



John A. Gauss



Dorothea P. Gauss

In most loving memory of John A. Gauss

November 19, 1922 – August 23, 2021

In August 2021, time and grace intervened in our lives and took from us a person of enormous character, influence and, most of all, love.

John Archie Gauss, longtime Salida resident, patriarch of a bloodline and key figure in an extended “family” of friends and colleagues, passed from this world the morning of Aug. 23. His departure was dignified, as was he, and came as a humble, gracious and gentle end to a life so very well lived.

Throughout his life John was all of those traits as well, in balance. He was humble but secure, gracious but determined, gentle and rock-solid. He was a man from another generation whose life will, without doubt, continue to influence generations to come.

Last year, 2020, John had reached the extraordinary age of 98 and was just three months from his 99th birthday when that final intervention came – most certainly one of time and, for those of us who knew, respected and loved him, also grace because he would have it no other way.

I can say that without a doubt John Gauss was among the most grace-filled men I've ever known and at the very top of the “gentleman” list, a portrait in comportment even when circumstances were less than ideal.

His family – sons Steven and Mark (Molly), grandchildren Noah (Serina) and Peter (Micaela) and great-grandchildren Lily, Milo, Hannah, Atreya, Zoe and Johnny – grieve in his absence but rejoice that he has joined his beloved Dorothea (“The prettiest girl I ever saw...” he often said) in eternity. They, and I, also rejoice in the volume of memories and abundance of wisdom he gave us all through the years.

So much can be and in fact has been said about this remarkable man, but with some individuals perhaps a few words carry more emotion. I try to pare my thoughts to fit the character I met more than five decades ago, and I can share with you this:

Anyone who knew John longer than five minutes knew him to be a man of quiet faith in God and of enormous honesty and integrity – and he demanded no less from those around him. His work ethic was one of “do it and do it right,” liberally sprinkled with “do it again if you must.”

Oh, and about that word “liberally.” For John Gauss, it had only one definition, and that was “abundantly.” Politically he was unabashedly conservative, and though he seldom if ever introduced himself leading with his political affiliation, he never shied from sharing his viewpoint if asked.

Anyone who knew him for longer than five minutes also knew he was fiercely devoted to his country and its flag, and he did not suffer fools gladly for any disrespect shown toward patriots who had fought and sacrificed for the United States of America.

A veteran of World War II who had earned the rank of Captain in the Army Air Corps, John Gauss was the right stuff. The real stuff. The stuff of legends, truth be known. The Salida Mountain Mail chronicled his service in stories published over the past few years, accessible online by searching his name. He lived through missions that could have ended a lesser man, but he never boasted about that.

It was only in his later years that I heard John really share his military memories, and like so many of his generation and particularly those who served during WWII, he saw his service as duty. If something is worth having, it's worth fighting for. And so he fought, because he believed in America.

As he gained experience in the world of finance and real estate, he was an intuitive and successful businessman, understanding the art of the deal before the deal was ever struck. In both areas he had the sharpest mind I'd ever encountered – we spoke about business and the state of the world many times in the last few years, with our most recent conversation taking place in early July. He was as up-to-date on world events as I was, and he said quietly, “I weep for my country.”

An avid outdoorsman, John was as at-home in a cabin next to a timberline lake as he was at a conference table in a board of directors meeting. One of my very favorite stories was told to me by Dorothea years ago – she and John had gone to a mountain cabin in the central Rockies and, I think the first full day there, bagged a deer. Minutes afterward they realized they didn't have a knife. The only sharp instrument at hand was a tin can lying at a long-deserted campsite. Its lid served to field dress the animal, and with that lid they split the meat into two packs and carried it out.

He was an incredible father, instilling his values and integrity into his sons and passing on his wisdom to his grandchildren. His great-grands were, from my vantage point as their grandmother, his to dote on, and he did, with great enthusiasm and love spilling over.

The grandsons both were given sage advice just weeks before “Gramps” passing: There's no such thing as a free lunch, and question the messenger if he promises you such a lunch. “They're lying to you,” he told us all about those messengers.

It is my absolute joy to have a trove of memories of this incredible man, examples of his devotion to Dorothea and his boys, his compassion for those who suffer through no fault of their own, his lack of patience for those who refuse to take the time to do a job right, his gratitude to those who helped him along his way, his generosity with his loved ones – and his wit.

John Gauss had a finely-honed sense of humor that bordered on kabuki – he was just downright funny.

If you were, as I and so many others were, blessed to have had your life's path intersect with that of John Archie Gauss, you have an unfillable place in your heart now. But John above all others would tell you, “Get going, kid. Don't let anything slow you down. Live life to its fullest.” He would also say, “You're never too old to try something new.”

And, I suspect, he might have thought to himself, “Think of me when you do.” We do think of you. And we thank you, John, for it all. We love you.

