

Austin Douglas

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Wife, advocate, and safety pioneer: Laurel Youngstrom’s life of service

WACO, TX– Resilience, creativity, and compassion led to Laurel Youngstrom’s mission in life.

For the past 14 years, she and her husband, Russ, have dedicated themselves to promoting workplace safety through their company, Youngstrom Safety.

Their mission is clear: to save lives by emphasizing the importance of safety and its ripple effects on loved ones.

“My husband, Russ, is a work-related paraplegic,” Laurel Youngstrom said.

Together, Laurel and her husband do safety presentations anywhere in the world, for any shift, in any industry. By sharing both perspectives of the permanent and ongoing consequences of ignoring safety precautions, they hope to help even just one worker think twice before doing something unsafe.

This commitment to safety is deeply personal for the Youngstrom's. Russ's workplace accident in 1995, which left him paralyzed, reshaped their lives and inspired their mission to educate others about the devastating consequences of unsafe practices.

"We show our listeners how one careless act has affected every aspect of our lives," Laurel said.

"Hopefully, it will help them move safety from their head to their heart."

Laurel's passion for helping others began early. Born in Nebraska and raised in Wyoming, she spent her childhood volunteering at a nursing home across the street from her family home.

"I think it was always just my personality," she said. "I was kind of born like that."

Her natural inclination to serve others led to a 33-year career in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. When the COVID-19 pandemic isolated residents, Youngstrom found a way to bring joy back into their lives.

"I started doing 'Sidewalk Serenades,'" she said. "Residents would tell me their favorite color, character, song, and costume, and I'd perform outside their windows to brighten their day."

Her creativity and compassion have touched countless lives over the years.

"She's extremely reliable, very dedicated and faithful," said Stella Scott, a longtime friend and colleague. "She's got a total interest in human life itself, to be able to say, 'I want to protect other people.'"

Stephanie Fiskum, another close friend of Laurel's, echoes these sentiments.

"She is so bubbly, she's always happy, but she has a genuine heart where she truly loves people...just really compassionate and caring towards everyone around her," Fiskum said.

In regards to Laurel's work ethic, Fiskum added, "She puts her heart into everything she does."

Youngstrom's love of performance began in high school. As the only choir member her freshman year, she sang all the solos. She carried that passion to Casper College in Wyoming, performing in musical theater productions before joining "Up With People," a touring group that promotes cultural understanding through music.

Her adventurous spirit continued when she moved to Washington in 1990 and met Russ while working at the Space Needle.

"We got married just three months later," she said. "In a hot air balloon."

When Russ Youngstrom's accident happened, their bond grew stronger as they navigated the challenges together. Laurel Youngstrom transitioned into a safety advocacy role, sharing their story to prevent similar tragedies.

"Well, it's definitely made me more resilient," she said. "Every day, there are challenges."

Beyond safety advocacy, Youngstrom is deeply involved in her community. For 25 years, she volunteered with the American Cancer Society, inspired by her mother's battles with breast and kidney cancer.

"I would sing the national anthem and read names during the luminary ceremony," she says. "I thought the people needed to be honored."

Her dedication extends to accessibility advocacy. Laurel serves on the advisory board for All Wheels Up, an organization working to make air travel more accessible for wheelchair users.

“Everybody kind of thinks air travel is wheelchair accessible, but it’s not the way people think,” she explains. “We’re also studying how many hotels claim to have free shuttles included, but they’re not actually accessible.”

The Youngstroms’ presentations often leave a lasting impact. Youngstrom recalls one particularly meaningful moment early in their business.

“Spence, our son, was working at a fencing company and hadn’t even graduated yet,” she said. “We had a presentation scheduled, and it turned out to be at the same place. It was surreal to share our story in front of him.”

Over the years, audience members have approached them to share how their presentation saved lives.

“It’s hard to gauge safety,” Laurel admits. “They only document the people who get hurt, but we’ve had people come up to us and say, ‘You saved my life.’”

Her friends are quick to praise her impact.

“She is a ray of sunshine,” said Jill Douglas, who met Laurel nearly 30 years ago at the Auburn Avenue Dinner Theater in Auburn, Washington. “She makes other people’s lives positive.”

Laurel’s ability to adapt and find creative solutions has been a hallmark of her life. Whether it’s performing sidewalk serenades during a pandemic or advocating for improved accessibility, she always finds a way to make a difference.

Her work with Youngstrom Safety has brought her into contact with people from all walks of life, further fueling her passion for service.

“She’s a person who sees a need and finds a way to meet it,” Scott said. “She doesn’t just talk about it—she acts.”

For Stephanie Fiskum, Laurel’s outlook on life is as impactful as her actions.

“The glass is always half full, instead of half empty,” Fiskum said.

Through all her efforts, Laurel hopes to be remembered for her kindness and dedication.

“I want to be known as nice, kind, generous and also for saving lives through our business,” Youngstrom said.

Her advice to others is simple:

“Stick with your convictions. So many people and situations will try to distract you. Pay attention to what God is telling you and stay focused,” Youngstrom said.

For Laurel, every day is an opportunity to make a difference, whether through a safety presentation, a song, or a simple act of kindness. Her unwavering commitment to helping others serves as a powerful example of a life well lived.

At its core, Youngstrom’s work is about protecting people—whether they are workers, nursing home residents, or passengers with disabilities. Her dedication to safety advocacy, coupled with her love for performance and community service, has left an indelible mark.

The Youngstrom’s continue to travel and share their story, hoping to inspire others to prioritize safety in every aspect of life. For Laurel, it’s not just a job—it’s a calling.

“I’ve learned that life is unpredictable,” she said. “But it’s also full of opportunities to make a difference.”

Her journey is a testament to the power of resilience, creativity, and compassion—qualities that define a life truly worth celebrating.