Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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I was a scrawny college kid toting suitcases at the Delmonico Hotel one winter in Miami Beach. Smitty, a wily 62-year-old lifelong bellhop, was mentoring me.

"It's all about seeing people and making them happy," he counseled. "There's nobody who isn't made in God's image. Sure, I've seen the sinful side on the strip: mobsters, loan sharks, jewel thieves, hookers, celebrities who make a mess of everything. You name it. But my faith helps me see what God wants me to see. It stiffens my spine and comforts me when things are difficult."

Smitty was no more than 5'4", and probably 130 pounds soaking wet. But, boy, could he tote suitcases with style. After seeing me having trouble carrying multiple suitcases on my first day, he blurted, "Kid, you couldn't carry a quart of milk and a loaf of bread on the same trip. I'll teach you the ropes."

"It's an art," Smitty taught me. "Lodge two bags under your armpits, grab the other two by the handles and let them cushion the ones in your arms. You'll make a mint in tips, and the guests will love your style."

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Bing. That was the sound of the Pavlovian bell signaling the bellhops to hightail over to the registration desk. It would be my initial voyage after Smitty had shown me the ropes.

"Mr. and Mrs. Tucker checking in," the desk manager said. "Room 224." I did exactly what Smitty taught me to do.

"How did you manage to carry all those bags at once?" Mrs. Tucker asked in astonishment.

"A veteran taught me," I said. Mr. Tucker hit me with a $20 bill.

But Smitty was much more than a skilled and wise bellhop. He was an inveterate romantic. He held tight to the old saw that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. And he wasn't shy about expressing his love and devotion for his wife, Marisol. For 42 years of marriage Smitty had this ritual: once-a-month, every month, he would buy three red roses — long-stemmed American Beauties — and bring them home to Marisol. Red was her favorite color. Three was her favorite number. The rose was her favorite flower.

Now, being the son of a florist myself and having grown up with flowers in my DNA, I loved that. "Smitty," I said one day at the bellhop station after he had given Marisol

the roses the night before, "You are one of a kind."



A postcard of the Delmonico Hotel in Miami Beach, circa 1955 (Wikimedia Commons)

My father, a wise man, had always told me that the rose speaks to the verities of the heart, the mind and the soul: trust, loyalty and, most of all, to love. "It is a flower from God," he'd say. "Goldenrods never fail to blaze on hills, daffodils never come up pale, chrysanthemums give hope to a fertile season, but the rose promises connection and strong feelings."

Years after that winter in Miami Beach I escorted a girl to the famous Philadelphia Flower Show in Philadelphia, and I couldn't tear her away from the rose display. The next day I sent her a dozen roses — long-stemmed American Beauties. Then I married her.

Most of all, my dad reminded me, at its core the rose possesses the power to turn on what makes our lives complete: love on the wing with songs still to sing. One day that winter in Miami the songs became silent.

Bing. "Let's go," Smitty said.

"Mr. And Mrs. Lyons are checking in," the desk manager said. "Please get their bags from the car and check them into room 301." The Lyons' had six bags, so both Smitty and I were needed.

As Smitty was carrying four suitcases, he suddenly stumbled, tumbled, fell and hit his head hard on the floor. He was unconscious and was rushed to the hospital. He never regained consciousness.

At the funeral Mass, Marisol whispered to me, "One day we will be reunited in heaven. Smitty always believed that."

Valentine's Day came that winter in Miami Beach, and I couldn't help but think of Smitty, particularly how he expressed God's love in his marriage to Marisol. So, on Valentine's Day, I went to a local flower shop, bought three long-stemmed American Beauties and took them to Marisol.

My soul beheld the glory of God in this flower that winter in Miami Beach. My father was right. The rose speaks to the truths of the heart, the mind and the soul. Smitty was proof.