

Til Death Do Us Part

I'm in a nursing home as I write this. Fell down a flight of stairs at home and woke up in ambulance. Cracked some ribs which doesn't hurt too bad. Other aches and pains but living with it OK. They sent me to a number of different facilities in West Milford and wound up here. Was in a wheelchair until two weeks ago. I just started walking and they didn't like it. I might fall and they would be liable.

My wife Jacquie had Whipple surgery, very serious cancer operation a few years ago; took out a third of her pancreas and she had to inject insulin. She had a recurrence of cancer requiring more treatment which she didn't survive. She died January 17th, 2022. I was still in nursing home. Her daughter Lizzie and husband Charlie took me to funeral home where she was lying in state. I could barely look at her lying there with closed eyes and expressionless face. I was still using a wheelchair. I turned to face away from her to talk to Charlie. On the way out I got on my knees beside her and wept for some time with my hands on her arm.

Jacquie was president of the West Milford Newcomers Club because everyone loved her. If I may paraphrase Winston Churchill in *Their Finest Hour* speech June 18, 1940, she walked in the broad sunlit uplands of her soul which everyone immediately sensed and loved her for. Her continuing dedication to the welfare of her constituents in the face of her pain was her finest hour.



Her daughter Lizzie with husband Charlie had her buried in a cemetery in Warwick, New York, a lovely, woodsy place just across the state border and not far from home, but without a gravestone which would come later. They said they would take me there on Sunday, February 20, her birthday, which would have made it the perfect day and perhaps my finest hour. But the nursing home would not let me go. The woman in charge said I would be a flight risk if she did. In other words she thought I was a prisoner, not merely a patient.

I still break into tears whenever I think of how this facility supposedly dedicated to the welfare of its wards deprived me of the solemnity of 'til death do us part' even as I write this. I cannot ignore or accept this aspersion of my burning need to celebrate my late wife's finest hour. This crosses the line from patient discipline to Roast in Hell Evil.

I was told last week that I could go home Monday. After much preparation I was again not allowed to leave. Although I was not in fact a prisoner, I could sign out at my own financial peril. I then talked to the doctor and repeated his own judgement that I was doing well. He said something about me not having enough physical therapy and I told him how I went for it several times a week and pedaled 15 minutes on a bicycle type machine and he said he would then give permission for me to go home. I talked to the gym manager and asked him if the doctor discussed my physical therapy with him. He said he never even spoke to the doctor. Evidently the doctor was just telling me what he wanted me to hear.

Will see tomorrow if he was

He was; and I was not allowed to go home

I spent two years in Việt Nam in the Air Force and this place is much worse. I was a Vietnamese linguist and a lifeguard on China Beach—pictured next page in 1965—across the river from Đà Nẵng by the fishing village of My Khe.

This will eventually fade into the ever-diminishing cacophony of my past, should my present last long enough. Perhaps I'm getting too old. Roosevelt was in Washington when I arrived in Philadelphia (Franklin, not Teddy.) And I'm told I toddled in the VE Day parade ("I's marchin"). The secret is designer genes.

I was again told I could go home on Monday, but this time by the doctor himself. I set it up by having him read this article, giving him the choice of further criticism or getting rid of me. I'm sure it will happen. Some time ago, one of the suppliers of my jewelry store (a very talented manufacturer for whom I was a day one customer and a friend) asked me when I mentioned selling the store "what will you do?" had no answer. So what will I do? I'll find out on Monday.

Take care of me? Make sure I'm on time? Well, I just sprang out of bed to spring ahead to daylight savings time. Lifted the clock off the wall on tiptoes, futzed with the corrugated wheel on the back until it was exactly 1pad time and was able to hang the clock back on the nail the first time.



Cook for me? I'm the wizard of egg! This is how to make eggs over easy without easing them over and risk breaking the yolks. Use a teflon coated pan, spray some Pam into it, break the eggs on the rim of the pan (carefully) and put a glass lid over the pan. When the outer whites are done but the thicker whites next to the yolks are still transparent, take the lid off and run a little water into the inside near the rim and put back on and let the water go into the pan. The water will boil and steam the tops of the yolks. When the yolks have a whitish glaze the eggs are done. Take the lid off and tilt the pan and the eggs will just slide out of the pan and onto the plate. You should make some toast to slide the eggs on. That way you won't have to worry about scrubbing the hardened yolks off the plate and the taste will be enhanced. I use rosemary and olive oil bread for the toast. The best!

Breaking news...cancellation cancelled. Went to the headquarters desk of my wing and reamed them out big time. They meekly said they would now let me go home per the previous arrangement. My son-in-law had just come in and I took him to the desk to hear it straight from the horse's mouth. They were all very personable and seemed good heartedly interested. What a change! None of that senioritis bullshit...you're old so this and that bad thing will happen so go stand in the corner with your dunce cap on.. That was the predominant attitude of the staff and set the restricted nature of life in the nursing home. This attracts people who like telling other people what to do. I just want to keep other people from telling me what to do.

We'll see. Tomorrow is Monday. Just a wake up away!

Of course it didn't happen tomorrow. They said it was now scheduled for next Saturday. In case I tried to escape early, they had put a BigBrotherBot on my ankle. Forget electronic miniaturization. It was a chunky white box about 3 inches long, 2 inches wide, and an inch thick with a plastic band holding it on my ankle. It got in the way of putting on socks and pants and taking them off. There were escape detectors on the walls of every doorway to a room with outside doors. They would make a ruckus if you even got near them, not necessarily enter the doorway and, of course, somebody would have to check it out. I would deliberately set them off, then casually walk away down the hall. I could have simply scissored the plastic band holding it on and put it in the trash, then walked out any door and escaped but it was more fun to annoy Big Brother by making noise.

There is an ombudsman in New Jersey for nursing homes. "The New Jersey State Long-Term Care Ombudsman. (LTCO) advocates for residents by investigating allegations of abuse, neglect, exploitation, crime and serious bodily injury of individuals living in a long-term care facility. The LTCO investigates, resolves and/or refers allegations of abuse, neglect, exploitation, crime and serious bodily injury of individuals living in a long-term care facility. The LTCO investigates, resolves and/or refers complaints to the appropriate agency. By law, callers may remain anonymous and our case files are closed to the public."

I figured why not? and filed my complaint on their online site. I also attached a preliminary version of this article. On Saturday, I went to the hall outpost and asked them to scissor my BigBrotherBot off my ankle, which they did with no fuss. Then when my in-laws showed up, we all went out the door into the parking lot and went home. Free at Last!!

Then began the catch-up. Stacks of mail with lots of bills, most of them overdue. You were too sick to pay your bills? Get well soon! Lots of bills for Jacquie. Health insurance premiums which I just threw out. Go ahead, cancel it! She was good. Only the bad die twice. Sale offers, and on and on. Her estate is large enough to take care of most of them. A lot of them they can shove you know where. Some of them they can eat or close the account. Welcome to "til death do us part." If I can live with it, so can you.

On our 21st anniversary date, August 11 2001 (8/11, a month before 9/11) I will go to visit her grave and see if death did us part.