



W. Thomas Richards

**A HERITAGE
OF COURAGE**



American Author

A Heritage of Courage

W. Thomas Richards



Strategic Book Group

Copyright © 2011

All rights reserved – W. Thomas Richards

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, from the publisher.

Strategic Book Group
P.O. Box 333
Durham CT 06422
www.StrategicBookClub.com

ISBN: 978-1-61204-739-3

Printed in the United States of America

Book Design: Suzanne Kelly

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of my late grandson, Ashton Drake Richards, who was born in Wheeling, West Virginia on July 9, 1997. Although the news of his birth gave the family great joy, their happiness soon turned into considerable concern when it was discovered that Ashton had serious heart and lung defects. The small child was tough, for he immediately faced open heart surgery and survived. The doctors informed my son and daughter-in-law that Ashton's condition was extremely rare and was probably caused from a bad chromosome passed on from either the mother or father's gene pool. Surprisingly, in the next two days, five more children were born at the same hospital with this extremely rare condition. This gave us and the other family's the belief that the defects were more likely caused from a toxic substance introduced into the environment during the eleventh week of pregnancy when the lungs and heart were being developed. Although the six families lived up to fifty miles apart, during the critical eleventh week all six mothers worked within seven blocks of each other. Much information was gathered about the factories in the area; however, the toxic substance was never determined.

Although Ashton was brought into this world with numerous health problems, he was a very happy baby. How he continually smiled, laughed and expressed joy while his small body was slowly dying is beyond comprehension.

W. Thomas Richards

When he was six months old, Ashton had gained enough strength to have surgery once again. Unfortunately, this time he did not survive. He died on January 22, 1998. His six months of life filled my heart with a lifetime of love for him. May God give me his great courage before I die?

Contents

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | vii |
| Chapter One | The Friendly Priest.....1 |
| Chapter Two | The Fugitive17 |
| Chapter Three | The Story Teller33 |
| Chapter Four | Harry's Decree42 |
| Chapter Five | Adventures at Sea52 |
| Chapter Six | Aunt Jenny's Return.....67 |
| Chapter Seven | Wild West Show73 |
| Chapter Eight | African Boer War91 |
| Chapter Nine | War Hero99 |
| Chapter Ten | Journey to America111 |
| Chapter Eleven | Captain Bull's Proclamation116 |
| Chapter Twelve | The Boxing Game123 |
| Chapter Thirteen | Philadelphia Experience131 |
| Chapter Fourteen | Those Busy Years141 |
| Chapter Fifteen | The Last Fight.....147 |
| Chapter Sixteen | Ships in the Night160 |
| Chapter Seventeen | Lost at Sea.....166 |
| Chapter Eighteen | Return to England.....174 |
| Chapter Nineteen | The Courtship185 |
| Chapter Twenty | Atlantic City.....196 |
| Chapter Twenty-One | The Baptism.....202 |

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-----|
| Chapter Twenty-Two | Tommy's Sickness..... | 213 |
| Chapter Twenty-Three | The Canadian Railroad..... | 223 |
| Chapter Twenty-Four | Death And Sorrow..... | 231 |
| Chapter Twenty-Five | Indian Promise..... | 237 |
| Chapter Twenty-Six | Hungry Wolf Pack..... | 246 |
| Chapter Twenty-Seven | The Titanic..... | 254 |
| Chapter Twenty-Eight | Missed Connection..... | 262 |
| Chapter Twenty-Nine | Guilty Conscience..... | 268 |
| Chapter Thirty | Search for Tommy..... | 275 |
| Chapter Thirty-One | Return to Ireland..... | 283 |
| Chapter Thirty-Two | The Reunion..... | 296 |
| Chapter Thirty-Three | A Message from Heaven..... | 301 |
| Chapter Thirty-Four | A Time for Action..... | 311 |

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to those who read and commented on this Manuscript throughout its development: to my late wife, Patricia Lewine Richards, who was first reader and editor, and to my good friend, Constance A. McGraw who was second reader and editor. Words alone cannot express my gratitude for their help and counseling. Also, a great big thanks to all the friends and family members who allowed me to use their first names for the fictional characters in my story: Robert J. Richards, Jody M. Richards, Rhiannon B. Richards, Jessica L. Richards, Eric M. Richards, Julian M. Richards, Jill Richards, Gregory S. Richards, Madeline P. Richards, my step-granddaughter, Jessica Cameron Ehrlich, and my good friends Fran and Joe Garcia.

I also want to thank my acting coach, Molly Benson, who acknowledged a talent I didn't know I had. Without her tenacity, I would have never written my first screenplay which led me into writing. I would also like to thank romance writer, Joyce Mullen, who has given me much help and encouragement, and to director Doug Lenzini who helped me create a special style in my story telling.

Very special thanks to my grandparents, Bridget Della Flanagan and Tommy Edward Thompson who I spent nearly every night with for the first fifteen years of my life. Many of the stories in this novel are as I remember them as a child. However, this saga must be considered a work of fiction for I have tied stories together with events created in my own mind and I have

W. Thomas Richards

taken the liberty to embellish their stories to make the novel more interesting. Any Name or event that that this story closely resembles is purely coincidental.

CHAPTER ONE

The Friendly Priest

The sounds of the Chicago train station were tuned out by Rhiannon Lewine, as she sat on the hard oak bench waiting for the Amtrak to Denver. She had never ridden a train before and had been looking forward to this new adventure. However, today the five foot ten inches of her 18 year old, athletic, slender, body drooped on the bench as if she had the weight of the world on her shoulders. Her dark blue eyes stared into space while her mind was deep in thought. Unconsciously, the long fingers on her right hand whisked through her short, golden brown hair--fashioned in a pixie style that complimented her long lashes and high cheek bones. The normal sparkle in her eyes was absent as she pondered over the many frustrations that flooded her mind.

Rhiannon was on her way to Denver. She planned to spend the summer with two cousins, Jessica and Madeline, taking care of their grandparents' home. It was the only positive thing in her life at the moment. She looked forward to the opportunity to get better acquainted with the two cousins who were close to her age. Rhiannon had four first cousins, who were the children of her father's two brothers, but she didn't know them as well as she would like. Although she loved being around her family, she very seldom had the opportunity to see them. Fifteen years ago, her father moved his family to Philadelphia because of his job. Since then, Rhiannon had visited relatives only occasionally.

Her older cousins, Camie and Julian, were unable to meet in Denver because they were both working hard at their professions. However, all five cousins planned to meet at the grandparents' house at the end of the summer.

Rhiannon's oldest cousin, Camie, was a beautiful, five foot five inch brunette with lovely brown eyes. Presently, she resided in the small Bavarian town of Garmisch, Germany, where she practiced a figure skating routine that she hoped to use in the upcoming Winter Olympics try-outs in Tasmania, Australia. If she qualified, it would be her second attempt at the gold medal. It would also be her last chance for the Olympics, because she soon would be 26 years old. Although she would never admit it, she knew she was not as quick and agile as she was when she was younger. She was, however, more graceful and polished because of her years of practice.

Julian, on the other hand, was Rhiannon's only male cousin. He was in the middle of his busy season playing for the Colorado Rockies baseball team as their star catcher. He had the best batting average on the team, and was fondly referred to by his fans as 'The Jewel of the Rockies'. Julian was a fun loving young man with a very mild manner. That was a good thing since he was six foot six inches tall, with a trim, muscular 225 pound body. His fans constantly marveled over his gracefulness since he was such an overpowering man. To his credit, he had never denied any of his fans the pleasure of a handshake or a request to autograph a baseball. Although being in the spotlight made most people gruff, Julian was always seen with sparkling dark brown eyes and a gleaming smile.

The house-sitting the three cousins agreed to do become necessary because of a tragic event that happened six weeks ago. It was assumed that Flight 436, a 15 passenger Beech Craft in which their grandparents were passengers, had engine trouble and went down somewhere in the dense, uninhabited jungle of the Amazon.

The plane wasn't discovered until three weeks later, and only seven bodies, plus the pilot and co-pilot, were found. With the discovery of the plane came the startling news that the aircraft

had been shot down. By whom, or for what reason, was not yet known. It appeared to the rescue team that four survivors had left the scene of the crash and were traveling northerly in an attempt to escape from whoever had attacked them.

The world wide media constantly told viewers that the survivors had little chance of enduring the hardships offered by this unforgiving jungle. The hot, humid, unfriendly environment was filled with poisonous snakes, spiders, and wild animals; the multitude of swamps in the jungle was filled with deadly caiman and piranha fish. Newspapers speculated that any survivors of the crash would surely experience nightmarish encounters, and it was predicted their bodies would never be discovered. So called experts of the jungle theorized that the lack of proper food, fresh water, and exposure to the unfriendly elements would be nearly impossible to survive.

When the downed aircraft was finally located, the bodies remaining at the site had already experienced a great measure of decay, but the authorities were able to identify each corpse through dental records and DNA. Fortunately, Rhiannon's grandparents were not listed among the dead.

What brought so much world attention to the incident was that the plane was filled with United States citizens and the attack took place in the foreign country of Brazil. Of added concern was the notoriety of two survivors -- one was a popular nun named Sister Mary Magdalene, a Mother Superior, who was heading for a small village in the Amazon jungle to set up a school and hospital for the neglected Indians. The other, and most important survivor, was Jose Domingo, a thirty-eight year old United States Senator from New Mexico whose national popularity had been rapidly climbing. It was predicted by many political experts that Domingo would be the next President of the United States. Jose was on this trip to support and help Mother Superior begin her work.

It had been a very difficult three weeks for Rhiannon because of the constant attention from the media. Although the focal point of the news was the senator, Rhiannon's grandparents were part of the overall story. Rhiannon's parents found it

easy to be cordial to the press, but she had found it difficult to maintain her composure. One day a reporter asked, "How do you feel about your grandparents being lost in the jungle with the senator and Mother Superior, knowing they will probably die a horrible death?" Rhiannon pondered over the question for a few seconds as anger welled up inside her. She blurted out a response, which made her mother's eyes roll up in embarrassment. With a sarcastic inflection she said, "It makes me feel angry to know they are probably suffering at this moment, when it could have been some worthless reporter instead. There is no justice in this world." Of course her words were never printed. Only the picture of Rhiannon glaring at the reporter while her mother stared at the heavens was pasted on newspapers across the country.

Since the tragic airplane crash, young Rhiannon had been plagued with recurring nightmares of her grandparents walking through the jungle and encountering the demons of the Amazon. She knew from a feeling deep inside that her grandparents were still alive and in need of help, but how to help her grandparents remained obscure. No one knew where in the vast jungle to begin looking. Rhiannon knew that undergrowth in the jungle was so thick and the monkeys and wildlife so noisy, that two people walking only 50 feet apart could remain unseen and unheard by each other for days. Rhiannon wanted desperately to launch a rescue mission but knew it was hopeless unless she could pinpoint where to start.

The only other family member who shared Rhiannon's feelings, was cousin Jessica Leigh who was presently waiting for Rhiannon in Denver. Since the crash, the two cousins had talked to each other every day on the phone. They had developed a close friendship, which did not exist when they were younger. To their astonishment, Jessica Leigh had experienced the identical nightmares as Rhiannon. This uncanny phenomenon had both of them wondering what was causing this to happen. They knew it was more than just a coincidence, but their families passed it off as wishful thinking and part of the normal grieving process.

Rhiannon and Jessica Leigh expounded to one another that there seemed to exist a mental telepathy between the two of them and their grandparents. The young cousins recalled that throughout their early life, all they had to do was think about their grandpa or grandma and one of them would call on the telephone. When the girls had talked to either grandparent, it was strange how they understood each other's deepest feelings. It was as if the grandparents could see into their grandchildren's minds. The deep love grandpa and grandma had for their grandchildren was never hidden but was displayed with pride for every-one to see. It was a wonderful feeling to know for sure that someone loved you and was proud of you for who you were.

The unfortunate plight of the grandparents was not the only thing bothering young Rhiannon. She had just left Philadelphia that morning after a heated disagreement with her father, something that rarely happened. She knew that he was upset about his mother and father being lost in the jungles of South America. But today, he became more angry than she had ever seen. It began when she mentioned her desire to visit the Air Force Academy, while she was in Colorado, because she was considering a stint in the Air Force to learn to fly jets. Immediately Rhiannon's father became furious. He was emphatic that she was going to attend Harvard Law School like they had always talked about. He had spoken harshly and said, "Your grandfather and grandmother have scrimped, saved, and gathered up a large sum of money, God only knows how, to set up a trust fund for each of their grandchildren so they could go to the colleges of their dreams. You have always said you wanted to attend Harvard, and now that you are 18 years old, you tell me you want to fly airplanes for the damned government! Your poor grandfather is going to turn over in his grave, wherever in the Amazon jungle that may be. Young lady, your selfish idea of what you want to do is beyond comprehension. Unfortunately, you have always had that adventurous nature like your grandparents, and you can see what good that has done them."

Her father's harsh words repeated over and over in Rhiannon's mind. She felt so bad at the moment, that she began to wonder

if the Air Force Academy should be part of her future. The love for her father was so great, she considered starting the application papers to attend Harvard. She would sacrifice anything just to make her dad happy. Rhiannon was gratified to know her father's feelings before she had a chance to show him the letter of acceptance she had received that morning from the Academy. Although she was very disappointed in her father's reaction, she was not surprised. That was why she had secretly worked very hard with Congressman Thornapple. She had hoped that if she was accepted into the Academy, that her parents' approval would come easy. Now it doesn't look like it will happen. She was disturbed thinking of the numerous hours of help she had received from Congressman Thornapple. She hoped that he would forgive her for wasting so much of his precious time.

Rhiannon sat wondering how it was decided that she should go to Harvard. All she could remember was it being said many times as she was growing up, but couldn't remember ever telling anyone that it was her goal. She was sure that either her mother or her father first mentioned it as a possible ambition. Her silence and failure of not disputing it had become her consent to establish it as her dream. Now she realized she should have said something earlier, before everyone became convinced that being a Harvard graduate was what she wanted. In fact, whenever Harvard was mentioned, she experienced a nauseating feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Unlike most young people her age, Rhiannon knew what she wanted. Ever since the first day she took flying lessons, at fifteen years of age, she was filled with a wonderful emotion when flying an aircraft. She spent nearly every cent she made, in her part time job, renting airplanes, or buying the paraphernalia needed by pilots. She only felt this incredible sensation when dreaming of flying jets and becoming an astronaut in outer space. She was very disappointed with today's conversation with her father, for she had been looking forward to the hard physical and mental challenges required as an Air Cadet.

Suddenly Rhiannon was distracted from her deep thoughts by loud irritating noise made by a couple of young punk rockers

yelling at her from across the room. They were trying to get her attention by calling her “Good looking mama” in voices loud enough to wake the dead. Rhiannon was embarrassed when she saw all the faces in the train station staring at her. She was mortified to be the center of attention. One punk rocker had a Mohawk haircut standing straight up and dyed purple at the lower end near his scalp, with a pink stripe on the top. The other young man had his head shaved on one side and had long hair dyed blue on the other. Both of them had a face full of jewelry and wore large gold earrings decorated with small dyed feathers. Their noses and eyebrows were pierced with gold rings. They wore faded blue jeans with holes in the knees and weird looking orange and black shirts with no sleeves. The ganglier of the two was about five feet eleven inches tall and had a tattoo on his right forearm of some large bodied, evil looking snake.

Rhiannon was not afraid of these loud, obnoxious boys for she was confident that she could defend herself. These two skinny young men, who were probably her same age, had no idea that she had earned a third degree black belt in the martial art of Kung Fu. She had learned self defense from her father and occasionally from her uncle Eric. They had both taught Kung Fu while attending college at Colorado State University. Since she was six, Rhiannon had faithfully practiced the art of self-defense. Rhiannon, however, didn’t want to be involved in an incident that required her to show off her fighting skills. She tried to ignore the two pests and hoped they would soon get tired of making fools out of themselves.

After a few minutes, it became obvious that Rhiannon’s silence was not going to deter the two young men. It was clear that they would go to extremes to bring attention to themselves.

An older man, who appeared to be in his late fifties or early sixties, dressed like a priest in a black suit and white starched collar, walked over to Rhiannon and said, “Let me see if I can be of service, Miss,” as he walked over to the punks holding a brass crucifix in his hand. The loud shouting stopped instantly. Rhiannon could not hear what the priest was saying, but was surprised to see the two punks quietly stare at the priest with an expres-

sion of fear. The priest pointed back towards Rhiannon, and the two young men shook their heads in agreement. Both hooligans walked over to Rhiannon and the taller of the two said, "We are very sorry to have embarrassed you and we promise not to bother you for the rest of your travels." The young men excused themselves and walked over to the other side of the train station.

Rhiannon walked over to the priest and asked, "Father, what did you tell them to settle them down so fast and make them act like gentlemen?"

The priest just smiled and said, "The Word of God sometimes makes people act in strange ways."

"I guess," she replied. "It's a miracle how you changed their personalities in just a matter of seconds. I'm very impressed."

Rhiannon paused and looked into the priest's eyes and had a funny feeling that she was looking at someone she had known before. She then blushed for the way she had stared at him, and said, "I just came over to say thank you and to tell you I appreciate what you did."

The priest smiled and said, "You are very welcome. It is not often that I get the opportunity to protect a young lady." He then excused himself and informed her that his train to Denver was ready to board and he walked away.

It suddenly dawned on Rhiannon that she was booked on the same train, so she picked up her bag and started after the priest who had already vanished into the crowd.

As Rhiannon entered the first passenger car, she saw the two young troublemakers who were again making a lot of noise. As soon as they saw her, the look of fear instantly appeared on their faces and they sat down very quietly and stared out the window. Rhiannon didn't want to be in the same car with the two men for she was afraid that they would eventually become loud and obnoxious again. She walked into the next coach where she saw many eyes staring at her as if she were peculiar. Rhiannon sensed that it was probably due to the loud scene with the young men in the train station. Suddenly she noticed the priest sitting at a window and walked over to him. She asked him if she could sit on the seat next to him. He

looked up at her with a pleasant smile and said, "It would be my pleasure". The motion of the train usually makes me ill if I read at the same time it's moving. So, if you don't mind me talking your ear off, have a seat."

Usually Rhiannon would have preferred not to indulge in a conversation with someone she did not know, but for some reason, she looked forward to talking to this old priest. She placed her bag on the seat and pulled out a book that she could read if the priest fell asleep or later became tired of talking. Before she sat down, Rhiannon stored the rest of her items in the luggage rack overhead. She held out her hand and said, "By the way, Father, my name is Rhiannon Lewine, and I am looking forward to your company." The priest smiled and shook her hand as she sat down in the aisle seat next to him.

Before the priest could introduce himself, the train began to move and a short stocky conductor with grey hair, gold rimmed glasses and a white mustache entered their passenger car and announced in a loud voice, "Tickets, please. Please have your tickets ready." Rhiannon fumbled through her inside jacket pockets to find her Amtrak ticket. The conductor punched a hole in the tickets of the couple who were sitting across the aisle. For some unknown reason, the two of them had been giving Rhiannon some very strange looks. Maybe it's not the scene in the station after all she thought. It could be because she was a young woman who chose a seat next to an older man. Rhiannon decided to just ignore the glances for it didn't matter. The conductor turned to Rhiannon and said, "Do you have your ticket, Miss?" She held the ticket out to the conductor and watched as he punched a hole in the ticket so she could not use it again. To her surprise, the conductor proceeded on to the couple who were sitting behind her and never asked the priest for his ticket. She turned to the priest and said, "He acted like he didn't even see you. Is there some type of arrangement with the train system that allows you to travel free?"

The priest smiled at her and said, "There are many advantages available to a man of the cloth such as myself."

“Wow,” she exclaimed. “That may be an enticing fringe benefit for encouraging more people into the priesthood, except for that celibacy thing.” She then thought of what she had just said and blushed as she stammered, “I’m not saying that the celibacy thing is bad, Father, I just meant...” She paused not knowing what to say next.

The priest smiled and was pleased that she was considerate enough of his feelings to be embarrassed, since she thought she had insulted him. He responded with a smile, “I know what you mean. But, the celibacy thing of which you speak, is a requirement of the Catholic priests.” He paused for a moment, then said, “I’m an Episcopalian minister.”

Rhiannon didn’t know what to say, and fumbled with the book she had on her lap. The priest looked at the title and said, “I see that you are reading about the Titanic. That was a devastating event. Many people lost loved ones and found their whole lives altered.”

“I was going to read something about it, because my cousins in Denver are planning to take me to see some historic sites. They said that this time we were going to the Molly Brown house on Pennsylvania Avenue.”

“That’s nice,” the priest commented. “Since you said this time, I gather you tour a lot of historic sites every time you go to Denver?”

“Yes. Not only Denver, but I always take a tour in every city I visit. It was something our grandparents ingrained into us. Whenever I traveled with them, the first thing they would do when they arrived at a city that they had never been to before, was to take a tour of the town. Travel becomes more fun when you learn about the history and customs of the places you visit. Tour guides also give you an insight of other things to see while you are in a strange new city.”

“Your grandparents sound like adventurous people, however, you speak of them in the past tense. Are they still alive?”

“I wish I knew for certain, but I think they are.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I would rather not talk about it at this time.”

The priest paused for a second, smiled and said, “What interesting things have you seen in Denver?”

“I have been to the Denver Mint and the old area of the city by Larimer Square; plus, I have toured the Coors Brewing Company in Golden and have watched movies at the old Tivoli Brewing Company. If you have never been to the old mining towns of Central City or Black Hawk, that’s a must. Even with the new gambling casinos the two towns transmit an atmosphere of the past. One time when we were in northern Colorado in Fort Collins, visiting my uncle Eric and aunt Jill, I toured the only working diamond mine in North America, which is located just south of the town of Laramie, Wyoming. It is called the Kelsey Lake Mine. The area is covered with deposits of kimberlite, the ore that contains diamonds.”

“That’s a recreation that can be very educational. Tell me, why do you want to visit the Molly Brown house?”

“I saw the movie called ‘The Unsinkable Molly Brown,’ and thought it would be nice to see the actual house where this woman lived. Did you know that even after she had become wealthy, she was not accepted as a society person because of her lack of a proper heritage?” Rhiannon shook her head in disbelief, and then continued, “Although she was one of the survivors of the Titanic and sort of a famous folk hero because of the help she gave to the passengers of her life boat, she was still not accepted by the wives of Denver’s upper class.”

“I remember that some of the Denver society people never allowed her into their clique.” The priest commented with fervor, “But, you have to realize that people relate to things by what they know and what they are taught as they are growing up.”

“Well, I don’t know about that,” stated Rhiannon with a frown. “It seems to me that some people go out of their way to be mean.”

The priest smiled at Rhiannon as she gave her opinion. “What else are you going to see when you are in Denver?”

“We are going to the top of Lookout Mountain to see Buffalo Bill’s Grave and Museum. They tell me the view of the City of Denver is incredible from there.”

“Yes, I have heard the view from there is astonishing.” said the priest. “He was a very popular man.”

“I read that there were 20,000 people at his funeral on top of the mountain,” said Rhiannon. “But, from the little I have read about Bill Cody’s life, I was not impressed. It seems to me, he was a braggart and thought only of promoting himself, without regard to anyone else.”

The priest responded, “I’ll have to admit that Bill Cody did a tremendous job of making himself famous and he did brag about his exploits. But, I know for a fact, that he helped one young lady to accomplish her dream in life. He had a heart as big as the whole outdoors.”

“Well” replied Rhiannon, “I would be interested in hearing that kind of a story. I don’t think many people would think of Bill Cody as someone who would help a person obtain their dream.”

“I could tell you the story,” The priest answered, “which for that matter is also tangled around the sinking Titanic. However, it is not the type of a tale you can impart in a few minutes.” “That’s O.K.,” replied Rhiannon, who was thinking that a story may help cheer up her depressed mood. “We have a long ride to Denver and I’m all ears.”

The priest began: “Well my story is of a young couple who were soul-mates who came from different backgrounds. The young man came from a well-to-do English family in London with ties to the crown, and the young lady was a peasant girl from a farm in Northern Ireland.”

“What do you mean they were soul-mates?” asked Rhiannon.

“It means that in their inner beings, or what is referred to as a person’s soul, there is an understanding that their spirits belong together. It was what you might call, love at first sight, or an awareness of a predestined affection for one another.”

“Oh. They are destined to love each other and will always be truly happy together because they both see things the same way,” responded Rhiannon.

“No, not exactly,” said the priest. “That is what most people believe, but what you don’t need is more of yourself. If you

look at the world which God created, you will find that nothing has much meaning until it is with its opposite. The white of the moon is never more beautiful than it is when viewed in a totally black sky. We would not know what the concept of 'up' meant unless we were able to know its opposite of 'down'. There is nothing we can understand without knowing its reverse. Tall goes with short, fat goes with thin, every front must have a back. So I would say that usually soul-mates have opposite personalities. The difference is that they know what makes their relationship special. They don't spend any time trying to change their mate. They accept their spouse as they are and have a deep respect for the other's opinion."

"Oh! So what you are saying is there is some truth in the expression, 'Opposites attract'? Can they be truly happy?" Rhiannon asked.

"Happiness is a state of mind", continued the priest, "and has nothing to do with what is going on around you. I would say that most soul-mates know this and they are some of the happiest people around."

"Hum". Rhiannon frowned as she thought about what the priest just said. "It sounds like my mother and father, or grandma and grandpa for that matter, must be soul-mates. They seem to be made for one another, but I can tell you for sure, they don't necessarily always see eye to eye." The mention of her parents and her grandparents instantly reminded Rhiannon of her worries and she felt a great sadness in her heart.

"Exactly," stated the priest, as he paused for a moment. "I may be wrong, but the expression on your face suddenly exhibits a soul filled with a great burden. Rather than tell you this story, maybe you would prefer to tell me what is bothering you?"

Rhiannon gave the priest a shocked look as she wondered how he could have known of her anxiety. She assumed that her own body language had given her away. She was not the type of person to share her private thoughts with a stranger, so she smiled to regain her composure and said, "It's nothing, Father. For a moment I thought of something that made me sad. Right now I'm looking forward to hearing your story. Please proceed."

The priest smiled at her, nodded his head and began; “Now I could start my story at the train station in Chicago from where we have just come, for that is where Tommy Thompson first heard about the Titanic going down. Tommy became very disconcerted when he found out that his wife and children, who were supposed to board the ship in Southampton, England, were not listed among the survivors.”

“Oh my!” said Rhiannon. “I can imagine how he felt. Confused, angry, a hollowness inside. That’s how I feel since...” She stopped, realizing that she did not want to go into her grandparent’s tragic affair. She did not want to start crying in front of the priest or these other strangers.

“That’s how you feel since what?” asked the priest.

Rhiannon mustered up a convincing smile and said, “Never mind, it’s something I would prefer not to discuss at this moment. Maybe I will tell you later. Please proceed with the story. I’m looking forward to it.”

“Very well,” said the priest, “but, I think it would be better if you knew a little bit more about Tommy before I get to the Titanic. Also, the other important individual of this story is a young woman by the name of Bridget Flanigan. She’s a farm girl from Ireland who had a delightful personality. Remember, these two individuals lived in different worlds from each other. Tommy came from a family of wealth and power, while Bridget came from a lineage of poor peasant stock. To begin this story at just the right time, I would say 1900 would be the right year. Both Tommy and Bridget were only fifteen years of age, but didn’t know that each other even existed. That was the year opportunities began to present themselves to allow them both to pursue their dreams of travel and adventure.”

“What do you mean that opportunities started to present themselves?”

The priest smiled and said, “All of us are offered different opportunities throughout our lives. However, most people pass up a multitude of opportunities before they die. Sometimes it is a chance to take a job or to proceed in special training, but they never take the chance because it would cause their life to

change. The funny thing is, these are the same people who complain constantly about their life. Sometimes, because it would create a change in life style, we choose to ignore opportunities. Sometimes we are encouraged by loved ones to overlook chances of doing something we might enjoy.”

Rhiannon thought this was uncanny. The priest first mentioned something that reminded her of her grandparents’ dilemma and now he alluded to something that reminded her of the argument she had this morning with her father. She wondered if she would learn something from this story that could help her with her own circumstance.

“Each time this young boy and girl were given an opportunity,” said the priest, “they never hesitated to find out where it would lead them. Remember, this story takes place when it was expected to always do what your parents wanted.”

“What do you mean by that? Are you saying that young people nowadays disregard their parents’ wishes?”

“No, not exactly. What I am saying is that presently, the parents of today’s society are more knowledgeable about the expectations for the future of our youth. Parents know that a person will excel further in life and become more productive if he or she proceeds in a field in which they have an interest.”

“I agree with that.” said Rhiannon, “But even today there are young people whose parents want them to proceed in a career that is not of their liking.”

The priest smiled for he knew that he had gotten her to start thinking. He said, “Quite often the parents of today have their own ideas on what their children should do. However, a loving parent will usually give in to their child’s wishes once they have been informed. If the child just gives them a little time to do some soul searching, the parents will come around.”

Rhiannon pondered over what the priest just said, and hoped that in her case it would all come true. She saw him staring at her and said, “I’m sorry to ask so many questions while you are trying to tell me a story. Please continue, you were saying it wasn’t like that at the turn of the century.”

“No it wasn’t. Everyone was born in a set station in life that determined how one should act and how much education they were expected and allowed to obtain. Even a person’s prejudices in life were predestined by their heritage. Protestants hated Catholics, who hated the Jews, and so forth. Everyone associated with only the people of their own race and looked down upon anyone else who was different. The world was full of bigotry, but it was not looked upon as an UNGODLY thing. People who crossed these lines usually found themselves being scorned by even their loved ones.”

Rhiannon thought another talk with her dad, before she gave up on her educational desire to attend the Air force Academy, would be in order.

“That’s enough preparation”, said the priest, “I’m going to begin this saga on May 27, 1899. It was the turning point in Tommy’s life.”

Buy the B&N ePub version at:-

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/heritage-of-courage-w-thomas-richards/1102798959?ean=2940012939548>

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/A-Heritage-of-Courage-ebook/dp/B005575ZNU/ref>