

JEREMIAH WAS A BULLFROG



Was a good friend of mine.

Jeremiah & I were born in the same town in Ireland. We attended the local Primary school where Jeremiah was tolerated because the teachers had no option but to try to educate him. After all, he was a child & not in his 'right mind.' He aggravated all & when he could not impose his will on other's he gave no second thought to intimidating them physically. Such was Jeremiah's tour-de-force in his younger years & there were many times when I was glad to have him as my friend. In my case, Jeremiah never measured whether I was right or wrong, he cared less. I was his friend & that was enough for him.

Jeremiah saw life very simply. It was his way or the highway & he had the physical power to back it up. At age twelve he was almost six feet tall & prematurely well developed for his age from working with his dad on the farm. His father considered children as livestock to be put to work as soon as they became capable. I have often heard him say 'What the hell good are they if they can't work?' Ours was a farming community where a man's worth was measured in how he managed his fields and livestock. Often, the Priest at Sunday Mass would tell the congregation 'increase & multiply,' Jeremiah's dad took it literally, producing a healthy crop of twelve kids one directly after another. Jeremiah's mother died giving birth. It was

her only escape. She was forty one years of age.

At age fourteen, Jeremiah & I were accepted into the local technical school to learn a trade but after the first month he was expelled never to return. It started when he released the handbrake on the Head-master's car causing it to roll down the hill into a swamp. I will never forget Mr. Newman's expression as he suddenly realized that his car had passed by the window without a driver. I admired his mental & athletic quickness of action & screamed with laughter as he chased after the car in front of all the other kids who were equally in pain from laughing so hard. It was a moment that can never be surpassed in the minds of all us kids. We talked about it incessantly. Of course, everyone knew that Jeremiah was responsible but no one actually saw him do it. Jeremiah flat denied all accusers & acted very upset at having been accused without a shred of proof. Mr. Newman had no option & could only say "I'll be watching you, me bucko!" Two weeks later, Mrs. Murray, the English teacher had to be taken home in shock after a rat jumped out of her desk frightening her half to death. This time there were witnesses & Jeremiah got the unceremonious & grateful boot of Mr. Newman both figuratively & practically.

Jeremiah was quite pleased & headed off to England to work on the 'buildings' which was his plan all along in any case. After my two-year stint at the school, I also headed for England & freedom. I was good at mechanical drawing but other than that I was quite clueless. I got a job in a bar picking up glasses & washing them. One of my other responsibilities was to bottle the beer in the cellar of the pub. In those days the beer came in large metal casks & bottling required the use of a siphon that had to be activated orally for each filling. I was drunk/sick every day & I was only seventeen. Jeremiah, whom I was now meeting quite regularly at another local, thought this was the greatest job ever. Jeremiah's conversation when he was not discussing his current offenders was always about sex. He was insatiable in his need for sex. He was forever falling in love & having his romantic dreams crushed. Finally, he just gave up & simply saw all women as objects to be used. Life, as usual, was simple in Jeremiah's world. He physically fought regularly for any excuse simply to relieve himself - better than sex in his book. When a scuffle or disturbance was to break out in a dancehall or bar it was there you were sure to find Jeremiah. The predominantly Irish community of Cricklewood was a

dangerous place in those days especially with the likes of Jeremiah running loose. I began to distance myself, figuring that sooner or later, someone was going to pull a gun or a knife & I did not want to be part of it. In my opinion, Jeremiah was a wild man that could only come to a bad end.

Eight years passed before our next meeting at an Irish center in N.Y. It was a grand re-union & we fairly celebrated on Guinness until I finally had to bow out and order a taxi. I met him often after that. He sometimes bragged of his ability to stay out of prison. To my knowledge he never saw the inside of a jail other than perhaps for a night or two. He was very crafty in managing the law & seemed to know how to get around most situations.. Everywhere he went he attracted trouble like nails to a magnet. He had leveled off at six feet & seven inches, pot-bellied & wearing on his face all the marks of a street dogs mind. He continued to have little respect for law & order & treated any form of control as social disease.

By this time, I had a family & was attempting to re-build a 'handyman special' house. I asked Jeremiah if he would be interested in the work. I had little experience in construction whereas Jeremiah had, or at least I assumed that he had. I reasoned that I would continue to work harder at what I know best & pay Jeremiah to do what he knows best. I set him to work & work he did. He was ferocious in his attempt to measure up to the responsibility I had thrust upon him & all worked out just fine during the destruction phase. But when it came to the construction part Jeremiah was at sea. His pride would never allow him to admit that there was anything he did not know. In the past, he had always worked with other people so consequently he could get by on other people's knowledge. He was always clever in manipulating his advantages, almost as if to actually learn something was a concession to his cavalier attitude. He did not want to belong, did not want to become mundane. Jeremiah wanted to be alive only on his terms alone.

Meanwhile, my handyman special was suffering heavily because he had little knowledge of how to square things properly before constructing. As a result few phases came together properly, with each new mistake impacting on the one before. Jeremiah, of course, believed that I was clue-less & continued to muddle through with the very best of intentions on my behalf. I really believe that Jeremiah had faith that he could pull it off. But I got worried when the calamity of

errors resulted in a door-jamb being obviously so off-center that I was compelled to mention it to him. Without any hesitation, he immediately picked up a hammer as if the problem was only a slight detail & tried to make it right by brute force, only to end up damaging the jamb even more than before.

I pretended nothing because on some level I was feeling the sadness of Jeremiah's position & did not think he could handle being criticized by me, his long-time friend. I understood how Jeremiah felt because I also had been in a similar position many times in my own life. In those years, I too, was running scared of learning anything. I had no self-confidence, low self-esteem & just as Jeremiah was, we were both just muddling through. Finally, I ran out of money & told Jeremiah that I would have to let him go. He objected, saying that he was more than willing to continue for nothing until the work was finished. I, of course, told him that I would not hear of it & thanked him for his generous offer. Jeremiah has a big heart & I have never mentioned this experience to another soul for fear of embarrassing him.

I lost touch with him for many years after this, not for any reason other than that our lives simply took different directions. I remained in N.Y. continuing to work & raise a family while he traveled to Alaska to work on the oil pipeline. Finally, we met purely by chance in Philadelphia. He was with a group of mutual friends from our hometown. We were all pleased to meet up & christened the event in true Irish fashion. As the evening was wearing down our group was reduced to Jeremiah, myself & Jeremiah's friend Bill. I was sitting between the two listening to their conversation which was, as usual, about women & 'scumbags,' which was Jeremiah's favorite term for anyone who disagreed with him - some things never change & I remember feeling quite refreshed to know that at least Jeremiah was a constant in a world that was becoming increasingly confusing to me. Earlier on in the evening I had a most interesting conversation with Bill & found him to be a highly aware, educated & sophisticated man. It seemed incongruous that he should be fraternizing with Jeremiah and his clique but I was soon proved wrong by observing the respect & acceptance he was treated with by all in that company. It was an enigma.

In the meantime, I am sitting between the two of them, all the others had left, I told Jeremiah that I had recently spent a week in the Bahamas with a beautiful

woman (I had since divorced from my wife) & that even though we slept in the same bed we never touched each other intimately. Jeremiah looked at me as if I was quite mad & made his usual comments about what he would do in a similar situation. I then said to him 'sometimes love between two people can be so powerful that sex becomes an afterthought.' I watched his eyes mist over as he said, 'I understand that.' I was shocked to hear Jeremiah say this & his reaction made me look directly into his eyes for a moment & say 'I really believe that you do,' & I did.

The conversation drifted back to Jeremiah & Bill; they were talking about hunting & fishing & discussing the various exploits the pair of them get up to. I was silent in the middle just taking it all in. Then suddenly something magical happened & I realized that I was being communicated with on an entirely different level to the conversation going on between them: I was being told by the two of them that they loved each other & that they deliberately wanted me to know their secret. I remained silent & tuned back to their conversation which was still about hunting & fishing. I again returned to the discreet communication & basked in the awareness of being so honored by these two people. I was floored at the prospect of Jeremiah loving another man & was in awe of his courage to bridge the gap of our external façades & share it with me. It made me aware that this world is not a safe place for higher beings & they must do what they can to protect themselves.

Jeremiah had everyone fooled but I now knew for sure what I had always suspected; that Jeremiah was an Angel in disguise. As we left the bar, I was completely aware of how well insulated Jeremiah & Bill had made themselves in order to invite me to their experience. There was nothing to be said because nothing was actually spoken in relation to this experience. There was only the intense understanding between people sharing a very special secret, 'the love that dare not speak its name'. Jeremiah left in Bill's car as if to put the final stamp on the interchange. I left feeling like I had just been an honored guest at a most unique banquet.

Jeremiah was killed in a car accident in 2006. He was driving under the influence while being chased by the Police for speeding. Fortunately, no one else was injured. He is interred in the local cemetery in our home town. He was well remembered, people travelled from far and wide to pay their respects and have a

final party with Jeremiah. The wake lasted for three days. Many I suspect thought that he was going to wake up at any moment.

The sweetest love on the vine does not have a gender.