

I.

# AN AWAKENING



## *An Awakening*

### Chapter 1

It was June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1995. I'm sure of the date now as I've gone back over my calendar and phone records to verify *everything*. At the time the date meant nothing to me, just another day like any other day. The only difference being was that my wife Susan and I had just completed construction of a new home with a separate office building out back, above the garage. We lived on a bluff in Westchester that gave us a great view over Marina del Rey, Santa Monica Bay and the entire West Los Angeles basin.

I remember it being a cool, clear day headed into evening. The foggy marine layer usually present at that time of year was gone and I could see all the way along the coast to Malibu. I stood up from my desk, walked over to the window and lifted up on the lower pane, cracking it open a few inches to let the soft ocean breeze spill in.

Susan was over in the house unpacking, and still fuming from an argument we had an hour earlier. When she got like this I found it was best to just leave her alone so I had retreated to the safety and solitude of my office space, her words still ringing in my head.

*"I don't know why I ever let you talk me into building a new house in this white trash neighborhood with these white trash neighbors."*

I wondered if she actually meant what she had said. She seemed happy when we first moved into the area eight years earlier. I chalked her comments up to the tension and stress of building a new home and all the work of moving into it. Standing there now, gazing out to the mountains off Point Dume, the sting of her remarks dissipated as my mind quickly cleared of everything. I was focused on the sun's brilliant yellow mass as it diffused into a soft orange glow slipping quickly towards the horizon.

I didn't know where my next thought came from. It was just suddenly there, out of nowhere – the memory of a girl I'd known in grade school. Her name was Kathy Lynch, and what I was thinking was so disturbing that I tried to push my thoughts of her out of my mind. But it came back again, stronger and through my inner voice, telling me Kathy had passed away! Kathy was dead. I felt it... I knew it!

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A feeling of immense sadness washed over me quickly and with such force that my body shuddered, causing my knees to buckle, snapping me out of my daydream. I quickly grabbed onto the window sill to regain my balance. Looking out again, the sun had vanished and my haunting thoughts echoed that loss through my own emotions as well. Kathy was gone...forever!

I sat back down in my chair, trying to understand what had just happened and hoping to shake this feeling of losing my friend.

*Why am I thinking this? I'll just make it go away. I won't think this thought any more.* I tried once again to shove the idea out of my mind.

*If she's not dead, then what happened to her?*

Who keeps asking these questions I hear bouncing around loudly in my head? It's as though Kathy herself was prodding me for the answers. The thought to ask my mother about Kathy the next time I talked with her then crossed my mind.

*No, you have got to call your mother now!*

My inner voice had begun taking over, demanding action tonight. I had always lived by that inner voice, my conscience; something my parents had always told me would be there to guide me through life. It had never failed me before through my career as a photojournalist. Listening to it often gave me the extra edge of being in the right place at just the right time to get the perfect shot.

I looked down at my watch. It was eight minutes after eleven in Pennsylvania. I started to hesitate, but then picked up the phone and dialed my parent's number.

"Hi Mom, it's Randy." I always identified myself when I called even though my mother could usually detect the subtle voice differences between me and my brothers' Jeff or Tom.

"Oh, hi Randy, Bob, pickup the other phone it's Randy." My mother called out for my dad.

"How's the new house going? Are you finished moving in?" My dad was now on the line.

"Everything's in, and we've made good progress of getting it put into place but it feels like a never ending job."

"How many moves does this make for you now? Have you kept count?" My mom laughed as she brought up the subject.

"It's an even dozen now Mom, but I'll never catch up to Jeff."

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We all chuckled as my brother Jeff definitely held the record for a life in constant transition.

“How do the kids like it?” My dad was asking about Dana and Phil, Susan’s two children from her previous marriage.

“They love having their own bathrooms. I guess I won’t be hearing Phil arguing with Dana about that anymore.”

“And how’s Susan holding up with all the turmoil?” Mom asked.

I paused for the briefest of time but enough to drive home my next statement. “She’s over in the house and I’m in my office, trying to stay out of her way. It’s a little tense and that’s all I’m going to say on the subject.” They both laughed and didn’t push me any further about Susan.

All the time I was talking to my parents, my inner thoughts kept bubbling to the surface, pressuring me from the background to get creative, change directions and work my questions about Kathy into the conversation. I finally got my chance when I brought up the topic of an old friend of mine from high school.

“I talked to Dave Lang the other day. He’s still working down in Wallops Island with the rocket launches,” I said. “He’s the only guy from high school that I still talk to anymore.”

“You two did spend a lot of time together hunting and fishing back then,” my mom said.

“I used to stay in touch with Kathy Lynch too, but her Christmas cards stopped coming a while back. I always wondered how she’s doing. You wouldn’t happen to know anyone to call who might know where she is, would you?” I asked.

“They moved down to Florida years ago, Randy. But I could ask Rita Sheehan – she was Caroline’s best friend when they lived up here. She may know where they are now. I’ll mention it to her the next time I see her.” Caroline was Kathy’s mother. My mom and Caroline were friends also but had never stayed in touch after the Lynch family had moved.

I wanted to say more. I wanted to ask my mother to make sure to call Rita tomorrow and find out for me but I didn’t. I didn’t want to bring on a lot of questions from my mom asking why I was so interested in finding Kathy right now. I didn’t have an answer for her that made sense at that moment just my feelings and I wasn’t ready to reveal those feelings to anyone. I just moved

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on to the next subject and hoped my mom would see Rita Sheehan in the near future. The funny thing was the constant demand from my inner voice to find Kathy now subsided. Events were in motion that I hoped would eventually lead me to an answer for all these thoughts of her passing away.



Within a few weeks I had all but given up on my mother coming through with any information. I did continue to ask but at the same time turned my attention to a different kind of search. The Internet was still in its infancy when I hooked up my computer to it in August 1995 and began spending countless hours late at night searching for Kathy. I had a feeling that she was listed somewhere out on that vast web, but finding out where was going to be another problem. I never gave up hope that Kathy was still alive, yet couldn't bring myself to tell anyone that I had fears that she wasn't. The hardest part of all was keeping my feelings to my self.

I'm usually a very open person with most people, but this subject I was dealing with had me confused, unsettled and driven to find an answer that I thought might lie deep within feelings for Kathy that I had buried a long time ago. I couldn't tell a soul, especially my wife Susan who I knew would never understand the connection I had to this girl.

Also high on my list of fears in the beginning of my quest was the fear of being wrong. I may have been living in California now but my personal character and values were molded in a totally different environment. Having thoughts and feelings about someone passing away was new to me. Was I losing my mind? What kind of person has these kinds of thoughts? As I sat in my office night after night repeatedly typing her name into various search engines, I was beginning to wonder about my sanity myself.



Kathy and I had met in the early '60s. My family had just moved out to the "country" from the city of Johnstown in western Pennsylvania, famous for its great flood of 1889. More

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than 2,200 people had perished when the South Fork Dam on the Conemaugh River collapsed during torrential rains on the morning of May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1889.

Western Pennsylvania was a region rich with a mix of Eastern European immigrants working hard in the steel and mining industries that dominated the landscape. Great clouds of red smoke billowed daily from the dozens of stacks scattered around the town. These steel and coal mining industries made industrialists, like the Forbes, Carnegies and Mellons, the richest people in America.

These same industrialists owned a secluded sportsman's lodge near the South Fork Dam where they spent weekends hunting and fishing. Engineers had been warning them that a height modification they had added to the breast of the dam would dangerously stress the structure if the water level continued to build up behind it. Instead of removing it, the club ignored their warnings and gambled that the dam would never reach that level. It was a gamble they were destined to lose.

A severe storm centered over the Johnstown area in late May of 1889 and refused to move. It unleashed a downpour that filled the dam to the brim. The structure failed, just as the engineers had predicted and the resulting flood forever changed the landscape and the character of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, which was now host to the greatest "natural" disaster ever to strike this country.

Even with all the death and destruction caused by the flood, many good things occurred. The American Red Cross started service at the Johnstown Flood; Clara Barton herself was present to help in the recovery, and most importantly, the local people became determined to rise above the situation and work together to rebuild the area.

The character, history and work ethic of this region was something ingrained in me from my earliest memories. We had Polish, Slovak, Serbian, Hungarian and other European heritage in our backgrounds. Like our ancestors who had settled the area, many of us came from large families. Our fathers all worked in the steel mills or the coal mines and, if we didn't do something with our lives, so would we. I can only imagine that breaking this trend was one catalyst prompting my parents to send all five of their children to a private Catholic school. That's what happened

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when we moved from renting a house in the city to building our own place in the country – one day we were in normal public school classrooms, just like everyone else, and the next day we were in a parochial school. The differences were startling for me, my two brothers and two sisters.

It was the fall of 1961, I was 8 years old and starting third grade at Sacred Heart School in Conemaugh, Pennsylvania. Sacred Heart's pastor was Father Kelly, a very large, no-nonsense Catholic priest of Irish heritage. His mere presence caused a nervous quaking among the students that never really settled down until he was out of sight again. The sisters who taught grade school ran the gamut from loving, caring souls that everyone wanted to be near, to what I can only describe now as Marine drill instructors disguised as nuns.

Going to school everyday was a conditioning exercise for me and my younger siblings. I was the oldest and had to set an example but no matter how hard I tried, my efforts were just not going to be good enough in ways I'd never foresee. As Sister Josita paced up and down the rows of desks, I would quiver in my seat, my head bent over, braced for a slap to the back of it or a hard tug on my ear. A sharp, unexpected, crack across the knuckles with her steel ruler was another attention getter. She liked to mix them up, keep you off guard so you couldn't protect yourself. If you were unlucky enough to catch her full wrath, you could expect it flying violently from all directions.

It was in this setting of strict discipline, fear of damnation for impure thoughts and general loathing of nuns and priests in general that I met Kathy Lynch. I remember the moment I first laid eyes on her, standing on the playground among a group of her friends. They all looked the same dressed in their green and white uniforms and giggling among themselves but Kathy stood out a head above the rest. Her light brown hair was parted down the middle, long and straight with a slight curl up at the ends where it fell just below her shoulders. Kathy's neck was long and slender matching her slim body with its long arms and legs.

I was standing there, attracted like a magnet to steel, when one of her girlfriends whispered something in Kathy's ear. She immediately looked up to catch me staring in her direction. It was Kathy's sparkling, steel blue eyes that captured me that morning

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and though she looked away, feigning shyness, a connection had been made. She looked up again and this time our eyes lock together and in that brief moment, volumes were said. Her spirit emanated from a place very close to mine, radiating an instant association through those eyes, and pulling on my heart. I can only describe my initial feelings for Kathy as pure love.

We were only 8 years old, but my feelings of love and a bond to Kathy never left me. By the time I reached 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Sacred Heart, my parents had finally heard enough complaining from the five of us kids about the excessive physical abuse and humiliation by the nuns. We were all taken out of Sacred Heart and put back into the Conemaugh Valley public schools.

Kathy finished grade school at Sacred Heart and then went off to Bishop McCort High. She had four siblings as well, one brother and three sisters, with one big difference, she was the youngest. I never knew any of them at the time as they were all older than Kathy and gone from their parent's home. Kathy was in that respect an only child growing up and that was the image that played in my mind when I thought of her. I held my love for Kathy close to my heart, and viewed myself as her protector, a guardian she might need someday. One thing I knew was nothing would ever happen to her while I was around to do something about it.

I never dated Kathy – never even kissed her – but I had this feeling of responsibility for her well-being that stayed with me as we grew up. One day after we had graduated from high school, I heard that she was in a hospital in Pittsburgh with Hodgkin's disease. It was the fall of 1972 and I had been working as a news cinematographer at WJAC-TV in Johnstown since my graduation from high school in 1971. As soon as I heard Kathy was sick, I took my first day off work and drove the eighty miles over to Pittsburgh to visit her.

"You've got the entire congregation praying for you now, thanks to Father Kelly," I said jokingly as I walked into her hospital room. "He made a special request to pray for your speedy recovery during his sermon last Sunday but I thought a personal visit might work better." Kathy's face lit up when she saw me enter the room.



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“I know it will definitely help,” she replied. Kathy looked tired from all the blood tests and injections she had been receiving. Hodgkin’s disease is a cancer of the lymphatic system that causes your cells to grow abnormally, weakening your immune system and if left unchecked, spreading to other parts of your body. Kathy’s initial symptoms were mistaken for the flu but combined with a sudden loss of weight and then swelling in her lymph nodes, the diagnosis was finally made. Treatment back then was with radiation.

“I can see the prayers are working already – you don’t look sick to me,” I replied, smiling back at her.

“I’ve felt better, that’s for sure,” Kathy answered in a soft, sedated voice. Kathy’s mom was in the room with her when I arrived and took this opportunity to go out for a break while I visited with Kathy. There was only one IV bottle hanging above her bed with the line running into a needle in Kathy’s arm. Kathy had just begun her radiation treatments, so the full effect hadn’t yet shown in her face although she was noticeably thinner than normal.

“I know you have a battle ahead of you but you’ll be out of here before you know it. Everything will be fine after that.” I could see a good spark of energy still burning in Kathy. She was young and ready to fight this disease, and all she needed was some encouragement and support from everyone around her. I told her I was working as a photographer in the television news business now and relayed a few short stories about the news I had been covering lately. I finished up by telling her about my latest love.

“I just got a ‘69 Javelin that I’m dying to give you a ride in when you get out.”

“I’d really like to do that,” Kathy replied. Her voice was upbeat now and I could feel my visit was having the desired effect of giving her the energy to carry on.

“I promise I’ll call as soon as you’re back home and feeling up to it.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” she said.

I didn’t realize it but I had been holding her hand the whole time I was talking to her and now it was time to let go. We both seemed to notice it at the same time and as I pulled my hand back she gripped it one last squeeze reaffirming to me that she would soon be back to normal.

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### Chapter 2

It was in January of 1973, after a heavy snowfall, that I picked Kathy up at her home and took her with me to the Blue Knob ski area to shoot some weather footage for the news that night on WJAC-TV. Her hair was gone from all the radiation treatments and she was wearing a wig, but Kathy was full of life and anxious to enjoy a day out in the weather.

“There ought to be a lot of snow up on Blue Knob today, look at those clouds.” Kathy pointed out the front window at the remnants of last night’s storm ahead of us as we drove over the back country roads east of Johnstown. We were headed to the highest ski area in Pennsylvania nestled among the peaks of the Allegheny Mountains in Bedford County.

“Yeah, I was a little worried the roads might not be opened but they seem okay so far,” I replied. The highways had been cleared by the plows but many were still snow covered where the salt trucks hadn’t made it.

Kathy and I drove along enjoying the scenery of a pristine winter wonderland. Stands of hemlock and pine, leaden with snow, created a tunnel effect through the forest that would suddenly break out into a rolling meadow, free of any human tracks and glistening like a field of diamonds in the mid-morning sun.

At the ski resort, Kathy seemed pensive. I remember watching her as she leaned against the railing on the viewing platform, bundled up with layers of undergarments, a heavy coat, warm mittens and a tousle cap. I turned my camera lens towards her to get a cutaway shot from the action on the slope. The steam from her breath was barely noticeable compared to other people around her. She was conserving her energy and just trying to stay warm. I hit the button on my Bell & Howell and as the film started to crank through the camera, a broad smile broke across Kathy’s face. She had just won the battle of her life and it was time to enjoy it.

The Hodgkin’s disease had really beaten Kathy down but her doctor said it was in remission. Kathy’s immune system however was far from recovered so I didn’t want to keep her out in the cold too long. The last thing her mother had warned her was not to overdo it. I wrapped up my shooting quickly and got Kathy back into the car.

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“That cold really took it out of me,” she said warming her hands in the hot air blowing from the heater.

“It was freezing, that’s for sure. I didn’t want to stay out there any longer myself. I’m just happy the film didn’t break.” She laughed and I was glad to see that I hadn’t completely worn her out. “I have to get this into the lab anyway and you look like you’ve had enough for one day.”

“I’m definitely ready to go home,” Kathy said.

That was the last time I can ever remember seeing Kathy Lynch. That image of her sitting next to me in the Javelin as I drove back out of the mountains is all I can recall when I search my mind and think about her now.

The funny thing about my relationship with Kathy was that the greatest thing I cared about was her well being. It was so strong of a love that it somehow transcended the romantic part altogether. Sure I would’ve kissed her if the situation would’ve presented itself, that day or any other day but our lives passed by each other, so close but somehow just out of reach. Being with her that day and thinking she was going to be okay was somehow all I needed to move forward with my life.

Back at my job at WJAC-TV, the photo staff had been receiving letters from Bob Barndt, a friend and former co-worker of ours who had moved to Phoenix recently and opened up a camera shop. Bob’s reports about the warm Southwest winters sounded like paradise to a nineteen year old guy who had just spent a frigid night at the TV station with most of the crew. We were stranded there because we couldn’t find or move our cars buried under the yards of snow that day.



In May of 1973, I put a hitch on my Javelin and packed up a rental trailer with my worldly possessions. These consisted of my clothes, a guitar, an amplifier, my recently purchased 1972 Yamaha 350 Enduro motorcycle, and several boxes of things my mother knew I’d need to survive on my own. I was off to Phoenix, Arizona, looking for a fresh start, away from my family for the very first time.

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Within three months of getting settled in Phoenix, I managed to pick up a job working at KPHO-TV in their commercial production department, processing the station's news and commercial film and shooting various promotional projects. I wanted to get back into the newsroom as soon as they had an opening but for now I had my foot in the door. I hadn't been in Phoenix eight months when I went through the first of several life altering events.

On January 11<sup>th</sup> 1974, I was on my way home from work at the television station. It was a Friday night, shortly after 9 p.m. I was riding my motorcycle east on Thomas Road just passing in front of the Phoenix College campus when a guy decided to turn left directly in front of me. I had no warning and no time to react. My bike crashed into his right rear quarter panel, stopping instantly and launching me off the seat. Everything went into slow motion at exactly that instant. I was now floating peacefully along, out of my body and thinking... *So this is what it's like to be dead...* when suddenly, the violent impact of landing back onto the pavement, knocked the wind out of me, jolting me back into my body and the realization that I was not dead. Sliding and bouncing my way down the roadway in the same direction I had been traveling, my helmet dragged along the asphalt, grinding huge gashes into the surface where my head would've been without it. I finally came to rest lying in the gutter, thirty-five feet from my crumpled motorcycle.

The accident happened in full view of dozens of college students leaving classes at the time. They rushed across the street to check on me. I was still conscious but couldn't see my right foot when I looked down to where it should've been.

"Is my foot ripped off?" I asked the first person that came up beside me to help out.

"No, it's still there but your shoe is gone and your ankle is pretty messed up. Just lie there and don't try to move until we can get an ambulance."

My hip was killing me and my right leg seemed tangled under my body and over where my left leg should be. I didn't know it but I had broken my hip and everything was out of place.

I was rushed by ambulance just a few blocks down the street to St. Joseph's Hospital where an orthopedic surgeon would perform

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the first of multiple surgeries on my right ankle and hip. I had lost a lot of blood and the last thing I remember before being given a pain killer that knocked me out was having an argument with the hospital staff.

“Can you give me your parents’ phone number so we can call them and let them know what has happened?” An emergency room physician was looking directly over me waiting for the number.

“They live in Pennsylvania. It’s late back there, I’ll call them in the morning,” was my reply.

“I think it’s best if we call them now, you’re in serious condition here and I think they would want to know,” he replied.

“I don’t want to wake them up and have them worrying all night. Can’t I just call them in the morning?”

“You may not be here in the morning to make that call.” His sober response drove home the seriousness of my injuries. I begged him to give me some kind of shot to take away the pain and put me to sleep but he held off waiting for the number. I finally relented and gave it to him.

It was 2 a.m. in Johnstown when my parents got the call informing them that I was going into emergency surgery immediately. I didn’t know it but my life was heading down another new path.

One of the people taking care of me in the hospital was Judy Myrick, a young nurse’s aid. I spent three weeks at St. Joseph’s and got to know her well enough to ask her out a few months later when I had recovered. She and I dated solidly for a year and then married on June 14<sup>th</sup> 1975. I continued working at KPHO-TV, moving back into the news department as a cameraman again, while Judy quit her part time job to get a registered nursing degree at Phoenix College. Two years later she was a full fledged RN working in the pediatrics intensive care unit of St. Joseph’s Hospital. About a year after getting back into the work force, Judy began to have second thoughts about wanting to be married. She moved out of our house during the summer of 1978 while having an affair with a pilot she had met. I took her back that fall, forgiving her indiscretions and hoping that would be the end of it. Two years later it happened again and we divorced in July of 1980.

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After the divorce I began questioning my own beliefs in religion, praying and in particular, marriage vows, especially the line “until death do us part.” I knew for sure that wasn’t true. Years of praying and going to church didn’t seem to make any difference when you were dealing in real life situations. I stopped going to church but didn’t stop praying. I still felt connected on some level to whatever higher power there was controlling all this.

Kathy Lynch and I had continued to stay in touch yearly with Christmas cards. She and her parents had moved down to Orlando a few years after I had left Johnstown. Now my latest card to her was returned as undeliverable. She had moved again and the forwarding address had expired. I didn’t feel the need to search Kathy out and burden her with my problems. I thought of her often, but always felt she must have gotten married herself. I knew that I should just move on with my life and let Kathy live hers. That was December of 1980.

In February 1982, I met Susan, a management compensation analyst and divorced mother with two small children. Our meeting was happenstance, I asked her to dance in a country western bar one night after a friend of mine pointed her out to me. She said yes and at the end of the evening I asked for her number.

Susan was thirty years old when we met and I was twenty-eight. Dana, her daughter, had just turned three and her son Phil was only one and a half. My first date with Susan was really a double date, taking Dana with us to the Phoenix Rodeo. Susan had great kids that were fun to be around and many of our outings included the whole family. I remember watching Phil for her one time while she went out of town on a business trip. She was more than a little nervous about leaving him in my care for the weekend but could also see that I was someone she could trust to handle any situation.

Susan was everything I wanted in a woman, energetic, outgoing and could hold her own keeping up with my skiing, scuba diving, hiking, camping and boating. She was five feet eight inches tall on a thin build with medium length brunette

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hair full of body. She had brown eyes and thin lips with sharp facial features. If you saw us together you would think we were the perfectly matched couple. I felt very comfortable with Susan and her children. Being part of a family was something I was very familiar with and it was easy for me to quickly fall in love with my instant family of Susan, Dana and Phil. Susan and I dated for less than six months and married in July of 1982.

Susan was just the spark I needed to push my life down the right path. We built a new home together in Phoenix, vacationed on our boat at Catalina Island and moved to Los Angeles in 1986 when NBC offered me a job as a network news cameraman out of the Burbank bureau. It was the crowning highlight of my fifteen years in the television news business when I got that call. I now traveled wherever the news was happening on a much wider scope, shooting images that millions of people watched on the NBC Nightly News and Today Show. I covered Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager's quest to become the first pilots to circumnavigate the earth non-stop and without re-fueling in their aircraft the Voyager. I climbed Mt. Whitney with ninety year old Hulda Crooks, documenting her accent as she became the oldest person to climb that mountain. On March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1989 I was one of several crews sent on assignment to Alaska for the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Later that year I was dispatched to another disaster, the earthquake in San Francisco on October 17<sup>th</sup>.

It was an exciting life in its heyday, carrying a suitcase of clothing with you at all times, ready to leave anywhere at a moment's notice to anyplace in the world but by the end of the '80s I could see it was all but over. NBC had been sold to GE and the news business would never be the same again. It was then that I started my own production company and began doing promotional work behind the scenes of many of the major motion pictures coming out of Hollywood in the early '90s.

In 1993 I branched out into what are known as press junkets. Press junkets are publicity interviews with the stars of a movie, set up by the studios to promote the release of their motion picture. I ran the junket venture under my corporation, Telefilm, Inc. supplying the crews, cameras, lighting, sound and set design for the promotion of dozens of major motion pictures every year. I lit and photographed nearly every major star of the day including

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Clint Eastwood, Tom Cruise, Sylvester Stallone, John Travolta, Tom Hanks and Jim Carrey just to name a few.



It had now been a year since my first thoughts of Kathy passing away had swept over me. I was busily engaged with all my promotional work yet discreetly continuing the Internet search for any record of her with no luck at all. As fate would have it, events were about to change for me.

One June morning in 1996 I received a call asking if I would produce a video to be shown at the Fire & Ice Ball in the fall. This ball was held annually to raise funds for breast and ovarian cancer research funded by Revlon. The host of that year's ball was Jane Semel, wife of Terry Semel, Warner Bros. studio chief at the time. The request to do the video had come from producer Joel Silver. The very first junket I had worked on was *Demolition Man*, a Joel Silver picture starring Sylvester Stallone. It was Joel's movie that gave me my start at Warner Bros. so I immediately signed on for the project. They wanted a short, documentary style video about the latest breakthroughs in breast and ovarian cancer research at the Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center at UCLA.

I called Nancy Williams, the best medical writer/producer I knew. Nancy and I had known each other since working together in 1976 at KPNX-TV in Phoenix. She has a shelf full of Emmys and was now living in Los Angeles freelancing for a variety of clients. To say Nancy was extremely excited when I told her about the project would be an understatement – she has an energy about her that is off any Richter Scale. She immediately began to research the project and line up shooting for later that summer.

When the mail arrived one day in late June it contained a letter from the reunion committee for my Conemaugh Valley High School Class of '71. It had been 25 years since I graduated from high school. *If I'm having a reunion then Kathy's class should be having one also*, I thought to myself. Had I finally gotten a break in my quest to find what had happened to her? It didn't take me long to come up with a name of someone that would know when and where that reunion was going to be.



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I called Chuck Mamula, a photographer friend of mine that shot almost every reunion in the Johnstown area. It was July 1<sup>st</sup> 1996.

Chuck had a name and number for the place Bishop McCort High School would be holding their reunion, and through them I found Mary Pat Sheridan, the coordinator. I called her at work and, on my second attempt, got through.

“Mary Pat, this is Randy Rogers, I’m a director out here in Los Angeles.” I said, explaining that I grew up in Conemaugh. “I was wondering if you could help me. I understand you’re in charge of the reunion party for the class of ‘71 at McCort and I’d like to get a current address list of your alumni for that class.” I explained to her that I was working on a short film about growing up there and would like to talk to some of the kids I had gone to grade school with at Sacred Heart.

“I knew a few of the kids that came from there,” she said. “Who are you looking for in particular?”

I decided to cut to the chase. I had gotten nowhere beating around the bush before with my parents. “Well in particular, I’m looking for Kathy Lynch.”

“Oh, well, I heard that Kathy passed away over a year ago.”

I nearly dropped the phone. It seemed like an eternity until I finally answered her.

“Where? When? What happened?” I asked. A cold chill was sweeping over my body.

“I don’t really know,” she said. “I can’t remember where I heard it and I don’t know what she died from. I just remember hearing it.”

“Do you happen to know where she was living?” I asked, grasping for any shred of information to help in my search.

“I think somewhere out in California, some town with desert in the name. She had gotten married and changed her name to Winger, I do know that.”

“Is there someone else that can help me find out about her? Do you have a list of your alumni you could send me?” I asked.

“You can call Charlie Hagins. He’s in charge of alumni and could get you a copy, he may even know more about Kathy,” she replied.

## *An Awakening*

“So you’re not even sure she died, just that you heard it from someone and can’t remember who?” I asked, surprised.

“Right,” she said, “I wish I could tell you more.”

I thanked her and got Charlie’s phone number to try to find out more about Kathy.

After trying to reach Charlie for several days, I finally spoke with him on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, but he knew even less than what I had heard from Mary Pat. He was not aware that Kathy had died, which gave me hope that the rumor I was hearing may be just that: a rumor. He did have the alumni list but there wasn’t an address for Kathy. Her forwarding order had expired. I asked him to send me the list, thinking that I would call everyone on it if necessary to get the information I needed. One of her classmates must know where Kathy was, I just had to figure out which one.

I was having quite a morning. Here it was the day before the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1996. I had been searching for Kathy for a year now and still no solid answers. All I could think about was Kathy’s fate; she was possibly gone. I felt that it was true, but I still tried to push the thought away. It could all be a big mistake. After all, it’s easy for rumors to get started – at one time people had heard I was dead. I had plenty of them flying around about me during my life. Nevertheless, I decided to keep an open mind about this.

But who was I fooling? I was the one that felt she had died over a year ago, now I was just denying that feeling. How did I feel this? How did I know this? I know what torment I had gone through the past year, driven to search for this answer and now here it was, staring me in the face and I still didn’t want to accept it. My news background was demanding positive proof. Even though I constantly relied on my intuition as a news photographer to be in the right place at the right time, I wouldn’t listen to it now. I had to hold on to any last hope that it was all a mistake. I knew that I would just have to wait until I received the alumni list. When I did, I would call every person on that list if I had to until I found out what happened to Kathy Lynch. As it turned out, I was not going to have to wait as long as I thought.