

Mary Newton

Mary Newton worked hard, many years, 40 is what they say, at Lackey's Variety Store, center-city Stowe, Vermont. She wouldn't hear of taking time off to vacation with her husband Bernie until late October, when those coming to Stowe to see all things country cute had come and gone.

To my knowledge, she never missed work because of sickness. Mary viewed sickness as something that, like tourists, would go away eventually, if you stayed your course.

Mary's ability to speak the truth at all times was exceptional.

"Hey Mary, the new street lights in the village, I don't think we need em. Do you?"

"Well course, I don't know . . . really, I mean," she'd reply, not offending your opinion.

"But Mary, I've lived here 40 years and I have yet to get lost on Main Street. We don't need em."

Mary would insert, "Well, I guess I see your point there. Yah. Course it is hard ta get lost on Main Street."

"But then again Mary, I'm surprised how good the lights look. And these days folks like to feel safer, maybe the lights are a good thing."

Mary would ride the swell. "Well, yah, I mean, course that's true too."

I'd rarely pass up an opportunity to stop by the house to see Mary, Bernard, and their son Russ. A solid knock on the door would elicit a chime from Mary. "Come in." I'd step through the doorway and see her rocking in her rocking chair, head back, turned toward me a little, smiling "Just leave your shoes on Rusty, that's all right."

As I'd be getting settled on the living-room couch, Mary would do something I think is one of the most respectful things one can do for a guest: She'd reach for the remote and shut off the TV. For that move alone, Mary deserved the Medal of Freedom.

Me and the fellers would prattle on about this and that and Mary would hang in there for about 20 minutes, fitting in a few "how's ma and pa" type considerations, then she'd get up to do a spot of cleaning or laundry.

Mary Newton was always in motion. The moment Lackey's store was free of customers, she'd turn and come from behind the counter and commence to dust, or sweep, or straighten, or rearrange. Ole Frank and

Ann Lackey never lost a second of sleep worrying whether their payroll investment was being wasted on Mary Newton. She was a true *day's work for a day's pay* gal.

Mary was famous for walking. If someone was new to town and you needed to reference her, you'd need only say, "The woman you see walking," for them to know exactly who you meant.

Mary loved the cold. Bernie hates the cold. Winters when Mary was still alive, Bernie would fret, "Well I hate the cold. If Mother would allow (Bernie called Mary, "Mother"), we'd spend winters in Florida." Mary's gone three years now, and Bernie ain't been to Florida yet.

If there was a severe cold snap, a blizzard, sleet storm, hail shower, or downpour, and you came upon Mary walking home, you'd be wasting your time slowing down to offer her a ride. With a wave of her arm, and without slowing her pace a half beat, she'd trumpet, "No, I'm all right. But thank you."

Mary will be remembered for her years at Lackeys, and her honesty, her good humor, work ethic, her kids, grandchildren, and her month short of a 60-year marriage to Bernie. I'll remember her especially for how she greeted me with a sing-songy "Well hellllloo Russ," and for the times she put my presence above her family's interest in television.

And I'll remember Mary for a conversation I overheard one January day at the local coffee shop, years back, when Mary was alive.

"Dan, it's cold out there ain't it? What is it, 15, 20 below?"

"I don't know," Dan replied, "But I'll tell you what, it's cold. I saw Mary Newton take a ride."

Mary Newton was a real Vermonter, the likes of which haven't been made for a generation or so.