

# Burying the Tramp

*by* Peter Wood

Don't get me wrong, funerals aren't a cause for celebration, but there weren't many tears shed Doctor Hadley Trimp's passing either. Not doctor of medicine or science but some kind of honorary doctorate for being in the right place at the right time, many times over. Enough for the right people in the right establishment high-echelons to take note.

And behind his back, long ago, Trimp had been given a vowel change too.

Trimp to Tramp in a few disparaging gossip-mongering vowel-bent conversations. Not that the man himself was aware, or if he was, he never made an issue of it. Maybe he gloated about it. No one, least of all me really knew.

Why would I?

Yet sure as bread needs butter, if something didn't suit that ol' codger, he was never slow in glowing fuse-red. That much was for sure. So maybe Trimp didn't know about the moniker change or more likely, care that much after all.

Besides the sanctimonious old sod is dead now and it's doubtful there's much of a debating society in the ground. Just worms and bugs nibbling daily, relentlessly through some sub-standard meal of flaking skin and chalk-grainy bone.

Heaven and hell. Hadley believed in neither. *One way or another you're a meal ticket for someone, best to be the one spending than the one being spent.* Not exactly a route-map for living. The bugs and insects are getting their meal ticket, that's for sure.

Am I being harsh?

I know I'm painting one type of portrait and the eulogy painted another. A little like asking Picasso to do your portrait and you find he's gone into his cubist or more figurative period. Not flattering.

I don't mean to cause offence or speak ill of the dead but you go from where you actually are, what you've seen. I've never been one for guess-work or conjecture. Never the way I've operated, and I

think I can say — as his only, sadly for Trimp, I suspect — he was one cold hard son of a...

Well, let's just say neither of us saw eye-to-eye on much of anything, nor now will we ever.

One thing I know through jet-lagged red eyes is how Trimp would've seen this funeral. The same as he saw his long-departed wife's: An event for the living and hardly anything much to do with the gone.

Church, high or low, religion whether Christian, Jewish or any of the other outliers are fine for those that need to be kept warm and tear-free at night, but it didn't touch him. Not even a finger-nail fine divot. Sure, he married in a church but like the bugger said, *It's an event for the living*. Besides, if there's a chance for a good chow-down never turn it down. I know that sounds a very Jewish sentiment - and believe me they love a good bit of grub - but to me it's part of who Trimp was - pre-war, born of ration books, UXBs, bomb-craters and a burgeoning belief in rationality. The last being as cold and calculating as the fragments of the German 'presents' left for some of his unsuspecting childhood friends to be maimed or killed by.

With sentiments like that, it's hardly surprising I wasn't the cherished son of his loins or that I left the iceberg family home as soon as finances and legs were able.

I wanted more. So I left for the States on a budget-priced 2-month monolith of a steamer where I experienced everything verboten and banned by my good old dad, then I fell in love with film. That CinemaScope gaudy visual and the booming life-in-a-sea-shell sound, yet I wanted better. And with a few - some may say dubious moves I made my own path, ploughed my own furrow. Ultimately, I wanted most of all though to be anything but the visible and psychological incarnation of the good Doctor Hadley Trimp.

That much I knew at 10, that much I hoped for at 20.

But that much I also knew was impossible by 25 and beyond. Genes don't lie, genes, like dice will fall as they will. Some parts

chance, some nurture, but mostly a necessity that won't be denied, however much self-determination you pursue.

But I'm getting too personal. Too close to my own skin when it's Trimp I'm talking about.

See You Next Tuesday? Is that what I'm saying about Trimp? Was he that? No more than anyone else born of undistinguished beginnings, saw a few angles that could change a life from bomb-blasted poverty to relative — if parochial — wealth. Did he leave blood on the floor? Of course and no doubt if he could have afforded it at the time he'd've found some eager novice to clean it up. But that novice though was never going to be me.

In a way I'm thankful he had the nerve to break a few rules, wield the knife on occasions. Don't get me wrong I wish he hadn't as well. Blood makes noise, it will always. In short I have a certain amount of conflict. But if a good start in life depends on another's fall, then fine.

See! Not far from the tree.

Far enough to give a fool the feeling that a branch isn't going to fall smack slap on the head. You're never far enough away though. Denial is impossible.

So, as only, but somewhat estranged and foreign-living son, the duty of writing and speaking a eulogy for my own dearly departed departed dad - I didn't even get a look-in. Not that I wouldn't or couldn't, but whichever self-interested colleague actually got handed the job did a better job of re-plastering the past into acceptability than I ever could. And if I'd done it those few tear-splashes and semi-grieving sighs would've been more exultations of anger. The Messenger wouldn't've been shot, he would've been tarred, feathered, hung drawn and lovingly and lavishly quartered.

*These are events are for the living. Always the living, remember that.* Like Sunday shopping before midday, the shutters stay down and no amount of peering through the glass or banging on the windows is going to alter that. No way, no how.

So, below the rafters that echo the drone of voices quailing out psalms, hymns and recitations in honour of our not-so-dearly

departed Trimp, I wobble jet-lagged and whiskey congealed. Legs fragile as twigs, hands press against the hard wood of the back-most pew barely daring to issue proper eye-contact. Below the stained glass priests and prophets of old and among the cast of my supposed peers I feel certainty drift like smoke out of me. I mumble the correct responses, but it's less believable than a B-movie actor hamming their dialogue — and believe me in my line, I hear lines fluffed and filched from the time the sun yawns to when the moon belches a final gordon's gin smirk. I've seen smiles more convincing than my performance right here, right now.

Certainty may have departed like old Trimp here today but one thing I know, I'm shielded — my dark grey winter suit — the cloth and tailoring which costs, doubtless more than many of these good people's annual remittance. Clothes keep you warm, but my heart is cold, colder than a Siberian Winter cold snap at midnight.

I can tell this cast of mourners have eye-balled me, are taking in my demeanour — snazzy maybe too showy suit but beneath that, disheveled as a late-night stop-out that's locked horns with the worst of them and almost won. Battle takes it out of you but I know they're thinking that somehow, some way without their inkling I got an inside track on whatever inheritance there is, there was. In the suit they see some kind of sub, they see their share in return for faithfulness sliced away from them before they even got to the brandy snifter.

Not true, but what of it.

Sterile sandalwood looking casket steadily departs the aisle into a cold-cut winter graveyard. The diggers have done their bit and idle at an appropriate distance, cupping roll-ups beneath wrecked-gloved hands. The faintest white wisp drifts between their fingers.

They are the workers here, they are the true mortal reminders. And I wish to hell, as I button up my coat I could stand with them watching the whole pantomime of grief. But that's not my role.

Priest all decked in snow-white regalia with the wind-blown pennants of the local chapter of Heaven's Angels heads up the coffin, stiff as a board like a general on parade. The first one into

battle always softens them up. Oh, old Trimp would've laughed yourself til you choked in coughs.

But watching this fiesta for the fallen I realise something. Trimp isn't the one that's gone. His memory still lives. The rest of these dutiful, diligent but hollow mourners will be long dead, gone and forgotten before Trimp's legacy fades from closing credits to black. Like some faded screen idol eager for one more chance, Trimp won't go down that easily. No doubt there.

*Life's for the living, but history's made before you go.* Ain't that the truth Trimp old man.

I watch the casket slowly descend below the solid cold un-dug earth. Like a submarine on its maiden mission it hovers, hesitates, mid-air for all to see — one last deep gulp of a breath before sailing into the depthless black of infinity.

After the final prayers, the throwing of sods of soil onto the casket that lurk below but which no-one really dares to look at, not properly, with even drink and tear-clouded eyes. After the hellos, how-are-yous and hot-toddies are distributed there'll be brief edited reminiscences of the good Doctor's times on this earth. There'll be smirks and *did-he-really's*. There'll be platitudes, points scored and lost, new bonds created and old friendships broken. I know all this. I know they'll ask casually *how long are you staying?* and I'll tell them I've not decided, yet. They'll smile with nervous nods and find someone more appropriate to talk to this.

I know all this.

I knew it at 2am, two days ago when I got the call and I flew red-eyed to this god-forsaken non-home of mine. But none of that matters, not really.

*These events are for the living not the ones just gone.*

Yet I feel his puppet-master hands still tweaking and twiddling the strings. For days after they'll all talk about today. The Tramp's memory will fade.

Briefly.

Give it a week, a month, however long, Trimp's sandalwood casket of a submarine will surface again in each and every one of their dulled heads, meaner and more terrifying than before.

Trimp, or did you really prefer Tramp? Tramp, dear father, you were wrong.

These events aren't for the living.

They are the stone thrown into a stream.

They are the ripple.

The legacy that is never truly forgotten.

