



THE JOY & WONDER OF JEAN McFADDIN



In the 1970's, a young high school trumpet player from West Virginia found himself marching wide-eyed down Broadway as part of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, surrounded by giant balloons, floats, confetti and clowns...not to mention New York City...and filled with joy and wonder that I came to understand better through a decades-long and treasured friendship with Jean McFaddin in the years ahead. I have often quoted Jean, when she noted in an IFEA presentation that, "As festival and event organizers, we are medics of the heart. Certainly, we are concerned and responsible for the fiscal and marketing needs of our events, facing demanding challenges in today's market. But we don't do events for dollars; we do them for the looks of joy and wonder on the faces of all those parents and kids who attend. That's the big payoff that we all have in common, despite the size or nature of our different events. We are the industry that fuels the hearts of our communities." As she fueled so many of our hearts along the way. Friends, family, professional peers, students, children, and many, many more; across multiple areas of influence (festivals & events, theatre, creative, retail, media, education, government, international relations and many more). In my career, I have known very few 'icons' in our industry, but Jean was truly deserving of that moniker! And interestingly, like the rare group that she shares that space with, it has always been, in part, because of her inclusiveness of everyone vs. any remote thought of excluding anyone.

If anyone in our industry could have gotten away with being aloof, Jean would certainly have earned that right, but that was never who she was. Jean always embraced, included and welcomed everyone into her world, as excited for their success as she was for her own. She would far more easily fill the role of everyone's favorite relative than anything even remotely resembling exclusivity. She brought humor, smiles and love into the mix, while never leaving any doubt of the level of professionalism, creativity and expectations of quality that were her hallmarks. Jean didn't have a 'Posse' (as would be befitting of her Texas roots). She had a 'Family' – accepting and welcoming of everyone, with hopes – as a good family should have – that each new generation will do more, be more and dream more, than the last. The gift and legacy of Jean's life can be found in all of those 'family members' around the globe, doing the most remarkable things!

But Jean and her parade, were only starting their influence on my life. Early in my career with the international, musical and educational organization Up with People, Jean placed a trust in me and my peers to help in the production of the 60th Annual Macy's Parade opening in 1986 (a huge honor, as you might imagine, even for a seasoned professional) that helped to lay the foundations of my career moving forward. We were the only group ever, I think, to perform for the opening at Herald Square and then make our way back to the parade start to accompany a float down the route.

In the years ahead, Jean continued to serve as a personal mentor and inspiration, always willing to lend advice, support and direction when needed, as I was involved in the production of other events and parades of my own. On the 10th Anniversary of the Boise (Idaho) River Festival, that I produced, Jean generously allowed us to include the famous Macy's star balloons in our 'River Giants Parade' (inspired by Macy's) to pay tribute to our own success.

As my career path took me into my current position as President and CEO of the IFEA, Jean continued to support our common efforts to educate, motivate, and inspire all those in our global industry, including accompanying our first-ever international team of experts to China in 2005. Her outreach, welcoming personality and respect on a global scale was unparalleled, easily going beyond any language, cultural, business or other perceptual boundaries that can often stop many others.

Jean always had a special soft spot in her heart for students and young professionals who were just starting their careers, helping to host them at our IFEA Conventions, video conferencing with them in their college classrooms, and encouraging them all to follow their hearts into a career and industry that she knew, firsthand, has the

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ability to touch countless lives through the creation of memories and moments and milestones that will be cherished by friends and families forever. Several years ago, Jean helped us to craft the future as we created the 'Jean McFaddin Legacy Scholarship,' ensuring that students and young festival and event professionals are able to attend our IFEA conventions and to share and to learn from the gathered leadership of our global industry today. That scholarship will be available in perpetuity to ensure her vision and to spark future generations.

And looking to the next generation, I was fortunate to have Jean and Suzy welcome and embrace my personal family as part of their own, setting examples, both professionally and personally - for my son, who is now about to graduate college and looking to be a part of the magic that we all get to create; And for all of us, in the art of caring. The love of Jean's life has always been her partner, Suzy Falk, and to all those who know them both, there could not be a more perfect union. To be with them together was always magical and an example that all of us should hope to emulate in our own relationships.

Jean loved to travel, to spend time with good friends and family, to laugh, to motivate, to inspire, to share and to support

those around her. She was a 'bigger than life' personality that translated itself into everything and everyone that was fortunate enough to have been touched by her, both directly and indirectly. Jean lived her life as if she were a parade passing through all of our lives. The passion that she exuded as she cut the ribbon and declared "Let's have a Parade!" was the same passion that she brought to every aspect and relationship in her life. She loved the energy of having people around her that she cared for. And some of us were fortunate enough to have been asked to march in her parade.

In Christina Abt's remarkable video series, '64 & More,' she captured the Jean McFaddin that we all should build into everything we do. But the two most memorable things from that interview, that will stay with me, were when she was asked if she 'marched to her own drummer or followed the crowd' and Jean responded that (not surprisingly) she marched to her own drummer, just as most of her friends march to their own drummers, but while still caring about others. She noted that "I don't want to march to my own drummer just for me and my values. I want to do what makes the world a better place. I would like to think that I/we are part of a great rebellion, a great

body, who protects a variety of values and rights; not just mine; but who is against all those who would take away somebody else's rights. A part of a mass who wants a better world, equal and good for all." I, personally, am proud to be a part of Jean's great rebellion and to continue her vision.

And then, she described something that all of us in our business work for every day.

In 2001, her first year consulting with, but not directly responsible for the Macy's Parade. In the interview, with a definite gleam in her eye, and a smile in her heart, she shared the fondest of memories:

"I walked down to Columbus Circle, with Suzy, and we were standing there with my guys - the police; the head of the police, who I love - and here comes the parade. And if I ever knew I was successful in my life, it was in that moment. That was just a great moment. It was confetti in the sky; every level was filled with colors; the people were cheering; there was not a space on the ground or in the sky; it was just color. And all the kids were happy... and it was a great, great moment."

I believe that is what heaven must be like for Jean. A place where she can experience the joy and wonder of all that she created and shared with all of us.