

**CHAPMAN - Dole's Gift Was Being Present with People in Every Encounter**  
**The Manhattan Mercury Dec 7, 2021 – By Jeff Chapman – Contributing Writer**



Chapman teaching Dole how to do a selfie while touring the state. Minneapolis, Kansas in 2014.

I'm honored beyond words to have this opportunity to pay tribute to my good friend, Senator Robert J. Dole of Kansas. Bob Dole who sometimes in jest referred to himself in the third person, was a Washington DC powerhouse, a beloved favorite son of Kansas, a great husband to "Liddy" and father to Robin. There were hundreds of people much closer to him than I, his staff, his family, his colleagues, so I don't claim any special part of his life, however, he does claim a significant part of mine.

You'll hear much about him in the near term, his accomplishments in policy, politics, his losses, and failures, but I'm writing on behalf of those who knew him well enough to call him a friend and actually have shed a tear or two over his passing.

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I learned so much from this man, a mentor... about perseverance, about treating everyone the same, about working a little harder, about bouncing back from setbacks, and about how to effectively use wit to break down barriers, make friends and influence preferred outcomes.

From age 7 until most recently, Bob Dole not only remembered who I was with each random or scheduled meeting, but seemed genuinely interested in my well-being, was always interested in the conversation, and wanted to help me be successful, a trait I've tried to carry forward with other people I meet. What I'm saying here is in every meeting, in every conversation, Senator Dole was present, not aloof, not passing off things to his staff or handlers, but genuinely engaged. That's really what made him truly effective as a politician and leader. I left every encounter feeling like I had a voice, had been listened to, had a friend. I was also wiping tears from laughing at his quips. Often doubled over belly laugh as he and I exchanged quips. You see making Bob Dole laugh was about the best thing ever. And it always made me so excited to call and tell my family and friends about what happened.

It all started in the fall of 1976, when Senator Dole was named by President Ford as the candidate for Vice President. He had ventured into my town, Sylvan Grove, Kansas and I knew little about history, politics or much of anything, but I was 7 years old, and when a big black sedan pulls into a town of 300 people, it's a noteworthy event. I peddled my red dirt bike down a gravel road to see what this big black car was all about and got to meet him.

He stood tall, had a great smile and a genuine good nature, held a pen in his right hand and shook mine with his left, and was immediately engaged in conversation with me as though I was an adult. He was chain smoking and taking a call or two on his mobile phone, and quipping to his driver about things I didn't understand, but I remember making him laugh and his insistence that I tell my parents to "vote the Ford Dole ticket to get us to Pennsylvania Avenue" which was puzzling to me since we lived on Pennsylvania Ave, in Sylvan Grove. I responded, "It's right there." Pointing toward home. He quipped, "The kid has better lines than the Senator" as he chuckled. I also was intrigued by Watergate and asked him if he knew President Nixon. Senator Dole said, "He's a good man, Nixon. He was loyal to his friends, and people make mistakes, but he's a good man."

The Ford Dole ticket lost an election, but they gained a friend. I was a forever loyal Bob Dole supporter from then forward and later in life we shared our love and admiration of Richard Nixon in many conversations.

Throughout life, The Senator was making news, brokering deals, raising money for campaigns and always during his trips to Kansas, I made a point to catch him at a press conference or event or walking down the street. He always called me by name, he always asked me how things were in Salina, Manhattan, Kansas City or wherever I was living at the time. He was once surrounded by a dozen or so people in business suits and I had been working in the yard all day and was dressed like a high school kid who mows lawns. I was standing in the back, trying not to be seen, I just wanted to hear his comedic banter. He answered a few questions, poked fun at the news reporters and then said, "You should probably talk to Jeff over there, he's the only person here that's working today."

I had an English Springer Spaniel whom I named "Liddy" after Elizabeth, and Senator Dole knew this... so on a few occasions he would ask "How's your Liddy doing? Mine's pretty good." I would laugh and quip, "She's great, I walk her twice a day" to which he would respond, "Me too." And then he would laugh.

The past 15 years, I would purposely make time to see Senator Dole in his office when I was visiting Washington D.C for various things. He was always gracious, always hilarious, always informative of the

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latest politics both in DC and home in Kansas. I could hear him yell to his assistant once as I was going down the hall to see him, knowing I could hear. "Hide the checkbook, that Chapman guy is here!" Since I was in non-profit fundraising, I found this both funny and flattering.

The last few times I saw him he was growing more frail, he took a little longer of a pause between quips, but he was always on his mark. And instead of smoking, he was continuously sucking lemon drops. "These are better than cigarettes they tell me, also it makes Elizabeth happy."

I tell these more personal encounters, of which were hundreds I could have chosen, not to try to give myself any sort of significance, but to tell those who didn't know, that the great American military hero, political juggernaut, one who both teamed up with and challenged the likes of Ted Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and Tip O'Neil, that he was just a regular guy who cared about the people he met. Even a commoner with no agenda or an iron in the fire like me.

Bob Dole made me feel like I was his long-lost friend, every single time. Just like so many you will hear about in the coming days. Bob Dole loved Kansas, Bob Dole loved America, and he loved the many second chances he got in life and tried to give it all back in many ways. And because of his desire to fight, to learn, to listen, to never give up, and to find the humor in life, I loved him too. May God Bless you, Senator.

Jeff Chapman

[https://themercury.com/opinion/chapman-doles-gift-was-being-present-with-people-in-every-encounter/article\\_f969224b-68e7-5ff2-90fd-1b58e639621c.html](https://themercury.com/opinion/chapman-doles-gift-was-being-present-with-people-in-every-encounter/article_f969224b-68e7-5ff2-90fd-1b58e639621c.html)