

## **Dominic Pelicano Memorial Foundation Tribute from Jack**



[One of Dom's "Coffee Pieces"]

The basement was a mess.

I closed the door behind me, turning the music and chattering voices upstairs into a monotonous hum.

From the third or fourth stair I saw Dominic, hunched over and staring at what looked like a poster on the floor. He had a paint brush in one hand, and with the other he rubbed his face nervously.

I took a cigarette from my pocket and lit it. Dominic did not seem to notice the sharp metal click. As I quietly made myself comfortable on the staircase, Dominic put the brush into a small paint can. He held the wet brush over the poster, letting black paint dribble onto the surface.

He seemed to have decided what he wanted to do now, because he began to work furiously. He would deliberately brush the poster for a few seconds, then throw the brush into a plastic bowl of what I took to be either water or turpentine; pick up a clean one and then let the paint drip pensively; discarding that one and choosing another.

This went on for at least two minutes before he looked up.

"Shit!" he said. "You scared me."

"Sorry, man," I replied. I stood up and began walking down the stairs. To my left were some of Dominic's paintings leaning against a wall, a heap of clothes that obscured the washing machine, paint cans, tools, and the old junk that everyone puts in their basement.

Dominic's studio was on my right. It was very modest—a harsh yellow light hung from the ceiling over the tarp where Dominic worked on his current project, with guitars, keyboards, turntables, amplifiers, a bongo drum, empty beer bottles, an ash tray, and more of his paintings around the perimeter.

"Dude," Dominic said when I got to the bottom of the stairs. "Can I bum a cig?"

I took two from the pack and gave him one. "So what are you working on?"

Smiling from ear to ear the way he always did, he said: "Owen got these things from Starbucks. They were going to throw them away, but I just love the way it looks."

He showed me what he meant. His roommate, Owen, took several promotional posters from his job at the coffee shop after management decided they had worn out their welcome. There were three or four of them, all about poster size, with a diagram of a coffee cup extended from the surface describing any one of the store's mixed drinks.

The one he was working on was now unrecognizable as an advertisement. Dark, textured paint ran across the surface, in a manner I would have called chaotic had I not watched Dominic work so methodically.

There were dots, dashes, deep pools, sharp turns, long and short lines. Parts were smooth, parts were rough, and all of it was much more than my Art History for Non-Majors class could have prepared me to fully appreciate.

I said something like "wow," and Dominic laughed. Trained as I am, I asked the simple question: "how long does this take you?"

"Couple hours," he said, looking at his work. He put the cigarette to his lips, and his hand was covered in paint. "You like it?"

"Yeah," I said. "It's awesome..."

"Thanks," he said. "So what are you guys up to tonight?"

His roommates and I were going to some bar in a few minutes. I asked him if he was coming with us.

"Naw..." he said. "I'm going to stay here and finish this. I'll try to hit you up later, though."

It was time for me to leave, so I walked back up the stairs. By the time I got to the top Dominic had already finished his cigarette and was hunched over on the floor again, holding a paint brush.

It was not the last time I saw him working on a project in the basement. Every time I saw him he would show me his latest and speak in the tones of someone who had figured out how to do what made him happy.

To this day I cannot draw a straight line with a ruler, list the names of more than a handful of colors, or explain the difference between Realism and Surrealism without looking at my notes. But only Dominic could take something as crass as a corporate advertisement and turn it into something I would remember for the rest of my life.