

Marylin Nease

Leading the Way, April 2021

“You go ahead, and I’ll follow you,” I directed my older sister, Linda, as she steered her electric scooter from her kitchen to the ramp that takes a rider or a pedestrian from her home’s main level to the sunroom level.

“I don’t know about that,” Linda replied impishly.

“I’ve followed you all my life, Linda,” I responded cheerily as I walked down the ramp behind her, carrying her lunch plate with its pureed dollops of savory squash, sweet potato, guacamole, apricot mousse, and pumpkin pie. For a year, her diet had been liquids and pureed foods. She never complained, but I’d seen her slip leftovers to her dogs.

Instantly, our words pulled me back to what I’d written in 2013 for her 70th birthday.

Watching and Learning

My first memory of Linda involves the two of us—and one steer.

Probably, I was six, and she was 10.

I remember being with her in a stall in our barn, and the stall’s floor having a bed of straw. I watched her groom the steer with a curry comb, leaving a wavy pattern in the animal’s coat. When she finished, Linda used a halter to lead the steer outside, and we walked the animal from our house to the end of our road—where our road intersected with the next road—and back again, maybe half a mile.

Linda was grooming and exercising the steer in preparation for showing it at our Grady County fair.

It was early morning—so early that it seemed night because we walked her steer in the dark and made our way down the road by moonlight and starlight.

I can feel, in my imagination, the dampness and the chill in the air, of that time before night ends and morning begins. I can hear the sounds of the steer’s hooves crunching the gravel of the road as we marched from one end of the road to the other and back again. Other than that crunching sound, quiet was all around us.

When the steer-walking chore was done and we climbed our school bus steps, it was still dark outside.

The mystery and wonder I felt as I walked by Linda’s side that early morning, through the dark beneath the moon and the stars, is strong in my memory, as if it happened this morning.

I was along to watch and learn from Linda. I’ve been watching and learning from her ever since.

In the end, I didn’t learn to show cattle from Linda; cattle didn’t turn out to be my cup of tea.

But I did learn more important lessons from Linda—about responsibility and patience, work and goals, family and love.

I also learned to be an adventurer: to walk in the dark, to look for the moon and the stars, to be unafraid while I find my way in life.

Thank you, Linda!

We’ll soon celebrate Linda’s 78th birthday—and her lifetime of leading the way for us all.