

Author Tom Murphy pens novel honoring legacy of his late wife Barb

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Sometimes, the hardest lessons in life to learn are the ones that leave the biggest mark on the soul. They can be painful, but they are often rewarding, opening doors to self-discovery that we may have previously locked on ourselves.

Author Tom Murphy knows that all too well. Some of his toughest lessons for him occurred after he learned his wife was dying of lung cancer. While an extremely difficult experience, the leadup to Barb's passing in 2016 was a time of understanding and introspection.

"I was amazed at how she dealt with her illness," said The Pinehills resident. "Barb accepted it with strength and courage. She never complained or acted as a victim. I kept asking her about how she found the fortitude to face this terrible disease."

Her answers provided the basis for Murphy's own growth and development – not to mention a deeper love with his wife, whom he was already very close to. The relationship subjects they explored are now the basis of a novel written by Murphy, "The Anniversary Box: A Love Story."

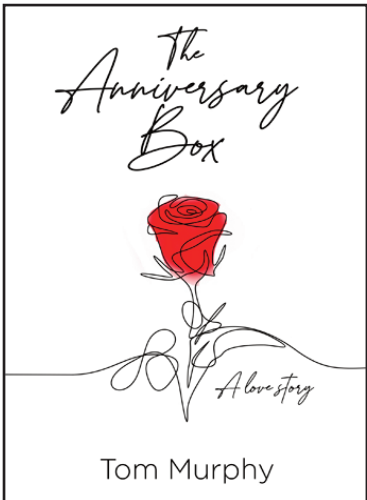
Like a parable, there is more to the story than just romance. The book examines what we need to do as individuals to find lasting love and create meaningful relationships with others.

"There are 24 messages in the book," Murphy said. "While it is a tribute to Barb, in many ways it is a roadmap for finding meaning in our lives. Too many times, when people encounter hardships in their relationships, they give up. The key lessons here are 'Build on what you've built,' 'In conflict, look for the positive' and 'Not me, we.'"

The novel follows a young woman who is about to be married. She's overwhelmed by the idea of making a lifetime commitment, but then discovers a secret about her parents. They had created an anniversary box where they wrote messages to the other to affirm their love and suggest ways to make it stronger.

Along the way, the woman discovers a mystery that she has to solve. Her mother is dead and her father incapacitated by illness, so she has to find the answer on her own. Through this discovery, she learns lessons about herself and how to create a lasting relationship.

"It's a fictional story but it comes from the lessons I learned from Barb during her six years of illness," Murphy said. "There's a mystery to help keep the plot



Tom Murphy's new book is a story about deepening love and relationships. COURTESY PHOTO



Tom Murphy outside the Blueberry Muffin in The Pinehills. WICKED LOCAL PHOTO/DAVE KINDY

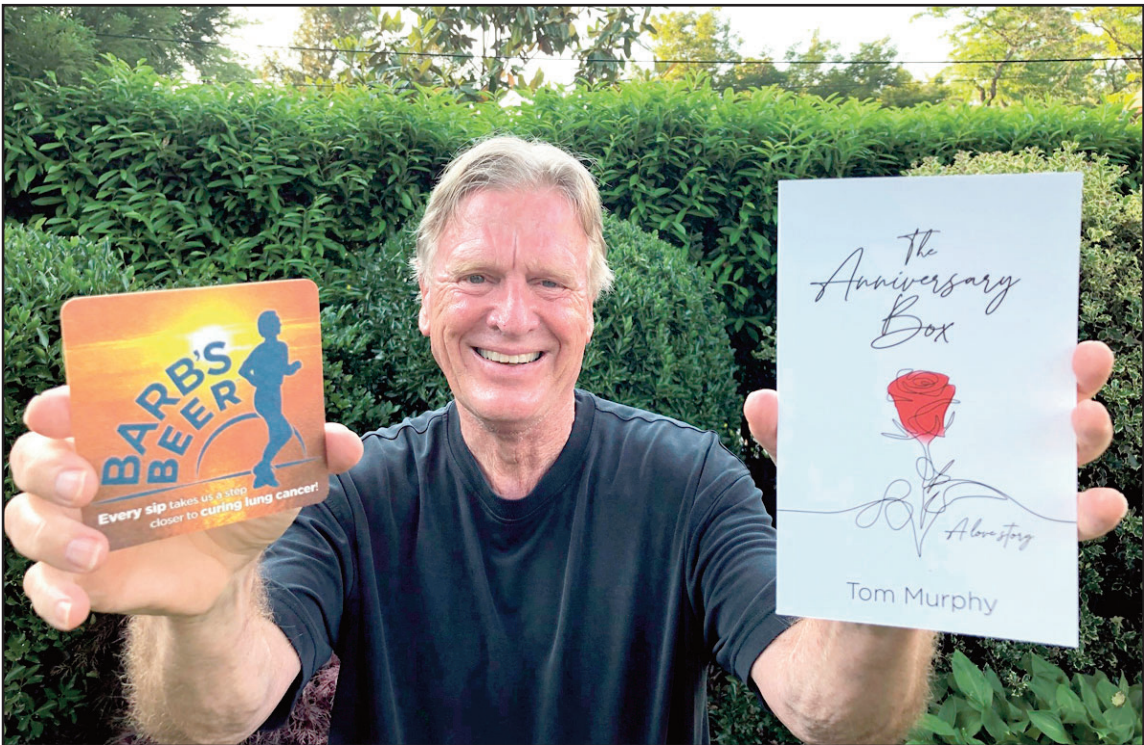
moving, but the real story is the message of love and how we develop it."

The author bases his theory of relationship success on the O. Henry short story "The Gift of the Magi," where a couple sacrifices what is important to each to purchase a Christmas gift for the other. Of course, there is an ironic twist to the story (if you have never read it, go online and do so now at americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/1-the_gift_of_the_magi_0.pdf).

"I call it The Gift of the Magi Principle," Murphy said. "Essentially, it boils down to one plus one equals one. We only become one when we stop being so self-absorbed and learn to sacrifice for the other."

Murphy and his wife had a close relationship to start. They were dedicated marathon runners, often training and racing together. However, when Barb learned she had nonsmoker's lung cancer in 2010, Murphy found himself being drawn closer to her. Rather than shut down to protect himself from eventual pain, he opened up to better understand what she was going through and help her with a difficult experience.

"Barb was diagnosed the week after she set an age-group record running in a 15-kilometer race,"



Tom Murphy of Plymouth displays a coaster for Barb's Beer and his new book, both honoring his late wife. COURTESY PHOTO



Barb and Tom Murphy with their daughter Caitlin at the New York Marathon in 1989. COURTESY PHOTO

he said. "It was devastating to me. She was so healthy and had never smoked a day in her life."

At the time, the couple lived in Seattle, where one of the top doctors in the country for this disease practiced. Howard West went above and beyond to help his wife through the illness.

"He was wonderful," Murphy said. "Whatever she needed, he took care of it for her. Barb could call him anytime to ask questions or just to talk."

The Murphys moved to Plymouth in 2013 to be closer to her family on Cape Cod and their daughter Caitlin. After his wife passed in 2016, Murphy knew he had to honor her in some way.

"Barb had two passions in life: running and beer," he recalled. "So I started a fundraiser by cre-

ating a beer brewed by Trappist monks."

Called Barb's Beer, proceeds go to finding a cure for lung cancer through www.cancer-grace.org, which was started by West, Barb's doctor.

However, that wasn't enough for Murphy. He felt like he needed to do more to honor the memory of his wife. Murphy had an idea for a novel but just couldn't find the time to write it. He was busy with his day job as director of Edge4Vets, a foundation established by Fordham University to assist returning military veterans with assimilation back into the private workforce. He also directs the Human Resiliency Foundation at Fordham.

Then the pandemic struck. Murphy found himself with

time on his hands, so he began writing "The Anniversary Box." He has written two other books, both nonfiction. Murphy plans to funnel proceeds from the novel to Barb's Beer to honor his wife's legacy and support West's research.

With his book about to be published, Murphy has only one suggestion for readers:

"Buy the book, grow the beer and raise funds to cure lung cancer," he said. "That's what Barb would want."

Published by Encircle Publications, "The Anniversary Box" will be released Aug. 2, the date of the Murphys' wedding anniversary. It will be available in hardcover, paperback and digital online and in stores.

For more information, visit www.theanniversarybox.com/.