

Lofty people: A crowded balcony of saints

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [November 15, 2003](#) issue

The articles in this issue set me pondering the great and significant people in my life. And I recalled a remarkable lecture I heard years ago by the late Carlyle Marney. Marney was a Southern Baptist preacher from Charlotte who finished his career by directing a retreat center for broken and hurting preachers. He was a big, robust man with a great sense of humor and a contagious laugh.

In his lecture Marney used a house as a metaphor for a person. There are different rooms in the house that is you, he said. There is a parlor where you welcome guests, a kitchen and dining room for eating, a bedroom where you sleep, a basement where you store your trash. The house also has a balcony, he said, and on that balcony are the people who have exerted good and positive and gracious influences in your life. They are your balcony people. “Walk outside and look up and see who’s up there on your balcony looking down at you,” he suggested. “Wave to them. They are your saints.”

On All Saints Day I try to remember to do that—to wave to the saints on my balcony. Some of them are the great people who are on a lot of balconies. Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln have been up there for me for years. Recently John Adams and Benjamin Franklin have joined them. John Witherspoon, Presbyterian minister and signer of the Declaration of Independence, is there too. John Kennedy is there beside Martin Luther King Jr. Bonhoeffer is there talking with Reinhold Niebuhr. Joe Sittler is smoking his pipe. On down the balcony are Calvin and Luther and J. S. Bach, and Julian of Norwich, and Paul and Jesus.

Some of the people up there are peculiar to my balcony: the ministers who showed me what a minister is; the Sunday school teachers who put up with me and somehow imparted something of God’s grace; the teachers who cared enough to push me; the coaches who insisted I could find in myself an endurance I didn’t know was there; Aunt Peg, who loved me unconditionally; cousin Frank, who escaped from a POW camp in Italy, and who insisted that I not ever settle for anything mediocre; and, of course, Mother and Dad.

Great men and women. I have a crowded balcony, and it’s good to walk out onto the lawn, look up and wave to them.