

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

One point that stands out in my life is my father's very serious talk with me, before he passed away. I had worked summers at his shoe stores, understood the business, and would have grown it even more. But one day when we were alone, he informed me that he was selling the company to an investor. I was extremely surprised and said so. His answer was the best I could have hoped for. "The funds will all go to your mother, who will spend them on you, your younger brother and herself. They might last two, perhaps even four years. After that I expect you to look after her the rest of her life. If she remarries, that's fine as long as he's a good, caring man that the three of you like. As for you, I have other plans that I can only hope will come to fruition. I think that for some reason you're a little different from most of the young men I've come in contact with. Not better or worse, just different."

He continued, "There were many things I wanted to do with my life, especially to travel and study. Meeting people from different backgrounds would have been fascinating. I'm suggesting that when I'm gone and your mother and Steve are settled, you leave not only the city but perhaps the country. You need not go to one school, go to a number of them. Experience different places, ideas, foods, religions, colors, and new progressive thoughts that will spur you on to do things that I can hardly dream about. Where you will end your journey, I have no idea. That's exciting, the way life should be."

After he passed away, I related his message to Mom and my brother Steve. They both were totally supportive. I like to think he'd be pleased with the way things turned out for me.

MOM

My Mother Anne was eighty-one when she died. Mom was diagnosed with cancer in her early forties and told that she probably wouldn't have more than a few years. She was a hell of a broad, and told them they didn't know what they were talking about. Over the

years, they removed various parts of her body. She had a double mastectomy, lost other parts of her body.

But she was totally with it. I remember when she told me, "These doctors don't know me. I want to see what my boys grow up to be."

She was a big shock to the doctors, a woman who could outlive their predictions, and by a good forty years. But she was strong and strong-willed. When she was in her sixties, she visited me in my home in Mill Valley, in Northern California. We went for a drive one day and most of the conversation was about death, and her passing. I informed her that her passing was quite an impossibility at that time. I was moving to Europe and would certainly need her wisdom and strength as a young man just beginning my journeys to foreign lands.

Subsequently, we both had the joy of her visiting me in many countries. She was a fantastic traveling companion and very wise. I was fortunate to have her with me during many of my business and personal encounters.

I remember we were Norway, in the land of the midnight sun, and she sat alongside me and rowed the boat. And many times during this and later trips, if I spotted a lady I might be interested in somewhere, she'd say, "You go for it! We have two rooms. Have a good evening. I'll see you tomorrow."

CAROL

Prologue #1 To A Marriage

When it came time for my mother to go, she flew from Philadelphia to Los Angeles to be near my brother and me. The fact that I was living in Paris at the time was not a problem. Mom called me and said, "I'm flying to California in a few days. I would like you to be there. It's important." My mother never said that before. I immediately made preparations and flew back to L.A.

Meantime, almost as soon as Mom arrived in Los Angeles, she checked herself into a nursing home in Santa Monica. When I got into town and went to see her, she said, "This is it. I'm tired. I'm ready to go."

I was shattered. But I could see in her face, in her body, in her words what she was feeling, and I understood. She had gone down to 80 pounds, and it was clear the end was near. She didn't have the will anymore with the cancer to keep fighting and fighting. Enough was enough.

At that time, Carol and I had been meeting secretly, for about two years. We couldn't tell anyone because we were cousins. A few days after my first visit to see Mom in the nursing home, I asked Carol to join me. She did and we drove together.

We went into Mom's room. She was surprised to see us together and asked why we were. I explained that we were both going to come down so we thought we'd drive together. After just a few minutes of conversation, Mom looked at us and said, "That's not true. There's something going on between you two."

I explained that can't be because after all she's my cousin. My mother looked at us, smiled, and said, "There's no one else that's still alive that can tell you what I'm going to tell you. Your great-grandparents and Carol's lived a few doors away from each other in Russia and were close friends. They came to America almost at the same time, and the friendship remained between your grandparents and your fathers later. And now you and her brother Warren have been close friends all your lives. When you live so close to each other and know each other over a hundred years, you become like cousins. But there isn't a drop of blood between you from our families. We were just great friends."

Carol and I were stunned, and then explained to Mom what had been taking place. She passed away at 5:25 the next morning. It was almost like she stayed alive to pass this news on to us. If she hadn't, I don't know if we'd be together today.

I told this story at the burial and there wasn't a dry eye at the gravesite.

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A few months after Mom died, Carol and I were at Charles de Gaulle airport outside Paris. She said to me, "We've been together for some time now. How come we're not married?"

Jokingly, I answered, "Well, you never asked me."

With that, Carol got down on one knee, clasped her hands together, and proposed.

I froze, embarrassed, and thought, "Oh, my God." But I couldn't keep the smile from spreading across my face. Reaching out my hand to help Carol up, I gave her a hug and said, "Yes." Other passengers around us broke into applause. We bowed, thanking the crowd, hired a car and drove into the City of Light.

HOW I GOT MY NICKNAME, ROCKY, AND ALL THE OTHER A.K.A.'S

August 5th, 1939...Someone at Saint Luke's Hospital had made a mistake. Perhaps it was an accent or an accident, but "Alon" was registered in the paperwork for the about-to-be-born child, instead of "Alan," the name my parents had planned on giving me. Once I actually arrived, it was too late to change, I suppose. But I was to learn over the years it really did not matter.

My Hebrew name was Eliazer, which was OK. The one name I NEVER answered to was Al! That was lazy and showed no respect for me. However, all that was going to change over the next generation or so.