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## **Patti and I in Fun Times**

**Frank Zahn**

Patti and I met at M's Pub in Omaha's trendy Old Market while attending a singles club rendezvous. As we talked and got acquainted, it was clear we liked each other—not yet romantically but clearly as friends.

At a little after seven, she abruptly asked me to drive her home. I didn't understand why at the time, but later, I learned that it was because Lou Dancock, a guy she thought was romantically interested in her, arrived at the party with another woman. The woman was the wealthy and aloof Sally Cline, who unlike Patti looked thirty-five instead of sixty-five because she could afford the best and most expensive plastic surgeon in Omaha.

My guess is that if either Lou, Chuck Ellison, or a couple of other guys on the singles prowl in Omaha would have shown a romantic interest in her, I would not have been able to experience the years we spent together. They were years that often come to mind and put a grateful smile on my face.

Although attractive, beauty was not Patti's strong suit. She had a broad nose and thin lips. And like other older women in Omaha's singles world, she often wore too much makeup. She was also short—five-foot-five—with narrow shoulders; large, balloon-like breasts; and narrow hips. But what she lacked in beauty, she more than made up for in personality, fashionable attire, and manner.

She was a popular dinner hostess with a knack for picking the perfect combination of dinner guests. And her dinner table was always set elegantly with Irish linen, China, sterling silver, crystal, candles, and an attractive centerpiece from a local florist. She was gifted with ingratiating cocktail chatter and dinner conversation. And she had an engaging sense of humor that varied from proper to sexually suggestive, depending upon who was listening and how many glasses of wine or Scotch and water she had consumed.

She could be as sophisticated, reserved, and proper as an English lady, demeanor she picked up from her very English Australian mother. And she could quickly become the life of any cocktail party, demeanor she picked up from her very Australian father, who never turned down an opportunity for a pint or two of Foster's draft and raucous exchange with his mates in a neighborhood pub.

She had a couple of close women friends but preferred the company of men. And more than once she said that she was the kind of woman who believed the way to hold on to the special man in her life was to provide him with great sex and food. I can still hear her say, "If a gal wants to keep a man, sex has to be an adventure in ecstasy, and meat and potatoes have to taste homemade and delicious."

Tipsy or sober at a country club gala, a singles club rendezvous, or a get-together in someone's home to watch the Super Bowl on television, she did everything she could to be the center of attention. And that was easy for her not only because of her lively and outgoing personality but because she always stood out with her stylish clothing and shoes. With a gleam in her eyes, she told me once that her shoes were not just stylish but sexy, especially her dozen or so pair of heels for eveningwear that she called her follow-me-home shoes.

We didn't become involved sexually until well into our relationship. She wanted to before I did. More than once, she whispered in my ear after a couple glasses of wine or Scotch and water that she would give me a ride that would knock my socks off. But each time, I put her off by either accusing her of just teasing or only wanting to go to bed with me because I reminded her of her late husband. The truth is that I was reluctant to become that involved with her because she was several years my senior.

It finally happened, though. It was at the old Miramar Hotel and Resort on the beach in Santa Barbara while we were attending the Santa Barbara Writer's Conference one year in the late 1980s. I was taking a nap in my cottage when she came in, crawled into bed beside me, and snuggled.

I awoke from the warmth and movement of her body, and without further hesitation on my part, we began a wild and torrid romance that was everything she had joked it would be. Although she enjoyed foreplay, it wasn't necessary to arouse and animate her. Entry and the slightest prodding were enough. Most of the time, she climaxed within seconds and usually more than once during intercourse thereafter.

We maintained separate residences so that her son, daughters, and grandchildren would not get upset about her living with a man to whom she was not married. But in every other way, we were together—a couple, or to use a popular singles term, *an item*.

We got along great—rarely had an argument, and as time passed, that worried me. My experience with women had conditioned me to expect that sooner or later the M-word—marriage—would creep into our conversations.

And finally, it did. But much to my surprise, Patti didn't want to get married again, primarily because it would create the complication of having two husbands in heaven. I thought the reason was goofy but didn't comment or question her about it. And when she went on to explain that all she wanted was a man in her life for fun times and sex, I knew she was the perfect woman for me.

The singles club we belong to was Who's Who International. The name of the club was pretentious, but the activities Skip Fillmore, the director of the Omaha chapter, organized were always engaging. The dinner dances at the Omaha Country Club were Patti's favorites because she liked for us to dress-up and pretend we were in the same social and economic class as Warren Barrett and the other swells she knew in Omaha.

I enjoyed those dinner dances as well but mostly because she did. I preferred casual dress places like the Lazy Leopard, a lounge with a dance floor and live 1940s and 1950s music. Both of us enjoyed dinners at Omaha's steak houses, especially Ross's and Gorat's. And although Patti worried that she might jeopardize her social standing and reputation with her country club friends, she loved the downscale chicken and rib joints I took her to, especially Stroud's under

the Eighty-Fifth Street bridge and others we frequented on road trips to Kansas City.

We traveled to other cities in the country as well and took several trips abroad. Each trip was an occasion for good times, great food and wine, and interacting with people we met and partied with along the way. Patti was unbelievably outgoing, and she displayed an uncanny knack for getting us into bizarre situations that provoked disbelief at first and then laughter that neither of us could contain.

Several situations or incidents come to mind often. Two of them occurred during a trip to Lisbon, Portugal in the early 1990s. We checked into our hotel a little after seven at night, and after a light supper in the hotel dining room and a good night's sleep, we set out early the next morning to see the sights of the city.

Outside the hotel, I said, "Let's take a bus."

"A bus? You've got to be kidding. I don't take buses," she replied.

"Oh, come on. It's a great way to sightsee," I said and pulled her by the hand toward a bus that had stopped less than a half block away from the hotel.

I helped her up the bus steps and paid our fares. And when I told her to head for two vacant seats midway of the bus, I noticed the other passengers were sitting motionless in their seats and gawking at her. I wondered why, and then it dawned on me. It was the stark difference between the way she was dressed and the way they were dressed.

They were dressed in dull gray, blue, and brown colored clothing, obviously on their way to work in what I guessed were factories and perhaps shops and offices. Most of the men wore stocking or ivy caps and ill-fitting jackets that buttoned down the front. Most of the women had on little or no makeup and wore black, matronly hats and coats that had seen better days. Several of the men held on to lunch boxes that rested on their laps. The women sat with a firm grip on

the handles of their purses. Although well-scrubbed, the men and women alike looked like people out of a 1930s movie about the Great Depression.

In contrast, Patti had on a bright red, worsted wool pantsuit; a string of pearls around her neck; dangling earrings; and red, slingback pumps that were topped with silver buckles. Over her right shoulder hung a small silver purse on a silver chain. As always, she had teased and puffed up her colored blonde hair with dark root and curled it back behind her ears. And she wore lots of makeup, including rouge and bright red lipstick. She was indeed overdressed, over made-up, and out of place in contrast to the other passengers, including me in my black sports shirt, gray jacket, khakis, and black sneakers.

With every eye fixed on her, she paraded down the aisle of the bus toward the vacant seats as if she were a model on the runway of a fashion show. She loved being the center of attention, even though I was sure she would have preferred an audience that was more adoring.

When the bus lunged forward and pulled away from the curb, she lost her balance and would have fallen into a man's lap had I not grabbed and steadied her. She quickly regained her composure, however, and continued her parade down the aisle to the vacant seats. Once seated, she sat regally with her legs crossed and acted as if she were unaware of the attention she continued to receive from the other passengers, especially the new ones that boarded the bus.

"Patti, I didn't notice when we left the hotel that you were not dressed for a city bus ride this early in the morning," I whispered in her ear. "I'm sorry I got you into this."

"Don't be sorry. I feel great. I'm the scandalous Belle of the Bus," she said with a giggle and gleam in her eyes. "My guess is these people think I'm a painted and fallen woman out to lead God-fearing men astray. And I must admit, the image has its appeal."

With those words, we laughed, settled back in our seats, and viewed the sights of the city from our window. The city was picturesque—oozing with old world charm. But at the same time, it was depressing because it seemed stuck in a bygone era and out of touch.

After an hour or so on the bus, we decided to stop sightseeing by bus and do the rest of it on foot. We stopped for lunch at an outdoor restaurant and treated ourselves to an assortment of Portuguese pastries and coffee. Our young waiter, who spoke English, helped us order from the menu. Patti's favorite was the *pastel de nata* (custard tart). I had two favorites, the *pastel de feijoa* (bean tart) and the *queque de cenoura* (carrot cake).

When we had eaten and drank our fill, we continued our sightseeing on foot. Several blocks from the restaurant, Patti watched two squatty and poorly dressed men drop a bundle of women's purses in a sheet onto the sidewalk, spread out the sheet, and motion for passersby to come and check out the purses for sale.

Patti headed straight for the purses, and I followed close behind. After rummaging around in the pile, she picked up a purse and examined it, carefully checking to see that the zippers worked and it was roomy and fashionable enough for her.

When satisfied, she walked over to one of the men. "How much in U. S. dollars," she asked, holding up the purse.

The man gave her a puzzled look. "No Anglish me speak," he said.

"U. S. dollars. How much?" she said loudly and enunciating each word as if the man had a hearing problem instead of a problem understanding English.

"Ah, yes, yes, dollars U. S.," the man said in English and then held up ten fingers.

Patti shook her head. "That's too much," she said and held up five fingers.

"No, no, no," the man said and held up eight fingers.

Patti gave the purse a quick once-over and started to toss it back into the pile.

But the man stopped her. “Okay, okay, okay,” he said and held up five fingers. At the same time, he lifted his right leg and let out a loud, prolonged fart.

Patti grimaced. “Good Lord!” she said, stepping away from the man and fanning the air with her right hand.

The man chuckled, and I fell apart laughing.

Patti set the purse she wanted to buy down on the sidewalk in front of her and searched for a five-dollar bill among the dollars she carried in her purse. But before she could find one, the man grabbed the purse and tossed it back onto the pile. Then in a panic, he and the other man bundled up the purses in the sheet and took off running up the sidewalk, shouting to each other in Portuguese.

Patti chased after them. Clutching her purse in one hand and waving a five-dollar bill in the other, she yelled, “Wait! Wait! Come back here! I want to buy that purse. Come back!”

Feeling like a fool for both of us, I chased after her, choking with laughter all the way. But when two policemen came from behind and outran us in the chase, we stopped and watch them continue up the sidewalk after the two men and their bundle of purses.

“What was that all about?” Patti asked, breathing heavily.

“I’m not sure. Maybe it’s against the law to sell things in Lisbon on the sidewalk,” I said, struggling to catch my breath. “But you and those guys put on the best show I’ve seen in a long time. I wouldn’t have missed it for the world.”

I teased Patti about the incident for at least a week. In a shrill voice, much like hers when she was excited, I imitated her yelling at the two men to come back so that she could buy the purse she wanted. Then I switched to imitating the gas-passing man, lifting my leg as if ready to let it rip. Each time, we laughed and laughed, embellishing the incident to make it all the more



laughable.

Another memorable incident occurred one evening in December 2000 during a trip to Patti's hometown of Sydney, Australia. Patti's niece Belinda and her husband Tom treated us to dinner at a fashionable bistro. After dinner, which included two bottles of wine, Patti was happy and ready for after dinner drinks, some music, and maybe some dancing.

Tom drove us to a lounge that was not far from the bistro. It didn't have a dance floor, but such as it was, it had live music, a singer with a guitar.

After seating ourselves at a table, we discovered the singer had finished his last set for the evening. Tom asked Patti if she wanted to try another place. But when she said she could do without music and dancing for one night, Tom ordered our first of several rounds of Scotch and water from the cocktail waitress. I wanted Bourbon, but it is hard to come by in Australia and other British Commonwealth countries where whiskey means Scotch.

The more Patti drank, the more excited and animated she became, jumping up from her chair occasionally while telling stories about the days during World War II when Australians lived under the threat of invasion by Japan, her travels around the globe, and her many important friends she had entertained in her home.

Tom and Belinda listen intently. She was their legendary Auntie Patti who fell in love with a Yank during World War II and escaped from what they considered the provincial Australian life. And she relished their attention and admiration. She had my attention and admiration as well, and I thoroughly enjoyed listening to her.

But that evening in the lounge, I worried she would knock over the Christmas tree behind her each time she got excited in her storytelling and jumped up from her chair. With each jump, her chair shot back and hit the tree, causing it to shake and at least a couple of its decorative balls to drop off, hit the floor, and break into pieces, each one with a pop that could be heard throughout the lounge.

Each time, I said, “Patti, be careful. There’s a Christmas tree behind you. You’re knocking off its balls.”

The third time I said it, she replied, “To hell with the damn tree and its balls!”

I shook my head and laughed, and much to my surprised, neither the bartender nor the cocktail waitress came over and asked Patti to move away from the tree and calm down—or worse, asked the four of us to leave. In fact, the bartender, cocktail waitress, and some of the people in the lounge seemed as amused as I was by Patti’s behavior and the popping sound of the balls hitting the floor with a pop, pop, pop.

But like all things, the incident of the shaking Christmas tree and its dropping balls came to an end. “Frank,” Patti said when she finally exhausted herself. “I think I may have had a little too much to drink. I’m feeling kind of woozy. Maybe we should call it a night.”

I agreed and comforted her in the back seat of Tom and Belinda car as they took us back to our hotel and said goodnight.

But when morning came, I couldn’t resist the opportunity to tease her about the incident the night before in the lounge. As she lay in bed, embarrassed but choking with laughter, I pranced around our room in my undershorts like someone who was a taco short of a combination plate, chanting, “As the Christmas tree shook, shook, shook, its balls went pop, pop, pop!”

Then I stood at the foot of the bed and imitated her in her shrill voice: “To hell with the God damned tree and its God damned balls, Frank!” I shouted. “Are you listening to me, Frank? To hell with the God damned tree and its God damned balls!”

We laughed and laughed. She laughed mostly because of the way I imitated her. She insisted, however, that her voice was never shrill, and that in public, she was too much of a lady to take God’s name in vain. Then she added in a shrill voice that I was grossly exaggerating everything.

The list of my memories of Patti antics and our laughter is a long one. I remember her telling me about an incident in the examination room of her much younger and handsome physician. He came in, handed her a robe and asked her to remove her clothing. She looked up at him with a twinkle in her eyes and replied, “You first.”

The incident that occurred one evening in Chang’s Chinese restaurant in Montecito, California was another one of those unforgettables. Following the hostess, an elderly lady on the arm of what we soon discovered was her daughter stopped at our booth, looked at Patti, and said with a happy-to-see-you-again expression on her face, “Hi! How are you?”

“I’m fine! How are you?” Patti replied in kind without hesitation.

The daughter pulled her mother away from our booth. “Mother, you don’t know that lady,” she said with a chuckle.

Shaking my head in disbelief at Patti, I asked, “Why in God’s name did you act as if you knew her?”

“Because she thought she knew me,” Patti replied.

“You’re something else,” I said with a smile.

Patti chuckled, and with a gleam in her eyes, she said, “Well, I wasn’t about to hurt her feelings by not responding. It’s obvious the poor little thing is suffering from dementia.”

Several times during the rest of the evening and the following day, I looked at Patti and said with a happy-to-see-you-again expression on my face, “Hi! How are you?”

Each time, she replied in kind, “I’m fine! How are you?”

One time during trip to Seattle, Patti and I came out of the main entrance to the Pike Street

Market and crossed the street where I spotted a sex toy shop. I grabbed her hand and led her toward it.

“No, no, no, Frank! I’m not going in there,” she said when she saw the sign above the entrance. “My children, my grandchildren would have a fit if they knew I—”

Reluctantly, she gave in and no sooner had we entered the shop than she spotted a dozen or so dildos hanging on the wall to the right. “Oh, my God!” she exclaimed as she headed toward them. Grabbing a large black one off the wall, she added, “Look at the size of this, Frank! It’s huge!”

I watched as she examined several of the dildos. “Are you thinking about buying one?” I asked with a grin.

She started to reply but spotted a plastic statue of a woman in the middle of the store and headed toward it. The woman was naked, and she was kneeling on a platform with her vagina cut away and setting on a box in front of her. I guessed it was meant to be artistic in some weird way.

Pointing at the plastic vagina, Patti shouted in her best shrill voice, “What’s that, Frank? It looks like a chicken!”

Laughing, I explained what it was.

“Well, that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever seen. And I still say it looks like a chicken.”

There was little that Patti didn’t examine in that shop. She was shocked, yet fascinated, by everything she saw, including the vibrators and the black leather, domination outfits and whips. But when she had seen enough, we left the shop and headed across Pike Street toward the Australian deli and restaurant in the next block so that we could stuff ourselves with sausage rolls, meat pies, lamington cake, and other Australian delights.

On the way, I imitated her reaction to the plastic vagina on the platform in front of the statue in the sex toy shop. “It looks like a chicken, Frank!” I said in a shrill whisper. “And I know what a chicken looks like. It isn’t her thingy between her legs. It’s a chicken!”

We laughed the first time I did the imitation and more and more intensely each time I repeated it. In fact, we laughed so hard that we had to stop and catch our breaths. Passersby on the sidewalk and in cars gawked at us as if we were a couple of crazies. But we didn’t care. It was one more of those fun times when we lost ourselves in Patti being Patti.

To be fair, it wasn’t always my imitations of her antics that provided us with laughter. I had my moments as well. I remember once we were in the greenhouse where Patti bought flowers each spring to plant in the flowerbeds around her backyard patio.

A heavysset and down-to-earth woman, who was about Patti’s age, was pushing a shopping cart up and down the aisles of the greenhouse and loading Patti’s pick of plants. Patti stopped to look at the petunias, her favorite flower because of their vivid colors. The woman stood in the aisle with her hands on the cart. Patti looked at the petunias on one side of the cart while I waited patiently on the other side for her to finish her selection.

“Frank, come over here and tell me which colors you like best,” Patti said.

The aisle was narrow, and in order to get around the cart, I had to squeeze past the woman. My backside was to the table of plants, and my front side was to her backside. As I squeezed by, I threw my arms up and moaned as if having a sexual experience, “Oh, my God! OOOOOOOOh!”

Patti’s face flushed. “Frank!” she said, struggling to hold in her laughter for fear of offending the woman.

The woman turned to me. “You’re a naughty, naughty boy,” she said, shaking an index finger in my face and grinning. Then she turned to Patti and said, “Where did you find him? He’s a hoot and a half.”

All the way home, it was Patti's turn to imitate me, and she thoroughly enjoyed it. "Oh, my God! OOOOOOOOOh!" she moaned repeatedly, vacillating between giggles and out-and-out laughter.

I could go on and on about the years we spent together and the laughter we shared, but enough is enough. Patti passed away November 19, 2016. I think of her often. I miss everything about her.

With her passing, I lost my best lady friend, my party girl, my sexy lady, and the woman who brought more joy and laughter into my life than any women I have known. I strongly suspect that God was jealous of how much she livened up my life and took her because he needed someone to liven up heaven. And he couldn't have picked a better person to do it.