!” Don’t have the wrong idea about Bonnie just because she is an inordinately clean person. I remember clearly the day I first met her. It was in 1962 and she was walking down Sepulveda Boulevard near Moraga Drive in Bel Air, California. My second in command at the *Lockheed Astrodynamics Research Center* there, Dr. Merrifield (already mentioned), had advertised for an Executive Assistant. Well he was not really interested in typing or shorthand speed, but fantasized that his female Assistant would accompany him on his skiing trips. I took a look through my window at Bonnie approaching our building. The words to the song “Have you ever seen a dream walking” came to mind. She had on white gloves, purse and hat – Wow! I had never seen a prettier girl. So I punched the phone and said to Paul “I don’t care if this girl applicant can ski or not, but I want you to interview her and I would like to see her as well!” Well Bonnie had gone to San Jose State, was a Physics and Math Major (I think she majored in about a dozen different subjects) and “enjoyed typing equations.” Paul hired her. Since I have reminisced about times prior to our wedding, I will bring up another story. Every so often there was a professional conference in the aerospace industry. One major one was sponsored by the *American Rocket Society* (now the AIAA). Well the Conferences had Hospitality Suites and we attended one sponsored by Douglas Aircraft Company. There were cocktails and music and even dancing! One popular dance at the time was called the “Limbo” and involved dancing under a horizontal pole. The object was to dance under as low a pole as possible “How low can you go?” as Cubby Checkers sang it. Well Bonnie was an absolute expert and could beat anyone at going under the lowest pole. To facilitate her performance she said that using a pair of pants, such as I was wearing, would be very beneficial. Well I went into the suite’s bathroom, took off my jeans and Bonnie replaced her skirt with my jeans. I sat in the bathroom and listened to the dancing. I could hear that Bonnie won the contest and eagerly awaited her return to the bathroom. But Bonnie did not arrive – I listened to the music, the laughing crowd ... , but no Bonnie! Finally I put on her skirt, went out of the bathroom and retrieved Bonnie.

Bonnie loves to travel and so do I. One of our first trips was to Italy. We rented a Fiat (stands for “Fix it again Tony”) convertible and were driving from Rome to the coast. We were on our way to Assisi for lunch and Bonnie was driving in her polka-dot bikini and slightly rear-ended another car filled with young Italians. As I said I consider Bonnie to be breathtakingly beautiful ... as my son Robbie said upon viewing picture of Bonnie while we were dating: “I see why you married her Dad!”(even recently Bonnie entered a local restraint and the couple waiting for us there – Lloyd McAdams – said that the level of background talking picked up immediately upon Bonnie’s entrance). Well the Italians approached Bonnie, she smiled and when they asked for insurance papers she simply said “Hertz Car.” After staring at Bonnie for a moment or two that satisfied them. We lunched and as she was driving down the hill from Assisi, low and behold the same car filled with Italians was in front of us and they yelled “Momma Mia that crazy blond is behind us again!”

Now to Bonnie’s toe. One time Bonnie was talking to our Physician and asked him what the symptoms were for various maladies? The doctor said “Bonnie, you tell me your symptoms and I will tell you what malady you might have – not the other way around!” Not that Bonnie is a hypochondriac, but when most people first have a headache they take two aspirins – Bonnie wants a brain scan. Bonnie’s maladies are, starting from the top of her head: occasional headache, rosesacha, lip herpes, contact lens problems, post nasal drip, chronic coughing, left thumb pain (while cleaning a cabinet her hand was once trapped under a shelf and I did not respond quickly enough to her screams for help), back problems (was operated on the L4 and L5 region of her spine), stomach aches and pains, sciatica, knee problems (had a left knee replacement) and foot problems. Many of her health complaints can be eased by rubbing – especially her butt and her toes. Her toes in particular are a source of great comfort to her if pulled “... with BOTH of your hands, but for heaven’s sake **don’t touch my left toe!!!**”

Smart as a whip and soaking up knowledge like one of her cleaning sponges; that’s Bonnie. Unquestionably she would have been awarded all A’s in High School and College were it not for one factor: her contagious outgoing personality that sometimes eclipses her intelligence, Extracurricular activities occupied Bonnie: The Band, Basketball, Cheer Leading and, yes, Boys. One summer in High School she dated 100 different boys – probably a record that may stand today! In the late 1960s (I think) she worked for *Online Data Processing* (ODP). She trained in the burgeoning new field of word processing. One day her job took her to Canada. I went to LAX to collect her. I recognized her bag going round and round on the carousel ... but no Bonnie. Finally she showed. Apparently she inadvertently cued up with non-US citizens. The Customs Officer demanded that she show her passport (at that time it was not required for Canadian travel). She did not have it but fumbling around with her wallet her store of credit cards fell out. The Custom’s Officer said “Lady, anyone with all those charge cards must be a US citizen so you can pass.” Speaking of credit; when we returned from our honeymoon I was surprised to find a revolving credit-card bill in our mail. I considered it an “inverse dowry.” Well those revolving credit cards were like a merry-go-round out of control! So I asked my secretary (now I worked at Computer Sciences Corporation) who was Bonnie’s sister Merrilee Reid to write letters to all Bonnie’s creditors. She relished typing those letters stating in no uncertain terms that I was no longer responsible for Bonnie’s debts. Well just to be sure I collared Bonnie one day and marched her up to the *Beverly Hills Robinson’s* Credit Office. I demanded to see the Credit Manager. I cut up the Robinson’s card, showed him the letter and asked him to take a look

at Bonnie “See this lady” I said “Please never extend her credit again!” Next morning Bonnie returned to Robinson’s since she needed to buy some serving plates. They asked for her credit card and she replied “I don’t have it, but I know my charge account number.” Somehow Bonnie had memorized ALL of her charge numbers! In her defense I must state that several years later Bonnie paid off all of her charge accounts out of her own salary and cut up all of her cards! But back to Bonnie’s intellect (aside from her uncanny ability to memorize charge card numbers). She has always been interested in science (thank heavens) and was a docent at LA’s Museum of Science and Industry – her job, of course, was to guide the visitors through the human reproductive system display. Because of her smarts she once worked for “Astrophysics Research Corporation” or ARC, a very high-tech defense contractor. One day after work I took Bonnie to a pub on Westwood Boulevard, “The Red Log” (there is another story related to place concerning my being “inept” that I will not repeat). Anyway she glanced at her notes from her first day at ARC and asked “Bob, tell me about some projects called ‘penetration aids,’ ‘long-wavelength Infra-red satellite sensors,’ and ‘over-the-horizon radar.’” Well, I had a TOP SECRET Security Clearance and Bonnie must have had a security clearance even higher than mine – but I was startled! “Good grief!” I whispered to her “I only know that those projects are a few of the most sensitive ones our Country has today – so please don’t bring them up in a public place.” These projects have been long since declassified; but at the time, even mentioning them would have been a great breach of our national security. They were never again discussed. “Deal me in!” Bonnie loves cards, but the game of Bridge was never popular among her friends. A few years back, however, she became seriously interested in the game. She started taking lessons at the Bel Air Country Club and within a couple of years she and her partner, Susan Smith, won two Bridge Tournaments. The other day Bonnie commented that she had not “done well” (for Bonnie a euphemism for being deal bad cards) at a Bridge Party. I asked how she came in compared to the other girls “Oh, I tied for first place.” That’s Bonnie -- hardly a dumb blond. She has a thirst for knowledge and enrolled in adult education classes in the Marina del Rey to learn Microsoft Word 2010, Excel and Power Point. Of course she was first in her classes and so far has three *Certificates!*

As part of the lead up to the *LA Olympics*, Bonnie was MC at a gymnastics event. There was a gymnastics show that included our daughter Robin (Southern California State Gymnastics Champion). It was even broadcasted nationally on ESPN. An important dignitary showed up by surprise. Poor Bonnie struggled to remember his name and finally remembered it and avoided embarrassment. Speaking of embarrassment, although not a Bonnie story, I must relate a story about Robin Baker Fell (our daughter). She was in the finals of Miss Teenage Playa del Rey or Westchester (or somewhere – I can’t recall). She was number 9. Well the MC announced the winner as number 29. The former Queen, who really liked Robin, thought he said “9” and put the crown on Robin and was about to bestow a bouquet of roses on her when Robin was unceremoniously dethroned by number 29 who snatched away her crown and took the roses. We all hid our heads.

Bonnie also likes our Country’s Military. She actively pursued our son Robbie’s successful application to Annapolis (we really enjoyed visiting there). Prior to that we travelled for many years to the *Air Force Academy* in Colorado on teaching assignments. I was an Assistant Professor at UCLA at the time of our first visit and given the effective rank of Brigadier General! Thus we had great quarters. The Academy had only been moved to the new campus from Ent Air

Force Base a year or two earlier so all was brand new. Bonnie and I were dining one day at the Mess Hall with a number of Air Force Officers. Bonnie said to them: “These Cadets are so nice and hard working I would like to give a BEER BUST for them at our Quarters this weekend.” Eye brows went up – no cadet drinking was allowed and absolutely NO parties. Then one Officer at the Table turned to Bonnie and said “What a nice offer – let’s do it!” The other Officers were aghast – it turned out he was Academy Commander and his word was law. The Cadets arrived, about 20 of them and they were perfect guests even cleaned up our bathroom. The next morning Bonnie went into the bathroom to get her underwear. Where were they? We did not have time to think much about it since the morning parade was about to start so Bonnie secured a replacement underwear set. Well as we reviewed the Parade the Cadets did an “Eyes Right” in front of Bonnie and pointed to the flag pole where Bonnie’s underwear was being hoisted up the flag pole. I’ll bet that was an historical event – no doubt the first lady’s underwear to be raised up the flag pole of the *United States Air Force Academy* – the event no doubt started a tradition there.

Bonnie loves to travel ... we go as independent travelers and Bonnie plans our trips in infinite detail – even as to where to shop, get her nails done, eat our meals, etc. She accomplishes this literally a year in advance. One of the most enjoyable aspects of our trips is to meet interesting people. We have met a large number people on our travels – no doubt because of Bonnie’s enchanting personality and sincere interest in others. Recently we were in Bhutan on an Amman Journey (a string of luxurious chateaus). One nice couple, who Bonnie made friends with, were sitting next to us a cocktail time. The husband remarked “I love tequila, but this is terrible.” To that Bonnie replied “I didn’t know that they would have proper liquor on the trip so I packed a few miniatures of *Patron* in our bags ...” (as I said Bonnie considers every travel detail!). “Let me get them for you.” “You have *Patron* ... fabulous!” She brought three little bottles back and he was so grateful that he invited us to their place in Mexico City. It turns out that he was quite wealthy and part of the *Braniff Airline* family. His name was Juan Carlos Braniff and his wife Barbara (although of Mexican decent her mother named her after Barbara Stanwick) was the heiress to *Dos Equis* beer. Well on a trip with Darien Iacocca and Charlie Knapp we visited Mexico City. A limo (turned out to be an armored car).picked us up and took us to their estate. A giant steel gate opened -- inside were four guards with submachine guns (I guess he was really important and a target for abduction). Anyway we entered an elevator with another armed guard and it delivered us to their subterranean residence and they hosted us to dinner. We entertained them when they were in LA at the BABC (where the parking attendant said “Oh! You are the Mexicans Mrs. Baker told us to let park here.” Of course 90% of the help is “Mexican.”). We also met them in Puerto Vallarta and we remain good friends to this day. While at the Hotel Cipriani in Venice (I think that was the place). Bonnie befriended the Italian Ambassador to Guatemala. He invited us for cocktails. It was late and Bonnie noticed a couple sitting alone. She suggested that we invite them over and the Ambassador went to their table. They started arguing about what champagne to order: *Dom Perignon* in or *Piper-Heidsieck* Champagne. They finally chose *Piper-Heidsieck* Champagne. Guess what ... the old gentleman **was** Piper-Heidsieck! ... and he invited us to his place in the South of France – darn it! I lost his card and we missed out on his invite. It was Robin’s 25th birthday and we were celebrating it in Paris where she had spent a semester abroad while attending *UC Berkley* a few years back and now started a company that displayed children’s videos at the *Cannes Film Festival*. She traveled to meet us in Paris. We went to one restaurant in Paris that she recommended, but no diners were present and Bonnie suggested that we find another restaurant. We found one called “Le Boeuf

Sur la Toit“ (or something like that?). Robin had arranged to meet a fellow American (a *Time-Warner* young executive) at another restaurant and she phoned him. The three of us sat at the bar before our table was ready. Bonnie immediately engaged the French couple next to us in conversation. Robin whispered to her: “**Mother!** You do not know these people so why are you talking to them?” Bonnie replied “Robin why don’t you return to that other restaurant and collect your friend and bring him back if he is there?” A bit disgruntled Robin left the Bar and Bonnie continued her conversation with the French couple. They inquired about why we were in Paris and Bonnie told them that it was to celebrate our daughter Robin’s 25th birthday. Robin returned (her friend never showed) and we were seated for dinner. At desert we were amazed to here Bonnie’s’ new friend stand and addressing the entire restaurant he said: “I want to propose a toast to Robin Baker on the occasion of the 25th birthday.” He raised his glass and the entire restaurant toasted Robin. I sent them a bottle of champagne and invited them to our table. Upon arrival he invited us for lunch the next day at the *Plaza Athenee* and Bonnie quickly accepted. He then presented us with his card. I must say it was the largest business card I had ever seen! And who did it state he was? Bernard Vuitton the grandson of Louis Vuitton! Well several times after that he picked Robin up at the Airport since, as I stated, Robin now had business in France – all due to Bonnie’s loquacious and friendly nature!

Chef Bonnie: “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” The saying goes – so why not to a woman’s heart? While we were dating I would ply Bonnie with Chicken Pot pies. Working girls don’t have much time for fixing elaborate meals and Bonnie loved them. Soon after we were married Bonnie settled on a standard meal when we entertained at dinner. It consisted of Cornish Game Hens and Wild Rice. Our freezer was filled with frozen Cornish Game Hens and our cupboard chuck full of boxes of wild rice. Soon Bonnie (or our guests) tired of our “Standard Meal.” Bonnie began to experiment with various recopies. She was very inventive here and one day decided to submit them to a recipe contest. Well she won and was published in the *Better Homes and Gardens Cookbook* and later in the *Neiman Marcus Cookbook* – twice! I felt her feeling of success when I found all of her new stationary inscribed with “FROM THE KITCHEN OF BONNIE BAKER.” Her cooking is still superb. While in India, while on a river cruise in Burma, at Villa Feltrinelli, Lake Garda, Italy and in Mexico she was a guest chef. She has cooked and taken cooking lessons all over the world! Bonnie also has a voracious appetite. It is a miracle that she keeps a Marilyn Monroe figure after decades of consuming wonderful food – much of it being her own creation. One day while watching our son Robbie pitch at *Little League* (he was an award-winning left hander) she went to the food Booth and asked to buy a big jar of Red Vines. The girl in the Booth said “How nice of you to buy these for the whole Team!” Bonnie responded: “No. Actually they are just for me.”

I really doubt if there is any major city in the northern hemisphere with shops that Bonnie has not visited – I believe she has ran her hands through almost every stylish clothes rack on this side of our planet! Bonnie should have been a lot of things: a famous chef, a decorator (our BABC Cabana has been given every prize), a movie star, a travel consultant for the rich and famous and certainly a fashion designer. She has exquisite taste and a fantastic eye for clothes. Once in China we were with a group of people and Bonnie found a very unusual hat (really a crown). Everyone asked exactly where she found it. “Well,” she said “back there ... you all passed it.” In Vietnam she has had clothes designed by her made up by them – even including shoes!

I mentioned her stint as docent at the *LA Museum of Science and Industry*. Well that was just a very small part of her charity work over the years. When we first were married in the 1960s, I was active in Aerospace and felt that our Nation's biggest problem was our lack of educating competent scientists. I recommended a then new charity the *Achievement Rewards for College Scientists (ARCS)*. Bonnie joined and was extremely active, bringing in millions of dollars and organizing about ten elaborate galas including Pauley Pavilion during our Olympics and the LA Train Station. An account of one, written by Monica Panno, that she did at Paramount Studios can be found on the Internet at www.DrRobertBaker.com, under ARCS GALA 2006. She also was a member of the *Nine O'clock Players of the National Charity League*. It presented plays, like the *Wizard of OZ*, to young children. Well you would expect a beautiful extravert like Bonnie to be on stage – but no she elected to be a Stage Hand. She followed my mom into the *House Ear Institute*, was a *Chip* in the *Children's Institute*, and a member of the *LA Library Foundation*, *Blue Ribbon*, *Foot lighters* and *Les Amies* among other charitable activities. Whatever she joined she put her soul into it – charity to others was Bonnie's Religion!

Well, the saga of Bonnie is destined to go on and on; but remember one thing: **don't touch her left toe!**

With Love, Bob