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U.S. recently lost five lives 'worth watching'

Someone once said, "One day your life will flash before your eyes. Make sure it's worth watching."

In recent days, the nation lost five people who lived very different American lives that were worth watching, and whose influences touched individuals and nations.

Actor Patrick Swayze's rugged appearance was balanced by the feline grace of the dancer he was, and he slipped from action to comedy to drama with ease. He was indelible as Johnny Castle, the hustling Catskills heartbreaker who took Baby out of the corner, in "Dirty Dancing," and as Sam Wheat in "Ghost." Mr. Swayze spent the last 20 months of his life not dying but living, and advocating for cancer research -- and so he added another kind of grace to his memory. He was 57.

Jody Powell was the public face and twang of Jimmy Carter's administration as press secretary for the 39th president. Powell started as the president's driver before both of them made the improbable trip to the White House. As press secretary, he was known and admired for his integrity, honesty and wit, a reputation which carried over to his post-White House, bipartisan PR firm. He died at 65.

Jim Carroll was a poet, punk rocker and author whose fans included avant garde artists, as well as Leonardo DiCaprio devotees. His renowned book, "The Basketball Diaries," chronicled his descent from sports star to drug addiction to fighting his way back to sanity and was made into a film with DiCaprio. Music fans remember his punk and New Wave work, especially his song about friends who didn't make it back from the brink, "People Who Died." Carroll died at 60.

Larry Gelbart was a writer and satirist whose best-known works are pillars in the comedy hall of fame. He started as a writer for Sid Caesar's legendary TV show and cemented his place in TV history for writing and steering "MASH." The Korean War comedy-drama won more than a dozen Emmys, and its finale is the most-watched episode, ever, on TV. Mr. Gelbart's talent was felt on Broadway with "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" and in movies with "Tootsie." He died at 81.

The least widely known, Norman Borlaug, probably had the most profound effect on the world around him. Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, Borlaug was a

scientist whose work in plant breeding helped developing nations increase their food production. He literally saved millions of people from starvation. On the day the Nobel award was announced, Borlaug was working in a wheat field in Mexico and kept working after he heard the news. He died at age 95.

Grace, honesty, art, laughter, bread - rich rewards from lives worth watching and remembering.

-- *The Courier-Journal, Louisville, Ky.*
