

PLANET PROCTOR ■ AUGUST 2023

# *Planet Peterson*

*"This last act must take place...But the wise person accepts it with grace." ~ Cicero*

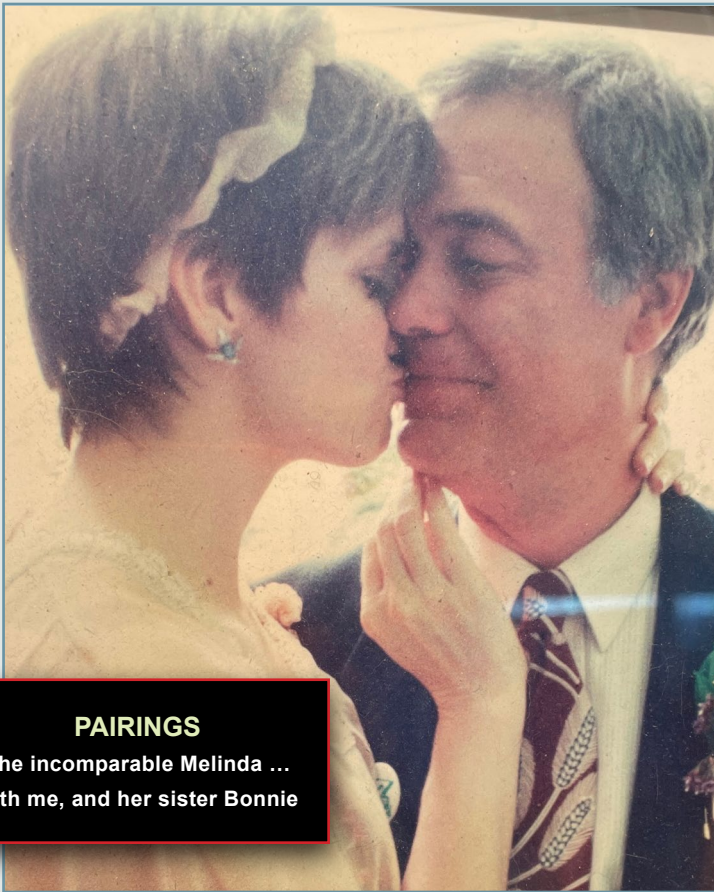


Melinda Sue Peterson of Beverly Hills, California died suddenly on July 30th. Beloved wife of Philip Proctor, she passed away in his arms due to cardiac arrest.

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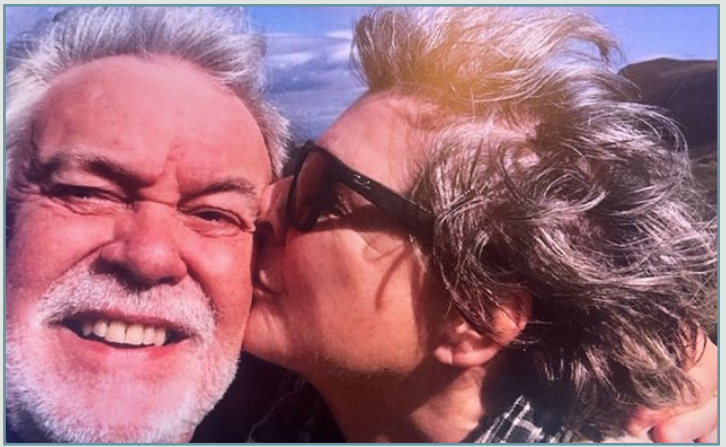
photo by Rob Lewine





#### PAIRINGS

The incomparable Melinda ...  
with me, and her sister Bonnie



## Melinda *Continued on first page*

**M**elinda was born to **John and Shirley Peterson** in Hartford on August 20, 1949. She grew up in West Hartford and graduated from Hall High in 1967. Early in her life she had dreams of becoming an actress. She attended Hofstra University and graduated with a degree in Drama.

An enormously gifted actress, she was active on stage, screen, and radio for over four decades. After lengthy appearances on "As the World Turns" and "The Young and the Restless," she moved from New York to Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles, she met her husband **Phil**, also an actor and founding member of the comedy troupe **Firesign Theatre**.

Melinda also furthered her career with television roles on "Santa Barbara," "MacGyver," "JAG," and "The Twilight Zone." She was an ensemble member of the **Antaeus Theatre Company** of Glendale, CA from its inception in 1991. She was very active in the Southern California theater community. She received a *Dramalogue* Award and an Ovation nomination for her outstanding performances. She has worked at regional theaters across the country, has made numerous guest appearances on television, has lent her talents to several independent films, and written and performed radio comedy with her husband.

Melinda and Phil loved traveling and sightseeing, which

took them to numerous countries all over the world, especially Italy. Unfortunately, on their last excursion, she fell near Palermo, Sicily on May 31 and broke her left shoulder and right kneecap, and she wound up spending three months confined to bed as she recuperated. All the while she remained in good spirits and kept up an optimistic outlook.

She is survived by her brothers and sisters: **Bonnie Peterson** of Imperial Beach, CA; **Art Peterson** and his wife **Linda Pountney** of West Hartford, CT; **Bruce Peterson** and his husband **Kelly Moore** of Abingdon, VA; **Marjorie Bender** and her husband **Harald** of Simsbury, CT; **Carole Peterson** and her husband **Jim Brice** of Pleasanton, CA, and **Alan Peterson** and his wife **Cindy** of South Windsor, CT. She also leaves behind her stepdaughter **Kristin Campbell** of Beverly Hills, CA and her godson **Luke Peterson** of West Hartford, CT.

A Celebration of her life and art is being planned, called ***In Lieu of Flowers***, and contributions to her beloved Antaeus Theatre can be made in her honor by **CLICKING THIS LINK**.

"Do not think of me as gone. I am with you still in each new dawn." ~ **Native American Poem**

■ **CONTINUED**



## Last but not last

**M**Y DARLING MELINDA VISITED ME IN A DREAM a few days after her untimely death, and after teasing me – she is the middle child in a family of seven, and I'm an only child, so I HATED being teased! – she says to me, “We come from the same asylum, just different wings.”

And since her passing, a beautiful monarch butterfly has been following me around and playing with me.

Different wings?

After finally coming home from Sicily by way of Rome, she continued to take her two-hour conversational Italian zoom classes twice a week, and I was so tickled to hear peals of laughter erupting from her room – in Italian! And I was even more pleased when she signed on to take a Creative Writing class with our friend, **Craig Belnap**, whom she had met at a Writers' workshop in Italy. Melinda and I had written comedy together for various purposes many times over our blessed time together, and she was a respected contributor to the shaping of Firesign tours and an invaluable director for the tapings of **Boomers on the Bench** with me and **Jamie Alcroft**. Yet she never thought of herself as “a writer,” so I was delighted to hear she was engaged in this class.

Well, her very first assignment was “Thoughts at Your Own Funeral!” And what she wrote so impressed her teacher, that he used it as an example in his other classes.

So, this is what she wrote:



**MELINDA AND WE**

The royal 'we' of course

"If I had a flower for every time I thought of you,  
I could walk in [your] garden forever."

~ Alfred Lord Tennyson

## THOUGHTS ACTUALLY THOUGHT AT MELINDA'S MEMORIAL OR "NOBODY REALLY DIES 'TIL SHE'S FORGOTTEN"

**W**hat, No flowers?! But she's a gardener.

So fun to work with. OMG, the *Peace in Our Time* dressing room!?

What was it with her and Italy?

Judgmental bitch

Her Eleonora Duse! What a dark, funny, and divine performance!

Okay, I know she's been a member of Antaeus since 1991 and been on the board & I know she's acted in dozens and dozens of our readings and presentations

and performances & I know she's contributed thousands of dollars to the company over the years & I know she's initiated and led many projects (none of which went to full production, by the way) but does that mean Antaeus is expected to just give her memorial in the theater space gratis?

Look at poor Phil. He's in despair. I've never seen him so downcast. Oh wait, he just made a joke and got a laugh, He'll be okay.

Hmmm, I wonder what Phil's going

to do with the house. I mean, he can't live there alone. Hmmm.

Does this mean Phil is available?

I never really liked her. What am I doing here?

Look, I loved her and she was really good, but not quite as good as she thought she was.

I heard she had started writing.

So, this was the fall that finally did her in. Cracked her skull wide open.

Melinda who?

"There's no reason to focus on the bad.  
Don't want to be stuck in the rut? Then don't look  
at the rut. Focus on where you want to go."  
~ Irish race-car driver **Niall Quinn**

## And then, what?

**A**ND HER NEXT PIECE WAS ABOUT AN Italian insurance adjuster visiting the scene of her accident and interviewing the floor she fell on, the door frame that broke her shoulder, and the tiny piece of coverlet upon which she slipped. My genius!!

### IL PIANO & LA LASTRA

**A**s he pulled into the parking lot, Agent **Giorgio Asciugamano** eyed the building of the *Miss Sicily B&B* and scowled. He had seen and examined this kind of edifice before and knew there could be trouble. Noting the metal gates surrounding the property, he made certain that his car was locked.

The case seemed pretty straightforward. An American woman had fallen and broken her knee and her shoulder, and the owner of the premises wanted to know if he or *Miss Sicily* had liability. Agent Asciugamano was there to ascertain culpability and report back his findings to the insurance company. Bracing himself he entered through the open door.

He was greeted by the owner, **Edwardo Forze**. Ashen white with fear of his insurance premiums being increased should a claim be made! He shook the agent's hand limply. "Not very *forte* for a Forze" Asciugamano thought to himself. He cut through the whimpering and dismissed Forze as soon as he was shown to the scene of the incident. As he looked about the room, he could see there were plenty of witnesses and figured this wouldn't take long. As the American had fallen

onto the floor, he thought that was the best place to start.

"Hey floor! **Signor Piano!** I gotta couple of questions for you." The response was immediate. "Why, of course" the floor answered "What would you like to know? What kind of wax I use to get this sheen, this gleam, so shiny, so glossy...?"

'So slippery?' said the agent, cutting to the chase.

The floor swelled with pride. "Yes, as linoleum I'm known for that. Why just this morning the Forze kids were sliding across me in their stocking feet. A couple of starter steps and they just flew over me from the doorway to the bathroom. Fun!"

"Okay, good." Asciugamano had his first question answered. The surface was very slippery. "Now, Signor Piano lemme ask you about yesterday's fall. That certainly must have hurt when the American landed on you." The floor demurred, "Oh, not so very much. Slab took the worst of it."

A deep voice rumbled from below "That's right! And now me, **Signor Lastra**, cement slab-of-the-house, I have a bruise! Typical American! She

was a big girl.' Asciugamano was stunned. "Really Signor Lastra? A bruise? On a cement slab?"

"Hey, don't blame me. I was attacked. Look, I'm tough, I can take a blow. It was nothing compared with the screaming. Loud?! *Mama mia!*"

Floor agreed. "Loud? Yes! And *Dio mio!* She wouldn't stop!"

Not wanting to miss pertinent details, Asciugamano said "Let's go back for a moment, Signor Lastra, to that bruise. Do you happen to remember who poured your cement?"

"Sure do. Nice guy by the name of **Nicco Cucchiaio**." The slab rumbled a chuckle. "I called him The Kook. Made him laugh."

"And so it begins," thought the agent. He knew Cucchiaio. How could he not? Nicco Cucchiaio was his brother-in-law. He poured for several construction companies but mainly for *I Fratelli Sfortunato*. The Sfortunato brothers were not to be questioned too closely as they were family with a capital *EFFE*. All Sicily knew the Sfortunato brothers, and this was exactly what Asciugamano had feared ... (To be continued ~ like her??)





"You can't truly heal from a loss until you allow yourself to FEEL the loss." ~ **Unknown**

"The object is not to forget, but to remember to go on."  
~ **Author Unknown**

## Neeson knows

**T**HE ACTOR LIAM NEESON ALSO LOST HIS bride suddenly after a few years of marriage. These are his thoughts:

"They say the hardest thing in the world is losing someone you love. Someone you grew old with and watched grow every day. Someone who showed you how to love. It's the worst thing to ever happen to anyone.

"My wife died unexpectedly. She brought me so much joy. She was my everything. Those 16 years of being her husband taught me how to love unconditionally. We must stop and be thankful for our spouses. Because life is very short. Spend time with your spouses. Treat them well. Because, one day, when you look up from your phone, they won't be there anymore.

"What I truly learned most of all is, live and love everyday like it's your last. Because, one day, it will be. Take chances and go live life. Tell the ones you love, that you love them every day. Don't take any moment for granted. Life is worth living."

## Break a knee

**O**UR DEAR FRIEND, SEVAN MINASIAN, married a brilliant and beloved German performer named **Jutta**. As she recently retired after a perfect farewell concert, and learning of my darling wife's demise, he sent this note from Nuremberg:

"Actors never tire of comparing their one night's performance of a play to another. Focus, energy, concentration, passion, cannot but differ from night to night. Sometimes the brilliance of the text will make worthwhile even an uninspired rendition of it. Other times an impassioned interpretation by even only one of the actors on stage can be something for us to take home at the end of an otherwise lackluster evening.

"What this all comes down to is that, as a theatre goer, you must invest several evenings viewing the just good-enough, the perfectly acceptable, and the rather ordinary to be present when, on that rare occasion, the play takes flight, the life on the stage becomes real life, the characters transcend the imaginary. They become your brothers and sisters, your family; *they are you*. In your heart you sing with them....and, if the story demands,

you weep. On those evenings, when the curtain comes down, there is silence. The audience needs a moment to return to itself, to leave the Cherry Orchard, or Valhalla, or Venice or Verona. They have traveled far that evening; a voyage of the heart.

"And now, from hearts broken and healed again, applause. For this experience, the true experience of theatre, you have to be there."

"Good theatre stretches our notions of people and events; and a stretched mind never returns to its original shape."  
~ Critic **David Richard**



### HAWAIIAN AFFAIR

Celebrating one of our trips to  
our Island paradise

## Dearest Phil

**J**UST HEARD THE NEWS OF MELINDA'S PASSING," writes our colleague, Director **Stephanie Shroyer**, "I'm so very, very sorry to hear this and want you to know you are so much in my thoughts. You and Melinda were peas in a pod, peanut butter and jelly, scrapple and maple syrup, all the pairs in this world that will forever go together because they bring laughter, light and good feelings in one's belly cause they're the 'meant to be.' What a lovely person your Melinda was, funny, feisty and a wonderful addition to any room or project she was in. She will be so missed.

"I will always cherish you and Melinda's warmth and welcome when I first became a presence at Antaeus. The both of you were and are a big part of my affection for all things Antaeus. All my love and condolences are with you and yours at this difficult time."

*"Marriage is a fine institution, but  
I'm not ready for an institution." ~ Mae West*

## Always leave 'em laughin'

*(Melinda always loved a good joke)*

**P**UTIN IS SITTING IN HIS OFFICE WHEN HIS telephone rings "Hallo, Mr. Putin!" a heavily accented voice said. "This is Paddy, down at the Harp Pub in County Clare, Ireland. I am ringing to inform you that we are officially declaring war on ya!" "Well, Paddy," Putin replied, "This is indeed important news! How big is your army?"

"Right now," says Paddy, after a moment's calculation, "there is meself, me Cousin Sean, me nextdoor neighbor Seamus, and the entire darts team from the pub. That makes eight!" Putin paused. "I must tell you, Paddy, that I have

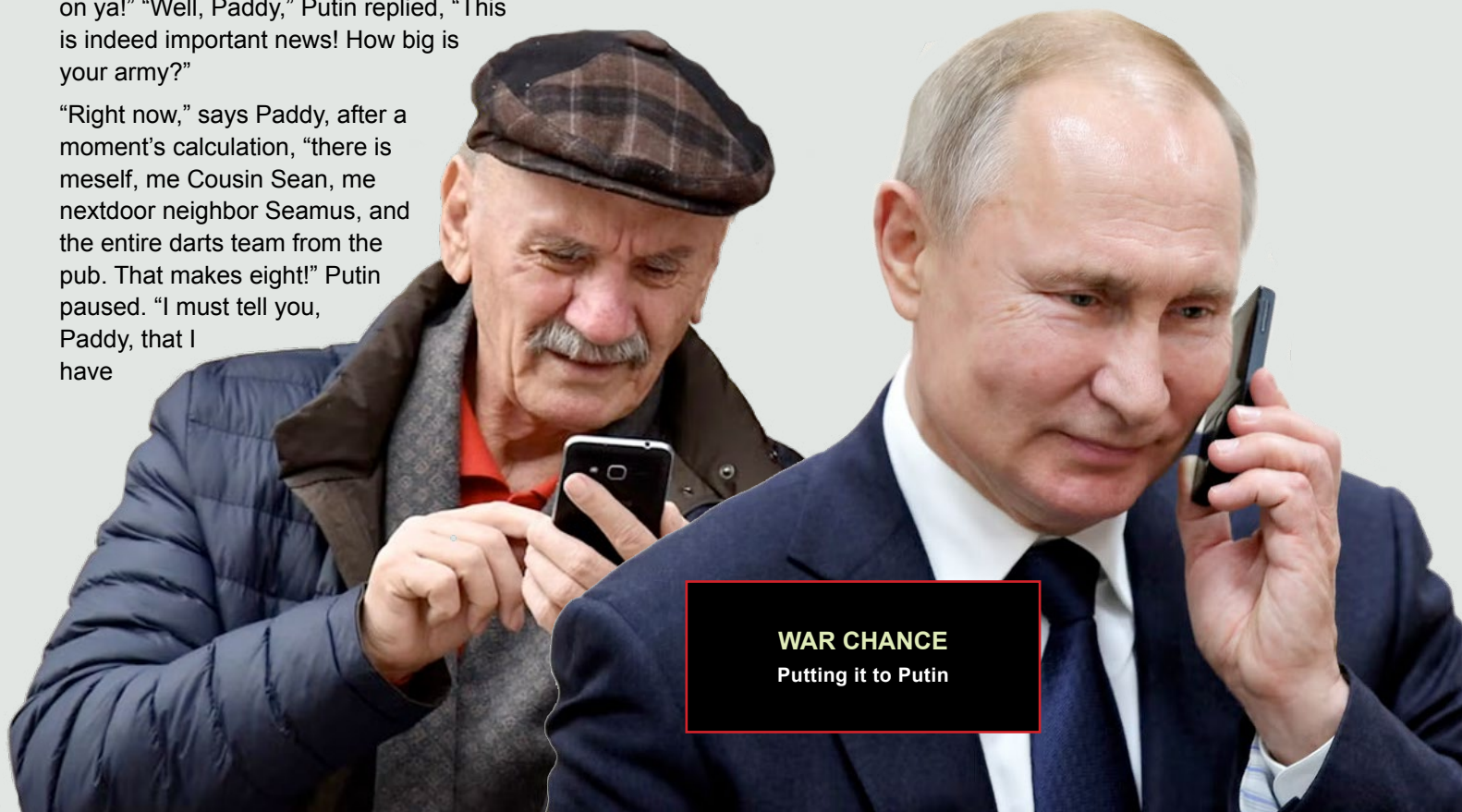
100,000 men in my army waiting to move on my command." "Begoora!" says Paddy. "I'll have to ring ya back."

Sure enough, the next day, Paddy calls again. "Mr. Putin, the war is still on. We have managed to get us some infantry equipment!" "And what equipment would that be Paddy?" Putin asks. "Well, we have two combines, a bulldozer, and Marphy's farm tractor." Putin sighs amused. "I must tell you, Paddy, that I have 6,000 tanks and 5,000 armored personnel carriers. Also, I have increased my army to 150,000 since we last spoke" "Saints preserve us!" says Paddy. "I'll have to get back to ya."

Sure enough, Paddy rings again the next day. "Mr. Putin, the war is still on! We have managed to get ourselves airborne! We have modified Jackie McLaughlin's ultra-light with a couple of shotguns in the cockpit, and four boys from the Shamrock Bar have joined us as well." Putin was silent for a minute and then cleared his throat. "I must tell you, Paddy, that I have 100 bombers and 200 fighter planes. My military bases are surrounded by laser-guided, surface-to-air missile sites. And since we last spoke, I have increased my army to 200,000!"

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" says Paddy, "I will have to ring ya back." Sure enough, Paddy calls again the next day. "Top o' the mornin', Mr. Putin! I am sorry to inform ya that we have had to call off the war."

"Really? I am sorry to hear that," says Putin. "Why the sudden change of heart?" "Well," says Paddy, "we had a long chat over a few pints of Guinness and finally decided there's no way we can feed 200,000 Russians."



**WAR CHANCE**  
Putting it to Putin

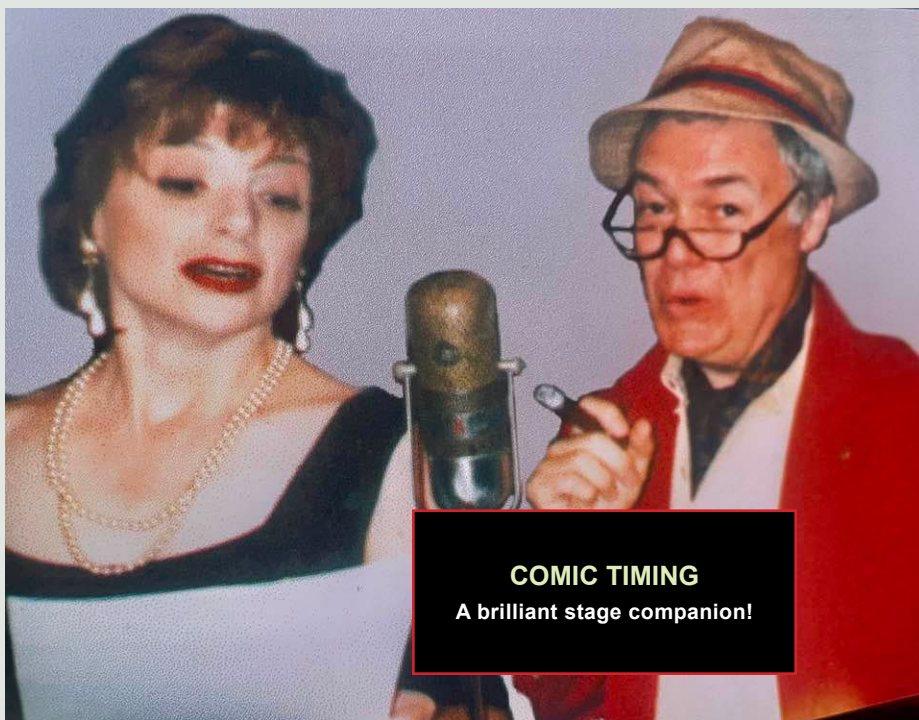


"Say not in grief 'she is no more' but in thankfulness that she was." ~ **Hebrew Proverb**

## From our hearts

**T**HE DAY I POSTED THE TERRIBLE NEWS about my broken bride, it got over a thousand condolences and many moving tributes, a few of which I'm sharing here. Melinda Sue Peterson, AKA "Toots," was a genius – short and simple. There will never be another.

"What we have once enjoyed we can never lose.  
All that we love deeply becomes a part of us."  
~ **Helen Keller**



## Funk & Mundaigne

**S**HE WAS THE ANNE BANCROFT TO PHILIP Proctor's Mel Brooks, happy to laugh at fart jokes but elegant as the Queen of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire. Smart as a Bletchley Park codebreaker, sufficiently ethereal as to offer Tinkerbell lessons, and a hostess with an unforced and natural warmth that rivaled a mythological offspring of **Martha Stewart** and **Julia Child**.

And now, too soon, too soon, Melinda Peterson and her megawatt smile slipped the surly bonds of earth and high-tailed it to points unknown in the Twilight Zone. In the words of the late **Jim Murray**, "Wherever she is today, they can't believe their good luck."

Those of us left behind reminisce and mourn and quietly revel in our great fortune to have inhabited her space, if only for a little while.

Magical, unique, breathtaking, awe-inspiring, Melinda was a snowflake unicorn; and as such, sadly impermanent, though we would have wished otherwise.  
*Adieu, ma Chérie* ~ **Thane Tierney**

"Those we love and lose are always  
connected by heartstrings into infinity."  
~ **Terri Guillemets**

## Giving life

**O**VER SIX YEARS AGO, MY PARTNER in rhyme, **Jamie Alcroft**, received a donated heart and liver. "I thank my donor every day," he says, "Then I decided to thank the donors that are still here with us, while we can STILL THANK THEM!!!!"

SO, we offer NO COVER (\$25) on the first Thursday of EVERY month at **The Comedy & Magic Club** in Hermosa Beach.

PASSWORD: One Legacy.

If you are not a donor yet, visit **THIS WEBSITE** [<https://donatelifecalifornia.org/onelegacy-ecampaign-registration/>] to give LIFE, and dodge the cover charge.

"This kindness, this stupid kindness, is what is most human in a human being." ~ **Mary Quant**

"The day you die is just like any other, but shorter." ~ **Samuel Beckett**

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