

Urbino beckons, the Via Veneto entices and I long to explore the digs of Odysseus or backtrack and split for Split. Istanbul is a joy and there the dancers are spicier than the Spice Market.

Far from the malls and sprawls of Cincinnati, far from the Redcaps and fauce white beards of the Queen City, the bells are ringing.

For the moment, forget impeachment. Forget the tawdry. Think of stars, spelled with one "r." Let every soul cast aside the lugubrious and embrace the salubrious.

Thank you and Merry Christmas to you all!

Martin B. Macht

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SUICIDE REVISITED

January 4, 1999

Frank J. Address

This is a true story. It began in 1938. It ended here at the Literary Club in April 1992 when Alan Vogeler presented his Paper entitled "A Hoosier Lawyer". Coincidentally, I was here only because I was Alan's guest that night.

Alan related the story of a young legal colleague of his whom at age 25 committed suicide. Alan referred to him as "Tom" and identified him as growing up in Brookville Ind. And attending Brookville HS. Alan did that to disguise Tom's true identity for reasons, which will become apparent as this suicide, mystery unfolds.

Tom was not his real name. I know his real name because he and I attended Walnut Hills High School together. However, it is preferable to retain the

young man's anonymity and so I too will refer to him as Tom.

There are several men here tonight who know his real identity and I would appreciate it if each of you would respect the need for his anonymity.

Purely by coincidence, what Alan did that night was to unravel for me the final chapter of mystery surrounding Tom's suicide - something I had been seeking for 41 years without success. I also learned that night that many years after Tom's death I played a role, unknowingly at the time, of retaliation against Tom's tormentor.

Alan was rather shocked when after his paper I went up to him and said, "I think your story about Tom may be the story of my dear friend so-and-so". Alan concurred that Tom did not grow up in Brookville Ind., the only son of parents of very modest circumstances. Rather, he grew up in an affluent Cincinnati suburb, the son of a successful attorney.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. The story really begins in Sept. 1938 when Tom and I entered the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of WHHS. I was 12 years old and he was only 11. We were referred to as "Effies" and subject to occasional hazing by those awesome upperclassmen. We had not known each other previously but came to enjoy each other's friendship as the subsequent years unfolded.

Tom was tall, slender, nice looking, very shy and quiet. Everyone admired his brilliance and quiet ways. His parents, I'm told, were extremely strict. His father, I learned years later, was my future father-in-law's attorney. He considered Tom's father the smartest man he had ever met. It is small wonder that many of us always felt that Tom would some day achieve greatness and make a significant contribution to our world.

While he excelled in every academic subject, he was hopelessly lost in social affairs, especially with the opposite sex. Many of us did better socially than academically. I like to think back to it as a matter

of priorities. We all liked Tom and almost subconsciously set out to help him become "one of the gang".

We included Tom in our weekend parties and even fixed him up with dates for special occasions. Tom was too shy to call a girl on his own.

Let me relate a couple of never to be forgotten evenings with Tom and several others in our group. Many of you here tonight can probably relate to this from your own high school experiences.

The first incident occurred in January 1943 at the home of a mutual friend "Chip" whose parents had two large homes because the grandparents had died and the parents couldn't decide which home to keep. Therefore, they kept both homes fully furnished and moved back and forth. This provided our buddy Chip a wonderful opportunity to throw weekend parties at whatever home was unoccupied for that particular weekend.

One cold, snowy, Saturday night in Jan. '43 we were all playing cards and drinking 3.2 beer (the only kind we sixteen year olds could buy). We were at one of Chip's parents homes. Tom was there along with six others of us. One buddy named "Chuck" played center linebacker for the WHHS football team. He'd gone to bed earlier, to stay in shape he'd said. He later came storming down the stairs clad only in pajama tops. (There weren't enough pajamas for everyone so we'd either wear the bottoms or the tops - but you could not have both! Chuck's pajama top did not even cover his ample waist). He complained that we were making so much noise that he couldn't sleep. I don't know why he was so unhappy - after all it was only 5 AM!

We decided to teach this noisy brute a lesson. Someone suggested he go outside and see how deep the snow was. (It was probably 5 to 6 inches). He did go out, and bang went the front door as we slammed it behind him. We immediately turned out all the lights. Chuck banged on the doors and windows but to no avail. We called the police and said there was a prowler outside. They quickly appeared and their squad car spotlight flooded the front yard while we all lay flat

on the living room floor rolling with laughter. Chuck was outside in the snow, no shoes, clad only in a pajama top, jumping frantically behind the snow covered shrubs to hid from the penetrating beam of the police searchlight. Can you imagine yourself barefoot and bareassed on a bitter cold night romping in your snow covered front yard shrubbery? Finally Tom, being the nice guy as usual could take it no longer. He unlocked the back door and let poor Chuck, half frozen, bare from the waist down, into the house. A free-for-all erupted, keep in mind that Chuck was a football linebacker, which only ended when Chip's parents unexpectedly drove into the driveway.

They had been in New York and returned by early Sunday morning train to our stunned surprise. We leapt into bed, it was now dawn, and slept until about 2 PM, when we got up and had breakfast. Chip's parents ever gracious, asked what time we got to bed. Our answer was very vague. Chip's father volunteered that he'd noticed that the water in the kitchen sink was still warm when they arrived home about 6 AM.

Tom soon went off to a prestigious Ivy League school in the middle of our Junior year, at age sixteen and graduated from there at age 19. Then came an MBA from Harvard Business School eighteen months later at age 20 and then on to Law School where he graduated with High Honors at age 23. You can appreciate how we all admired his brilliance.

Meanwhile, the rest of us completed High School in the traditional time span. We went into the service in 1944 and our paths diverged. I entered the Navy V-5 program on 7/1/44, two weeks after graduation. Tom was 4-F and never saw military service.

It wasn't until 1948 that we all got together again. It was July, a beautiful warm summer night. Tom and several others of us gathered at the old Crestview Gardens near Mt. Washington. We'd gotten Tom a date for the evening and he was driving his Mother's big new Hudson auto. New cars were still scarce and unique. I was not yet married and had a date with someone other than my future wife.

We sat around drinking beer on the lawn, telling war stories for several hours (I don't think any of us ever heard a shot fired in anger). About midnight we all decided to go swimming at the pond at the Hermitage Club in Newtown, at the end of Ragland Rd. None of us were members but we'd slipped in there before and gone swimming. So Tom in his Mother's new Hudson, plus one other car load, about ten of us in all, quietly slipped in with our lights out so as not to be detected. By now it was about 1 AM and we'd all had our share of Crestview beers. The girls changed into their bathing suits in the Hudson. The boys changed in the other car and all slipped very quietly into that beautiful dark pond about 1:30 AM. About 2:30 AM, we decided to leave and the girls again changed in Tom's mother's car.

The next morning, Tom's Mother went out to her car. But LO - what was this in the back seat? My goodness, a pair of girl's lace panties - red no less with a hole in the bottom. Most Mothers might be upset but not Tom's. She was ecstatic! At last, she thought, my shy, bashful son has lost his virginity - and in the back seat of my new Hudson! I think she was heartbroken to learn otherwise. The panties belonged to my date - not his!

I went off to Harvard Business School in Sept. 1950 while Tom, now having completed his schooling and possessing his AB, MBA and LLD all by age 23 joined a prestigious law firm as a young associate.

I saw Tom only once more in my life. It was Xmas 1950, I was married by now (Tom had attended our wedding). Tom seemed very depressed. The Russians had recently exploded a hydrogen bomb and Tom, ever the insightful, thinking person, was very pessimistic about the probability of nuclear war. While I too was concerned I put it in the category of things beyond my control and pushed it out of my mind. This reminds me of the question, "What's the difference between an optimist and a pessimist?" Answer: the pessimist is better informed. And certainly Tom was a pessimist in some ways and definitely better informed.

That was the last time I saw Tom. I went back to Cambridge, and he went back to the law firm. In Nov.

'51 I received a call from one of the old gang informing me that Tom had blown his brains out with a revolver. What a shock. All that brilliance and promise and all for naught. Tom never married, lived with his parents and probably died a virgin in spite of all our efforts to the contrary and his Mother's hopes.

I tried for years to find out the reasons and never got a clue until 1956. Much as Alan's paper was in 1992, this too, was a coincidence. When I graduated in 1952 the Korean War was still on and I was scheduled to go into the Air Corps as a lowly lt. One of my professors suggested I work for him. He had a big consulting project with the Pentagon to study military logistical problems. He assured me I would be deferred so I called the Air Corps and they agreed. The next two years I spent most of my time at the Pentagon as a consultant on military logistics.

When I went to work in the Finance Dept. of the Kroger co. in 1954, the late Joe Hall was then President. He was a newly appointed Commissioner of the second Hoover Com. and was assigned the task of getting the military out of competition with private industry. Joe needed someone to do his legwork in Washington and I was reassigned from Kroger to the Hoover Commission, once again working at the Pentagon.

Coincidentally, one of the senior men on the Hoover Commission was the managing senior partner at the very same law firm that Tom worked for when he committed suicide. I think he was called a "dollar a year man" since he volunteered his time. I introduced myself and told him about my long friendship with Tom and how devastated we were by his suicide and asked if he could enlighten me.

The Sr. Partner was probably 75 and I was about 27. He could not have been more pleasant, and seemed very anxious to enlighten me. He seemed deeply concerned about what had happened to Tom some five years earlier. He said the Partners reviewed the events of the time and thought, in hindsight, that they were overloading Tom with legal work, especially price and wage controls, which were in effect in 1951. The

Korean War was on at the time. They thought Tom was very stressed out.

As many of you may know there is nothing more pointless and futile than preparing price and wage control reports. No one, not even Tom, could understand those ridiculous and conflicting rules. And those voluminous reports, which are required, end up in huge warehouses in Washington. No one there can understand them either and they sit there unread. It is total futility for the filer and the regulator. This stress and futility may have contributed to Tom's suicide.

The Sr. Partner said they shut the firm down for two days following Tom's death and reviewed the workload of all their young associates and tried to redistribute it more evenly.

That was all I ever heard until another coincidence occurred in April of 1992 here at the Literary Club. Alan Vogeler's paper that night read as follows - -

"In January, Oscar Roberts, (not his real name) who was Tom's supervising Partner, told Tom that the firm would be working on a proposed acquisition for Frederick Steel, a major client. Roberts told Tom he should draft the required documents.

Tom welcomed the assignment and started to work at it night and day. He often talked to Fred Steel and their relationship grew warm and friendly. It was on a Monday morning that a final draft of all the documents, approved by Roberts were ready for Tom to take to Steel's office for his signature.

'Tom,' said Steel, 'Why don't you wait for me while I go over these, and we can have lunch together?' Tom hesitated momentarily and then accepted. They had a delightful lunch at Steel's nearby club, and it was nearly 2:30 PM by the time Tom got back to the office.

The receptionist said that Oscar Roberts wanted to see him as soon as he came in. As soon as Tom had hung up his coat, he went into Robert's office. It was

obvious that Roberts was furious. Where were you at our firm luncheon today? Don't tell me. You were with Fred Steel. You should have been back here by 11 o'clock. And it's now 2:30, so you obviously spent a long time there. This was a serious violation of our procedures. If you think you can steal Fred Steel and his company away from me as a client, you have another thing coming. And Bob Walker (who was another partner in the firm) and I will make sure you'll never become a partner in this firm. Now get out!"

Tom stumbled back to his office. My God, he thought, what have I done! My whole life is ruined. And the worst part is that deep down inside me I really had thought that Steel might become my client, not his. What can I do? He left his office, went to a downtown gun store and purchased a .38 caliber revolver and a box of shells. He drove to his apartment, unlocked the door and left it open. He wrote a long letter to his mother and father, explaining how he had disappointed them and how sorry he was for his actions. Then he loaded the gun, lay down on the floor and blew his brains out.

So Alan solved the mystery suicide of my friend Tom for me that night. It hadn't been overwork but personal stress brought about by his boss Oscar Roberts.

There is an interesting Epilogue to this story. Many years later in the 1960's, I resigned from Kroger to become Financial VP and Director of another firm. Coincidentally, this same Oscar Roberts was outside legal counsel for my new employer - a position he had held for many years. He was in his mid-60's at the time and I was in my mid-30's. One of my first tasks as to negotiate a new long-term loan to finance our forthcoming expansion. Oscar Roberts, now the late Oscar Roberts, (he's been dead now for many years) was my counsel. I inherited him. I found him extremely opinionated and difficult to work with. He thought that he was running the finance dept, not me. Perhaps because of the difference in our age - about thirty years - or because he resented me, I found him very condescending. After several weeks of this, and



concluding he wasn't really that knowledgeable about this type of financing, I'd had it!

After a lot of soul-searching, I went to the President of the Company, the man who had recently hired me, and asked to have Oscar Roberts fired as our legal counsel. It was a tough spot for the President. He and Oscar were the same age and had worked together for many years. Nevertheless, he supported me, and Oscar Roberts was fired.

So here at the Literary Club in 1992, I learned that the man who had tormented my friend 41 years ago and led to his suicide, was the very same man I had fired as our corporate legal counsel some ten years later.

As I reflect on this strange chain of events, several thoughts come to mind – particularly the following:

1. What goes around, comes around. Oscar tormented my friend Tom and 12 years later I fired Oscar.

2. Maybe gun controls work. If Tom had not been able to buy that revolver that same day Oscar Roberts fired him, he might have changed his mind during a gun purchase waiting period.

3. Maybe we can be too smart for our own good. Tom had three degrees by the age of 23 and committed suicide two years later.

4. Don't worry about things you can't change. Tom's worries about the Russians exploding a hydrogen bomb and the threat of Nuclear War probably contributed to his suicide.

5. Tom's friends had great expectations for his future. His untimely death was not only a great loss to his friends but also to this community and to society as a whole.

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