

Polka Dots and Politics

By

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Chapter 1

“Breathe if You’re Horny”

The year was 1972 and a crowd of local political pundits gathered at Nana and Papa Ranieri’s home, a modest white-house in the small town of Bellingham, Massachusetts. The scene was a powder keg. No doubt from the massive quantities of beer and dynamites the nervous crowd had consumed. My grandfather worked for Budweiser as a salesman. The golden nectar would flow infinitely from the brass tap on the basement bar. Nana would be upstairs with Aunt Cathy speaking idle chit-chat and putting the “dyno” in the dynamites.

Dynamites for all those not from southern New England are hearty helpings of ground beef cooked to perfection with well-proportioned amounts of diced red and green peppers, onions, celery, and tomatoes. All were heated in a tomato paste base of medium viscosity. Nana would often tell the boys that her cooking was sure to put hair on their chests.

“If it doesn’t kill ‘em first” Papa would jokingly chime.

There was a dark haired, brown eyed girl always by her mother’s side. Cheryl, the youngest of the clan and only girl of six children, would later have three boys of her own. Apparently, living with five brothers wasn’t torment enough. Upon further questioning and speculation in regards to this “all boys club” a doctor would explain to her the fundamentals of genetical science. It is believed that if she had kept having children she very well may have been able to man her own hockey team by the end of the decade. Cheryl was closer to my age then to some of her brothers. I looked to her for information on what was “hip” and “cool”. After all she did take me to my first rock concert.

It was a stormy night and lightning flashed, the thunder and audience clapped, as the laser light show began to “shine on like a crazy diamond.” Legend has it that the band’s music which featured the acoustical scientific advance known as quadraphonics or Q-sound, pioneered by James Guthrie, producer of Pink Floyd’s *The Wall* (1979) and *The Final Cut* (1983), projected sound beyond the scope of the fifth-dimension!

I grew sweaty with anticipation thinking of the tonal complexities and sheer force at which Pink Floyd would be cast upon us like a net of sound, complete

with a wall of visual imagery. In the center of the arena was a gigantic disco mirror ball which sprayed light beams in a thousand directions. The lasers shimmered and shone across the wave of fans. I turned to my soon to be new Uncle Gary and said, "Look at that man puffing that funny smelling cigarette." At my young tender age and at an event of this nature a natural high is, well, almost as good. The last words I remember from that show, sung in three-part harmony, were "See you on the dark side of the moon".

Cheryl was and always will be Daddy's little girl and Mother's helper. She would supervise and give hourly reports on what her brother Kevin was doing. He couldn't get away with saying "Ah heck!" without a holler from Mom to watch his mouth.

Kevin was a tireless, tough as nails competitor. The kind of guy you were glad was on your side. Rumor has it he once shot a man for eating his ham sandwich. He is from the old school, whenever he played hockey he didn't wear a helmet or mask, and he was the goalie!

Kevin would later join the Bellingham Police Department and became an upstanding detective reporting on the wrong doings of others. Perhaps he was motivated into this occupation by Cheryl who gave her reports about him to the parental authorities, namely Mom.

During his climb up the ranks Kevin found himself drawing his technique upon many of his major influences such as The Andy Griffith Show. Bellingham was a small town much like the fictional town of Mayberry and Kevin often resembled Deputy Barney Fife. This one particular occasion is called to mind.

There was a bank robbery. Kevin took it upon himself to set up a sting operation knowing the robber would come back for the hidden money, which Kevin stumbled upon accidentally while on patrol. The guy that comes after that money could be none other than the crook. Kevin would make the bust.

It went down in the backroom of the Coachman's Lodge where all the big-time gamers played until the dark, smoky wee-morning hours. There was Jolly Fingers, Tony Buzzcock, Roy Sweetpuss and Paul Caci who often wore a T-shirt with the words, "Breathe if you're horny", white slacks, no socks and penny loafers. Often found drunk on Pina Coladas, he was sweating as the ocean is vast and began talking to himself, as he was already down \$300,000 after two hands. Paul was a self-made millionaire through selling sex toys on E-Bay. He once quoted some Charles Bukowski, from his book Love Is a Dog from Hell, "If you got to be fucking somebody you might as well be fucking somebody with money." Paul had money and loved to fuck. Inflatable dolls were his forte and he often said they were ideal for every man, "They never have a headache and don't

bitch about bringing the garbage out.” Paul once tried to get his wife to have a ménage a trios with one of his blow up dolls. Over dinner one evening Paul turned to his wife of over 30 years and whispered, “Honey, I have someone I want you to meet.”

Paul loved to gamble. Paul and my father would drop unprecedented amounts of cash on Keno at their favorite hot-spot Grumpy’s, a strip club in South Bellingham. The other place for a little Keno action was Ma Glockner’s and everybody knew what went on at Ma’s. In town, Ma had quite a reputation.

Paul had the gambler’s anonymous hot-line number tattooed on the inside of his palm but it wore off. He also had another vice. He was a habitual masturbator. Paul often could be quoted as saying, “If you find something you enjoy and are good at then stick with it.” Paul certainly did!

As the night drew on a stranger made his way into the basement where the money had been stashed. Kevin made his move.

“Whoa, what’s this?” the stranger said.

“B.D.P., you’re under arrest,” Kevin replied.

The robber managed to convince Kevin that he was FBI and was on an investigation and recovery detail in regards to the Bank’s FDIC (Federal Depositors Insurance Corporation) claim.

“We are on the same team!” the guy claimed.

“I even know the secret FBI handshake!”

This was enough to convince Kevin. He then allowed the guy to pour him a laced cup of coffee served with a jelly donut. The bandit might of got away with all the money but Kevin already had his wife Mary Beth empty the suitcase of \$500,000 into a private offshore account. Kevin let the thief escape. It was assumed that the thief had re-hid the money. In fact, Kevin’s daughters needed their college tuition, his yacht and beach house cost money.

Mary Beth’s furs, shoes and jewelry cost money. When Kevin was asked by the Police Chief, “How the hell could he let this happen and what happened to the money?”

Kevin was cool and cocky, “He knew the secret handshake!”

“Jesus Christ, Ranieri!” Chief Daigle steamed.

Both Kevin and his sister Cheryl were rather young at the time of this pinnacle election that was unfolding all around them. However, their supportive role in the future of their oldest brother’s political hopes and aspirations cannot be understated.

Dickey, the second oldest brother, was more conscious of the nervous

anxiety and anticipation that pervaded the thoughts of those in attendance that night. He coped by playing with matches in the corner. Staring at the fire, so its' intensity and brightness could be seen even after the flame flickered and faded out. It is said that Prometheus stole fire from the gods. If he hadn't done it, Dickey would have!

At one point his obsessive curiosity resulted in three acres being torched and scorched. It called to mind the fires that burned Rome in 64 AD. Yet there were no Christians to blame or put to death for this disaster. There was no delusional Emperor Nero to lay fault upon. No, Dickey stood alone in this reflection and found that fire was a cruel mistress. He picked up his cross, *hoc signo vince*, "By this sign thou shall be victorious" and did the one thing that he had to do, that was fight fires. In good time he would rise through the ranks to become Bellingham's Fire Chief. He often was seen in the same light as Boston Celtics star, Robert Parish. Both men were soft-spoken, steady contributors to the team and not afraid to take a stand. Their nicknames were one and the same, simply, "The Chief".

Sports went hand in hand with the five boys whether on TV or playing their favorite game, table hockey. Competition was fierce. The game was a Mecca of entertainment and amusement for friends and family alike and on this occasion it was no different. Nothing was more sacred than the miniature plastic Stanley Cup. This splendid and revered prize would often change hands in the course of the evening and many a beer would be drunk from the vessel in jubilation.

"The taste of victory is sweet," was the phrase heard above the din of the crowd.

"But even sweeter when washed down with a cold beer," Uncle Romeo piped in as a toast was raised to that game's winner.

Bobby, one of the brothers, would peel the labels off his bottles of beer. He hated what corporations were doing to the sanctity of brew. He was somewhat of an alchemist and mad scientist. He brewed his own suds. His greatest claim was his recipe for blueberry beer. It didn't taste half-bad but it turned your tongue a bluish tinge.

Bobby was notorious for sleeping with the silver hockey chalice. He would dream of sugar plum fairies skating circles around his competition. Bobby was a model for strength and physical fitness. This was often a point of pride. Legend has it that while visiting his brother at college he came across the path of "The Big Man on Campus" and challenged him to an arm wrestling match in front of all his peers. The two young men had been talking trash, rolling up their sleeves and showing off their guns. Bets were placed. Fists clenched with fives and tens

shook feverishly as the group huddled around the coffee table where the contest was to take place. The two men locked hands. The veins throbbed from Bobby's temples as he ground his teeth and stared through his opponent with the intensity of a wild bull. Back and forth the gladiators struggled for what seemed like hours. The spectators cheered as the battle raged on. Some heckled the combatants.

"Tear his arm off!"

"Break his wrist!"

At this point the crowd was nothing less than a rioting mob. It was as if this match was some kind of life or death blood sport. Then finally the "Big Man's" wrist went limp. He could take no more. His arm smashed into the wooden coffee table splintering it into pieces. Bobby done good!

The brother that Bobby visited at college was Tommy, my godfather. Tommy was the greatest sports announcer of all the brothers. He had an uncanny ability to turn a phrase and capture the moment by using everything from pure driven wit to biting sarcasm. Tom truly earned his seat by the hockey table. However, Tommy had a dark side. He didn't wear leather mini-skirts hiked above his thighs with stiletto heels; rather he was somewhat of an unexplained phenomenon in reference to the rest of his family's position on the political spectrum. Young Tommy had "come out" so to speak and declared himself a staunch Republican in an all-Democratic family with his oldest brother, Daniel, my father, in the heat of his election bid. It was all we could do to make sure he wasn't drawn and quartered for high treason.

Tom with the fervor of a religious zealot could often be heard preaching to those not yet converted. It was often like him to be seen in the halls of Bellingham High School carrying a bust of Richard Nixon on his way to Political Science class. Thomas would chant the mantra, "We shall overcome!" as if he was an oppressed people. He would often finish debates with the words, "Those damn Democrats are giving the store away!" He would even complain that under Democratic leadership Massachusetts' spending habits with its "big government" was digging far too deeply into the pocket of his pizza delivery boy money which he had worked so hard to earn.

Despite his lavish appetite for all things Republican he was always one of his brother's most avid supporters. He was right there to raise a toast at rallies and fundraisers. Tonight was no different. Tommy rose to his feet and spoke,

"People listen up! The polls have been closed for a few hours now. We should be receiving the results soon. All the time and effort, the phone calls to get the vote out, the placing of signs on lawns of voters, the legwork of going

door to door, the rallies and fundraisers. None of it could have been done without your help and support. Thank you on behalf of my brother.”

The speech lifted the spirits because it reminded the supporters how much work went into the campaign. Just then the phone rang. The results were gradually coming in one precinct at a time. A gentle murmur fell over the crowd. As the precincts’ votes were tallied it became more and more obvious the race was going to be close. There was one card yet to be revealed that was precinct five or South Bellingham.

South Bellingham was where the Ranieri’s lived. They went to school there. They went to church there and their kids were raised there. If there was a high turnout in precinct five it very well could carry the day. However, there was a problem with the automated counter that tallied the votes. Daniel and his supporters would be sitting in limbo until they received the official count. There were no concessions or declarations of victory made by either side.

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