



Goodnight Sweet Prince

A Love Story by David Hummel

High school is a distant memory that resurfaces when I hear about tragedies like Columbine. In my high school days I was always picked on. I was six foot two and skinny as a rail. The phrase "Let's beat up the queers" wasn't in use yet. It was "Let's get the sissies" back then.

One afternoon I stayed late to help on a project. The halls were empty and dark as I went from class to my locker. When I got there I was surrounded by the usual group of bullies that haunted the halls of Saginaw High. I knew they had it in for me as a few days earlier I had run from their threats and they couldn't catch me. Today was different: I couldn't get away.

Suddenly a big black athlete grabbed one of my assailants and slammed him up against the lockers. He told him, "If you don't leave my friend David alone, they'll be scraping you off the wall! Needless to say, I wasn't bothered again. Oh, I got snide remarks and obscene gestures but I was never again bothered physically. I wish I could remember my friend's name so I could look him up and thank him for how he affected my life but this was more than fifty years ago. He towered over me and had the type of body that looked like he should be doing commercials for an exercise machine. He was also strikingly handsome. I wasn't gay yet and knew nothing about sex. I did, however, follow him around like a little puppy dog. I loved the way I felt just being with this guy because I knew I was safe. This set the stage for the type of man I would be attracted to.

I was twenty-one years old when I found my first lover. We had a great relationship that lasted ten years. We just grew out of love with each other but remained friends. I spent the next three years playing the field and doing the bar scene, which I hated. It was during that time I made the biggest mistake of my life by getting involved with a married man. Looking back, I now realize I wasn't in love with him but had become obsessed with someone I couldn't have.

It was in 1969 and I was sitting in the Woodward Bar in Detroit. That night there was the usual "during the week" crowd. Someone came in the back door but I couldn't quite see his face until he sat down. I had seen him before but never had the nerve to approach him. This night he kept looking at me and my heart was beating wildly in anticipation of what might happen. He came over to me and said, "Come on, we're going home!" I didn't hesitate for a second because I was looking at exactly what I had dreamed about for so

long. I liked his self-assurance. He was six foot four, 185 pounds of muscle and strong as a bull. The first time he held me in his arms, that feeling of long ago came flowing back. I felt like the kid in high school being protected from the bullies. I felt there was no one or nothing that could harm me now.

It wasn't long before he wanted us to be a couple. I was still getting over that married man and felt it would be unfair to say yes at that time. I wanted to make sure I wasn't doing this on the rebound. A short time later I did say "yes" but it was two years before I actually moved in with him. From the day we met we were inseparable but decided we needed to make sure of everything before a major move like this. We had to be sure there was more to the relationship than sex. It was five years from the time we met before we moved to Traverse City, bought property together and opened joint accounts at the local bank. By this time complete trust was there. He preferred we remain in the closet as he felt being open about our relationship could hurt his automotive business. That was fine with me as I had everything I wanted in him. We still had gay friends in Detroit and went there at least every six months. I think the thing I am proudest of is that not once in 32 years did either of us stray.

Finding my "knight in shining armor" didn't mean everything was perfect. We had our problems like any other couple. For about six or seven years I had to fight his alcoholism, which almost destroyed our relationship. We did get through that and I thought the rough times were over. Little did I know they were just starting.

In 1984 he had a TIA or mini stroke. The symptoms were gone by the time he saw a doctor but after extensive tests we found his right carotid artery had closed. The left one was 70 percent blocked. He was already taking medication for high blood pressure so he saw his cardiologist who found he needed balloon angioplasty. In Traverse City, they weren't doing any heart surgery or even angioplasty at this time so he was sent to Petoskey. A few years later he went back to have the other carotid artery cleaned out. They waited until it was 90 percent closed before they would take the chance.

By 1990 he needed back surgery. Years of doing backbends under cars and leaning over fenders as a mechanic had taken its toll. Two of the discs had deteriorated and a plate was put in their place. After being in a body cast for six or more months his left leg was numb and very painful. Another back



surgery in 1991 showed there had been nerve damage and nothing could be done about his leg.

Over the years he lost weight each time he was hospitalized. He never regained all of the weight he lost. In 1995, quintuple bypass surgery was performed and he began to go further downhill. After his heart surgery when I saw that "zipper" down his chest, I quit smoking on the spot. Late in 1995 he needed bypass surgery from the main aorta to the left leg. This helped eliminate the pain but his leg was still numb and he walked with a limp from that point on. Even after all of this he refused to quit smoking!

Every two years following the heart surgery he was back in the hospital for congestive heart failure. This was in the spring of 1997, 1999 and 2001. The final time his kidneys were only operating at 20 percent. They put an access shunt in his arm as he would need to be on dialysis for the rest of his life. He was in the hospital for two weeks and they let him come home to rest up for a heart valve replacement. This would have stopped the congestive heart failure. After 12 hours at home he was having problems breathing and was taken right back to the hospital. Only part of his heart was working and the kidneys were getting worse. I knew he was too old and in too bad a shape to be eligible for a kidney transplant so I offered one of mine if I was a compatible donor. The doctors said "One thing at a time. We have to get his leaky heart valve replaced first." I doubted he could withstand another open-heart surgery. I wasn't even sure he could survive a kidney transplant. He was already beginning to look 85 instead of 65 and resembled something out of a holocaust film but I still always saw the hunk I met back in 1969. Even in the hospital, when he put his arms around me I still felt like the kid in high school being protected from the bullies. However, when I looked down at him in the bed I realized that a long time ago I had become the protector.

While trying to eat, he was having severe back pain and the nurse gave him a shot to relieve it. Almost immediately after receiving the shot he said he wasn't feeling right and he was all hot and sweaty. He tried to get from the chair to the bed but almost collapsed. The nurse and I got him to bed and I got a cold wash cloth to put on his forehead. At that point he noticed the floral arrangement that a friend from New York had sent. I put it on a table at the foot of the bed where he could enjoy it. As I was changing the cold compresses he said, "You should have left it at home, you're the one that deserves it!" I almost lost it right there but I kissed him and told him how much I loved him. He did likewise. I didn't realize it at the time but we had just said our good-byes.

I hadn't slept in several days so I went home to grab a nap and some lunch. I'm glad I left when I did as he coded (his heart stopped) almost immediately after I left. I ate and went right back but I found no bed in his room! After his heart had

been restarted he had been taken to the CCU where they were in the process of putting in a temporary pacemaker. I waited all day to hear that and went home to attempt to get some sleep. That night they called me that he had coded again and the doctors would call me. I was told his kidneys had failed completely and they would not do dialysis on someone who had been coded twice. The doctor said they would make him comfortable and the next time his heart stopped they would do nothing. At 2:10 A.M. on April 30, 2001 he died.

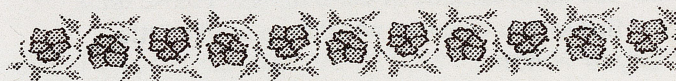
Epilogue:

Grief is not new to me. I lost both of my parents and a brother but nothing prepared me for the loss of the person I spent most of my adult life with. He had been part of me for 32 years. Not having any gay friends in Traverse City didn't help the matter either. Friends North was there for me and has now become my family. Through them I have made even more friends.

They can be there for you too. Whether you've experienced something life altering and need a friend to talk to, or if you just want some new friends to socialize with, stop by at a Friends North 4th Thursday Potluck Dinner, 2nd Thursday Film Night or one of our many other activities and get acquainted.

Authors' note:

When I originally wrote this article, my mate's name was included. My sincere thanks to a new friend who had the insight to see what I was too close to this article to see. Because my mate was such a private man and wanted to remain in the closet, I have honored this by not using his name. Anyone close to me knows who he was. To anyone who doesn't know me, a name would not matter. DH



U.S. poll reveals gay adoption support

Beth Shapiro, 365Gay.com
Wednesday, April 3, 2002

NEW YORK -- A new poll shows that the majority of Americans support giving gay and lesbian couples the right to adopt.

Forty-seven percent said gays should be permitted to adopt, and 42 percent were opposed, according to the ABCNEWS.com survey

Continued on page 12, see Gay Adoption