



Sebastian Puleo

August 6, 1928 - July 1, 2012

Sebastian Puleo, an artist residing in Greenport since 1975, died Sunday evening at Columbia Memorial Hospital. He was born in Petralia Soprano, Sicily, in 1928, and came to America with his family in 1939. He is survived by his sister, two nephews, a niece, and by Terence Murphy, his friend, companion, partner of 55 years standing, the last year of which was legally sanctioned.

The following remarks in obituary were prepared by his partner and will be repeated in company with other remarks at a service to be held in the Bates & Anderson - Redmond & Keeler Funeral Home on Tuesday, July 10, 2012 at 2 pm.

Once many years ago, someone in New York City said to me----it was Sebastian who said it---he said, "You know, you've never escaped that hick town you grew up in." It was a putdown and I was put out. But his assessment was not inaccurate. I've never escaped it. It's stayed with me my whole life long. For better or for worse. For better AND for worse. Odi et amo. I don't regret my life. Sometimes I regret myself.

What characterizes me, characterizes all of us. We spend our lives walking on our two good feet. On our backs we carry an old man of the sea, the old man of our limitations, the limitations nature or nurture or both have imposed upon

us. We can never get rid of that old man; he's up there for the duration.

So what do we do? If we wish to make anything at all out of existence, we have to learn how to carry that old man's weight, how to adjust our own selves to his burden, how to shift him on our shoulders so our two feet can keep moving. If we can't manage that, our loves are "spent in shallows and in miseries."

When Sebastian was five, his father died. His mother was unable to take care of the children. Sebastian's sister was sent to a convent school. He went into an orphanage in Palermo. He remained there three years. During his stay there were long stretches of time his mother was unable to visit him. Often he came to think maybe she had died too and he was abandoned forever.

The monks who ran the orphanage were not cruel or abusive. The horror stories involving the clergy that we hear today, nothing of that kind happened. But the orphanage was not much wealthier than its wards. The monks had their hands full and lacked the time and, perhaps, the inclination to provide the anchor that a family provides---for better or for worse. They also did not provide him arithmetic or his ABC's. He left the orphanage innocent of them. He also left with an eye infection. When his mother and his new father arrived to pick him up, they discovered their first duty was to take him to a doctor.

One evening he got relating all this to me. It was while we were having a drink before dinner. I had heard it before and was, I suppose, listening with just one ear. All of a sudden, his voice broke off. I looked up to find him all overwhelmed by something that had happened over six decades before. Our childhoods haunt our maturities.

Eventually the family came to America. He learned a new language. When he was old enough, he went out to work. After a time, he opened his own

business. In his line of endeavor, he became known from coast to coast. Display items for use in department stores or by other companies connected to fashion was his business' business. NOT your run-of-the-mill display items like the waxwork mannequins so often on view in department store windows. His were custom made for particular promotions. For several years the major promotions at Saks Fifth Avenue were supported by his work. He sold also to Macy's. to Abraham and Straus, to Bonwit-Teller; outside New York City to Neimann-Marcus, and many others. His work caught the eye of the people in charge of one of the great charity balls in New York, at that time the best known one, the April-In-Paris Ball. For several years his work furnished attitude and ambience for that ball. He also prepared the ball to benefit the North Shore Hospital of Long Island. The New York Times, the Daily News, McCall's, the New York Post, and several other publications, made mention of him. After he retired, the head of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Diana Vreeland, wrote him through the agency of her personal assistant, wondering if he would like to come down to New York and help with work at the Institute.

So much achievement, so much recognition, so much more spotlight than most of us receive our whole lives long, even sixty lives long. And yet it can truly be said that he never left that orphanage in Palermo. Even while he was dying, he still struggled with that orphanage and the sense of abandonment that it inspired.

Tribute Wall



“ *It has been my honor to be in the presence of the most beautiful couple I have had the pleasure to meet. You both have taught me much about life, love, strength. You have dealt with aging and now death with dignity, compassion and understanding. I'll always wish I could have done more, but know that you knowing you both has touched me deeply.*

Sincerely, Mary Ann Proper RN

mary proper - July 08, 2012 at 01:00 PM