

## Chapter 1 ~ The End

The telephone rang at 3:50 a.m. ripping me from a fitful sleep and slamming me back in to my body. I lunged for the phone on the nightstand through the early morning blackness.

"It's all over... your father's dead," my mother's voice faltered. I felt as though my guts had suddenly been wrenched from my body.

"What?" *It's not possible.* "We were just with him a few days ago in Atlantic City; he was fine." I suddenly felt sick to my stomach.

"He wasn't feeling well before he left for London, promised me he'd see a heart man when he got back." Mom was crying.

"Oh, My God!" As I sat up shaking, I dug my hands into the sheets and shivered, hoping this was just a bad dream. My wife, Arlyn, sat up next to me. "Oh, my God, Mom. W-w-what happened?"

"Your father was on his way upstairs to get dressed after having his morning coffee. Julius heard him yell for help, ran to him as he collapsed on the stairs, clutching his chest."

"Are you home?"

"He was dead instantly. There was no time. It all happened so fast. There wasn't anything we could do. It just happened so fast!"

"Mom? Arlyn and I will be right there."

"I have nothing to live for..... my life is over."

Click.

“Mom? MOM!”

Life as I had known it would never be the same after that call in 1973. How I wished that telephone call had been in error.

Julius had telephoned my mother from London when it happened. It was the hardest call he had ever had to make. Sammy had been his best friend and now he was gone. All he could offer Flora was, “You let me know if there is anything at all that I can do for you and your family. I will be here for you.” It seemed so inadequate for consoling a new widow.

Julius had looked upon Pop as the son he never had, and whenever Pop was in London on business he stayed at Julius’ house at 10 Farm Street. They would spend days and nights together, living the art world until they dropped from exhaustion. The only respite was television, which Julius absolutely adored. Their cricket matches were one of two interruptions that were compellingly scheduled. The other was gourmet lunch and dinner during which they continued their art business dialogue, the essential ingredient which fueled the fire of these two experienced dealers. Julius loved “Sammy” as he affectionately referred to him. He was intrigued by his affable nature and his love of paintings; especially the Old Masters which was Julius’ personal specialty. They got on well together, sharing various trade secrets and gossip, which were never heard outside of that house. They were in awe of one another’s encyclopedic knowledge, which they spouted proudly to impress themselves. Their relationship required perpetual stamina to maintain. It was woven with work, work, and more work, and held together by a rigid fiber of friendship which lasted to the bitter end.

I sat on the side of the bed in a state of twilight, fraught with the unreality of Pop’s death as Aryln tried to comfort me. My life’s teacher was destroyed with one quick gesture of mortality. Perhaps, even in death his final lesson to me was demonstrating that time on Earth is only borrowed—temporary at best. Pop was a vibrant fifty-eight years of age and though I always knew that he would burn out early, the premature nature of his death was criminal. This was one trauma that I

would never let time erase.

I didn't know what to say. I was stunned and feeling numb from the whole thing. I just couldn't believe it had happened. I called my brother, Alan. Mom had already told him.

"Are you okay?" Alan was the strong one of the family.

"I'm all right," I lied. I was scared to death.

"I'm leaving New York immediately. I'll meet you at Mom's in about an hour and a half.

Arlyn and I jumped into our jeans and headed for the apartment located in a prestigious area of Philadelphia, a block south of Rittenhouse Square. The morning's light was dawning as we drove through transient space. I was crazed with a mixture of fear, anger, and grief. I ran red lights, and raced relentlessly to my remaining parent. I no longer gave a damn about rules or anything else mortal. None of it made sense anymore. How could anyone compare the sudden loss of my father to anything earthly?

We made the normal thirty-minute trip from Mt. Airy to center city in about twelve minutes in my 1967 Cutlass Supreme. The sun was peeking above the horizon as we parked the car in front of the gallery adjacent to the new apartment house she and Pop had shared until two hours before. The doormen greeted us with their condolences to which we nodded gratefully. The elevator ride was brief but seemed to take forever. We walked into Mom's apartment. She looked ghastly. I went over to her and put my arms around her and held her close.

"I can't believe it; my life is over!" Mom sobbed her newfound mantra over and over. I was worried about losing her, too. She and Pop were as close as any man and woman could ever be. They were more than married; they were intimate on all levels, frequently able to communicate without a spoken word. They knew each other's minds, wants, likes, and dislikes. They were the epitome

of spiritual blending, a unit unto themselves able to exist under any circumstances. They grew closer with each passing day and they thrived on the excitement of new experiences. Nothing could ever deter them from one another because they lived in love. It was extraordinary to grow up under such a benevolent sparkling shower of affection, for no matter what failed, there was always the comfort and reassuring love of my parents upon which I could depend. It took the awesome and relentlessly destructive force of death to sever their bond. Death, which could limit future activity, was powerless to eliminate history. My memories would continue to provide me with the solace and inspiration to persevere.

Mom would need us now, more than ever; but we also needed her to survive this horrible ordeal. She had been through an awful lot as a child, so hardships of life were no stranger to this indomitable lady. Both of her parents had died senselessly when she was still quite young. Her father, at age forty five, had caught double pneumonia at the funeral of her grandmother, and subsequently died thereafter. There was no cure for an ailment like that in those days. The flu or a bad cold, made chances for survival dim because of attendant complications and developments. Antibiotics were a glint of the future, as of yet nonexistent, so old home remedies were the prime modality of medicine. Her mother took ill not long after the passing of her father and eventually died in her early sixties of heart failure. Mom, and her two sisters, Annabelle and Eve, and three brothers, Arthur, Harold, and Isador were left by themselves to hold together the fragile pieces of their lives. The very eldest was merely a teenager who would be thrust out with the adult work force to bring home the money to feed and clothe the lot of them.

They had been raised to that point in Erie, Pennsylvania, but decided on a move to Philadelphia where there were some distant relations already established. This decision was made after watching their father's brother run the lucrative family soda bottling plant into the ground. They couldn't cope with any

more disaster and felt that they would all benefit with a fresh start in the big city, far away from their life of recently delivered tragedies.

Mom, was the baby sister. She and her brothers and sisters were alone to survive the only way they knew; with love and hard work. Those who were old enough worked full time or after school and on weekends, while the others would take shifts caring for their younger siblings at home. Whatever money they earned was used to provide for each other. In time, they managed to save enough to move into a pretty nice house in a section of Philadelphia called Logan. Theirs was the most popular gathering spot in the neighborhood. All the kids in the area would flock to it, to bathe in the newfound pools of love, respect, laughter, and closeness there. This was one special clan, who had pulled themselves through very difficult times. They made it, grew up, and all eventually married and had children of their own, never losing their closeness for one another.

“Life’s purpose has abandoned me. I don’t want to live anymore.” Mom sat sobbing uncontrollably.

“Mom, you can’t mean that.” Arlyn took her hand in hers and held it. “You have a beautiful house and a loving family. We are all here for you.”

“Life has no meaning without Sam. What do I need with a place like this?” The grand multi-room apartment, which they had just rented six months before, overlooked Rittenhouse Square on the north side, 18th street to the east, and almost to the airport off to the south. Each view offered either tranquility or excitement. Aside from the beauty of the place, the convenience of being right next to the family-owned gallery would have saved Pop half his life in commuting time alone. It was especially nice to walk a few steps to get home after a grueling day at the office. Besides, that way he could sleep a little bit longer in the morning, or saunter over at ten ‘o clock in the evening after dinner if he so desired. “Living here without Sam would only be an empty and lonely experience,” Mom cried.

“We are all upset. All of us have lost Pop.” I tried to console her, but my own tears were pushing forward with the emotional current. “He wouldn’t want you to give up. He would want you to continue to enjoy life. Surely....”

“I cannot endure this.”

Pop had been utterly comfortable in the many well-proportioned rooms whether it was the library, the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, or either of the bedrooms.

“I’ll make a cup of hot tea for you,” I said as I headed toward the kitchen to recompose myself.

“I don’t want any tea. I don’t want to live anymore,” Mom continued to wail. As I walked into the kitchen, I noticed a hand-written message that my father never intended for the rest of the world. It was boldly placed on a message board tacked on the wall by the telephone. It read, “Flora’s God is Sam.” To the outsider, the interpretation would be one of glaring chauvinism, but to those who knew him, it spoke differently. It was a proud commentary, which boasted of their mutual adoration. I cried when I saw the note. Though it would still retain its meaning, likely for a long time, there was a side of it that only reinforced Pop’s terminal absence. It was a statement. which couldn’t be unified by his presence, and like anything else it was inevitable that the sands of time would watch it fade into memory.

We were all in a state of flux and knew that the world wouldn’t wait for us. We had to get our acts together and begin the very slow and persistently painful process of recovery. The first step to be taken was the reclamation of Pop’s body. Julius had informed us that even with breaking the English red tape it could easily take from ten days to two weeks to return his body to the States. There was no way in hell that we were going to wait such an obscene length of time to retrieve him from overseas. We made it very plain that we wanted him back immediately, and begged Julius to pull any and all strings necessary to expedite

matters, and through his political connections and powerful friends he did just that. In just two days, Pop's body arrived at the airport and the funeral was set for the following day. Someone had to go to the airport to meet his body, so Alan was elected. Of course, I had the option to accompany him on the trip but I was absolutely petrified by the idea of seeing Pop dead. I had no notion as to whether or not the body would have to be identified, but I imagined the worst and my stomach quivered with panic at the very thought. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Alan also went to pick out the casket. I was embarrassed that I didn't have the spine to do these things, but I felt paralyzed. Anyhow, Alan was my older brother and more grown up about such things.

I had been lucky enough to have Pop for twenty-four miraculous years of my life. Some people never have that; others have it and treat it with disregard, and others have fathers who simply inherit the title without earning it. Every child grows up trying to express his innermost feelings of independence, and most parents suppress them by injecting their own philosophies without permitting them to stumble and find their own way, but my father was different. He issued the option of choice, exerting influence only in situations of danger, stupidity, or futility. He insisted only upon respect, obedience, and good manners, for those disciplines were fundamental to success and happiness along the road to independence. I was surely going to miss him, for there are too few people in your life in whom you can place total trust, love, and belief.

I'd had the best father, and though he's been relegated to the past, I still have the memories to cherish and keep alive forever. The painful truth is that memories are just not the same as the real thing, and as a replacement they are hardly perfect. They are wonderful bits of sentimentality, which thrust you into a pool of nostalgia that gets deeper as you wade farther into the recesses of yesteryear. What's the use? Memories only drag you back to the past, making it more difficult to forget the aching loss by teasing you with wisps of what used to be, while awakening you to the cold and heartless beckoning vacuum.

Everything was settling into a lengthening state of shock. Reality and unreality merged swiftly, and would take years to distinguish again. They had become married in an unhealthy defense, and it would be a well-fought battle, which would undermine their association. My God had been demolished in an instant, never to be again. I was on my own to use the wisdom he had been administering to me patiently in our splendor-filled years together. I vowed to make him proud; I would never again be lazy, or take lightly his commandments, which he never forced upon me, only insisting that I hear, understand, and observe if I deemed it appropriate. He was a visionary and it always mystified me to discover how right he was about things, which I could scarcely even envision. His perception of human behaviors was awesome. He came to be my hero.

As I stood in the kitchen that day, I felt my soul agonizing for any children I might have because they would never know their grandfather, except through me and the lessons I would transfer to them. I made a commitment then and there to etch into their young minds every single shred of goodness and wisdom I could furnish, and paint them an everlasting mental portrait of the man. It is my obligation in life to share with them those very extraordinary qualities that I enjoyed so briefly, but so thoroughly and so permanently. It is my mission to give them the same enlightenment and engaging energy, which he so willingly donated to me every day of my existence with him.

Fate had made a serious mistake to take him away from me. I would journey through the rest of my life with the sole remembrance that I must take advantage of every single minute while it exists. It won't last forever, and once it's gone it cannot be regained. I had learned the hardest way through death's personal pronouncement. I would never forget the era of pain into which I was about to enter.