

2005 PROCEEDINGS

Trilogy

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Steven L. Hammer, CLU, ChFC, is a 12-year MDRT member with one Court of the Table and one Top of the Table qualification. A member of MDRT's 2005 Editorial Advisory Task Force, he has served three times on the Program General Arrangements Committee. He also received a Quality of Life grant in 1998 from the MDRT Foundation for his involvement with Camp Friendly, an organization based in Minnesota that is open to children with developmental and physical disabilities. Hammer has served as past president of the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors-Minnesota, Central Minnesota Association of Life Underwriters (now known as the Central Minnesota Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors), St. Cloud Financial Planners and St. Cloud Area CLU, ChFC Society.

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I was attending St. Cloud State University in Central Minnesota for my sophomore year when I met Jerry; he was a freshman. My family had moved to Pennsylvania during my freshman year and soon I was going home with Jerry on weekends and holidays. We hunted, fished, partied and became very close— best of friends. In fact, one summer Jerry went with me to my family's home in Pennsylvania and we worked construction together. I became part of his family — he a part of mine.

When we got back to Minnesota, Jerry decided that college was not for him. He went to work for a construction company and I continued on at St. Cloud State. Shortly after my graduation I was introduced to and started my life insurance career. Jerry and I stayed close and he, with my two brothers, were groomsmen in my wedding. After a year or so in the business I finally got around to talking to Jerry about his life insurance. Jerry made it very clear that he did not want to talk about life insurance. In fact one day he said to me "How can you sell things to people that they don't want and don't need?" I responded by saying that I didn't agree with him but I didn't want my chosen career to affect our friendship. I told him that from that day forward when I saw something that was a reason for him to review his decision not to buy, I would mention it to him— after that it was up to him— and that's what I did.

Jerry got married in April of 1974. It was in January of 1975 that his wife announced to us she was expecting in July. We were all so very happy for them. Then came the call in February, about 5 a.m. — it was his brother calling to tell me that Jerry been taken to the Dakota Clinic by ambulance. No one seemed to know what was wrong. We all rushed to the farm to await the news. Later that day we found out that Jerry had suffered a brain aneurysm. After visiting with doctors, the family decided to turn off the life support. At the age of 25 years 6 months and 5 days, my friend Jerry was gone.

Jerry's son was born in July and has grown up to be an exceptional young man. My wife and I attended his wedding in April.

For Jerry's widow it's been another story. She never ever seemed happy. She sold their hobby farm and moved

Trilogy *(continued)*

closer to her parents. She went back to school and became a court reporter. Between her income and Social Security she was okay financially until her son was too old for them to receive any more benefits. When her son left for college, she seemed to struggle financially and emotionally. As her son got closer to graduation, she seemed to lose her zest for life and talked about going to be with Jerry. She did not commit suicide but had lost her will to live. She was in her early 40's when she went to be with the love of her life and my good friend, Jerry.

As we all know, life insurance is something some people seem to think they don't want or need. Yet, many times I have wondered if life insurance proceeds would have made a difference for Jerry's widow. With every fiber of my being I believe that life insurance could have made all the difference in the world.

And, I wonder if Jerry could have come back for one day, knowing what has happened, would he have done anything differently? Would he have changed his opinion about life insurance? Would I have done anything differently?

You bet I would!

Let me tell you another story. Have you ever had a client come in to thank you for all you've done shortly before they died? Perhaps you've had an experience like this.

In the spring of 1982 I was working on what was, for me, a very large case, a substantial increase to a buy/sell agreement. There were four equal shareholders between the ages 45 and 57. After a year and a half and several meetings with the president and comptroller, the decision was made to increase the coverage on each shareholder by \$500,000. The president asked me to visit with the other shareholders, explain what we were doing and take the applications. Three of the four visits went like clockwork. The fourth was a different story.

We set appointment after appointment, day after day... each time the shareholder cancelled, postponed or rescheduled the appointment for one reason or another. It made me wonder why he was avoiding me. Finally we met and completed the last application. I submitted the four applications and scheduled the exams.

Three or four weeks later, I received a call from our vice president of underwriting who was calling to tell me that three of the four clients were approved standard— but that he had to decline the fourth because he hadn't taken very good care of himself. When I went to the president of the company, he asked if I could get a letter from the underwriter for his file so he could try to help the fourth shareholder straighten out his life.

The company president then said, "Steve, this is an all or none deal." Either all four shareholders get coverage or none of them would. I took the fourth case to the substandard marketplace where we were able to obtain coverage on a slightly rated basis. The four shareholders were pleased with the result and happy they had the additional coverage.

After that, the fourth shareholder and I developed a strong professional and personal relationship. I became the person who serviced all of the policies he owned. He would call every year or so and come in so we could do a complete audit and review of all his policies. We truly enjoyed our time together. I looked forward to spending time with him.

In April of 1992, he called to schedule what had become a routine review. After the review he told me he knew that he had not been easy to work with at the beginning of our relationship and wanted to apologize for that. He also wanted to thank me for all I had done for him and his family. That was the last time I saw him. Two months later I attended his funeral, knowing that he appreciated all the work I had done. That made me feel good about our profession and what we do. He left behind his spouse and a special needs child who is now in his late 30's.

Because of the life insurance and the other planning my client had done, his family has remained in their own world, just the way he wanted it. What a difference life insurance and planning can make in the lives of the people we love and leave behind.

Kelly was 2 ½ years old when her dad went to the doctor for a checkup. He knew things were not right. After a checkup and a battery of tests, Kelly's dad was referred to a doctor— a specialist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester,

Trilogy

Minnesota. Ten days later Kelly's parents dropped her off at her grandparents and they headed for Rochester. After what seemed an eternity in the waiting room, Kelly's dad and mom were taken to an examining room. The doctor finally came in for the examination, discussion and review of Kelly's dad's medical records— after 20 or 30 minutes the doctor excused himself and left the room. Kelly's parents didn't know what to think. After waiting another 20 minutes (which to them seemed like an eternity) the first doctor returned with a second doctor. The second doctor now had the chart and medical records. His first words to Kelly's dad were "Son, we think you have cancer." Kelly's parents couldn't believe what they were hearing. How could this be— he was in his early 30's and very active. They were devastated.

The doctors laid out the game plan— find a motel room for Kelly's Mom because tomorrow they would do a biopsy to determine just what the problem was for Kelly's Dad. By late in the afternoon, Kelly's Dad was checked into the hospital and was taken to his room. It was the worst day of his life— the uncertainty, the not knowing— the questions. He thought, "Why me? Why now?"

His roommate was asleep so the lights were out in the hospital room. The only light in the room was that which came in from the hallway. As Kelly's Dad stood there with

tears in his eyes, looking out the window, he could see the geese returning to Silver Lake and in the reflection of the window was an image of his 2 ½ year old daughter running and playing in the park, and he wondered if he would have the chance to watch his daughter grow up. Because of the life insurance he had in force and the planning he had done he knew that financially his family would be OK— Kelly and her mom would be fine if he didn't make it, they wouldn't be dependent on anyone at any time for any reason— what a relief.

The next day the biopsy confirmed their worst fears— it **was** cancer. That was the bad news— the good news was that it was very treatable. That led to a series of radiation treatments, surgery and checkups every three months. Two years following surgery Kelly's Dad was given a clean bill of health. He is a cancer survivor.

So, please remember it's not about policies— or type of plan. It's really about what our products do for families and the people they care about. What a wonderful opportunity and responsibility we have— go out, tell the story, help people help themselves.

Kelly has grown up, graduated from college, started her teaching career and last Saturday I was as proud as a father can be when I walked her down the aisle at her wedding and I love her so much.