

TESTIFY
— A TRUE STORY —



Welcome.

We hope you are enjoying your stay.

*Now is the time to sit back,
relax and reflect.*

We are pleased to provide this true story.

*Perhaps after reading this piece
you will want to pick up a pen
and write your own personal story.*

A story that shaped and embraced you.

*Possibly, you'll want to share it with others.
An invitation to submit your piece
for future Testify books is offered.*

*It is not complicated.
Just write from your heart.*

*Even if you decide not to pick up a pen,
we trust the story you read in this little book
will give you a moment of reflection.*

Enjoy.

tes·ti|fy (tes'te fi') 1) to make a declaration to substantiate a fact; to bear witness or give evidence, esp. under oath; 2) to bear witness to; affirm; declare or proclaim publicly; 3) to serve as evidence

—WHEN COMIC GOES COSMIC—

W

HEN THE RECORDED MESSAGE CAME ON FOR THE THIRD TIME, I HUNG UP. "She's not answering," I said to my husband, Tom. "It's getting late." He looked at the wall clock in our living room. "It's nine-thirty. She could be anywhere. Try her again in an hour."

"An hour?" I shook my head. "I can't stand it."

"Then give her until ten."

"What if she still doesn't answer?"

He shrugged and went back to reading *The Wall Street Journal*. "You worry too much."

The fact that he was right was of absolutely no comfort to me. How many times had we been through this since my mother—universally known as Annie—was widowed back in January of 1986?

A week after my father's funeral, she strung some plastic clothesline between two pipes in the cellar, hung his navy wool dress coat smack in the middle of it, and set up a footstool beneath. Although she'd taken to wearing his watch and his shoes, this was too unsettling to let pass. "When I get to missing him too much," she explained, amazed that we'd found her setup the least bit maudlin, "I just come down here and wrap the arms around me."

Eleven years later, I still hadn't adjusted to the thought that she is living alone in the house she and my father built on a windy hillside in New Hampshire. Even worse, though, were the times when she wasn't in the house at all, like this frigid night in March.

I imagined her going up and down the aisles in one of the super-supermarkets with nothing but a bag of mini-Tootsie Rolls in her cart. She liked to insert one of the odd little chocolate logs between her cheek and her upper gum, getting a sugar fix the way a baseball player gets a bang from a wad of chewing tobacco.

At eighty-four, Annie was still the life of the party, any party. She could be extremely silly. Sometimes it was on purpose, as when she slapped on joke eyeglasses with flies embedded in the lenses, and at other times it wasn't. The mistress of malapropism, she once told us a friend of hers might have to go to the hospital for a "dog scan."

Joy spilled out of her the way the foam on a really good root beer float comes tumbling over the top of the glass. And yet, as with all great clowns, she'd done her share of suffering, from surviving a hard childhood on a dirt-poor farm to beating breast cancer at a time when a radical mastectomy was the only treatment and the only follow-up was a prayer.

When a doctor told her she was a perfectionist she took it as a compliment.

Perhaps in the 1940s it was, but fifty years later her obsessive-compulsive habit of "zipping" and "unzipping" all twenty-four Venetian

blinds in the house to the exact same height four times a day drove everyone else crazy.

She definitely had her quirks, such as hiding in my father's clothes closet during thunderstorms, a practice she enforced on my sister and me when we were too little to protest. After my father's death, whenever she heard thunder she fled to Dunkin' Donuts at all hours of the day or night in her thirty-year-old red Dodge Dart convertible whose top had never once been put down because she didn't want creases in it.

But tonight was clear and unseasonably cold after a mild winter. Where on earth could she be?

At 10:25 the telephone rang.

"Annie, nice to hear your voice. Yep ... yep."

Tom grinned at me. "Here she is."

"Ma!" I only called her that when I was mad at her. "Where have you been? I've been trying to—"

"Can't talk," she said.

*Knew it,
knew it,
knew it,
kidnapper,
gun to head—*

"Hale-Bopp," she said.

"You're outside, watching some comet?"
I shook my head. "Ma, that's crazy."

Before I could stress the thousand hazards she faced out there in the dark all alone, she added, "I've got to go. It won't be back for 2,400 years and I don't want to miss anything. I don't know if you can see it down there in Massachusetts, but up here it's halfway between the big maple and the mailbox."

I was left with a dial tone and the thought that no one on the planet could be a bigger space cadet. "She's outside, watching the comet," I said to my husband. "If we miss it, we'll have to wait until" — I grabbed the pad and pen by the phone and did a hasty calculation—
"4397"

Tom and I went out into the icy night. "I hope when it comes back, it's in July," he said, stamping his feet.

"We'll plan a barbeque." I stared up at the tiny patch of silver dust among the bigger nuggets of stars. I'd always thought comets moved faster than a speeding bullet, but to me it looked as if this one had been glued there for all eternity.

"I'll give Annie a call."

"Good idea." His breath hung in the air like a cartoon balloon.

"But not tonight."



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genuine in the telling of your story.*

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