

**“Here’s the story…”**

**May 1979**

**In 1979, I was living in a two-bedroom apartment in my hometown of Skokie, IL with my best friend Gary. I was 22 years old, a few months removed from my sophomore year at Illinois State University--and I say `removed’ literally, since the Dean of Students had strongly pointed out that school wasn’t the best choice for me. Gary and I both had “floater jobs” which basically covered our monthly rent, weed, beer, and food, in that order. The landlord would likely say the rent and weed could be in a reverse order. Basically, I seemed to be following a destiny first noted in my 8<sup>th</sup>-grade yearbook from Oakview Junior High, where I was dubbed “town clown.” My mom was horrified. Me? I took it as a badge of honor, one that kept wearing through high school and my short stint in college.**

**It was a typical September Sunday. Gary and I were laying around, recovering from hangovers and planning our next adventure. Around four o’clock, the phone rang. It was my Dad.**

**“Hey, Jeff, are you busy?”**

**“Well, a little. Hanging out.”**

**“I really need to speak with you. Can you come over?”**

**I was at that age when I didn’t really have anything against my parents. I’d see them for birthdays and holidays and when I wanted to conduct a secret withdrawal from the packed meat freezer they kept in their basement, but I didn’t see the need to spend any time with them. “Is it important?”**

**His answer was firm. “It’s important enough that I’m asking you to come over—now.”**

**That was good enough for me. I quickly jumped into the shower to wash off the after-aroma of the previous night’s parties. As the hot**

water rushed down, my mind began spinning with scenarios. What did he want to talk about? Abruptly it dawned on me that maybe he was going to tell me he was dying. My mind always moved at a mile a minute, and all of a sudden it came to a screeching halt.

Why else would he need to talk to me? My dad was an ordinary man--52-years old, husband, father of four, CEO of an Envelope Company, recovering alcoholic, and my hero. He really was my rock, and more than made up for my distracted mother. How would I survive without him? We always shared this unspoken bond of my inheriting his OCD gene. And while he never appreciated that I was that town clown and high school fuck-up, he admired my work ethic. When I did put my mind to something, I took it to completion, whether it was shoveling neighbor's sidewalks in those Chicago winters or moving their lawns in the summer. Even as an eight-year-old. And if I had suddenly kicked the bucket at age 20, that would have been the story of my life—a human oxymoron who had a great work ethic yet couldn't keep a job.

He hugged me when I came through the door and told my mom to let us be. We went upstairs to my parents' bedroom, which was decorated with a complete Brady Bunch-era motif: matching avocado and orange bedspread and curtains, beige shag carpeting, large imitation Picasso paintings on the walls. We sat together on the bench seat at the bottom of the bed, connected at the hip. He started to put his arm around my shoulder, and almost instantly I began to cry. *"Dad, please don't die on me!"* I began to sob.

Startled, he jumped to his feet, then put his hands on my shoulders. *"Listen to me! That's not what this is about. I'm not dying! But now that you mention it, you are killing me."* I started to say something, but he quickly interrupted, *"Seriously, I need you to listen to me."*

He started speaking to me, but it was more of a sermon. The tone in his voice was unlike anything I had heard from him before. I had never heard him in such an authoritative voice. I could already tell that I had either upset or disappointed him, but just did not know how or why. I

quickly learned. "You are wasting your life," he said. "You have always had an outstanding work ethic, he told me, along with an incredible quick wit, which I was just throwing away by being a smart ass, just looking for the laugh. "If you were ever able to use that wit in a more "think on your feet" manner instead of just being a comedian, you could have great value to some company one day." He looked at me directly in the eye. "I didn't send you to college to be a fuck-up. You have a gift, and I cannot allow you to waste it. You need to get your collective shit together."

I was stunned, and very upset. Not so much about what he said, but because I knew it was dead-on.

My mind jumped back to a moment two summers before, when I was working in his company warehouse. The combination of my 17-year-old male hormones and the highly Latina warehouse staff were just too much for me to overcome, and I devoted far more time to chasing skirts than my responsibilities. He sat me down then, too, but instead of giving me a sermon, he fired me. I know that conversation was painful for both him to say and me to hear as well. It wasn't so much that I embarrassed him as the boss's son getting canned, but what hurt me most was that I had let him down. Here I was, letting him down again. What most upset me was knowing that he was not proud of me.

I drove back to the apartment. The aroma of cannabis greeted my arrival. Gary passed me the loaded a pipe as I entered, saying something to the extent of "you look like you need one." But what I needed is what I had just received. My dad was my hero, and I had been confronted with the fact that I was failing him. And really, I had also been confronted with the fact that I was failing myself. "No thanks," I said to Gary, echoing the words my dad had just said to me, "I really need to start getting my shit together."

The very next day, I started searching the Help Wanted section in the Chicago Tribune. Some company called Tek Aids two towns over was looking for a warehouse worker. I had never heard of them, but I knew

**I wanted that job. I'm not sure why, but the ad called out to me. Maybe I just wanted a job quickly so I could get back into my dad's good favor. For the interview, I put my best foot forward, wearing the blue blazer my mother bought me for high school graduation and borrowing a paisley tie I had bought Dad for Father's Day.**

**They were a family business about five years old that had set themselves up as a computer peripherals distributor. They sold printers, monitors, and bins full of internal parts. Jud, the founder and CEO, gave me a tour of the 15,000sf facility. I could tell he had great pride in his operation, and I was impressed that he knew every employee on a first-name basis.**

**The warehouse was sloppy and seemed a little disorganized. I knew I could fix that. What surprised me is that they also had a tech area in the warehouse, run by a guy wearing thick lenses a lab coat – he looked like mad scientist. They were building student tech systems for community colleges, based upon Ohio Scientific's Challenger 1P single-processor computer systems. "A warehouse and tech?" I said to Jud, without reply.**

**I did find it interesting that he was already introducing me, and after the tour, we went into his wife Lorraine's office and they both told be the job responsibilities. I was trying not to jump the gun, but it sure seemed like I was already hired. And I was really hoping they would, and I knew I was looking into a crystal ball and seeing my future. Perhaps I was willing it to happen by confidently adding "I look forward to hearing from you sometime tomorrow." She gave me a strange look, perhaps due to my presumptuousness. "The blazer and tie won't be necessary when you come back," she said. At that point, I knew the job would be mine. I was already reorganizing the sloppy warehouse in my head.**

**I started two days later. Two years later, I was promoted to Vice President of Sales. Twenty years and three days after my Dad's sermon, I founded my own IT server-building company, morphing into the video surveillance recording market in 2009. By the time of my**

**retirement on my 66<sup>th</sup> birthday on July 21, 2023, I had built a company that is the world's largest supplier of purpose-built surveillance video recording appliances, with over a quarter-million devices recording the video surveillance from over four million cameras in 91 countries around the globe. And all at the most secure sites or coolest companies in the world.**

**Here's the story of how that happened.**