

## The "Bully" Griever

As the grief-stricken young New York Assemblyman was led like a child from the twin graves in Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetery, legislators sadly shook their heads at such tragic misfortune. He had had such a bright future but no man could survive such blows. If you had asked this grieving husband, son, and politician, "Do you have a future?", how would he have responded? Perhaps as many readers of this article would respond: "Futures? After such losses?" After the funerals, this twenty-five-year-old man wrote, "For good or bad, my life has now been lived." Had anyone predicted, "Theodore Roosevelt, you have a bright future" he would have scoffed.

Days before the deaths, five of Roosevelt's bills had been reported out of committee—a significant feat in 1884. First-termers in the Assembly traditionally were to be "seen and not heard." Republican Party old guard had nudged one another: "Better keep an eye on this guy. He's going places!" On February 12, his wife gave birth to a baby girl. On the Assembly floor the proud father had exuberantly passed out cigars and read congratulatory telegrams. Then, one telegram drained the color from his face: "Come home. Now!"

Unbelievably, both his wife and mother were dying. Alice's pregnancy had masked Bright's disease, an acute inflammation of the kidney. Teddy immediately left New York City. For five hours, as the train weaved through the thick fog, he summoned all his discipline to ward off any unmanly display of emotion or weakness in public. He remembered another telegram that arrived six years earlier after his father died. As he reread the telegram, he prayed that this time he would arrive to find both still alive. As he walked into his home, his brother Elliott moaned, "There is a curse on this house!"

All day and late into the night he alternated spending time with his wife and his mother. At some point in that dark night, as he held Alice's hand, someone whispered that if he wanted to see his mother one last time, he should come now. He slipped into his mother's bedroom and held Martha "Mittie" Bulloch Roosevelt until she died at three a.m. Then he held Alice until she died at two p.m. The sorrow ricocheting off the walls in that house was punctuated by the cries of a two-day old motherless baby. Before bed that night, he slashed a large X across the day's page in his diary and scribbled, "The light has gone out in my life." He would spend the rest of his life—including the years in the White House—vigorously trying to forget Valentine's Day, 1884!

Teddy Roosevelt finished the legislative term, tromped the Dakota Badlands wrestling his demons, then married Edith Kermit Carow in 1886. It had been assumed that Roosevelt's sister would rear the child but Edith vetoed the idea. Throughout their lifetimes, however, the relationship between stepmother and stepdaughter would be strained.

Roosevelt developed his "macho" reputation by charging up San Juan Hill with his Rough Riders, served as assistant secretary of the navy, governor of New York, and, as vice president of the United States. Upon the assassination of William McKinley, on September 14, 1901, Teddy became the nation's youngest president.

Over the years, Teddy wrestled with the reality. Although he had zealously destroyed most of the letters between he and his wife Alice, as his daughter, Alice Lee, grew, she physically resembled her mother and became a continuous reminder of his first love. Roosevelt never talked to his daughter about her mother and forbade his second wife to do so. Keep the grief door locked.

Not surprisingly, Alice Lee made a niche as one of the most troubled First Children. On one occasion she reflected on her five stepsiblings and wrote, "It is clear that he loves them but Father does not love me." She tried through her outrageous behavior and antics to get her father's attention. When reporters questioned why he did not "do something" about Alice Lee, Teddy snapped, "I can run the country or run Alice Lee—but I cannot do both!"

I wish there could be a cessation of dying during February when Cupid is on the loose. The death of a spouse, partner, or fiancée can be particularly challenging when merchants and matchmakers market love. What lessons might griever today learn from Roosevelt? Give your grief a voice. Theodore failed his daughter and himself by not acknowledging his grief. By his rigorous "moving on", he mothballed his grief. He thundered, "There is nothing more foolish and cowardly than to be beaten down by a sorrow which nothing we can do will change!"

Talk to your loved one. How might Alice Roosevelt's life been less conflicted if her father had made space in his life for a continuing bond with her mother?

Give your future some space in your imagination. Who would have believed those grief-tinted days in 1884 that widower would someday become one of America's greatest presidents? Who can predict during your grief-tinted days

what your future will be?

Future-believing is a demanding task. You have to be open to believing that you have a future. By reflecting on the story of Theodore Roosevelt, you may be the first to believe in a future with your monogram.

John Claypool, from his experience as a grieving father concluded, "If you are still breathing, the final impact of any experience of your life is still unknown". Take some moments to think about what might be in your future. How will you use this day to offer hospitality to the future?

And give your grief a voice!

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