

MY FRIEND BOB

By Fred Hobbs

Being asked to write about different races, cultures and traditions opens a huge door of creative opportunity. However, no sweeping analysis of that topic can be accomplished in the space allotted for this short essay. So, I've chosen to concentrate on my lifelong friendship with a man named Bob. Not only do his traditions differ from mine, but we have disparate experiences and upbringing regarding one very important aspect, (religious beliefs) and one pretty trivial, namely, geography.

We met while stationed in the army in Germany and were assigned as roommates in the quarters we occupied at the American Forces Network (AFN) radio station in Berlin. But what about our lasting friendship? Is it chemistry? Or just serendipity?

To be sure, Bob and I enjoy a common interest in broadcasting and show biz related subjects. We share the same basic political beliefs and perhaps most important we are on the same "wave length" on the sense of humor dial.

Yet, we are of different religious orientations and geographic perspectives. Bob is Jewish and observes the important rituals, traditions and holidays. He grew up in Boston and has lived for years in Stamford, Connecticut, working in New York City. I am a product of a Southern family tradition, yet born and reared in Colorado, a confirmed westerner. I don't have any particular religious affiliation, but married a lovely Catholic girl and we raised our children in that faith.

The friendship bond that the nice Jewish boy from the east and the Rocky Mountain heathen forged more than a half-century ago has lasted through the proverbial "good times and bad." With our respective wives, we once "did Manhattan" on an eastern visit. We were pleased to return the favor when Bob and his bride joined us for a great week in a Breckenridge condo.

As the years rolled by, we first exchanged letters and holiday cards with occasional phone calls added. With the advent of e-mail and unlimited long distance, we kept in closer touch exchanging our views on the changes in the media (we didn't like most of them), the constant barrage of political shenanigans, a little sports talk and, of course, the weather.

Then, some ten years ago, I delivered the sad news to Bob that my wife had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He was very sympathetic and inquired at frequent intervals about possible progress in fighting the disease, how the research protocols we had decided to pursue were working and the state of my welfare through this process. It was especially comforting to know that not just my family, neighbors, and nearby friends were so concerned and involved, but a friend miles away. When I called to tell him that the ravages of Alzheimer's eventually took my wife's life away, Bob began crying at the other end of the phone line.

Bob continued to keep frequent contact with me. In those conversations, he began to ask me some specific questions about my wife's Alzheimer's experience. And then, he told me what I had suspected. His wife had been diagnosed with the disease. He reports that she is not doing well and he's not sure her treatments are doing any good. And most reluctantly, several months ago, he also revealed that he has pancreatic cancer. He since has been operated on successfully, but just a few days ago he called to say doctors have found evidence of a new tumor.

I'm still hoping for some kind of a happy ending to wrap up the events I have described. But even if that doesn't come to pass, I will never forget, despite our different backgrounds, the special place in my life provided by My Friend Bob.