



Christmas Festivities! Children attending Christmas in Olde Bronte on Saturday, December 9, were treated to a story time by Mrs. Claus at First National Bank (above photo). The Grinch also made an appearance during the festivities in downtown Bronte.



The Funeral

By James M. Decker

*But Jimmy looked at Mama,
Mama just looked down,
She said, "Why's it take a
funeral, boy, to bring you back
to town?"* --Turnpike
Troubadours, "The Funeral"

I appreciate a good funeral. If you have ever attended a funeral service that fittingly memorializes a life well lived, then you know exactly what I mean. I attended one of those last week. The gentleman was almost 90 and was a well-regarded lifelong educator who retired back to his family farm south of Stamford. As I sat in the pews of a small Methodist country church, listening to reminiscences both poignant and funny, I reflected on some of the other funerals I attended in 2023.

I attend a fair number of funerals, whether for clients, friends/loved ones, or for people who are important to me or important to someone else that I care about. It strikes me that I have never attended two funerals that were alike. That is only proper, given that no two humans are alike. I have attended very sad funerals, usually for the unexpected passing of a young person in the prime of life. I have attended borderline hilarious funerals that celebrated a well-lived life with tales of hijinks and humor over many years. I have attended formal services full of liturgy, solemnity, and suits. I have attended services in which only a handful of attendees wore a tie and the soundtrack included classic rock and honky tonk music. They all

fit the individual. In my estimation, the only incorrect approach to a funeral is to ignore the unique personality and humanity of the deceased.

Funerals often bring mixed emotions for family and loved ones. A person can live the longest and fullest life imaginable, filled with happiness and warm memories, but it is still difficult to grapple with saying a permanent goodbye. Strained relationships can be tested or frayed. I opened this week with a lyric from that sort of tale. The protagonist Jimmy and his dubious partner Lorrie return to pay their respects to Jimmy's father, but we're told "their folks were decent people, but they didn't like their kind." If you listen to the lyrics of that song, you can visualize the difficult small-town reunion. Many of us have been witness to a similar scene, either as one of the involved parties or as a bystander.

When I was a young child, I naturally found funerals to be drudgery. As I got older, I began to see them as more interesting. It was a time to learn about a person's life, perhaps meet distant relatives that I had only rarely met, and hear generational stories from adults who naturally fall back on such conversation to pass the time. I learned to appreciate obituaries as well. I inherited this trait from my mother, who faithfully checked each day's obituaries and death notices in the Abilene Reporter-News. One of her stated reasons was "to see if I died." That was funny until she opened the paper one morning and found the obituary of a woman who shared her first name and maiden name. My ornery grandfather (the "Bread Man" of recent West of 98 lore) noticed it too and he promptly raced to call our house and fire off some (poorly received) jokes. I now catch up on area

obituaries at least weekly and I read as many as I can. It is important to note the passing of someone I know, or their kin, but it is also worthy to spend a few minutes reading the final story of a person and what their family found most meaningful to share.

There's an adage that you never see a U-Haul trailer on the back of a hearse. It is a reminder that worldly possessions are of limited importance. I have attended funerals and read obituaries for people who were wealthy or influential by any worldly measure, but their final story usually focuses on their

relationships. I have yet to hear a financial statement recited at a funeral, but I have heard loved ones eagerly share memories of a loving and dedicated spouse or parent, a doting and energetic grandparent, or an irreplaceable friend. Even hard-bitten characters are revealed in the end to be kind and loving.

I cannot attend every funeral that I wish to attend and often regret the ones I have to miss. I have attended many funerals that were deeply fulfilling and heart-warming. You know what I have never experienced? I have never once been to a funeral that I regretted attending.

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