

The Dispatch

The October 2022: The Special Saints of Our Lives

The idea behind this month's Dispatch is the Christian Holiday of [All Saints' Day](#), celebrated on November 1. The focus of that day is to celebrate men and women of exemplary life and faith through history. Though inspired by this idea, our interest in this Dispatch is slightly different. We would like to recognize saints as "special people" who have done something significant to influence our lives. Perhaps you also have someone who, because of a lesson taught, an ideal espoused, a commitment maintained, or a relationship developed, has played an important or even outsized role in your life. Some people have a tradition of writing a letter on All Saints' Day to let living saints know how valued they are. In this newsletter, Lance, Davon, and Ethan each tell stories of such people in their lives. As you read each essay, ask yourself, "*Whose life can I truly, and maybe uniquely, celebrate at this time this year?*" We invite you to let us know who that is for you...perhaps we can write about them next year!

[Bill Long](#)

Two Family Business Saints

[Lance Woodbury](#)

As I thought about saints, my mind drifted toward famous saints in history, such as [Saint Augustine of Hippo](#), or [Saint Francis of Assisi](#). I also have a more current connection to a few saints, in the names of the schools our children have attended: Saint Dominic in Garden City, Kan., or Saint Therese and Saint Pius X in Kansas City. What stands out to me about saints is that they are recognized for contributing to the way we understand our world and ourselves. We are better off because of them; their gifts have blessed us in how we think about our faith or our relationships to one another. We are educated and enlightened by who they were and how they lived their lives.

Thinking of family business, I immediately considered two people, no longer with us, who contributed significantly to those around them. They each left me with an expanded view of myself and my connection to others, and I know they did that for many others. As you read, click on the links on their names to see their impact.

One of those saints is [Celine Larson](#), part of the [Bestifor](#) companies in Belleville, Kan. Celine always focused on other people, allaying their fears or concerns, helping them to see love and opportunity, and emphasizing the positive all around them. Her focus on EMS/First Responders was a shining example of how she used her illness to bring good to the world. She was that rare person who, even as she was dying, was continually ministering to those around her.

Another saint is [Don Funk](#), founder of [Channel](#) seed company (and more recently, he reacquired [Midwest Seed Genetics](#) and [NC+](#)). Through his seed businesses, Don exposed thousands of people to other cultures through trips, and he shared his homes, mentoring countless business owners. His goals of connecting people, succeeding in business, and having fun (his travel groups are called "Funseekers"), made lasting impressions on many in the agriculture industry and influenced how business is done today.

My Joy

[Davon Cook](#)

Joy worked at the cotton gin my parents bought in 1975 when I was 3 years old. She came as part of the deal. Joy owned her name well. She had a tall beehive wig, laughed all the time, and never took anything too seriously – which means, she was the polar opposite of how I perceived my parents at the time! Watching my perfectionist father trying to manage free-loving Joy (who all the customers loved, by the way) was a sight to see.

From age 3-10, I spent a lot of time in that gin office, most of it sitting right by Joy behind the scale desk doing whatever odd jobs she found for me. I vividly remember twisting wire ties onto thousands of small cotton trailer number cards. She was my second mother. And one day I christened her “My Joy.” I was even a little jealous of her own granddaughters who turned up in the summer to take over her life.

Fast forward 20+ years when I moved back to work there as an adult. Joy was slowing in quickness and memory, and working together added a new layer to our relationship. I think it’s a great testament to her, and to our bond, that we managed so well. She was still My Joy.

Joy made my parents’ workplace a fun place to be, not something I resented. She taught me to not take life too seriously and to laugh a lot. She showed me it’s okay to stand up to others when needed, in a respectful way (for example, to my father). She showed strength in being a self-reliant divorcee who could take care of herself. I’m grateful for Joy, this special saint in my life.

My Influential Saint

[Ethan Smith](#)

When I first arrived at college I remember introducing myself to a girl from the “big city” of Omaha, and I explained that I was from the “little town” of [Eustis](#). To my surprise she said, “Oh I’ve been there! We went to this crazy old lady’s house to look at Santas and ride horses.” I stopped in astonishment and responded, “That’s my Grandma!”

The tag line “That’s my Grandma” was developed long before I went off to college, but each time it was said it had a new eyebrow-raising meaning. My Grandma, or Grams as I like to call her, has always been a unique individual who has a love for horses, a hard-working attitude, and an insane Santa Claus collection.

She taught me the importance of caring for cattle, of respecting a horse, and to be sure to wash up in time for church. Her support for the community was shown through volunteer work and her unquestioning devotion to those in need. She taught me reliability and would drop whatever she was doing for the chance to work cattle, even into her 80’s.

Without question, my Grandma, has had a wonderful influence in my life. From sneaking Coca-Cola into my bottle as a baby, pulling me out of school to go work cattle, and getting thrown off her horse on the way to her 80th birthday party, her stubbornness and resiliency are unmatched. Next time you have the urge to hear some Nebraska Sandhills stories from a crazy, old Santa Lady named Nancy, well “That’s my Grandma.”