

## *Good Night, Johnny*

The news came like a bolt of lightning out of the blue. My wife, Lola, had the television set on while I was working at the computer. "Oh, no," she announced. "Johnny Carson is dead." The announcement was almost akin to that of the death of a family friend, for, indeed, Carson was invited into millions of homes night after night as the television host of the *Tonight Show* for 30 years.

His nephew, Jeff Sotzing, told the Associated Press that Carson passed away peacefully early Sunday morning. "He was surrounded by his family, whose loss will be immeasurable. There will be no memorial service." As of late Sunday, Sotzing would not give further details, including the time of death or the location. Carson was 79. The cause of death apparently was the respiratory disease emphysema. He was first diagnosed with it three years ago.

Carson, a boyish-looking native of Nebraska with a disarming grin, survived every attempt to topple him from his late-night talk show throne. He was a star who managed never to distance himself from his audience. His blend of humor, music and conversation was the last thing millions of Americans heard before going to sleep.

"I am one of the lucky people in the world. I have found something I liked to do, and I have enjoyed every single minute of it," Carson said as he closed the show for the last time on Friday, May 22, 1992.

What made Carson so hugely successful? There were several reasons, including:

- An understanding of his talents and the continual refining of them.
- Putting others first. Although Carson was always extraordinarily comedic, he played straight man to his guests, and never sought to embarrass them.
- A constant study of human nature. Among Carson's gifts was the ability to sense the emotional state of the people he encountered -- happy, sad, heavy-hearted, grieving, anxious -- and to react in a fashion that complemented or uplifted the person.

Come to think of it, those are qualities we all should strive to achieve.

Good night, Johnny. We'll all miss you.

-- Beecher Hunter