IN MEMORIAM

Susan B. Baird, 1942-2022

Reverend Judith A. Spross, PhD, RN, FAAN

First Oncology Nursing Forum *Editor, Tireless Mentor, and Pioneer in Oncology Nursing*

Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) member, leader, and past editor of the *Oncology Nursing Forum* (*ONF*), Susan B. Baird, RN, MPH, MA, died on March 30, 2022, at the age of 79. Baird was a 40-year member of ONS, and from 1980–1990, she transitioned *ONF* to a journal, guiding it to the evidence-based resource enjoyed today. During the time most of us knew Susan, she referred to herself as Sue. For the last 20 years or so, she preferred Susan. I have used both in the following paragraphs.

Susan Baird is a key part of ONS's history. It is my honor to tell you more about who she was—a leader and a beloved mentor, colleague, and friend to many—not just from my experience, but from those of oncology nurses and others who knew her. She was smart, generous, and accessible. She was passionate about nursing and all the paths she followed across her career. She loved nursing and medical history. She loved writing, helping others write, and everything associated with publishing, whether in oncology nursing or camp nursing. She loved to travel and fell in love with China when she visited on a professional trip. Most of all, she nurtured community in every sphere of which she was a part. Some of these qualities shine through in the memories people shared.

To understand the origins of Sue's impact on ONS publications and the writing skills of generations of oncology nurses, several leaders, including Connie Henke Yarbro, RN, MS, FAAN, and Deborah K. Mayer, PhD, RN, AOCN®, FAAN, reminded me that, prior to the ONS presidential election in 1979, Connie and Sue, both candidates for the office, with the advice and support of the ONS Board, agreed that the candidate not elected as president would assume leadership of *ONF* (Yarbro, 1984). How fortunate that such wisdom informed the paths of both leaders.



The words I most commonly received from those responding to my call for reflections are mentor, pioneer, leader in oncology nursing, generous, encouraging, and empowering. Many oncology nurses who became clinical experts, leaders, educators, researchers, and administrators in the early days of ONS and went on to write for our profession can trace the lineage of their professional development as writers and leaders to Sue. ONS Chief Executive Officer Brenda Nevidjon, MSN, RN, FAAN, said Sue's legacy as "a leader who cared about educating the generations of oncology nurses who crossed her path is imprinted forever." Dolores Esparza, RN, MS, remembered being "in awe . . . of her making the time to stop by to give a rookie some love" when Sue gave her feedback on a patient pamphlet. Even an oncology nurse who has been in the specialty for 40 years but never met Sue in person said, "Her influence in oncology nursing was essential to my career," citing her leadership and publications. While at Fox Chase Cancer Center as the director of nursing and patient services, Sue was recognized with ONS's Distinguished Service Award and the Cancer Nursing Administration Award in 1994. The ONS President at the time, Sandra Lee Schafer, RN, MSN, AOCN®, described Susan as "a visionary and a tireless mentor."

According to Deborah McGuire, PhD, RN, FAAN, "Sue believed in investing in young oncology nurses by shepherding them through the creativity and practicalities of the professional writing and publishing

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process. She wanted to teach them how to contribute to the specialty through scholarship, knowledge, and expertise; she made it a growth-producing, stimulating, and pleasurable experience. I loved her for it, as I had never met anyone previously who did that for us young oncology nurses." In my own experience, when I went to her with a puzzling clinical question, whether at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center or the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center, Sue would listen carefully, indicate if she had heard of the topic, and counsel, "If you find nothing, you will have to write the article yourself." Three of my publications were a result of not finding anything in the literature to help me with clinical challenges!

As *ONF* editor, Sue was an innovator and leader, facilitating the publication of ONS Position Papers and ensuring *ONF*'s growth, leading to its indexing in CINAHL® and MEDLINE®. Susan showed us how to grow in new directions by growing herself and demonstrating the personal and professional benefits of extending our networks of connection. As the ONS publication enterprise grew, she participated in national and international groups of medical/healthcare editors.

Sue "opened the door" said one colleague and another said, "Sue demystified the writing process when I talked to her about my dissertation." Pat Nishimoto, DNS, FAAN, from Hawaii, wrote: *"Ku'ia Kahele aka na'au ha'aha'a.* [A humble person walks carefully so as not to hurt others.]" Marie Bakitas, DNSc, CRNP, AOCN®, FAAN, noted that as a young oncology clinical nurse specialist, when she was tasked with reinvigorating an R25 grant, she was referred to Susan who had worked with the same folks on prior grants. Marie not only got sage advice, but Sue also expressed confidence in Marie's ability to do the work. Sue was generous with her time, presence, talent, and opportunities. Sue was, for so many of us, that safe person with the faithful hand, helping us to keep what was worth keeping and blowing the chaff of our writing away with kindness, enabling us to persist (Craik, 2004).

She worked hard and loved what she did. Those of us who happened to travel with her when she was *ONF* editor knew overnight packages would arrive—and daily if publication deadlines were approaching. She made working hard seem fun and seamless with living a good life, largely because she loved her work. In the early, pre-Internet days of *ONF* when we both worked at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, she would invite me down for dinner (the fun) and afterward, we'd assemble and paste up the journal pages to be delivered the next day to Dartmouth Printing, where the journal was first published.

When Sue left oncology, she brought all of the qualities we loved about her to the Alliance for Camp Health (formerly the Association of Camp Nursing)—mentoring nurses in that specialty, editing and growing their publications, and influencing other generations of nursing in another field.

After she retired to Cape Cod, Massachusetts, Sue brought the same qualities and energy to that community—spending more time with her family, volunteering to administer flu shots, helping people in her condo building, and visiting the ocean, a place that brought her such joy and peace throughout her life. Eventually, she moved to Keystone in Buzzard's Bay (her home in an independent and assisted living setting). Once again, she brought along her community-building skills, starting a book group, volunteering, and organizing activities to the point where she was dubbed the "mayor."

A final quality, obvious from this remembrance, is that Susan built community wherever she went. For *ONF*, she built community with her editorial teams—the volunteer board and publishers. She built community with her colleagues at the Alliance for Camp Health and, finally, with her community on Cape Cod. Susan lived a tremendous life, providing a legacy that will continue to benefit oncology nursing.

Learn more about Sue's life, family, and careers at https://bit.ly/3xlDoBq.

Reverend Judith A. Spross, PhD, RN, FAAN, is professor emerita in the College of Science, Technology, and Health at the University of Southern Maine in Portland and a former ONS member who retired in 2015. She is an ordained interfaith minister and uses her skills in family caregiving to help loved ones navigate the demands of aging and chronic illnesses and interactions with the healthcare system that these changes require. She teaches the evidence-based Family-to-Family program for the National Alliance for Mental Illness in Maine (NAMI-Maine) and is involved NAMI-Maine's Faith-Net program, aimed at helping faith communities become more welcoming to people who live with mental conditions. Spross can be reached at judith.spross@maine.edu, with copy to ONFEditor@ons.org.

The author gratefully acknowledges all former and current ONS members and Sue's other colleagues who shared a reflection. Although only a few quotes could be shared, the sentiments are woven throughout.

REFERENCES

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