



MY GENIE

by Jim Goodnight

Aladdin's magical and powerful servant from the lamp is simply called Genie in the Disney Arabian Nights tale. I will name my genie Alexis. Alexis and I both eschewed oil lamps. Instead, he came through the door as a patient to our UCLA clinic in 1977. For sure, he was big and loud, often appeared unexpect-

therapy at the time, but he dutifully completed the arduous full course.

Not so long after, I was working in the office on a Saturday. I got a frantic call from my wife at home, "There's a huge guy here who arrived in a Continental with a driver, has balloons for the kids, flowers for

To be around Alexis was never easy, but always fun. I thoroughly enjoyed the relationship and never wanted any favors. Certainly, no one should expect to have a genie and no one in my profession is entitled to privilege. Nevertheless, temptation is hard to resist. Alexis was a Los Angeles ticket broker.

"There's a huge guy here who arrived in a Continental with a driver, has balloons for the kids, flowers for me, says you're the greatest doctor in the world and wants to take us to Disneyland."

He had incredible access to events. At the time, Zubin Mehta was the conductor and music director for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He had arranged a Star Wars concert at the

edly, often embarrassed me, never let me repay him and unabashedly vowed to serve me for life.

I rarely articulated a wish. He simply produced magic. We never got to the magic carpet ride, but he made incredible things happen.

Alexis had a dangerous malignant melanoma on his abdomen. His magic had failed to ward it away. I removed it and performed the required lymph node dissection. Ten of the lymph nodes contained the cancer, a terrible prognosis. We were doing fairly crude immuno-

me, says you're the greatest doctor in the world and wants to take us to Disneyland."

"It's OK. I know him. It's Alexis. He's a friend."

Alexis thought nothing of embarrassing me. A new patient said to me, "I met your friend downstairs. He grabbed me by the shoulders and said, "Smile, you've got the greatest doctor in the world!" The adulation was nice, but not so easy to deal with in a professional encounter, particularly meeting someone for the first time.

Hollywood Bowl complete with a laser light show and fireworks to capture the raging pop culture enthusiasm inspired by the movie. The first film had been released a few months earlier.

My wife and kids were dying to see the concert. I asked Alexis if he could help me find tickets. A day or two later, he delivered box seats and refused any payment. I was embarrassed but thrilled. We loved the concert particularly viewed from our very special seats. I asked Alexis, "How?" He

shot back, “I told him. Zubie baby, gimmie your box or you’ll never see another Lakers’ game!”

Alexis never dealt in cash, only in favors and trades. The same was true in our relationship. In time, he

“Jimmie, gimmie those tickets. They’re in the toilet. Take these.” We looked at the tickets, 50-yard line a few rows up from the field!

became a remarkable fundraiser for cancer research.

As might be guessed, Alexis was terribly overweight and plagued with high-risk hypertension. After the melanoma treatment, he decided on his own to get “healthy.” He lost 100 lbs., took anti-hypertensives, limited his alcohol intake and actually did remarkably improve his health status. Unfortunately over time, he gained back the weight and the hypertension returned. But with his consistently ebullient persona he told me, “Jimmie, I lost all that weight, but I never felt so bad in all my life. I ached all over, felt weak and besides, I couldn’t get it up! I’m OK now. I feel great.” Impotence is sometimes an unfortunate side effect of hypertensive meds. No coaxing on my part could induce him to try alternatives.

I followed him closely for his cancer. He in turn enhanced my existence. We saw from fifth row center Elton John in concert, Dolly Parton’s roadshow, the musical “Chorus Line” on tour, and when the Dodgers made the World Series, we were there, right on the first base line. I did not ask. He seemed to read my mind. These opportuni-

ties appeared. It was magical. No favors were ever requested in return.

In January 1979, I was in New Orleans interviewing for a job opportunity. My hotel phone rang, “Jimmie, do you wanna go to the

Super Bowl?” I don’t think Alexis waited for an answer. The Pittsburgh Steelers with Terry Bradshaw at Quarterback were pitted against the very strong defense of the Los Angeles Rams in Super Bowl XIV at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. Alexis delivered my 30-yard line tickets a couple of days later.

On the big Sunday, my wife and I were walking down to the stadium. A white Continental pulled up beside us. The back window rolled down, “Jimmie,

gimmie Johnnie Carson, Super Bowl XIV 1977

those tickets. They’re in the toilet. Take these.” The Continental pulled away. We looked at the tickets, 50-yard line a few rows up from the field! Still amazed, we made our way to our seats. The Super Bowl Sunday excitement was palpable. Very soon, Johnny Carson arrived, nodded in our direction and sat down in front of us. Such was the glitz, a memory we will never forget.

UC Davis hired me and my career

has been incredibly rewarding, but my genie remained in LA. That was Alexis’ world. Life for me at Davis has been very special in its own way, but more conventional. Alexis came to see me once. We had a good talk about cancer research. “Jimmie, there’s a guy in a garage somewhere working on something that’s gonna be the cure.” I remain convinced he was right.

Alexis’ malignant melanoma never recurred. But some genies are mortal. Alexis died of a stroke 25 years after I met him. I was robbed of someone I loved, and for me, a personal legend. Still I wonder if someday I’m polishing a lamp or simply opening the door, will my genie reappear? ♦



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