

Puzzling

05-12-2014 by Harry Zirkelbach

Uncle Walter was a functioning alcoholic during the day. A mid-level manager he was considered by bosses and fellow employees as highly competent, dependable, really likable. He was punctual, never missed work.

Week nights he was considered by drinking friends, as garrulous, generous, alcoholic, whose physical stamina sheltered him from being a stumbling drunk. For after work, his habit was to go to a bar, have a bite to eat with the first of many drinks. Regularly staying until closing, never sober leaving, usually going to a home shared with his alcoholic wife, a stay-at-home solitary drunk.

Several time a week he left the bar to stay with his sister's family, whose home was nearer work and the bar.

Established as very competent at work, he never exhibited alcoholism ,was likable, of a cherry disposition. These traits certainly endeared him to those who shared the evening drinking with him, for he was a wonderful story teller, and when others commanded the bar-stage, he listened, responded as friend to their tales of triumph, misery, or tragedy. Somehow remaining alert through hours of drinking , he was everyone's dearest drinking buddy.

At home on weekends, he drank little, completed male house chores as well as many expected of his wife, who maintained the same drinking habit every day. And he was pleasant with their two children these two days, who, aware of his absence after work, never accepted Mom's explanations of dad's abnormal parental life.

Nothing changed in this couples drinking as each of their two children left home. And when Uncle Walter retired from work, he retired from evening tavern life.

Unable to reestablish any commonality with his wife of 42 years, and having severed any ties with the remainder of the world, Uncle Walter's vigor, humor, health disappeared and his funeral was attended by few who worked or drank with him those 42 years.

That was not the case for his sister's family.
Uncle Walter was that family's joy.

He was generous with his sister and her family, a chatterbox at the breakfast table before going to work nights he slept over; or on rare visits there with his family

on weekends, holidays. He would always remain in their memory as handsome, tall, witty, a replica of mother's dad, and

for three exceptional night memories, usually before 3:00 am.

From some bedroom, a cry would be heard “fire” as the first to detect smoke on the second floor called for attention. There would be the skirmish of eight sets of feet rushing to the top of the stairs, then down to the living room, eyes fixed expectantly. In each of these scattered moments, the scene had a central figure, Uncle Walter, tall, handsomely nude, trying to beat out a fire on the sofa or couch. For that is where he had slumped after undressing, smoking a cigarette, igniting a conflagration.

To the inquiry “What happened Uncle Walter?”

*The reply always the same as he beat a smoldering cushion with his hands,
looking all the world like a moving drawing from a museum,
a white nude male, flailing, ruddy face and hands, replying*

“I don’t know. I just walked in, found the sofa/chair on fire.”

*There was no puzzle. None believed him.
The younger family members saw it his streak of humor;
found it appealing.*

*His sister found her brother a delight,
saw the inner man;
her flawed, faultless, beloved brother.*

Was that positive commentator at Walter’s funeral.

