

Shorts

By
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A story of a man lost without his lifelong mate

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A personal journey of love and family

Katlynn

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Orange, red and yellow streaks of sunlight reflected off the walls as I wrestled with the idea to get out of bed. Eyes closed, I lay listening to the wave's pound the beachhead, resonating the sound of the oceans' heartbeat through the beach house windows. Finally giving in, I placed both feet firmly on the floor, reached over and patted my wife to get up. Hearing only muffled resistance; I knew I had a good hour to spend by myself. Having taken care of the essentials, I eased out the back door, put on my running shoes and started down the beach for an early jog.

The silhouette in front caught my eye. As I approached closer, I could see her dark auburn hair flowing down her bare back, being pushed to one side from the light breeze blowing in. The long shadow on the sand outlined her figure, the top of her bathing suit folded in her left hand. Looking down the beach, I watched as her bottom rocked gently with the flow of the tide, she was stunning. I quickened my pace for a closer look.

Running past the startled girl, I hit the surf, lifting my knees as high as I could get them, than swam out until I could no longer reach the bottom. Stopping within twenty feet, I noted an older gentleman watching my approach with a cautioned stare. On the transom, the name 'Katie Ann' or possibly 'Katrina' was barely visible. I called up to ask what she was.

"You know anything about boats?" asked the lone figure.

"A little. I can tell she's a cutter, maybe 30 to 35 feet, double-headsail masthead, probably built around late 50's, early 60's". A smile broke across his face, a ladder was produced and an invite was given to come aboard.

As my eyes reached deck level, a strong hand reached out, grabbing mine and almost yanking fully onto the deck. "She was custom built in 1957 and you're right, she is a cutter. Getting ready to run her up the coast a couple miles, then back, want to come?"

The thought of my wife waking up without me and wondering where I had gotten off to, gave me pause. "Sure!" I said. I moved over the light colored mahogany floor timbers to the cabin roof, began unlatching the main sail covering and crept toward the mast port side. Several inches above the Gooseneck, underneath the finish, I saw a picture of a beautiful woman staring back at me.

With main and jib up, we started on a close-hauled course, watching the sunrise higher out of the east. The conversation returned back to the boat and I began to learn of her history. She was built around the 1947 plans of designer Gerd Hendel, whose boats were built by the Bigelow Brothers. Originally customized and purchased by his wife's father, he had named her 'Majestic' and she had been the family's get away, cruising from Maine up through Nova Scotia and Canada during the summer months, down the west coast during winter. She was 32 foot, with a draft of 5 feet, 9 inches.

Sometimes, both her father and the boat would disappear for months. Since her dad worked for the government, she had her beliefs that somehow it was all related, but he would never confirm her suspicions or talk about his trips. When he was home, they would sail together, plotting out the next passage as soon as they returned. He was very proud of his daughter Katlynn and had taught her to sail the boat single handed by the time she was eleven.

Peering into the companionway, I could see the main salon, several berths and caught the craftsmanship of the varnished joiner work as I turned to listen again. His wife had spent more time on boats than land and loved to sail. When they married, she brought him into it kicking and screaming. Over time he had learned to like it, but never as much as she did. When her

father passed away, he left the boat to her as part of the estate. With a wind shift, we began to pick up some speed as we eased the sails out and started a beam reach course downwind.

Off to the starboard side we could see a C&C fast approaching with the full intent of racing. With a two-man crew, we knew we were no match, but we would challenge for as long as we could. The C&C continued on line to our starboard and was closing the gap faster than I wanted them to. We would hold our own for a little while at least.

Suddenly, with a smooth calculated tack, they cut across our stern, close enough for us to read the logos on their shirts, grabbed our wind and watched as our sails began to luff. It was at that moment we realized they hadn't wanted to race, but simply get a closer look. After exchanging some small talk, they pulled away and we tacked around to begin the journey back home.

Asking me to take over the helm, the skipper went below and soon returned with a couple shot glasses and a bottle of Jim Beam 'Black' Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey. "I want you to know that you're the first crew member that's been aboard 'Katlynn' since my wife passed away four years ago."

I listened on in silence. "I sometimes think she loved this old boat more than me. When she died, I had it hauled out and dry docked for a couple of years. Decided to sell her, so she's been refitted with some new sails, halyards, brass trimmings and bronze turnbuckles. Couple of other things too that I could afford."

I wanted to ask how someone so blessed could let go of a part of their life like that, but the words were lost in my own thoughts of past despondency and I could not get them out.

"This is my last sail with her. The new owner is taking delivery in Louisiana, that's where I'm headed now." His eyes gave away his heartache and I could see the tears begin to form. He turned and reached into an old sail bag and produced an even

older tattered book with a faded red ribbon wrapped and tied securely around it.

“This was my wife’s diary. She has all of her father’s and her adventures aboard this boat, written in it. There are stories in here...” His voice broke and I waited. “I’ve spent some the saddest but most wonderful days of my life reading and re-reading every word of every page. This boat was my wife and this is the hardest thing I have ever done.”

We sat in silence for a while, listening to the wind through the sails, taking in the warmth of the sun and smelling the salt air. I watched as the skipper sat lost in a cherished time gone by. ‘Katlynn’ sailed on as if guided by her own free spirit. Seeing my destination shortly ahead, I finally broke the silence asking if the picture on the mast was indeed his wife. “There’s one on the starboard side too. She loved the wind in her face, I made sure it always blew in that direction.”

Louisiana man, take care of ‘Katlynn’, she’s more loved than you will ever know.

Insensitivity

By **Jim Burkett**

Several weeks ago, I found myself cornered in the kitchen with my wife spewing over the latest insensitivity of men towards women. Hoping it wasn't a slam at something I had forgotten, I quickly glanced at the wall calendar to see what was marked so as to catch a hint of what was coming. Feeling relieved that it wasn't myself in trouble this time, I stood there sipping my beer, nodding in total agreement to everything said. Occasionally I threw in a "what a jerk!" just to make sure she felt as though I was sharing in her anger.

Listening from 10 miles away, I did my best to maintain focus. Finally, I decided it was time to cut this one sided debate short and reminded her of an upcoming doctors' visit. Since my wife suffers from 'White Coat' distress, I knew this was a great opportunity to show her that men do care about their women's needs; I volunteered to go with her. The person who said "Silence speaks volumes", knew what they were talking about.

We arrived roughly twenty minutes early and took a comfortable seat amongst the rest of the women, I being the only man visible. Forty-five minutes after her scheduled appointment time, her name was finally called and we stood to begin proceeding back to the patient room. I was quickly stopped at the door and was told to sit down and wait by a nurse whose size blocked the door completely. The snickering behind my back didn't help the situation.

Fearing a possible beat down from this woman, I retraced my steps and walked over to the magazine rack, staring down at 'Vogue', 'Vanity Fair' and an assortment of other women's publications. Having stood too long silently begging for any

man's article to appear, the muffled laughter began again so I reluctantly grabbed one and sat down.

Flipping past almost every article with hardly a glance, I finally settled on one if for no reason other than to stop the glances. The primary topic was '*ways of showing your mate how much you loved them when the opportunity to be close wasn't there*'. Within the article, it talked about finding an intimate gesture that only you and your significant other would understand, should you find yourselves separated in a room and unable to talk directly. It should be something quick and simple, non romantic so no one would know your intentions and finally, leave the other people in the room wondering what the two of you were up to.

I thought about it for a while, then out of nowhere found a perfect solution, the 'Finger'. After all, it was quick, no one would ever mistake it as a sign of affection and it would sure as hell leave them wondering about the two of you. When my wife finally appeared, I showed her the article and told her of my suggestion. At first she thought my idea was crude, but when I told her she could use it as well, she embraced it completely. Over the last several months since, I have found her becoming more and more open with her feelings and using this gesture almost daily, in fact, more frequently than I. I am truly loved.

We have become so attached to this form of passionate display, that we use it almost every time either one of us speaks to the other. It is incredible the amount of peace of mind I get every time I hold it up in front of her face and the smile she gives me back when she uses it in return. In fact there are times that no words are even exchanged, it is all that is needed.

So, the next time you're at a party, talking the night away with a beautiful woman and catch your spouse giving you that look, flip her the 'Finger' and show her how much you truly care.

The Women In My Life

By **Jim Burkett**

My wife loves to loan me out to the single moms, executive females and housewives of the neighborhood. It's usually when I have the key in the ignition, golf clubs in the trunk or my kayaks on the roof of my car that I find out I have been promised to another woman who is in immediate need.

Now before you read anything more into this, I assure you it is only to fix something in their home that either through old age, wear and tear or the kids destroyed in a fit of 'play', is now broken. And it's not that I'm handy, it just gives her a chance to sit and chat for a couple of hours while I wrestle with the simplest of instructions, shock myself or bang a finger or two all in the name of trying to be 'a good neighbor'.

It was during one of these visits that I overheard yet another conversation with regards to their list of new goals for the year: how they were going to lose weight, get the bills paid down, pay more attention to the significant other (yea sure) and so on. I've made it a rule never to listen in on the chatter unless it centers on 'Victoria Secret' or bikini wear, but this subject caught my ear.

I have an attention span just slightly longer than a 2 year old. Regardless of whether it is a book, a budding hobby or something that's new and cool, if it doesn't keep me excited, it soon finds itself sitting on a shelf or quickly forgotten. Having to work at something is not what I want to do after having done it all day as a vocation. Setting goals and keeping them is just plain hard work for me, however nothing is more satisfying and that's what keeps me craving for more.

Whenever a new goal begins to overwhelm me and I start searching for a good excuse to quit, it always helps to look

around and take inspiration from others. For me, it doesn't take looking very far. The women on my wife's side begin to slow down somewhere between the ages of 85 to 90 years old. Their husbands don't make it as long simply because they wear them out trying to keep pace.

My wife's aunt Louise will shame you for ever wanting to give up. At the age of 89, her doctor advised her she needed to do a 'little' more exercise to keep her muscles toned and maybe reduce the heart rate a bit. To me that would mean walking around the block at a slow steady stride, to Louise it meant weight lifting. Within a year, she went from being mild mannered to holding the National weight lifting record for her age bracket. No kidding, look it up. I don't share that with many of my buddies, I'm afraid they will call her to come 'kick my ass' when I once again strike-out during a slow pitch softball game. She is determination.

Then there is Grace, my mother-in-law. At the age of 82, she can out walk my wife on any shopping spree and my wife can shop, just ask my credit card carriers. Having raised 4 children and helped in molding the lives of 14 grandchildren, she still has the time to love and guide each of us in demanding times, giving of herself first before ever taking the time to enjoy time on her own. She is our rock, our spirit, our inspiration for learning to do the right things as a parent ourselves. She is so loved by her children and anyone who comes in contact with her.

Tish holds a special place in our hearts. Always happy and smiling regardless of the stress placed upon her daily, she never fails to make her home your home, to make you feel she is always sincere to see and be with you. Having gladly given up a career to mother and nurture Caroline, she gives us all strength in her patience, her kindness and her ability to always stay positive in the hardest of circumstances. To me she is courage.

Caroline shows us the true meaning of love and family ties. As a special needs child, she keeps us centered on what family

commitment is. When she hurts, we hurt, when she laughs, we laugh louder as her joy reaches to our hearts. She teaches us that 'will' can overcome all obstacles and to celebrate and give thanks for the many things we take for granted everyday by her constant determination. She shows me hope.

Then comes Nancy. Nancy is our family historian and protector, always making sure we are all safe by constantly checking to see if another day has passed without incident, if the kids are 'ok' or if there are needs we have overlooked that she will happily assist in obtaining so we don't have to. She watches over all of us, mentally keeping track of our lives so everyone knows the whereabouts of the others, keeping us all close knit, mindful that we will always have someone close by should any ill-gotten event happen to us.

Bettie, my mom. With the loss of my father only 10 years into their marriage, she looked at the future of having to raise 4 children on her own, all too young to be employed to help with any bills. Holding down at times 2 jobs, taking care of the everyday problems and needs of her small children, she went back to school at night to earn a degree in Civil Engineering. Now retired, she stays busy with her crafts, selling her goods at craft shows across the country, driving to and from in a 38 foot RV, motoring it in the mountains and back roads from Florida to Maine, as easily as I drive my sports car.

With the touch of her hand, a quiet smile or just her presence, my wife brings me total peace. No breath escapes without a thought of her. My constant companion, helping me to make the right choices, listening when I need understanding. She is strong when I fail, a silent and reassuring voice always present that makes me try harder at whatever I want to accomplish. She gives me meaning.

Some men still have their heroes, mine just don't happen to be men.

About the Author

Jim Burkett is a Senior System Analyst for a large company located in Florida. When not working, he enjoys writing short stories as well as photography. He recently published his first novel 'Declaration of Surrender', available through Amazon Kindle and paperback from Lulu.com.

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