RE: 2020 Pasatíempo Writing Contest

CATEGORY: Non-Fiction

TITLE: My Friend, Jack’s Murder

Jack finished medical school in 1969 and moved to our small rural town near the Canadian border to launch his practice. The community was considered an underserved area so he avoided military service in Vietnam by practicing medicine in a rural community.

Jack was approximately six feet two inches tall and had straight sandy blond hair. At work, he primarily wore scrubs and a lab jacket. After hours, he was usually dressed casually in a shirt and slacks. Although he owned nice suits and ties, there were infrequent reasons for him to dress formally.

 Jack developed friends of all ages. He especially loved his older patients, because “they had such interesting stories to tell.” Each of them felt that he took a personal interest in them which he did. Some of the residents in the nursing home would dress up or get their hair done when the doctor was scheduled for his monthly rounds.

I was pregnant with my son when our Grandma Sadie had a heart attack. I followed the ambulance to the hospital and when I arrived at the intensive care unit, Jack was already there. He was with our family most of that day and later through the funeral. He had a similar relationship with many of the families in our small Midwest town.

Both Jack and his clinic partner, Dr. Larson had Wednesday as their day off. The two physicians would have dinner together at the local steakhouse. By the end of an evening, anyone else who was also dining at the Cedar Inn had joined them for drinks. It was common to see the small tables in the bar all pushed together in a group for these conversations which included individuals from all walks of life and age groups. Jack was popular!

Jack enjoyed his income by traveling, driving luxury cars and purchasing art from regional artists. Jack’s new home had been designed to showcase his growing art collection with high raftered ceilings and large open spaces. He started accumulating art in 1972, and by the 1980’s his home was a virtual art gallery. He also served on several regional art museum boards where he got to know the regional artists and often socialized with them.

In 1978, Jack was married for a short time to Kari, a native of Norway who had a small daughter. The marriage broke up and Kari returned to Norway. Prior to her departure, she told everyone that she was leaving because Jack was *gay*. I always thought he was *asexual*.

Each December, Jack would travel most of the month. I remember the night he returned before Christmas 1985 with a stack of presents for my family. The first thing he said to me was, “I got a clean bill of health.” Now I knew why he’d been depressed lately. He thought he was sick.

In 1985, the famous movie star, Rock Hudson died at age 59 of Auto Immune Disease (AIDS). The world soon learned that he was gay. This provided the catalyst to make the entire country aware of AIDS. The following year, the National AIDS Education Program was launched to raise awareness across the country. People were afraid of the disease, and they didn’t know how to react to their homosexual friends and family. It reminds me of the current 2020 pandemic and COVID-19. Very little was known about Auto-Immune Deficiency.

We often traveled with our friend, Jack. One year, Jack, my husband Mike and I, along with some other local friends traveled to New York City to enjoy plays, eat well and shop. Two weeks after we returned from New York, my friend Jack was found stabbed to death in his home.

When a murder takes place in a small town where everybody knows each other, everyone remains guilty or at least suspicious. Today, this investigation is still an *open* case, but not a *cold* case. As a result, the investigation files are closed to the general public. There is no statute of limitations for a murder investigation, but someone has gotten away with murder when it is never solved.

In 1986, the concept of saving DNA evidence was not a possibility. CODIS, the central depository for DNA samples in the U.S. didn’t yet exist.

According to FBI reports and Pew Research, one third of all murders in the U.S. are never solved. The FBI says that there is little likelihood of a case being solved if there is no evidence found within the first 72 hours. As a result, *most* of the crimes reported in the U.S. don’t end with an arrest, charging someone, or with prosecution.

My friend Jack has now been dead for 34 years. His murder remains unsolved.

CLN -11/9/2020