

John's prayer book

By [Maria L. Evans](#)

May 4, 2011

If there is one thing we natives of rural northeast Missouri know how to do, we know how to "do funeral." One of the greatest comforts in this life--but only if we choose to ride with it--is the small town funeral. I remember during the 14 years I lived in Columbia, going to funerals and visitations was a somber, sterile activity. My friends who live or grew up in the "very urban" areas of cities tell me funerals in "city neighborhoods" are more like the small town ones. It seems to be suburbia that hasn't quite found its way to it.

I particularly remember when the wife of the student dean of our medical school died of breast cancer. The visitation line was like going to the DMV to buy a license tag. Everyone filed in, shook his hand, peeked at the casket, and promptly left. No one stood around in the room and chatted. After going through the line, I remained in the room a bit and tried to engage people in the line behind me. They kept looking forward and having this "go away" look. I walked out to my truck, shaking my head, and thinking, "Y'all don't get it."

In small towns, visitations and funerals are not just for family; they're for community. Granted, one has to walk through a certain number of inane comments and "the mantra of the day." I have come to appreciate the inane comments are simply because people just don't always know what to say--things like "He looks good." (Well, yeah, for a dead guy, I suppose.) Or right after a "he looks good," comment, another person says, "He looks bad." (Well, he *was* sick--and he *is* dead--that doesn't lend one to a lot of choices on how he or she looks.)

The "mantra of the day," for my grandfather's funeral was, "Yes, it was

very sudden." (He had died of a heart attack.) For my grandmother, it was, "She had a hard life at the end." Saturday, for John, it was, "He had been sick a long time--but he was ready to go."

But what I

appreciate the most at small town visitations are the stories. Many of the stories have loud, raucous laughter with them. Sometimes there are tears immediately following the laughter. When one is the "marathoner" at a visitation--one of the family members that stands up by the casket and simultaneously greets and consoles people--sometimes for hours on end--hearing others in the room talking and laughing with one another is the most healing part of it.

Since John had no living relatives,

I was one of the "marathoners" as one of his more long-standing friends. The place was packed--quite a testimony for a man with no living relatives. Saturday funerals are often "visitation before the funeral" days--so they can become all-day affairs--pre-funeral lunches, visitation, funeral, and post-funeral meal. It was a long day. John was laid out in very "John-like fashion"--reading glasses in his pocket, turquoise bolo tie, a cross around his neck--and his dog-eared, thumb-worn Book of Common Prayer in his hands... *Continue reading at [Kirkepiscatoid](#).*