
Chapter Forty

I could have been a Contender.

*Photo Shoot, Southlake, Keller and Autumn Leaves and
Sky Creek Ranch Golf Club*

July 24-26, 2008

It wasn't him, Charley! It was you. You remember that night in the Garden, you came down to my dressing room and said: 'Kid, this ain't your night. We're going for the price on Wilson.' You remember that? 'This ain't your night!' My night! I coulda taken Wilson apart! So what happens? He gets the title shot outdoors in the ball park - and whadda I get? A one-way ticket to Palookaville. ...You was my brother, Charley. You shoulda looked out for me a little bit. You shoulda taken care of me - just a little bit - so I wouldn't have to take them dives for the short-end money...You don't understand! I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am. Let's face it ...It was you, Charley.

In the comfort of Rob and Joy's living room in Southlake we caught the conclusion of the 1980 movie, *Raging Bull*, with Robert DeNiro in the lead role as prize fighter Jake LaMatta. Jake is in front of a mirror practicing the Marlon Brando scene from the 1954 movie *On the Waterfront* based on the Tennessee Williams play by the same name. Both movies have significant plot lines around the relationships between brothers. The Brando portrayal is a classic and so full of emotion.

My business trip to the Dallas area for the purpose of supervising a photo shoot of welding and cutting products in Denton is a great excuse to extend through Saturday to make time for my own brother, his family, my dad and visit mom at the *Autumn Leaves* assisted living facility. This trip is just about 30 days since my last visit from St. Louis and about 2 years from the visit before that one. (The really great thing about Rob and Joy is how easily they accommodate and welcome me whether it has been 30 days or 2 years.) It is also terrific

to spend some time with Megan (home from college), Tara (college bound next year) and Kevin (on summer break from high school, who, next year will be the only Carroll Southlake Dragon left at 403 Atherton Circle).

Morgan Studio Texas

Rob is at a career crossroad, but has a pretty nice set-up in an outplacement office facility in Grapevine, Texas where he can make calls and work on his computer. His new corporate office is highly functional and includes access to secretarial services and a handsome conference room. Rob is president of Morgan Studio Texas. It's a lean operation so Joy needs to be both trusted advisor and the only subordinate he can boss around. (Rob knows, however, that telling Joy what to do too often is entirely too risky at this juncture.) J.O'C.M. watercolors hang in his highly utilitarian office space: a Longhorn steer on one wall and the head of a horse on another wall. On the window sill rest a small collection of books including John Lucht's *Rites of Passage at \$100,000 to \$1 Million+ - your insiders guide to executive job changing and faster career progress* and *The Kennedy Red Book of Executive Recruiters*. Rob is ready to do battle in the quest for his next career adventure. He's also resigned to the notion that he next opportunity will be in the Dallas area (at least for now).

Autumn Leaves

On Friday afternoon, I was able to meet Dad at his house and travel with him to visit Mom at *Autumn Leaves*. Dad just turned 90 last week. His freshly renewed driver's license makes it possible for him to insist on driving. Unlike my brothers, Rob and Greg, and my wife, Lynn, I don't feel the need to always be the driver in control. That said, however, in Dad's car it is, at times, a little tense: 20MPH, drifting over the center line, ill-timed turns and hesitations in traffic can make you want to be a tad more alert in the passenger seat.

Autumn Leaves in mid afternoon is jumping. There are 40 residents and many of them are enjoying the common area.

Music is playing tunes by the likes of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. Iced Tea (sweetened by Equal) is being served.

We caught up with mom in a corridor. In spite of the fact she broke her hip just a month ago she's up and around. She's lively and there are glimmers of the Mary Morgan I remember, the kind of person who can make a perfect stranger feel like a close friend. She's always been sociable. I'm convinced she recognizes me as someone she should know. However, instead of being sad or frustrated, she rolls with it.

"Ohhhh," she sighs as she wraps me in a hug.

"You look very pretty today" I offer.

"Oh sure" she responds with a touch of wit.

"And you are walking around. Last time I saw you, you were in a chair?"

"Was I?" She has no memory of the last visit and I remind myself to confine remarks to what is in the here and now. Dad is nearby, but I am now her escort around the building. She moves with a sense of purpose and mission but she's clearly not really going anywhere in particular. She agrees to stop and rest on a small sofa.

"I love you...You're so handsome"

"No I'm not?"

"Oh, yes you are." It's a charming exchange. It's also not too far from the script I would expect from my mom. She's been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, but she still has the uncanny ability be warm and loving.

"Let's go." mom doesn't want to sit too long. We get up with a new sense of urgency and head down another hallway.

"That picture looks like it might be a DaVinci," I said.

"It could be." Her short response is both amusing and dismissive. I have no idea if she recognizes the artwork as a print of a detail from a DaVinci drawing.

"Let's sit down for a while." Again we sit.

"Ohhhh...You are so handsome... We haven't seen him for a while." She includes Dad in the conversation from time to time.

"Yeah. That's Wes." Says Dad. But I'm sure she isn't

processing the information. I am at peace with that. It's nice that she seems in good spirits and happy to be center of attention.

"Let's go." Again we get up and walk. This time we are checking doors. Some are rooms of other residents, some are closets and some are exits. All are locked to her.

"Oh look Bonnie!" says Dad. (Bonnie is an aid that is originally from Kenya, Africa. She knows Mary Morgan and she gets high marks in Dad's book as someone who genuinely cares for mom. She does her job well. On this visit, Bonnie presents Dad with a 90th birthday card. Dad's disappointed that Bonnie won't be able to join us for lunch at Rockfish, his new favorite restaurant.

Rockfish

Dad orders the Snow Crab. He's paying. At \$19.95, its most expensive thing offered as a special today. Rob has battered Alaskan fish-n-chips, I have the Mahi Tuna. Rob and I also have a Blue Moon Belgian draft beer. Rob invited Joy and Kevin and Megan and Tara. All politely declined the invitation. That's okay, and fortunate too, since Rob was willing to assure anyone and everyone that non-seafood items were also offered at Rockfish. A fact that did not present itself on the menu.

Sky Creek Ranch Golf Club

With Dad's permission, I checked into his spare bedroom on Friday night. Dad is going to be a part of the foursome Saturday morning at Sky Creek Ranch Golf Club. Rob and his boy Kevin will share a cart. Dad and I will share a cart. Dad's house on Watercrest is right on the golf course.

There's plenty of time for Frosted Flakes with bananas, O.J. with extra pulp and coffee in the morning. Dad admits that he has forgotten which hole it right behind his house - the hole you can see from his breakfast table. I went on an early morning recon mission, a short walk through the gate in back and discovered it was hole number 7 - a par 5.

"It's hole number seven. It's a par five."

“Five.”

“No it’s number 7. But it’s a par five hole.”

“Oh.”

We are quite a foursome: Rob, Kevin, Dad and me. Kevin struggles but it is obvious he is an athlete. He’s 6’3” and a sturdy teenager. When he connects he’ll out-drive his dad. Rob has intense focus and concentration but an unorthodox address. He can’t help offering suggestions and coaching Kevin. “K-Mo, keep your head down. I’m no golfer but I noticed you came out of the shot a little early.” Dad is looking sharp in a golf shirt our sister Lynn bought him and a straw hat like something you would see Greg Norman wear. The hat keeps his face protected from the sun on a day in which it is expected to reach 100 degrees.

I set up this tee-time for 8:06 a.m. and wrangled Rob into recruiting Dad and Kevin to play too. It’s a first rate golf course. I started trash talking Rob early in the visit. “You’re going down, Robo! Dad and Kevin are just witnesses to your crushing defeat!”

We finished 18 holes. A foursome with 75 years between the oldest and youngest player! As much as I pretended it was about fierce sibling rivalry between my brother and me, that’s not what it was about at all. It was about spending 5 hours with my Dad. It was about being with my baby brother. It was about being up close and personal and witnessing quality time between Rob and his son. The circle of life!

We finished eighteen holes. Rob checked his phone. A text message from Joy, “Who won?” His none-response was as good an answer.