Fifth Helena

A short story

by Mark Thomas Murphy

In August of 1963, I was living in LA with my mother. She and Pop had divorced just after I was born, and we had moved around a lot. My dad had stayed back east where he worked. I missed him terribly. I saw him off and on - - when he came to LA on business - - but only in short bursts. In town for a few days, his camel-hair overcoat on his arm. It was almost worse that way, since he was always getting ready to leave again. I'd watch the airplanes in the sky and think, one of them is gonna take him away.

He and my mom got along and didn't fight too much except when my mom got after me about my clothes or hair or things like that. My dad liked the fact that I was sort of a tomboy or, at least, liked that I was into sports. In high school and college, I had to play softball. But I was really not into being the daughter of a legend.

I remember going to a Dodger game once. We tried to sneak in and just watch the game like everyone else, but everyone recognized Pop instantly and then someone from the front office asked him to sit in the press box. They thought it would be ironic, the greatest Yankee of all time watching the game in LA. Pop hated irony.

They asked him a couple questions about Mom. Pop hated that even more. That was too personal for him. He liked attention, but he never liked THE attention. He wanted to choose how people saw him. Everyone thought they knew all about my parents, at the time probably the most famous couple in the world. They didn't. They still don't know my story.

That morning in August started a lot like most of them that year. It was a sullen day, overcast and humid. It was a Saturday so there wasn't much traffic noise to wake me up. It was Mrs. Murray who woke me up, running the dishwasher at 8:30. I lay in bed for a long time, just the sheet over my legs, my hands behind my head, just staring at the ceiling. I was inspecting the plaster on the ceiling and the pattern that looked like a map of Greenland. I did that most mornings, tracing the coastline around, each squiggly little cove and cape. Running my little boat

back and forth. Greenland was all alone in the middle of all that plaster, without even little Iceland to keep it company. It's funny how you wake up every morning and look at the ceiling until one morning you move away, and you never see it again.

And obviously we did move away eventually but I really loved that house. It wasn't fancy. Just a three-bedroom, hacienda-style house in the Helenas of Brentwood, between Sunset and San Vicente. It had the first swimming pool I ever knew, which was amazing to me but not really that special in Southern California. I loved the house because of my room, which looked into the side yard.

My room - - I had everything I needed in my room. All the windows had those wooden louvered shades, the ones that open and close on a single vertical handle. I would open them wide in the morning and look out into the dense thicket of bushes just beyond the glass. It was like a diorama in a museum, like a jungle scene. Little birds would flit around in the bushes eating the pyracantha. The light was cool and green.

Mom's room had the louvers, too, and looked out over the pool and back lawn. She loved to lie in bed and drink coffee and look out across her back yard . . . HER yard, the first she ever had all by herself. She had a door that opened to the back porch, so she could go swimming first thing in the morning, something she loved to do.

That morning I could hear Mrs. Murray, who worked for us, in the kitchen working, all echoed, and I heard my Mom, too, from across the hall. She wasn't talking very clearly. She had been sleeping poorly the last couple weeks - - trouble with work - - and was taking even more pills than usual and they made her all doped up in the morning. I hated that. They made her sound like a moron, her thoughts all smeared out. I heard Mrs. Murray tell her to go back to bed since it was Saturday and she didn't have to go to work. It really pissed me off that she had to be told NOT to go to work. I quickly got dressed in a tee shirt and last night's overalls, purple socks and PF Flyers.

When I came into the kitchen, Mrs. Murray already had breakfast on the stove. She slid two pieces of toast, a fried egg and bacon onto a plate.

“So Rosalie. What’s on the agenda for today?”

“Nothing. Maybe I’ll play with Robbie.”

“Oh yes? He’s back from camp?”

No one except Mrs. Murray and my teachers ever called me ‘Rosa-lee.’ It didn’t sound right with my last name. Other kids just called me Rosa. Pop called me ‘Bella Rosa,’ in an exaggerated Italian accent. My mother called me ‘Bug.’

“Yeah.” Mrs. Murray wiped at the Mexican-tiled counter with a rag. She continued to clean as she talked.

“You spend a lot of time with Robbie, don’t you?”

“I dunno. Maybe. He’s my friend. No one else in this neighborhood.”

“Yes, I suppose it is a rather adult group here. What about Beth Newcomb? She seemed nice.”

“She’s OK. But she never wants to do anything. She just plays in her room. She’s boring.”

“Well, your mother and her mother are good friends. You should give her a chance.” She put the rag down and reached for her glass of iced tea.

Why do people think this even matters to a kid? So what if they’re friends? It’s so demented. When did it ever go the other way . . . a kid insisting that their parents hang out with their best friend’s parents? The idea is ludicrous.

“Mom knows Mr. Kerensky,” I said to my eggs and bacon. Mrs. Murray didn’t approve of the Kerenskys because Robbie’s dad was a beatnik. Mr. Kerensky was a musician or something,

always on the road. Mrs. Kerensky was . . . gone. I remember Mr. Kerensky saying that his wife and he had gone to a party on MacDougal Street and she left with the mayor, whatever that means. So Robbie and I were friends sort of because we were both born in New York and we both were missing a parent.

“That’s different. That’s business.”

The thing was, it’s not like I didn’t get along with my mother, or Mrs. Murray, or Beth Newcomb. I was not a rebellious child. I was not maladjusted or angry at the world. Actually, I was as normal a little girl as you could find in LA, zooming down the 101 into the end of the twentieth century. I just always felt like I was expected more to be something than to behave. Like I was lazy or wrong in the head and it hurt and made me angry in a way that I had no way to talk about. I felt like a loser.

Someone smart, I forget who, once said, when we’re kids, we have no idea that we aren’t the center of the universe - - our little world - - because there is no other world we know. I was no different than a million other kids growing up. And yet, in some way, I really was the center of any universe I knew. That’s a little weird but true.

Mrs. Murray retreated to the living room and I finished my breakfast and grabbed my baseball cap. At the door I hesitated, wondering if I should try to talk to my mother. I knew it would be . . . difficult. With a shiver of guilt, I yelled, “I’m going to Robbie’s.”

“Be home by six,” I heard Mrs. Murray call back as I closed the door. My bike was right where I’d left it - - on the front patio - - and I quickly headed down our little cul-de-sac, turning right.

My world that summer was defined by roads that I could not cross and of these, San Vicente on the south was the most strictly enforced. There was a store around the corner where my mother shopped and was beloved by all the clerks but aside from that: Here be dragons, as the old maps used to say.

Since my school was up past Sunset, the north side was fair game if I crossed at the light at Carmelina. Robbie lived across Sunset, too, just off Kenter.

In 1963, Schwinn came out with the Sting-Ray. The Sting-Ray was exceptionally cool to us kids but I just had a regular Sears bike. Pop thought the Sting-Ray was ugly so I did, too. But I loved my red Sears bike and used to ride it all over. I remember we were learning about maps in school and Mrs. Stratton asked us to bring in maps from the gas stations. In those days, they gave away free maps. I rode my bike all over the neighborhood scrounging free maps. I must have had about two dozen. It seemed peculiar and wonderful that these lines and rectangles actually existed out there, with people in them, far beyond the range of my bike.

I pulled into Robbie's driveway, putting my foot down to brake.

"Hey." I threw my bike onto Robbie's front lawn and walked over to where he was sitting on his front step, flopping down on the grass next to him.

"What's up?"

"Nothing." Robbie was lying back on his elbows, squinting into the sky. He looked like he owned the whole neighborhood. The clouds towered over us, fluffy white on top with dirty-grey bottoms, like they had been dragged across the pavement by an exasperated parent.

"Didja watch Combat?" I asked him.

"Of course. I watch <u>every</u> Combat. We play Combat <u>every</u> recess." Don't know why he had to say this. I knew that. We went to school together. He always got to be Sgt. Saunders; I was always some dumb French girl except when they made me some dumb German that got killed in the first five minutes.

"How come people get . . . insomnia?" I asked Robbie.

"You mean when they can't sleep?"

“Yeah.”

“How should I know? Is your Mom acting weird again?”

“I guess. She’s OK this morning. I didn’t talk to her.”

“So . . . is your dad coming back?”

“I dunno.” I had told Robbie that I thought my parents were getting back together. I didn’t know for sure, but my mom had been talking to him a lot on the phone. And she seemed to be in a better mood . . . asking me a million questions about every little thing I did and all.

“I’ll bet they move you. I’ll bet you have to move back east again.” Robbie thought he was so smart.

“Nah. My Mom wouldn’t go back there. Maybe the Valley or up north. Maybe near San Francisco. That’s what she always says. It’s too crazy for me to grow up in the city.”

“Yeah? This ain’t the city.” Robbie leaned over and scooped up a handful of gravel from the walk. “New York is the city. I bet your dad will take you back to New York.” He started pitching bits of gravel at my sneaker, trying to make them land right on top of my shoe.

“Quit. He hates New York. He thinks they’re all phonies in New York.” One of the pebbles landed behind my ankle. “Quit it, buttface!” I started to unlace the shoe, so I could dig out the stone. “Are we going to the Indian Cave?” Our neighborhood backed up against the Santa Monica Mountains, which in those days were not as built up as they are now, especially after the fire. A few roads snaked up the canyons from West LA to Mulholland.

Robbie was kind of in love with my father. I could understand that since Robbie loved Little League but his own father seemed completely disinterested. I guess it’s always that way with other kid’s fathers. They always are more exotic than your own.

“Let’s go to the barn.” Robbie suggested, tossing his handful of gravel away.

“Yeah, OK.”

In that year, west LA was paradise for a kid. We could ride our bikes from Brentwood right up into the canyons and hike and play all day long. Weekends in the canyons seemed like an inexhaustible source of freedom, an existence without consequence.

Of course, in 1963 people were still rebuilding after the fire. We arrived in 1962 so we missed it; but no one in LA would ever forget the big fire. Many of the kids at school had lost their houses. Upper Mandeville, Kenter Canyons were both still a mess.

The fire had started up on Mullholland drive in November of 1961. Just someone burning trash. But the wind was blowing and the fire spread quickly through the dry brush. Soon it was down into Bel Air, roaring down the canyons. The fire created its own inferno, sweeping up burning detritus and showering the Santa Monica Mountains. Some of that roared down on Brentwood, starting fires in our canyons, too. This all happened the second day and fortunately the wind started to die down. But all sorts of people got burnt out. There’s pictures of a grim Richard Nixon leaving his apartment and Kim Novak hosing down her roof. But most of Brentwood was spared.

The barn was up on Hanley. There were a bunch of ranches and horses up the canyon. We used to sneak into the paddocks and jump on the backs of the horses and ride them bareback. We got bucked off half the time but that didn’t stop us. We had no fear.

Eventually, Robbie and I made friends with the Mexican stable workers and sometimes they would let us exercise the horses in a more sedate manner. I think they admired our audacity. They called us the ‘Indians.’ Our favorite was Humberto, ‘Beto’ everyone called him. He was an old gentleman, probably must have been in his sixties when we knew him.

The California tradition was different than back East. Things were more relaxed, the horses

were rangier, the people were more casual. Everyone dressed down, even if they owned a stable full of Arabians they showed at Madison Square Garden.

When Robbie and I got to the barn, Beto was in the ring, lunging one of my favorites, a horse named 'Ranger' on a lead. He had a long switch in one hand and was putting the mare through a series of exercises. Beto dressed like a cowboy in his long, lean Wranglers and straw Stetson.

Robbie and I ditched our bikes by the tack room and crawled up onto the white fence that made up the ring. Beto glanced over at us and broke into a broad grin.

"Mis indios! Qué tal, chiquitos? How are you?" We waved back at him. He kept the horse on the lunge line, as he smiled at us, clucking his tongue to make the mare canter in a perfect circle. We watched him masterfully urge the animal to speed up and slow down with just a flick of the line and the sound of his voice. He kept the horse moving, then finally drew her close to him and led Ranger over to where we were sitting. He looked at me, his eyes flashing amusement.

"You want to ride her, chica?" He asked me. I nodded my head enthusiastically but he laughed back. "I better not. Her owner is nasty thing. She wouldn't like it. You can feed her though." He handed Robbie and me a couple pieces of apple. "Hold your hand flat. She don't know where the apple ends and your fingers begin."

The horse quickly slurped the apple out of my hand. The rough surface of her tongue seemed honest and joyful.

"My dad says we can get a horse maybe next year." Robbie said as Ranger took the apple out of his hand.

"Is that so?" Beto looked at me. "How 'bout you, chica? Is your mom gonna buy you a horse?"

"She loves horses. She loves to ride. Maybe after we settle down." Beto led the mare through the gate and back into the barn. He tied the lead off to a rail and picked up a brush, sweeping it across the mare's back as she snorted with pleasure.

“Settle down. When do we ever settle down?” He turned back to the mare and addressed her softly. “That’s a good girl. You remind me of the horses of my youth, little one.” Robbie and me sat on a bale of hay and watched him.

“You were born in Mexico, Beto?” Robbie asked.

“Yes, I was. My father was a colonel in the Federal Army. As was his father before him.”
“How come you came to LA?”

“How did I come to be in Los Angeles?” Beto repeated, smoothing the horse’s back. “Better to ask, how did I come to be here in this barn.”

“OK. How come?” I asked. Beto smiled.

“The genius of children is they don’t see the shields grown-ups use to deflect the conversation. They charge right through them,” he chuckled to himself. “Like Custer with the Indians.” Beto stood, quietly for a moment, still holding the brush.

“As was expected, I joined the Army. I was a soldier, serving as aide de camp to General Lázaro Cárdenas. I learned to ride properly in the old cavalry. When I was in my 20’s, we fought the Cristero rebels under President Plutarco Elías Calles.

When Cárdenas was elected President, in 1924, I left the Army and eight years later, I came to LA for the Olympics with the Mexican equestrian team.”

“Gosh,” Robbie said. “you were in the Olympics? Didja win a medal?”

“No.” Beto laughed. “I came in ninth in dressage. Out of nine. None of us came close to medals. Cárdenas was very disappointed with us. Of course, we did much better in 1948 when I was the coach.” He knelt next to the horse’s front feet, and pulled a hoof pick out of his pocket.

“C’mon, chica. Up, up up.” The horse nervously lifted one foot and Beto began to carefully clean

it. “She’s sore,” he explained.

“So you came here for the Olympics and stayed?” I asked him.

“No. I came here and was noticed by Mr. Robert Taylor. That was when he was married to Barbara Stanwyck. They had a little ranchita in the Valley.” Beto dropped the hoof and stood up. “Do you know of Robert Taylor, the actor? Have you met him?” He looked at me expectantly. I felt confused and embarrassed.

“No. Is he famous?” Robbie snorted with disgust.

“He’s on The Detectives, Rosa. Yeah, he’s very cool.” Robbie turned to Beto, conspiratorial in male censure. “She watches Lassie,” he explained patiently.

Beto smiled at my discomfort. “Not to worry, little one. No es importante.” He picked up the lead and clucked at the mare, directing her back to the stall. Then he closed and locked the door.

“Mr. Robert Taylor played polo. All the big stars played polo. They had a polo course at the Riviera Country Club. I ran the stables for them. It was quite a big deal in those days. I used to drink whiskey with Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney. I was with Clark Gable when his wife died, pobrecita. I loved that woman. She loved to laugh . . . ” He shook his head. Then he looked at me, his expression sad. “I know you know who Clark Gable was.”

My eyes dropped. “Yeah. I know who he was. He was nice.”

“I ran the stable for fifteen years. There was some trouble at the end. Mr. Taylor sold it and the new owners needed to make more money. They treated it almost as a hobby. We ran it for the people who loved the game, loved riding, loved drinking and carousing. The new owners did not carouse.

“Eventually they fired me. I bounced around from job to job and wound up here. I think Mr.

Taylor arranged it. He still lives in the Canyon. And here I am . . . after all that." Beto closed the stall door. "You want to help me feed?" Of course we did.

"One coffee can of grains for Ranger. A couple flakes of hay," Beto called to us, as Robbie and I headed to the feed room with a wheelbarrow. When we got back, Beto had his back to us, the sun from outside profiled his lean body, his weight on one leg and his hat at his thigh.

"Is this OK?" Robbie asked. Beto didn't answer. His eyes were looking into the distance.

We got back to the neighborhood, just as the sun was kissing the horizon. I said goodbye to Robbie and turned my bike for home, a little nervous that I'd be in trouble for staying out so long. After I got to the end of the cul-de-sac, I slowly . . . cautiously walked my bike up the brick walkway. I leaned my bike on the porch and came in the front door, trying to act like I had been playing in the yard all afternoon. But no one was there to scold me. It felt like Mrs. Murray had gone home. I could hear some music in the back, it sounded like my mother was in her bedroom. I walked down the hallway and pushed open the door.

She was on the bed, the covers half on the floor, idly turning the pages of a magazine. The radio was playing Sinatra. She looked up as I walked in, her eyes a little cloudy. My radar came up.

"Well, there you are." She said with a little cluck. "Where've you been all day?"

"The barn." She looked back at her magazine.

"I see." She slipped off the bed and walked unsteadily to the window, snapping the louvers shut against the setting sun. "With Robbie?"

"Yeah . . ."

"Robbie, huh. You should be playing with girls."

"I like Robbie. He's cool." Mom looked like she had never gotten out of the bedroom. Her terry

cloth robe was loosely tied and I could see a flash of leg. She hadn't even bothered to put a nightgown on. Her blond hair hung lank around her face, unbrushed.

"Are you OK?" I asked carefully.

"Of course I'm OK. Why do you think I'm not OK? I just can't seem to shake this cold. It's stuck in my chest. This famous chest . . . filled with snot." She slowly stumbled into the bathroom, closing the door behind her.

The room was heavy and sour. I looked around at the rumpled bedsheets and discarded clothes. On the nightstand was the usual clutter of Kleenex, books and prescription vials. I noticed one still opened, a few tablets scattered. I picked it up and studied the label. Nembutal.

Shoot, I said to myself, I hate this. The toilet flushed.

"How many of these have you taken?" I asked, holding up the vial of sleeping pills as she came back into the room.

"What?" She came back into the room and began to pick at a pack of cigarettes, her back to me. She only smoked when she was stoned.

"How many of these pills have you taken?" She seemed to be having trouble getting a cigarette out of the pack.

"Fuck." She said under her breath, then quickly looked back at me with mild dismay. "How many . . . I don't know. What of it? Are you my nurse now?" Her voice was quiet but harsh. I kept moving forward.

"You're not supposed to take them all day, Mom." She tossed the pack of cigarettes back on the dresser.

"I'm not, huh?" she said distractedly. "I dunno, maybe six, ten, I think. I've been sick as a dog.

You've been out playing. I've been cooped up in here with old Mrs. Murray all weekend."

"Mom, this stuff is . . . strong."

"I know all about it," she snapped. "I don't need you nagging at me. Jeez, everyone telling me what to do. Will you get off my back!" I felt like she slapped me. Tears immediately welled up.

She looked puzzled, it seemed like she had just landed in the room and she was watching both of us in total surprise. Her face drained. Then, just as quickly, it crumpled. She rushed over to me and knelt down in front of me.

"Oh Bug, I didn't mean that! I'm so sorry. I didn't mean that." She was crying now, too, and she tried to hug me.

"I hate you," I said calmly. Then, I ran into my room and slammed the door, locking it.

I heard her follow me down the hall, knocking and pleading with me to open the door and come out. I was in a ball next to my bed with my hands over my ears and my eyes tightly closed against my angry tears. I hate it. Why does she do this? Eventually, I fell asleep.

I woke up about a couple hours later. The windows of my room were dark but I could hear voices. For a moment, I was unsure where I was . . . who I was. I couldn't tell if it was night or just dark.

It was one of those moments when you seem to be outside of your body. I am still fascinated by that feeling to this day. You wake up and you know that you are someone. You are a person. You know that . . . but you have no idea who that person is. Like amnesia, I guess, except you also know that, eventually, you will be that person again. I like to try to hold onto that moment, like a fistful of dream money, like an exotic scent, trying to stay between the worlds. Try to slow down the scary stuff yet to be.

I could hear Mom and it seemed like Mrs. Murray had returned. This pulled me back into the

waking world. I unfolded myself and got up. Then I slowly walked out of my room.

The bright light of the kitchen hurt my eyes and I squinted as I got to the kitchen. There was a big Mexican terra-cotta sun with a smiling face way up on the kitchen wall. For some reason, I remember staring at that like I'd never noticed it before. Then I looked at Mom and Mrs. Murray, who were standing by the breakfast bar.

"Well, sweetie, did you have a nice nap?" Mom seemed more cogent and totally oblivious to the earlier nastiness. It always amazed me how she could pull herself together when outsiders showed up. Acting. Her hair was brushed, she had put lipstick on. Mrs. Murray smiled at me in a equally fake way.

"Did you have fun today, Rosalie? Did you go up to the barn?" She looked at Mom. "It's wonderful how those folks have all rebuilt all those beautiful homes."

"People have a wonderful gift for rebuilding their lives," Mom answered. Mrs. Murray smiled and she reached into her bag.

"So. Let's give you your shot and you can get a good night's sleep." Mom gave me a little conspiratorial smile.

"Yes! I need all my energy tomorrow." She looked at me. "I didn't get a chance to tell you but Joe Junior and I had a wonderful talk this afternoon on the phone. Your Dad's coming to LA next week and we are going . . . to talk." Her eyes danced. "He wants to talk."

I felt a strange cord grip me and yank me up and out of the kitchen. My thinking became all hazy and suddenly I thought, I'm still asleep. I'm still asleep and this is all a big fake. Everything I begged for. This was not happening and I was going to wake up, my eyes squeezed shut against the truth and then the cold morning air would hit my brain and I would be here . . . and life would be real. But the I looked at Mom's face, the face that all of America loved and desired and wanted and I saw the deep and glorious truth that we all wish for. I saw heaven.

“Really? Pop’s coming to see us?”

“That’s right. He’s coming to see us.”

I looked over at Mrs. Murray, she was beaming, too.

“That’s wonderful! I am so happy for you.” She began to unfold the syringe and the ampule of chloral hydrate. “Let’s get this done and you can sleep all night and wake up refreshed.”

Suddenly all the dreamy state left me. It was like one of those movies where you go to a sudden, tight focus.

“Mrs. Murray, are you sure that’s right?” She looked up at me with mild irritation.
“Is what right?”

“The shot.” I was way, way out on a limb here.

“This was prescribed by Doctor. It’s what your Mother needs to sleep through the night.”

“No, I mean, I guess, she’s been taking the Nembutal all day. I heard Dr. Greenson say not to mix Nembutal with the shots. I heard him say that.” Mrs. Murray looked at me with even greater irritation. Mom was staring at me wide-eyed, slowly nodding her head.

“Well . . . I don’t know. He told me to give her the shot not an hour ago. I guess he knows what to do.” I felt the same horrible feeling coming back. I looked at Mom and she was still looking at me in total wonder.

“That’s right, honey. You’re right. It’s not good to mix the shot with Nembutal. Isn’t that right, Mrs. Murray?” My mother looked like a child who’s seen a penguin for the first time.

“Well . . . of course. How many pills did you take today, ma’am?” Mom looked at her with embarrassment.

“More than a few. Maybe . . . a dozen? Too many. I had a horrible morning.” Mrs. Murray looked confused.

“Well . . . I’ll call Doctor and ask . . .” She left the room and went to the phone in the living room. Mom stared down into the floor for a couple beats and then slowly shook her head.

“What made you say that, honey? I could have been in real trouble. What made you notice that and say that after . . . after we argued?” We both stared at each other. “That was a good catch, as your Dad would say. I’m so sorry I was cross with you, hon.”

I felt a huge well of emotion fill me. And - - just like my father - - I said, “No big deal.”

Later, I was in bed, just drifting off to sleep. My sleepy mind was filled with thoughts of beautiful, strong horses. There was a gentle knock at the door.

“Come in.” It was Mom. The smell of perfume hit my nose.

“Can I get in bed with you, Bug?” I pulled back the covers.

“Sure.”

I felt her snuggle up to my back in the dark, the silk of her nightgown enveloping me. I felt like I was held in her dark, warm smell. I felt totally at drowsy peace.

“Mom?”

“Yeah, little Bug?”

“Do you know Robert Taylor?” I felt her smile in the dark.

“Sure . . . I know him. Very handsome! He was married to Barbara Stanwyck.”

“More handsome than Pop?” She gave me a squeeze.

“No. Not even close. Now go to sleep. We have a big day tomorrow.”

My mother always claims that this day was her ‘moment of clarity,’ as the alcoholics say, and she never used sleeping pills again. But I remember it took a couple years for her to kick the habit. Of course, after this, my parents remarried and Mom quit the movies. They moved up to the Peninsula - - south of San Francisco - - to be near Pop’s family. Pop started making those dumb coffee commercials on TV and Mom always kidded him about it, asking for a cup of Joe in the morning.

Mom and I had some rough times when I was a teenager but things got better in my twenties. I still call her every week and she’s still just as beautiful now as then.

But I *really* remember this day because it was the last time I saw Beto Flores. I think he got sick and died soon after that day. Later, I read something and found out that everything he said was true. He was a member of the Mexican Olympic team and he was friends with a bunch of movie stars. There was even a picture of him and Clark Gable at Carole Lombard’s funeral.

The End

