



## Victoria Berlinghof Bigelow

May 25, 1947 - February 9, 2017

Victoria Berlinghof Bigelow, born May 25, 1947, in Flushing, NY to Henry (Bud, Buddy) Berlinghof Jr. and Rhea Wood Berlinghof, was her parents' only child. She was named after her mother's modeling career name—Victoria Ford. However, she was known by other names: by her father as Vicki, by her mother as Wacky Woo, or by her daughters as Wick Whack. As a porcelain-skinned, doe-eyed, slender young woman with accompanying hairpiece, she captured the eye of a dimple-cheeked Navy serviceman, Michael Lee Bigelow and married him on July 27, 1969, in Solana Beach, California. They later divorced in October 1980. Vicki (who still signed her name with circles over the i's) died at the age of 69 on February 9, 2017, in Draper, Utah, in her home, which was equipped with her beloved personal art gallery.

Vicki's life was filled from beginning to end with health-crisis management. She was like a cat. She certainly had at least nine lives. The reality is, this obituary could have been necessary at any point in the last 68 years. At eighteen months old, Vicki contracted acute encephalitis, leaving her suddenly blind, deaf, and paralyzed on her right side. Although her mother was told there was "no hope," Rhea never gave up on a course for Vicki's healing, calling on extensive prayer when doctors could offer no answers. Vicki eventually fully regained her movement, sight, and hearing (yet still managed to talk so loudly, especially on the phone, that you would think she was half deaf). She maintained a 20-year relationship with self-customized braces on her weak, uncoordinated right arm and hand. Only in death has she finally gained respite from debilitating, life-altering seizures that were a result of the encephalitis.

Life was sprinkled with happy memories in between the physical hardships. Vicki spent some of the brightest days of her life with her parents and animal friends in the home her father remodeled for them in Del Mar, California. Her eyes were brimming with vistas of avocado groves and the nearby racetracks. When she wasn't combing through the tide pools of La Jolla, California looking for shells and creatures, she was eating so many fresh lemons straight from the trees that she eroded the enamel off of her teeth. The most treasured moments of her youth were spent with her cousin Dee Dee. Deed, as she often

called her, was Vicki's cousin by blood, but was her sister by heart throughout her life. From the time they were six years old until Dee Dee got married, they would ride the train to see one another nearly every weekend, holidays, and throughout the summers. She spent the rest of her life employing her remarkable long-term memory to reminisce about her times with Dee Dee: the days spent working with Buddy on the house, giggling when he'd cuss; playing for hours on end with their Jenny dolls making them furniture and clothes; walking a million miles on the dirt road circle in front of the house. Vicki and Dee Dee enjoyed wonderful camping adventures to Huntington Lake. They'd take long hikes, canoe, swim in the lake, look for deer, sing songs, and toast marshmallows by Buddy's bonfires. They'd even bathe in the lake with Ivory soap because it would float. It was through these years that she developed her life mantra, "I can do this. I cannot fail." Despite many, long absences listed on school report cards, Vicki graduated from San Dieguito High School and attended Palomar College in San Marcos, California, before fully embracing her passion for art—opting to spend long days at home developing her talent.

After marrying, Vicki and Mike lived the military life with numerous stopping points including San Diego, California; Huntsville, Alabama; Patterson, Louisiana; Monroe, North Carolina—adding three daughters along the way. Following their divorce, she and the girls lived with her mom and dad in Huntsville, Alabama. Vicki filled her child-rearing years with paint brushes, oil paints, palettes, drawing pads, pencils, copper enameling, stained-glass, clay, pen and ink, pastels, colored pencils, and water color pencils. She spent all of her free time creating clowns, portraits, animals, bugs, flowers, religious icons, and abstract pieces in every medium. Her art suspended realism, making way for more vivid whimsy. Along with her art, she used humor throughout her life as a coping method to counteract her physical difficulties. She adored puns and was quick with them. Corny jokes were welcome and retold to every friend. She'd read the funny papers each Sunday, sharing Garfield, Hagar the Horrible, or Peanuts out loud when she found the story lines reflective of home life. "She only does it to annoy because she knows it teases."

Solid Gold, Wheel of Fortune, Tom Selleck, Hawaii Five-O, a large piece or two of dessert, a bottle or three of wine, a pot of black coffee, Neil Diamond, her tambourine, fireworks, waist-cinching belts, Final Net hairspray, a card game of Gin, chats with her mom and dad around the wood-burning fireplace, bowling, bleu cheese dressing, swinging on swings, shiny blue eye shadow, and singing every song on the record player an octave too high, were some of her favorite things—but not necessarily in that order! When there was sun, she was bathing in it. When there was music, she was wiggling her shoulder to it. She loved a rare steak. She used way too much tape to wrap a gift in multiple layers to confuse the recipient. She painstakingly shaved each leg ten times per bath, writing the

number of the round with the shaving cream. She bedazzled everything she touched in any form of embellishment—be it ruffles, silk flowers, bows, ribbons, jewels, shine spray, sequins, paint, color, or glass surround. More was still not enough. She constantly repeated a variety of favorite phrases. “Hold the pickles. Hold the lettuce.” “I’s a comin.’ Hold your horses. I’s a comin.’” Her keychain was always a “great big, huge” conglomeration of loud chains and trinkets. She wore a ring or two on each finger, jumpsuits, mink coats, knee-high boots, ruffled necklines, and numerous layers even in high temperatures and was still constantly freezing. She loved Christmas, especially decorating the tree. She had an uncanny knack of being able to correctly guess her wrapped gifts each year but never realized the extensive Christmas sweater collection still in her closet comes with the qualifier of “ugly” in front of it.

Aside from selling her artwork here and there, Vicki worked different jobs over the course of her life. Among employers on her resume were Lucky’s Supermarket, Steak and Ale, TJ Maxx (where she was a fitting room attendant), and Walmart as a greeter. Perhaps the position she was most proud of was the time she spent as an assistant at a nursing home. She gained job skills and felt a sense of pride in being a caretaker rather than being care-taken. Despite all of the damage her body had sustained from illness, she was still strong. She could lift patients and assist them walking. She recounted her days in nurse assisting with great joy.

Vicki moved to Draper, Utah to be with her mother again in 1997. She experienced extensive periods of critically ill health during that time, but finally recovered enough to move into her own place just a few blocks away. When she wasn’t doing artwork, or loving on her pets, she was gardening, eventually earning the highly coveted neighborhood “yard-of-the-month” award against some fierce competition. Vicki joined her family for dinner on Sundays with numerous bags of belongings in tow. She loved playing with her grandkids, teaching them how to draw, demonstrating drawing for them, or applying invisible vanishing cream while telling them stories. Her grandchildren brought her so much pleasure in life. She enjoyed long walks throughout the neighborhood on pretty days, but would admit that, although the snow was beautiful, she wasn’t suited for Utah winters. She took advantage of annual or biannual trips to Florida to see Dee Dee and thaw out.

In 2005, she moved into her final home at Draper Peaks, mere blocks from her daughters Shelley and Suzanne. She had a brand new condo immediately across the street from Michaels, Petco, and TJ Maxx. It was her personal Nirvana. She spent the good days shopping or drawing at Smith’s Grocery for fundraising efforts for Primary Children’s Hospital, where she donated hundreds of dollars earned from her art sales and just as

many hours. The rough days were reserved for drawing at her home art studio to create gifts for family and friends or to expand her personal art gallery permanent exhibitions. As her medical conditions became increasingly complicated, her daily routine simplified. Draw. Nap. Take care of her animal friends. Talk on the phone with Dee Dee. Watch some TV. Repeat everything the next day. She was appreciative of the smallest kindnesses from friends and expressed endless thanks for them. There were interruptions of doctor appointments, hospital stays, physical rehab stays, and aggressive treatments for massively complicating infections. She looked forward to each new treatment as the possible salvation from increasing, severe seizures. All who knew her now celebrate with her that she is finally free of the cursed body she put up with all these years.

Vicki was preceded in death by her genius father, angel mother, Grammie Mable Wood, Grandma Chubby Berlinghof, Uncle Jack Wood, extended family members, various life-long friends, and her menagerie of animals:

Dogs—Eric, Chris, Niki, Maggie, Hansel, Lulu, Dudley, Little Bit

Cats—Snow Pants, Rusty, Butterscotch, Shadow, Piglet 1, Piglet 2, Tigger

Hamsters—Romeo, Pancake, Sunshine

Birds—Pepe, Kiki, Sidney

Her childhood donkey—Sunshine, aka Sunny

One mean duck—Joe

Numerous nice ducks

Two sheep

Rabbits

Guinea pigs

A favorite neighbor horse

Countless scorpions (which she preserved in alcohol-filled jelly jars)

Her avocado tree—sprouted from a seed but kept in the kitchen (with leaves dropping on our dinner plates) for over a decade

Vicki is survived by her three daughters: Shelley Ann Bigelow Wright (Trent), Suzanne Michelle Bigelow Nelson (Cameron), and Jennifer Lee Bigelow Neslen (David); her grandchildren Christian, Ethan, Claire, Calder, Hillary, Luke, Josh, and Grace; her OLDER (Vicki would teasingly insist) more-of-a-sister-technically-a-cousin Sheri (Dee Dee) Lee Wood Murphy, Shawn and Christopher Murphy and their families; her sweet “puddy tat” Topaz, and newest-acquired-pet-hamster-friend, Peaches.

The family would like to thank numerous doctors and care providers who have worked with Vicki over the years. She always said that her stays in the hospital were so nice that it was more like she was on a Caribbean cruise. Thanks to her dear friends near and far who have kept her company over the years, called to check in, visited, and offered assistance with rides, her home, or her furry friends when she was away—with special thanks to Janice, TeriLyn, Irene, and Shelley. Vicki found joy from all of her visitors. Thank you to the Meals on Wheels delivery team and various home health specialists who came for care appointments.

Even in death, her body was recalcitrant to Vicki by not being acceptable for scientific study, as she had planned for many years. Instead, she was cremated with a likely final resting place in the Pacific waters of her childhood where her parents' ashes were spread. In lieu of flowers, please donate to your local animal shelter, art center, plant some pansies, or buy yourself a piece of gaudy, completely unnecessary, semi-precious jewelry, because she no longer can.

Readers: thank you for bearing with me, Jennifer (Gigi). In true Vicki style, I have inherited her gift to gab. Also, one never got out quickly when saying goodbye to our mom. I will take a self-indulgent moment to thank my two indescribably selfless, tireless sisters Shelley and Suzanne, and their lovingly supportive families, for the years and years of hands-on assistance that our mother's physical dependence required. The sheer number of doctor appointments, the medical research, first aid interventions, hospital stays, rehab stays, insurance battles, blood draws, prescription refills, medication management, specialist appointments, transportation, veterinarian appointments, financial obligations, home and utility demands, cleaning, food, clothing, gifts, and, now, final arrangements is mindboggling. I am certain that Nan and Papa (our grandparents) couldn't be more thankful that you have cared for their baby that they unceasingly fought for throughout their lifetimes. There are only inadequate words available to express my profound appreciation and respect for assuming such an unrelenting and emotionally complicated care-taking task. For all of these reasons, and many more, you are heroes.

Mom, it's been nice remembering you today. I still have the voicemail you left for Luke on his last birthday. I'll play your arrhythmic rendition of "Happy Birthday" to each family member for the years to come, because I know you would have liked to have called and done it yourself like you always did. In the most complexly simple way, I love you. I'm so very glad you are finally free to fly. You take care of your precious self. Tell Nan and Papa "hi" for us, and your pets, too. And give sweet Nan and Papa and a hug and a kiss from us. Take care, sweetheart. Have a happy day, and enjoy yourself. Take care. We'll talk to you again soon. You take good care of your sweet self. And bye-bye...



# Comments

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“ One of the pictures that she drew for Larry and I



Jackie Chambers - September 03, 2020 at 10:44 PM

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“ I had heard about Vikki's death over a year ago, and it still affects me sometimes. My husband, Larry, worked for the landscaping company that mowed the lawn at her apartment complex, and she became like a second mom to both of us. She was always a sweetheart and made us both laugh.

Jackie Chambers - July 12, 2018 at 06:58 PM

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“ I am so sorry about Vicky!! That was the most beautiful obituary(story) I have ever read. It was all so true. Made me laugh and cry. She will be missed dearly! I loved my crazy Vicky!! She was the greatest, sweetest lady ever.

Jamie Kyzer - October 04, 2017 at 10:59 PM

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“ Upon hearing the news of Vicki's passing, I was somewhat surprised as it seems Vicki would live forever, continually fighting through health challenges & making the best at what life would throw at her. My next thought was of happiness for her...happiness to have been blessed with a beautiful family. Lovely parents who cared for her & lovely children who did the same. Happiness for her as well as she is finally released from constant health concerns & setbacks. What a joy it has been to know Vicki, to see her use talents she has been given, to watch her light up when interacting with friends & family. She will be missed but not forgotten. Much love to her beautiful daughters that have similar attributes of genuine love & friendship passed down to them. I feel blessed to know you all & to have been touched by your wonderful mother.  
D'dree Grange

D'dree Grange - February 21, 2017 at 10:01 AM



“ 4 files added to the tribute wall



suzanne nelson - February 17, 2017 at 05:38 PM



“ 25 files added to the tribute wall



gigi - February 17, 2017 at 01:31 PM



“ Such a wonderful woman..Thanks for sharing her with us here at Spring Creek! She became family to us and she will be missed! She will be remembered by all of the art hanging throughout the building! RIP Victoria Bigelow....

Travis Miller - February 17, 2017 at 09:45 AM



“ Thank you for caring for her. This is so nice of you to have written.

gigi - March 05, 2017 at 05:27 PM



“ 2 files added to the album New Album Name



shelley wright - February 16, 2017 at 07:33 PM



“ Grandma Vicki loved her eight grandchildren very much. She was so proud of all of them. We are comforted to know that they will have a special guardian angel to always watch over them.

**shelley wright** - February 16, 2017 at 07:24 PM

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“ 7 files added to the tribute wall



**shelley wright** - February 16, 2017 at 07:21 PM