

Anyone who has heard me speak of how I broke into the business has heard the name Burt Pearl.

I was working as a host at a restaurant called Womphoppers. It was located at the entrance of the Universal Studios Tour. It was a wild place where we, the hosts and waiters, were hired to entertain the customers as much as possible. If they wanted us to dance on the table, dancing we did. On the table. There were a lot of crazy and creative people there. While there, I met Burt. We hit it off immediately and became good friends. Burt was also interested in doing some writing so we started collaborating. Together, playing on our strengths and learning from our weaknesses, we broke into the business launching two careers that spanned over twenty years each.

Having a writing partner gives you someone to bounce things off of ; a partner forces you to articulate ideas in your head and can put a perspective on those ideas that you didn't see; a partner challenges you creatively; a partner gives you the chance to play writer and audience to challenge assumptions you had; a partner adds to your total creativity; a partner is there to strategize with; and a partner certainly picks up half the typing duties. Those are very practical reasons. But there is another reason. Because you love the person as if part of your family. That was the case with Burt.

In case you haven't already figured out where this is going, on April 6, 2006 Burt Pearl passed away.

It wasn't sudden, but it was way too soon. I hadn't spoken to Burt in a few years, not since I was producing "Sheena" and he was still producing "Touched By an Angel." I had wondered what he was working on now when I got an e-mail from a mutual friend trying to track me down. He told me that Burt was in bad shape, a tumor, and that he wouldn't be with us much longer. I called immediately and got Burt's mother, Barb, on the phone. She explained things to

me with a voice that was both strong and vulnerable in tone. She said Burt has had a lot of visitors and he'd like to see me. I went over the next day.

Barb welcomed me at the door. God, I wish I could understand how people in such situations can have the grace of strength. Barb is an exceptional person, as you would expect her to be. A parent who is losing her child shouldn't be able to smile at me, hug me and ask me if I'm all right. But she did and she meant it; she wanted to make sure I was okay.

Burt was lying in a bed in the middle of his den. I had no idea what I was going to say to him, I had no idea what I was going to feel as I hadn't sorted out any of my feelings yet. This was a man who was with me at what was arguably the greatest turning point in my life; a man who was a major part of that turning point. Barb had told me he might drift in and out, but his eyes flickered toward me as I said "hi". He nodded and I started to speak.

I don't know what I said... I probably didn't know it at the time. I didn't want to use words that were in the past tense because of what it implied, but I didn't want to say anything that was a lie of optimism. Burt and I never lied to each other, I wasn't going to start now. I held his hand, fumbled through some stupid things until, in a hoarse and low voice, he said "So, what's going on in your life?" So I told him. The good, the bad, the banal, the mediocre, everything I could think of. And I made him laugh... a few times. And I told him I loved him. He nodded and said something I couldn't make out. His eyes fluttered shut and Barb came over to tell me he needed to rest. I didn't want to let go of his hand, but I did and moved to the other room with her.

That was the last time I saw him. And what I remember from it are three things: I held his hand (I had never done that before), I told him I loved him (that was an unspoken between us) and I made him

laugh (something I had done many times). As I said, I don't remember what I talked about but those three things are what I am taking away from it.

Even though Burt and I hadn't worked together in fifteen years and hadn't spoken for three or four, it didn't diminish the bond he and I had. Have. I really wish I could put into words what that partnership was like. We didn't come together because we wanted to be writers, we came together because we wanted to be friends. We traveled with each other, we roomed with each other, we vented stories of failed relationships to each other. And we were so much alike in our humor, and so different in our creativity. I know I learned a lot about writing from him, I only hope he learned something from me.

Funny thing, the last conversation he and I had when he was well was on the phone, as I said while we were both producing our respective series. He broached the idea of, perhaps, when we were finished with these shows, he and I might get together and write a screenplay together, just like old times. That might seem sad to others, but it isn't to me. It's nice that we were able to refer to our time together as "the good ol' days" and want to return to it. Though we had both grown apart in many ways, we still longed for the days when he and I would sit in the Beverly Garland Hotel Restaurant, eating all-you-can-eat fried clams, working out stories together. Or when we went to Las Vegas on a really really low fare deal just to take a break and ended up paying our way at the Blackjack table.

Come to think of it, most of the time around Burt could be considered as "the good ol' days". He had an infectious laugh that was sincere and hearty. He had a way of looking at the world that made you stop and think. He never held any malice in his heart and would go out of his way to help others. He couldn't avoid touching others and those he touched smiled. It wasn't by coincidence he

worked on "Touched By an Angel", the man was what he wrote. He loved people. He loved life.

I will so miss his laugh.

This is Burt Pearl as I will always remember him:



I took this photo in 1983. It's not a great shot and it's not the best photo of Burt. But it captured him for me. It's the image I always have in my mind when I think of him.

I'm still sorting out my feelings about all of this. I feel sad, yes, but I don't feel sorry for myself or all the wonderful people Burt attracted as friends. I feel sorry for those people who never had a chance to know him, for those who never will.

The second worst thing is to lose someone. The worst thing is to never have had them in your life.

I celebrate the life of Burt Pearl.

- Steven L. Sears