

## DEATH ARRIVES WITH A SMILE

*There are many lessons to be learned and scales to be balanced...Humanity must learn to accept everything that life offers as a learning experience.*

– Peace Pilgrim

The first thing Adele does whenever I visit her at home in Boulder, Colorado, is offer tea and snacks. She's old enough to be my mom, yet there's a youthfulness in her easy movements and carefree smile that belies her age. Spend a few minutes with Adele as she glides through a room bantering playfully, and it's easy to forget that she nearly died.

In the spring of 2004, Adele contracted a recurring cough and lung infection, but she wrote it off as a curable side-effect of recent stress in her life. She'd spent time in California, where she'd held vigil by her older sister's bedside during her last days battling endometrial cancer. After Sandra's funeral, Adele returned home with sadness lingering from her sister's death.

Adele also was in the throes of an aggressive public relations campaign to promote her audio book, *From Pain to Passion: Building a Truly Great Relationship*. She invested most of her life savings in the program, hoping to further entrench her position as a relationship expert in the media. A familiar guest on a Denver TV station, Adele had spent much of her 30-year career building a name for herself as a love and relationship guru. Not unlike my clients, her PR goal was to

sell audio books, tour on speaking gigs, and drive clientele to her one-on-one counseling sessions – all to cinch enough financial success to carry her through the rest of her life.

When the lung infection showed up, it seemed more of an inconvenience in Adele's busy schedule than a serious health threat. Take some antibiotics, get some rest, and she'd be back in the game in no time. Yet everyday as Adele took her regular walks, she found herself surprisingly fatigued and having to stop more and more frequently to catch her breath.

And then one day, after spring had blossomed into summer, Adele began to feel nauseous. She'd eaten seafood the night before and assumed that was causing her discomfort. Adele went to the bathroom and when she turned around to flush, she stopped short. The toilet was filled with copious amounts of blood and her own bodily tissue.

Now fully aware that a serious health problem was brewing inside of her, Adele spent an anguished summer in and out of the hospital, steadily worsening, with doctors unable to accurately diagnose her condition. Her gastrointestinal tract was fast deteriorating, and her heart was weakening. The bleeding continued. Adele was repeatedly transfused with fresh blood.

The leaves were turning before Adele finally learned she had a rare and fatal blood disease called amyloidosis, a cousin to cancer. It was a word she'd never heard before, but it was one with serious connotations. The condition is one in which insoluble protein fibers get deposited in tissues and organs and impair their function. With wildly reproducing and uncontrolled amyloid protein overtaking

various organs, death usually arrives within three years, at the most. Already exceptionally weak, she could walk only a few feet before collapsing onto the nearest chair. Without immediate and aggressive treatment, she would have only months to live.

To make matters worse, another devastating problem had already begun invading Adele's life. Her husband, Paul, was trekking down his own debilitating path that could only end in sorrow. He had Alzheimer's disease. It was the slow undoing of two people who had been lovers, life partners, business partners, and the closest of friends.

Their story began in California in the 1980s, three years after Adele had endured a painful divorce and become a single mother of two young girls. As a regular guest therapist on a Los Angeles radio station, she was establishing herself as a leader in the counseling field.

Early one evening, Adele drove south from Hollywood, where she lived, to Orange County for a birthday dinner with her sister, Sandra. After sharing food and wine at a restaurant overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Sandra asked Adele if she'd like to go to Capistrano by the Sea.

The name so intrigued Adele that she didn't ask Sandra where they were going specifically, but she assumed that Capistrano by the Sea was a trendy bar serving the ambiance and flavor of a seaside hotspot.

Adele realized something was amiss when their car, headed inland up a barren hillside, passed a sign that read, "Quiet. Hospital Zone."

"Where are we?" Adele asked.

“Capistrano by the Sea. It’s a psych hospital,” Sandra replied. “There’s supposed to be a great lecture tonight.”

Sandra, who was also a therapist, led a huffy Adele through the small gathering to their seats.

“I was pissed,” Adele says. “Here I thought we were going to a cozy, special place for dessert or a drink, but instead we were headed to a lecture at a psych hospital. It was my day off. I had driven – no, crawled – along seventy-five miles of Southern California freeway hell to ‘celebrate’ my sister’s birthday. The last thing I wanted to do was visit a psych hospital!”

As soon as the graying, bearded lecturer began talking about alcoholism and codependency, though, Adele’s attitude changed. Paul Britton was a well-respected expert in addiction and drug abuse. When they met, Paul already held one doctorate degree, which he’d earned with the status of cum laude, and was completing his dissertation on a second.

“I was mesmerized by his sensitivity and brilliance,” Adele says. “He had such dignity and compassion.”

After the lecture, Adele gave Paul her card and asked him to send her more materials related to his talk. In the meantime, Adele mailed Paul a pamphlet about *A Course in Miracles*, the work that had influenced her own approach to counseling. He called to get together, and two weeks later they met again. After that, they never separated.

“We were intensely, deeply in love,” she says. “He was a profound partner and the love of my life.”

Paul embraced Adele's children as his own while building his counseling career alongside hers. Eventually, they left their private practices in Los Angeles and moved to Arizona, where they opened a counseling center together. They stayed there for several years before making a final move to Boulder.

When Paul began to show signs that something was changing, his role as the steady rock in Adele's life began to crumble. It began with subtle things: He would lose track of time, or familiar sounds like the garage door closing would confuse him. Then his memory loss became more evident. He'd forget about appointments with his clients. He didn't pay bills on time.

One heart-sinking day, Adele discovered that Paul had cancelled his life insurance policy without telling her.

"It's a disease that demands constant adjustment," Adele says wistfully. "I've had to consistently say goodbye to my dearest friend and sweetheart."

With each passing day, her once-familiar partner was growing more absent, becoming an incomprehensible specter of his former self. On top of that, Adele herself was suddenly facing intense chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant that would soon render her unable to work.

Their future didn't look promising.