



THERE, I SAID IT

BY CHAD HAYWORTH

Thanks, JoAnn, for everything

JoAnn Lamp didn't have a reason in the world to be kind to me when I first moved to Newton County in 2009.

After all, I was the second stepfather to her most prized possession, her three grandchildren. And in my day job, I was sure to cast a critical eye on another thing she loved with all her heart, the city of Granby.

For her to be wary of me would not have been unexpected. Others certainly were.

But that's not how JoAnn operated. And if she had reservations about me, or the role I was to play in her life or the life of her grandkids, she never let me see it.

JoAnn Lamp — the longtime Granby City Clerk and a current South Ward alderman; the doting grandmother to my wife's three children and the hub of an extended family of siblings, nieces, nephews, and cousins; my friend and confidant — died Monday morning from complications from COVID-19.

In my earliest days at the *Newton County News*, JoAnn was an invaluable resource. As City Clerk, she knew the ins and outs of the town and its history. And what she didn't know, she almost always knew who would.

"Hi, this is Chad at the *Newton County News*. JoAnn Lamp said I should call and ask you about..."

I can't prove that line got people to open up when I called with questions for a news story, but I believe it did.

But it wasn't just that. She took me into her family. My presence at her annual Halloween birthday party wasn't requested. It was required.

If others thought that it was odd to include her son's ex-wife and her new husband in family events, big and small, JoAnn did not care.

We love those three kids, she loved those three kids, and that was all that mattered. We were family to JoAnn. That philosophy extended to my parents, who moved to Newton County in 2010.

It's hard to explain JoAnn's place in my life, or mine in hers. She wasn't my mother. Or even my mother-in-law, exactly.

But it's impossible to deny that there was a maternal aspect to our relationship. Or that we had a bond that was unique, and hard to define.

It's OK if this is hard to comprehend. We've been confusing waitresses, nurses and others around the Four States for years.

JoAnn lost her husband Clint in July 2015 to a heart attack. That next spring, her son Mike had an eerily similar heart attack. It's not a family secret to tell you that his chances did not look good.

Jennifer and I got the news about Mike first. Jennifer's first thoughts were how to collect her kids from their after-school activities and break the news that their dad was in a fight for his life.

My first thought was finding JoAnn and breaking the news to her. (Sorry, kids.)

Telling her about Mike was one of the most painful things I've ever had to do.

As we were waiting for news on Mike in a small Freeman Hospital "family room," a chaplain stopped by to check on us.

With Jennifer on one side and me on the other, the chaplain asked if we were her children. Well, yes, but no, JoAnn said.

"Jennifer is Mike's ex-wife, and Chad is her husband," she said.

You could see the chaplain trying to do the math in her head. Nurses, doctors and hospital administrators gave us similar looks as we made the Freeman ICU our home in the next few weeks.

The tragedy of telling her the bad news about Mike was replaced when I came out of the ICU to tell her that he'd opened his eyes and spoken to Jennifer and I.

The vastness of my family's loss this week is hard to quantify. But we aren't the only one's richer for having known her, or poorer now because of her passing.

She touched the lives of so many, and worked so hard to make her hometown a better place. That's a fine legacy by any measure.

No, JoAnn didn't have any reason to be kind to me all those years ago.

But it never stopped her.

And for that, I will be eternally grateful.