

The Eulogy

by Tom Peters

My coffin sits atop the burial vault, that lies next to a hole in the ground. A hole where I'm told I will rest until my soul takes flight. Three large flower arrangements on stands attempt to add color and a sense of comfort to the empty area of the cemetery.

It's a hot September morning in Inglewood, California and four hours before my gravesite service. I wait.

A few folks appear under shaded tree twenty feet away while I lie in the relentless sun. My father, my husband, two uncles, a nephew and his wife, and aunt and two teachers from the community college I attended, one alone and the other with his wife. Everyone is wearing masks in light of the pandemic in the year of my death.

'Where's the rest of her family?' One of my teachers asks the same question I'm thinking to my husband. "The limousine took them to the restrooms, they'll be here soon," he reassures the teacher. Both teachers knew my devoted daughter. My sweet, sweet daughter pushing my wheelchair and present in every class I had taken. Odd not to have her by my side in this, the loneliest of moments.

While waiting for family members to return, my soul's eye oversees a large gathering of maybe a hundred visitors not far away. Large flags flank the gravesite and three handsome uniformed Marines stand at attention. Dare I wish that was my graveside service, handsome Marines, flags, a large crowd?

The limousine arrives an uncomfortable 15 minutes later and deposits my daughter, my mother, stepmother, her sister and WHAT! An Elder from our church!

Calm down...had the crowd been larger the church would have scheduled the Pastor instead of a second string, wait, make that fourth string 'Elder'. Let's be patient and see how this goes.

The man running the show from the cemetery and his assistant are carrying a portable speaker, microphone and folding chair.

The Elder rests in the chair as my mother passes out the service program she's so proud of.

The Elder begins with a few quotes from his tattered bible, states God is good, Jesus is good and so was I. Well, I'm in good company. He calls my mother a saint and gives far too little credit to my daughter's role in my life. Now it's getting ugly, he selfishly complains about his bum knee, the heat of the day and the difficulty the mask is presenting to his 'delivery'. He launches into a rant that describes anyone who doesn't follow his Lord, Jesus Christ, is ignorant and doomed to hell in the next life.

He is complaining and ranting, did he even bother to read the program. I was born first, then my twin brother was stillborn. The difficult birth left me without the use of my left arm and hand. A playground incident at age 6 resulted in a serious eye injury, Diabetes at 14, kidney failure and dialysis for the next 3 years. In my early twenties, a medical mistake led to my blindness and ten years later a cancer diagnosis. His nerve to complain about his life at my graveside service!

Bum knee! Give me a break! Hot! You fat ass! I'm the one in the airless coffin, sitting in the sun.

Mercifully, the Elder's botched talk ends with a prayer and my visitors are free to pay their last respects.

My mother and father, long separated, take turns touching, mumbling a few words and kissing the coffin. My stepmother and daughter spend tearful moments draped over me. Others step forward and bow their heads as they touch the coffin.

Everyone leaves and I'm left waiting for the cemetery staff to supervise the coffin being sealed in the burial vault that will then be lowered into my grave.

The eulogy. A disaster. My father felt awkward, my mother sucked up plenty of air. My husband looks lost and my daughter, my dear daughter. As sad as me.

Again, I quietly wait.

An odd sense of time passes as if I'm sleeping. I feel footsteps in the grass. Not uneven or shuffling steps but steps with rhythm and cadence. I'm being approached. The steps stop suddenly.

The ground next to my coffin is pierced. I'm dreaming I suppose. I'm dreaming of a large flag stuck in the ground next to me and three handsome uniformed Marines standing at attention, as my soul rests.