

# **Never Looked Better**

**by Phillip W. Weiss**

I knew a guy. We were the best of friends. We grew up in the same neighborhood, went to the same schools, played ball in the school yard, went to the same parties, and entered the workforce at the same time, he as roofer for a well-known general contractor and me as a civil servant. Both us dated ladies and then one day he met his special lady who became the love of his life. They lived together for decades. I had known her first, was even intimate with her for a while, but when she met my pal, it was love at first sight. I never held it against him, never harbored a grudge, never felt jealousy or envy or threatened them with harm. I did just the opposite. I wished them all the best and was genuinely glad to hear from them when they called me to get together, which we did every so often. The years went by. I watched them age. Yet we stayed friends. We talked politics and about life. Although he had only graduated high school, he had more common sense and was more street wise then any college professor, He could hold his own in any discussion about any topic. He laughed at the thought of going to college. He pointed out that he was making twice as much money as me with my bachelor's degree and chided me for even bringing up the subject. He said this with no rancor or malice. That would have been unlike him because he never had a bad word to say about anyone and had a way of engaging even total strangers in a manner that would have put even the most experienced politicians

to shame. He was unpretentious, level headed, and well-liked by all. He lived his life with no fanfare. He and his lady traveled the world. They went to Europe, the south Pacific, northern Africa, Mexico and the Caribbean. They had a jolly good time and when they returned, would tell me about their adventures. He had his health problems that eventually slowed him down but he never complained. His arthritis got worse, his teeth rotted out, his back became bent, and his hair thinned. But he kept on talking, kept on thinking, and kept on living with his lady who loved him more than any wife could love a husband. But time is cruel. One day he called and asked me to go to his mailbox and pick up his mail. His lady was in Europe visiting relatives. He could not accompany her because he wasn't feeling well. I went to his lady's apartment where he was staying. He was gaunt, bent over and could barely stand. But he was in good spirits and glad to see me. He gave me the key to his mailbox and off I went to the building where he lived. At his building I opened his mailbox and there was no mail. I returned to his lady's apartment, gave him back his mailbox key and told him that the mailbox was empty. He expressed surprise. He offered me a refreshment which I declined. Soon after I left him. The next day, his lady friend called me. She informed me that my friend had died. She told me that in the middle of the night, he had complained of a terrible pain in his stomach. She called an ambulance that took him to a hospital where a team of doctors worked frantically to save him but to no avail His time had had come and now he was gone. I felt sad but not surprised. He had lived a good life and I would miss him. Three days later I attended his wake.

He was lying in state. Despite his friendly and caring nature, few people attended his wake. His lady had made the funeral arrangements. His casket was open. I gazed at the remains of the person who I had known for my entire life and now was gone. It was unreal. Just a few hours earlier he was alive. The same person who had asked me to do an errand for him and had offered me refreshments was now a cadaver on display. Yet far from being morbid, this occasion seemed almost joyful, like a party with my friend the honored guest. That was because in death my friend never looked better. He was dressed in an expensive tuxedo and if you did not know he was dead, you would have believed that he was asleep and at any moment would awake. In a way, death became him. He lived and loved and now he lay in state, in eternal slumber. He earned it. That was his reward. Such is life.