
Chapter Thirty Nine

Slaying Dragons and Chasing Windmills

A visit to Southlake, Texas

June 22-24, 2008

Rob, his wife Joy and their kids - Megan, Tara and Kevin are all Dragons. They have been a part of the Southlake scene for nearly a decade. They fit the profile perfectly.

They're good at everything in Southlake. If you've never been, there's something a little Pleasantville about it. The streets are cleaner than your streets, the downtown more vibrant, the students more courteous, their parents more prosperous. Everyone is beautiful in Southlake. Everyone smiles in Southlake. Everyone is a Dragon in Southlake. This last fact, especially, is central to understanding the city. The kids and their mothers coming out of Central Market. The retired men who eat barbecue at the Feed Store. The white collar professionals strolling through the shops of Southlake's Town Square. They are all Dragons.

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Dragons are good in Southlake. But they have not always been so. My mother once directed a community theater production of the play about Don Quixote and his faithful companion Sancho Panza. In the musical play *Man of La Mancha*, based on a 17th century work by Cervantes, Quixote and Panza travel the countryside, looking to slay dragons, save damsels in distress and generally right all wrongs. My brother Rob does that too. My dad has always done that.

In the end, you have to love a hero who keeps the glorious quest alive. Rob is not delusional. He's a realist and the sort of overachiever that you'd expect to find in a place like Southlake. Still he is the sort of person who faces adversity with incredible optimism. I think he got that trait from Dad.

Mom and Dad decided to move closer to Rob and Joy years ago. Now mom is a resident of *Autumn Leaves*, an assisted

living facility that specializes in the care of individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Dad will be 90 next month and in spite of a battery of medical concerns looks remarkably fit. Mom and Dad are fixtures at the top of both Rob and Joy's "things to do" lists. They accept the responsibility cheerfully. (Thank God.) We grew up in a family of six but I bet no one ever fully considered the consequences of being judged the BEST.

Megan is a writer. She's almost finished with her studies at Oklahoma University. Her boyfriend is a musician from St. Louis (Jordan). Rob and I picked her up from the airport Tuesday night. She's a college student and 20 years old but that doesn't stop Rob from grilling her.

"So how was your trip?"

"Fine."

"Where did you go? What did you do?"

"We went to the St. Louis Zoo. It was amazing. We spend almost an hour watching a snake digest a small animal."

"Did you go to Laclede's Landing?"

"I'm not sure. We did go to the University City loop. It was fun."

The ride back from the airport was long enough to learn of one of Jordan's band-mates hitting on a woman who turned out to be married and 35 years old. Incredibly the woman turned up on the TV show Deal or No Deal, the game show with Howie Mandel as host. Oh my. Megan has nothing to hide, so the conversation is easy. She has a mature way of speaking and a very real sense of humor. She is thinking about where she's going to find 50,000 words for a writing class next semester. The final project will be a work of fiction – the organization/outline/structure of which is none of Rob's business. But it doesn't stop him from asking.

Tara seems a little more guarded. All three Morgan kids are handsome, but Tara is Paris Hilton-esque. You can't help wondering what kind of mischief she's up to.

Rob is managing his family and does it with love, but

sometimes the inquisitions can be a bit irritating. Tara and Austin (Tara's boyfriend for the past couple of years) are used to the questions. They know you have to face the music with Mr. Morgan. Austin remembers meeting Tara's Dad the first time.

"Where are you going? How do you plan to get there? I expect my daughter home by 11 O'Clock alright?"

"Yes Sir."

Tara's cell phone ring tone sounds like Brittany Spears or probably some more current pop star. She answers the ring and exits the room to where she can have a more private conversation. Joy predicted (accurately) that Tara would reappear downstairs at exactly 6:00, expecting dinner. Joy was right but her schedule was off by 29 minutes and Tara had to wait.

Rob challenges Tara with some more questions.

"Did you get a card from Uncle Wes?"

Rob wants to know a couple of things here.

1. Did Wes respond to Tara's high school graduation notice with a check? and
2. Did Tara do the right thing and send a timely Thank You note?

"Yeah" says Tara

"Did you send a Thank You note?"

"Not yet."

"Well, you better do that."

Interestingly enough, Tara and I are both misleading Rob, here. I know we didn't send any sort of acknowledgement of Tara's High School Graduation. I've been putting it off. I have the announcement in my briefcase. I could have busted Tara, but I would have to admit that I was a slacker too. Around Rob you just know you have to be accountable. Tara wants "the dirt" on Rob and Joy. They have been together forever. They were insulated by a tight knit group of friends at Lakewood High School. As near as I can tell they mostly made the right choices. (So, I got no dirt on them.)

Kevin is fifteen (15). He's tall and quiet. He likes to escape to a world of computer gaming software that allows him to compete with others in a virtual reality. K-Mo's own reality has been altered since his pitching arm is not what it used to be. Rob and Joy have taken him to multiple specialists but it's not serious enough to merit Tommy John surgery. He's only 15 for crying out loud. I had the pleasure of watching him play basketball in the last game of an off-season league. Rob is there and assumes the position of sideline coach. Kevin is embarrassed when his dad so naturally takes control. But by now he's used to it. My guess is that he'll come to appreciate how easily his dad can assess and take charge of a situation. Even in a losing effort, Rob encourages the team and applauds their efforts. K-Mo reminds me of my son who sometimes goes by the moniker Benny-Mo. (Only with Ben he's probably modeling a Hip Hop Gangsta Rapper whereas Kevin is probably thinking about a sports star. Regardless of their role models both K-Mo and Benny Mo are well on their way to becoming good citizens and fine young men.)

Dad was able to make the game too. He's a K-Mo fan and he's thrilled to see Rob on the sidelines. Joy is happy to be there too. It's good just to be around my Dad and it's nice to see how Rob's family is shaping up too.

Dad's been reading *Under a Wing* by Reeve Lindbergh, Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh's youngest child. The biography/autobiography traces her relationship with her famous parents, the effect of the murder of the Lindbergh baby on her family, and her discovery of her father's anti-Semitism. Dad's not a big reader and admitted to me that he mostly skimmed the later pages. Biographies are not easy to read – even if the people are famous. (Dad's own history -being a college Football star at John Carroll University, his post-graduate stint at Pratt Institute, his WWII experiences and building a successful business might be at least as engaging in 200+ pages as Reeve Lindbergh's book.)

“You know there are military installations, buildings and

artillery they still can't find in Southern California," My silly joke brings a smile to my Dad. I didn't mean to be disrespectful. I know my Dad has fond memories of OCS (Officer Candidate's School) and leading camouflage maneuvers while at Fort Belvoir, California. "Similarly, if you fly over Alaska there is a base there completely concealed from the 1940's application of the Morgan Buggy Top. It's all white!" Another joke based in the fact that a Colonel visiting Fort Belvoir learned about a camo technique invented by my father and applied it at his base somewhere in Alaska. (That was in the early 1940's, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. There was a very real concern that there could be more targets in the United States. No laughing matter.)

I have been playing a lot of golf the last few years and I sparked to the idea of visiting a driving range. Rob is agreeable and Dad is along for the ride. Sky Creek Ranch Golf Course is perfectly willing to take our money. Everything I've learned about a controlled swing is out the window. Rob's long ball is the result of better club head speed. He's a more natural athlete and can crush the ball. He wins the competition as long as it's about killing it. I am a sucker for this kind of challenge. In my street shoes, with a charity golf outing in the background I fall into the trap of letting Rob define the contest. "Who can hit it past the blue flag in the distance? Who can hit it to the creek on the left – oh say 250 yards away?" (What the hell is wrong with me? I know perfectly well I can't hit it 250 yards with any accuracy.) Dad offers advice on grip. (Puhlease, even if there was validity to his advice, this is the wrong time for a new swing thought! I can't beat Rob at his own game. I have to get him into the short game stuff. Even then, he's got me so rattled I am lucky I can hit the ball at all.)

In the back of my mind, I'm playing back recent memory of the visit, earlier in the day, with my Mother. Pleasant enough, but about what I expected. Sad, nevertheless.

"Did she recognize you?" The woman in the front office at *Autumn Leaves* asked me as we were leaving. I couldn't help

thinking it was a trick question?

“Did it seem like Mom knew who you were?” Dad asked me later while we were eating five-dollar foot-long Subways sandwiches at his house.

“Honestly, I don’t know. I doubt it.”

“But she did seem to know you were someone important to her...Someone who loved her.”

“I hope so.”

Time marches on. Next year, Megan will be producing thousands of words for someone else. Tara will be headed to Oklahoma University. Kevin will still be battling his virtual foes, not to mention opponents of the Southlake Carroll Dragons. Rob will be taking his career in a new direction. (After nine years at Petmate this chapter in his life is over.) Joy will be opening the mail and tempted by the next private showing of high-end jewelry at Bailey Banks & Biddle. (Not really, Joy is not the pampered trophy-wife type. She’s a rock solid pragmatist and the foundation of this small band of Southlake Dragons.) Joy and Rob will be managing household finances and a thousand of other decisions about Mom and Dad. God Bless ‘em.

Mom has left the acting and directing behind but still manages to smile and say “I love you.” Dad is dedicated to making sure Mom is as comfortable as humanly possible for the rest of her days. He’s a great man.

*To dream the impossible dream
To fight the unbeatable foe
To bear with unbearable sorrow
To run where the brave dare not go*

*To right the unrightable wrong
To love pure and chaste from afar
To try when your arms are too weary
To reach the unreachable star*

*This is my quest
To follow that star
No matter how hopeless
No matter how far*

*To fight for the right
Without question or pause
To be willing to march into Hell
For a heavenly cause*

*And I know if I'll only be true
To this glorious quest
That my heart will lie peaceful and calm
When I'm laid to my rest*

*And the world will be better for this
That one man, scorned and covered with scars
Still strove with his last ounce of courage
To reach the unreachable star*