



# *JoAnn Leavell: My Mentor and Me*

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JoAnn Leavell has been an important part of my life for 39 years! Chuck and I were called to NOBTS in August 1995, only seven months after Dr. Landrum P. Leavell II became its 7th president. I immediately bonded with Mrs. Leavell because we were both from New Orleans and loved our city. We both lived on campus, went to First Baptist New Orleans, and loved to talk!

As a young bride, married only one year, I quickly connected with Mrs. Leavell who became a beloved mentor and friend. I was in her first student wives class in 1979 and have been closely involved in that wonderful ministry since then, now serving as the Director of the Ministry Wife Program.

*As a student wife, Mrs. Leavell taught me many important truths:*

1. You never have a second chance to make a first impression.
2. Learn to say “no” with your teeth showing (with a smile).
3. You don’t have to do everything in the church, but you do have to do something.
4. The bigger the earrings, the better. She said, “I am part gypsy.”
5. Learn to cry pretty. (I still struggle with that one, especially as I say goodbye to my friend.)

1983 was a very big year for the Kelleys. Chuck received his ThD in May, I received my PhD in August, and he joined the NOBTS faculty in August of that year. Chuck had worked with Dr. Leavell as grader for his evangelism class while working on his doctorate. Though he was called to evangelism and planned a ministry in itinerant evangelism, God had different plans for Chuck’s life. In the spring of 1983, Dr. Leavell approached Chuck about teaching evangelism. After redirection from the Lord, Chuck accepted the position and became the youngest faculty member at NOBTS and the only faculty member without significant church staff experience. Our ministry connection with the Leavells continued during Chuck’s 13 years on the faculty as Professor of Evangelism, Chairman of Pastoral Ministries, and Director of the Leavell Center for Evangelism.

*As a professor’s wife, Mrs. Leavell trained me for ministry and shared many life lessons along the way:*

1. If you love me, call me JoAnn. That was hard! She was Mrs. Leavell and held my greatest respect. I could never call him Landrum.
2. If you are sick on Sunday morning, move your car from the driveway so the students won’t think you are sleeping in.
3. If you don’t pick up the trash on campus, no one will.
4. A written thank you note is a lasting ministry.
5. Wear black; it looks better on your hips.

During those years, I had the joy of working with JoAnn on many campus events. We planned two major conferences for women. She called them "big women's conferences," but little women could come too. Our theme was "Lord, Change Me." Dr. Leavell teased us about being partners in crime. He called us Bim and Bo (Bimbo), threatening to plan a conference with Chuck with the theme "Lord, Change Her Back!"

One of her personal passions was the JoAnn Leavell Clothing Ministry. It was my joy to accompany her to Stein Mart to dress many grateful student wives. She did have opinions about their clothing choices. On occasion, she would fling open the door of the dressing room to examine an outfit and exclaim, "Honey, that color doesn't work for you." The student wives were always grateful for her generosity and personal attention. We continue that ministry in her memory.

JoAnn wrote two books, her "Alpha and Omega!" Joy in the Journey was a reflection on life after her "episode" (a stroke). I had the joy of writing Don't Miss the Blessing with her. Dr. Leavell said that I was "the only person on earth who could outline JoAnn!" I am so grateful that we revised that book for ministry wives in 2010. She spent a week at their apartment on campus, and we worked through the manuscript while drinking coffee and reminiscing. I read aloud each word of the book for her to approve or reject as she often digressed to tell the rest of the story. That was a special time of bonding.

JoAnn involved me in Women's Auxiliary at NOBTS, the organization which provides scholarships for student wives seeking undergraduate or graduate degrees. I now serve in her previous position as First Vice President, coordinating programs for the meetings. She also involved me in the SBC Ministers' Wives Luncheon. She served as president in 1978 and received the Mrs. J.M. Dawson award as an outstanding ministry wife in 1990. She nominated me to serve as Vice President in 1990 and as President in 2010. My greatest honor was her nomination of me for the Mrs. J.M. Dawson Award in 2005 just before Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. I was thrilled to host the Ministers Wives Executive Committee for lunch in the NOBTS President's Home in June 2012. As a member of the MWL Executive Committee, JoAnn was there. It was her last visit to our home – the wonderful home in which both of us have spent many years of life and ministry.

*As the president's wife, Mrs. Leavell encouraged me and offered wise counsel:*

1. Never put your photo on the cover of the Seminary cookbook.
2. Always keep the downstairs ready for company.
3. Students come and go, but you can still make a lasting difference in their lives.
4. Don't try to be me. Be better...be yourself!
5. People will give you lots of advice. Let it go in one ear and out the other. Listen to God!

What a privilege to continue the Ministry Wife Program, Women's Auxiliary, and Clothing Ministry loved so dearly by JoAnn Leavell. She was a bigger-than-life personality who had a profound impact on my life. I will miss her every day and will always thank God for my mentor!