



# MARTIN B. **HART**

November 14th, 1946 - November 25th, 2019





# A Note to you... **My Father**



BRETT A. HART · THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2019

Martin B. Hart you were born on November 14th, 1946... you passed away on November 25th, 2019; eleven days after your 73rd birthday.

For almost a month I've been attempting to sit down and write a note to you. To capture all of the memories drifting through my mind's eye of who you were. But that is not an elementary task, for you were as complicated as our relationship was... is... shall forever remain.

How does one start? How do I honor the memory of the man who not only brought me into this world but passed on many of your own passions and artistic traits, as well as much of your enigmatic personality? I guess I start by diving in and sharing who you were...

One of the qualities I always loved most about you was that, like many of those in the family, you truly encompassed our sir name - "Hart". To the very end, you were passionate and capable of moving the spirits of an entire room by just being yourself. What you saw is what you got. When moved, much like the film scores you would play that echoed throughout our home, your emotions could be felt by all. Whether you were laughing, irritable, somber, irascible, perverted or simply loving... you could be assured you were always "authentic".

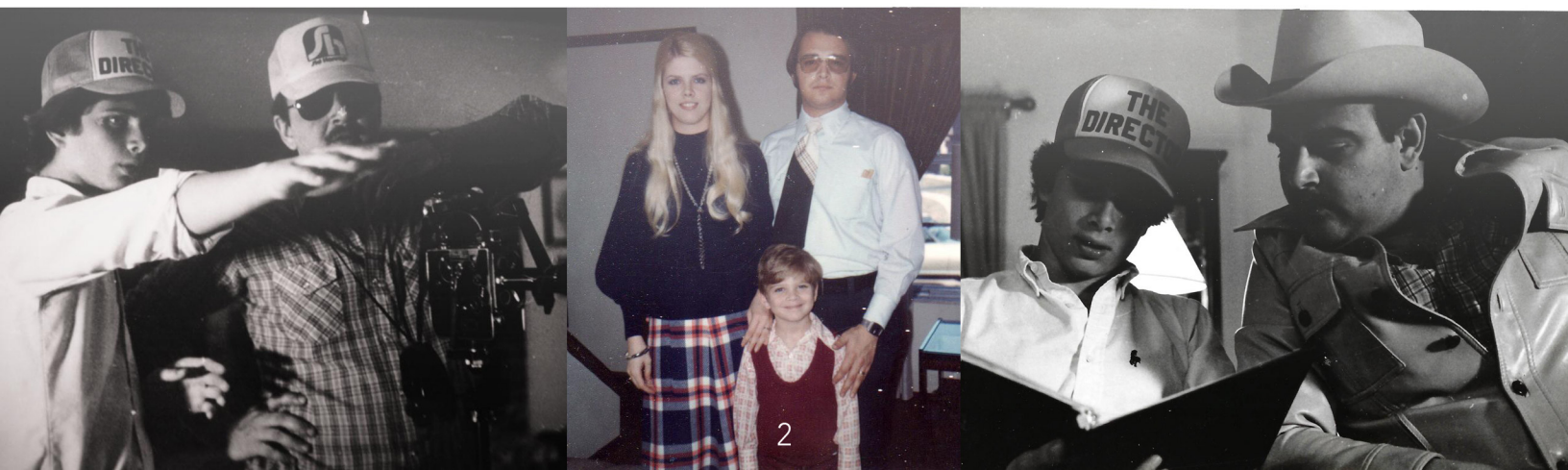
To understand just how mystifying you could be I'm reminded of your favorite film... William Wyler's "Ben Hur". Not only do I admire the fact that you have spent a lifetime championing the film, the score, the cinematography, direction, set pieces, performances, you name it... but have also pondered just how it was possible for an atheist to love a film about the son of God? Something that brings joy to me and makes me chuckle. An admirable quality in you that I will always carry on. For when you had differences of opinion, you didn't always let it stand in the way of your objectivity. At times you were able to see the beauty of something despite being contrary to the world through your eyes. Though you were far from a Saint and on countless other occasions, quick to judge without all the facts. Another trait of yours that I have ingrained in the very fiber of my soul. Something you didn't believe existed up to the very end.

People have often said throughout my life how much we are alike. Though I personally felt on the surface perhaps... however, at times we are also polar opposites. True you did pass on your passion for cinema, music, and a shared appreciation for the beauty of women... but I think one of the closest traits you passed on to me was your ability to march to your own drum. To not bother caring if you had the most popular of opinions, but to adhere to those that you held true. For that, I am forever beholden.



With that said... I think you would also agree that mom is where I got my die-hard perseverance and inability to back down from a fight, or any fears that might otherwise bridle me. Something that you once hinted to me that you were envious of. For you were forced to not chase your dream... but rather take on a job to keep a roof over our heads when you found yourself a father at a very young age. Something I'm sure always left you with an emptiness in your heart. As you WERE MADE to be in show-business. Both in front of the camera and behind. You were always a natural. A true artist to the very core. You were one of the finest sketchers I had the pleasure of witnessing draw. You taught me the skills and gift of drawing that I carried on for years before the film bug eventually took over my life. And in front of an audience, you could work a room. Even winning an award for your work on stage. In fact, you were one of my first actors. Yet another complicated relationship, largely in part due to the fact that you were also my first producer that I had to approach to convince into letting me use your film gear. Something that I may have taken for granted while younger... I now hold dear to my heart. Those were different times. No iPhone cameras at your fingertips. To have access to film gear in the early '80s was an honor. Being 11 years old and asking to use your prized 8mm Bolex cameras, projectors, Splicers, lights, 1" video cameras, etc was one of those life-affirming moments that could have come to an untimely end if you hadn't said "yes". And being who you were... I planned my move carefully and waited until the entire family, grandparents, mother, brother, you name it were around and unleashed my query. "Dad... can I use your camera for my first film?". Knowing how you loved anything you ever owned with such pride and quite honestly self-indulgence, I had to wait until an audience was around. And as I had predicted, you gave me the answer I set out to attain. Something I'm sure at first was difficult for you to do. After all you love your toys... and honestly, nobody takes better care of things than you. Something that goes back to your childhood... and a skill I sadly did not pick up from you.

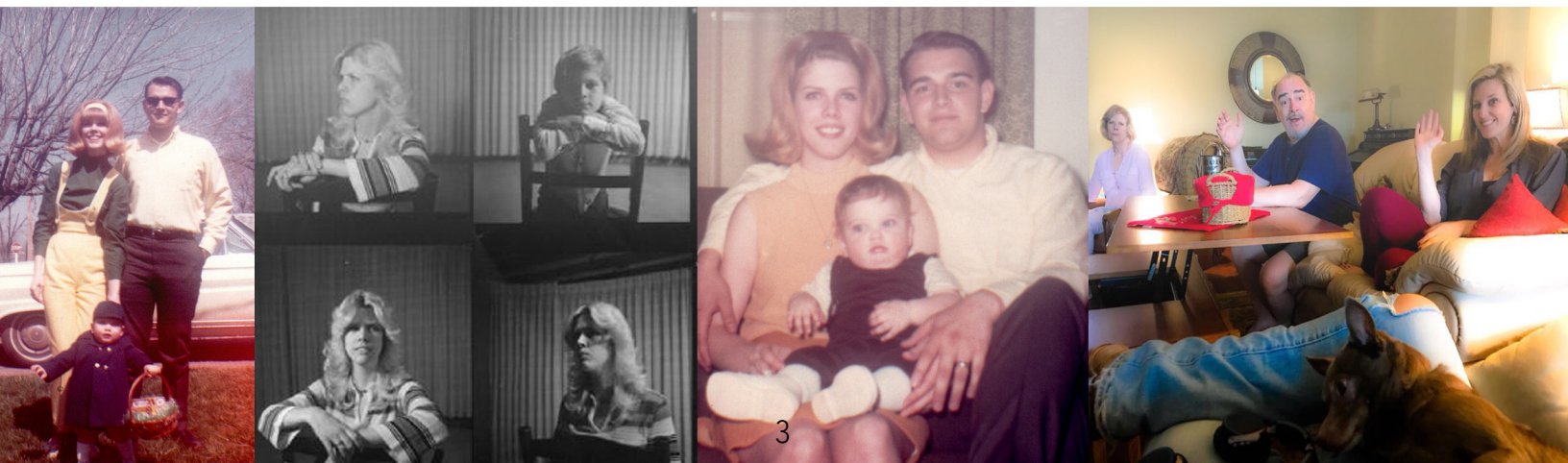
You were one of the smartest men I've ever known. Particularly when you were younger. The fire you had in you to discover and learn new skills was a vision to behold. Not only did you share your technical skills of film-making with me as early as the ripe age of 6 years old... you had me assist you in creating stars zooming by the lens of a camera in the basement of our second home on San Sevilla street in Bridgeton Missouri... would later be one of the first people to own a VHS machine while we lived in Michigan... and shortly after when we lived on Mustang Springs in Missouri City TX, you were once again one of the first to own a VHS tube camera. You then opened my eyes to computers before many had a faint idea of what the technology would end up becoming. Later when I would return from one of the college holidays, I discovered that you had turned your love of computers into a website that would end up becoming **The American Widescreen Museum - <http://www.widescreenmuseum.com>**. Something that would eventually become your legacy. You were such a force to be reckoned with that most people would avoid





debating with you. Later after you and mom's first divorce... you did change. You became much better at hearing both sides of an argument. Or at least with me, you did. I suppose the 5 years we didn't talk to one another out of pride and frustration helped amend both of our ways of communicating with one another. But no matter what, even during the times that you weren't necessarily right... to borrow from your other son, Jeff Hart... "He was always the smartest guy in the room".

While we're on the topic of divorces... who gets married to the same woman three times?! Yeah... you called it... Martin B. Hart. That's you. And that's our beautiful mom?! Another quality I admire. Two very strong personalities that might not have always gotten along, but loved each other to the very end. Either that... or you were hung like a horse. I suspect a little of both. Regardless, it was always apparent when you were both divorced the first time that you pined away for her. And your love for her was one of those things I'm certain that Jeff and I did recognize and cherish. I remember you telling me "I always loved your mother" and being moved by the sincerity of the words. But being you... it was once again challenging. You may have loved her, but you never could bite your tongue about your infatuation with other women. Something that took all of my fiber to not chastise you about. But again... that was just you. You were old school. Not necessarily Ironclad. But you were from the age of the sexual revolution. Where Playboy magazine and any other type of imagery of women scantily clad were your world. And another idiosyncrasy that I'm certain I also inherited from you. To the point where an ex-friend attempted in vain to ruin any chances with the woman of my dreams, your daughter in law, Bonnie Hart. He warned her not to be in a relationship with me, for I was a "Womanizer". I on the other hand... disagree. What I was, was much like you. I was looking for that one girl that I could obsess over Night and Day and devote the rest of my life to. No not like your infatuation with "Grace Kelly" but rather something more like what you and Mom shared. Truthfully, I wish you had been more of a gentleman to mom. Watching the unconventional love story of my parents... I think I was eventually able to figure out what I truly wanted in life. And when she came into my world... I pounced. And I owe it to both you and mom for how I treat Mrs. Bonnie Hart... like the matchless, elegant, woman she is. She's my "Grace Kelly". And I'm glad you were the first to meet her back when you were living alone in Quail Valley. That's a special memory that I'll always have... though, I suspect that you might have been suffering from the onset of dementia back then. When you met her again after we married you almost behaved like you were seeing someone for the first time. And I'm grateful that you were also smitten with her charm and beauty as much as myself and showed her nothing but love. Thank you for that.





Regarding your granddaughter, **Tessa**. I'm sorry that you didn't get to see her more before you passed away. I know it destroyed your soul as much as it has mine. But what can I say? Divorce can bring out the pettiness of people... and the ones who suffer the most are the children and those they are being held hostage from. I attempted many times near the end to have her in your life before it was too late... sadly with no success. And I'm certain my daughter and I will also have a complicated relationship akin to yours and mine. But I'll do everything in my power to let her know that she will always be unconditionally loved. I AM thankful that you did hear from your other lovely and compassionate grandchildren, Stavros and Sophia this summer after your stroke and brain surgery. When I got the news that you were already in a catatonic state last summer I called the room where you were waiting alone and unable to talk to me, I asked the nurse to hold the phone up to your ear and quoted lines that seemed to capture us from "The Big Country". The nurse said your body responded. Your eyes shifted. Your feet and hands as well. And hours later expecting to hear the worst... I was astonished when Jeff told me that you had in fact cheated death! And it was then that I began to sadly take each day for granted. For I thought you were built like a Sherman tank and would outlive us all.

I'm so very grateful for the few times we did get to spend with you this year. 2019 was a turbulent year. While I was fighting skin cancer, gastritis, and a torn meniscus, you were fighting for your life. And though you were partially paralyzed, your spirits, in the beginning, were truly inspiring. I was so very proud of you. The nurses all loved you... and I think you and I may have let our guard down more than ever before. I'll always cherish the words you spoke about "Being a good son" and thanking me for being by your bedside. I'm only sorry I couldn't be there months later in the end. But you know I was there in spirit. In fact, I felt so connected to your fight for life that I had a terrible feeling on the last Friday you would ever have. Mom answered and you were once again back in the hospital. She told me how you were rapidly deteriorating and that you may not be with us much longer. I had the chance then to go back to Houston... but I opted to wait until you had passed. As I wanted to be there for Mom when she no longer had you there. We will be traveling to Houston soon to honor your memory and comfort her.

When I called you before you went into surgery this summer I uttered a simple sentence in the voice of Burl Ives. "I hear youuuu!". A line that seemed to encapsulate our complicated relationship. It came about when I was in my twenties and you were living alone after you and mom had divorced. We sat down to watch one of yours and my favorite classic William Wyler Films "The Big Country". When it came upon the final moments of the film we both sat quietly beside each other in front of the projection screen watching Rufus Hannassey (Burl Ives) shoot down his own son Buck Hannassey (Chuck Connors). Though his hand was forced to prevent his son from cowardly shooting James McKay (Gregory Peck) in the back, it became palpable how much it affected us. As the Father cried out "I told you... I told you I'd do it... I told you, but you wouldn't believe me... damn it... damn your soul... I told you!!!" and after his son dies... he clasps his head realizing what he's done. At that moment the two of us became deathly silent and tears filled our eyes. We had seen the film countless times. Since I first saw it in St. Louis in our first home during a tornado warning and spring air flowing through our home... but THIS time... it had more resonance. I don't know exactly what it said about us... but it did open our eyes to how fragile life was... and most importantly the bonds that we shared. - **THE BIG COUNTRY Rufus & Buck Hannassey Scene**





I had two flights booked the night you passed away. One for a trip to Oregon with my wife, unparalleled in-laws and our children. And another to be at your side. However, the opportunity to be with you, in the end, slipped between my fingers. When mom called to say that you were no longer with us, I immediately got angry and let out a strained cry of frustration. Afterward, I played "The Big Country" over and over... drank Jack Daniels and walked our neighborhood of Beachwood Canyon under the Hollywood Sign in the frigid night air.

I'm torn, Dad. You're no longer here to talk to. And if you were... you would probably still be just as difficult to talk to as I am. Now that I don't have the opportunity, there are things I'd like to ask you. Things I was too self-indulgent & arrogant to ask when I had the precious time to do so.

I'd love to share stories about my childhood growing up with you. How I saw you when I was an impressionable young boy... the different stages of life from the genesis in St. Louis, to Michigan and finally TX. Stories of you being tickled that I was so invested in the theatrical presentation of "This Is Cinerama" when I was probably 5 yrs old, that I grabbed your hand and yelled, "we're going down the roller coaster"! Stories of you bringing home an LP for a film nobody had yet seen called "Star Wars". Of you coming into my room thinking I was listening to your LP of Bernard Herrmann's "Obsession" but in fact, I was listening to my very first soundtrack, "Hammer's Dracula" that I had purchased at the age of 7 yrs old while shopping with you at Peaches Records & Tapes. Stories of playing Sinbad fighting skeletons in the basement when you were playing soundtracks and working on your very own 8mm films. Stories of approaching you and mom on the deck in Bridgeton Missouri. Deep in conversation, you both turn around and inform me that I was going to have a brother or sister within a year... Mom beaming with pride and you looking concerned on how to provide for another child on a middle-class income. Stories of you giving me my first "VHS" tape for my birthday and I recording my favorite film of all time "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes", which you introduced me to and your favorite composer scoring the **Bittersweet Soundtrack**. Stories of assisting you to create the cinematic opus The LFA Tapes for Dennis Lowry a dear friend that I would consider family and yet never meet?! One of your closest friends that contacted me and like many of your friends, in the end, was worried about you... and who sadly departed one year prior to you. Only to discover that he had a daughter after your passing?!!! Stories of you showing up to the house I had run away to some twenty miles away in Houston and being informed that you had "promised mom not to lose it on me" & beat my ass. Stories of visiting me in the hospital while I was in film school and the two of us facing divorce for the first time. Stories of you and Tessa staring at each other at a family celebration when she was finally old enough to know who you were and her smiling and being charmed by her loving grandfather...

But there are just too many.

As I've already told you... you're a beautifully complicated man... so much so that we didn't even have a funeral for you. So I guess this is my way of sharing my feelings with you and the world. I can say with tremendous happiness that near the final years of your life... when I was all alone in Austin and you were alone in Houston... we became very close. Both of us were proud of "Ain't It Cool with Harry Knowles" and after it wrapped I was able to finally get you in front of the camera again for an experimental project with your prized "Panaflex camera". I'm happy that I can go back to social media and see some of the loving comments we shared during that time. And I'm VERY proud that I was able to list you as one of the primary sponsors of the show when we migrated





