

Week of December 13, 2010



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Goodbye to Avis Tucker

Former owner and publisher of The Daily Star-Journal in Warrensburg, Avis Tucker, died on December 17, 2010. This weekly column is dedicated to her wonderful life.

I was saddened to learn of Avis Tucker's death. I guess there is never a good time to go, but it seems especially sad when it's this close to Christmas.

Like many, I have wonderful memories of Avis Tucker. She was an icon; an institution; one in a million. She will be missed. Even her name was unique. I have never known another woman named Avis. And it fit her so well. I can't imagine her being a "Mary" or a "Linda." Avis would do nicely.

Although I first met Avis as a teenager working at her radio station KOKO, fortunately, I got to know her on a much more personal and professional manner as an adult. As a candidate for state representative, school board member, and director of the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce, I sought the counsel of Avis on many occasions.

You could always count on Avis giving honest but sometimes brutal feedback. She would ask tough questions and make you prove your points. She made me a better and tougher person, and I am extremely blessed for it. You knew if Avis thought it was a good idea, then you felt the general public would also probably approve.

I loved stepping into her office at *The Daily Star-Journal*. Although her personal appearance was tidy, neat, and professional, the appearance of her office was not. Her desk was piled with books, newspapers, articles and souvenirs. She would greet me and others with, "Have a seat, if you can find one." Her office was adorned with photos from her past. Dignitaries included Walter Cronkite, Tom Eagleton, Warren Hearnes and, of course, Jimmy Kirkpatrick. It was like stepping into a museum.

She was a cheerleader for her community. She wanted what was best for her hometown.

She made elected officials justify new programs and expenditures. Every tax issue had to make sense before she gave it her blessing in an editorial.

Avis did not take the easy way out. When her husband Bill died unexpectedly in 1966, Avis could have sold the paper and had a comfortable and much easier life, but she poured herself into that publication. In that endeavor she made history. She was a pioneer for women. She the first woman to fulfill many roles in the press industry. She was even the first woman to join the Warrensburg Rotary Club.

Her reputation spread far and wide. Many times, when I would meet new people in the State Capitol and tell them that I was from Warrensburg, invariably the question would pop up, "You must know my friend, Avis Tucker."

Several years ago, her staff at the paper surprised Avis with a reception honoring her 90th birthday. She chastised them for hosting the celebration in her honor. But I think, deep down, she enjoyed the day. The long line snaked around outside as many of us greeted her that day. Many offered her well wishes and said their goodbyes since it would probably be their last opportunity to visit with Avis.

I guess each one of us wants to achieve a certain level of immortality. Avis Tucker certainly deserves that claim. She left *The Daily Star-Journal*, her family and her community a much better place than she found it. Avis' family decision to hold a private funeral is one we all respect. I know the hundreds of people whose lives she touched along the way will continue to regale others with their "Avis stories." The legacy she leaves behind runs deep and her bold way of blazing her own path will never be forgotten. Memorializing will be done privately, in small groups around the state, groups like the Missouri Press Association, former newspaper and radio station employees, Missouri Public Service Company and a host of other state boards and commissions.

We will never see the likes of Avis Tucker again. Rest in peace, my friend.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

Contact Information

Capitol Office
State Capitol Building
Room 227
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Website:
<http://www.senate.mo.gov/pearce>

Phone Number:
866.277.0882 (toll-free)
573.751.2272

Fax:
573.526.7381