

Legend

by David McKenna

My half-brother Salvy laughs each time we meet here at the hospital to visit our father Phil, who has lung cancer.

He laughs because Phil married my mother, not his.

He laughs at my job in Valhalla, the final resting place for those who lose at the gaming tables.

He laughs at my chipboard palace on the mainland away from Atlantic City, where my wife Leslie and I moved after Phil was diagnosed.

He laughs loudest when I confess I'm cheating on Leslie with an all-American pole dancer who went to Ball State U.

"Don't be so wishy-washy," he says, a pitch-perfect impression of my mother Celeste. "Stop hanging around your good-for-nothing half-brother and that scheming bitch from Idaho."

He and I are dawdling to avoid seeing too much Phil today. On CNN, a homely old gent says the Chinese government, to pre-empt trouble from Western animal lovers, has ordered restaurants in Beijing to remove dog from their menus during the Olympics next month.

I think of when Salvy and I were 14 and Phil drove us to South Philly and we were at Pat's Steaks and a German shepherd growled and tried to get at Salvy. Phil and I froze. The dog owner said "Don't worry, cous', he don't bite," but the dog kept straining at its leash until we drew a crowd and Salvy brought his fist crashing down. The dog yelped and backed off.

Phil and I looked at each other -- shared an insight, that is -- and then we looked at the sidewalk. Some kid shouted "Bad Sal" and the crowd laughed, everyone but Phil and I.

Of such stuff are South Philly legends made, and dirty little secrets.

