

Daniel



By Anna Von Reitz

I'll just call him "Daniel".

We met forty years ago. I was a college girl candy-striper at the VA Hospital. He was already a Captain in the Army with a chest-full of medals, recovering from his latest "misadventure" --- the Vietnam War.

Daniel was small and lightly built, five foot six inches tall and 145 pounds. His face that first afternoon was lean and tanned, with a stubborn chin, thin lips, a narrow, beaky nose and two of the largest, most observant grey eyes I have ever seen before or since. He was recovering from multiple reconstructive surgeries for a shattered shin bone and injuries including severe burns to both hands, but he was chipper and alert and had his bed propped up like a recliner.

"Is it you?" he asked abruptly.

I stopped, wondering which "you" I might be.

"My new correspondence secretary?" he then asked. He nodded his head toward the ream of paper on his bedside table. "I have to get on with my Daily Dispatches."

And dispatches they were, too. He was running half a dozen projects from his hospital bed. He kept me writing all afternoon, and at the end of the day, he critiqued my penmanship and grammar.

Daniel was so naturally observant and analytical that he became an expert in many fields and many subjects both practical and arcane. Soap, for example. Daniel was a soap expert. It was Daniel who taught me to pack lightly.

It was Daniel who said, "That's a terrible idea. When do we start?"

In a different world we might have been lovers and carefree adventurers. As it was, we were cadre of the back-to-back sort.

After Vietnam there was Thailand and then Western Australia and Somalia. Wherever he went, Daniel took me with him and shared his life, irritations, heartbreaks, and all. After Somalia, he lived in England with some cousins in Suffolk, and worked for the NATO strategic command. When he embraced his highest self, I soared with him; when he was bitter and cynical, we fought. And we were always the best of friends, no matter what.

Two days ago, he slipped and fell, and because of the fall, he drowned. It was an odd circumstance and odd terrain. None of the rest of his team could get to him in time and the cold water took him. Hypothermia, I am told, is a gentle death. No doubt Daniel will give me a full and excruciatingly detailed report when I reach the Other Side.

At age 77, he was engaged in the worldwide manhunt for Lucifer, still scrabbling up slimy, moss-covered rock walls when he should have been retired, but such men never retire. Intellectually, logically, I know it was a fitting end to a long career and yes, the way Daniel wanted it to be. No long, lingering hospital drama for him.

Still, I've wept until I can't squeeze another tear.

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