

## THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

### Small Packages

She was smaller, or tinier, than I had imagined she would be. But actors and actresses almost always are. On celluloid they are always “larger than life.” In person initially they appear to be pretty much like everyone else and thus inevitably one hides the disappointment that someone they had looked up to was indeed a mere, normal mortal.

Even though just four foot and eleven inches, Anna Pearce was clearly different. Her eyes danced. Her smile was genuine. Her questions incisive. Even if one had not read her painfully honest autobiography, *Call Me Anna*, one could tell that “Patty Duke” was a survivor, a person at last at peace with herself, comfortable in her personna, full of energy.

The cliché, dynamite comes in small packages, immediately came to mind. Several things surprised me, though. She had a wide-ranging intelligence that reflected being well read and she had a deep sense of compassion for her fellow man. One could tell that because of her own struggles she had an innate ability to empathize with those she met because she knew we all have our own demons and struggle to various degrees with the consequences of poor decisions, bad choices, or serious health challenges.

So, just what had brought Anna Pearce to the Spokane office of The Gallatin Group, a public affairs and strategic planning firm I had founded in 1989?

The immediate catalyst was her nephew, Mike Kennedy, a fellow traveler of mine in the world of Idaho Democratic politics. He had convinced his aunt to meet to discuss an assessment of her running for public office.

Mrs. Pearce was brutally candid about Hollywood having few roles for aging actresses. A Paul Newman or a Robert Redford can have a starring role no matter how many wrinkles they have, but how many starring roles are there for aging actresses? With the possible exception of Susan Sarandon, there were damn few, Mrs. Pearce opined.

Then in her 50's, she wanted to know whether political office would be a viable way for her to continue to serve her community or her adopted state. She wasn't seeking a new ego-gratifying role. To the contrary, she knew she had much to offer and there was a genuine desire to want to know if it would be viewed that way by Idahoans.

Some may scoff at the thought of Patty Duke running for any office in Idaho, whether local or statewide, as fantasy, especially as a Democrat. However, the least bit of research would quickly show she had been a successful president of the Screen Actor's Guild, the over-arching union that represents all the various guilds in negotiations with the studios.

The post requires intelligence, toughness, political and negotiating skills not to mention the support of a vast number of narcissistic actors and actresses. By all accounts Anna Pearce did an excellent job.

The post had also been the springboard into elective politics for another SAG president, a fellow by the name of Ronald Reagan.

To her credit, she wanted a candid assessment of perceived strengths and weaknesses. To that end she invited us into her home to meet husband Mike and other family members. She and her nephew also flew to Boise for a private dinner at the Arid Club with Governor Andrus. During several meetings we discussed her views on various Idaho issues as well as what she could bring to various political offices.

We also examined a variety of potential posts from Kootenai County commissioner to the office of governor. After several weeks, we met to discuss my conclusion that despite the considerable assets she could bring to any office, she should not run.

She could have easily handled any issue relating to her past struggles. She would have been taken seriously because of name recognition alone. Her command of the issues of the day would have been obvious. Her genuine compassion would have come across.

The downside she could not surmount though would have been her identification as a Democrat. In the few short years since Cecil Andrus had turned the governorship over to Phil Batt the Democratic party had moved away from the lunch-bucket carrying, fiscally conservative but

socially compassionate party of Andrus and had evolved into the wine and cheese liberal party painted by Republicans.

It would have been too easy to turn Anna Pearce into a caricature of Patty Duke. It would not have been fair, but politics, like life is especially unfair.

Given the opportunity she would have been a successful governor or county commissioner, but we'll never know. Anna passed away peacefully last week, at age 69, after receiving the Last Rites from a priest of her native Catholic faith.

She had been ill for a few days. Nonetheless she and her husband left their home the evening of March 22<sup>nd</sup> because she wanted to do her civic duty and participate in the Democratic caucus like thousands of other Idahoans. It was her last appearance.

I drew one other conclusion: Anna Pearce really was larger than life and much more than just Patty Duke.

Idaho lost one of its best.