

Remembrances

By Stan Bumgardner

At the time I'm writing this, West Virginia's COVID-19 death toll is still rising. Please remember the families and friends of these people in your thoughts and prayers. I've been fortunate so far not to experience any personal losses to the disease, but I want to note a few recent passings that have hit me in various ways.

He wasn't a West Virginian, but he touched a lot of our hearts and funny bones. COVID-19 took singer-songwriter John Prine from us. For those of you who aren't familiar with his songs, please take a moment to look up some of his music. His lyrics have been the narration for much of my life, from the saddest to the happiest times. It always seemed to me he had a West Virginia sensibility about life.

The others mentioned here didn't die from COVID-19, but their deaths brought many of us great sadness, beginning with Raleigh County native Bill Withers, who passed from heart disease at age 81. Songs such as "Lean on Me" and "Ain't No Sunshine" were part of the soundtrack of my childhood. Those songs kept getting better as I got older because they were about so many different aspects of life and all very genuine. If you have 80 minutes free this evening (maybe during dinner), pull up his first two albums: *Just as I Am* and *Still Bill*. In addition to great music, you'll hear some great life lessons. And in songs like "Grandma's Hands," you'll be transported to Slab Fork, West Virginia, and see how one person can change a life. Bill Withers' music still changes mine.

Here in West Virginia—in our agency's family—we lost a beloved soul. For years, Beulah Walkup was a cook at Camp Washington-Carver, historically the first statewide Black 4-H camp in the nation and now home to the Appalachian String Band Music Festival. Beulah passed away February 5 at age 93. She was the sweetest person, and I'll always remember her wonderful



Tina Sonis Holmes. Photo by Mark Wolfe.

cooking. Beulah was the type of cook who would very humbly make you the best pot of soup you've ever tasted, and then, rather than eat with the rest of us, she'd stand off to the side with a sly grin on her face as she watched us savor every bite.

Finally, a death that hit me and the entire GOLDENSEAL family very hard was the loss of Tina Sonis Holmes. As our longtime proofreader, she caught so many typos, grammatical errors, and general screw-ups by the editor (me) that I commonly yelled out loud, "Thank God for Tina!" But Tina was much more than a proofreader. From the first time I met her, she was like a friend I'd known forever. In a way, I had. When I was a child, we could call up a number just to hear the time (yes, all generations younger than me, this was a real thing). I'm still not sure why we didn't just look at the clock, but I know that for me, it was because I loved the time-teller's resonant baritone voice. Decades later, I found out that lovely voice was Tina's. Our proofreading review sessions often devolved into discussions about the news, Charleston history, or the latest jokes we'd heard. The news of her passing devastated us. What I wouldn't give for one more proofreading session with her. On behalf of all GOLDENSEAL readers and our staff, thank God for Tina!