

I've had stars on my mind a lot recently. It could be because one of the last things I see when I leave Lafayette each evening is a few stars in the sky over the houses on Broad Branch Road. Or maybe the number of lighted stars I see as holiday decorations on so many houses. It may be the time I'm spending at the Kennedy Center this month and singing with some people who could be considered stars. Or maybe because during my trip to Texas over winter break, I'll get to see something that people in this light-polluted metropolis never get to see, the entire sky full of glorious stars. Or just possibly because I've been thinking a lot about the people that surround me each and every day at Lafayette and wonder at their star like qualities. I do have stars on the brain.

I was in my twenties before I really saw a sky full of stars. Oh, the brightest ones managed to shine each evening in Chicago just like they do in Washington, but what a revelation the sky was when unaffected by any other light sources. You almost marvel at how bright the sky is. One of the joys of heading to remote Hinsdale County in Colorado each summer is seeing the stars. Each August there is the spectacular Perseid meteor shower—a great reason to get out of the city and do some sky watching. Every few minutes another shooting star falls to the earth. There really is a Milky Way that you can really see with the unaided eye. It made me finally understand all the emphasis the ancient Greeks put on constellations when I got to see stars the way they did.

We are presumptuous enough to call certain people stars, though how they can compare to the glories of the heavens is beyond me. Many of the 'stars' I have been privileged to be around have been somewhat disappointing in person. They never really look like they do on TV without their makeup and costumes. They often seem pretty self-important as they order people around. But one who really is 'larger' than life is Dolly Parton. I got to perform with her one 4th of July and then was at the Kennedy Center the year she was named an honoree. As part of her tribute, they mentioned her Imagination Library. For over 15 years, she has been sending a book each month to every child born in her home county in east Tennessee. From birth until the child enters kindergarten, those books keep coming to let parents and children know how important reading and learning is. The program has now grown as other donors and communities have joined. Last year over two and a half million books were sent out to young children. For all the stories in the news last year about the Kardashians and other people I really don't want to hear about again, here is a true star in my book, making a difference in the world.

And at Lafayette each day we have our own galaxy of stars. Some of our stars you see almost every day. In the office, Mrs. Bright, Mr. Hover and Ms. Walker keep us on our toes. From the early morning 'what is for lunch?' and 'Janie is home sick today' calls to the pick-up changes at the end of the day, the phone rings constantly, yet they always try to get you the right information when you want it, which is most of the time NOW. Daily reports are done and attendance is recorded. Announcements are copied so you can be informed about what is happening at Lafayette. The activity in the front office never stops. (It did slow down a little the last two weeks with all our phone problems. The peace and quiet was heavenly.)

Other stars are often hidden. What would we do without Mrs. Murphy in the cafeteria? Each day a new lunch to prepare. Along with milk, salad, fruit, etc., a lot to get ready in a very short time. Each and every day our cafeteria 'stars' do it with patience and expertise and a true love of the children they serve. Our five custodians work mightily to keep this old building up and running. Imagine cleaning more than 30 bathrooms each night. Spreading salt and clearing ice and snow so we can start on time. You had a snow day last week. They were here working on the grounds. Imagine the amount of trash we generate each and everyday both in the cafeteria and in the classrooms. But there they are bagging it up and cleaning up after all of us.

And then the true stars at Lafayette. The ones that shine brightly no matter how obscured the sky is, our group of teachers and instructional assistants who touch almost 700 young lives each and everyday. If we had a Lafayette Walk of Fame, what an amazing sidewalk that would be. What a collection of stars we would see before us. Stars making up grade level constellations that lead to an eventual Milky Way of educational expertise. Stars just beginning to shine along with ones that are in their full glory. Stars that will be part of you and your child's memories for all time.

You will be on winter break for the next two weeks. We will be returning a day earlier for some workshops. During this time away from Lafayette, many of us will be reconnecting with the true stars in our lives. Parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, children and grandchildren. People whose light led us on our way and people who are following the light we shine. Whether up in the sky or down here on earth, there are millions and billions of stars. Can you really blame me for having stars in my eyes at this time of year?