

Fun-eral

By Douglas J. Alford



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To laugh at life before the last breath.

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Introduction

Don gets the life altering news and responds calmly, “so it’s a tumor and soon I will be no more. I am going to have a big party and invite everyone I know. It will be like speaking at my own funeral. Only it will be a fun-eral. Let’s look at what made us laugh before I leave.”

Act I

**Life
Of Problems and Priorities**

Seizure the Day

Don

This is being blown way out of proportion. You want to throw me under the bus instead of holding the wrong doer responsible.

Ben

Don, this is serious! You are in a lot of trouble here.

Don

Ben, let's look at the facts. I catch our Supplier on this program who is also our competitor on other projects – stealing our software. Their sticky hands are clearly on our crown jewels. My guess is their Project Manager got into a load of trouble for doing this.

Then suddenly, this Supplier writes a contract letter with a bunch of half truths and demands that the Technical Subcontract Manager, that would be me, be removed immediately.

Ben

Upper Management wants a conciliatory way out this mess.

Don

Where is the backbone? What mess? They are thieves. I catch them with their hands in our cookie jar. The next thing I know I am the one on trial here. What I can't believe Ben is that you are falling for this. Do you know what people from our company call their Project Manager – the Temple of Doom or TD for short? It is because he only sees everything right his side does and refuses to be fair. He thinks that ever thing we do is wrong. This is one of the most confusing contracts ever written. It is totally muddy who is responsible for what. The Supplier says they are the leaders until something is hard or will need to be worked the weekend, then the problems are ours. This isn't right! What happened to holding a them accountable?

Ben

I wrote this contract. Careful Don, I will add to your two day suspension.

Don

What? I can't believe this?

Ben

Starting now please. My job is to escort you off the premises and give you a couple days to cool down.

Narrator

Don bites his lip as he and Ben walk towards the lobby.

Don forcefully hits the turnstile. Ben mentions that this is a time for cool heads. Ben waves and offers a reconciliatory, "see you in two days". Don doesn't turn around.

Don is driving and the phone rings. It is his wife who works in another state to be close to her twin teenagers. The boys spend the week days with their father and weekends with Mom.

Kim

Hi Don. Hope you are well.

Don

I am fine – more or less. How are you?

Kim

I am rushing to get the presentation to JT. He will make updates and then I get to redo charts tonight in time for the seven am meeting tomorrow.

Hey, while I am thinking about it. You know that fixed income of Mom's doesn't go very far. See just found out today that her house needs new plumbing and wiring. Before you ask, it will cost \$40,000. Think about. Sorry love. Got to go.

Narrator

Don looks at the house as he pulls into the garage. Gosh, this is a nice house. I haven't noticed it in a while. It is usually dark by the time I get home from work. DJ get's the mail and walks to his bedroom. When he opens the door there are screams. Don's step son, Gene and his girl friend are mattress dancing on Don and Kim's bed.

Gene

What the F* are you doing home early?

Don

[yells] What the hell are you doing in our bed? You know you are not allowed in here. I have told you this before. [trying to remain calm] Jane would you leave us alone please?

Gene

You are not my real Dad. Don't even pretend you can tell me what to do.

Don

[pushes Gene] You are a guest in our house. [tackles Gene to the carpet] Your disrespectful behavior is unacceptable. You don't care about this family and you sure as hell need to learn some manners.

Narrator

Don gets a bear hug hold on the rebellious teenager. Suddenly Gene elbows Don in the temple. Don groans and falls to the floor. He is having a seizure with convulsions.. Jane hears the commotion and comes back into the room. Gene gets free from the choke hold, stands up and doesn't notice what is happening. He kicks Don. Jane yells and calls 911. Gene sees Don's spasms and grabs a pillow off of the bed. He crouches on the floor near Don.

Gene

I am sorry Dad. I didn't mean to hurt you.

Don

Gene, it is ok. Whatever is happening with me is not something that you caused. Maybe we should listen to your Mom and not rough-house inside.

Narrator

The paramedics take Don to the Emergency Room. There are immediate scans and tests. Don is only half awake but he hears the Doctors low hum discussing the diagnostics.

Epiphany news

Narrator

Don is taken to a private room and given something to help him sleep. In the morning he is awakened by more Doctors reviewing the test results and more exclamations.

Doctor 1

Don we need to speak with you concerning your scans and tests. Is there someone we can call please to be with you?

Don

My wife lives out of State. So the answer is no. Like they say in the movies, tell it to me straight Doc.

Doctor 2

Ok, well here it is – straight as you requested. Don, the MRI shows that you have a brain tumor?

Don

Is it treatable?

Doctor 1

[pauses] No, it is inoperable. We have had all of our experts look at the data. Everyone agrees.

Don

How long do I have? Should I worry about this year's taxes?

Doctor 2

More direct talk Don. You have 6 to 12 months.

Don

So the good news is that I don't have to worry about next year's taxes. Wahoo!

Narrator

Don talks with the Doctors about what to expect next. The tumor is a tornado that will knock out his senses one by one. He will remember less and less and eventually lose control of bodily functions.

The doctors leave and the room is quiet. Don thinks back at the last thing he said to the Doctor's. He tries to make a joke and remarks. "So this tumor is vegetable maker as it slices and dices its way through my head."

The grim reality descends on Don. He fidgets and scribbles notes. It is the Project Manager in him that needs to have an action plan for every problem, even the one that will kill him. Don smiles and says to himself.

Don

So this tumor will turn me into a veggie. I don't want my loved ones to see me this way. I must die alone. [half-joking] Wonder if Doctor Death has a website? I need to say good-bye to everyone and then travel away while I can still think and function. I will pick a tropical island to die on. Hey this way I get to speak at my own funeral. I don't want gloomy speeches on how great or not I was or wasn't. I want to look back at my life and laugh! I want to share the laughter with family and friends. Then I want to exit stage right and ride into the sunset. Decision made.

Narrator

Don grabs his cell phone and calls Kim. She answers but tells Don she can't talk now. The Customer has added new requirements that must be responded to immediately. Don hangs up and then sends Kim a text.

Don

Dear Kim. Don't know how to say this so I'll just type it straight. Sorry for the directness but it is best. I am at the hospital. Doctors just tell me I have brain tumor and less than year to live. I do not want the people I care about to see me wither. I will die alone. Sorry things turn out this way. Goodbye. -Don

Couple Chat

Kim

[texts] Cute ploy. My husband is feeling a little neglected so he tries the sympathy approach? Well it won't work. As we discussed I have to work this weekend. We'll talk soon.

Don

[texts] I called you but like so often we didn't connect. I wanted to talk in person about this but we never get the chance. Here is the phone number of the doctors who can explain everything to you.

Every day spouses die in car accidents. I think we should treat this incident the same. You are busy. I definitely do not want your sympathy. It is what it is. Best just to say good-bye right now. Look at the Brightside. In less than a year you will have money for Gene's college; pay off debt to your friend Sue and your Mom gets new plumbing. Turns out to be good for everyone except the guy who owns the life insurance. You always put him last anyway. Good-bye.

Narrator

Kim calls the doctors. At first she is convinced this is a clever scheme of Don's to get her home this weekend. The reality wake up is doubly hard. Kim calls Don but he does not answer. Kim is agitated and sends Don a text.

Kim

Why the hell aren't you answering the phone?

Don

[texts back] I don't want to talk with you. I also want you to feel last in someone's life. It is how you have made me feel the three years we have been together. Not very nice is it. You often say you are not cold but you never stop to think how your actions feel to me. Well enough. I am dead to you and will soon enough be that way. The only thing

that I did wrong was to fall in love with a steel-in-heels woman. Good-bye.

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Narrator

Kim reads and re-reads the text. She is surprised by the potency of the prose. The key words echo in her mind: cold, steel and last in someone's life. Kim is confused. She thinks over and over about what the doctors said. She mumbles to herself. I thought we were happy. I thought we were dealing just fine with the distance today with the hope of a being together tomorrow after the kids are grown.

It's an epiphany. There will be no tomorrow. She understands Don's anger. She spends the next hour writing an e-mail.

Kim

[types] Dear Don: As I write to you I think about how many times we have written each other. Though we are often apart, the words help hold our marriage together. Right now the hurt and anger in your text still rings in my ears. Part of me still doesn't believe what the doctors told me. How can it be that you will die? We had our lives planned out. For now we live in different states but that was to change one day. Remember when you wrote that you understand a Mom's need to be near her boys. I have worked hard on my career that is here too. The plan was put up with the distances today for we have the rest of our lives together. I still don't want to accept that this is it. In business I am decisive. It is what my bosses like best about me. I have never been good with saying I am sorry. It was never my intent to put you last in my life. At the time we were caught up in our busy lives. I understand how you could feel last. I am truly sorry. That you think I have been a terrible wife hurts me.

When I was little, my parents divorced. My Mom and I lived with her parents. I loved my grandparents. It was like I had two Moms' and a Dad. Emotions were hard for my Grandfather to express but he always found ways to show that he loved me. I remember the kindness in his eyes. One look and I knew he loved me.

I am not a person who regrets but I am sad that between the two of us – I didn't show you I loved you more and you didn't see the times I said the words with my eyes. I didn't know that you didn't notice.

God, I am so sad. There are dark gloomy feelings inside me. I turn on all the lights but I cannot scare away the shadows. I want to be strong to help you though this. My head started swirling when I heard the news of your cancer. I do not know how to deal with this. I want to run away to a place where everything is fine. This place does not exist.

I wonder how this must be hard on you. You had dreams that will never come true. You have given so much of your life serving others. You are a great dad and husband. You do your 'job' so well and without complaining that we have

taken you for granted. I don't blame you for being bitter. But that is not the Don that I know. I am the hot headed one. You are the calm one who keeps our ship even keel even in storms. Do you know what I fell in love with from the very first moment – you are kind.

Think of the times we travelled together to Europe and Asia on vacation. We had little time together but we made the most of it. Like you like to often say, look at the pictures and remember.

Remember when you, I mean we, mis-read the tickets and we missed our connecting flight in Hong Kong. I was upset. You sat there calmly but I could see the engineering gears churning in your head. Suddenly you said, it will all work out. We got tickets for the next flight. The next plane broke down. By the time we got to Hong Kong we had missed the connecting light too. The airline said they were sorry for the plane breaking down so they put us up in a nice hotel and then booked us on the next flight in the morning. You looked at me with those determined blue eyes and asked, are you tired Kim or do you want to take the train into the city. You said that you have always wanted to see the Hong Kong sky-line as the sun sets. Main point is that you were right, everything turned out fine. Actually better than right, by missing our flight we got a romantic evening together. I close my eyes and I can still see the yellow-orange hues on your face as we took pictures of the skyscrapers. We seized the moment. You are always larger than life to me. You have a way about you where everything works out. I know that you are not a mean person. Please help me understand why you want to shut me out of the last days of your life. We married for better or worse. Think of the happy times.

Love,
Kim

Don

[types] Dear Kim: You are right. There is something comforting about being able to write to each other. Do you remember how many times during our engagement that we broke up? Something had led to a big fight. We would get frustrated. We would call it quits and that this is it then. But it was never "it then" as every time we would find a way to put things back together. We are soul-mates.

Thank you for your words. They are comforting to me. There is rage in my soul as I try to learn how to deal with news of my own mortality.

When we walked around Stonehenge, I remember thinking. Wow, look at this monument to the people who built it thousands of years ago. I wondered what I will leave as a monument that I was here. I thought I would have a lifetime to achieve my goals but it is all cut short. Let me speak straight please. You are right that I am not trying to be mean about wanting to die alone. The doctors described what the next months will be like for me. I stare at the mirror and don't see the tumor but it is there. Every day it is winning. Bit by bit it will ruin me. I have my dignity my love. I don't want you or any of my other loved ones to see me like that. I want you to remember me as I was. You and I are actually much alike. At work, people can't believe the energy I go after projects. You and I both do "lock brain" where we focus on the task at hand at the expense of everything else. When we are together, I am the calm one you are right. I am sad that you never had the chance to see me in action at business. I think you would be proud. I am proud of you too.

Looks like I took a tangent here. Maybe it is just too hard to admit that I am dying. But I am not dead yet!

I am planning a meeting with family and friends to celebrate the happy moments of life and not dwell on the dying. You are of course invited to what I am calling a "Fun-eral" (the word is fun like funny ha-ha). Please respect my wishes that I want to die alone.

Love,
-Don

Kim

[types] Your words confuse me. They half pull me closer and half push me away.

Don

[types] I am confused. I have never had to deal with my own death before. I am trying to make peace with the past as I let go off the present. I sincerely say that I am glad that we married. You were the last love of my life. I just thought it would last longer. Also safe to say that marriage did not meet our expectations. It was shorter than you wanted and less fulfilling than I wanted. I am not bitter. I will not dredge up the well- it-could-have-been- better-if-only issues. That is pointless. But what is important is that you know that I loved you. Above all else remember this. I tried to be the best husband and Dad, Step-Dad and weekend worker around the house that I could be. To be frank, that is all in the past now. I am going to laugh at life one last time and detour death as long as I can. But I am a realist. I know how this will end – death wins. I will face off with the Grim Reaper alone. I am really trying to hold it all together but let me be frank. You are invited to the Fun-eral but I understand if you can't make it. So this time, the last time, I have no hopes, no expectations. I have to let go. My former love, you need to do the same. xox

Kim

[mad] Why are you acting this way?

Don

[mad] In the last seven months we have spent two weeks together. It doesn't feel like a marriage but more like a mugging. I was alone when the news came. I will be alone when I leave.

Kim

[frantically types] That is unfair. We both work hard and have long hours. The result was lots of time apart. You once said that you and I are much alike. We both get “lock brain and focus on what is in front of our face.

Don

[types] Well, it is not what is in front that matters now. It is what is inside my head. It is pointless to argue over what could have been. None of that matters now. My former love, you need to let go.

Kim

[yells to herself] Oh! That man really knows how to push my buttons. He has some nerve calling me his former lover! He acts like he is already dead. I need to talk with someone about this. I know just who to call.
[dials]

Grandpa (Don's Dad)

Hi Kim. How are you?

Kim

Not well Dad. Has Don talked with you?

Grandpa

Yes, but we haven't told his Mother yet. Don has called a family gathering this Saturday night at our house. My guess is that because you didn't know this you two have had another fight.

Kim

Not just another fight. Don wants this one to be a knock-out. He keeps telling me he wants to die alone and how it needs to start now.

[tears start to flow]

I never cry but I am crying now. Sad at how the past has been. Sad we let so many moments pass us by. I am unhappy that this happening to us.

Grandpa

Kim Dear. Over the past few years you and I have had a few of these talks. Often it was when you two had broken up again.

You once said to me that one of the things you loved about Don was that every time your relationship fell apart; the Engineer in Don found a way to put it back together.

This time it will need to be you who puts it back together.

Don cannot change the fact that he is going to die. His

thoughts are consumed with this. We all want to help him but first he needs to come to terms with what is happening.

Everyone who watches you two as a couple knows you two belong together. You love each other but don't

communicate it well. It is a time for closeness not distance.

Don will be here Friday night. Recommend you figure out the rest.

Kim

Dad, as always, thanks for the good advice. It means so much to me that you have welcomed me as a daughter. I need to go and take care of a few things.....

Narrator

The next morning Kim is talking with her boss.

Kim

JT, I like working for this company. I have always tried to do my best. The facts are that I have often put this place ahead of my family.

As we discussed, my husband has a brain tumor and it will kill him. I am taking some time off. Don't know how long I will be gone. It depends if my husband can put the past behind him. All I know is that I want to take this one day at a time. I just want to be near him and that starts now.

JT

Kim, you are one of the best because of your results and your priorities. I understand why this all needs to change now. Talk with Human Resources. They have policies to deal with this. I cannot promise you a position if you come back.

Narrator

Kim walks out of JT's office with a spring in her sway. She thinks to herself, there is still time to enjoy the remaining times.

Inform Family

Narrator

It is Friday night. Don has taken a flight to go visit his family. During the hour drive from the airport, Don thinks of how to tell his Mom tonight. Tomorrow is a family barbeque where the “C” word news will be shared with his kids and the rest of the family.

Don drives up alone to his parent’s house. He parks and slowly walks to the front door. He takes a deep breath and climb the stairs to the family room. There on the couch is Kim. It has been months since they have seen each other. Like magnets they approach each other. Don goes to speak. Kim puts her finger tips to his lips.

Kim

Just hold me please, no words.

Narrator

Dad and Mom come out of the kitchen.

Grandpa

[looks at the embracing couple]

Mother, let’s give them a few minutes before we say our hello’s. Is their bedroom made up? [Grandma nods]

Narrator

Kim and Don go hand in hand to their room. For the next hours they just touch. No words are spoken. They re-connect. They think only of the present. They know they will need to deal with the future but for now all that matters is now. Later, they meet up with the Grandparents.

Grandma is uneasy. She senses all is not right. She speaks first.

Grandma

We are so happy to have you both here but I fear that something is not right. Call it Grandma's curse if you will but I can tell something is wrong. What is going on please?

Don

Mom. You are a great Mom! You can always tell when something is wrong. Whether it was a fight at school or a bad test or a married couple having a fight you always know. And you know how to help.

Please sit down. Mom, there is no easy way to say this. I have a brain tumor. It is inoperable. I am going to d.....

Grandma

[interrupts and stands up] Let me get you all cinnamon rolls and milk. I know they are your favorite. Let's have a snack and then continue this conversation or maybe wait until tomorrow. You have had a long day travelling.

Narrator

Grandma goes to the kitchen. She takes the opportunity to wipe tears from her eyes. She gathers her composure and serves everyone. Sometimes something sweet can soften bitter news. For a moment everyone forgets the pressing trouble and just relaxes. As they polish off the iced sweet rolls, Grandma counsels.

Grandma

Well we were having a conversation that I think we should reserve for tomorrow. Everyone get a good night's sleep. It is so nice to have you here.

Narrator

Everyone sleeps fairly well. In the morning there is breakfast off the griddle. As everyone helps clean-up from the massive sausage, omelet, French toast breakfast, the conversation topic returns to last night's bombshell. For hours they discuss the doctor reports, what it all means and Don's plan for a Fun-eral. They talk about how to tell the kids and the rest of the family at the barbeque.

Grandma and Grandpa eventually say they need to get the food ready for the barbeque. It is good to be busy. That evening the rest of the family starts arriving. The first is Don's brother Kent. The moment he walks in the door he sees Don and Kim and makes a comment.

Kent

Well this can't be good. Don and Kim are together so something must be up.

Narrator

Teri and Jared, Don's kids arrive. They have light conversations to catch-up on most of the things that are happening. The barbeque starts.

It is a feast of barbeque steak, corn on the cob and a cornucopia of salads. Good food and lively conversation fill the air but as the evening goes on a tension starts to permeate. Grandma, Grandpa, Kim and Don grow increasingly serious. The dirty dishes are cleared and the family sits down in a giant circle. Grandpa speaks.

Grandpa

Well I can think of nothing nicer than to be together as a family. I know that not everyone here believes and your Grandma and Grandpa do. I will put all of your hearts to ease that I will not preach. I only mean to say that how a family can be together forever is wonderful to me. Don't want to make anyone uncomfortable talking religion so I won't. Your Grandma and I are so proud of you all. We love you!

Grandma

Life is full of trials. Would you all please give your attention to Don? He has something serious that he needs to share with us.

Don

Well, you know the old joke where the Sergeant asks all those with a certain relative alive to step forward. Well, soon you are all not going to be able to say you have a

Husband, son, brother, or uncle Don. I am going to say this directly but here it goes.
When they say will everyone with a brain tumor please step forward, that's me first in line.

Narrator

All faces grow serious and pale. Don looks at his children. He wonders know if he should have told them separately but he wanted them to feel the support from family. Don, ever the optimist, turns to his children.

Don

Well Teri and Jared, did I ever tell you the story of your Mom when we were finishing the downstairs in the Seattle house? These are the days before I wore glasses.

[the adult kids shake their heads]

Well, let's put this into context. We bought the house with an unfinished basement. Over the period of five years we put in a bathroom and finished off the rooms one by one. On this day I was hanging the door to the washroom. The lock isn't on yet so I grab the door by that hole and move it into place. I am on the inside hammering and your mother is on the outside holding the door in place. I finish shimmying and hammering.

For no apparent reason and at that particular moment I decided to look out the hole where the handle and lock will soon be. At that exact moment your Mom pokes her finger through the hole. Remember your mom likes long fingernails. I let out a yell in pain and grab my eye. I scream, "why did you put your finger through the hole and poke my eye." She counters with, "well why did you put your eye there in the first place."

Narrator

Everyone laughs and the tension eases. All gather around the wide screen TV. Ice cream and pie are handed out. It is family home movie time.

[

Home Grown Movies

Narrator

The big screen is awash with babies born, birthdays, Grandparents who age as he children grow. There are relatives no deceased.

There are pictures of scraps and broken bones and Christmas presents. Thirty years fly by in an hour. There are celebrations, vacations, marriages and funerals. The flow of life is flashing on the pixels of pictures.

Everyone pays double attention to the blond haired baby boy, the youngest child. He is so full of energy, so happy. He always smiles even if sometimes mischievously so. Childhood is storybook carefree and full of adventures. How can it be that the person so active in the pictures is dying? All watch in disbelief.

Yes, the wonderful Great Grandparents are now dead. They lived long, full lives. They grew old. Death is always a shock but somehow year by year one knows that it will one day come to the elderly. One is never prepared to accept the vibrant youngest sibling will soon cease to be. The home made video finishes and for a few moments everyone just watches the dead dark screen. All think about the news of the night. Don senses the despair and knows he must say something.

Don

Wow, it was fun to see the pictures of our family vacation to Washington DC. Dad had a seminar. We all got to play. I was eight. Kent you were about to turn sixteen.

We went to Colonial Williamsburg. Everywhere we were surrounded by what life looked like before the Revolution. Kent, ever the big brother, tried to explain to me that people who had been bad were put into the stockades for punishment. We stood there as Kent told me about how they worked. I looked at Kent with my inquisitive blue eyes. I pretended not to understand.

Kent grew tired of my tide of questions. In frustration he said, I'll show you how it works. We lifted up the top piece.

Kent put his neck and arms in the “C” shaped cut outs. I quickly brought the top down and then did something that surprised Kent. I pinned the stockade closed. Kent’s face was priceless as he realized that little brother had tricked him. Kent began giving orders to get him out of the stockade immediately.

So what did little brother do? I walked away leaving Kent standing locked in the stockade. I went and found Mom and Dad. It was ten minutes or so until I came clean and let them know where Kent was.

Grandpa

[looks at the Grandchildren]

Well, a long while ago, when your Grandma and I were recently married, Grandma made homemade rolls. It was spring time and the weather was cool. I came into the empty kitchen to check on the rolls. I was shocked to see that they were not raising. I was scared that a new wife would be concerned about this. I knew I needed to help. The dryer had just stopped. I took the clothes out and had what I thought was a good idea. I put the tin of cool low dough into the warm dryer with the intent that I am helping. As I shut the dryer door, to keep in the heat, I hear a Ka-thunk. When I closed the dryer door, the drum had turned. Shocked, I hurry and open the door. The tin is empty and the dollops of dough are stuck around the inside of the dryer. Grandma walks into the kitchen just as I pull the sticky dough off from around the inner rim. Grandma asks, what are you doing? As I explain the situation, we laugh together. Here it is almost sixty years later and we still laugh together.

Lynn

[looks at her Sister] This story is about my wonderful and often cheeky Sister. It is Gerry’s and my first date. He had just rung the doorbell,. Wanting to not seem overly anxious I wait a few seconds before answering the door. I walk slowly towards the door, when suddenly, Pam dressed in that awful old robe runs down the stairs and beats me to door. Can you picture it, the first time Gerry is

greeted to my house it is by my younger sister in a threadbare bath robe? I push my way to the door and invite Gerry in. We walk to the front room and sit down. Mom tells Pam to go finish getting ready. Mom, Dad, Gerry and I start talking about the Air Force. We talk for half an hour. Gerry looks at his watch and says we need to get to the movie. He said it is cold outside and I will need a coat. He asks what color it is and always the gentleman walks over to the closet to get it. Just as he stops in front of the closet to open the door, a hand holding my coat thrusts forth. Pam had been in the closet the whole time. At first I cover my eyes with embarrassment. Mom asks Pam, what are you doing? Pam responds matter-of-factly, "I just want to see if he is good enough for Lynn." She confidently responds. "Looks like it."

Narrator

The day has grown dark. Everyone can see that Don is tired. Worry shows on the faces that surround him. Kim makes an excuse about it getting late and gets Don to leave. As he walks away he lets everyone know that in two weeks they will get back together as a family to say good-bye before the Fun-eral. They get ready for bed. Don reaches over and touches Kim and says.

Don

Thank you for being here. I really don't know how I would have made it through tonight without you. Our family is good people. The look of shock on their faces is hard to handle. I know you and I have a lot to discuss later.

Kim

They all love you Don. They are wrestling with the emotion of how to say good-bye. This sudden news is quite a shock.

This brings up the next topic. I will be with you for longer than you think. Do not push me away please. We are married – remember. We were apart too much in the past but that was then. This is what we have now. I am part of all this you know! I do not want to talk about it tonight but in the future when we are on the beach, if there is a point when you want me to leave we will create a signal and I will know it is time to leave. But that is not today. Today, tonight we are together. We have time to make up and a future to prepare for together.

[Don nods, snuggles up to Kim and falls asleep]

Headlines and Adverts

Narrator

In the morning, the sun shines through the window and highlights Don's face. Kim wakes up first. Her mind is going a hundred miles an hour.

She goes to the kitchen table, gathers her thoughts and scribes down a plan. Grandpa is there and they chat over Kim's idea. An hour later, Kim goes to wake up Don. She sits on the bed beside him. Kim wonders if Don is breathing. She puts her hand on his chest. Don wakes up.

Don

Good morning my love. You are up early. I am usually the one up first.

Kim

Lots to do my love. We need to get publicity for your party.

Don

[stretches] First a story. You know this was my bedroom when I was growing up. It only had a single bed in it then. My first job was working as a "go-fer" building houses. I remember coming home very tired. Sometime during the night, my cat Tiger came to sleep with me. She liked to sleep on my chest. Later, someone was getting a drink in the kitchen and the tap noise startled me. I immediately jumped out of bed. I was mostly still asleep but I remember seeing the silhouette in moonlight of Tiger flying across the room. I didn't mean to hurt her. I quickly grabbed her and told her I was sorry. She immediately forgot about the midnight flight and forgave me.

[Don grabs Kim] I am sorry Kim that I tried to push you away. I never died before and the thought takes a little getting used to.

Kim

I forgive you and ask you do the same for me. There is much to be sad about but we can't linger in the past. We have a huge party to prepare for but first let's take this moment to hug.

Narrator

They just hold each other. There is silence but the couple touch is long and warm. After a while, Kim starts moving.

Kim

Come on Don. We need to get up. Grandma has breakfast ready I can smell it. I have an idea to share with you.

Narrator

Grandma has plates full of pancakes and bacon and of course fresh cinnamon rolls on the table. Grandma brings a hot omelet over too.

Grandma

Wasn't sure what you wanted for breakfast Don so I made up a bunch of choices.

Don

Thanks Mom. It all looks great. I'll try a little of each. Especially with that apricot jam.

Grandma

You always liked to climb up the tree to the very top to pick the apricots for me. I couldn't watch you climb up that high but Grandpa would tell me let him be a boy!

Kim

Well growing up so close to the mountains, it is no wonder that you like to go hiking too.
[turns to Don] I know we are mid bites but need to discuss this with you please. We need to get the word out to friends near and far about the funeral. Dad had a great suggestion.

Grandma

Well Don, that smart energetic wife of yours has a good idea.

Kim

And Dad has the contact. We have an appointment in a few hours at the local Newspaper. They want to do a human interest story on you and your fun-eral.

Narrator

After breakfast, the search of stories begins. Kim doesn't let Don out of her sights. Together they forage through boxes of old photographs and filing cabinets. Pixel by pixel the pictures and stories starts to emerge of a life common in many ways and extraordinarily lucky too.

Early afternoon Kim and Don are at the Newspaper, Interviewing for a story about Don's Farewell Party. Everyone shakes hands and sits down.

Reporter

So how is your Father? He is such a fine man. He has done so much for this community. I asked him for an interview when he turned eighty. He said no. He is too humble to talk about himself.

Today we are discussing you Don. So let's start with you attended local schools from Kindergarten through High School. You were the Debate Team President and Valedictorian. What do you remember about growing up here?

[pushes a recorder]

Don

At High School Graduation the three Valedictorians get to give speeches. The event is at the local state college auditorium. I get up to the podium. The spot light is bright. I look down into the band pit in front of me. The audience can't see the band member but I can. My girlfriend Brenda is looking up. She smiles at me and I forget every word of my speech. I am standing at the podium in silence. I

reach in my suit jacket pocket and get the 3X5 cards I used to practice the speech. I read the first line and it all comes back to me. [everyone laughs]

I know this is jumping around but I was on that same stage a few years later after I had returned from being a Mormon Missionary in Thailand.

My friend and I were acting in a Religious theme play. We were the comic relief missionaries. I grabbed an ironing board and started whistling the song, "Let Us All Press On". I don't remember the lines I was saying but I remember what happened next. The prop was a bowl full of dough. I was stirring it as I talked. It was the last of three performances and I was exuberantly hamming it up a bit. I accidentally swished the dough out of the bowl. It landed on the wooden stage with a loud splat. The audience stared in disbelief and total silence. Everyone knew this was unscripted. I turned to Tim and with impromptu said, "Well so much so Dinner how about McDonalds. Everyone started laughing so hard. The energy was amazing. Next the Choir was supposed to sing a serious song but because everyone was still laughing so hard, the director had the curtains closed so everyone would get into the religious frame of mind.

Reporter

That brings up Religion. You were born a Mormon, served as a Missionary in Thailand but today you are not religious. What happened?

Don

I appreciate my Mormon roots and the values they taught me. As I had the good fortune to travel, the more I believe that one group does not have monopoly on morals and truth.

Reporter

This probably doesn't go over well with the Mormon's especially those in your family. You Dad is a Church Leader, this must be an embarrassment to him.

Don

Please don't focus the article on conflict. The purpose is to get the word out about the Fun-eral.

Reporter

What and when is the Fun-eral?

Kim

Most people die unexpectedly. Don has been given bad news but he responds by wanting to have a big party with family and friends where the emphasis is on life not death. Don likes to tell short stories. He has done this since we met. It always makes me laugh! He wants to laugh one last time with those he knows. It is his way to say remember me for who I am and to say good-bye. [hands the Report era flyer] Here are the details of when and where.

Don

Maybe I have always liked short stories because they are as long as my attention span lasts.

[chuckles] I ask those who want to come to bring short funny stories with them. We will be passing the Microphone to hear from the audience. At the Fun-eral, we all tell stories and laugh. When it is over I will say good-bye. The tumor will rob me of my identity. I want to be remembered for the funny stories not for a cancer.

Reporter

[changing topics] So tell me about your unconventional marriage.

Kim

We met at an airport, so we knew that travelling would play a pivoting role in our marriage. Don's works in one state nearer his kids and family and my kids and work are in

another state. We thought it would take a few years to sort out and then we would be together for the rest of our lives. Life has thrown us a curve.

Don

[rushes to help Kim]

There is a story about a miner who spent his whole life digging. He died and the next miner in the same mine went a few more feet and struck it rich.

St. Peter and the first Miner are looking down on this glittering scene. St. Peter asks, are you angry you spent your life digging and never struck it rich? The Miner responds, I enjoyed the dig and there were nuggets along the way.

We are not going to complain or pine about what we didn't do but rejoice that we had wonder times together albeit short. Sometimes the brightest stars, shine for the briefest time.

Kim

Changing Subjects to the first time Don met my parents. Need to appreciate that English is not my parent's first language.

Don talked with my Father for awhile and then asked for permission to marry me. My Father said yes and then immediately said, "but it doesn't matter what I think, what matters is what she thinks. Working it out with her will not be easy. Then with a twinkle in his eyes, he adds, "and that will not be easy. She is not patient but she is worth all your efforts." I think this is still good advice.

My Mom liked Don from the very first time they met. When we called off our first engagement, "Mom said to me, well if he can't be my son-in-law then he will have to be my son. Fortunately we got re-engaged and then married.

Reporter

Sounds like your relationship has had its challenges.

Don

Distance is hard. The closer two objects are the stronger the gravity. With a couple, it is a constant struggle to re-energize the connection that keeps you together.

Reporter

[flips through notes] It says here that you once worked as a gardener and guard at the local Mormon Temple.

Don

That's right. I worked there while I was going to college. It was interesting how working with blooming landscapes changes one's perception. After a while, you can only see the weeds and not the flowers anymore. Probably a life lesson there for us all.

I also worked part time as a guard at the Temple. One of my duties was to take the cafeteria money and deposit it in the bank a short walk away. One hot Saturday afternoon I was walking the couple of blocks from the Temple to the bank. All the guards had a walkie talkie for emergencies. In the past I had responded to heart attacks and diabetic comas etc. Today I had forgotten to turn the volume down as I walked down town. I was in a middle of a crowd when suddenly a voice scream over the walkie talkie - "Brother Jones, Brother Jones, the commode is overflowing." Everyone laughed as I hurried to silence the volume. Even holy places have toilets that runneth over.

Reporter

[playfully] Have you ever met anyone famous?

Don

Back when Ross Perot was running for President. He spoke at the capital of Washington State. I took my daughter out of school and I took the day off to hear him. Ross was at the top of the steps and a huge diverse crowd was at the bottom. We listened to the speech. I liked how he didn't owe anyone anything and how he spoke about cleaning up Washington DC. He waved a pooper scooper

shovel above his head and we all laughed. After the speech was over, I said I want to go meet him. Just then my kids said they needed the restroom. I said ok and we walked towards the Capitol to find the loo. I tried several doors but they were all locked. Seeing the urgent need reflected in my kids eyes, I vigorously kept trying doors until I found one unlocked. It was a narrow set of stairs. We were all walking up when to our surprise we ran into Ross Perot walking down. We had a short chat as we squeezed by each other. He patted me on the back and rushed to the awaiting car.

Reporter

[seriously] Don, I am sorry to ask this next question but I know the readers will want to know. What is it like knowing the Doctors have given you less than a year to live?

Don

Well it is a head ache and a pain in the butt. The head ache is from the tumor. The discomfort in the derriere is caused by trying to run away from the facts and can't. People think that when one is dying; that you suddenly get all the secrets to life. Like God will suddenly show you secrets to the Universe. I don't know about that but I do have a few insights that I will share at the Fun-eral.

Reporter

[seriously] Kim, I am sorry to ask you the same question. How are you dealing with all this?

Kim

I am sad, mad and motivated. Certainly I feel sad and guilty for all the married time we spent apart. I am mad that our lifetime together doesn't include Senior Citizen discounts. Hell, we won't even make it past menopause! I am energized to treat every moment as if it were our last for soon it will be.

Reporter

[shuts off the recorder] Very interesting! Thank you two so much. I need to get busy writing all this up because it needs to be in this Sunday's paper so we can get you maximum advertisement for you big party.

Narrator

Kim and Don leave and go get their favorite milkshakes. They are both a bit shell shocked after the interview. It is laughter amongst the longing for a longer life. Kim is the first to speak.

Kim

After we met at the airport, we wrote each other. I fell in love with your words and then the man. Writing gave us a chance to connect on deeper levels than just what can be seen.

When we were together, you described it accurately as holiday time. You were right that we did not have much time together to address real life issues. When crisis happened we fell apart many times but each time we went back to writing and the wheels were put back on our relationship.

On our first date I said that it feels like I have known you for ages because we knew so much about each other. It is true then. But now, I am learning new dimensions about you and I love you even more.

Narrator

The Sunday Paper has a glowing report of the up and coming Fun-eral. They get the publicity they hoped for. For the next nearly two weeks, Kim and Don are always together like investigative reporters gathering details on a life. Kim helps Don with the speech for the parting party. Don offers to throw out the comments on his Ex wife. Kim replies it is important for your kids to remember the happy times when you and their mom were married.

Kim and Don then focus on the coming barbeque to say good-bye to family.

Farewell to Family

Narrator

The huge barbeque is a feast of Don's favorites. There is steak grilled to perfection. Fresh corn on the cob and fruit salads amongst a sea of Tupperware bowls with mountains of casseroles. There are so many desserts that they take their own table with Peach Pie, Chocolate Cake and a sweet spectrum of sugared creations in between.

Don is glad that most of his family is here but he knows he must focus on his children. After savoring the cuisine, Don starts talking.

Don

At three thirty-three pm on April third my daughter was born. My son came three years later at five twenty five on the twenty second of August. I am proud to be your father. I am glad that I leave you with videos and a plethora of pictures to remember me by.

When we first started a family, a co-worker of mine who had a lot of kids gave me some advice. He said, "be there for your kids." I tried my hardest to be there for our family. I don't say this to puff me up, just want you to understand my priorities. When you both were young my boss said to me "Based on your performance to date, you have a very promising career. You should apply for management. My reply was not now. I will work hard during the day at work but when I want to be able to leave and have time with my kids. At the same time the Pastor asked me to do a Church Calling that would take a bunch of time. I told him no. I want to be with my kids.

We did a lot together from day trips to zoos and aquariums and hiking to rollerblading and bike riding at the shores of the Puget Sound. We had a lot of fun and I have pictures to prove it.

Here's the main point and then a couple of stories.

Remember I love you and there were happy times.

I got a call once from a second grade teacher that she needed to speak with me after school about my child. I left

work early and apprehensively entered the classroom. The excellent teacher explained that she had handed out math sheets. The instructions said to do the problems and then color in the shapes different colors depending on the answer. Because time was short, the Teacher told the class not to color in the shapes.

She then brings me, my daughter's paper. The Teacher explains that you had finished early and then colored OUTSIDE every shape. Thank heavens your teacher realized how clever you were being because she told you not to color INSIDE.

Son, I got similar call from your elementary teacher. It was the proverbial, need to speak with you after school. Again, I left work early to get to the school. I walk in and your teacher shows me that you received a "C" on your science project. I was surprised because you had worked on it for months. It was a very clever project that you thought of. Your teacher explained that you said you didn't really want to give the report to the class so you only gave a short presentation.

I turned and looked at you son. You jumped up and stood by your project and then spoke for the next half an hour. Your teacher then had you give the presentation to the class the next day. That night you beamed as you showed me your "A" grade.

The next story is not to embarrass anyone but to highlight how life can be unexpected.

We were moving to England soon on foreign assignment.

We took the opportunity to go to a Star Wars Marathon.

We bought a huge tub of popcorn and I handed it to one of you kids. I was caught up in the film for a while before I asked for the pop corn back. I was surprised at how much was gone. What I didn't know was that only one person had been eating it not four.

After the movie we went into the mall. One of you kids went with your mother and one stayed with me. We went to buy electrical adapter plugs for England. We had just stepped into Radio Shack when you said you didn't feel good. I looked at your face and knew it was rush to the

restroom time. The moment I picked you up, you erupted. Here was this little body spewing forth great amounts of throw-up. It was a Doctor Who's telephone box experience with much more coming out than one could think would possibly fit in a children's stomach. The trail started at the store and went all the way across the hall and into the Men's Toilet. While we were waiting for the popcorn based lava to stop erupting, your Mom came looking for us. She didn't see us in the store where we said we would be. She did see the huge barf trail and watching her steps walked to the entrance of the boys' bathroom. She yelled in, Don is that you in there? Do you need anything? I yelled back, "we need wet ones and new clothes for both of us." I wonder if they still have our picture up at that Radio Shack as people to not let back in the store.

Narrator

Everyone laughs so hard there are tears: part of joy and part of pain. It is now the kids turn.

Teri

Dad, do you remember the Zoo and Aquarium trip where we were pushing each other in a playful way. [smiles] That is until you pushed me and I rolled down a short hill and into some bushes – some thorny bushes.

Talking about thorns. Dad wanted us to have a pet but mom was allergic to cats and dogs. So Dad got us some walking sticks you know the African bug that looks like a stick. In some ways they were the perfect pet. They ate blackberry leaves free from behind our house. In Washington they grew all year round too. You didn't need to take them for a walk. They took themselves for a walk. We had three walking sticks and then one day we had a hundred but that is another story.

Do you remember what you said to me Dad about Santa Claus? [Don nods]

Don

Your school mates had been saying that there is no Santa. I could tell this upset you. I remember what I said to you. I said, when you want to know an answer, you need to first ask me the question.

Teri

I said to you, that there are some questions that I don't want to know the answers to at least not yet. You let me keep believing. There are some things that I don't want to accept. I don't want to let you go.
[cries and runs over and hugs her father] Dad thanks for everything.

Jared

Well, it's my turn. I remember doing lots of things together when we were little. My first bike had training wheels. The three of us would go down by Puget Sound. You two would roller blade and I peddled. There were wide and long cement strips and a few places where cars turned in to go to restaurants that faced the water. One day a car zoomed right in front of us. I was about to get hit when Dad lunged and caught me and then crashed onto his knee. I noticed when we went swimming yesterday that he still has the big scar on his right knee. I would have been killed if Dad hadn't saved me. Before I learned to ride a bike without training wheels we moved to England. Dad bought us bikes there. We used to go down to the green grass near the Lytham Windmill to practice. When I got a little better, Dad would hold onto my seat and I would peddle for all I was worth. It was comforting knowing that Dad was back there. One day I was riding just fine when all of a sudden Dad ran past me. I dawned on me that he wasn't holding the bike anymore and I soon crashed.

Don

I was trying to show you that you could do it. To your credit, right after you crashed you got back on the bike and rode by yourself. That reminds me of a story.

On the non-rainy days, the three of us would go for a drive down Green Drive. It was a paved pathway with thick plants on either side. Your older Sister had her first full size bike. Your first bike was much smaller but fit your legs just fine. You two were racing. You were doing well keeping up with her when all of a sudden your front tire collided with hers. In a flash you were gone into the thick vegetation. It was like the green sea had eaten you. In a moment you come out of the undergrowth walking your bike and holding a thick branch. You turned to me and said, "I broke this off with my neck".

Jared

Dad, I know we have not always gotten along but I do love you and will miss you so.

[fighting back tears he runs over and hugs his Dad]

Pam

Well Don, I just want to tell you that we love you.

[grabs a Kleenex] I need to ask your forgiveness. I know that we picked on you because you were the youngest. I don't even remember the game but it ended with you getting your forehead smacked.

Don

[jokes] I always wondered why my forehead was so flat? Don't worry about it. I am sure that there are a lot a little brother should say I am sorry for too.

Grandma (Mom)

Don you were probably two. We were all down at Grandma and Grandpas. Grandma pulled me into the Living Room were you all were playing games. She had me watch as toddler Don went around and took the toys from each of his older siblings. They each let you do it. Grandma informed me that this wasn't right. I immediately

walked over and took the toys out of your hands and returned them to those who had been playing with them before you had been. A swat on the behind reinforced our conversation about sharing.

A few days later, your brother and sister were in school and I dropped you off at Grandmas while I ran errands. When I returned, I found Grandma sweeping up in the kitchen. I asked her what happened. She said that I shouldn't get mad at you because it was her fault.

She then said that you wanted to go outside and play in the sand box. She said no because it rained yesterday and the sand was wet. You would get that nasty cough so fast when you played on the damp ground. Grandma went and vacuumed the front room. Later, she found you in the kitchen. You had climbed up the drawers and then emptied all her flour, sugar and spices in a big pile. You made your own sandbox in the kitchen.

Don

[smiles] Changing topics.

Well, Older Brother, thanks for setting the good example. It was not easy following you through school. All the teachers had such high expectations of me. You set the limbo bar high and I came next.

Kent

[chuckles] Well Younger Brother, not so easy watching my records being broken by you. There was the swim time and number of merit badges. But I was still High School Vice President and you weren't.

Don

[friendly banter] So Kent are you still working on your book?

Kent

OK! I get it. So you were the first to self publish. The real measure will be who sells the most.

Grandpa (Dad)

My favorite story of you two is when the older brother got a new wrist rocket. Kent you put a smoke bomb in the sling and pulled it backwards. Don you had the job of lighting the fuse. You were probably six years old. In all the excitement Don you lit Kent's shirt on fire as well as the fuse. Kent was distracted by his favorite shirt being on fire. He didn't watch where he was pointing and launched the smoke bomb. It flew across the street. It bounced on the open tail gate, flew down the car and lodged on the inside of our neighbors' new station wagon. The owners watched in horror from their front room as smoke streamed out from the inside of the recently purchased addition to their family. She opened the door, walked over to Ken who was now inside their car. She handed him rags and cleaner and said call me when it's done.

Narrator

The family stories and laughter continued until the early morning. It was like everyone was afraid to stop telling stories for fear that Don would die right then. Grandma reminded everyone of the Fun-eral tomorrow. Don laughed so hard once that he fell off the couch. When he got up he staggered a bit like he was dizzy. Kim grabbed a hold of him and took him straight to bed.

Act II

**Laughter
Of Life and Love**

What's a Fun-eral?

Narrator

With a couple of hours to go before it starts, Don and Kim are at his parents' house. Don is pacing. He exclaims!

Don

What if no one comes? My gosh, I didn't think about that. How embarrassing will that be to want to say good-bye but no one shows up.

Kim

It doesn't matter how many show up. This is for you even if it is just family.

Narrator

Grandma and Grandpa went to the church early to greet people. With an hour to go Grandma calls Don.

Grandma

Don, just want to let you know that people have already started to fill the pews. My guess is you are a little nervous about how this will all work out. Just be yourself. That is who all these people have come to see. Let me hand the phone to Grandpa.

Grandpa

Son, you are ready for this. Just remember why you are doing this. You want to have a chance to laugh at your life with all the people you shared it with. You will do fine. See you soon.

Narrator

The large church is packed. The publicity worked well. Some of the people are church-goers who are dressed in their Sunday finest. Some are don't-go-to-church people and wear casual clothes including Tee Shirts that proclaim don't preach to me.

Right on time Kim and Don walk to the stage. Kim sits down and Don walks up to the podium.

Don

We would like to thank you all for coming today. The purpose of this get together is to chat about the past. Believe most of you have heard that I have a tumor. Things will only get worse. I wanted this chance to say good bye while I still can. The cancer hasn't killed me yet. This little meeting is about laughing. We meet in a church because we wanted to get everyone together in one place. Those who are religious please do not take offense as every topic is available to discuss. Those who aren't religious we are glad you came and want everyone to feel welcome and at ease.

The plan is to tell stories. I'll start it off. We would like to hear from you too. Microphones will be circulating through the audience.

More than a couple of decades ago, I sat in these chairs near the front. The meeting was packed like it is today. The meeting is called a Fast and Testimony Meeting. Believers had not eaten before the meeting. This is called Fasting. The Pastor doesn't preach at that meeting. The microphone is passed throughout the congregation; who share stories of their faith.

The gentlemen on the row in front of me is growing increasing agitated. He turns to his wife and says, this is my first Mormon meeting I've attended. I need to go out and use the rest room but if I stand up someone will hand me the microphone and expect me to talk.

[laughter]

Please make yourself at home. Let me just say this clearly please. I am grateful for my Mormon roots but Mormonism is not something I have kept up with. I am not a Churchy

type person. I say these things not to tear down but to further understanding and to just laugh.

Continuing comments on Fast And Testimony. The tradition is that Mormons don't eat two meals one Sunday a month. This is called Fasting. The twelve year old boys go to the member's houses on Fast Sunday and collect money for the poor. This is called the Fast Offering.

A non-member friend of mine told me the story that they had just moved to Utah. One Sunday there was a knock on the door. A young man standing there said he had come to collect their "fast" money. My friend's, bewildered dad replied, son we don't have any slow money and why should we give it to you anyway?

[laughter]

There is much mis-communication between believers and non-believers. Those included in the religious ceremony understand what is going on. Those on the outside don't. Take for example the Testimony Meeting. Those who understand know that you stand up and bear witness. Believers call this bearing their testimony.

A non-member friend told me the origin of the words Testify and Testimony. This is not meant to be disrespectful but facts are facts. Let me say this straight, when a Roman male wanted to make a promise, he would put his hand on his manhood, his testicles and swear what he was saying was true. Hence the word Testify and Testimony and gives new interpretation to the phrase spoken about standing up in front of everyone and saying I am going to "bare my Testimony".

[some in the audience laugh, some don't]

Please today this is not about those who believe or don't. It is about sharing time and tolerance. Let us enjoy each other's company please. When this talk is over and I do not say this rudely, I will say good-bye and leave out that door. The farewell is not meant to be grand or grand-standing just meant to be quick. This tumor will ruin me and I don't want to be remembered that way. Let the laughter be my eulogy.

I had the good fortune to travel during my life. When people found out that I was from Utah, many would ask so how many wives do you have. My standard reply is, "one alimony is enough please."

Welcome to this Fun-eral please prepare to laugh and contribute.

Childhood

Mom

[comes to the podium]

Don. I need Mom moment please. Let's see, Don was two years old. At Christmastime the usually active Don collapse on the floor with trouble breathing. We didn't know this until after but he is severely allergic to the flock coating on the Christmas tree. We rush him to the hospital.

He gasps for every breath as the medical team injects cortisone into his neck to combat the swelling. Later, the Doctor with tears flowing down his cheek consoles us, the worried parents. The doctor said, "I have never seen such a tiny baby fight so hard to stay alive. God must have a special purpose for him." All the sickness Don has when he is young, makes him compassionate.

Just two more short stories Don.

Don has always been curious.

Once I couldn't find Don in the house. I rushed around frantically suddenly there was a big laugh from on-top of the fridge. Don had opened the door. Climbed up the shelves and then sat quietly watching me search everywhere.

When we built the new two story house, the builder tried to talk us into putting in a laundry shoot from the Master Bed Room to the Wash Room. Your Dad and I looked at each other and said, Don would find it. So we did not put one in.

Don is fascinated with the world around him. He collects rocks and lots of bugs and animals.

Don you have always loved adventures especially when creatures are involved. "You were probably seven. After school, I met you at the front door with an empty quart jar. You immediately asked, "where's my frog"? I mentioned to you that it had escaped but that I found it. The frog had hopped to the room with a bowl of water. I found the frog

as I was about to sit on the bowel that had the water. Don exclaimed, you mean he was in the toilet? Don, ever the optimist said, “well Mom we should be grateful that he didn’t get flushed.” Life with you dear son is always unexpected and eventful. We love you.

Don

In the summer when I was five or six, our neighbors were getting a new cement drive way. My friends and I watched with eager excitement as the cement was poured and the surface finished. The workmen were just finishing up, when I ran up the hill. I ran down as fast as five year old feet will go. I made a running leap to jump the new cement. But with Evel Knievel precision, I landed in the wet cement about half way across the drive way. The workers, pulled me out, hosed me off and told me good try son. My sneakers were never quite the same.

Young Adult

Don

My young adult years were full of comfort of a loving home and strong community. There were also challenges to the rigid dogma that surrounded me.

Mormon youth go to lots of meeting. There was a huge “Fireside” meeting up at the college. The audience is full of teenagers. The Church Leader moved quickly to gain control of the meeting. With firm tones he talked about the speaker who was going to talk to with us about serious moral issues. Then the man said, when this is over we want you to all remember to be respectful, we want you to all pass out quietly.

We knew what he meant, but the words he chose made us laugh. There we many of us who pretended to faint.

Rachel

[grabs the microphone]

Don I just need to say to you “Mickey Mouse”.

[she pauses and watches Don’s face. Suddenly Don begins to laugh]

To let everyone else in the private joke. In High School, Don was a bit clumsy. We were quickly walking and talking between classes. Don cut the hallway corner and accidentally ran in Bertha’s ample bosoms. She didn’t get the nickname Big Bertha just because she was tall. Don’s head fit perfectly in the twin peak canyon.

We were all laughing so hard. I asked Don what the experience was like and he said, “like running full speed into a Mickey Mouse hat turned on its side”. Every time I see Mickey Mouse I think of you.

[laughs]

Don

I remember thinking I had passed out because I couldn’t breathe and suddenly everything went dark.

[chuckles]

Anna

I knew then that you are one of the good guys. Remember when you took a station wagon full of girls down to get donuts? Here's the way I remember it.

For the non-Mormon's with us today let me explain something please. In High School Mormon's get out of regular school and walk across the street to a Church for religious studies.

Don, I don't even remember the Church Teachers name but I remember you two did not get along.

He was trying to be all serious and you had made a remark that made us all laugh. He said that he is kicking you out of class for the rest of the day. You stood up and with confidence said, "I am going to the donut house anyone else want to come?" I don't know why but about 10 girls including myself said we are coming. The Teacher couldn't say anything because he is one who kicked you out of class. Good thing you drove a big car.

Don

Let talk about the Station Wagon for a moment please.

The youngest child does get the perk of being able to drive the extra family vehicle without competition. Of course the car that I get is the one no one else wanted. It is a gas guzzling huge station wagon. One that day, when we went for donuts we had every seat filled and then some.

As a side note, what was our classmate's name who drove the old Camero?

[some yells out, I don't remember his name but we all called him Rusty after his car] Well "Rusty" always gave me a hard time about driving such an uncool nerdy car.

The news got around the school that one guy and a station wagon full of beautiful ladies had stormed out of church meeting and gone to get donuts. No one ever made fun of my car after that.

I remember the Church Teacher and I didn't like each other. Suppose I didn't help when he was ill and teaching the class. He said he was having trouble hearing because of an ear infection. Later during the lesson, I raised my hand to ask a question. As I only spoke about half of my

words and silently mouthed the rest. He asked me to repeat so I said it again. It sounded something like this. "I really want to know about _____ if it is _____. Does anyone else in the _____ agree? Will someone _____ please _____ and then _____." Everyone in the class could see that this was driving the Teacher nuts. So others picked up on this and started saying sentences with silent parts missing too. The Teacher said that he is feeling worse and he left for the day.

Kristen

[grabs the microphone] I heard about that story. It made you something of a High School hero.

I am sure you don't remember me. We went to High School together. You were part of the popular crowd. But you were never conceited.

When you pass me in the halls you always give me a smile. There is something soothingly contagious about that crooked grin of yours. I always wondered why you said hi to me every day. My guess is that you saw how sad I always looked. You thought I could use a smile so you kindly shared one of your endless supply. Well, the truth is that I was suicidal. My parents were getting a mean divorce. I was doing terrible a school. I was so lost. Your simple hi and good morning was all that kept me going and literally alive. I just want to tell you thank you.

Narrator

The long room goes quiet as the veneer of laughter grows thin. Don is trying hard to think of another story. He fumbles through his notes. The silence is broken by a, "may I please have the microphone."

Blake

Truth is Don, not everyone liked you. Some of us were your competition. We couldn't understand how you made smart asky nerdy something cool. Your life always seems so carefree happy and exciting and the girls flocked around your quirkiness. A bunch of us were jealous.

We were at a Utah Church dance right after the High School band had returned from Californian tour. Someone started to do the pogo dance. You know the punk-ish move where one just hops up and down. We point at and laugh at him. We shame him into stopping. You see what we have done and start talking with him. He tells you about this new dance move. You start doing it and suddenly a whole bunch more people do too. Somehow in all this you always seem to get the girl too. I like Brenda but no she is dating you.

I am ticked off with you. You don't see my frustration but are nice to me. You are the captain of the debate team and organize the tournament at our school. You convince me to volunteer to help and now it is payback time. You show up in the room where I am in charge of giving topics for Impromptu Speeches. This is how it works. You pick a topic out of a hat. You turn around and think for 90 seconds and then have to give a speech for a couple minutes about that topic. When it is your turn I take all the topic out of the hat and write the most stupid thing I can think of on a piece of paper and fold it up and put it in the hat. Un-aware I am setting you up to fail, you pull the planted topic out of the hat. You flip around and gather your thoughts. The 90 buzzer sounds. You look so confident. I am disappointed you are not sweating. You go ahead and give a great little speech about buttons. How in the hell –heck can anyone talk so entertainingly about the word "Button". You finish and there is clapping. I don't hate you anymore and does anyone know what happened to Brenda but I digress. I am still jealous of your life, man but in a good way. Nice to be here today to laugh with you about a life that you say was ordinary but to others appears most enchanted.

King of the Back Parking lot Clan

Most of you don't know me, now that my long hair has turned to no hair. In High School, I was the self professed King of the Back Parking Lot Clan. For those of you unfamiliar with the High School Back Parking Lot, it is where all the partiers hang out for smokes and drinks. I first met Don in eighth grade. He sat ahead of me in our assigned seats in Math class. One day the teacher gave us all board work problems and then left class. I proudly pulled out my bag of marijuana. Don turn around and I threatened him. He just looked with those piercing blue eyes. He stared at me and my bag. I said sarcastically, what are you going to do run and tell on me that I smoke." Don firmly said, it is the burning weed that smokes; you are just the idiot that inhales. You are better than this. I thought to myself who the hell does he think he is telling me I am better than just smoking Marijuana. Fast forward to High School. People tended to hang out with people like themselves. The Chuchy-Do-Gooders never wanted to be seen with the Back Parking Lot People. But Don was different. He was as squeaky clean as they come but he was always friendly to everyone even me. One day after some lunchtime joint puffing, I was staggering back into the school. Don saw me struggling to get the door open. He opened it for me. I felt ashamed for being stoned at school. He looked at me and not in a preachy way but with disappointment in his voice said. You are capable of so much more. You know you are smart just need to figure out what you are going to do with it. I thought to myself, damn he did it again.

I was too out of it to reply then but his words of encouragement stuck with me. To cut this short I didn't ask for his sugar coated cheerfulness but I did often think back on his words. When friends tried to get me into hard drugs. When it came time to work for a career. Those few kind words changed my life but we can't tell Don because we don't want him to get a big head about it. Thank you my friend.

Mission

Don

Though I am not religious today, when I was nineteen I entered the Missionary Training Center. It was two months of studying Thai, Religion, eating and exercising. I found it hard to learn the Thai language in this environment. When I arrived in Thailand I did not speak well.

Our maid had a five year old daughter named Kwaang which means deer. I could understand her childish Thai words. The adults all spoke so fast. I asked them to help me speak better but they were too polite to correct me. Kwaang on the other hand would tell me when I wasn't saying the sound, or tone or words just right. She had the patience to teach me and the drive to keep after me until I got it right.

She would make us all laugh when she would enter the missionaries house and jokingly say, Hey Farang Don, your girl friend is here. Farang means foreigner. Sadly I have lost track of Kwaang.

Kim

[walks up to the podium besides Don]

Well that is not quiet the case.

Narrator

In walks a lady in her thirties holding her husband's arm. She walks up and hugs Don and Kim. There is a brief conversation in Thai.

Don

How did she know about today?

Kim

I took that the pictures of you two when you were a missionary and placed an ad in the Bangkok Times. Kwaang answered immediately. We are so glad that she and her husband are here today. They wanted to share this with you but there is more.

Narrator

The side doors open and a petite five year old girl holding a picture runs the down the carpet. She gives Don a bear hug and then shows him the faded picture of Don and her Mom.

Kwaang's Daughter

[In Thai] I have heard so much about you. Mom talks of you often. She says you are kind and caring.
[smiles] If you still need help with your Thai, I will help you.

Narrator

Kwaang asks to speak to the crowd. She asks Don to translate.

Kwaang

[In Thai] When I was about the same age as my daughter, I was lucky to meet Don. I have never met such a nice person before. My own father was an alcoholic and distant to me. Don was so different, so kind and so eager to give. My mother said to him once that we are not going to join your church and that she did not like to go to church. Don said he didn't like to go to church either. He only asked that we be his friends.

Thai is a very difficult language. There are many sounds that are similar. Don made some funny mistakes. I apologize if my words offend anyone. They are only meant to make us laugh.

Instead of asking my father how many children do you have? Don asked how many testicles do you have? Or instead of asking is anyone home, he asked is this a sexy house? He meant to say, this is my beloved son please listen to him but what he said was this is my son please go bury him.

Thai has many unique rules for example Missionaries would talk about avoiding the evil Satan called Sataan in Thai. Don was preaching once with an Elder with the last name Trasdale. In Thai the T and R together make an S sound. S at the end of a syllable is silent and the L at the

end makes an N sound. To cut it short Trasdale translates as Sataan. The Thai's to whom the missionaries were teaching thought that Elder Trasdale was Sataan.

To me Don you are an Angel. One who came into a little girl's life and taught her hope and love and friendliness. You asked for nothing but friendship in return. The world is full of examples of opposites to all of these. You are an example of what is right in the world. I am so sorry we lost touch during the years. I tell our story to my little girl. She loves you too though she had never met you until now. Good Luck. May your health be sufficient for you to truly see the meaning of your life.

Don

Thank you Kwaang for your kind words and for you and your family coming here.

Former Elder 1

Don, do you remember when you told me that you never wanted to change anyone's mind. You said it didn't make sense to make people join a religion. You said, you just want to be their friend. If they want to hear about Mormonism you are happy to tell them but you won't force conversions. This was in conflict with what our Church Leader was telling us. He wanted to get that metric count up so he looks good. In many ways you were not a very good missionary and in other ways you were awesome. Your favorite activities were service project. I remember we went to an orphanage. Right when you walked in the door, a little child ran over to you. You pick him up and he immediately wrapped his arms around your neck and fell asleep. You just sat down and waited. After forty minutes or so the child woke up and ran away. I looked at you and you were a mess. The hot sticky tropics and sweating child had melted your blue tie onto your white shirt. It didn't bother you. You wore the stain like a badge of honor. Amen Brother

Former Elder 2

Don, do you remember the Khon Kaen English class and your curiosity? Because there were not many people interested in our religion, some of the Mormon Missionaries got bored and got into trouble. Some were sent home for not hurrying by the massage parlors but participating. We all got lectured about how bad it is to do that. Sex is a sin is imprinted into all of us.

Missionaries are told to teach English during the middle of the day when not teaching religion. This keeps us young men busy.

We are living in *Khon Kaen* a city in eastern Thailand. We setup a free class for hotel staff. While taking the elevator up to the classroom on the 7th floor, Don notices that there is no second floor button. This bothers him for weeks. Don is naturally curious and yes naïve.

After finishing our class one day, Don notices stairs outside the hotel. With scientific curiosity, he convinces me to walk with him up to the second floor. We open the doors and are surprised. The large room is dark. There are huge Plexiglas dividers with loads of scantily dressed “ladies” wearing numbers. A man yells, “come in, come in we like *farangs*.” We just stand there staring. Our jaws drop. I’m sure our virgin eyes pop out at these unfamiliar but curiously curvy sights.

Don says we are sorry and that we have taken a wrong turn. The manager and working women try to encourage us to try their business with enticements of “you are going to like this.”

Don looks at my bewildered face and pushes me towards the exit door. Don opens the door to walk out when a nervous young man is walking in. In missionary mode, Don tells him he shouldn’t go in there. The young man turns and runs the other way. All this because Don wanted to find out why the elevator didn’t stop at the second floor.

Former Elder 3

Don, Elder Plaa Waan here. To those of you who don't know, Plaa Waan means whale in Thai. When I was a missionary in Thailand I was still about the same size I am now.

The Thais had never seen a person as big as me. They called me the whale.

Don, got the job of training me as a new missionary. During our first week, we ran to catch the Bangkok bus. Don hopped on the bus and I followed. As I jumped onto the first step, the rusty metal broke off from the bus. Don jumped off the bus and just looked at me as I was standing on the piece of broken metal.

After that, the word got out and the bus drivers would not stop for us. We did a lot of walking. When bus was the only way to go to our teaching appointments, Don had me hide. He watched for the right bus to stop and then would tell me. I would gently walk onto the bus.

We were out jogging once. As you can image slender Don was running a little ways ahead of me. I hear a commotion and turn the corner just in time to see a couple of muggers jump onto Don. He is doing well fighting one of the muggers but there are a bunch of them. When I turn the corner, the would-be-muggers faces fall in disbelief. I drop kick one as Don turns to the others and says, "Don't get the Whale mad, he'll eat you for an appetizer".

Immediately they run away. To this day I still laugh about that story.

Don

One last story of Thailand. I have always had good luck in Thailand. Back when I was a missionary, I saw a huge line of queuing of people. I asked who are you waiting for? The answer came back that the King is coming. I had my camera and made my way to the front of the crowd.

I asked the Thais what is the respectful etiquette for when a *farang* sees the King? They say you don't need to do anything special because you are a foreigner. I pick out a great place to take pictures. Just before the Royal Limo drives up, a swarm of press people with cameras crowded in front of me. I can no longer see where the King is going to be. Before I could react, the King gets out of the limo.

The Thai newsmen all bow down in front of the King. For a brief moment, I could see the King clearly. I snapped my pictures. Then all together, the Press stands up. I cannot see the King anymore.

I return to the USA in November. I am looking for a job to do until university starts in January. A friend of my parents tells me she has the perfect job for me. She invites me to a meeting at her house to discuss the employment. As I walk into her house, I should have noticed that everyone else has a belly on them. To cut to the main point, the job is being Santa Claus at the local mall. Now you need to appreciate that I am the same build then as now. I am skinny. Everyone one wears one fat pad. I wear three. We change up stairs and then cute female "Elves" escort us to the center courtyard and the awaiting sea of kids. I can't wear my glass so the Elves have to help me get to the seat. The days are full of listening to children's wants and lots of pictures.

The local paper comes by and takes pictures of several of the Santas. A few days later my Sister calls and says there is a picture of you in the paper. She said, at first I wasn't sure if it was you but then as Ron points out that nose has got to be Don's.

So here I am all dressed up and without my real glasses. I can see the close-up kids fine. The problem is when someone from the second floor yells hey Santa, I can see them. I would start waving and the Elves would point me in the right direction.

Once a Mother came to me and said that she is a Laotian Refugee. She asked if her son, who doesn't speak English could please see Santa? I immediately said yes. Then I started speaking to her in Laotian. The Eastern dialect of Thai is similar to Laotian. She was amazed that Santa could speak to her and her son. It was fun to explain the American Custom. I ended the conversation telling the boy in Laotian, remember to keep your room clean and help your parents.

Chai

After that story you volunteered to help the local community of Laotian Refugees. I am one of those you helped. Thank you.

Marriage Take 1

Don

I say these next words not trying to change what happened in the past. Not trying to cause concern in our new spouses but I say this so that Teri and Jared will know that there were happy times when your Mom and I were married.

First time we went shopping and you tried on Wedding Dresses. Don't think my jaw after that big drop has ever been the same. You looked so elegant and the way you looked at me leaves a lasting memory.

The truth is the first two years were heaven on earth. How did that change over nearly to decade that lead to divorce? Well I can just say that people change. What did not change is that both your Mom and Dad love you.

We were Newly Weds. Your Mom got a full time job as a secretary. I go to college and work part time. I called her during lunchtime. She didn't answer. Need to point out that this is the age when answering machines were just getting popular.

I hear a monotone voice say please leave a message.

Well, I start leaving a message for my wife. As a new husband, I get a little carried away with the romance in my message.

Suddenly a voice says, "you want me to say what"? It becomes clear that I was speaking to an answering service operator and not an answering machine.

Kids

Don

I am grateful to be a father. Sometimes when you are trying to teach your kids, they end up teaching you. We had just moved to El Paso Texas. The desert front yard was just ground cover rocks. I want to teach the kids good work habits so we are planting cacti together.

We had planted a barrel cactus and just put the ground cover cloth down. Next task is to cut a hole in the ground cloth and then cover over with rocks. Well I was in instructor mode and not paying attention. I am talking to the kids and then without thinking I push on the bump. Immediately my red hand is a pin cushion from the cactus quills. My kids turn to me and say, "Dad, you can't push on cactus". Good advice I think.

Teri

[grabs the microphone] Dad I have always liked the story you call A Plethora of Pumpkin Seeds.

It is late springtime. I am three years old. We saved the pumpkin seeds from the previous Halloween. We, mostly Dad, have prepared the soil. Today is the day to plant the seeds. Dad hands the huge bag of seeds to me to hold while he smoothes out the soil one last time. Remember I am three.

Dad turns around and sees me holding an empty bag. He asks me, where are all the seeds?

I reply, I planted them all Daddy!

Well, that summer we had more pumpkin plants than grass in the back yard. It did make mowing interesting.

Jared

Dad, I remember the story you call Posh Pushbacks. When I was seven, we were in London on a crowded Bank Holiday Weekend. The Tube or subway car was packed with people. Dad was concerned that I didn't have enough air down at my level, so he reached down and pull me up. As he did this, he must have leaned back. The posh dressed lady behind us said, in a polite but firm voice, I caan't be puushed any furthar."

Another story I remember was when we were living in Northwest England. Dad's company rented us a huge house that had a thatched roof. Mom had asked me had to go from the dining room and get the pop out of the fridge in the kitchen.

I came back into the dining room and handed the two litter bottle to Mom. As she opened the cap, she was immediately covered with pop spray. I said sorry Mom, but I just had to do a little shake dance on my way from the kitchen.

Don

When Teri was twelve she got to come to "bring your daughter to work day" The kids were supposed to be 14 and Teri was only 12 but I signed her up anyway. I had her wear a dress so she would look older. Teri got to see what work is like for her dad. At the end of the day she said to me, Dad all you do is talk and go to meetings.

Changing stories. We had just moved when Jared was ten. There wasn't a Scout Leading for his age group so I volunteered. We were doing a badge on rocks. I asked Jared what is petrified wood? With an inquisitive look, he guessed, it is wood that died saying AARRGGHH!

Work

Don

My profession is Production Engineering Management in the Aerospace Industry. Twenty plus years ago during my first weeks on the job, my lead engineer took me to the machine shop. It was impressive seeing the eight feet in diameter chunks of metal being machined to the final part. With pride he told me about how it took days to get the part ready for the cutting down to size. Just then an annoying physicist shows up. He starts issuing orders that this multi-million dollar machine is his and that he has first priority. He looks at our part and then with wild hand gestures, yells that his part is to be put onto the machine immediately. The Physicist leaves and I say to my lead, you took that pretty well. He smiles and grabs a transportation tag. He fills it out and puts it on the physicist's part. He routes the other guys part to another plant some thirty miles south. By the time they find out what has happened our part is complete.

Years later, I managed the Systems Integration Lab for a Maritime patrol airplane. There were both Americans and British on my team.

Foreign assignments are cultural exchanges. We taught them about No Tie Day Friday and they taught us that the British way to flip someone off was with two fingers.

The Brits went on to explain that it goes back over five hundred years ago to when the British were fighting the French. The British mowed down the French. The Brits secret weapon was the long bow. When the French caught a British Bowman, they chopped off his two fingers used to pull back the bow's string.

It was my job to inform the lab technicians that we need to work during the Christmas Vacation to catch up schedule. When one of the Technicians heard the news he immediately held up three fingers towards me. I asked him to help me understand what he meant. He said he was

flipping me off in his language, two fingers and in mine,
with another finger for a total of three fingers.
[holds up three fingers] Oops that was not meant to be
rude just a visual demonstration. Hope no one took
offense.

Deal with the Divorce

Don

The summer of the Divorce was a season of contrasts for me. The same week I signed my divorce papers, my parents celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary. Strangely funny how two independent events can cosmically collide?

The huge party was uncomfortable for me. Many I spoke with were uneasy not knowing how to talk with me about my recent split up. One senior lady, who I hadn't seen in years, fidgets while talking with me. She finally blurts out, "so you're single." The blatant simple truth caught me by surprise. I mumble back, "yes, but it is not contagious." We both laugh but I am hiding my hurt.

In the echoing quiet, cleaning up after the party, I struggle with grief and gratitude. I mourn for the marriage that could have been. I am glad to be free of the marriage that was. It hurts that I will not have a half century marriage like my parents. I long and hope that one day I will meet someone like Kim. At that point it is only a wish.

I was living in England. My Ex came back to the States. The wounds have never healed that she took my son away from me. All of our stuff is mixed together and in storage. My Ex gets the boxes out of storage that have a lot of my stuff too.

Fast forward a year, I am in the States on home leave. As I drive up to their house I see boxes on the front yard. I am here to pick them up. This will also be the first time I meet my Ex's new husband.

As fate has it, her new husband drives up to the house at the same time I do. We each get out of our cars at the same time. We strut and look like two alpha males on the scene. I glance at my boxes of stuff on the front yard grass. It dawns on me how funny this all looks. I turn to him and say, "I need to get these boxes off the lawn or your neighbors will think she is mad at you!" We both laugh. It is amazing how much two divorced men have in common.

Don

After my foreign assignment in England. I move to Huntsville Alabama. It is an interesting eclectic city of Southerners and out of towners. A local Secretary asks me, 'if I am from England or am I a Damn Yankee". I answer that England is good.

Love at First Write

We first meet when, Kim and I literally bump into each other at the Atlanta Airport. I had a long lay-over. I found a quite spot by the display on how African Rock Sculptures are made.

Aunt Lynn had made me Corn Bread for my trip. I just grabbed the honey bear. In my jet lag state, I forgot to take the top off. The plastic cap projectile launched up into the air at exactly the same time as Kim – a person at this time that I do not know – just happens to be walking by. There is no delicate way to say this so I'll just say it. The cap flew down Kim's blouse. Little did I know in that embarrassing moment that I would meet the last love of my life.

We exchange contact details. We e-mailed each other for a couple of months. We call this time, Love at First Write. I flew to Kim's city for a week of dates. Near Thanksgiving, Kim comes to my city.

You need to understand that Kim came straight to see me from a foreign trip. She is jet lagged. I pick her up at the airport. We do lunch and then stop at an Asian Market. Kim says she will make us a special dinner. I have to go back to work because a project must complete before the Thanksgiving break. I come home early to find a note from Kim. She said she is going for a short walk but will be back soon. I notice that she has forgotten her cell phone. I continue working on the critical project deadlines when I notice that it is dark. I pace for fifteen minutes and then call the police to ask advice. The dispatcher announces that they have a car on the corner of Balch and Gooch and they will be at my house soon.

The young officer and I talk about the situation. I express that I am concerned that Kim is jet lagged. The last info I have is that she is going for a short walk but that was hours ago.

The officer asks for a picture. He asks if I am concerned for Kim's safety. I answer yes because she is jet lagged and forgot her cell phone.

I repeat that she came here straight from a business trip in Europe. She went for a walk hours ago and has not returned. The policeman asks, “do you think she may be in danger?” With concern, I reply, “I think it is possible that is why I am worried.” The policeman responds, “well, I’ve got just a few more questions and the form will be complete.” Suddenly the phone rings.

“Hello Kim t! Where are you? Wal-Mart! Which one? How did you get all the way tout here? You walked and then caught a taxi. I was worried about you so I called the police. He is filling out the report as we speak.” Kim laughs and calmly replies...

“Sorry for the trouble but you should not worry. Want to come pick me up?” Motivated I reply, “I’m leaving now and will be there in 15 minutes.” We meet at Wal-Mart. I see from Kim’s face that she thinks I am mad at her. I am not mad but glad to see her.

Kim was having a shopping moment and lost track of time buying presents for her staff. The policeman follows me to Wal-Mart. He comes in and makes sure Kim is fine. We thank him for his efforts. He tells us, “Y’all be good. Don’t lose her again.”

Narrator

Everyone laughs. Don is laughing so hard that he suddenly gets dizzy. He stops talking and grabs his head. The room and people appear to spin. He staggers to the side and falls over. Kim quickly helps him back to his feet. Don grabs the podium for support.

Don

Wow that was trippy. I couldn’t have planned that better if I had tried. Next time I just need a hat, cane and vaudeville dance.

Narrator

The audience is silent. Everyone was having so much fun that they forget the reason behind today’s laughter. It is

clear that everything is not fine with Don. The cancer like the Master of Ceremonies makes its voice heard.

Fun-eral's Farewells

Don

Why do people think that when someone is dying they suddenly get great wisdom? It is like when you have a date with death that it is expected you have the keys to the mysteries of the universe.

Well I do have a few insights. [pause] What is the secret of Life? Eat red cabbage. The Germans live for a long time. [Don laughs] Ok, I just said that to make a joke after I fell over.

I do have three lessons learned from my life that I would like to share. They are: Realize self; Share Love and Better the world.

I remember when I found myself. It was a business meeting finally having the confidence to stand up to everyone else and make my idea heard. The boss said that no one else had thought of that. Co-workers start tearing it down. I hold my ground and say, let's try it; if it fails then you can all laugh at me. We did it. It worked. The power to be creative starts with a confident heart.

My happiest memories are of sharing love. First as a son, then two blissful years of marriage; next being a father and now as Kim's husband. Love has a short half life and needs to be shared immediately not put on a distant shelf.

When one is dying, one wanes philosophical and asks what have I done that will be still be here when I am gone? I am proud that leave my children to carry on.

Many of you don't know that I write for a hobby. Key word here is write because no one but me has published. It is a story about what if there wasn't an American Civil War? What if we found a way to resolve our differences other than the battlefield? Copies of 'Civil Sense' are available at www.lulu.com. I had to get one advert in.

[takes a drink of water and slowly speaks] Thank you all for coming here today. This has been a fun-eral. A time to laugh together on an ordinary life that did have its moments. [Don pauses and thinks that it is funny to talk about one's life in the past tense] I ask only one thing please. Remember me as I am in these stories. Focus on the three act comedy not the tragic ending that awaits me. Thank you all for being part of my life and letting me be part of yours.

Good-bye Family

Narrator

Don and Kim make their way through the crowd. They are plenty of hugs and handshakes. There are cheers, tears and lots of laughter. At the end of the room, Don waves good-bye.

Kim, Don and Kids get into the limo. They drive around Don's hometown. Past the schools where he learned bookwork and by the store where he had his first job. Don has the limo stop at a Park. He gets out and runs around and opens the door for Kim and Kids.

Don

Look around you please. This is more than just a green park. [pauses] This is where I was born.

Jared

[jokes] What in a Park? I know you are old but didn't they have hospitals back then.

Don

It was a hospital back then. Years later, and nothing to do with me being born here, the place was torn down. The point is building up and breaking down, life and death are natural cycles. I want you all to know that I loved you. All I leave to prove that I was here is you two kids and the love for a wife.

Kim

Don, what the fun-eral shows is that you have positively impacted the lives of many people. I make you a promise that I will work to get your book published as well.

Don

[squeezes Kim's hand] Thank you my love.

Teri and Jared, I'd like to share with you my philosophy to raising kids. I wanted you to have as much fun and as many experiences as we could when we were together. Always in my mind, was preparing you two to be successful adults. The medieval sword is hard on the outside so it can survive in hits of battle. It is also softly tough in the center so that it will bounce back from life's blows. I know you two think I was often hard on you especially in contrast to your soft mother. Know what I did, I did to make you strong and functional adults. I love you!

Narrator

There in the Nursery turned playing field, the family talks honestly about life and about the pending separation. They laugh and cry and laugh some more. The bright sunshine turns to dusk and they know it is time to head to the Grandparents house.

Grandma has prepared Swiss Steak. It is Don's favorite. The mood is somber as everyone knows separation is imminent. The meal is finished. There are hugs and kisses and then Don and Kim head to bed. Tomorrow, they are driving. Don wants to say good-bye to the Grand Canyon and then it is onto LA to catch a plane for Europe.

Start the Travels Together

Narrator

The road south is quiet. Don has driven for hours but they are now getting gas and upon Kim's insistence changing drivers. Soon it is back on the road. Just the two of them, together, going the same direction.

Don

Do you know Kim it is nice to be with you? Some of our happiest memories are on trips. There is something about being together with no cell phone coverage or distractions just the hum of the road and great conversations.

Kim

Last year we were driving not far from here on the scenic route when you started honking the horn. I thought you had lost your marbles. You said, "it is getting dark and deer wander onto the road. I just shook my head as you honked at every bend on that narrow winding beautiful mountain road.

Don

You shook your head at me until we turned that corner and saw that live deer near the road. From then on it was, Don honk more. HONK MORE!
[both laugh]

Narrator

They stop at the Grand Canyon. They take pictures and sit down a rock near the rim.

Don

When one lives fifty years it is hard understand a place where wind and rain have eroded over millions of years to show billions of years of the earth's history.

Kim

Right now I am wondering how to fill the canyon in my heart.
It is the hole that will be there when you are not.

Brit Mu Briefly

Narrator

Kim and Don take a taxi through London. They run into Harrod's and buy Crispy Cream Donuts while the driver waits. They weave their way through London traffic to the British Museum.

Don

Kim, I know that Museums are really not your favorite. I have a plan. We will run through over five thousand years of history in fifty minutes. Thanks for doing this.

Kim

I like "oldy worldy" classy decorations. I just get bored with all the history.

Don

Not today. First stop is the first farmers of the Fertile Crescent. You can thank them when you eat bread and steak. They planted the first crops and domesticated cows.

Kim

So they thought hamburger on the hoof was easier than hunting. [both laugh]

Don

Next stop, Egyptians. They used the Nile water for the crops and cows. The people population exploded. They worshiped water and built pyramids to symbolize the mountains where the water comes from. The pyramids were started to be built by religious follower but finished by slaves. Kim, come look at this picture of an Egyptian please. Sand just like them: head to the side, shoulders straight on and feet in a line.

Kim

[tries to walk and starts to fall when Don catches her with a big hug] It is not easy to walk like an Egyptian.

Don

I know, this next part will be Greek to you. The Greeks and Romans were civilized complete with stone buildings and indoor plumbing. Next came the dark ages. No indoor plumbing for the next thousand years. People started going to church and stopped asking why. Toilets were out door wooden boxes. Men would come and take the loo contents to be spread on the farmer fields.

Kim

It was a “crappy” job but someone had to do it.

Don

[looks at his watch] Here we are right on time. We end our British Museum Briefly tour here at the Rosetta Stone. Egypt was conquered by Christians. The new rulers outlawed using hieroglyphics as too pagan. Over the years people forgot how to speak and read it. Side note, Greek Alexander conquered Egypt hundreds of years before Christ was born. Alexander founded a city called Alexandria after himself. For over a thousand years, it was law that every book that entered the city had to be copied before the owners left. The main point is there were hundreds of thousands of scroll books at the Library of Alexandria. The Muslims finished burning them when they conquered Egypt. Back to this stone, see the different languages. Well it is the same message written in three languages. People could still read Greek and it let them figure out how to read Egyptian Hieroglyphics again. Just wanted to share with you some of the things that people made before they became history themselves. History is full of builders, breakers and believers. I have always wanted to be a builder.

Kim

And you have!

Five thousand years in fifty minutes, that was amazing Don. You always have a way of making anything into an adventure. This was great fun! What did you once say to me about your writing? [pauses] You like to write like a bikini – it needs to be long enough to cover the material and short enough to keep it interesting. This was a great Bikini tour!

Narrator

Kim and Don go to a Greek Restaurant near the Museum. They share a plate of olives as Don tells how Olives were the base of the ancient Greek economy. Slaves picked and processed the olives into oil. It gave the Greeks lots of free time to think. Don accidentally loses coordination and spills his soup all over the table. He is embarrassed but jokes, “Just trying to add a little color to the table setting”. The next few days Kim and Don stay at a friend’s house in London. They take short walks to experience day to day London and eat fish and chips and take in a West End Play. Kim flies back to the USA to see the children for a few weeks while Don rests and finds time to see a few more museums.

Eye Full Tower

Narrator

Kim flies back to London. She and Don take the Chunnel from London to Paris. They talk the whole way there. Don looks out the window and smiles at Kim.

Don

The green countryside is nice to look at. There is something fun about riding a train. But when you stop to think about it – we are following tracks that someone else made.

I am thinking of when my kids were young. It was one of their first plane rides. They looked out the window and asked me why is there a giant snake on the ground. I explained that it is a big river that we are far above it and that is why it looks small.

I thought to myself that it is the unexpected turns that give a river its character. It is the same way with life. I am so glad we met.

Kim

I have got to tell you we almost didn't. I was miles away when I was walking by at the Atlanta Airport. At first when I watched the cap go down my cleavage, I thought to myself, "well he has some nerve." My head said to keep walking on but I don't know why but I stopped. I looked at your face. It was full of surprise and blushing. I thought to myself, I have got to hear what he has got to say about this. Do you remember what you said?

Don

No?

Kim

You said, "well if you wanted some of this honey and cornbread you should just ask? You've got the cap already. We chuckled and then you got super shy and embarrassed. It was different than any man I had ever met. I was interested and wanted to learn more about you.

Don

I could tell you were miles away at first but what impressed me was how quickly you adapted to the situation and laughed. I liked that and I still do.

Narrator

Kim and Don tour Paris. They see the Champs-Elysees and Arc de Triomphe. They stopped long enough to do a quick running look at the paintings at the Louvre. They sit on a bench and just stare at the paintings.

Don

Pigments are what give the painting color. Many are mineral based like the blue is lapis lazuli and comes from Afghanistan. It shows how much the Europeans wanted color if they imported the blue from far away Afghanistan. The challenge was to find something to bind the pigment to the canvas. At first heated beeswax was used, then egg whites and then oil. Each painting would have cost a fortune to make so only the rich could afford them. Many of the paintings are religious based because the Church had a lot of money. In a time before cameras the rich had portraits of themselves painted as a way to say, hey look at me.

Kim

So paintings are held together with insects, eggs and oils. This is either the recipe for a masterpiece or a very strange omelet.
[walks to another room] so why are impressionistic painting fuzzy blurry?

Don

Camera were invented that could make clear pictures. Artists had a hard time competing with the camera. Some Artists struck back and painted how the scene felt to them using brilliant colors and contrasts with fuzzy blurry to add emotion.

Kim

So Monet made a lot of Money painting how scenes feel. Maybe it is just how things look coming out of the pub after binge drinking.

Narrator

It has been amazing weeks of site seeing from medieval churches to catacombs where fourteenth century plague victim bones are stacked because there were too many to bury. From Napoleon's tomb to the artwork and architecture and a couple of shows complete with artistic nudity. The couple has had an enchanted time in the romantic city. Their last night, they are eating at the restaurant on top of the Eiffel Tower.

Don

[to Kim] Can you believe this night-time view? It is an Eye-Full!

I love Paris. I do think the people outside of Paris are friendlier especially towards Americans. When I worked for Boeing, I spent several weeks on-site at a Supplier in southern France. I found that the French are like their bread bit hard and crusty on the outside but soft inside. They were actually very friendly to me even as we worked out production problems and cultural clashes.

Kim

[nods to Don as the waiter bring their food] French food is amazing. These sauces are ambrosia.

Don

Speaking of the sauces, I've heard that a couple hundred years ago Paris was sieged by invaders. The foreign army, not sure if it was the Germans or who, surrounded the city. After a while the Parisians began to starve. The story is that they invented awesome sauces to hide the spoiled meat and even leather they were reduced to eating. Like many times in history, something good comes out of some bad. [Lifts his filled fork] Cheers to surviving the siege!

Kim

Speaking of Saucy, that show today had a spicy ending when the lady's dropped their blouses. Suddenly you know that you are not in Kansas anymore. After we finish here let's head back to the hotel for our own fireworks show.

Narrator

Don slept most of the way back to London. Several times when the trip got noisy and Kim could not see him breathing, she touched him just to make sure he was ok.

They rest for several weeks. Don gets him a cane as the dizziness increases when he is tired. He jokes that the cane is to fend off muggers because the Whale isn't with him. After a couple of week of resting, Kim and Don fly to Rome.

Whirl Rome-ance (Call as I See ‘Em)

Narrator

Kim and Don hold hands on a tour bus in Rome. Their necks turn from side to side as the Tour Operator explains how the Romans conquered all the land around the Mediterranean Sea. En-route to the Coliseum, Kim looks seriously at Don.

Kim

[firmly] Don, I know you like straight talk so here I go. Your cane – what do you call it your stabilizer stick – bothers you. You see it as a visible sign that you are losing this fight and the doctors will one day be right. You are scaring me Don. The last time you fell over [pause] did you break your funny bone? You are far more negative now and less happy than I have ever seen you. Enough! There is more fight in you. I know you even if right now you don't. You must fight this Don. Every day and every second, you fight this tumor. I believe the more you laugh the less it grows.

Narrator

The couple continues the tour in silence. Taking pictures and touching but not talking. At the Coliseum, Kim and Don are alone. Don smiles at Kim.

Don

I am hungry but this is probably not a good place to say I am as hungry as a lion. [Kim hugs Don]
Have you heard about the Roman Emperor? He was all thumbs?
Why do so many couples come to Rome? For the Rome-ance?

Kim

Those jokes are Christmas Cracker caliber but they make us laugh and that is a good thing.

Don

Do you know where the Coliseum got its name?

Kim

No. Do tell!

Don

It was because of a referee. He said "I call as I see 'em. So they named the place a coliseum. OK, maybe not. Have you notice how big things are in Rome? I'll bet their favorite cartoon is Maximus Mouse instead of Micky and Minnie

Kim

Gag, what have I started?

Narrator

Next Kim and Don walk along what used to be the Circus Maximus. Don flips through the tourist guide and starts commenting.

Don

The Roman city of Rome had a million people and a fourth of them could fit at the Circus Maximus. This place must have been huge. Twelve chariots could fit side by side but today hardly a stone is left in place. Were the stones stolen by individuals or turned into a church by the Christians?

Don

[to Kim] I have heard two legends about Trevi Fountain. One is whoever throws a coin into the fountain will return to Rome. The other is that when a couple throw coins into the fountain together that there romance will increase.
[gives Kim a coin and gentle grabs her hand]
Ready, make a silent wish. Throw.

Narrator

They watch as the coins dance to the bottom of the fountain. Don makes a joke and throws in another coin just in case in the hope that he will be able to return to Rome. Kim throws another coin in the fountain too.

They look at each other then sit down on a nearby bench. The world around them is in such a hurry to get somewhere else. They just want to lasso the present and hold onto it. Quietly they kiss. Silently they reflect in the moment. They each are quick to think of the legend that whoever throws a coin into the fountain will return to Rome. They both know this will be only half right.

That night they eat dinner outside. The candlelight flicker adds romance to the couple's faces. They calmly watch the commotion of a city in a hurry. They slowly look deep into each other's eyes. Kim moves her chair so she can put her head onto Don's shoulder. The couple silently connects with body language. Later, they return to the hotel for more connecting. The next morning they fly back to London for rest, romance and casual day trips.

Great Wow of China

Narrator

During the long plane ride to Asia, Don massages Kim's feet. She suffers from poor circulation. She melts like chocolate in Don's strong rubbing hands. In the relaxed moment, Don shares his thoughts with Kim.

Don

What amazed me about Rome was that even after two thousand years, you can still see what life was like for the Romans. The ruins bear witness to the people who built them. The worn buildings are also evidence that nature and chaos win.

Remember turning thirty and realizing that you can't eat anything you want or it will go to your middle? Or turning forty and learning that life now comes with pains. Not sure what happens when you turn fifty but I would have liked to have found out.

Kim

Well that it is then. When we get to Thailand we will celebrate your fiftieth birthday a bit early.

Don

I'll celebrate my half century birthday, if you will do the same.

Kim

[playfully] Don't forget that yours comes first though! You always liked things 50-50! Ok, it's a double birth-date it is then. But we will have to have two cakes. Yours will be chocolate with a design of how something is made. You always like that. Mine will be something creamy with a fancy design.

Don

I can see what is happening next. There will be an excuse to buy new shoes and handbag just for the occasion!

Narrator

Fast forward and Kim and Don are walking on the Great Wall of China. Don walks with his cane and leans on it more frequently. He reads from the guidebook.

Don

The Great Wall and its branches are about four thousand miles long. Think of the millions of people it would take to build a wall like this. According to Wikipedia, it's estimated that a million people died during the hazardous building. The purpose of the wall was protecting China from invading armies. OK, enough of the facts.

[With a grin he says to Kim] Is it just me or do you want to start singing "Just Another Brick in the Wall"?

Kim

Well, I call this the Great Wow of China! It is amazing how they built over the ups and downs of the land. Probably a good parable here about building one's life over the up and down times.

Narrator

Kim and Don travel to Xi'an to see the Terracotta Warriors. Don uses his cane during the long walks along the fired earth figures.

Don

[reads] The first Emperor, Qin Shi Huang, had all these ten thousand clay figures built. Think how powerful he must have been to be the first to unite all of China in life and to order the creation of all this.

The purpose of this place was to give him an army for the afterlife. I am not sure who one fights with a clay army, maybe Chia Pet pottery monsters.

Kim

Their faces look fierce but their bodies are clay. So many of life's problems are like this. They look unbeatable but when you stand up to them they crumble. Wonder what religion believed that a body turned to ashes has a spirit that can lead a fired clay-mation army to world conquest?

Don

This gives me meaning to a "potty-mouth" soldier. The Say soldiers, I mean, clay soldiers are show pieces of the rich and powerful. Just like building the Woof of Changelings [corrects himself] the Wall of China. The leaders cared nothing for the masses who died in large numbers completing these projects.

Narrator

Kim and Don took a week long cruise along the thousand mile long Grand Canal. They marvel at how huge numbers of people armed with manual tools could complete such an amazing project. Kim and Don are on the top deck as the ship enters the last port on this boat ride.

Don

The Grand Canal was built to move armies and increase trade especially move grain to the capital cities. How could people with just hand tools make this Grand Canal?

Kim

One basket full at a time and lots and lots of people and baskets. I wonder how the overseers motivated the work force? What it positive rewards or fear of punishment of both? Wonder if they used gunpowder explosives?

Don

I digress for a moment. I heard this story of where fireworks came from. Bamboo grows so fast that it actually captures air in its segments. Long ago the China burned sections of bamboo in a fire. The air inside expands rapidly and

explodes with a crack. The noise was used to scare away demons.

Later a Chinese Chemist, probably searching for the elixir of life combined kitchen ingredients to make gun powder. Someone combined the bamboo and the gunpowder and invented fireworks. Now back to your comment, think of what the moved earth must weigh? Every mile is like moving several pygmies [pauses] I mean pyramids.

Narrator

Don is driving to the airport. He gets lost. The streets get more and more narrow. Don accidentally smashes the side mirror off of the rental car.

Don

Oops! How many years of bad luck does one get for smashing a plastic side mirror? Good thing I won't be around to see it?

Kim

[jet lagged] What do you mean talk that way? Do you stop to think at all about those of us who will be left to carry on after you are gone? I have grown so used to having you here? How am I to go on when you are gone?

Don

[speaks slowly] We spent so much of our marriage apart due to living lives in to different cities. Just think of it as more distance between us.

Kim

Being married to you gave me security. Even when we didn't see each other, we called and wrote almost every day. Many nights, I came home late. I crashed on the bed still in my work clothes. The last thing I would see was my computer. I felt comfort knowing there is a message from you in my e-mail even if I was too tired to open it.

Don

[quickly] Just remember my love, the fluster of the rib cages. [pauses] Oh have no idea what I am trying to say here. It was a brilliant idea to give you comfort sorry I can't remember the words.

Let me change topics for a moment. When I was in Kindergarten someone said the word buttock but I thought they said – Beu-tex. I went around for weeks saying things like that is a pain in the beu-tex. At first no one understood me and later my friends started using the word too. Fast forward to High School. It was one of my first debates. My opponent talked first. He spoke fast with a huge vocabulary of fancy words. When it was my turn I just started making up words using prefixes and suffixes that sounded like I knew what I was talking about. I used phrases like “the results are anti-flim-betical” and the “arguments of my opponent are clearly dis-con-ject-tabulated”. For the first time in his life he didn't understand the words. How could he? I was making them up on the spot. He got so flustered that he gave up the match. Sometimes it's not what you say but the amount of confidence in your voice.

Kim, I am sorry about the mirror and my comments. From now on, I will be more understanding of how hard this is for you also. Let's just focus on the moment at hand. Would you like a bowl of “nudes” [clears his throat] noodles? I am not sure but that was probably more Freudian slip than tumor tongue twister.

Narrator

Kim and Don end their Chinese adventure with another Ferry ride across Hong Kong harbor to see the sky scraper lights but mostly to stare into each others' eyes that are highlighted with sunset hues and a short but full lifetime of memories. After a night of passion, the couple is running late. They have to hurry through the Hong Kong airport security. They are walking quickly when Security Personnel yell at them. Don had forgotten his camera at the checkpoint and they ran after him to give it back. Don mumbles to himself, can't forget my camera. It may be all that's left of my memory.

Floats, Phallus and Food

Narrator

Kim and Don fly to Bangkok, city of angels and sinners too. Every day Kim and Don explore Temples and interesting sights in this crowded, soiled and enchanted city. It is November, the end of the Rainy Season and the beginning of Rice Harvest. Don is telling Kim about when he lived in El Paso Texas.

Don

El Paso is just over the border with Mexico, so no surprise there are a lot of Hispanics there. At Christmas, the locals take a small paper bag and fill it part way with sand and then put a candle in it. It makes an inexpensive and interesting Christmas ornamental light called a loo-new-be-dos I mean luminaries.

After Christmas the kids and I had a few paper bags left over. We decided to put the opened bag over a big candle. The sack fills with hot air and then floats above the ground like a helium balloon. Accidentally, a couple of the sacks catch fire and we end up burning the dead grass in most of the back yard before we put out the fire with the garden hose. In the Spring, the grass came back better and greener because the dead wood was gone. The point here is know when to clear out the dead and focus on life.

[holds a wrapped present] Kim, would you open this please and then let me explain.

Kim

[unwraps the package] it's a small boat that looks vaguely like your face with a few Thai features. [laughs and jokes] You really know what to get a girl. Who wants a new handbag when she can have one of these?

Don

Tonight is the celebration of Loi Kratong, or floating banana leaf boats. It is a festival to thank the water goddess for watering the rice plants which will soon be picked.

It is also a chance to float a small boat away and say good-bye to one's sorrows, sadness and regrets. You light a candle and then push them away. You watch from the shore and they get further away until the candle goes out and they are forgotten.

Kim

[seriously] Thanks for the gift. I will keep it for a while. I am not ready to say good-bye to this face yet. There will be other Loi Kratongs.

Meanwhile since we are going to hang onto your face float, let's get other banana leaf boats and sail our worries away!

Narrator

So they did just that. They buy the boats, light the candles and watch as their worries at least for a moment sail away. Kim and Don rest for a week. They take small walks and buy pineapples and sticky rice and mangos from street vendors.

Kim and Don fly to Angkor Wat in Cambodia. The journey was difficult to reach the World Heritage Site but worth it once they got there.

Don

[reads from the guide book] Angkor Wat was built by the Khmer Empire in the 12th Century. First it was a Hindu Temple and then later a Buddhist Temple. It is so important that it is on the Cambodian Flag.

Kim

This is exquisite architecture.

Narrator

Kim and Don wander through the structures for hours. They stop to eat the lunch they brought with them. They curiously watch many locals worshipping at a cylinder shape.

Don

There is no delicate way to say this so I'll just say it. Certainly many Hindus and Christians will not agree with what I say but it is interesting. Some scholars think that the origin of cylinder like this - that are called Lingam or Shiva Linga - is the penis called by the euphemism name phallus. Some people think that the Center towers here and the Chedis at Wat's like Wat Phra Kaew are based on the same premise. The same thing is said about the Egyptian obelisk, Christian Church spires and the Washington Monument. It is supposed that they started out as fertility symbols. They are monuments to male power. It makes a lot of sense that the ancients would have been obsessed with procreation. Power was based on who had the most people. Today to some extent it still is but education and productivity are added to the equation.

Kim

You are not planning on "bearing your testimony" are you? It does give new meaning to "erecting" a building. You should see the celebration I have planned for you tonight.

Narrator

Kim and Don return to Bangkok. They take it easy and also find time to visit the Ancient City of Thai Architecture and the Red Cross Snake farm where cobras are milked of venom and it is turning into anti-venom.

This is their last night in Bangkok before they flight to the beaches in Southern Thailand. They order a feast of Thai food. Waxing nostalgic, Don comments on the food.

Don

As I am becoming history, I find it interesting that there are echoes all around us of a human history that is interlinked. Take for example, the potatoes, peanuts and chilies in these delicious dishes originated half the world away. Hundreds of years ago the Portuguese sailed in windblown wooden ships from South America to Thailand with stops along the way. The Thai word for bread is “pang” which is similar to Portuguese word pão. The curry we are savoring came originally from India. One can only hope that we as a human race become as tolerant and inclusive as Thai food. The fusion of flavors is extraordinary. There is hope that we will all get along. I like foody Try Thai. I mean Thai food!

Kim

Look at all this fresh fruit! It is a rainbow of eatable colors. It is a cornucopia of tastes and textures. This Rambutan looks more like a bug than a fruit. There should be a cure for cancer in all this. Here Don, eat this Mangosteen it is worth a try.

I like how Thai food balance sweet, sour, salty and spicy. Sounds like a good recipe for life. I’ve heard that garlic is an aphrodisiac, here Don try this dish. With all this spice it should be an interesting night tonight before we travel to the beach tomorrow.

Mounds and Bays

Narrator

During the flight south, Don hands Kim an envelope. She opens it and lets out an excited, Oh yeah. Don got Kim tickets to a day spa.

They are both glued to the window of the small plane as they approach Phuket. There are lush green mounds and brown sandy bays with aqua marine water.

They check into the hotel. Kim hurries off to her appointment at the day spa. Don rests for hours then takes a taxi to the beach. He walks along the light-brown sand and clear water. Don is in pondering mode. It has been over a year since he first got the news from the doctors. He and his cane walk slowly where the warm water meets the soft sandy beach. A couple of times he gets dizzy and falls on the sand that cushions his fall.

Don

[thinks to himself and wades] So how long has it been? Fifteen months since the doctors told me I had 6 to 12 months to live. Maybe all the fruit does slow the cancer's development. Maybe Kim is right and it is the laughter. Wow! I can tell I am dying my slurred speech is getting worse. I get dizzy more often but thank fully I am not in much pain. Every day I am with to Kim and able to do adventure, I am lucky. Very lucky. I am blessed truly blessed. I can see from Kim's face that all this daily uncertainty to my condition is wearing on her.

[Don dizzily falls into the shallow water]

Narrator

Several young, beautiful girls run over to help Don up. They help him to seats near the shore. They think he is drunk a scene they see so often. An older white male runs over to the girls and yells at them that he is paying for their time not this guy.

The Bar Girls look at the farang, foreigner but do not understand him. Don speaks Thai to the girls.

Don

Sawaddee Khrap. Khor khorp khun thee khun thang lai dai chuay phom khrap. Hi, thank you all for helping me.

Bar Girl 1

Oiy,tham-mai khun phuut Thai dai kha?
Wow, why can you can you speak Thai.

Don

[in Thai] That is a long story. I am sorry that I have caused you all trouble with your customer.

Bar Girl 2

[Thai] That is ok, we bored of him already but we like you.

Don

[rubs his wedding ring and speaks in Thai] Ladies, I ask to speak directly please. I am not like the other foreigners here. I am happily married. I also want you to know please that I am not drunk but have dizziness. Since I cost you all business, would you let me buy you all a nice lunch please?

Bar Girl 1

[Thai] Food is good but what could after is a lot more fun.

Don

[Thai] Thank you ladies but I will settle for lunch.
[politely calls for the waiter]

Narrator

The table top is full of Thai food. The three bar girls and Don have light conversation while eating. Suddenly a fat white lady comes over to the table and starts yelling at Don.

Jana

[In English] Men like you make me sick. You come here to this beautiful place and buy young ladies for sex. You act like you own them. I hope you get Aids or some horrible STD. I will be taking pictures of you and I will find out who you are and send them to your wife!

Don

Woman. I appreciate your crusade and may even agree with it but your religious zeal has misjudged me. I am here in Thailand because thanks to a tumor, I will soon die. My wife is at a day spa and we will meet-up for dinner. I did not hire these ladies for entertainment. I was walking along the shore when I got dizzy and fell over. They fished me out of the water and helped me get to this chair. They were with a man like the ones you are fighting against. He got mad because they helped me and he ran away in a huff. I offered to buy the ladies lunch as a thank you. The situation is not what you think.

Jana

[In English] Well let that be a lesson to you that I and my friends are watching you.
[walks away with attitude]

Narrator

Don translates the conversation to the bar girls. One gets mad and runs after the large white lady to tell her off in broken English.

Bar Girl 1

[in Thai to Don] Your wife is lucky lady to have a faithful husband. It is a dream that each of us want but we have to eat today too.
Most white men who come to Phuket, look at girls like us and want only sex. They only see me as two mounds and hole to use for a short while. Thank you for being kind to us.

Don

[Thai] It was you all who saved me from the water. I thank you too. [looks at his watch] Please excuse me I need to go meet my wife. [Don puts some cash into an envelope and hands it to the nearest girl] Please share this with each other and be careful out there. Good Luck!

Narrator

Don takes a motorcycle taxi to a nice restaurant on the beach. Kim is running a little late. She rushes in beaming with excitement about her day at the spa.

Kim

[kisses Don] What an absolutely amazing day. There were facials and massages. I was pampered and totally enjoyed it! You knew I would.

Don

After a nice dinner there will be shopping for new shoes and matching handbag too.

Kim

[relaxed] Ok! What's up? [without thinking] What are you dying or something?

Narrator

Immediately as the words leave Kim's lips she realizes what she has said. She is horrified with the words she just said as reality sets in. Don laughs and doesn't miss a beat. He sees Kim discomfort and lovingly grabs her hand. He laughs again.

Don

Well now that you mention it, yes. [takes a deep breath]
Kim dear I need to say something, get it out in the open and then we need to move on and enjoy our evening at the end of your spa day.

[pauses] Let me just say it directly. Sometime in the next few months, my condition will deteriorate. I have code words which means the Valkyrie Plan is to take effect and the hired help takes over my care. I want you to remember me as strong, healthy and energetic. I couldn't bear it to think of you seeing me as weak and eaten from the inside out as my senses slowly shut down. The code is Cow Butts; I mean the code words are Khaaw Putt, Thai for fried rice. Ok, enough talk about that for now. Please let's order and then tell me of your day. After dessert we will go shopping.

Kim

[takes a moment to gather her thoughts and forces a smile]
Ok! Order anything you want for dinner except Khaaw Putt.

Narrator

The couple talks and laughs as the sunset over the glistening beach. They finish their meal. They are each relaxed and savoring the moment. They start a small beach fire and make smores from marshmallows, graham crackers and chocolate they brought with them from the States. As the fire burns down, Kim throws on some bamboo. It burns and explodes with a bang as the fire heats the inner air.

Kim

Wow! Burning bamboo really does crack like a firecracker. Let's hope it wards off evil spirits too.
[smiles] Thank you don for a wonderful day. You know exactly how to put a smile on my face. Let's just enjoy the moment. Do save some room for another dessert that I have in mind for you tonight. We can go shopping tomorrow.

A Last Heart Burn

Narrator

At Lunch Kim and Don both celebrate their 50th Birthdays even though it is a few years early for Don and a few years further away for Kim.

There are cards, presents and a banana flavored cake.

They joke about how old and young fifty seems. They toast each other in champagne glasses filled with Pineapple juice.

As their party for two winds down, Kim notices crowds of people going off to the west. She squeezes Don and said lets go see where everyone is going. They ride on motorcycle taxis to a Thai Temple. The crowds are going inside.

Kim

Let's see what is happening here.

Don

We are not exactly invited.

Kim

We will be respectful. Where is your sense of adventure?

Don

Right! Let's go!

Narrator

As they enter the large open hall, Kim is sorry she insisted they come. She sees the dried body surrounded by ornate burnable decorations. Kim and Don have stumbled right in the middle of a cremation funeral. They quietly sit a table in a far corner. The daughter of the deceased, named Noke comes over and talks with then.

Noke

[Thai] Excuse me but did you know my Father?

Don

[Thai] No Ma'am! We mean no disrespect. Let me just say this directly. I have cancer and will soon be doing the same as your father. We came here today to help us gain courage for the coming days.

Noke

[Thai] My Father was a kind man. If he was here today, he would welcome you as family. In his memory I will do the same.

Don

So I am the American Cousin, the one no one talks about.
[laughs and then is embarrassed]

Noke

[Thai] It is acceptable to laugh at my Father's funeral. He loved to laugh and make others laugh. There will be tears here today because we miss him. There will also be laughter for we remember him too.

Narrator

Kim and Don participate in the ceremony. This includes lining up with the crowd and placing hand carved kindling around the body. They see tears and smiles among the crowd of family and friends. Kim sees that Don is getting tired. She sits down and motions for Don to join her.

Kim

Are you afraid of Death my love?

Don

Death, no I am not afraid of it. As I sit here I am reminded that I have heart burn from the spicy lunch today. Respectfully as I look at Noke's Father I think wow that will be me soon. You do know that I want to be cremated right? That day will be my last heart burn.

Kim

Why do you want to be cremated?

Don

The tumor will kill me. But then, I will have it incinerated. It is my way to get the last laugh! Besides rotting in a stationary hole in the ground is not my style. I would rather travel on the wind.

Kim

[changes subject] I believe you promised your wife a new handbag. Everyone knows you can't just buy a handbag you have to get a matching outfit and shoes. I am sure it is a law somewhere that this is the case.

Don

[jokes] I think I have been had by "sandy sags tom fobbery", I mean daylight handbag robbery. Sounds fun. Let's get going

Narrator

As they walk to catch a taxi, there is a familiar sound. It is step, cane clunk, step, clunk. Kim can tell the cane clunks are growing louder and longer as Don relies on them more and more.

As they hail down a small taxi, they both see smoke rising to the sky from the Thai Temple where they were earlier.

Neither wants to discuss it. The evening is young and they are going to enjoy it.

Across the Elephant's Trunk

Narrator

Southern Thailand is shaped like an elephant's trunk. It is the crossroads between India in the East, China in the West and Muslim Malaysia and Indonesia to the South.

Today Kim and Don drive across the Elephant trunk shaped land of southern Thailand. The scenery is lush greens and vivid blues and warm browns. There are photo ops around every corner. The couple stops on top the mountain ridge to eat lunch. Kim has been quiet for the last hour. Something is on her mind.

Kim

[takes a deep breath] Don, as we rest among these views could we talk about my dream last night?

[Don nods] I'll warn you upfront it is not very nice.

I am falling in a well. It is dark, totally dark. There is no light or hope. The air is so thick one can only grasp for breath. I can't see anything but I can hear. The words are angry. The headlines from our past arguments blurt from loud speakers. They echo off the walls and surround me. I am just falling and listening to our mean moments. I hear: "you always put me last"; "steel in heels"; man, I don't come to your office, don't tell me how to run mine"; a Husband is for more than holidays"; "you say you understand but then you complain"; "it is not nice being last in your life"; "you say you are not cold but you don't care how it impacts me"; this is more like a mugging than a marriage". I fall and fall further. There are baby cries and old people moaning. Then one phrase just keeps repeating louder and louder: "hell if your husband died, it would take you six months to notice".

I woke up in a cold sweat several times but when I feel back asleep the same sleep channel repeated. I must have just tossed and turned last night because I am so tired today. What do you think the dream meant? Have I been a terrible wife?

Don

We have each been distracted by the distance between us. You are not a terrible wife. Here's my guess of what the dream means. Echoing phrases from our fights shows that these issues are not settled in your mind.

Kim

At first I was mad at the words, and then I felt sad as I began to listen and know many are right. I am so sorry for how I have treated you.

Don

The sorrow is from both of us not just you. I am sorry too. Let's look at why we were apart so often? Why did we live in different cities? We had separate lives before we met. Your kids live with your Ex during the week and you on weekends. You have to be in the same city as them. You also love your career. It fulfills your search for self and puts money in your wallet and self esteem on your shoulders. Your Parents live in that city too. You are so close to them, especially your Mom.

My Kids and parents live ia short plane ride from where I live. I go where the job is. You and I want to be good parents. It made it impossible to sort out where we should live. Somehow the old joke - that a bird and fish don't marry because they don't know where to live – doesn't sound so funny right now.

Kim

Is that what you think of us? Are we an odd couple?

Don

No! But a couple who couldn't figure out how to merge two separate lives – definitely. Don't take me wrong please. I am sincere when I say I don't have any regrets. Your kids are younger. The twin thirteen year olds need you near. I knew who would win that competition. I fully agree with our decision.

Kim

It wasn't a competition.

Don

Bullshit! Everything is a competition from the jungle to juggling time priorities.

[takes a calming breath] We agreed to spend time with the kids because raising them is a priority for us. We always thought we would have time for us when the nests were empty. We joked about being DINKs – double income no kids – after the children were grown.

Kim

We didn't know we will never see those empty nests days together.

Don

We made the right decisions and focused on family first. I have an idea.

[cuts down a banana leaf and fashions it into a make shift boat]

Kim, come with me please.

[he grabs her hand and they walk to the lake shore together]

Ok, Kim you need to put that entire dream last night into the boat.

Kim

Today isn't Loi Kratong.

Don

Everyday can be Loi Kratong if you let it. Now come on and work with me on this

Kim

You need to put in the boat the heartburn that you feel for my kids. I know you think they always come between us.

Don

Well let's be honest, they do. You are a mother first. Everything else comes after this. Ok, I will put these antacids in the boat to represent the heartburn. I better put in a couple more for all the times they tried to break us up too.

Kim

For what it was worth, you were a good step Dad. You know Danny once said that he likes going out to eat with you because you always make sure he eats well. That and the fact that you buy them desert.

Don

I love all five of our kids. Even the youngest who I think wanted us to divorce so you could marry a black rapper because he thinks they are cool. I only said this to get you to laugh.

Kim

I love all of our kids too. I will put this leaf shaped cross in the boat to float away my concerns that Teri tries to convert me. She would have me singing in the choir and sitting in the Sunday school seats but I am a passionate agnostic. I know she means well but...

Narrator

The couple puts a candle in their boat of worries. They float it into the small lake. They watch for awhile then suddenly the leaf falls apart and everything quickly sinks.

Don

Well that is one way to get rid of all our worries quickly. Wish I had time to syndicate the idea?

Kim

There is something in your personality that figures out a way through even the hardest problems. I like that.

Don

You have the strength of steel and that is a compliment. Changing topics – do you remember when we went camping in Yellowstone National Park? There is a spot called the continental divide. You pour water on one side and it ends up in the Pacific. You pour it the other way and it ends up in the Gulf of Mexico. Look to the left that is where we came from. Our past is behind us. To the right is where we are going to the beach and my final days. It is all about the spine-rip-snorters. I have no idea what I was trying to say here.

Narrator

Kim smiles and thinks to herself. I have never been to Yellowstone - must have been his first wife. That is ok; the thought is a good one.

Don

It is said that there are two ways around an elephant. The hard way is to climb over its back from trunk to tail. The easy way is just to step over its trunk. Well most of our lives we did things the distant, long hard way but look at us now we are driving across the elephant trunk of Thailand together.

Kim

We don't need to explain our lives to anyone else but ourselves. The fact is that mostly we put our kids, careers before couple time. But look at us now, no regrets and we are together. These last 15 months have been wonderful.

Don

They have been the climax of my life. Just think if I had been shot or died in a car wreck. We would not have had this time together. I am so grateful that we did.

Kim

That we do!

Narrator

As the couple talk about their wonderful day, dark clouds gather along the horizon. Within a few minutes the whole sky darkens and it is raining. Kim and Don run and play in the rain. Drenched, they race to the car.

The weather is wet but their spirits are un-dampened.

As they drive from the ridge towards the beach, they each ponder Don's words, "going to the beach bungalow to die."

They each seize the moment. The mood in the car is warm. They stop at a hotel for the night. They change out of the damp clothes and jump at the chance to jump each other.

Worst, Best and the Rest

Narrator

The next morning, Kim and Don make their way to the beach bungalow. They open their door and step onto the beach. Their accommodation is at the far end. It is like they have their own beach with a short walk back to full service holiday atmosphere. The couple awake in each other's arms. There is a knock at the door. Don gets room service breakfast and sits back down on the bed by Kim.

Don

[dishes up fruit and hands the plate to Kim]

Kim, I have a surge of pretzels, I mean surprise for us today.

Kim

[takes a bite] OK, what is it?

Page intentionally left blank.

Don

First a short story from years ago. Mormon missionaries have a lot of rules. Being called Mormon Monks is a good analogy. One of the rules is that you can't go swimming. I have always loved the beach. I had a slide picture taken that looked like I was jumping into the water.

We had a missionary meeting where the local church boss called the Mission President was attending. I was responsible for putting together a slide show. Remember this is the days before video. Pictures are projected on the wall to American and Thai music.

There are lots of pictures of us doing Missionary Work like teaching and service projects. There are also pictures of the one day a week we get off when we have fun. Up on the white wall screen comes a picture of what looks like me jumping into the water. The President gets all excited. He grabs his notebook and makes a note so he will remember to deal with me after the show is over.

A few minutes later there are pictures showing how we took the pictures. I jumped straight up in the air and then landed back onto the beach without getting wet. The picture take at an angle to me just made it look like I was jumping into the water. I set the strict President up. Psyche, I had not broken the "don't go swimming rule", just exercised a little photo creativity. All the Missionaries laughed. The President frowned but my rebellious sense of humor had won for the moment.

Today, you and I are renting bikes and going for a ride where the beach meets the waves. We are going exploring. We will have a private, catered picnic for lunch too.

Kim

Private and catered?

Don

That just means hotel staff bring us the food but "tushies away", I mean they don't stay. We get to have private conversation. It will be the just the two of us.

Kim

[makes a joke even as Don's more frequent word slips cause her concern] "Tushies Away"? Could that be a Freudian Slip from my husband? Does this schedule of yours have time for a little Afternoon Delight in the morning?

Don

Let me answer that with a massage message.
[play taps with his fingers on Kim's bare back] Yes, yes, yes. The "sands can Kuwait; I mean the beach sands can wait.

Narrator

Time seems to stop for the couple in love. There is connection and climax. Kim lets Don rest for awhile. Later, she hops on the bed.

Kim

So man! I believe you promised this woman a beach in motion.

Don

These sands aren't staying still. Let's get going.

Narrator

For hours the sunscreened couple, ride in the waves on the shore. It is half sand and half water. There are salt tracks on their swimsuits. Don calls the hotel and tells them where to bring the food. Don starts to spread the blanket on the beach but the motion makes him fall down. Kim reassuringly pats Don on the shoulder to say stay put. She finishes arranging the blanket. They start talking like there is no tomorrow.

They are so deep in conversation that they hardly notice the hotel staff who bring the food. Don settles the bill. Kim and Don are alone on their own tropical beach. They savor the food and fruit drinks and they relish the conversation. Afternoon turns to sunset, It is Don's queue to himself.

Don

I have had a perfect day with you. Thank you!

Kim

It has been an amazing day. [smiles] I have salt in places that I wish I didn't but what wonderful time.

Don, I can see from your face that you have more to say. It is something you have waited until the end of the day to say.

Don

Many cultures find the beach superstitious. Where the earth meets the ocean is revered as symbolic of this world meeting the next.

As a side note, in high school, a big group of friends took a trip from Utah to the California beach. There were parents as chaperones of course. We were playing flag football on the beach. I was chasing after the person with the ball who was the father of a friend of mine. We ran along the shore until the surf swallowed him. As he got up, he said that is the first time he had ever been tackled by a wave. We all laughed.

I do not want this late in the day chat to tackle the fantastic time we had today. [he picks up a handful of sand and slowly lets it fall] Kim there is no easy way to say this. So I use hyperbola and beach props. [pauses] The sand in my hour glass is running out. [Kim goes to speak but Don gently puts his finger to her full lips] Please let me say one thing more.

I am so glad we married. No regrets. I just appreciate the time we have had together. Just want you to be prepared. It is time for you to go see the kids again too. I really appreciate your idea to spend some time with Teri and Jared too. They will need help with the transition.

Now back to the Manifest Destiny, I mean main point – Soon I will be ordering Fried Rice, Khaaw Putt.

Kim

But if you call it “cow butts”, it doesn’t count. We both know the time is coming where I need to honor your request to be alone. I don’t like it but I respect you even as I try to understand. I do see the outward signs of what is happening inside your head. I looked away, at the many times you fall. We both know the problem isn’t gravity.

[Don goes to speak but it is Kim’s turn as she puts her fingers to Don’s quivering lips]

I know I didn’t tell you often enough. Maybe I just didn’t want you to get a big head, I do love you. You are the perfect husband for me. We are much alike you and I. Yet, you have the skill of being a perfect complement to me. You are calm when I am hyper. You are energetic, when I need motivation. You constantly showed me love and keep us even keel. Thank you.

Narrator

Don goes to speak but cannot. They sit, interlocked as the brilliantly bright crimson colors from the setting sun romantically, playfully dance where the rhythmic waves meet the moving sands. Don looks into Kim’s eyes. Her cheeks are a flush with setting sunshine rouge.

Don

What were the worst and the best of being married?

Kim

The worst was the distance. The hardest part for me was how mean people can be. They often ask about us. They dig about us being apart so often. They all would get that look. Gosh, I hate that look where you can tell what they are thinking”. It was always the same expressions that said, “they aren’t together – they must be getting a divorce – wonder who cheated first”.

Don

I know exactly what you mean! For me the worst was the echoing empty house and dinners with a table for one. Much of our time was lonely but let's not dwell on that. What are the best things about being married?

Kim

Security! Even when we were apart, being married to you gave me stability and security. Next would be comfort. I knew you were always there for me. Remember when I was sick and you dropped everything and flew to take care of me? I really appreciated it. I loved our couple adventures too. We got to travel. So many of our good times are just you and I on a distant trip or just a simple day trip. We focused on us and I always got a massage.

Don

The best of marriage to me is shown in your eyes. When we make love and you cum you close your eyes. When you open them, you lovingly stare into my eyes. There are no distractions just you and I looking into each other's eyes and souls. There is happiness in your glow. It is more than sex it is connection. Thank you for being the love in my life.

Narrator

Don reaches into his backpack and grabs the flashlights as the last of sunshine fades. The night is dark totally dark. Don keeps the flashlights off and points to the stars. Don points out that most of the universe is dark empty space but that points of light are billions of stars. Some of the specks of light that look so small are actually galaxies with billions of their own stars.

Kim

I get what you are saying. Most of our time was spent apart –like the emptiness of space. What we each need to remember are the stars - happy times – the points of life's light. I will! We talked about the worst and the best of our married life. For a moment please let's think about the rest of our time together.

We made even the simple times adventures. Whether it was going to the Asian food market or cooking dinner together – got to admit knowing we have such little time together made us savor every moment. [Don nods but cannot speak]

Come on now let's get back to our beach bungalow boudoir.

Wall of Frame

Narrator

The next morning, Kim is up early. Don awakens to the zipper opening on the extra suitcase.

Kim

Good morning my love! Today I have something planned for us. You often ask if you have done enough with your life? Does your life have meaning? What do you leave behind? Today we make your wall of frame. We are taking pictures and papers from your life and hanging them up on the wall. Now before you ask, yes I have talked to the owners and paid the fee for putting holes in their wall. Work with me on this. Don, this is your life. I want you to appreciate how long it took to organize all this. I did it to show I love you.
[reaches in the suitcase and holds up a picture]

Don

Wow, I remember that
[Kim holds up a baby picture]

Kim

Look at the energy in that picture. I can see this child climbing to the top of the fridge.

Don

Mom and Dad tell the story of hearing me crying. Mom is in one room frantically saying I hear him but I can't find him. Dad is in another room saying the same thing. They panicked until they see an open heating duct cover. I had pulled the cover off and crawled into a duct. Mom and Dad got near the open vent and called for me. I backed up enough for them to grab my legs and pull me out.

Kim

In the center of the wall, let's put your degrees and work history. Graduated Cum Laud, very nice. Look at this, employee of the Quarter; Customer Appreciation Letters and here the products you built from airplanes to rockets that is pretty cool.

Narrator

For the next hour, they put up the academic and professional awards. Several times Kim exclaims, I never knew this about you. You co-authored the Certified Engineer practice exam from the Society of Manufacturing Engineers. They step back and look at the finished center.

Kim

Don, I have an idea. Let's put pictures from before we met on the left and after on the right. Look at this picture of a new Dad. You are on the floor playing with your kids. Look at those smiles.

Don

Earlier the day that picture was taken a boss tried to talk me into going into management. I said not yet. I wanted to work super hard during my eight hours and then come home and play with my kids.

Look at this old newspaper clipping of me being Santa Claus. Good Fun. Wow, is that really my nose?

Kim

Look at this one. The three of you are in Germany.

Don

Right before the divorce, I took both kids on a bus trip. It was 3,000 miles in 10 days from London to Italy. It was sitting on the bus, talking and entertaining ourselves and then running to see things like the Leaning Eiffel Tower, Tower of Pisa, Paris or the Rheine. See the Castle looking rocks around the railroad Tunnel Entrance. During World War Two Churchill told his bombers not to bomb German castles. Hitler then made important military places look like

Castles. One of my kids then asked if we could make our bus look like a castle just in case someone was trying to bomb us. Fun memories.

Kim

Remember these pictures? It was February. I was in London on business. You flew there to see me. I was depressed. The business deal had not gone as planned. We toured around the great city of London but the gray cloudy weather was like my mood. You asked me if we could be anywhere – where would you like to be? I said Asia to visit family. The next day we flew to Asia. Talk about jet lag but what an amazing adventure. What I remember most, right now is the time together on the planes. When I fly my feet swell to the point of being painful. You took off my shoes and rubbed my stinky feet. I knew that you really loved me.

Narrator

The rest of the afternoon they put up more pictures and talk about some of the thousand words associated with each one. They only stopped when room service brought lunch. Kim purposely left space on the right side. Later she asks for Don to close his eyes. Kim grabs something out of the suitcase.

Kim

OK, you can look now. I know your books that you've written are important to you. You've self published seven and written thirty more from short children's educational books to screen plays. We will put the covers of the published one's on the wall. Right next to them, I will put this case with copies of all the other items you have written. I promise you that I will publish ten thousand copies each of a couple of your books. I will do some marketing research to see which ones are the most popular. You write about space and civil peace and fun children's books that have a good lesson. I am sorry that I didn't help you earlier but I will do this.

Don

Thank you Kim! That means so much to me. So does seeing my life on wall. I have a lot to be thankful for.

Kim

Don, You have accomplished a lot. I don't want to hear you say again that you didn't do enough with your life. Look at your Wall of Frame. I am proud of you.

Narrator

For the next couple of weeks, Kim and Don do short day trips and long walks on the beach. One day, Don mentions that he is not feeling well from a headache.

Kim hires a painter to paint stars on their ceiling in the bungalow. Don can see stars even when he can't go outside. His hearing is fading but he tries to hide this from Kim.

Fried Rice and A Flight

Narrator

Don is well enough to take Kim out for Lunch. Kim senses the inevitable. She holds on to Don so tight that she feels his every breath.

At restaurant, uncharacteristically Don orders first.

Don

I am sorry Kim.

[turns to the waiter] I will have fried rice – khaaw putt.

Narrator

The words echo like a bell that slowly rings quiet. Don hands Kim an envelope. She knows what is in it.

Kim

[to the waiter] I will have khaaw putt too. Just make mine sour. [pauses and longingly looks at Don]

I've wondered what I would say to you when you showed the signal of wanting to be alone.

First is thank you for being in my life. Second is your words touched me deeply when you said that if you had died in a car accident we would not have had this year and a half together. I am so happy that we have had this time. [pauses to collect herself] Third, is I hired the painter to come back. He painted my face in stars on your ceiling. Know that I love you.

Narrator

Don goes to speak but cannot. He kisses Kim deeply and lastingly. Tears fill Kim's eyes. She quickly turns and wipes them away. "Be strong" she tells herself.

The couple touches each other and finishes their lunch. Don puts an envelope on the table next to Kim.

Don

[softly] Please tell the Children hi. [smiles] Tell Josh he can start looking for that Black Rapper now.

[Kim hits Don with the ticket. They both laugh with comic relief].

Kim

[looks at the tickets with surprise] I fly tomorrow morning? So Soon?

Don

The children need you. You and I both know we are too impulsive for long good-byes.

Narrator

They walk together where the water meets the sand. Kim holds Don so tightly that he barely needs his walking stick. The couple spends hours looking at pictures on the laptop. They laugh and talk like they are cramming a lifetime into a few hours.

They take plastic chairs down to the shore and with feet in the waves they watch their last sunset together. They make love like it is their last time for they both believe it is.

At dawn, it is panic time to pack and rush to the Airport. Kim checks in and the couple sits at a café to drink orange and pineapple juice. They are past the point of words. They just hold hands as the clock hands come together to signal it is time to depart. Methodically, they follow the familiar routine. They hug, they kiss, they say good-bye like they have done so many times before. Kim gets part way into security and runs back to Don. The touch again until the loud speaker warns of imminent departure. Don whispers in Kim's ears, "I loved you". Kim kisses Don and then turns and runs to make the flight.

Beach Sands of Time

Narrator

Don has a staff that provide his excellent 24-7 care. He has shaped cue cards of what he wants because he cannot speak and can just barely see or hear.

For weeks he carries on. One night he asks for a ladder.

The health care staff thinks he has lost his mind but they oblige. With help, Don carefully climbs the ladder to see the stars in the shape of Kim's face.

The next morning Don feels his way along the wall of frame as he remembers what he and Kim discussed. The next night Don enters his bed but he is not alone. He bumps into someone else. Startled, he quickly stumbles out of bed to grab his pad of paper to ask what is going on. A hand reaches up to steady and reassure him. The female hand takes Don's hand and traces his hand along her face. He knows that shape. He recognized that touch. Kim has come back.

She promised that she would not watch him die but she did not say that she wouldn't sneak back and sleep by him. Don's pain is comforted by Kim. She is like desert rain to his desolate state of mind.

Before dawn, Kim leaves to keep her promise that she will not see him as he is. This ritual of night time together day time apart continues for a week.

Tonight, as Kim holds Don she can tell that his breathing is erratic. She doesn't dare sleep. She whispers comfort into Don's ears. She holds him as his last breath exits. She keeps her promise and leaves before day light.

Before he died, Don organized down to a science what was to happen next. His body is moved and cremated and the ashes given to Kim.

Of Floats and Heart Fires

Narrator

Part of Don's ashes were given to his children and parents to release into the garden of the house where he grew up. Part was sent away by mail to those who turn carbon into diamonds. What will come back will be a small diamond. Don made Kim promise that she will not wear it when she remarries but it will be in her jewelry box. Kim has the remaining ashes. Today she fulfills her final promise to Don. Kim sprinkles a little bit of ash into the wind so Don will continue to travel the world. At the water's edge Kim unfolds a piece of paper and reads to herself.

Don's voice

Date: my last day

Dear Kim: time heals all wounds except the one that kills you. So it is with me the tumor won but as you can see from the bag of ashes you are holding. I fought back too. I get the last laugh.

Sorry to leave you my love. But I am glad knowing that you were loved by me. Before I lost my sight, I looked through our photographs. There were happy days with us together. Now for my final request, please put my ashes and this note in my face shaped boat. At the next convenient Loi Kratong, please go to Sukhothai and float me away from you.

In life I held you to help you be happy. In death I let go of you for the same reason. It is time for you to let go of me too. Move on! Yes remarry and go on as many adventures as you can.

Be Happy! Your Former Lover, - Don

Kim

[thinks to herself] Well Don, you did it! You made the ash of yourself just like you said you would. But you did not make an ass of yourself. You had strength and managed to laugh along the way. You always kept your promises. I will say good-bye because I promised you I would. I will move on with my life for the same reason. I will light the candle in your personalized boat and sail you away for you made me promise that I would

I will not watch until the candle burns out. For me there will always be a candle burning for you in my heart. Deep down in my subconscious, I will think of you and your courage every time I laugh!

Narrator

Kim watches the boat as it gradually sails into the darkness. The candle flickers like a star.

She turns around and starts laughing. She is thinking of: Baby Don climbing the fridge; young Don locking his older brother into the stockade; Mickey Mouse ears and High School; missionary Don and the whale breaking that bus and standing there on the secluded bottom step. She thinks of their time and fun together. Kim learned so much about the man she loved. The more she learned the more she loved him. His contagious smile and kind heart touched many people. She is so glad it touched her too Kim with her back to the lake full of floats opens up a photo album. She looks at the pictures and laughs. Today is the time to remember. Tomorrow as promised she will move on. To those who let it, laughter will always get the last laugh even after the last breath.

Don learns he will die soon. He knows the best way to fight the grim reaper is to have a big party. They look at what made them laugh during his life. He holds a fun-eral as in funny haha.

During worldwide travels he connects with his soul and soul mate. Learn to laugh at life before the last breath.



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