

Of fireworks, and igniting the good

By Father Joseph Breighner

July explodes on the summer scene. It's impossible to think of July without fireworks. I spent many a happy Fourth of July in my youth and seminary days with Ned and Dorothy Suehle and their family. Dorothy happened to be the best friend of my sister, Helen. Dorothy also happened to be the sister of my brother-in-law, Mike. It was always a family get together.

In addition to all the food and fun, there always seemed to be a time in the evening when Dorothy would yell at her oldest son: "John put that down!" John, even as a young boy, was always intrigued by fireworks. He spent his career as a scientist for the government. It's hard to think of that little boy as now retired. How old am I?

But in addition to his personal fascination with fireworks, John passed his passion on to his siblings. The business has been successful beyond all imagining. If you watch fireworks at the harbor or stadium, likely it's the Suehle brothers at work. No, this is not their business name. I'm not here to advertise. They don't need any help. They really are at the top of their business. If you saw the Super Bowl half-time fireworks, you saw their work!

The point I want to make here is how our life's calling can manifest in different ways. A mother was concerned about her child playing with fire. Who could have known that this was the beginning of a business, as well as a vocation?

Typically, we think of vocations as special callings to the priesthood and religious life. And that is obviously still true. But all of us are called to do "something beautiful for God" with our lives, as suggested by Mother Teresa. Life is more than just having a job. Life is about doing whatever we do as best we can to give glory to God.

The Suehles have been extremely generous with their financial success. They are generous with contributions to their parish. John still works with St. Vincent de Paul. He puts on a summer camp for the children of the homeless. Kids who attend that camp have a much higher likelihood of finishing school, and going to junior college.

We all make a difference in big or small ways. Let's say, for example, that a future president would decide to send drugs to Africa to eradicate AIDS. No doubt, he or she might win a Nobel Prize for such an endeavor. Yet, while the president would get the world attention, think of all the other people that would be involved in such a project. There would be the countless people involved in producing the medication at some pharmacy. Then there would be all the people involved in transporting the drug. Next there would be "people on the ground" who would administer the drug. There would be people in Africa who would transport people to the drug sites.

Do you see my point? A few people may receive awards for doing good. But the good they do couldn't be done without countless other people who may be "just doing their job".

A "sparkler" at a party may lead to a business. A kind word may change a life. A waiter at a restaurant may make somebody's day. Whatever we do matters. Do each thing you do each day for God, and the world will never be the same. People will see God in you without even realizing it.

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