

Bob Thomas January 8, 2010

2009

Jack Wiler's World



John M. 'Jack' Wiler (December 14, 1951 - October 20, 2009) was a American poet and AIDS survivor.

Jack grew up in the close knit, quiet, sheltered town of Wenonah, New Jersey. His mother was a librarian who instilled a love of books in her children and his father was a salesman in the petroleum industry. Jack was the eldest of four children.

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First stupid blog

Saturday, October 07, 2006

Well,

I hate blogging and talking about myself but in order to say something nice about someone's poetry I had to create this dumbass blog. Blog. In and of itself an icky term. I spent the day doing things I had to do. Haircut at D&V's barber shop on Washington Street in Hoboken, picked up my meds at my favorite CVS, bought cigars from Gil at the Smoke Shop, and then drank two Margaritas and ate a lousy quesadilla at East LA, easily the worst restaurant in a restaurant deprived town. Finally I picked up a Frederick Church print I had framed and called my friend Teresa who came over and we gabbed about poetry and the Dodge Festival all afternoon.

Johanna's in Washington for Miss International so I'm mega lonely and it was nice to talk about words with someone who gives a fuck about them.

We talked about being famous in a dumb little world and we talked about how poetry works and how we hate hearing how it works and we drank a lousy Bordeaux and in general had a nice poetical afternoon. All afternoons should be like this.

Milo and Cookie barking like idiots and warm fall sun and friends.

Not too bad.

In two weeks it will be the fifth anniversary of my getting really sick. I hope every afternoon will be like this.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:46PM (-04:00)

Jack's Blog: First stupid blog

Thursday, October 12, 2006

Jack's Blog: First stupid blogWell, today I had the good fortune to talk about flying insects. First flies, then mosquitoes. All insects I can't deal with effectively with pesticides which means I have to convince people that other things are more important.

Cleaning.

Screening.

Removing standing water.

It's way harder than filling up a B&G with a gallon of one kick ass pesticide and spraying the fuck out of the place.

They always look at you like you're retarded.

And retarded I may be.

I also had a chance to show Willa, our dispatcher, one of my new poems.

She seemed to like it.

It's nice when a normal person likes a poem.

You can't trust poets.

They say yes but they mean no.

But regular people are kind of blind sided by poetry so when they like it they use real words that make sense.

Tomorrow cold comes back.

I hate the cold.

I can't wait for Saturday and the Greenmarket and then the Hoboken Studio Tour.

I'll try to post when I'm drunk as a lord Sunday night:
Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:41PM (-04:00)

A Day of Art in Hoboken

Sunday, October 15, 2006

Well, I spent the day walking through Hoboken with my friends. We went in search of ART and WINE and we found both. Not necessarily in abundance or quality but still, there they were. We saw Tim Daly's magnificent landscapes of beautiful Hudson County and we saw Bob Piersanti's joyous pop paintings of mermaids and dominatrix's et al. We saw abstract art and realist art and surreal art and we saw it all for free. I also bought some art at cut rate prices to hang in my little work room and was dazzled as was my friend Teresa by how much money artists can get for their paintings or photos.

I don't know if you know this but poets don't make dick for what they write. Oh, a couple dollars here and there for a reading but no real cash. This is good on the one hand cuz no one can tell you what to write about (outside of your family) but bad because you're broke. Artists on the other hand can get tons of dough. On the other hand their paintings are treated like wall paper and not purchased cuz they clash with the color scheme in the living room.

In fact, on Friday, while looking for termites in a customers townhouse in NYC in the basement "family room" I'm fairly certain they had a Chagall hanging on the wall. In the basement. Just before you got to the laundry room and the heater. If that's not respect for art god knows what is. Of course Chagall's lo these many years in the grave and it is just paint on paper so fuck him. Hang it over the toilet if you want.

Anyway, I'm a bit toasted, as I thought I might be and Johanna is not impressed with my purchases even though I am and tomorrow it's another day doing battle with the army of rats and roaches massed against Manhattan. A good pest control operator needs to know when to rest and when to fight and tonight I rest.

Hopefully I'll dream tonight of rooms of art with people that love it.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:34PM (-04:00)

Ralph Hager

Monday, October 16, 2006

My friend Suzy's husband, and my friend, Ralph Hager died several weeks ago. Yesterday was the memorial for him. Here's a poem I wrote for Suzy and Ralph and Jerry and Mrs Scott and everyone else who made their lives the best they could be.

Watching the Raiders with Ralph

It's 1st and 10 on Oakland's 45.

For the first time in my life I realize why 60 minutes starts late on the east coast on Sunday.

I'm watching football in Oakland with my friend Ralph and suddenly in that flat mid western nasally voice I hear, "Jack!", and I realize he needs a sip of beer and even though for me it's only 11 fifteen

I need one too.
God yes.
We're drinking beer at 11:15am.
Of course it's really 1:15 but the beer is great and Oakland
for the first time in two years is looking good and Ralph is all
full of himself.
He's whining for that sip of beer of course because he can't get it himself.
Which I keep forgetting.
Because he always sounds like Ralph.
And for me Ralph always lives in his voice.
His insistent yap yap yap about whatever makes him interested.
No wonder Livermore let him sit in an office for twenty odd years.
They were probably trying to keep him quiet.
But I spent the morning with Jerry pulling shit out of his ass and
I'm fairly clear he can't move so I hand him the glass of dark beer
with the straw and let him sip.
Deep.
We'd just spent the day before tooling through the Russian River
drinking wine and laughing and eating and getting the best treatment
possible because Ralph is a crip.
I kept forgetting he was a crip.
Which is dumb.
The first time I met him he had biked from LA to SF in one day.
ONE DAY.
What kind of nincompoop bikes from LA to SF.
The Ralph kind.
The kind who let's a friend watch a man pull shit out of his ass.
The kind who takes advantage of his condition to get a great seat at Chez Panisse
The kind who can argue for hours and hours about stupid carpets.
The man who loves film noir and wine and beer and who let his wife,
my friend,
my dear friend,
let her friends drink his priceless 63 bordeaux's on a Halloween night.
Really, a genius, you know.
The kind of man you'd let sit in a room in Livermore for years.
To hide him away.
Really a blessed, holy saint.
The kind who could turn wine into life and life into wine and then whine about it.
Really a great and true friend.
Really a man who could sit in a seat unable to move and make the world turn around
him.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:10AM (-04:00)

Tuesday at Acme

Tuesday, October 17, 2006

Well, it's Tuesday morning at Acme and I should be killing bugs or talking about killing bugs but I feel lousy and I've been thinking of some odd dreams I've had. Life can be very unsettling at times. I've got a book out, I get paid well, I don't have to work real hard but somehow I feel like somethings broken.

Go figure.

Of course, tomorrow is the 5th anniversary of the day I went to the hospital with AIDS and PCP pneumonia so maybe this forboding has something to do with that. Anyway enough whining and moaning and besides there's a lady on the phone with bedbugs. Got to run

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:36AM (-04:00)

Poetry at the Y

Sunday, October 22, 2006

I had what is relatively my last poetry reading for a while at the Y on 63rd St. It was a small crowd but nice. I read with my friend Jeanne Beaumont. Jeanne and I both grew up near Philly and when we were young both went to Ocean City. Even more weird we were born in the same hospital. Fitzgerald Mercy in Darby PA. I met Jeanne at the Frost Place in Franconia NH where I go to think about poetry and poets every year.

I was going to write about my reading but I think I'll tell you about the Frost Place. My friend, Don Sheehan, was asked by the town of Franconia to help with a celebration of the house that Robert Frost lived in before he accepted the writers post at Amherst. He vacationed there afterwards for many years. It's a small white farm house with an expansive view of the White Mountains and a little barn. Don set up a writer in residence program and organized a writers festival around the barn and the house. I've been going there since 1981. That year my friend David suggested I attend so my other friend Mack and I drove up and stayed with my friends Abby and Killer in Bath and went each day to the Festival. What I saw and heard helped change me as a writer forever.

The Festival itself is a simple idea. In the morning a poet of some renown gives a talk about poetry or writing or whatever and then you eat lunch. In the afternoon the bulk of the people attending sit down in small groups to talk about their poems in classic "workshop" fashion. Then, in the evening, the poet of renown and one of the people who lead the small groups read their poems out loud in the barn. Later, the people attending the festival move out in various amorphous groups to drink and talk about life and poetry. It's all kind of rote in a poetry conference way except that Don Sheehan had a unique way of structuring this week so that it felt like more than just a poetry conference. It felt and feels like a chance to really be a poet. To really hear and enjoy and talk and listen about poetry with people who love poetry. Almost without noticing you realized the value of what you do.

I would guess that 40% of the poems I've written have the stamp of that place on them. I remember one year coming home and telling my friend Suzy that I was the true Jack when I was there. That the person I was supposed to be was the person that walked the earth that week. She said that was bullshit. It wasn't.

One year Don came to Englewood, NJ to talk about Envy and the Arts. He gave a

basically theological talk centered on Russian Orthodox teachings saying that Envy was "original sin". He said that the only cure for original sin was love. Not love of self but love of others.

A woman in the audience said she was sure she'd be a better writer if only she worked harder at it and that love had nothing to do with Envy. That once she was successful and published and acknowledged as the good writer she was she'd envy no one and besides how could you go through your life loving everyone? Don said, you know it's funny, once a year I invite 60 people to a small town in New Hampshire and ask them to love each other and they do.

That's the Frost Place. Once you're not involved in the bullshit of acceptance and validation and who's who and who knows who and you're just listening and talking about the thing you love it comes to you like a lost friend. Poetry.

One night I heard Hayden Carruth read. He'd been an asshole in the morning talk and was treating his wife like shit and I wasn't expecting anything of note. What could this asshole bring me? He brought me poems that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. That shook my core. At the end of this stunning reading a shooting star crossed the sky. Huge, big, and green. What a night!

I've been drunk with Bill Matthews and harangued Molly Peacock and embarrassed myself with Tony Hoagland talking about the thing I love most. Poetry. When I'm there and for months after I'm the person I really am. A poet.

So, to get back to 63rd St...when my reading was done I realized for the second time in a week that I know what I'm doing. All this time spent writing hasn't been a waste. Poetry matters. For me and for the people who hear it and read it. Thank God.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:23AM (-04:00)

A day at Acme

Thursday, October 26, 2006

Today was a relatively pleasant day at Acme. I did have to spend an hour in the most horrible work imaginable; I know, you're thinking killing some hideous insect or fending off rats, but it's really releasing service tickets. This is a computer data entry task that requires using odd parts of the keyboard, interpreting the cryptic handwriting of our technicians, and coping with mistakes by other folks previously releasing tickets.

You basically enter numbers and amounts and times over and over and over and over. Mice and rats and ger roa, mice and rats and ger roa. Siege, glue, maxforce, siege, glue, maxforce, until the end of time or perhaps an hour. One of my technicians, Albert, was a graffiti artist back in the day. Buddies with Keith Haring. His handwriting strongly resembles Turk182 or somebody else from 1981 or 83 in the Bronx and the 3 train looking like a train to hell with really garish cartoons. The problem is this isn't art. It's how many glue traps Albert put down. Hard to say but the number looks real good.

Finally Peter reads a joke from the internet. Here's the joke. It's mildly sexist and offensive and probably in a normal workplace environment would get him canned. But what the hey, he's close to retirement. Peter read it out loud and changed the names as I have here to reflect our actual staff:

Luis was in quandary. He had to fire somebody. He had it narrowed down to one of two people, Willa or Jack. It was an impossible decision, they were both super workers. Rather than flip a coin, he decided he would fire the first one who used the water cooler

the next morning.

Willa came in the next morning with a horrible hangover after partying all night. She went to the cooler to take an aspirin.

Luis approached her and said: " Willa, I've never done this before, but I have to either lay you or Jack off."

"Could you jack-off?" she said, "I feel like shit this morning."

This was very funny and we laughed and laughed. It has nothing to do with poetry but a lot to do with my job which I love. I hope it makes you laugh and is relatively inoffensive. But honestly I don't actually care at all. By the way, ever since I started working at real jobs there's always been a real problem when I take a day off. The boss always writes on his calendar "jack off today". Oh well.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:46PM (-04:00)

Fall and Walking Dogs

Sunday, October 29, 2006

I just spent the better part of an hour walking my lunatic dogs. Milo leaped a fence and nearly impaled himself on it. They both went crazy in the leaves at Columbus Park. They love this time of year. It's cool and since they're covered in fur it's not cold. They make me crazy walking them but what the hell, they like it.

The original purpose of this blog was to talk about the Eagles on game day. Sadly this was not a good day to watch the Eagles. They were flat and listless and the Jaguars wanted it more. Maybe my beloved Scarlet Knights will redeem the day for me tonight. Who knows.

The other day my friend Teresa told me how much she likes me as a friend. It was good and sweet but it scared me. I don't know I'm that good of a friend. A few nights back I had dinner with Caroline and her friend Paula and Paula reminded me that I broke Linda's heart. It came up because we were talking about Danny Hamilton, now Danny Maietta, and I said oh, he broke Linda's heart and Paula said: No, Jack, you broke her heart. And I did.

Being able to look back on what you did is a bitch. I did break her heart. I probably broke several other hearts. I don't think anyone ever broke my heart but I could be wrong. Now I try to live my life with care. I try not to break anyone's heart. I try to walk my dogs. I try to watch football and eat right and go to work.

These are modest goals and attainable.

I wrote last week about the Frost Place and my friend Don Sheehan. I worry about him and what he's making of his life. As we get older we have to confront what we've made. It's not easy. Don made the most beautiful place in the world for me and other people and now he won't go there. That makes me mad and it makes me sad. I wish I could walk down the stupid poetry trail and read the poems out loud to him. Tell him how much it meant to me to have this place. I can't.

It's like when a parent dies and you do something you know they would have loved. You can't show it to them. You can't watch the joy in their face. You can only hope you did the right thing.

So today I did the right thing. I took my dogs for a walk. They love to go for walks and they're really annoying but their joy is unalloyed by the shit of daily life. It's wonderful to be with them and it reminds me of what it means to be alive.

Oh, I'm reading my friend Richard Loranger's new book. It's cool, and weird, and gorgeous. More later in the week for the two people who read this...me...& you.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:15PM (-05:00)

November 2

Thursday, November 02, 2006

Well, that's a dumbass name for a posting. Although it's accurate. It is November 2nd. I'm posting this just for discipline sake so it's not going to have much of consequence in it. It's a nasty morning and I'm trying to decide if I should go running. And running I will go! More upon my wet and cold return...

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:12AM (-05:00)

After running

Thursday, November 02, 2006

Back, back from the rain, back from dragging Cookie down the street. Back from a cold wind in my face on the way back. Just a short one, two miles, but necessary. This summer my red cells tanked and I lost a lot of strength and energy. Couldn't run till just three weeks ago. But on Sunday I did my first three miler which is a great thrill.

I love to run. I love being in the world with no one but my thoughts and the feel of the road. If you run you can do it anywhere. I went running in Macedonia. I ran in Oakland with my friend Suzy. She ran further and harder than I did. I'd like to do another marathon but am worried about the stress levels on my body. This damn disease fucks you up in ways you never even think about. But we'll see. It doesn't take long to train for a marathon, just a few months. I've done it before. Lot's of old guys run them. Why not me. So, my push ups are done, my sit ups are done and now it's time to get clean and go to Acme. We have a new woman starting today and I have to do her orientation. With luck she'll work out and I won't have to release service tickets anymore.

Well, as all silly things must this post must end.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:43AM (-05:00)

Dinner Out

Saturday, November 04, 2006

Wow! What a mess! I received a very generous gift from a woman in Hoboken for doing a poetry gig for her. In return she gave me a \$100 at my favorite restaurant in Hoboken. Not knowing what was my favorite restaurant she enlisted my friend Caroline to get that information. Caroline asked in a round about way so I ended up with a gift certificate for the Brass Rail. Which is a nice restaurant and maybe one of the best in Hoboken but a tough one for me and Johanna to go to. Why? You ask. Because Johanna has a tough time in blanco restaurants. She prefers something a little more latin. And if you add in the china and linen napkins and other little incidentals she gets a little freaked.

Anyway, my friends John and Teresa graciously offered to join us and share a bit of vino and the date was set. At 5:30 I got home and Johanna was no where near ready but she

said chill and I chilled and by 6 she was dressed and set and I called Mojica and ordered up a cab and then it all began...

First Johanna doesn't wear a coat but the cab will drop us off and then we go downstairs but...the cab is late, late, late so she's mega peeved. Then we decide to drive but I can't remember where I parked the car...then on the way down to Hoboken she's pissed but thankfully we get a parking spot right away. No biggie. But, I forgot, on the way downstairs she says, I hope Sandy doesn't show up too soon. HUH? We get to the restaurant and I tell the waitperson about the gift and she says HUH? And Johanna is more pissed cuz she doesn't like awkwardness in public or anything that calls attention to her. And finally Sandy calls. She's at our house. So Johanna has to go back home, via cab. Then when she arrives she and Sandy have go to dinner.

So John and Teresa and I eat and drink and gab and plan John and Jessica and my birthday celebration (on December 14th if you don't know and now you do). We pay up, the gift certificate is resolved and I go to pay for parking but my credit card is declined cuz I tried three times to use it with the wrong pin earlier and Teresa offers 20 beans but my other card works, miracle of miracles and I go home.

I almost forgot what I ate.

Wait till the party! Sandy's cooking. Me and John and Jessica will be drinking and Johanna will be clicking her nails.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:12AM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Dinner Out](#)

- userCB

September 09, 2009

I never read this blog... but umm...It's a good one!!!!!! Pretty darn funny.

New Car & Driving Lessons

[Sunday, November 05, 2006](#)

Yesterday I left the house at 11 and told Johanna I was going to look at cars. Specifically Honda Civics. I went to the dealership, Metro Honda, and took a test drive with a new sales guy Jess and the car was sweet. I told them my credit sucks. They came back and said, yes, it does but if we can get you approved will you drive that car off the lot today? I said sure. So I called Luis and asked for money from my sales commissions and I called Geico and got the insurance and at 1:45 I drove away in a 5 speed black Honda Civic LX. Hard to believe. No more 94 Mustang. No more worrying about getting pulled over for failed inspections! Cruise control! A driver's side mirror! Highway driving is a breeze! So I came home and Johanna loved the car and today I took her for a driving lesson. She's undocumented so no license and she's never driven a stick. Yeeeps. But she did good and my heart almost exploded but we got through it. I plan to do this every Sunday for the next month.

Soon Johanna will be up for her green card and then she can get a license and we'll buy her a nice girly car:)

On another note entirely I got a sweet comment from my friend Alicia Ostriker about my book. Here is what she said:

Jack--

Isn't it great how writing about misery is fun? Reading about it too. Us lucky poets. The book is fabulous. what you said about randomizing the order is right--I love narrative, and my own first choice would have been to do the poems as chronology, BUT in this case i thought...fuck chronology, this is all existential, it's all right ma, he's only bleeding. Or scratch that, he;'s only living. Lotta living in this book. I laughed a lot too. thanks.

AO

That's one of the reasons you write. To have people read and understand. On Tuesday I'm driving my new car to my Dr appointment and giving Dr Condolucci and his staff my book. They saved my life along with Danny and Johanna and my brothers and sister and father and mother and a thousand prayers from a thousand friends. God is good.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:46PM (-05:00)

A Night of Contemporary American Poetry

Saturday, November 11, 2006

Last night Teresa and I went to a book party hosted by Gerald Stern and Ann Marie Macari for Ross Gay. Ross just had a new book published by our mutual publisher, Cavankerry Press. The book party was at Poet's House on Spring Street in Soho in Manhattan.

It was a beautiful Fall night and before the reading we had dinner at my friend Linda's restaurant Barmarthe. It's at 12 Spring Street and it's a great place to eat and we very much enjoyed the meal and Linda's hospitality. All this niceness is to set you up for the event and my reaction to the event.

First, there were a number of people there. This made me feel bad because I had had two book parties and not so many people came. Second, there were famous people there. Third, when we walked in Ross' friend Stephanie asked us to sign a release because a filmmaker, Norbert, was there filming the event as part of a piece on "Contemporary American Poetry". The evil God Envy was everywhere in the room and in my heart. I mean, I only saw two or three "Contemporary American Poets" (and I know a bunch of them) at this gig and I'm a contemporary American poet or at least a man writing poetry in the United States of America right now, yet I really didn't know anybody there, except Teresa, Ross, Ann Waldman, Gerald Stern, Ann Marie Macari, Jim Haba, & Teresa told me Joan Larkin was there, who I don't know. Oh yeah, I think Merwin was there. Or at least some old guy looked like him.

But in my head I don't feel that this is what "Contemporary American Poetry" represents. So, since nobody pays attention to me I really don't think this is what it represents. I mean, how could you do a film about poetry and not include the bard of Palisade Avenue? My heart had shrivelled to a black stone by now and Satan was knocking on the door with a pen dripping blood and a contract.

What the fuck is wrong with us that we act this way? Ross writes strong solid work that will only become more powerful as he gets older. Gerry Stern is a rock who stood up for him and helped him with his work as did Ann Marie. Gerry is a poet I admire more than almost any writer of verse in America. His voice helped shape mine. His displeasure with

the bullshit of poetry always makes me happy. The wine was free!!!! There was food!!!! But I'm all resentful and peeved just like I was at my brother's third birthday party. At MY book party at the Bowery Poetry Club my friend Danny Shot got up and read and spoke an introduction to me and my work. It was heartfelt, spontaneous, and warm. It made me want to cry. Danny is a contemporary american poet. In the room was my publisher, Joan Handler Cusack, another contemporary american poet. And Teresa Carson and Eliot Katz and Nancy Mercado, all contemporary american poets. There was Mungo who was in town to record "authentic NY voices" and he was there because he thought the Bowery Poetry Club was where you go to hear authentic voices and poems. I think the truth is that that night and the afternoon in Hoboken were two of the warmest evenings in my life. I think Ross' night, last night, with his family and friends about him, was probably one of the warmest evening of his life. I think each of us is proud of his work and each wishes the other well.

What a piece of work is man. I can say this about the party without sounding spiteful. The wine sucked. But it was free which is like a little miracle. Any poetry event with free wine is an event of consequence. Prosit!

In closing, I'm off today to the Mutter Museum to see the "Oddities of American Medicine". Pickled and stuffed and plastered relics from another time. Old musty artifacts from another world. It's supposed to be a little scary and a little thrill inducing. You might notice I may be talking about "Contemporary American Poetry"

Thank you Ross, for a wonderful night and a truly great book.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:26AM (-05:00)

The Mutter Museum and more on poetry in general

Saturday, November 11, 2006

Today my friends John and Teresa Carson took me to the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia. We took a side trip through Wenonah so they could see the town that generated so many of my poems. They started thinking about buying small crafthouses there at bargain and I told them I don't want NYer's to know about Wenonah cuz they'll drive real estate values up.

The Mutter Museum was neat but disturbing. Not least of all because everyone dies of something I could die of. Not a good thought. I try to pretend I'm immortal even though I have intimate acquaintance with disease. I did like the wall of skulls. The guy who collected them thought there were no racial or genetic reasons to characterize humans and looking at all those knuckleheads I agree. Nonetheless he characterized them as suicides, killed in combat, or imbeciles and idiots. I hope someday my skull is in a collection with the label: IDIOT.

On the way home we talked about my friend Suzy Parker who has a book, *Tumbling After*. Teresa is reading it right now. I read it through it's creation. It was beautiful and strong and we talked about how I knew Suzy and all the permutations of my relationships with her.

The night before, at the celebration for Ross Gay's book, Teresa gave me her manuscript for her second book and made me promise to read it. I did. Tonight.

Oh. My. God. It was stunning. Everything poetry should be and in a voice that was not confessional or loud or contemporary but nonetheless all about her and her life and it

moved me the way poetry should move you.

When I said Teresa Carson was at the event being filmed for "Contemporary American Poetry" you should understand even though she doesn't have a book published her book is and next book are contemporary american poetry.

I also neglected the names of two wonderful writers at my Bowery event... Joe Weil and John McDermott. Two great writers in two different streams. Real poets. Not acknowledged but real. Joe and I have jostled and hosted events at the Bowery and Mack has been my guide in writing for more years than I can own up to.

If you're going to talk about "Contemporary American Poetry" you should look harder than filmmakers usually do. Poetry that is real and hard and glorious is all over New York and New Jersey and I am lucky enough to know so many wonderful writers. For a few years Andy Clausen was my roommate in Jersey City. If there is an underrated writer in the US of A it is Andy. Powerful, passionate, committed. Andy lives and dies by the word.

Poetry is life. Life is Poetry. God Bless all of us who sit down and take pen to paper and try to sort shit out.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:12PM (-05:00)

The Mutter Museum and life and me

Sunday, November 19, 2006

I went to the Mutter Museum last weekend with John and Teresa. It was a revelation. Not one I was looking for but a revelation. They have a wall of skulls. The man who donated the skulls had an idea he might deride the idea of racial affinities, etc but nonetheless classified each of the skulls with their race and reason for demise.

Gypsy, Imbecile, Murderer, Suicide.

All of them dull yellow gaping bits of bone.

I'd seen them before in the mirror.

When I was very ill they looked much like me but I had a thin covering of flesh.

Oh and I still retained the cartilage of my nose and my eyeballs.

I'd like to think my teeth were generally better but I know they're not.

It was a window into my past and into my future. Our future.

All of us will be skulls. And bones. And sad descriptions of our lives. He died despondent over the death of his lover. He hanged himself when his wife left him. Suicide. Cancer. Heartattack. Shot in the battle of whatever in wherever.

All gaping bones. All sad men and women in a sideshow disguised as a museum.

Their souls departed. The hard facts of their lives left behind. Syphillis and cancer and foolishness. It amounts to nothing.

I spent the evening tonight with Teresa and John talking about poetry and art. About how you know what you write is good. About writers photos and publication dates and the joys impending publication and the vagaries of publishers.

I called Johanna and told her I loved her.

My dogs jostled over rawhide bones. Fought so hard I had to separate them.

Foolish dogs.

Foolish people.

Foolish poets.

Those skulls are just like the leaves we stepped on in the way into the exhibit. Dead reminders of something once alive.

The imbecile had a mother and a father and was treated however they chose or didn't choose to treat him.

The suicide made one really stupid decision but it doesn't matter.

He'd be here one way or the other.

So...

Why should you write poetry?

Or play football?

Donovan McNabb is out for the season.

He seemed strong and sure and all looked well.

Poof.

Gone.

What good is poetry?

That's the topic of a talk I gave this summer in New Hampshire.

Here's what good is poetry.

It tells the story of those skulls better than their bones.

It tells the story of why they walked the earth better than their bones.

It is more important than the cancerous growths or syphilitic teeth or weirdly enlarged colons or monsters that might come from our wombs.

It talks about what was in the skulls before they were skulls.

It talks about what fills the earth.

Life.

Skulls, rocks, shells, dead leaves, granite have nothing to do with poetry.

Poetry is talk and toil and life.

Poetry is anger and sadness and grief and joy and dissatisfaction and glory.

It walks and talks over the centuries and it mocks the skulls in the Mutter Museum.

Somewhere in East Africa the skull of Arthur Rimbaud lies muldering in the dirt.

But everywhere in the world he rocks in a drunken boat.

Jack Kerouac might be a pile of bones in a grave in Florida or Massachusetts or wherever the fuck they laid him to rest but

people everywhere get up and get in a car and go in search of...

Life.

Life is the earth.

It fills the earth.

It builds on the skulls.

It builds on the garbage and the shit and it makes us happy and sad and dumb.

I almost died once.

When I look in a mirror I see my skull.

Not like most people do.

There was hardly anything left on my skull.

Just a thin covering of skin.

But beneath.

There was something that leaped and roared and laughed and cried and got bored at work and took the bus and ate bad food and loved men and women and sex and words and books and music and

Well.

You get the point.

The point is.

Everybody and everything dies.

What happens next nobody knows about.
But while you're here pay attention.
Look.
Listen.
Smell.
Breath.
Eat.
Make love.
Love someone.
Be human.
It might not be redemption but it's as close as you can get.
Pretend you're a great football player and you're going to go back for one last long pass.
You see the approaching linemen.
You know you're going to get hit hard.
You know it might end your career.
Throw it far and straight and with luck someone will pull it down.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:35PM (-05:00)

Thanksgiving Day

Thursday, November 23, 2006

It's 4:25am and I can't sleep. I had to let Milo out to pee and then my brain starts working and here I am talking to whoever reads this. This is one of my favorite holidays. It is a day that has no real commercial value except for the travel industry and the poultry and stuffing lobby. It asks family and friends to join together and give thanks and break bread. I've had some of my most cherished times at Thanksgiving. With my family and others. I think it could be said that I've celebrated Thanksgiving on other days, by design and by accident. Just before I became ill I had Easter dinner with my friend JT and his wife Laura and their children in Long Island. It was a wonderful meal. People laughing and talking and eating. Thanksgiving.

Last weekend John and Teresa and I had a quiet meal of meatloaf and squash and brussel sprouts and good wine. It was our small Thanksgiving. Every year at the Frost Place on Thursday Ron and Eloise cook up Thanksgiving for the poets. We clink our glasses and hug and read poems and give thanks.

I have so much to be thankful for it's nearly impossible to include it all. First, there is my life. God and my family and my friends and my doctors and nurses gave it back to me. Second there is Johanna. Who gave me a reason for living that goes further than just getting up and going to work. Who gave me Cookie and Milo and laughter and sorrow and joy. Then there are my many friends. Danny, Caroline, Mack, Mila, John, Teresa, Linda, and Patty, Suzy, and on and on and on. So much.

Then there is all the stuff that fills my life. My new car, our apartment, my book, the shelves my books are on. My job. My writing. So much.

So today I will give thanks. I'll pack Cookie and Milo in the back of the car and hope Cookie doesn't puke on the new car. We'll drive to Mick's house and then from there to my step brother Bobby's. We'll drink and laugh and someone will do something stupid or not and I'll go home to Mick's and talk a bit and call Johanna and tell her I love her.

Then, Thank God, there's another day. Thank God for that. A day to bitch about. A day of

random things to do. Laundry and dusting. Cooking. Walking the dogs. Reading. Napping. Chores. So much to thank God for. And you get it every day. So please take this as my toast to all of you who are in my life. God Bless You and hold you. Drink deep and eat well today.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:35AM (-05:00)

Poetry in Newton

Saturday, December 02, 2006

Last night was my last public performance in 2006. Thank the Lord! I went to Sussex County College in Newton NJ. It's far, far away from Jersey City. When I was nearly there they were making tornado warnings on the radio. I figured five farmers and two chickens would show but it turns out there's an actual poetry community there and in spite of the threat of witches and houses dropping from the sky several people turned out to hear me read.

My friend Bob Carnevale did a nice intro and my performance felt solid and I sold my last five books. I've got four left. Time to buy more. I don't know if I've explained this earlier but poetry publishing is like Amway. If I want books to sell at my readings I've got to buy them and sell them. This wouldn't be so bad if I wasn't pissing my money away on wine and food but it's a tough nut otherwise.

On Thursday night I went to hear my friend Jeffrey Harrison read with two other poets from Four Way Books. My friend Martha Rhodes runs the press and it was a lovely event. I had publishing envy. Lot's of other poets I knew were there and the wine was free and Jeff and his fellow poets didn't have to pay for it or organize it. I'm doing something wrong. Ross Gay has Gerald Stern, Jeff has Martha, and I have me and my dogs running the show. I've got lots of energy but little experience and I think it shows in my poor turnouts at my readings. Boo hoo!

It will be good to celebrate my birthday in two weeks with Jessica and John and my friends and then run headlong into Christmas. This is my favorite time of year! If anyone actually reads this and would like to join John, Jess and I at our mutual celebration...come to my house at 590 Palisade Ave, 2nd Fl, Jersey City on Dec 14th and hoist a glass with us. Presents not required wine much appreciated as is food. It's time for Orion to cast his spell. Time to forget about poems and poetry and work and responsibility. It's showtime!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:19PM (-05:00)

Happy Birthday

Thursday, December 14, 2006

On Dec 14th 2001 I spent late morning and most of the afternoon projectile vomiting. It was my 50th birthday and my friend Danny and my sister Mary had come to visit. Me and Zithromax weren't getting along too well and as a result I puked and puked and puked and puked.

That was five years ago.

Happy birthday to me! Thanks be to God!

Today I will go to work, deliver Christmas gifts to my clients, argue with Luis about some dumb thing and at noon go to lunch with my boss, Bob. We will go to a restaurant I know he doesn't particularly like but which I do like and talk and eat and he'll rush off to an appointment. At 2:45 I'll leave work and go home, pay the rent, pick up two cards and two small gifts, and come home to cook Shrimp and Corn Chowder for Johanna. Then we'll wait for our guests to arrive and drink and laugh and talk till late into the night.

I'm still a sort of broken man physically but by and large I'm not the man that spent his 50th birthday covered in vomit. I don't intend any repeat performances. So here's to milestones and birthdays and simple things! Raise a glass with me and drink in this world in all it's joy. Happy birthday to me! Happy birthday to John and Jessica! Happy birthday to you all!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:27AM (-05:00)

Christmas at Acme

Saturday, December 16, 2006

Yesterday was our holiday luncheon at Acme Exterminating. Bob took the women in the office and me out to lunch at the local steakhouse, Uncle Jack's. Luis, our boss, was supposed to go but sacrificed himself on the altar of duty to answer phones. There may have been a bit of bullshit in that but he felt we should bond with Bob and that he'd get in the way. Either that or he didn't want to go. Hard to say which.

Uncle Jack's is like every other NYC steakhouse. Pushy, weird waiters trying to get you to eat enormous amounts of expensive food and drink all you can. They interrupt the meal every ten minutes to ask if everything is okay. I'm convinced they grow these guys on a farm in Brooklyn. They're all overbearing and incredibly manly and the whole experience is unnerving. Quite honestly I'd prefer a gay guy saying hi my name is Todd and I'll be your server tonight to this ordeal by manliness.

The good part was the food was great, Bob was pleasant and enjoyable, and the young women I work with all had a fairly good time. They were also careful to order the most expensive items on the menu. If they were older they would have thought to order cocktails.

I myself was exhausted from my birthday celebration of the night before. I stayed up till 1am laughing and smiling and being with friends. I may have drunk a gallon of champagne. I got lovely gifts and reacquainted myself with some old friends and ate birthday cake. Johanna had her friends Sandy and Divina help with the serving and they were both great. Sandy was quite the lady bringing out appetizer after appetizer and Johanna was the queen of the house (in more ways than one).

Today, I'm going to settle back and relax, enjoy my day and roast a chicken. Tomorrow, another holiday party, my favorite, at Patty's house and the Giants/Eagles game. Good weekend, good life.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:47AM (-05:00)

Christmas, New Years, and beyond

Saturday, December 30, 2006

It's been a quiet holiday season in the world of Wiler. Not counting Johanna's being assaulted in Washington and getting two fingers nearly severed or Divina being taken to the hospital or my fellow worker Derrick dying of pneumonia (that's a euphemism). Mostly I spent the week between Christmas and New Years taking care of Johanna and yelling at the hotel to get her things back.

I also had to deal with my broken window and an upcoming inspection at Acme. Plus I think my poetry sucks, my book sucks and my life is in the toilet.

But beyond that stuff I did get Sirius Radio from my friends Linda and Patty and can now listen to Howard again! Hey Now! Artie, Robin, Fred, and the gang are back in my life.

Plus while I think my poetry sucks I have been writing so I'm sort of lying about that. I thought it would be good to post my most recent poem here to keep you all up to date with what's the what. Here it is. Read it and weep:)

What You Can Do in Central New Jersey at Christmas

I go with my friend Bill Wasnak to Sayreville or Jamesburg.

One of those central Jersey towns with one long street,
low, one and two story buildings and a half dozen dozing bars.

We walk into one and there are all my friends from twenty years ago.

Big Mike, Debby Fried, Alan Estevez, Bob Zirpoli, Jack Ward,
the Irregulars, all standing around, happy, drinking, laughing.

I'm talking to Pete Keen and I ask him where he's living now.

He says the North Carolina coast.

I say, what a coincidence, I go there often.

I ask Bill, didn't we go there, what, two years ago?

He laughs, takes a drink, and says, no.

The last time we were all there was the fall of 2001.

The fall of 2001.

What a cruel joke.

Now I understand.

Now I see the bar for what it is.

The ghosts of Christmas have washed me up just short of Christmas Day
in a dingy old man's bar with all my lost and forgotten friends.

Bob Zirpoli, who hasn't spoken to me since 1981.

Pete Keen, Christ, for all I know he's dead.

Wasnak, married now, with two boys and a lovely wife.

Prosperous business man, avid golfer, man on the go.

I look around again and see the glasses covered in dust, the windows boarded up.

Waiting for the wrecking ball from some developers dream.

The Melody Bar crushed by the jaws of some great earth moving machine.

The Court Tavern huddled up against the New Brunswick of tomorrow.

My friends old and fat and drinking too much.

Working at jobs they hate.
Making too much money, or too little, with wives they abhor or who detest them.

O horrible dream. O stunted joy.
O Melody Bar.
A band now long forgotten plays some creaking punk anthem.
The smell of stale beer and lost love stinks up the joint and we reel out into the dawn.
Asking where's the party, where's the party?
Once someone would have said
I am the party
Once we would have laughed and laughed.
Now we stare at the harsh dawn sun, turn our separate ways,
march back home.

It's hours till Christmas and the ghosts have not found me fit for redemption.
They offer this happy gathering, my long forgotten friends, this bar, this grim lesson.
O Christmas.
O Joy

Anyway, that's all for now. I'm busy planning my new year and my poetic life and my romantic life...all of which are in disarray. I'm reading with a bunch of friends at the Bowery Poetry Club on New Years Day after 3:00pm. Come and hear Danny Shot, Elliot Katz, Joe Weil, Bobby Tiedeken, Chevisa, and me. It's the most goofy, ego-centric reading of the year. Thankfully the bar is open. God bless poetry! Adios Saddam! Hail, hail rock and roll, and goodnight to James Brown! I feel good. To quote Was Not Was, "I feel better than James Brown".
Hello 2007!
Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:50PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Christmas, New Years, and beyond](#)
- ClaudiaHayesHagar

April 27, 2008

I have started from the beginning and found this a good bookmark for your most recent post on jfk. I saw his and Jackie's images today at the warhol exhibit in bright neon ink and grainy black.
i loved this poem. you paint well.

Gerald Ford and the Seventies

[Sunday, December 31, 2006](#)

I've spent the past several days reading about President Ford and his presidency. It brings back fond memories of the CIA and Nicaragua and secret incursions. Not to mention Gulags and long range nuclear missiles and spies. Oh, what a time! I remember when I was in college several of my friends were members of the Socialist Workers Party. They all used to spend most of their time debating who among them was a CIA mole.
Ha, what sort of great, powerful government would investigate a bunch of schmoos who

couldn't organize a checkers game much less a great labor movement. Years later it turns out the government actually had an informant in their dumb little group. Duh! It was the moment I realized our government was as lunkheaded as my rabble rousing knucklehead friends. They wanted to organize the downtrodden workers. Workers with vacation homes in Belmar and a boat in the driveway and two kids (probably them) in college. For some odd reason they thought this country was Russia in 1917.

What a time!

Anyway, this all brought to mind a series of poems I've been working on about a new friend of mine. His name is Mario Infirmé and he works for a government group. Unnamed. Here's one from Mario...

Mario Infirmé Talks About Secrets

Mario Infirmé comes up behind me at the bar.
He whispers in my ear.
He says, tell no one your secrets.
He says, tell no one the truth.
He says, if you do you must cut out their tongue
and if you cut out their tongue you must cut off their head.
If you cut off their head you must bury it in a secret place.
If you bury the head in a secret place you must set a fire to cover
your crime, you must burn the place to the ground.
If you burn it to the ground then you must return and salt the earth.

If you salt the earth then you should return and build a market.
In the market you may sell drinks,
cool lemonade, ice cold beer, shots of whiskey.
When people come to buy the drinks tell them stories.
Tell them about murder.
Tell them about love.
Tell them anything but the truth but don't stop talking.

They will return, over and over, and you will run out of stories.
Then you may tell them the truth.
By then you will be old and no one will remember you or the reason
you are speaking.
There will be no reason to cut out their tongues.
Lie down at night then.
Lie down and dream.
When you dream you will dream of your crimes and they will be sweet.
Devour them.
Lies and crimes and secrets.
They are all you have.

I turn and Mario has left the bar.

Let me know if you like my friend and his stories. There are a few more I've already

committed to paper and he comes to meet me often, late at night. He's not a nice man but he likes his whiskey and he tells a good story.

Good night world

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:03AM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Gerald Ford and the Seventies](#)

- Claudia

April 04, 2008

yum.

[Re: Gerald Ford and the Seventies](#)

- Anonymous

November 21, 2009

Zithromax is a macrolide antibiotic drug class, patients will be issued a type of bacterial infection. The drug is the active ingredient azithromycin helps fight many different kinds of infections, the right of the airways to the skin and the ear of sexually transmitted Ones. This medicine is also prescribed for the treatment of middle ear infections, pneumonia, tonsillitis and sore throats in children.

There are many generic versions of Zithromax is now available on the market, with most pharmacies stocking more than one version. There is not much to compare between these different drugs, which would be only the information you find altered even be on the manufacturer. When you buy generic Zithromax online, it could either be in pill, tablet or capsule form, according to the manufacturer. It is also a suspension for child patients.

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The New Years Reading at the Bowery Poetry Club

Monday, January 01, 2007

What a wonderful place is the Bowery Poetry Club. What a disastrous, torturous day is this reading. Hour upon hour of poetry. Good, bad, smug, political, dull, overlong, read in the face of alarms and sirens. Why read one poem when you can read two. Or three? I was supposed to read between 6 & 8 but asked Danny to intercede and get me moved up. He was successful.

My friend Joe Weil was not and at some point came up to me around five cursing his fate and stormed off into the preternaturally warm global warming oil industry friendly Saddam hanging streets of New York. Oh, I think the verse got the better of me.

He just stomped outside and bitched and then came stumping back in. The world needs more Joe Weils and less bad poets. In fact if Joe Weil was president we would never have invaded Iraq. We might not have done much else but you got to take what you can get.

I'm kind of being a little mean here. I heard a bunch of funny, cool poems. Taylor Meade, an 82 year old man, was more hip than anyone in the room. Regie Cabico and his crew of actors were funny and cool and Eve Packer did a nice tribute to James Brown. Steve Cannon was thankfully and blessedly brief. The world's greatest poetry critic.

My friend Karen asked for more Mario... here's a new one:

Mario Infirmes Takes a Drink

Mario Infirmes is at the end of the bar.
It's two in the afternoon and there's no one
In the bar but the bartender, Mario, and an old guy reading the Post.
Mario says, sit down, sit down.
I sit down and he says what's your pleasure?
I say bourbon he says one turkey on the rocks
And then he leans forward and says
What do you know?

I say Mario I know almost nothing.
He says, that's what everyone says.
Everyone says they no almost nothing
But in the end they know everything.
He says while I was in the bureau we interviewed dozens
Of people who knew nothing but time
after time they gave it all up.

They knew things they'd forgotten,
Things they'd put in the back of their minds.
He says that with a little gentle persuasion
They could be led to the truth and it was always
Dirty, always incriminating, always
and here he takes a sip,
always what we were looking for.

Take the Rosenbergs.
Maybe they didn't know shit about the bomb.
But they gave us dozens who did and if
they'd had a half a brain they could have walked
but instead they take the pipe.
and still they told us all they knew.

People want to talk says Mario.
Even me.
I hate having no one to talk to, no one to hear my stories.
Oh yeah, I can sit in this bar and fill your ears with shit.
But it's just that.
It's just shit.
I can't tell the truth because I don't know anything either.
I know I want to talk but there's nothing to say.

So I sit here in this dusty bar sipping shitty whiskey
and think about what I would say if I were asked.
Talk of bombs and guns and deals and broads but
really most of the time I was just an accountant
poring over the books of men like me.
Men who thought they knew everything but really
really knew absolutely nothing.

I thought I knew who was right and who was wrong.
I thought I could look in a man's eye and know
he was dirty but it turns out I was the one who was
dirty and now I'm in this dirty bar drinking
with you and feeling sorry for myself.
Who knew?
Who knows anything anymore.
All we know is what we're told and no one
tells a good story anymore.

That's all for now. Sleep tight America:)
Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:14PM (-05:00)

The Plight of Writers

Monday, January 08, 2007

It's the new year and everything is sort of back to normal. Luis is normal. Willa is normal. Peter is slightly perverted. We've hired two men who seem decent and hard working. Bob is pleasant and thoughtful and the customers are relatively quiet. In the land of poetry I did my time at the New Years Day gig and now am on a hiatus till February when the poetry mill kicks in again. But at least now I have a good car to drive to gigs in and a book and even new poems.

Today I went a googling and found that Bob Holman on his about.com poetry space had made mention of my book in his summary of poetry in 2006. I was flattered and delighted. Here is what Bob said:

"The joke, of course, is that Jack Wiler thinks his life is not fun so he invites the reader to have fun, Fun Being Me (CavanKerry). The fun is no irony. It is the glint of real that sparks every line in his new book, in his face, in his decision to live it straight, not fancy. Wiler is one of our most underrated poets, and if you haven't read him yet, here you go. In this book he even broaches his time with AIDS, a topic till now verboten for him. The bleakness, the searing truth of it, stops you cold. But, as he says about his brother (us) in "The Taste of Beer in Late Fall," "He needs to know. / I need to tell." "

That's not too shabby. Most of us poor schmoos dwell in the outer darkness wondering whether anyone reads our work or likes it or whether it's any good and it's always a rare treat to hear such high praise from a man who knows of what he speaks. Bob has done yeoman work in the trenches of poetry for decades. Besides being an accomplished and brilliant writer in his own right he's also responsible for nearly singlehandedly saving poetry in NY. What a nice thing to have a man like him say such nice things about me.

More than that, how nice is it to know so many great poets and to have heard them over the years.

Performances rich or silly or dull and desperate but always from men and women who cared about the word. Where would one go to pick the best ones? To say this was a night so bright that poetry owned the world. I must have had the chance to hear dozens of nights like that. Thanks to folks like Bob, and Miguel Algarin, Danny Shot, Andy Clausen, Eliot Katz, Joe Weil, Jim Haba, Bruce Isaacson, and a hundred more, a thousand more. So, let's make 2007 a year of words and verse and cantankerous, verbose meanderings. Blessed be the poets for they shall never inherit anything. They wouldn't know what to do with it even if they did.

Let's make this the year we all try to be Jack Micheline or Allen Ginsberg or Gregory Corso or Charles Bukowski or Elizabeth Bishop or Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath. Let's be mad crazy saints. What the fuck, it can't hurt. Ha ha.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:49PM (-05:00)

On Being a Poet

Thursday, January 11, 2007

Maybe some of you have the same problem I have. What does it mean to be a poet in 2007? Of course, it's the same dumb question we probably had in 1978 but I'd like to think about it a little. Poets are really marginalized nincompoops. Even the best of them or the most famous dwell in a world that most normal people could care less about. We spend our time writing poems that we hope will be important, or change peoples minds or whatever the fuck each of us thinks poetry can do but the simple fact is most people in the US of A could give a rats ass about poetry.

They read it in high school cuz they had to. Maybe they wrote some poetry when they were young and full of passion but then they got jobs and went to work and poetry receded into the background. Some of us continue to write and sweat shit about readings or getting our ditties published or our books or whether we're any good at all. We get almost zero feedback except in small groups from other nincompoops just like ourselves. So why do we do it? We may be the most marginalized art form in America outside of quilting but at least quilts cost a bunch of dough.

So what should this shit do? Why do we write it? What does it matter if it's good or bad or indifferent? Why go to grad school or take workshops or have conferences with teachers of poetry? What do we want to happen next? I have book of poetry I'm proud of but quite honestly it might as well be a math textbook written in 1958. With the exception that at least a bunch of kids in 1958 had to read the math textbook.

So?

We all admire or find work we find of value. It makes us feel in a way that no other art form makes us feel. It is exciting and vibrant and real but no one and I repeat no one but us reads it. It's like being a jazz musician in a country where no one listens to music.

I think we all want to change this. I look at efforts like the Dodge Festival or the National Book Foundation or the thousands of websites devoted to poetry or the even more numerous university and small presses committed to the art and I see a real desire by poets to be heard and read but it seems to be read and heard only by other poets.

I read my poetry out loud and the only people in the audience are other poets waiting to read in the open. This sucks.

Poetry can be more. I'd like to see more poets more actively involved in making poetry a living art form. That doesn't mean just hip hop for the kids or a festival or what ever the fuck people come up with. It means a conscientious effort by poets to encourage people to hear and read good writing. This kind of means submerging your own desires for some marginal fame to a greater goal.

I think people love poetry when they hear it out loud. I think they like poetry when it's clear and part of their lives. I think poetry got involved in an argument back in the 30's about the bourgeoisie and the common people and that it lost its way. I think that for a couple minutes in the sixties and seventies it seemed poised to be a real art form again but sank under the weight of ego.

Poets don't always give a fuck about anything but themselves. This is nonsense. Who cares about your stupid problems or your ride to work or your backyard. Quite honestly, who really thinks that a poem ranting about George Bush is going to have more effect than organizing a real political movement against his imperial presidency? Poetry can galvanize societies that are oppressed and marginalized but in the US of A that is not the case for the bulk of the poets going for MFA's. They are comfortable middle class folks talking about their comfortable middle class political opinions. Do that at the polls. Register to vote. Vote often. Go to town hall.

Your poems should be real and true and dare I say it? Engaging. Like a novel. Like a great painting or movie. Find a way to make poetry part of regular life. Read in your town at the local library. Read poems you didn't write but that you love. Encourage people to read work you love. Don't read your work out loud unless it's good or unless you're in an arena where that's the point. Don't bore people. Leave them wanting more. Be a savant. Be a prophet. Be a savior. Be a sinner. But please don't be dull and pedestrian.

Think of Larkin's poem about his parents. Any chump on the planet can appreciate that. He's bare and naked and angry but anyone can get what he's talking about. "Whose woods these are I think I know"...everybody in New Hampshire or Vermont or Maine knew just what the fuck Frost was talking about. He wasn't talking down to people or lecturing them or hectoring them. He was giving them a place of their own.

Well, that's it for tonight.

Here's one more from Mario

Mario Discusses the Roots of Information

I've been in the bar for several hours.

It's late afternoon, mid-winter.

The streets are slush filled.

The sidewalks are mountains of blackened snow run through with dog shit, old banana peels, tissues, and slack, used condoms.

Some ugly, arctic decay.

Mario comes in.

As usual I'm not expecting him.

I smell his Pall Mall before I hear him.

Mario Infirme says, "Don't shit where you eat".

I say, "huh?"

I say, "I'd never shit where I eat."

He says, "everyone says they don't but everybody does."

He says, "I know because I spend days sifting through their shit.
Reading it like turgid tea leaves.
Breathing deep, clearing the mind, till I can understand its secrets.
Because everybody's business is my business...our business; as it should be.
He says that everyone's shit is a little different but in the end,
shit is shit."
"Like you," he says.
"That broad at the blood bank in '79 or your cleaning lady in '88.
You might not shit where you eat now but you did once upon a time.
You will again."

"Your shit is a river that runs to your heart.
Once I read your shit I know your heart.
Once I know your heart I know you.
Once I know you I own you.
Ask Hoover.
Ask Kennedy .
Ask any Tom, Dick, or Harry.
Ask your brother.
Ask your priest.
Ask the guy selling dirty kebabs on the corner.
Ask that fool.
Ask the first Bush or the second.
Nobody's shit doesn't stink.
That family has shit that reeks to heaven but just because it reeks
doesn't mean it can't have purpose.

That's my job.
Making something out of it.
I've watched men shit their pants just listening while I told them.
It's a gift.
Telling men stories about their own shit.
You should try it once in a while."

He stubs out his cigarette, drains his whiskey, and walks like a ghost into the twilight.

Hope you like it. Sleep tight. Pray for our boys on all the shores they guard. Pray for your family and friends. Enjoy this life you've been given...it will end soon enough:)
Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:51PM (-05:00)

Eagles

Saturday, January 13, 2007

This blog was originally designed for me to talk about the Eagles in real time during games.

It had nothing to do with poetry.

Right now is Johanna's birthday party so my house is filled with transexuals and gayboys who could care less about football but it's half time and the Eagles are up by 1.

My brother Ted is probably almost having a coronary.

Mick could care less.

It's a tough match up. The Saints are the most dynamic team in the NFI and have a lot of heart.

Fuck them.

Go Eagles.

More to come....

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:47PM (-05:00)

No Fuck the Eagles

Sunday, January 14, 2007

Well the Saints were a hungry dynamic team. They kicked the Eagles up and down the field. It's a sad day in Philly.

Ah well, there's always next year.

At least now I have a team to root for on the way to the Super Bowl.

Go Saints!

No thoughts on poetry today. Johanna's party ended at 4:20am. I got up walked the dogs and now am going back to bed.

Sleep tight America, don't let the bedbugs bite!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:41AM (-05:00)

Fun Being Me & Stuff

Monday, January 15, 2007

Well today it is a little fun being me. On Friday my friend Barry Seiler sent me a note congratulating me on having "Fun Being Me" picked by Bob Holman on About.com as one of the years ten best books of poems. I'm not usually comfortable with bragging but this kind of made me feel very, very good. Here's what Bob said about the book:

7) Fun Being Me: Poems, by Jack Wiler

(CavanKerry Press, Ltd., 2006) The joke, of course, is that Jack Wiler thinks his life is not fun so he invites the reader to have fun. The fun is no irony. It is the glint of real that sparks every line in his new book, in his face, in his decision to live it straight, not fancy. Wiler is one of our most underrated poets, and if you haven't read him yet, here you go. In this book he even broaches his time with AIDS, a topic till now verboten for him. The bleakness, the searing truth of it, stops you cold. But, as he says about his brother (us) in "The Taste of Beer in Late Fall," "He needs to know. / I need to tell."

And here's a link to the page so you can see all the other books he liked and hopefully buy one or two.

<http://poetry.about.com/od/poetrybooks/tp/bestbooks2006.htm>

We all need the dough and all of us need the shot in the arm. So thanks to Bob for his kind words and for honoring the work. I'm deeply grateful and honored. Thanks also to

About.com for even having a page and place for poetry.
Hopefully now I'll write more poems to justify this hype:)
Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:58AM (-05:00)

Up In The Old House

Monday, January 15, 2007

I'm reading "Up in the Old House" for what must be the 30th time. I'm reading the parts about Old Man Flood and the Fulton Street Market. My company did pest control in the market for decades. I could never figure out what we did because at 8am they pulled up stakes and moved on. What exactly were we doing. Anyway, I like Old Man Flood and the parts about him make me want to eat oysters, which I hate. But they reminded me of old men and women I knew years ago in New Brunswick. They were old and drank too much (which is putting it mildly) and they were like Mr. Flood without any passion or joy or words.

Here is a poem I just wrote about my friend Tommy, Bang Bang, Barrowman and New Brunswick, circa 1982.

Tommy Barrowman

I meet other people in bars beside Mario.
Tommy Barrowman for instance.
Tommy was born to a well bred family in Skillman
His sister endowed a library in her will.

Tommy was a drunk.
He was small and he was incontinent.
He had spent his youth traveling the world.
Merchant Marine.
One of the other men at the bar told me he and Tommy used to off load
vessels in Persia.

Tommy, Thomas, Tom Barrowman called himself Bang bang.
He'd say, "I'm Bang Bang Tommy Barrowman
what do you think about that"
He'd come into the bar off the short bus from the senior lunch program.
At the beginning of the month he and his friends drank like kings.
At the end of the month they drank like bums.
Really, all month long they drank the same.

Tommy listened to late night talk shows.
Tommy pissed and shit in his pants.
Tommy lived on the top floor of an SRO.
Tommy was blind and diabetic and a worthless hunk of shit.

Tommy said, "I'm Bang Bang Tommy Barrowman, what do you think of that"
Tommy's friend Ora Nixon was a fat giant drunken woman.

She'd come into the bar shortly after Tommy.
Her family had been rich as well.
There is a part of Edison NJ called Nixon.
In the 20's or 40's it blew up in a horrible munitions accident.
Or sabotage.
Ora sabotaged the Nixon name in her own way.

So there we all are at the bar.
Tommy and Ora and me.
Tommy is banging his shot glass and talking and talking.
Ora is flirting with the bartender.
Which is scary because she shit in her pants and she
weighs easily 300 pounds.

I'm watching the rich scions of the 30's wasting their lives
in an old mans bar in New Brunswick New Jersey.
I'd ask them to tell me a story but I know they can't.
They don't remember shit about Persia or Nixon.
They were young once and angry and all that youth and anger
brought them here.

Tommy writes me poems.
They all rhyme.
None of them make any sense.

Well, that's the poem. I used to have Tommy's poems but I think they're all gone. Like me
or you in a few years.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:25PM (-05:00)

Me and Rats

Saturday, January 20, 2007

Some of you know I worked once upon a time on rat farm. Specifically I worked at West Jersey Biological Supply for Dewey Parker, my friend Suzy's dad. Dewey's rat farm was a supply house for high schools, colleges, and research facilities in the Northeast. He raised white lab rats primarily. He once told me they were pedigreed white rats...but more about that later. He also did some toxicology testing for the beauty products industry testing shampoos, etc on live rabbits and brokered preserved animal parts for use by classes in various schools (sharks, lambs eyes, and on and on). Periodically he'd have hamsters or goats but mostly it was white rats and mice.

I got the job because Ralph Leeds quit. My friend Chuck Holstein was working there and asked Mr. Parker if I could have the job. Dewey had me come to the house and we went out to the building with the rats. It smelled mostly of sawdust, sanitizing agent, and a vague urine scent. While he was discussing my duties a woman and her young son walked in with a rat in a cage. The boys pet. It was sick and they took it to Dewey to see what he could do. He said it was probably going to die but if they'd like he'd give it a safe place to live, a clean cage, food, water and comfort till the end. Followed by a dignified

burial. They thanked him and left Dewey, me, and the rat behind. I looked out the window from the second floor and saw them about to get in their car. Just then Dewey pulled the rat out of the cage by its tail, spun it several times and whacked it on the end of table. Then he tossed it in the trash. Well, that's done, he said. That was my first day on the job. I lasted about a month. It turns out I was allergic to the hay the rabbits bedded down in and got asthma and had to quit but I learned a great deal about rats and work.

Anyway, you probably all know I'm an exterminator now. I send people out to kill rats, though usually not as directly as Dewey and I did back in the day. I've also written recently about my love for Joseph Mitchell's "Up in the Old House". I'd forgotten it's long section on rats. It's of a piece with Robert Sullivan's book "Rats" and in many ways takes place in the same byways of old Manhattan. I was interviewed by Kaz Janowski of BBC Radio for a companion piece on the book. I expounded over a couple pints of beer about rats and found myself on the radio at length. You can still listen to my ramblings if you google my name and rats and the bbc.

Finally to bring this little piece to a merciful ending you know I recently visited the Mutter Museum. While there I noted it was funded by the Wistar Institute. I went back and reread "Rats" and noted that the great rat catcher of London, Jack Black, had bred a highly specialized breed of albino white rats and sold them for quite a pretty penny to the Wistar Institute. The Mutter Museum is associated with the Wistar Institute. I called my friend Suzy on the phone and asked her for Dewey's phone number in Nevada. She asked, why? and when I said I needed to know what kind of rats he bred, she said Wistar, he bred Wistar rats.

I've probably done this story before but in less detail. What I'm trying to talk about is the long trail of coincidence and mystery that life makes as it moves along. Where to begin? My name is Jack. I kill rats. I write about rats. I killed the white rat offspring of history's greatest rat catcher. His name was Jack. I was interviewed by the BBC and knew of none of this except how to kill rats. Mr. Mitchell gives less than a line to laboratory rats, doesn't even know they're descended from royalty (Jack Black was the Queen's rat catcher!). Mr. Sullivan knows more but only cares about the ones in his alley. I am not afraid of rats. They're fairly easy to kill. I'm fairly easy to kill. Think about it...rat spelled backward is tar...which means nothing.

But all together it's a great, rich stew on a cold, snowy day. I suggest you pick up a copy of "Rats" or "Up in the Old House", cook up some stew, settle down with a pint of good stout and read about New Yorks most unheralded denizens. I'm going to.

On tap for tomorrow: Why we shouldn't listen to poets talking about poetry

Posted by Jack Wiler at 12:14PM (-05:00)

Poets and Poetry

Monday, January 22, 2007

Okay, I said I'd write about why you shouldn't listen to poets talking about how they write. Here's why. They're lying. Well, maybe not lying, but making it up. They're talking about the act after the fact. Someone asks them how they do what they do and they come up with an answer. Whenever someone asks you a question you're supposed to answer and poets are always flattered that anyone asks them anything so they answer.

But really, it's all postscript. While they're writing they have no clue. They're writing. Later, they're editing but that's not writing it's just part of making shit look right. How and why

they choose what they choose is locked inside them in secret places they may not even know about.

It's always good to hear poems in process. It's always good to hear poets read their work and see how it changes and watch the moves they make and the changes they make but why they made them and when aren't things set in stone. It's true when you're learning how to write people help you through this process. Or hector you through it. Or badger you. But once you understand how to put a poem together you just put it together. Oh, you might reach out to people that know your work and ask their opinions but your responses to that are largely instinctual and based on past responses.

I know I write something and if I think it's good but not done I'll send it to people I trust for comments. They say stuff. Sometimes I just do everything they say. Sometimes I do part of what they say. But honestly I never think much about the reasons. The poem has a place and a voice. I say it. There's grammar and structure and words and stuff but everything else is me and my cluttered world and I'm never entirely sure exactly what I intended.

But when I'm done and you ask me how and why I did what I did I'll give you an answer but it's a mishmash of reality. It's more like asking someone who just woke from a dream asking them the structure of the dream. To them it makes perfect sense but as they become more aware, more part of the world the structure disintegrates and they're left with just the dream. Odd and compelling but only a dream.

Last night I dreamed I was at a poetry/food festival. We were at a pre festival meeting of the faculty lying on surfboards in a lake. The leader of the faculty, Howard Levy, was asking for our thoughts on where the festival should go and I had a million ideas. After all, what a great marketing concept: The Food Network meets Longfellow. I sort of woke from the dream and sank into a new dream where Howard had just recently passed away. Apparently he'd been gravely ill throughout the entire process. We were all stunned. A great loss.

Then I was with my friends Danny and Eliot talking about the death of a poet from the East Village. He was a lousy poet with a bohemian schtick that sustained a meager career in a marginalized world. I told them who gives a fuck. He was a nice guy but his work sucked. They were appalled. I said, come on, this guy wasn't Bukowski! He was wasn't Jack Micheline! He was a near psychotic street person that just showed up week after week year after year reading the same scribbled verses on index cards to anyone that would listen and none of them had anything to recommend them. I said a poet should be someone who builds something real and solid and they said oh yeah, what about Frank Lloyd Wright! And I said Falling Water was a shitty building that is falling down and was leaky and nearly uninhabitable and they were really angry at me. I realized I'd chosen a lousy metaphor and was doing everything that I could to extricate myself from my own trap. They just got madder and madder at me for my high hattedness.

You could at this point, mention Moondog or Antler or even Hal Sirowitz as poets who transcend their schtick and take it to a place that is glorious. You could say, Jack you bourgeois idiot! You'd be right.

It was all just a dream. But it did get me to thinking about a cruise theme idea: Poets & Food & Booze. Travel the Caribbean with Mario Batali, Pedro Pietri, and shit loads of great wine. It might not generate any great poems but everyone would eat better than they usually do and they'd be in a better climate and the booze would be free!

One can dream.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:08PM (-05:00)

Today's Post is just a pome

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

Praises for the Insect and Mammalian Dead

I had a nice day today.
No one cursed me.
No one asked me odd questions.
I went to work a bit late.
I checked my mail and answered some of my correspondents
and then settled back to see what else might happen.

It was cold today.
Not as cold as yesterday but
I have the feeling it will be colder tomorrow.
My friend Jane's boyfriend died suddenly from liver disease.
This should not have been a shock but it was.
To her.
To his children
Everyone is angry at everyone else at a man who lived life
on his terms and died on his terms and not the way you're expected
to die.

It will be cold thank God for several more months.
Men will stumble up to me on 9th avenue and ask for money.
They will say it is for food.
Perhaps it is.
People will call me to solve difficult problems involving
mice and rats and other pests.
They will be arrogant and they will be willing but they will be
desperate.

They will be asking me for answers that aren't simple.
I will fail in my explanations.
I will offer biological and social explanations but in their fear,
in their worry, they will dismiss them.
To the people that I talk to everything I say is stupid.

Like everything we say to a lover we think is leaving.
Don't go.
Don't I do this or don't I do that.
Didn't I buy you this or didn't I comfort you then.

It's all stupid.
My consolation and explanations are all hollow.
Real.
But hollow.

You have mice. You have them because you're a human in a densely populated region of the world populated by a rich mess of other humans. Not everyone gives a shit about mice like you do. Not everyone lies awake worrying about the bedbugs biting. Some of them come from places where the bedbugs are like flies. Some of them come from places where if you raise up your head someone else will lop it off.

Cherish your mice, your rats, your roaches, your bedbugs!
Love them as you love your sons and daughters.
They are your children!
They live with you as much as you with them.
They huddle in little clutches terrified of destruction and they don't even know about terrorists or nuclear devastation or satellites.
The little bugs and mice are the meek.
They wait patient under your stove for your castoff crumbs.
For your drops of water.
For the condensate on your pipes.
They are your poorest children.
They have no other home but yours.
You wretched misers of capital.
You own your apartments!
You own your lawns!
You own your skin and your hair and your sons and daughters!
But all of you muddle under the same dull January sky.
Each of you struggles for a bit of food, a spot of conversation,
the day your boss says, oh, what a nice idea.

This is the time to consider what will come.
Spring and rebirth and a thousand mice and cockroaches.
Ants and termites and love.
You'll strut down the avenue and duck into little cafes and they'll feed off your leavings happy as pets.
They are your children.

They will grow strong and happy and democratic.
They will feed at the common table.
They will join with the bacteria and the viruses and the multitude of plagues to usher us into the world of paradise.
Say all power and all praises to our Children!
Grant them health and joy!
Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:40PM (-05:00)

Groundhog Day

Friday, February 02, 2007

Well, yesterday was Groundhog Day. A chance to find out how rodents react to the sun and a reference to my favorite movie. That's not entirely true. Groundhog Day with Bill Murray and Chris Elliot and all my dumb friends is not really my favorite movie. I have dozens of favorite movies. Casablanca, Duck Soup, The Shop Around the Corner, Swingtime, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, any movie with Jet Li, ET, who fucking knows. I love movies. But there are those movies that I will watch no matter what and weep copiously no matter what and Groundhog Day looms large among them.

It wasn't on.

Not on any channel.

My friend Willa said what the fuck is up with that? They show it all through Christmas week but today no Bill Murray? No angels in the snow? No chance at redemption at the beginning of the stupidest month of all? A month that seems to be designed by chumps. You can barely remember how to spell it. It's short. It's cold. It takes longer than any month in the world except maybe May in San Francisco but I don't live in San Francisco I live in the New York metropolitan area and it's the living, breathing, embodiment of hell. No. Purgatory.

Purgatory. A lamented Catholic state that should be brought back with bells on. Purgatory. It's just cold. It rains. It snows. You don't have any fun. Oh, there's the Super Bowl, a horrible media event concocted by chowderheads in the NFL that subverts everything great about football. They put it in a dome or the sun for God's sake! Football from late November to January should have snow and ice and fog and rain and men covered in mud looking foolish. No dice.

There's Presidents Day. A made up holiday to get out of two good holidays celebrating two great Presidents. Washington and Lincoln and gluing them together so they are joined at the hip with Grover Cleveland Alexander and Franklin Pierce and George Bush and US Grant who was a good general but basically ate shit as a president.

So all we do in February, unless you live in Arizona and only old people and curmudgeons and people from "the new southwest" live in Arizona, is freeze your fucking balls off and wipe freezing sleet and rain and snow off your face slogging to work every fucking day of a month that is only technically sort of sometimes 28 days long but seems to last till the end of time. Sometime in early January in New York Willa was complaining. She was coughing and sneezing and it was 50 degrees. She said it's "the bad air". Well, the motherfucking bad air is gone for good and even though the ice caps are melting and no one will be sunning themselves on the slopes of resorts in Switzerland in 75 years it's still just like winter always looked. Nasty. Brutish. Short.

They have Fashion Week now in New York but all I can see is armies of down. Men and women swathed in immense cloaks of puffy material sniffing and trudging slowly in brutish weather.

You'd think I could at least watch Groundhog Day. You'd think I could get some small chuckles when Bill Murray doesn't step in the puddle or when he hugs the oafish insurance salesman but you'd be wrong. All the tv programmers in the world are thinking about the great commercials for the Super Bowl. They're talking happily about K Fed or whatever dopey dot com company is willing to bet the farm that they'll drum up biz by being mildly controversial while we're all downing beers and falling asleep before Peyton

Manning crushes the Bears and snow devours the world.

February deserves better. Put the Super Bowl on at 1:00pm. Let the Bears win on a snowy day in Soldier Field. Let Bill Murray hear Cher just one more time and please God, please, find a way to change the wind patterns around Madison Square Garden so that it doesn't resemble the Antarctic even in April. If we can't get that then I'll settle for Jesus coming back for the resurrection; but that seems a way off too.

With luck and seven or eight weeks my opinions and the global climate will have changed. Please God hasten spring. Oh. Punxsutawney Phil didn't see his shadow which means the bad air will be back relatively soon.

In a better world the savior would have been born on February 15th or thereabout and you would get holiday gifts and light trees and treat each other with kindness. In this world we have to wait till he was crucified or whatever and it's Spring. Just a little while. Courage.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:42PM (-05:00)

Cold, cold, and then colder more

Monday, February 05, 2007

I'm sure that most of you that are reading this are freezing right now. Or sitting in houses burning up as much gas and oil and electricity as you can to fend off the cold.

I know I am.

Johanna, being from El Salvador, is no big fan of chilly weather. Today she decided to go to Bergenline Avenue in Union City to a Botanica. For those of you that don't know what I'm talking about a botanica is a store that sells voodoo stuff. Or Santeria. Or offerings to the saints. Or candles. Anyway, I started getting calls about how cold it was about ten seconds after she left the house. They continued through the whole two hours she was gone.

I of course was already intimately familiar with the chilly weather. First Milo and Cookie had to pee and poop at 6:15am when it was 7 degrees or -15 with the windchill. Then I had to walk from 6th ave to our offices. See any earlier post about the unnatural weather conditions created by the evil architects who created Madison Square Garden, 1 Penn Plaza, and 33rd St. You could probably leave off 33rd street. The schmuck that designed that just knew the wind would whip in off the river like a whip but it does that everywhere till you get above Lincoln Center.

I arrived at the small but cozy offices of Acme Exterminating to find everyone wearing their jackets and gloves and hats. I wasn't entirely surprised because this is a long-standing tradition at Acme. No heat. When I first returned in 2004 on my third day the temperature dropped to like 7 and the boiler failed. We spent three days shaking in the cold. Our boss bought us the little handwarmer packs you put in your pockets and shoes. They were relatively ineffectual.

Eventually he got us electric heaters. They were sort of effectual.

So I was ready for this.

I'm not entirely certain I did any real work today. I spent most of the day huddled over my heater like some 21st century Bob Cratchit. All of us were sore at days end from hunching over.

The walk back to the PATH was okay. The wind was at my back most of the way except right by the Garden where it goes in six directions. I got home and drank some wine and

ate chipotle Welsh Rarebit. I'm tired and a little inebriated.
I don't have to work tomorrow. I'm going to see my Dr to find out if I'll be around a bit longer. I'll spend most of the day in a warm car. I'm hoping to go for a run midday to keep up with my health.
They say it will be like this for three more days.
I need a job where I can travel for my health.
Four days in Aruba would be nice right about now.
I would welcome the opportunity to discuss rodent control measures over a rum punch watching the sun dip into the Caribbean. I did get to see the sun set over the Palisades as I got off the PATH.
In closing let me say you should check out Teresa Carson's great poems on the site, buy my book, and find a way to get me some slimy gig talking about poetry in a near tropical climate. Anyone who can help with this will get a bonus. This is not a joke.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:37PM (-05:00)

Poetry Magazine John Barr and the World

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

Hi all,
I read an account today about the tribulations of Poetry Magazine getting boatloads of cash and everyone bitching about John Barr saying poetry doesn't talk to the present. Duh.
You're upset? Please say no. It's a good thing that someone gave us dough to do what we do and it's good that that opens up debate on what we do. Who gives a flying fuck about what the founder of the mag cared about when she started it. Life was different then. Poetry had a different place in the world of America.
So this is my direct address to John Barr:
John,
There are poets already in the US who write poetry that is accessible, powerful, real and compelling in a variety of styles. Reach out to them. Find a way to bring them under your tent. Poetry is at it's best when it doesn't give a fuck about audience but connects deeply with the audience.
Ginsberg, Auden, Eliot, Frost, and ninety million others. Reach out to poets that care and not to poets who care to publish.
Print is nice. Audience is better.
People need to hear the roar and natter and quiet of poetry. They need our diverse and stupid views and if they have a way to find it they will respond.
God bless Dana Goia and John Barr. Great men who care about the art, not the artist.
They may be dumb chuckleheads and in fact they are but we could all use their cash.
You can make fun of Billy Collins but the man writes poetry people hear and love and it doesn't suck.
He cares about his art and his audience and his soul. Oh, is that so bad?
For every Billy Collins there's a Henry Rollins.
Open the tent.
Make it a real show.
Invite everyone in and show them the magic.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:49PM (-05:00)

Cornelia Street Reading

Thursday, February 15, 2007

Well, I've got my first reading since Bruce Weber's New Years Day gig. I've got to admit I'm a little worried. I haven't read out loud to anyone but Cookie and Milo and Johanna in over a month. More than that I've got concerns about material. I'm going to read some new work. I'll be reading from Fun Being Me because it's my child but I have new poems that I want to hear out loud. I'm hoping to read 3 poems with Mario Infirme. It's got me nervous cuz they're not my normal schtick. Oh well, stick your neck out right?

I hope you can join me tm'w. The room is nice, the open doesn't suck, and I'll be happy as a clam trying to sell my book. Stop by, buy me a drink and listen to Mario Infirme's life lessons.

Ciao

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:19PM (-05:00)

Wenonah, now and then

Friday, February 16, 2007

Starting today I'm going to be writing a series of pieces on my hometown, Wenonah. Bear with me. Some of you know a little about my hometown, some a great deal, some more than me. These are my memories of a town that made me.

In order to talk about my town let me say this. I'm going to begin briefly with today, then go back to my first days in Wenonah. It's like a time machine without any distortion except my faulty memory. All of this is past. None is prologue.

I was last in Wenonah about six months ago but more meaningfully three years ago. I left for the second time on January 10th 2004. I arrived the second time October 31st 2001. When I arrived I was fresh from the hospital. I weighed 90 pounds. I still had some hair but that would soon end. I moved into the first floor of a house at number 4 South Monroe Avenue. My landlords were Rachel and Ralph Knisell. They lived next to me in a house on Mantua Avenue. Mantua Avenue is the main street of my town. They were devout Methodists. My apartment was one bedroom, a den, a living room, a bathroom, and a kitchen. I had access to a basement with a washer dryer. When I moved, my brother Mick lived across the street in another apartment on Mantua Avenue. He lived there with his two children, Louise and Doug. The second floor of my building was occupied by a man I'd known since childhood, David O'Connor. His family lived one block away on the corner of Jefferson and Mantua Avenue. I grew up two blocks away on the corner of Lincoln and Mantua Avenue. I knew almost everyone in town.

They all knew me.

The town was built, for the most part in 1888, 1890. A second section was developed in the early fifties by a man named Sinnott. One smaller section was finished in the latter part of the 1960's. Wenonah is one mile square. It's population has been at or around 2000 since it's founding. It was built originally as a vacation destination around the newly built West Jersey Railroad. It became a bedroom community for people working in Philadelphia very soon after it's founding.

It was and is a town of white middle and upper class Americans.

When I moved there I was recovering from complications of AIDS. I was close to dying.

Obviously I didn't die. When I moved there the first time it was 1958. No one had AIDS. Homosexuals were invisible. Black people were invisible. The town looked remarkably like it did when I moved back in 2001.

In two days we will go back in time to 1958. Buckle up. It's a wild ride.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 12:12AM (-05:00)

How Wenonah is Laid Out

Sunday, February 18, 2007

Wenonah is a small town. Before we join my youthful self in 1958 you should know how it's laid out. It's bisected east and west by the West Jersey Railroad, a now mostly unused railroad line that was in fact the reason the town was built. North and south it's cut in half by Mantua Ave., the main street of Wenonah, which turns into Wenonah Ave. when it rolls into the adjacent town, Mantua. The northern end of town is bordered by Woodbury/Glassboro Road and the southern end by the Mantua Creek which originates in the Delaware, a few miles upstream.

The town is surrounded on the eastern, southern, and western borders by a small woodland area. This area is called the Wenonah Woods and was purchased through a gift by a local naturalist in the early 1970's. Here is a link to the google map of the town: [http://maps.google.com/maps?q=08090+\(Wenonah\)&ie=UTF8&z=13&ll=39.792051,-75.153351&spn=0.066082,0.154495&om=1](http://maps.google.com/maps?q=08090+(Wenonah)&ie=UTF8&z=13&ll=39.792051,-75.153351&spn=0.066082,0.154495&om=1)

Mantua, the town on the southern edge was a largely Italian working class community. Just past Mantua farms stretched for miles and miles. Tomatoes and peaches as far as the eye could see. The northern, eastern, and western edges were part of Deptford Township. Deptford was an amalgam of small settlements and suburban developments that in the 1960's began to grow. The area directly east of Wenonah in Deptford was known to us as Jericho. It was an African American community with long standing roots. When I was young it was mostly working class black people. People in Wenonah didn't talk to people in Jericho. More on that later.

The next town up the road on the eastern side was Woodbury Heights, then Woodbury. My father lived in Woodbury as a teenager and it was this connection that led us to Wenonah. My father moved our family from a Levittown development outside of Philadelphia in 1957, first to a rental property in Woodbury, and then to Wenonah. None of us live in Wenonah now but all of us carry pieces of it with us. You don't really get to leave Wenonah.

We moved to Wenonah just after my Kindergarten year in Woodbury. Our family consisted of my father, John Sr, my mother, Louise, and my brothers, Ted and Mick. More accurately, Edward and Michael. Ted was the baby and Mick was a year and half younger than I. My father's parents helped him with the downpayment on the mortgage and so we came to Wenonah.

We first saw the house about a month before we moved. My father showed us the treehouse in the back, the yard, the neighborhood, the damp basement, the spacious rooms. We were used to moving (this was our third since I'd been born) so it seemed like no biggie. Mick and I were excited. I have no idea what our parents thought. That brings us then to August of 1958 and my first days in Wenonah. You'll have to wait a bit for more. In the meantime if any folks that lived in Wenonah would like to contribute memories or photos let's find a way to link them up. This isn't just my story. I know my

friend Bob Thomas remembers way more than I do and I don't know anything the adults thought about. I hope you'll find a way to mash these things together.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:23PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: How Wenonah is Laid Out](#)

- JimMaddox

October 26, 2007

I met Jack Wiler for the first time in September of 1964, when the kids of 4 small towns were sent to a new high school, Gateway Regional. I knew I liked this guy right away. In the confusion and frustration of being separated from the comfort of hometown friends, here was a stranger I could connect with. Somehow I knew we were kindred spirits, and from reading his blog I now see that all along we grew up with similar emotions and experiences just a few short miles away. We were small town South Jersey boys born in December and molded by our parents with love and discipline. We were not close friends in high school, but we enjoyed each other's company and conversation. Our greatest adventure together took us to the Vietnam war protest in Washington D.C. in the fall of 1969. I don't think we told anyone what we were doing. I forced my brother to give me his railroad pass so Jack could ride free too. For one day at least, we truly were brothers. I don't remember much about what we heard that day, but it was exciting. I will be entering Jack's world where I feel that my life experiences closely parallel his. It seems we were destined to meet in 1964 and become re-acquainted once again. Cheers, old friend.

Wenonah, 1958

Monday, February 19, 2007

So here we are at last. August, 1958. Wenonah, New Jersey. I'm 6 years old, about to turn 7 in December. Mick is 5 and Ted a mere 2. My mother is 31 and my father 30. To me they are old. Grown ups. My grandmother Glading was probably younger than I am right now but she was ancient to me. It's late summer and early evening. Summer evenings in August in Wenonah were hot but Mick and I ventured out of the house to meet our new neighbors.

Our house was located on the corner of West Mantua Ave and South Lincoln Ave. Our address was 206 W. Mantua Ave. S. Lincoln was only two blocks long, ending in the Wenonah Woods, then known to me only as "the woods". It was in the woods that I would spend most of my young life. (here's a link to the Wenonah Woods that I found today: <http://www.geocities.com/woodsofwenonah/index.html>)

Thanks to WW II and the baby boom there were several children my age and Mick's age up and down the street. Our nearest neighbors and the boys and girls who would become our friends were Terry Fleming, Chris DeHart, Gary Condell, Charlie Flitcraft, Robby Cook, Dotty Chattin, and several others we will meet in the months to come. All of our parents were roughly the same age and worked in a variety of trades. My father was a salesman for the gasoline industry, Terry's father was a dentist, Chris' father worked for the family trucking business, Gary's dad worked in the oil refineries along the Delaware. Mr. Flitcraft worked in Philadelphia. I have no idea how he made money. I'm not even sure if Mr. Cook existed. I can't remember him at all but then adults played only a passing role in our lives then. Teachers and other children were the people who made up our

world. Everyone else was just part of a larger mystery. One we learned about bit by bit. This evening Mick and I would meet Gary and Chris, Terry and Charlie. They treated us like the outsiders we were. They wouldn't let us play in any reindeer games. We stood around and watched them play their elaborate games and waited to be invited in; then our mother called us into dinner. We were in bed shortly after. Every night till I was 9 I had to be in bed by 8pm. This was a slow torture because Mick and I would lie in bed and listen to the distant shouts of playing children and the murmur of the TV downstairs, all the time wishing we were older and able to go out like everyone else.

So what was this house like? It was a three story Victorian on a corner lot. All the blocks in Wenonah were the same size; roughly 500' by 300'. Most of the southern part of town and the bulk of the northern part were Victorian homes. They'd been constructed in the late 1880's as a development meant to attract vacationing Philadelphians. The railroad and the nearby man-made lakes were the attraction but it quickly became a bed room community for business men who worked in Philadelphia. Later the oil industry built refineries and tanks along the lower Delaware and the men who worked there came to live in the nearby towns. You'll note I have not once said, men and women. That's because most of the women of that generation stayed home to keep house and raise the children.

At any rate my block had four houses on our side of S Lincoln and of course four on the other. Along Mantua Ave there were also four homes (including our own). We knew the names of everyone on the block and the adjacent blocks. It was a rare house that didn't have a name associated with it. Of course, since we were children, the further you moved from our block the less likely it was for us to know the people there. That would change slowly as we grew.

The street was lined with Black Maples, mature trees all. There were a few oaks and on Cherry St a number of Sycamores. Farther down Mantua Ave, closer to the Mantua Creek, there were taller trees. Not being a naturalist I don't know their names but now and again in a rough summer storm or hurricane they'd come crashing down.

Once tramping through a part of the woods we'd only just discovered we found an immense Elm. So big four of us could just barely encircle it, arms spread. We thought it was the largest tree in the world.

Eventually we became part of Terry and Chris' games. Some of them were familiar, others new and completely made up. Kick the Can, Capture the Flag, yes, but also, He Died at the Foot of the Werewolf Tree, and Who Looks the Deadest. We left the house at 7:30 and ran out to play and play and play. We returned to wolf down peanut butter sandwiches and hershey's chocolate milk and back out again. Talking about it now it sounds idyllic. But idyll's have their hollow cores and children at play aren't just playing. I was an asthmatic.

I think I left that out.

Mick was as well but only a bit.

Ted eventually was as well and his asthma was severe.

But it was asthma that made games both a joy and a curse.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:38AM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Wenonah, 1958](#)

- JimMaddox

October 25, 2007

Woodbury Heights down the road apiece from Wenonah, was my world in 1958. A small town where it seemed you knew almost everybody. I lived at one of the farthest corners in town, bordering Deptford. When we first moved there, I was only 2 years old, and there weren't any kids around of my age. I lived in a fantastic world of my own with imaginary friends. I talked for them, using different voices for each. My father would hear the goings on outside and say, "Mary, who's he talking to?" It was all me. The woods behind our house was my Disney World. A land of mystery, of Davey Crockett and the French and Indian Wars.

Then something wonderful—a boxer, my very own dog. Her name was Whee-Zee and she was so ugly she was beautiful. She was my closest and dearest friend. She protected me from the myriad of older kids that loved to terrorize the younger kids in town. Bullies named T-bone and Tanker and Lucas, and the infamous Goss Brothers. Whee-Zee was my armor, my shield. Raise your hand to me and behold her wrath. She lived until I was almost 11. She eventually got so sick she had to be put to sleep. I can still feel the horror and the anguish watching her being taken away from me, put into a van, never to be seen again. I spent a long lonely time in those woods after that. I still miss her deeply.

September, 1958 First Grade, First Day of School

Monday, February 19, 2007

I began First Grade that September. I attended Wenonah Public School, which at that time was grades K through 8. After that you would go to Woodbury High School. Because my mother had two small boys she couldn't take me to school my first day so she arranged for the daughter of one of our neighbors to take me. Her name was Peggy Sacca and her family had owned our home before we moved in. Peggy was a grown up in my eyes but actually was an eighth grader. Her father Tony owned the local meat market which was located at the back of Bowker's Grocery Store in the middle of town. Her uncle ran a fruit and vegetable truck that sold produce to stores and also door to door.

I thought Peggy was really beautiful and the walk to school seemed okay to me. We only had to walk a little over 1/2 a mile. Four blocks up to the park in the middle of town where we'd cross Mantua Ave and walk the last two blocks to school. Across the street from the park when I was growing up was Margie's Luncheonette. It would be awhile before I'd cross it's threshold but it was one of the places I liked best in town.

First grade was taught by Mrs. Kaufman. She lived two blocks down from us on N Lincoln. She was an ancient wizened crone who'd already taught most of the people who lived in Wenonah. Throughout the school year she called Terry, Tim, who was his older brother by nearly ten years. She taught Tim. Eventually she taught my youngest sister. I don't believe she retired until the late 80's. A long time with young children. She taught us to read.

She taught us math as well; beyond that subject matter was kind of vague. But I remember reading as being magical. It was something I could do and do well. She taught us to write.

I had the same children in my classes for nearly six more years. Tomorrow we shall meet them. Preferably at recess.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:46PM (-05:00)

Recess; September 1958

Thursday, February 22, 2007

Here we are in the schoolyard of Wenonah Elementary School. Twenty or so spindly kids with our nice clothes on. Girls with peter pan collars and dresses just below the knees. Boys with plaid shirts and khakis, all of us wearing one style Buster Brown's or another, all bought at Ernie's Shoe Post. Standing in line in order of height on the edge of the yard. The schoolyard was yellow gravel with a raised and asphalted section at one end. On the asphalted section there were two basketball hoops, a tennis net and a swing set. Monkeybars too.

We were ready for our first recess. All but one of us is white. The lone black kid, a girl, Michelle Smith, stands out even more as she's the tallest.

Wenonah school is a mish-mosh of three buildings; on each end are the older school buildings dating to the 1880's and in the middle is a one story fifties set of classrooms. Most of us have never met until today. Now we'll spend six years together.

We have recess twice a day. Once in the morning and once in the afternoon. In first grade recess is fairly simple. We play Dodge Ball or we play Kick Ball. No football, basketball, baseball, or track. Both sports are horror shows for kids. They're all about hierarchy and torture and pain. Plus they're good exercise. For someone. Not for me. We pick sides for our games. The boys and girls play separately. Good plan. We're picked by children the teacher names as captain. The captain picks kids who can do well. He picks children based on their physical abilities. While all of us have some limitations a few of us are severely limited. The worst is Tommy Woods. He must have been borderline retarded. One day he got his leg caught in the bars of his chair. His agility rivaled a milk carton. Then there were the one or two fat kids. Then the skinny and half blind. I was skinny, inept, and full of drive. I always got picked close to last.

That didn't mean I wasn't popular on the field. Dodgeball involves hurling a rubber ball as hard as possible at several chowderheads lined up against a chainlink fence. Like an execution but you never die. Kids seemed to like throwing the ball at me, the ball seemed to like hitting me and so Dodgeball became one of the joys of my youth. That and vomiting.

Kick Ball wasn't quite as bad. I just got picked next to last and fucked up repeatedly on the field and then was reminded over and over again by my peers what an idiot I was. Nice.

After recess and our hour of fun we went inside to study. Outside recess took place everyday unless it rained. It never rained often enough. Our studies started simple. The ABC's. Sentences. Then "Fun With Dick and Jane". Oh Spot! Oh Jane! Oh Mother! Oh Father! Oh great stories spun out each day the winter of 1959. The world began to open. Then each day, twice a day, it would close again in an onslaught of brown rubber balls. I walked to school each morning after that first morning and returned each afternoon with my friends, Terry and Dottie. Over time they found a way to expand the joys of Dodgeball to walking home. They called it Rough Tough Creampuff. Guess who was it?

Next post...what to do with your weekends when you're six.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:56PM (-05:00)

Reading at the Bowery

Saturday, February 24, 2007

Hi everyone!

There's more from Wenonah coming today but I wanted to remind everyone I'm reading tomorrow at the Bowery Poetry Club at 2pm. The Bowery Poetry Club is located at 308 Bowery and is a great place to hear poetry. I'm reading as part of the on-going Four Way Books reading series and will be sharing the stage with three other poets of renown and international reputation. They are Ellen Dore Watson, Alexandra Soiseth, and Adria Bernardi. It should be a great afternoon and I hope to see some of you there!

March starts my mad poetry rush with a tour of New England. I'll be teaching High School students in Littleton NH and then doing readings in Maine. Then of course it's National Poetry Month in April. All of which will insure that by May I'll be so sick of poems I'll be the first one on the beach at Sandy Hook on Memorial Day. Here's to a naked summer.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:59AM (-05:00)

Weekends and Catholicism 1958

Saturday, February 24, 2007

Weekends were a new thing for me. Before first grade every day was a weekend. Now the week was bracketed by Saturday and Sunday. Saturday was always the best because Sunday marked the long count down to Monday. A pattern that never ends until you retire. Weekends also marked my initiation into the mysteries of Faith. Yes, that's right, First Holy Communion and the Catechism. Who Made Me. God Made Me.

Every Saturday morning until I was 15 I went to Mantua to learn the vagaries of the Catholic Faith. That first year I was educated so I could accept the body and blood of Christ. Remember, I was six going on seven. Who gave a fuck who made me. I wanted to run in the woods. I wanted to play with my little men. I wanted to annoy my little brother Ted but instead me and about six other little kids from Wenonah were trucked off to Mantua and the Church of the Incarnation so that we could receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

We spent about two hours every Saturday morning being tutored by either nuns or the laity (shorthand for old Italian ladies from Mantua). We recited our Catechism and prepared to accept the Sacrament. It fucked up Saturday like nobody's business. There were only about six Catholic families in Wenonah so this was an opportunity to learn about diversity. Or more appropriately about difference. Nobody else in my town knew what I was doing. They went to church school on Sunday, then church, then they went home and had fun.

Not me. Not my friends. We went to listen to dour, nasty, old women talk about topics that to a seven year old had almost no value. Pure, unadulterated torment. I know some people profess to love the trappings of the Mass. It's rituals and robes. The incense. The mysteries. Fuck that shit. I used to gnaw on the back of the pew in front of me. I grew to love the taste of varnish. In summer I would faint. This was before air conditioning after all. The only time the church was nice was Christmas. The Church of the Incarnation was beautiful at Christmas. There was a holiday bazaar and we had a little party with gift giving. Everyone was kind and thoughtful till Christmas day when the priest told us we

were assholes for only coming to church at Christmas. I never understood this because I was there every week. Come hell or high water. Sick, well, sad or happy, I was there to worship the Lord.

I should mention there were also no Jews in my town technically when I arrived in 1958. One family, the Parkers, were sort of Jewish. Their father had changed their name from Katz to Parker but they didn't technically live within the town's borders and they were never brought up within the Jewish faith. For all I know they went to the Presbyterian church. I think this means they were assimilated.

Most people in town were either Methodist or Presbyterian. Wenonah was primarily Methodist. A dour little religion. No gambling, liquor, or cursing. No fun. Wenonah was a dry town because of Methodism. A lot of towns in South Jersey are Methodist, including one of the great shore towns, Ocean City. No liquor could be bought or sold in Ocean City but the largest liquor store I've ever seen was right across the bridge in Somers Point. Next to the Dunes till Dawn, one of the great roadhouses of the world. Fun, fun, fun, till your daddy takes the T Bird away.

It was a sin for Catholics to go to another church. At least that was what we were told. You could get dispensation for special circumstances, like camping trips or a funeral. I only went to a service held by another religion once in my young life. I was in Boy Scouts and we attended a Methodist service in the Pine Barrens. Dull as dishwater. Hard to believe but Methodism is kind of like Communism. It was a mass movement founded by urban activists in England and Europe in the 17 hundreds to fight the excesses of drink and gambling caused by the changes in lifestyle brought on by the Industrial Revolution. See George Eliot for more details.

There are also bunches of Quakers in South Jersey. Several of my friends were Quakers and their services sounded interesting. You just get up and talk once in awhile. No host, no wine, no God really. There is a strong pacifist presence in South Jersey and Philadelphia. My town sent lots of young men to war and our local draft board gave out no exemptions but several young men went to Canada in the 60's because of their Quaker beliefs.

Anyway, that was the first two hours of my weekend. In two days we get the next 46. Ha ha.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:10PM (-05:00)

Weekends 1958

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

The rest of the weekend in those first few years in Wenonah was bliss. I had yet to get chores assigned to me and my world revolved mostly around my family. I spent many hours just playing in the house with my brothers or watching tv. I can't even tell you what we did. Explored the dark basement, climbed the tree behind the garage, played catch with my father. Not much. No organized ball, no work, no anxieties to speak of.

Many weekends were spent at my Grandmother Glading's. She lived in a suburb of Philadelphia in a nice little house with my Aunt Gersh (short for Gertrude). For a while my Uncle Al and Aunt Gert were also both there though they ultimately moved away as they grew up. This was heaven for me and for my brothers. They doted on us. We got to eat good food. I have a feeling my parents packed us away so they could go have fun but who cares.

We got to stay up late and drink a half a Piels and eat ham and cheese and watch Mike Hammer.

Oh joy. We explored their attic and played in the back and half listened to the alien conversations of adults. My Aunt Gert brought home a boyfriend once who was black. He was from Tanganyika. His name was Ramesh. He was alien and spoke differently and fascinated us.

I never thought how he might have felt or how my grandmother felt. We wanted to hear about lions.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:57AM (-05:00)

Weekends at Nonny's

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

Our weekends with my Grandmother centered on a big meal, either on Sunday or Saturday. It's important to note that for two reasons I wasn't used to good food. The first is that while my father was a good provider, we weren't rich. That meant my mother had to make do with less expensive meals. We're talking hot dogs, hamburgers, meatloaf, the standard hodge podge of middle class cooking in 1958. The second is that my mother was a terrible cook. I don't know if that's because she was a product of her age or what but cooking was not her finest moment. We did have fresh milk on the table and in the tradition of the fifties a loaf of white bread and butter. We ate fish every Friday and almost never had chicken because my father hated it.

My Grandmother, my mother's mother, was a wonderful cook. Everything was fresh and from the butcher or the grocer. Rarely were canned ingredients part of a meal. The table was always full and the desserts were fantastic. Homemade pies and cakes. After the meal the adults would sit and talk. If it was Sunday we watched a bit of television. First Lawrence Welk, then the Ed Sullivan show. I hated both until I was in my early teens. I always hated Lawrence Welk but the toxic mix of European circuses and lounge acts and comedians who appealed to adults bewildered me. At any rate when it was over we'd pack ourselves up in the car and head back to South Jersey. I knew the way so well that when I first got my license I drove there without directions.

We boys were all jammed in the back seat with mom and dad up front. Like my most young boys we spent half the way fighting and half gazing out the window. We'd move first through the suburbs of Philly, just off the Main Line. At Christmas you could tell when you moved through a Jewish neighborhood, no lights. Then onto the Schuylk Expressway, past the Sunoco Oil Refinery, the company my father worked for and over the Walt Whitman Bridge. Going over the bridge was the stink of the whiskey brewery at it's base. Past the bridge and Camden then on through Woodbury and Woodbury Heights to home. Home. Some nights when we came home in the summer the porch was covered in tree frogs. Some nights it was cold with frost. Always it was home.

My brother Ted was always out like a light by the time we got to Wenonah and it was straight to bed. I hadn't begun the morning ritual of showers yet and so got my bath each night before bed.

I'd go to bed each Sunday, clean, and tired, and ready for a new week of being chased to school by my beloved friends. The rough tough creampuff was me. Each Monday began my torment and it didn't end till Friday at three. In between were my friends Dick and Jane and Far and Away and Here and There and the library in the basement began to beckon.

Second and third grades began to open the world to the asthmatic, skinny wretch that was me. Little fool running home chased by two other little fools shouting made up nonsense. The hierarchy of the ignorant. I loved them both.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:50PM (-05:00)

Weekends at Nonny's

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

Our weekends with my Grandmother centered on a big meal, either on Sunday or Saturday. It's important to note that for two reasons I wasn't used to good food. The first is that while my father was a good provider, we weren't rich. That meant my mother had to make do with less expensive meals. We're talking hot dogs, hamburgers, meatloaf, the standard hodge podge of middle class cooking in 1958. The second is that my mother was a terrible cook. I don't know if that's because she was a product of her age or what but cooking was not her finest moment. We did have fresh milk on the table and in the tradition of the fifties a loaf of white bread and butter. We ate fish every Friday and almost never had chicken because my father hated it.

My Grandmother, my mother's mother, was a wonderful cook. Everything was fresh and from the butcher or the grocer. Rarely were canned ingredients part of a meal. The table was always full and the desserts were fantastic. Homemade pies and cakes. After the meal the adults would sit and talk. If it was Sunday we watched a bit of television. First Lawrence Welk, then the Ed Sullivan show. I hated both until I was in my early teens. I always hated Lawrence Welk but the toxic mix of European circuses and lounge acts and comedians who appealed to adults on Sullivan bewildered me. At any rate when it was over we'd pack ourselves up in the car and head back to South Jersey. I knew the way so well that when I first got my license I drove there without directions.

We boys were all jammed in the back seat with mom and dad up front. Like most young boys we spent half the way fighting and half gazing out the window. We'd move first through the suburbs of Philly, just off the Main Line. At Christmas you could tell when you moved through a Jewish neighborhood, no lights. Then onto the Schuylkill Expressway, past the Sunoco Oil Refinery, the company my father worked for, and over the Walt Whitman Bridge. Going over the bridge was the stink of the whiskey brewery at its base. Past the bridge and Camden then on through Deptford and into the pig farms of Jericho with their rich smell of garbage to home. Home. Some nights when we came home in the summer the porch was covered in tree frogs. Some nights it was cold with frost. Always it was home.

My brother Ted was always out like a light by the time we got to Wenonah and it was straight to bed. I hadn't begun the morning ritual of showers yet and so got my bath each night before bed.

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Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:50PM (-05:00)

Mrs. Kaufman's 1st Grade Class 1958

Wednesday, February 28, 2007



Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:33PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Mrs. Kaufman's 1st Grade Class 1958](#)

- Keith

June 06, 2009

This is great! What I see in this picture is a teacher with incredible handwriting and a poster on the wall that I think may have been in my room as a kid. Gram was amazing. I miss her so much.

Keith Kaufman
keith@wsix.com

Who's who in Mrs. Kaufman's class

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

I spent about an hour trying to figure out who everyone was in this photo. My friend Suzy Parker thought Michelle Smith started school in 2nd grade. How nice to see her tall and black figure in the second row. Tommy Woods is in the back row on the right looking all twisted. I'm obviously in the front row, right, looking worried. I look that way in all my school photos. That probably means something.

My Aunt Gert wrote to tell me that Ramesh went to work in LA for their subway system and married an Indian woman. There were problems with caste. There are problems with caste here but not so obvious. I knew all the boys except two and I'm sure my memory could be jogged with help.

Time is a strange thing. Photography a trick with light and chemicals. All of us are older. Older than our parents then, older probably than our grandparents. We look worried and clean and dare I say it, eager.

I welcome my fellow Wenonah friends to help me along this path. Who the fuck are all these girls? I only spent time with boys.

When I said that in the office they all made gay comments but of course what self respecting kid in 1958 hung with girl. Ick. So, help!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:31PM (-05:00)

The One Black Girl in Mrs. Kaufman's Class

Thursday, March 01, 2007

My friend Carolyn in my office has asked me to talk more about Michelle Smith and her family. I've resisted because I thought we should wait for the full thrust of time and society to give her and her family weight. Maybe I'm wrong. Michelle's mother was Irene Smith. She was and I believe still is an strong and powerful advocate for the black community and African American's in South Jersey. Their lives in 1958 were severely circumscribed by the society of the day. I mentioned we drove home from my grandmothers through the pig farms. The pig farms were largely worked by the black people of Jericho. They lived next to them. When I was in high school we rode our buses through Jericho and we could see the outhouses in the backyards. This was a world ten steps away from ours. This was a caste system just like the one that separated Ramesh and his Indian bride. This was and is a great divide.

Irene Smith believed strongly in establishing a strong black presence in South Jersey. She bought a property in Wenonah. It must have been a great struggle. As it was it was just one the outside of everything nestled close against Jericho. She was outspoken. She was proud. She was what black people needed in a time when black people were nothing in South Jersey. When I was growing up South Jersey most closely resembled the deep south. There were long arguments among my friends about what their families would do if blacks moved into our neighborhood. My friend, Chris DeHart's mother, was a southern woman and he had deep antipathies to black people. Most of my friends believed black people didn't belong in Wenonah. When I moved back to get well in 2001 there was a house on Mantua Avenue flying the Confederate flag. It was not because of Southern sympathies. It was because the man who owned the home hated niggers.

In my family that word was forbidden. My mother's father, my grandfather, had deep seated hatreds against foreigners, Jews, Catholics, but most of all, niggers. He railed against them at the table each evening. Philadelphia was a deeply divided city and remains so. For all the good Quakers there were a thousand racists. Frank Rizzo was Philly's hero and Frank fought the Negro menace.

My mother hated racism and her father's bigotry. Nonetheless it was part of her. Wenonah was a white as white can be. Michelle and her brother Michael were of our town but until the late sixties never really part of it. I hate telling a story early but part of what this story is about is how my world changed. I had to leave a party when I was seventeen with two of my friends and my brother with our backs against the wall and fists up because we were "nigger lovers". Nigger lovers. What a sad phrase. I know all the words for black people. Spearchucker, porch monkey, spook. I knew boys that tried to run down black hitchhikers on Glassboro Road for kicks.

When I went to work at Cornell Steel in college my co-worker Jim Sterner said he went to Senior Year in HS with a shotgun in his bag to kill any nigger that got out of line.

Got out of line.

My mother had a series of housekeepers from Catholic Charities. They were all black women who worked for a few months or so helping an overworked woman cope with three overactive idiots. They were paid nearly nothing. That was the only reason my mother could afford them.

I know nothing of the internal life of Michelle Smith. I don't know who she loved, who she gave birth to or where she went to college. She and her brother were the only black people I came in contact with till I went to college in 1970. This is an America that we don't need to go back to. You can guess at her alienation from my own. It's just a guess. You can wonder why this country discounted so many people just because of the color their skin. But we all danced to nigger music.

So all I can offer for right now is this: Motown was the music we all loved. Philly was the heart of Soul. White kids loved nigger music. Something there is in this country that won't let us become a balkan state. I envied the black people I saw because they were comfortable with their bodies. Maybe they weren't. I envied their music. I loved it. With all my heart I wish I'd never heard the word nigger.

In my office people use that word cavalierly. People who don't know the hurt it carries. They don't know that if I use it I don't mean nigga; I mean nigger. It's not an expression of familiarity, it's an expression of derision and hatred and disgust. No, it's an expression of negation. Cuz niggers don't count. They're not even there. Like a lot of people. Like Ramesh. And really like me.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:59PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: The One Black Girl in Mrs. Kaufman's Class](#)

- Anonymous

October 22, 2007

It amazes me that I did not succumb to the racist ideas of my friends and family. Growing up in the late 50's in Woodbury Heights, I too was close to the pig farms in Jericho. A black family lived across the street from us. Across the street was Deptford, but it may as well have been the moon as far as racial lines were drawn. The only playmate I had at that time was a little girl from that family named Lulu. I would stand in my front yard and cry out, hey little colored girl, will you come out and play? My mother would here me and rush out to tell me not to say that, even though that was what she called black people at the time. I could just as well called out the words my father and uncles used, but fortunately I never did. I never cared what a kid was as long as they wanted to be my friend. I still do not understand the irrational racial hatred members of my family have. The racism of the past is still with us and continues to prevent us from being a whole people.

Writing this thing

[Friday, March 02, 2007](#)

This post has nothing to do with the Wenonah posts. Please ignore it and pay attention to the others. But keep in mind that as I write about my past things come up that I haven't thought of in years. I asked my Aunt Gert, my mother's sister, the one who dated Ramesh, when her father died. She told me 1956. She took me to the zoo that day. I loved my Poppy Glading. He was as distant and removed as my father's father. He died of emphysema, the same disease that killed my father's father.

I dreamed last night that my mother sent me emails congratulating me on my birthday. In the dream I was elated but sad because she sent them to my gmail account which I rarely check.

What the fuck does that mean? What does it mean to spend time looking at your past? In

the present I'm under enormous stress. The NYC Health Dept is under pressure cuz they fucked up and now they're fucking all my clients and they're fucking me. I am the man who has to solve their problems. Calm their nerves. Make certain they are in compliance. In the meantime my mother is sending me emails.

This is a hard row to hoe.

It was a warm day today after a nasty rain. I took the day off because I was exhausted and afraid.

My dogs didn't care. They just wanted me near them.

Outside over all of us is the world; and outside over all of that is God. We act and we bend and we fail and care but it is with his grace that we are at our best. I thank God that I am alive. Once I was nearly dead. Now I just get emails from the dead.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:35PM (-05:00)

Summer 1959

Sunday, March 04, 2007

First Grade came winding down. I received my first Holy Communion. My parent's bought me my first suit of clothes, from Robert Hall, and I trudged with a couple dozen boys and girls to the altar to taste the Body and Blood of Christ. Then it was summer. And just like school changed the world into weekdays and weekends, so school gave us summer vacation. Three long months that had a rhythm and structure all their own. My family took a two week vacation at the end of June each year. We would rent an apartment in Ocean City, NJ and spend two weeks at the shore. The day consisted of waking up, going for a long walk on the beach, to the point perhaps, and then going home to get our towels and toys and going back to the beach. We spent the day on the beach except for lunch. Lunch was a rushed sandwich, tuna or cold cuts or PB & J, and then back to the beach.

We'd body surf and try to float. We'd make great sandcastles. Most of the time we stayed near 59th Street in Ocean City. Until 1962 it had a long fishing pier that stretched well out into the ocean. It also had a row of great Granite blocks dumped along the shore to hold the beach in place. We'd play inside the spaces between the blocks. We found sand sharks in gullies and learned how to find shells in the morning.

Sometimes my father would play box ball with us or handball. It was my father who taught us how to body surf. How to catch a wave just right. In the evening we'd eat seafood from Campbell's and then if we were lucky go to the boardwalk and ride the rides.

My father had been going to Ocean City his whole life. Ocean City had long ties to the Philly Irish community. The Kelly's of Philadelphia had a big house that my father never failed to point out to us. Our Uncle John had a home on 42nd Street right on the beach and we'd walk up and visit Uncle John and Aunt Ellie and my fathers cousins, including Aunt Alice who I thought was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

On the boardwalk our father taught us how to grab the brass ring on the merry go round and took us up high on the ferris wheel. We'd watch the great summer moon sink into the sea and then get up and do it all again.

By the time we returned to Wenonah it too was different. Wenonah in summer was hot and humid beyond belief. Nothing moved except the children. That first year we joined the Wenonah Lake and went there to take rudimentary swimming lessons. We played in the kiddie part of the lake and cooked hot dogs and ate snow cones.

We began to expand our world that summer. Mick had gone to Kindergarten that year and now had friends of his own. Some of my classmates were members of the Lake as well as his so we all joined together in games. Hierarchies had not yet been established and we knew nothing of cool. We were just having fun.

In the evenings we could play outside till 8pm when it was time for bed. There was really nothing of consequence on television so we began our long games of Kick the Can. Our friends played it for hours after we'd gone to bed and we could hear the can rattling along the sidewalk from our beds.

Thunderstorms would come rolling through and I'd lie at the end of my bed with my cat Surprise and watch the terrible skies light up. Great trees would fall and crush a house or lie across the road.

Each summer the town would put new macadam down on several of the streets. The smell of hot tar would fill the afternoon and the stones were new and fresh. We had yet to really explore the woods but that was soon to come.

Finally the summer wound down in a long, long slide that took us inexorably back to school. A few days before the first day of school we could walk up to the school and they would have our class listings posted.

Second grade for me would put me in a class with Third graders. Miss Quigley was our teacher. She was blond and pretty and looked a bit like Donna Reed. I was as glad for summer to end as I'd been for it to begin. I was bored with play and wanted something new. Something new I would get. Each September.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:50AM (-05:00)

My New Suit/First Holy Communion

Sunday, March 04, 2007



Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:52AM (-05:00)

One foot in One foot out

Monday, March 05, 2007

Here's the thing about Wenonah in 1959. I have one foot in the future and one foot in the past. Look at Mrs. Kaufman's clothes. It could be 1899. Take a closer look at our scuffed shoes in the picture. We could be in a Walker Evans picture. Shoes scuffed and timeless.

They could be the shoes of a newsboy in 1912.

They're not.

We don't know anything about our history. We're little kids in a world about to erupt in change. We play games children have played for fifty years or more. We walk streets children have walked since 1888. We're obedient. We don't know about anything beyond our town.

My father's family did what they had been doing for nearly fifty years, if not longer. Men went to work. Women stayed home. Further south of Wenonah there were farms that were farmed the same way for hundreds of years. The connection to the past was long and hard. Our values, our perspectives, our beliefs were all formed fifty or more years ago. Yes, our father's fought in World War II as their father's had fought in World War I. Yes, we hated negroes. Yes, we went to church on Sundays. Yes, we learned reading and writing and prepared for a life just like our fathers.

That was all to end.

If you could see my brother Ted's photos or my sister Mary's they'd be different. My parents changed, everything changed. There were riots. There was a war. There was rock and roll. There were drugs and sex and loud arguments. But for now we are suspended in a strange time warp.

A time warp that had to end.

Over the next 11 years the world would change in ways we didn't yet understand. For better or worse.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:02PM (-05:00)

The Architecture of Wenonah Public School and Its Effect on the Young

Tuesday, March 06, 2007

Second Grade had a lot more challenges than First Grade. But before I talk about what we actually learned let's talk a bit about how the school was laid out. Wenonah Public School looked a little like a barbell. At either end were the older parts of the school. I wish I knew which was oldest but honestly I don't. I do know that the end closest to the Water Tower on the north end of the barbell held the Nurses office, the Janitors office, and the Library. When I first began school this was where the 7th and 8th graders had their classes. I was in the last group of children to go through a school that went from K to 8. Because of population pressures a regional High School was built when I was in 6th grade. It would take the students from 5 sending districts and relieve overcrowding in Woodbury HS. We'll get there eventually but for right now I'm jammed in a school with kids that are near toddlers and others that are teenagers. All of us dress the same.

The other end of the barbell held the 4th, 5th and 6th graders. In the middle were us schmoos. The kindergartners, the 1st graders, the 2nd graders, the 3rd graders. Because of the same population pressures we were often jammed into combined classes.

The baby boom was too much for Wenonah and too much for large swatches of America. Loads of us were jammed together with older or younger students just as in later generations they'd be jammed into trailers. It's all the same.

You might be asking why they just didn't build a bigger school. That's a larger political question. New Jersey has this fucked up tax structure that basically funds a town's school system with the taxes of home owners. What that means on a practical basis is that in a

town like Wenonah with a number of older residents whose children were grown, coupled with a number of families with young children was that you create class warfare. Every year some knucklehead young parent would lobby hard for an addition or whatever and every year the old people would come out in droves to the polls to defeat it.

This continues even today. When I was living in Wenonah in 2003 there was a school improvement initiative on the ballot. My landlady Rachel asked me how I was going to vote and being a progressive, thoughtful man I said I was going to vote yes. She said I can't afford to have my taxes go up and if they do so will your rent. Thank God in America your vote is your secret.

At any rate there I am in 2nd grade with a group of 15 3rd graders. This is the dawning of hierarchy. I start to understand I know nothing. The 3rd graders make it clear I know nothing. They can read and write and spell and multiply. I can print and read Dick and Jane and maybe add. I think I could count to 100. I was fucked.

Plus I'm tiny, skinny, and smart. A bad combo. Egghead. Even in 2nd grade I'm a marked man. I might as well have been wearing a target. The only nice thing was I discovered the school library. Next post: Revisionist, socialist literature in a tiny white Republican community and it's effect on 2nd and 3rd graders or how I learned to love Clarence Darrow.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:04PM (-05:00)

Socialist Revisionism and Wenonah Public Schools

Thursday, March 08, 2007

The Wenonah Public School had a small library. But it was very interesting. It was only when I was older that I realize how interesting it was. The books in the library were filled with biographies of famous Americans. Steinmetz, Darrow, Lincoln. They were all about the struggle of the working man against the interests of big business. Steinmetz vs Edison, Darrow working to save the lives of union men.

This was odd because no one in Wenonah could give a fuck about this shit. These were books the school purchased in the thirties and forties, probably as part of some weird government program that gave them the books on the cheap. We're talking Socialism. We're talking neo-Communist lit. I remember one book about the heroic struggles of a young Soviet worker and his tractor.

All in middle class Wenonah. Darrow fighting for Leopold and Loeb, fighting against the ignorant in the Scopes Trial, fighting for big Bill Haywood and the IWW. The IWW! In Wenonah. A town of insurance agents and commercial interests and moms and dads. What could be stranger. I read these books like a hungry man. Charles Steinmetz was a God! Clarence Darrow a God! I wanted to be an attorney representing the rights of the little man. I saw in his battles my own. I was downtrodden. I was the rough tough cream puff. I was a thin little fool. I was inconsequential. These books gave me hope and it still amazes me they were in my library.

Thank God for the WPA because as far as I can figure that's why these books existed. A bunch of reds in the WPA wrote school books that were distributed on the cheap and our school bought them cuz they were cheap and being parochial nitwits no one ever read them.

Today a town like Wenonah might be battling about evolution and creationism. Then,

Clarence Darrow was a god who brought enlightenment to ignorant communities in Tennessee.

In the years to come we would debate endlessly how black people and white people could co exist. We would sit on our porches and talk about what our parents would do if a nigger family moved onto our block but in the basement of the Wenonah School I read about heroes of social injustice.

It's like someone accidentally planted the seeds of social change.

It sort of worked.

For me it did work.

Clarence Darrow was my God and rational examination of the world became my goal. In second grade. In third grade things got even more out of hand.

Meantime, there was dodge ball.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:48PM (-05:00)

A Life in Hell

Saturday, March 10, 2007

Well, this is the last blog post for one week. No Wenonah posts until I return from New England and the second leg of the Fun Being Me tour. It's been a hellacious week for me and I'm glad it's over. Just a reminder to anyone from New England reading this: I'll be in Portland on the 15th and Hallowell on the 16th and on the road back to Jersey on the 17th.

It's all good in poetry land.

See you all in eight days or so!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:45PM (-05:00)

Ruth Felch and the forgotten

Monday, March 19, 2007

I'm back from New Hampshire and Maine. I should have prepared a proper posting for today but alas the real world has intruded. I did spend several days with my friend Baron Wormser and his wife Janet Wormser. Two wonderful artists but more important two real people. We talked of many things from the troubles of being a parent to the vagaries of poetry to the photos of William Eggleston.

It was a nice idyll and for several days I saw no television, drank wonderful beer, and lived the life of the itinerant poet. Oh joy.

My friend Bob Thomas has discovered my Wenonah postings and weighed in with numerous bits of help. Most important he and his sister have given names to some of my first grade class mates. For the moment I won't put the name with the face but only give you their names. Nancy Allen (Bunny to all of us), Margie Loving, Ruth Ann (Ruthie) Felch, Jack Wesh, and Jane (Jabby) Bowker. Beautiful children, great women and men, lost people.

Let us take a moment, bow our heads and remember all those we've lost to the swamp of time. All people with lives of complexity and struggle and joy. Who had friends we've forgotten, married men and women we never knew and grew rich or died according to their inclination. My classmates. My lost friends. My beloved confederates.

May I take a moment now to suggest you take the time to read the poetry of Michael Casey, Dave Moreau, and my friend Baron Wormser. Please also raise a glass to all who didn't make it out of childhood. One of those in the photo was Johnny Budd. In the early 1970's for reasons all his own Johnny took his life. However each of us might feel about suicide and loss we can at least bow our heads in prayer for Johnny at least in sympathy with him and others who find this world more than they can bear. This place is rich with many blessings but equally so with many difficulties and for the young especially it can be a heavy burden. I spent two days in Littleton NH talking with young men and women who lost a friend to a tragic car accident. The loss felt more than they could carry. We older men and women know this isn't so. We know you can and will pick up and go on but we also know that leaving a fallen friend by the way hurts like the pain of losing a limb. Please then, say a prayer for the young men and women who leave us every day. In war, in accident, by disease, by whatever terrible means and more importantly pray for the boys and girls left behind.

Yo, this is a tough world we live in. But we can make it a haven for those in pain and give them grace and respite.

Then we can ask them to join us in a game of dodgeball. But that's another story.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:37PM (-04:00)

TB

Thursday, March 22, 2007

When we were growing up disease was still a real presence. On the way home from my grandparents outside Philadelphia, as we passed through Camden, my mother would make us hold handkerchiefs over our faces to protect against Polio. Smallpox was a real disease. Later in life one of my high school teachers bore the marks all over his face. The janitor of our school was found to have tuberculosis. This prompted a mad scare. We were herded en masse to the nurses office and tested. He was sent to a Sanitarium.

It's odd. I can remember the disease, the fear, the sanitarium but the poor man's name is lost to me. Just as the names of the children in first grade were lost to me. Or the name of our crossing guard. You'd think names would be the thing we cling to, like a lifeline but instead I cling to something else. Second grade was pleasant enough but unchallenging. We moved past Dick and Jane, I guess we had arithmetic but I can't recall any of it. I was by now socialized and spent a good deal of time playing with my friends. This was probably the last year of my life that was centered in my home.

The center of my family year, after the trip to Ocean City, was Christmas. Christmas was our special time. My father bought the tree two weeks before, roughly around the time of his and my birthdays and put it by the side of the house in a bucket of water. The same day he'd put the lights up around the porch.

Of course Christmas began for us in October. That was when the Sears and Roebuck catalog came to the house. My brother Mick and I would spend hours looking at the toys, the sets of army men, the plastic guns, the bikes, all the promises of Santa Claus' visit. And of course we were watching tv now so we'd badger our parents about toys we saw on the tv. This process became more intense as we grew older and now in 2nd grade it was somehow still innocent and filled with joy.

On Christmas Eve my father would bring the tree into the house in the morning and put it up. Wires were strung to keep it from falling and then we'd settle in to wait.

After dinner the ornaments came down from the attic. Old european glass balls, thick glass lights, tinsel. My father was a stickler for proper Christmas tree protocol and taught us well how to put the balls and decorations on the tree. Lights first a few hours before the rest, then smaller balls at the top, medium in the middle, and largest at the bottom. Variation was key. You couldn't have too many red balls or green balls in one place. After the tree was decorated my mother would sit down on the couch with me and my brothers, and later my sister, and read. First an abridged version of the story of the birth of Christ and then "Twas the Night Before Christmas". She did this every year until the year before she died. It's my sister's fondest memory of her and I must admit it was a wonderful moment in our lives. In my Senior year in HS my friends, Suzy and Gary, came over to hear as well. It was worth it.

Then it was time to bed although first my father would tune the radio for the reports of the movements of an unknown flying object originating over the North Pole.

I don't think I ever slept more than an hour on Christmas Eve. My brother Mick and I shared a bedroom till I was in 7th grade and we'd lay awake and talk and speculate as to what would be under the tree and when Santa would come.

Then at around 7 in the morning when we could take no more my father would allow us to leave our rooms and sit at the top of the stairs while he went downstairs to make sure everything was ok. It always was and we'd race down to find our toys, Santa's cookies and milk devoured, and a tree rich with light.

This was the last Christmas I believed in Santa Claus though I knew in my heart it was a fantasy. I'd find the truth the following year along with multiplication and To Kill a Mockingbird. No Santa. Just my mother and father frantically assembling toys into the night.

Just as they'd assembled us and the tree. Without much of a guide or instruction. Just memories of how their parents had done it and conversations with friends and co-workers. No wonder the tree needed wire to keep it up.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:55PM (-04:00)

2nd Grade 1959

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

Sorry it's been so long. Normally I wouldn't comment but I've been busy with personal issues. Let's move right into my second year of grade school. It was the last uneventful year. I had friends. I played. I walked to school. I was still largely a child. The failures and successes of growing up were yet to come. I went to church each Sunday. My friends and I were excused from school for a few hours to attend Mass on Holy Days. All Saints for instance. This was the first year I went trick or treating. My brother and I dressed in costumes and in the company of our parents went door to door seeking candy.

In Wenonah a great deal was made of who was behind the mask. Everyone knew everyone else so everyone offered opinions as to your identity. We collected a bag of candy and devoured it in our room.

Our room. My room and Mick's room.

Two small beds. Red, wooden beds. Small.

Three windows, no, maybe two.

One on the side yard, one on the rear.

Mick and I fought fiercely. Mick was now in First Grade and our lifelong rivalry was now

entering it's richest phase. My brother Mick could enrage me with the most foolish acts. He'd sit at the table in the morning and look at me and say yah, yah, yah over and over till I could kill him. My mother said, "Ignore him, he's looking for attention" and attention he got. We'd spill into roiling fights across the linoleum floor. We'd fight over anything. I detested him.

Funny.

Now he's a beloved brother who saved my life. Then he was a monster from hell. A fat, squat monster, that belched evil curses that demanded recourse.

Plus, everyone liked him. My friends. His friends. My parents. Other parents. He was likeable, amiable, and cute. Evil, little spawn of hell, I hated him.

My brother Ted at this time was just becoming more than a pawn in our games. He was truly mobile and alive. Five years younger than me he was found one afternoon perched on the kitchen table with a stick of butter wedged in his mouth. A boy of prodigious appetite and imagination he dreamed of tools and trucks. As he grew older he loved Tonka trucks but even at this age or perhaps just beyond his favorite toy as a hand propelled, professional grade, Sears push lawn mower. Not motorized. The older variety. A deeply deranged young boy with his own mark on the world.

Together the three of us over the next two years would bumble through the world.

I'll post a photo of Miss Quigley's second grade class tomorrow as well as the photo of Mrs Kaufman's class with names and identities for all the world to see.

You might ask where are the public events in Wenonah? For a second grader during the school year there were none. There were lighted displays in the park for the Christmas Holidays but beyond that we had no role in the life of the town. Happily. We were content to play our games, roam our blocks, fight our foolish battles and dream of the day we could enter Cub Scouts or play Minor League baseball.

It was in 2nd Grade thought that Mario Contarino joined us. His family emigrated from Italy and Mario spoke barely a word in English. But by the end of the year he was as fluent as any of us. What a tiny world. What a small place.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:07PM (-04:00)

A New Poem

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

Just for your consideration here's a new poem:

Happy first day of real spring:

Praises for the Insect and Mammalian Dead

I had a nice day today.

No one cursed me.

No one asked me odd questions.

I went to work a bit late.

I checked my mail and answered some of my correspondents
and then settled back to see what else might happen.

It was cold today.

Not as cold as yesterday but

I have the feeling it will be colder tomorrow.
My friend Jane's boyfriend died suddenly from liver disease.
This should not have been a shock but it was.
To her.
To his children
Everyone is angry at everyone else at a man who lived life
on his terms and died on his terms and not the way you're expected
to die.

It will be cold thank God for several more months.
Men will stumble up to me on 9th avenue and ask for money.
They will say it is for food.
Perhaps it is.
People will call me to solve difficult problems involving
mice and rats and other pests.
They will be arrogant and they will be willing but they will be
desperate.

They will be asking me for answers that aren't simple.
I will fail in my explanations.
I will offer biological and social explanations but in their fear,
in their worry, they will dismiss them.
To the people that I talk to everything I say is stupid.

Like everything we say to a lover we think is leaving.
Don't go.
Don't I do this or don't I do that.
Didn't I buy you this or didn't I comfort you then.

It's all stupid.
My consolation and explanations are all hollow.
Real.
But hollow.
You have mice. You have them because you're a human in a densely
populated region of the world populated by a rich mess of other humans.
Not everyone gives a shit about mice like you do.
Not everyone lies awake worrying about the bedbugs biting.
Some of them come from places where the bedbugs are like flies.
Some of them come from places where if you raise up your head
someone else will lop it off.

Cherish your mice, your rats, your roaches, your bedbugs!
Love them as you love your sons and daughters.
They are your children!
They live with you as much as you with them.
They huddle in little clutches terrified of destruction and they don't even
know about terrorists or nuclear devastation or satellites.
The little bugs and mice are the meek.

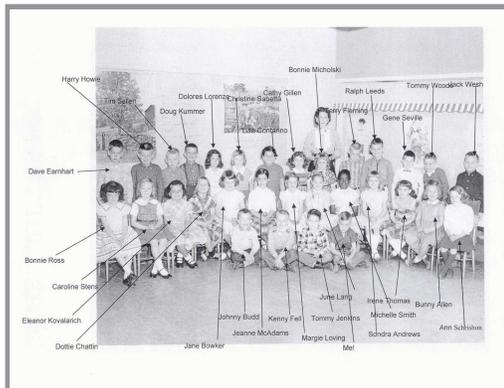
They wait patient under your stove for your castoff crumbs.
 For your drops of water.
 For the condensate on your pipes.
 They are your poorest children.
 They have no other home but yours.
 You wretched misers of capital.
 You own your apartments!
 You own your lawns!
 You own your skin and your hair and your sons and daughters!
 But all of you muddle under the same dull January sky.
 Each of you struggles for a bit of food, a spot of conversation,
 the day your boss says, oh, what a nice idea.

This is the time to consider what will come.
 Spring and rebirth and a thousand mice and cockroaches.
 Ants and termites and love.
 You'll strut down the avenue and duck into little cafes and they'll
 feed off your leavings happy as pets.
 They are your children.

They will grow strong and happy and democratic.
 They will feed at the common table.
 They will join with the bacteria and the viruses and the multitude of plagues
 to usher us into the world of paradise.
 Say all power and all praises to our Children!
 Grant them health and joy!
 Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:29PM (-04:00)

First Grade w/Names

Wednesday, March 28, 2007



Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:09PM (-04:00)

Thank you's etc

Thursday, March 29, 2007

I'd like to send out thanks to several folks who contributed to the names on the first grade picture. First, Suzy Parker, a great writer from the Bay Area (read her book "Tumbling After"), second, Bob Thomas, a man with a great memory who lives in the middle of nowhere New York, and finally Ralph Leeds and his sainted mother who actually put together the final pieces of the puzzle.

You guys id'd everyone, especially the women (girls) and Harry Howie who to be honest I can't recollect for the life of me. Terry Fleming reports he doesn't know who the fuck Harry Howie is either. Harry if you're alive and read this tell us what's the what.

I'd also like to mention that one of the beauties of this blog is that you can get alternate views of my life, town, and memories. Bob has contributed some lovely comments about Wenonah, in particular the 4th of July Parade, and I encourage anyone from Wenonah who reads this to weigh in with their own reality. My writing is highly subjective, radically skewed to my assignment, and since it is based on my disease addled memory, faulty at best.

Please post your memories here and let's build an elephants graveyard of Wenonah memorabilia, flotsam, and jetsam. Some of it will be true, some lies, some bragging. Who cares! Let's build a Wenonah of the soul! That lives and breathes in a way that the real Wenonah we lived in can never live and breath again. It being long past...dead...historical.

My apologies again for rushing through first and second grades. Carolyn in my office is peeved but to be honest based on my assignment to myself I'm screwed. I don't remember shit about 2nd grade. I might as well have been in Antarctica.

I'll try to fill you in on what I do remember, my friends, my tribulations but the whole gig kicks into high gear with the lovely Irene Ferrera in 3rd grade. And oh what happens with Mr. McIntyre! Ask Ruthie Hammel about her stay in the closet. In Wenonah school they still remember that legendary day.

So please, buckle up, raise a glass, and let's have some fun.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:55PM (-04:00)

206 W Mantua Avenue (as per Bob)

Friday, March 30, 2007

While I can't remember much of my academic life in second grade my house is rich in memory. I haven't spent enough time describing the house. Here is how it looked. The house sat on a corner lot, 1/4 acre. It had a basement, a first and second floor and an attic. There was a front yard, side yard and rear yard and garage and behind the garage a smaller yard. We called this smaller yard "the digging yard". You'll see why later. At the rear of the garage was a tall tree with a small tree fort in crumbling disarray.

The first floor had an entry hall, small powder room off the entry hall, a formal living room, a second living room, a dining room and a kitchen. The second floor had two large bedrooms, a bathroom with shower/bathtub, and a smaller bedroom and a smaller room that could function as a den or bedroom at the occupants discretion. The attic was finished but unpainted. The attic held a large exhaust fan that would cool the whole

house in summer. A crude, early form of air conditioning. The basement was unfinished with three distinct areas. At the base of the steps (arrived at through the kitchen) was a laundry area with sink. Immediately following that to the left was the furnace, oil tank, and my father's workbench. The larger area, beneath the formal living room and entry hall was an unfinished space that served as our play area. It was lined on the sides with huge waste lines. These were cast iron pipes, roughly six inches, that wrapped the whole basement at a height of three feet. We'd play on these like a jungle gym.

We'd also venture into the front crawl space, which was beneath the wrap around front porch. The crawl was fecund with a pungent aroma that I now know to be chlordane. The home must have been treated for termites either just before or shortly after my parents purchased it to eliminate a termite infestation. Chlordane has a strong odor that I came to know years later when I became a pest control operator. We crawled happily through the sandy soil of the crawl. In the furnace area, just behind the furnace there was a break in the foundation that led to a second crawl space. This was beneath the kitchen. The kitchen was a recent (20's or so) add on and this too was fecund with insecticides. We'd make this a clubhouse in fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. Hung on the sides of this area we found leg hold traps for muskrat.

We loved this basement. We played here on rainy days. We were banished here covered in swamp mud later in life. We'd strip our clothes and run up to bath and change. We had huge wars and games of hide and seek and once we got a ping pong table beat the crap out of each other with tiny white balls.

The attic was scary as shit. It was finished with unpainted white plaster. There was graffiti on the walls scrawled in black charcoal. One piece read "Peggy Sacca says her mom smokes cigarettes". The Saccas were the previous owners. Peggy was the leggy girl that walked me to first grade. She was and, as my friend Suzy said, is, stunning in a classic Italian manner.

The house was ringed in Black Maples. Easy to climb with limbs just four or five feet from the base they were hideouts in games, bases for wars with little men, and filled with carpenter and pavement ants. Moss sprawled out from their base which we'd cut out and toss at each other or marvel that it would retain it's shape.

The space by the kitchen on the side had a small, ivy covered, garden. In one corner were several lilac bushes. My parents had a cement St Francis statue placed there and irises grew there as well. Around the yard were various ornamental bushes, including lilacs. On either side of the home were two evergreens that grew eventually to a great height. The wrap around porch was encircled with bushes that left you able to see out in the summer but no one could see in. Our life was lived completely on that porch in late summer.

The garage eventually crumbled into dust, destroyed by carpenter bees and dense wisteria. At the rear of the garage was our tree. We climbed it relentlessly. I climbed higher than anyone but Charlie Flitcraft's sister Susan, nearly to the top. The limbs swaying under my tiny frame. Probably close to fifty feet.

We'd use the tree to gain access to the garage roof and then leap to our near deaths in the digging yard (eight feet or so). My father hung his rowing oar from his sculling days at the University of Pennsylvania in the garage and besides a variety of cars over the years it held our bicycles, Flexible Flyers (including my father's from his childhood), and shovels and rakes.

The rear yard for many years had a hole with a garbage can in it to hold organic garbage which the town emptied once a week. The milk man delivered milk to the back porch until

I was in fifth or sixth grade. We received several bottles of milk, half and half, and one of chocolate each morning.

It sounds like some magical place. In the morning in the spring the air was rich with the scent of a thousand blossoms, most notably a flowering ornamental peach by the garage. When I was older and returned to Wenonah to get better Johanna came to stay with me shortly before Easter. One day in late April she walked out onto my porch, a swirl of blossoms filled the air and she screamed for me to come out. Popi she said, I've never smelled air like this before! I had. Every year for many years. Each spring in late March the ground would erupt in crocus blossoms. I imagine that right now Wenonah is bright with forsythia and daffodils. As it has been for years.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 01:32AM (-04:00)

Dr. Seuss

Monday, April 02, 2007

This was the year of Dr. Seuss. My mother and father gave me books by Dr. Seuss to read. The first was The Cat in the Hat, then the Cat in the Hat Comes Back. For my birthday in 1959 I got Happy Birthday to You. I loved these books. First because I could read them, second for the wild world they painted. I hungered for them. At Christmas in 1959 we got Green Eggs and Ham. This became my brother Mick's favorite and then my brother Ted's. They loved this book. My mother read it to them each night.

I do not like them Sam I am. I do not like green eggs and ham. My brothers sat on the big couch in the living room next to my mother as she read the books. I loved them too and I too hated green eggs and ham.

I did not like them in a boat, I did not like them with a goat. I was thrilled by the cat and his improprieties. I was glad when all was restored.

We began to go to my Uncle John's house at Thanksgiving and Christmas. My Uncle John was my father's mother's brother. His name was John Murdoch. My middle name. Murdoch. He had an immense house outside of Philadelphia where he and his wife Eleanor and their daughters, Molly, Peggy, and Alice all lived. We ate wonderful meals there served by colored people cooked by colored people in a kitchen ran by colored people. We children ate in the kitchen away from the grown ups.

I love my aunt and uncle and they gave me my most cherished Christmas gifts. Books. Every year they'd come to our home on Christmas day with a gift for each of us. Mine was always a book. Ghost stories and mysteries. The Hardy Boys. Places to run to when life was grim. Not that life was ever truly grim but for a small boy a place to hide was a blessing.

Alice was twelve or thirteen years my senior and I thought she was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. An Irish beauty like Grace Kelly. I loved her small attentions and craved the times we had together.

At times we'd visit my father's parents house outside Philadelphia and they would be there along with my father's brother Ed and his lovely wife Simone. Simone was French Canadian and was the first person we knew to wear a bikini. She was witty and sophisticated. Dinner was almost always a wonderful roast of beef. There were whiskey cocktails and talk and we children were shunted to the outskirts.

My father's father, Poppy Wiler, was becoming ill with Emphysema and we were a distraction and a curse. Or so I felt. They had a ranch house with apple trees. We'd play

in the back, pelting each other with fallen apples. Yellow Jackets would swarm around us and at dinner we'd run in to sop our bread with the blood of the roast. Rich roasts deep with blood and flavor.

A meal that would never leave, like the sting of a bee that hurts for days afterwards.

Like the smell of cigarettes and whiskey and the distant murmur of adults in talk. Like the perfume of Alice and my mother.

Lingering still. Even here in Jersey City while I type. I've never eaten or prepared a roast that tasted as good. No matter how I try.

I have my grandmother Wiler's cutting board for roasts. It has grooves cut for the blood to run off. We dipped our buttered bread in the blood at the far end. Maybe you can taste it. Maybe you dislike the taste of blood but for me it's a good taste. Like love withheld but always there.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 12:48AM (-04:00)

Easter in the South

Monday, April 02, 2007

I'm leaving for South Carolina early Wed morning so no more posts till early next week. Hang in, they'll be there. I'm going with my brother Mick and his son Doug to visit my Dad and Mother. They live in Bluffton South Carolina. I hope to get in a little swimming, a little golf, and a little socializing. I'm also hoping to pump my Dad for more info about my youth. More to come my friends, more to come.

Till then have a Happy Easter or Passover and enjoy the first stirrings of spring!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:05PM (-04:00)

Miss Quigley's Second Grade Class (w/3rd Graders)

Monday, April 09, 2007



Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:29PM (-04:00)

Back From Bluffton

Monday, April 09, 2007

Hi all! I've returned from Bluffton and three days of fun in the sun. My brothers and I golfed, played putt-putt golf, kayaked, drank way too much beer and toured scenic Savannah. We also almost got popped touring a wildlife preserve outside Savannah. Fortunately my nephew Mark tossed the beers and weed before the Feds could catch us (outright lie! No beer or pot were anywhere near us).

We had a great time and it was a good chance to talk with my father and my Uncle Ed (Dad's brother) about my youth and their own. More on that to come in the days ahead. Until then stay warm on these Spring nights. Tomorrow will be my next official Wenonah post so stay tuned Wenonah heads, more to come!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:34PM (-04:00)

Pest Control/Poetry Month

Monday, April 09, 2007

Just so you all know; this is National Poetry Month. Us poets are all making hay while the sun shines with gigs in high schools across the land. Yippee! And in an interesting twist it is also National Pest Management Month, so I'm doubly honored. All praises then to poems about ants and termites, mice and rats! Archie and Mehitabel are rising up from their graves in joy! The Conqueror Worm and the Worm Ourobours all say thank you! God Bless the US Government for having the foresight to honor two of the most despised professions in America in the same beautiful month! You'd have thought they'd give us February but no, we get April! Wan that Aprile with her shoures soote hath pierced to the roote and please forgive my old English! It's a great month for verse and a worse month for bugs and mice! All across the land guys with bait guns and termite rigs and B&G tanks are whistling and thinking about Ogden Nash...Spring is sprung, the grass is riz, wonder where the birdies is?.

Keats and Corrigan, the Pied Piper and Ozmandias, Shelley and mus musculus! O what a wonderful month! O what a beautiful season! O what a grand cacaphony of nonsense! Elegies and bait trays, villanelles and rodent proofing, a snappy turn of the phrase butts right up to a well placed glue trap! It's April, it's Spring! Finally!

Remember your local poet and don't let the bedbugs bite. Ha ha!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:06PM (-04:00)

Cigarettes, Pipes, and Smoke

Wednesday, April 11, 2007

It was legal in 1959 to burn leaves. My father would rake the leaves from the lawn to the curb in a series of small piles and then set them on fire. He'd tend them for an hour or so till they were ash. In 2001, 2002 when I was in Wenonah leaves were collected by huge machines. Back then their smoke filled the sky with a rich, pungent odor. Fall was a time of burning.

While my father burned our leaves he'd smoke a cigarette. Usually then it was a Kent.

He'd change brands over the years but only a grown up could tell the difference. it was all cigarette smoke and it filled the air as much if not more than the burning leaves.

Everyone smoked. My father, my mother, my Aunt Gersh, my grandmother Wiler, my grandfathers, my uncles, my friends parents. Ashtrays were everywhere and smoke was everywhere. While it was true people knew in their hearts it could kill them they still took long drags of their favorite brands.

Pall Mall, Chesterfield, Winston, Kent, Camel. TV was filled with ads for cigarettes, movies and tv were rich with their tracings in the dark. Cigarettes were the transition from youth to adulthood.

My grandfathers both died from emphysema. Part of their disease began when they were young in the mines but really it was cigarettes that killed them. But it was tobacco that gave them succor and cool and calm.

In Second Grade Chris DeHart and Terry Fleming and Gary Condell and my brother and I went down to the dump at the end of Cherry Street to smoke cigarettes Chris had stolen from his mother. We didn't do well and my brother Mick ratted us out and that was my last cigarette save a puff or two holding someone else's cigarette year later.

My father periodically would try pipes. His paraphenalia would litter the end table by his spot on the couch and the smell of pipe tobacco would fill the house. The smell of old pipes and the oil of old tobacco were everywhere. Since I was asthmatic this was not an easy row to hoe. Since I was a strange little boy with his own angers and fears it was even harder. Still, my father was cool with his Kent in his mouth. My mother and her friends were beautiful at parties with their heads tilted back, exhaling rich tobacco in the night.

Aunt Gersh tried to stop for many years. When she finally succeeded in the late sixties she always told us of her dreams of smoking.

Dreams like movies.

Dreams like fantasies.

Dreams with piles of leaves smoldering on Lincoln Ave with boys running up and down the sidewalks laughing. Dreams with parents at parties laughing. The wild sound an adult woman makes when she's a little drunk. Crazy. Me and Mick upstairs in bed listening intently to a world we only were privy to the next morning when we'd walk among the half empty glasses of cocktails and overflowing ashtrays. The cherries still sweet and rich with whiskey.

The ashtrays overflowing with cigarette butts and an adult world we didn't, couldn't understand.

Later we'd stand by our father as he raked the leaves into the fire. No talking. Just the smoke from the leaves and his Kent filling the air.

Think of a room filled with women in dresses and men in dress pants and LaCoste shirts. Think of crewcuts and tans and one piece bathing suits and whiskey.

This was one of the scariest, most beautiful parts of my youth. Breath deep. When you pass a girl smoking a cigarette on the street as she exhales, breath deep. It's memory you're inhaling.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:44PM (-04:00)

Then my friend Bob Thomas reminded me about Pig Farms. All around the northern boundaries of Wenonah in Deptford, really, in Jericho there were Pig Farms. Lets just un cap that. pig farms. They were owned by Italian families and worked by black families. The black families lived close by the pig farms. The garbage came from all the adjacent towns. Bob reminded me that the garbage came from Wenonah. Or Woodbury. Or Sewell. In our back yard you'll remember there was a can for garbage only. That garbage was collected by garbage trucks and it had a destination. The pig farms.

The last stretch of my rides home from my grandmother's house in Pennsylvania was always through the pig farms. The stench was ungodly. Newark had nothing on this. There were miles upon miles of pig farms. Butted up against them were the homes of the black people that worked the pig farms. Their shacks, really. Shotgun shacks in the parlance.

The garbage trucks were outfitted to process the garbage for the pigs. They were designed to collect, process, cook and deliver our garbage to the hungry pig population. The trucks could be heated with steam and then the garbage fed to the pigs.

On the one hand this was an entirely eco friendly way to process organic matter. On the other hand the workers who handled the pigs lived a hundred yards from the stench of garbage.

There were no white families so far as I know that lived by the pig farms. One family in my town owned one of the biggest farms. The Villari's. Good people with a nice home in the newer part of Wenonah.

Their children worked in the farms the same way the black people did. They learned their trade. From the pigs came sausage and offal and food. For the Italian Market in South Philly, for meat processing plants across the country. I only knew how bad it stunk.

I only knew that the shotgun shacks didn't resemble the Victorian homes in my town. We'd pass through in the night and say ooh hold your nose. It's the pig farms. The wind never wafted over Wenonah.

Maybe it did. Maybe you could think lots of things about this way of doing things. Farm workers using organic materials to make home grown pork. Local people employed in natural ways. Maybe that's just pig shit.

Maybe it's easier to pretend there aren't any pig farms outside your town. Maybe it's easier to ignore the shotgun shacks and outhouses. Maybe it's simpler to say black people are animals and they can't do anything else but this.

But then I had Michelle Smith and her brother Mike in my school and they didn't seem to have anything to do with pig farms. And when I got older I met people from Jericho and Hammond Heights and it turns out they had a real town with dreams and aspirations. There are lots of questions you can ask about where your food comes from. I know that when I was young any Italian sausage I ate came from a pig farm that stunk to high heaven in Jericho. It didn't seem very cute or nice or organic. There's a good chance it wasn't.

There's every chance that just like every farm stinks a bit these farms stunk a lot. Right now in South Jersey there is a big argument that farms make the neighborhood less attractive. The fertilizer. The machines. The dirt. Back then I'd say the dirt was the laborers. The men who had no other options.

We almost always forget what it was like in 1960 in the USA. How black men could only aspire to be railroad porters or garbage men or pig farmers. We make jokes about Mexican laborers and how they're taking work away from people but I note that the pig farms are gone. I note that black men and women can aspire to be President. That's a far

cry from the cry of crows over a stench filled farm in South Jersey.

The really sad thing is that even though I have lots of nice photos of Wenonah with it's lovely homes and lawns there are no photos of the shotgun shacks. No photos of the men who worked the pig farms. I drove through when I was sick and getting better hoping to see things as they were but they were gone. That's the way it is America. We love the invisible. It makes life seem nicer somehow.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:25PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Rain and water and steam and pigs](#)

- JimMaddox

February 09, 2008

Woodbury Heights is bordered by Deptford as well. My side of town is next to New Sharon, and the pig farms were there as well. Just down Egg Harbor Rd. were the shotgun shacks you speak of. Poor whites were scattered among the black families, one of whom moonlighted as a carpenter. He helped my father build our house. Every now and then, on a really hot day, and after a heavy storm, the stench would make its way down the road. "The pigs are ripe tonight!" we would exclaim.

The Puerto Ricans who worked the farms near my Uncle Everett's in Clarksboro were treated like the soil. Just dirt. Contract labor to be treated without consideration for their humanity.

Ed Sullivan and life in 2007

[Monday, April 23, 2007](#)

My apologies for not posting over the past week. Life has a way of intruding into writing lives that we don't often anticipate. My young niece, Louise, had a party on Saturday to celebrate the upcoming birth of her first born and her engagement. I had the occasion of talking with my doctor regarding a medical procedure he's advised I undergo. Some of you know I'm HIV positive but I'm also positive for the virus that causes Hepatitis C and it's been wreaking havoc on my liver since the HIV virus roared into high gear. Twice in the past four years I've attempted the cycle of drugs to control the virus and each time have had a difficult time dealing with the effects. Basically I take a drug much like a chemo therapy drug that acts to destroy fast growing cells in the body. There are several fast growing cells in your body. Hair. The virus and it's ilk. Bone marrow cells. During my last round of treatment last year I achieved great reductions of the Hep C virus but unfortunately my red and white cells and my platelets also tanked. I kept my luxurious growth of crewcut hair. Once before I required a transfusion to deal with the near complete extermination of my red cells. This time it was my platelets that were a concern. My doctor has suggested a splenectomy to allow my platelet count to rise. Your spleen and mine has little to do with actual spleen. It does however remove some old immune cells from the body. By removing the spleen they hope to allow my platelet count to rise to a level at which I may tolerate a vicious assault on my bone marrow cells and by coincidence the virus that causes Hepatitis C. So Wednesday I'm going to see a surgeon to determine if I'm able to endure this surgery. What an odd operation. They're going to remove a perfectly healthy, functioning organ in hopes of saving a damaged, dying organ so they can save my aging husk of a body. To say this concerns me would be an understatement.

Nonetheless it has helped propel me once more to Wenonah in 1959 and 1960. Dwight David Eisenhower is our President. Soon to be replaced. I am small. Negroes are relegated to the outer darkness. My friend Bob writes to remind me the pig farms were in New Sharon, not Jericho. How nice to note small errors. There were still no white folks there. He also notes the origin of the term "shotgun shack". A shotgun shack was any building you could discharge a shotgun in the front door and the shot would pass through the back door with no damage. Some anthropologists suggest it's older origin lies in West Africa with the term Shogun or the word for house. The long nature of the structure is analogous to the structure of the building in the US. Note my odd use of locution.

What is more pertinent to my previous post was not the West African or Southern meaning of the term but the adjacent outhouse. The lack of good schools. The lack of choice in job advancement. The fact that Mrs Irene Smith had to purchase a home in the oddest corner of my town in order to say she and her children lived in Wenonah and to allow them to attend our little school. This understatement is consistent with my refusal to confront my own current fears regarding my possible death during surgery. The spleen is connected intimately to the heart. You take it out and you may rupture the heart. Break it. You fuck with a system of life that has been in place for many years and you can break it. All hell might break loose.

Dwight Eisenhower, unlike our current sitting President, was a war hero. He'd actually served in real wars. He knew the cost of aiming a gun at someone. He wasn't all comfy with that. He made, like Harry Truman, hard choices regarding that.

He grew up in Oklahoma where black folk were regarded pretty much like they were in Wenonah. In the Senate, Lyndon Johnson was presiding over legislation to change the ways we allowed black people to vote. He grew up in Texas. With brown and black people. With poor white people. They probably lived in shotgun shacks. They most certainly worked at the only jobs people would let them work at. This is poor grammar but fact.

The wind that was bringing the stink of the pig farms to me, the wind that my mother asked me to cover my face for to keep out "the polio", the wind that kept queers and niggers and spics at arms length was still strong. But there was another wind growing. It seems odd to say Lyndon Johnson and Dwight Eisenhower were helping to make that wind but they were. So were gentle men and women throughout the South and the country. Brave men and women who were taking courage from the struggles and victories of WWII to make a change here in the United States. Me, I was just a little boy. My friends and I were playing games and learning arithmetic. But every night we watched the news.

On Sundays we watched Ed Sullivan. What an odd show. A variety show. Like vaudeville but on TV. Jugglers and circus acts and comics and musicians all performing for a few moments under the auspices of a bland host. I hated Ed Sullivan. My parents and grandparents loved him. So every Sunday after Lawrence Welk we sat down to watch a succession of crazy quilt entertainment.

I share my home and heart with Johanna, a transsexual from El Salvador. All her friends are undocumented aliens. Their favorite show is Sabado Gigante. It's Ed Sullivan in spanish. It's real message is home. They hunger for it's tales of families reunited, of lands they can no longer visit, of music they all share. It's as hokey and odd as Ed's show was. Reggaeton mashes up with Mariachi much like Ella Fitzgerald would share a stage with Elvis.

There would come a time in the next few years when the winds of change would sweep

Ed Sullivan off the air. New music and attitudes and power would show him to be the vaudeville act he always was. A quaint reminder of a long gone age. Someday Sabado Gigante will seem equally quaint. Different winds blow at different times but they blow hard and long and they don't stop till they're done.

Let's leave this post with Jackie and Mickie and Teddy all clustered on the floor with their parents and grandparents watching Ed. Senor Jimenez is making jokes in some fake Mexican accent or Jackie Mason is telling cleaned up versions of oft repeated dirty Catskills jokes. A troupe of Russian acrobats is twirling in the air. They will defect the next day, never to return. Kruschev is pounding his shoe. Missiles are poised at the ready. Men are boarding unmarked planes for southeast Asia to control the uprising of the Vietminh. Life is about to change. Someone is holding a shotgun and aiming at the front door. It's not the shot that carries the charge it's the blast and the powder. In ten years no one will be home.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:47PM (-04:00)

Cemetery Hill

Tuesday, April 24, 2007

Christmas 1959 passed with no ill effects. It was the last year I believed in Santa Claus. The winter of 1960 was mostly unremarkable except it began my practice of sledding at Cemetery Hill. The winters of the 1960's were above average for snowfall in South Jersey. South Jersey normally gets perhaps one big snow a year that melts within a day or so. The 60's were filled with snow which for a young boy was a god send. With the first great dumping of snow our father took us to Cemetery Hill to go sledding. After this year we went on our own.

My birthday had a tenuous relationship with snow and winter. My father insisted I was born in a blizzard though the NWS shows only a five inch storm that day. It really doesn't matter. Winter isn't winter without snow and the removal of snow and playing in snow. My father loved shovelling snow and he instilled that love and it's precision in his sons. It may be that when we were very young we thought he was nutty as a fruitcake but now whenever it snows I want to shovel. I'll clear any walk, anywhere, for free. I never hurt my back or over exert but my walk is clear throughout a storm. My father was a guru of two things. Snow removal and lawn mowing and I share both.

He was also a man who loved to play in snow. In Woodbury when I was in kindergarten there was a huge winter storm. He helped us make an igloo and showed us how to make snowballs. In Wenonah he grabbed his childhood Flexible Flyer from the garage and dragged Mick and I across the Mantua Creek to Wenonah Cemetery (in Mantua) to go sledding. Wenonah Cemetery is where my mother's bones are at rest. It overlooks the Mantua Creek, a thin ribbon of swamp water where over the next nine years I would spend most of my best moments. They all began that first winter's day.

There were basically two hills in the cemetery. One on the south side and one on the west. I think. You'd start at the top of a hundred foot hill and hurl yourself down on your sled. Then you'd trudge up from the bottom to do it all again. You'd get wet and tired and sweaty and cold. You'd try dumb things like sled surfing (standing on your sled holding onto the rope to maintain balance and stance) or practice sled battles with other kids. You sledded between row after row of tombstones. Remember my mother is buried there and not without deep sentiment. Not for the place but for the sledding and the creek and

the swamp.

On the one side, I believe the south there was a large statue over one grave of a doughboy. It was once featured in *Weird New Jersey*. I knew the names of most people in the cemetery, if not the first, certainly the last. I can remember kids in a toboggan toppling more than a few headstones during one heady Saturday run sometime in the mid 60's.

If it was cold and icy and really snowy you could hurl yourself down the road of the cemetery. This was a quarter mile run of great peril given that some person of sorrow might be driving up to visit a loved one. Nonetheless it was a heady rush of speed and cold and ice and joy.

As we got older we went on our own. In the years to come we got our own Flexible Flyers. Short or long. But always sturdy and dependable. We'd wax the runners and trudge the half mile or so to Cemetery Hill. Chris and Terry, Gary and Robbie, Mick and I. Ted and his friends Joel and Robbie and Evan. We shared the hill with kids from Mantua and the smell of new snow and the feeling of frozen toes was universal.

Fuck problems. Who cared about homework. Who worried about being odd or not fitting in. We just stood on top of the hill and threw ourselves down. Like small rockets in blue jeans and hooded sweatshirts. Sledding was a complete joy. There was no competition. There was no status. There was no position. The snow would be there for only a day or two and you had to sled while you could.

Among the graves and decaying flowers and lost loves we hurtled down small hills in a town without hills screaming with joy.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:38PM (-04:00)

Sleeping Beauty and the Starlight Drive In

Friday, April 27, 2007

The first movie I saw in a movie theater was *Sleeping Beauty*. My grandmother Glading, no my Nonny Glading, took Mick and Ted and I to see it in late 1959 in a theater in suburban Philadelphia. I was amazed. The witch was terrifying, the screen was huge and all of us could talk of nothing else for weeks.

We rarely went to movies when I was young after that. Not until the end of 2nd grade and on into my early youth did we routinely visit movie theaters. When we went to indoor theaters we usually went to one of two movie theaters in Gloucester County. The Wood Theater in Woodbury or The Pitman Theater in Pitman. Both were old vaudeville playhouses that had been converted to movie theaters. When I was under 17 we went primarily for Saturday matinees. A feature, a B movie, cartoons and a theater filled with screaming children, tossed popcorn, and enough sugar to power a small nation.

Birthday parties were the primary vehicle for these jaunts. Parents would gather a group of us together on the pretext of celebrating one of our birthdays and schlep us off to the movies where for three hours we'd be happily ensconced in the rich glow of cinema.

Our parents, when they took us to the movies, took us to the Drive In. South Jersey was the place where the drive in movie was invented. No shit. A drive in in Pennsauken NJ was the first drive in in all of the Americas. My father and mother's favorite was the Starlight Drive In. We could see the screens of the Starlight and other Drive In theaters as we rode home from my Nonnies house in Pennsylvania. We could imagine the dialogue and guess at the action and then we were by and the images were gone.

A drive in was a crazy experience. You paid by the car and by the number of people in the car. You'd drive in, pay your admission and proceed to a spot where a sound device was hung on a pole. This device was then moved from the pole to your driver or passenger side window so you could hear the movie. Drive in's were made for two groups of people. Young adults with cars and young parents with children.

My parents in the 60's were the latter group. We'd load up the family wagon, the Plymouth or the Chevy depending on the year, fill it with blankets and pillows and head to the Starlight. They'd be showing some great epic. Spartacus or D Day or whatever. We'd sit rapt for perhaps a half hour then fall asleep. My parents would have an hour of peace, we'd have a treat, and maybe they'd neck.

Teenagers only went to drive in's to make out. For further information on the uses of drive in's and the middle of the 20th century see any number of horror movies made at the time. Only bad things could come of this.

You got refreshments from a stand in the middle of the vast field of cars. Otherwise it was a movie theater with beds.

The movie I remember most was the Guns of Navarone which was released in 1961 so I know I'm cheating here but still.

I'm going to have my spleen removed on the Friday before Memorial Day weekend. I'll spend the three day weekend eating jello and bantering with women from South Jersey, some of whom may have visited the Starlight. Maybe their children were conceived in the Starlight. I'll lie in bed and watch bad television and read and think.

On the way home from my grandmothers we were always in a fugue like state. Half full of energy, nearly asleep. We lay with our heads on the car cushions and looked up to the stars. We'd pass a field with a huge screen filled with movies. The movie had no sound and was gone in minutes. It was the way you experience adults or nature when you're young. One moment you're transfixed, the next moment they're gone. My parents were young people with desire and needs. They worked hard raising us and making money. They came home and acted as they thought parents should. What did they do when we weren't around? What were their desires? What were their needs? They were young and beautiful and passionate and we cared nothing for that. We glimpsed their lives for just a second. A flash as the car passes a drive in movie screen.

Perhaps you remember a moment of anger or a hated chore. Perhaps your parents were monsters that lurched in and out of your life like Frankenstein or Barbara Stanwyk. Perhaps you cherish a few moments cuddled on a couch with a book open and the drowsy drone of your mothers voice. Images on a large screen on a hot summer night. The words unknowable. The context unreadable. All we have is that.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 12:27AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Sleeping Beauty and the Starlight Drive In](#)

- JimMaddox

February 07, 2008

remember the speakers that you hung on the window? The sound was always very metallic and scratchy. My Dad took us to a double feature one night. The Great Escape and The Train. it seemed like we were there all night. Dad and I were the only ones awake the whole time, getting our fill of World War II

Television and my world

Saturday, April 28, 2007

There were three channels. 3, 6, & 10. We went to bed each night at 7:30. That meant television had it's greatest impact in the morning. Like most cities Philadelphia had children's televisions progrms week days between 7am and 9am. I'm not talking about national programs like Mickey Mouse Club or Howdy Doody or programs of their ilk. These were cheaply produced programs primarily designed to bracket either cartoons or filmed material readily available to their libraries.

If you are from New York you watched Officer Joe Bolton and the Our Gang movies. We had our own bizarre programs. Sally Starr, Chief Halftown, Pixanne, Gene London, Uncle Pete's Gang. Bizarre not because of the bulk of their content but because of the odd sketch material that was created to bracket the content. Sally Starr wore cowgirl clothes and Chief Halftown American Indian Garb. Pixanne was of course a pixie. Whatever the fuck a pixie was. Gene London was his own version of a pixie. If pre 1970's Philadelphia was ready for a gay man Gene London gave us all he had. In 2007 he lives in New York and presides over a collection of movie stars and theatrical gowns. Guess where his sensibilities lay.

That said the content was brilliant Warner cartoons and MGM cartoons and the Max Roach Our Gang series. No one could complain about the genius of what we were shown. And being children who could complain about context. Fake cowgirls and Indians and Pixies and a shop keeper with a gay streak a mile wide.

Our Gang movies were my favorites. Rich, multi ethnic movies about wild children. I loved them and their anarchic spirit. How glad was I to read about them later in Ragtime. Alfalfa and Whitey and Froggie and Buckwheat. My dearest friends. Constructing crates of junk and careering down the streets. Lost in fantasies only children could understand. You can imagine my delight later in life when I learned Roach said to them... just do what you like and we'll film it. No plan, no ideas just children being idiots. Like me, like my friends.

And Bugs and Daffy. And all the Warner brothers cartoons. Adult beyond my measuring. Smart and cool and suave and wild. Who wouldn't love cartoons like that.

That was the morning.

In the afternoon there was only one show. The Early Show. A movie program that showed films of the 30's, 40's, & 50's. We lived for monster movies, for horror movies. For "The Thing", for "Frankenstein", for the "Mummy". We'd all sit in my second living room in terror at 4 in the afternoon watching monsters.

How much better to watch an alien possess and devour men on an arctic outpost then to deal with the problems of flowering plants in Wenonah. Or more appropriately the negroes next door. But in Our Gang the black kids and white kids played together and the jews made the movie. Go figure.

As we got older we made movies a richer part of our lives. For now our gal Sal was the best part of the day.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:47PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Television and my world](#)

- JimMaddox

October 22, 2007

Our children's shows at that time were some of the most inventive programming of the time. The Max Fleischer cartoons were totally wild. Surreal animals, singing flowers, Hunky and Spunky and of course, the black and white Popeyes. It's funny how we all knew that Gene London was gay. We couldn't put our finger on it, but we knew he was "different". Bertie the Bunyip with Fussy and Gussy and Sir Guy de Guy. I would not go to Sunday school because Bertie was on. Who can forget Wee Willie Webber in the morning and subbing for our gal Sal in the evenings. You also forgot Happy the Clown, man you can't forget Happy the Clown!

Second Grade and the Lake

Tuesday, May 01, 2007

I can't remember anything I learned in Second Grade. I remember Miss Quigley being beautiful. I remember learning to write and read. I can't remember a thing of arithmetic. I've asked my friends what they recall and the answer is the same. It's a strange thing to say but I passed through Second Grade as an innocent. It was the last year I believed in Santa Claus. It was the last year my parents were my whole world.

It was also one of the last years I spent at the Wenonah Lake. After school ended there wasn't much to do but play. Wenonah is a hot humid town near Philadelphia. When I was getting better and living in the Knisell's home Rachel told me that homes used to have outside kitchens to deal with the heat of summer. What we did do was go to the lake. There were several bodies of water in Wenonah. The Wenonah Lake was a community association that dated back to the 1880's when Wenonah was a resort town. There was the recently formed Wenonah Swim Club. A clean chlorinated pool with a snack bar and a kiddie pool and tennis and basketball courts. There was the Mantua Creek and the swamps. There was Parkers lake and Sinnott's Pond and another lake by one of the mansions in town. Only the Wenonah Lake and the Swim Club were open for recreation. It's a long standing fact of life in Wenonah that young families begin their lives at the lake and migrate to the pool. Young children have no sense of cool so the lake was fine. Once you were older the brown water and lack of facilities made it less than cool.

My friend Bob has many memories of play at the lake. Ed Campbell, one of the teachers in our school, was a lifeguard and regularly roughoused with kids on the raft of wood and 55 gallon drums in the middle. Kid's sold snow cones and families barbequed and there were rudimentary swimming lessons. The swim club had a world class swim team. Kid's from the Wenonah Swim Club competed in Philly and all across South Jersey. Their swimming records were all over the walls of the club. When you swam in the lake you emerged in a brown tan from the cedar water. It was neither clean nor cool. No one raced. Instead you ran willy nilly and cannon balled off the pier.

When I went back to Wenonah to recover from my illness (AIDS) I went each day to the lake. I sat there the only adult male in the place and watched mothers and young children having fun.

On the 4th of July there were competitive races at the lake. The 4th of July was the greatest day in Wenonah and remains so to this day. My friends come back year after year to sit on corners they sat on when they were children to watch the same silly little parade. It's beautiful. The Pitman Hobo Band and the Bonsal Blues Band square off mid town in a burst of John Phillips Sousa. Raggedy fake hobos and military nincompoops all playing their hearts out and everyone cheers and salutes. Politicians pay homage and

walk the streets. You can say hey to the local representatives, laugh at the presumptions of small businesses and guess as to this years theme. I'll have a lot more to say about the 4th in years to come.

But always, on a hot day, when you were in 2nd grade you went to the lake. You caroomed off the pier. You laughed and scared your parents. You begged for a dime for a snow cone.

I'm going to break protocol here and put in a poem I wrote when I was stuck in Wenonah in 2002-2003. Please read it for it's great joy and nostalgia.

We're All Going to the Lake

We're going to the lake!

All of us.

We're loading up the minivans.

We're slapping up the kickstands.

We're running around the house,
screaming about how we can't
find our badges or our high band
or our favorite suit.

Which was right here and
we're getting up slow from lunch
and walking out to the car.

We're going to the lake!

Eight housewives, twenty five kids,
three lifeguards, one kid in the refreshment stand to dish up the water ice,
me and once in a while a dad and maybe some teenagers,
who are loud and look scary but
swim like shit once they hit the water
and smack!

What a lake to dive into!

A long brown ribbon of cedar water.

Trees brushing it's sides, bright blue skies
fill it with clouds

and turtles strung out on a log.

They're so tired from this hot, hot sun they forget to eat.

So the crappies and minnows
are all over the shallows.

Gotta get while the getting's good.

Far, far out on the lake a big bass leaps up, flops down
and nobody sees the water ripple out.

They're riding their bikes
down Jefferson or Monroe.

Towels over their shoulders
snapping in the rush.

A whine of spokes and muscle that's been going on for fifty years.

Fifty years of kids hauling their
bodies trawling streams of brown water,
small muscles stretched,
yelling, running, tight little balls that

cannon into the water!
O Joy! O headlong rush to water!
O the whirl of spokes!
The shrieks!
The gossip!
The affairs.
Bodies lying in beds, dreaming of other
bodies last night, last week.
Husbands, lovers.
Heat raising tiny beads of sweat,
the bathing suit tossed heedless on the chair.
The brush of finger to breast.
The wives dreaming of sweat;
muscled backs, thick bellies.
The drop falling from his chin,
running down her breast.
But then the kids are yelling!
We gotta go swimming!
Insistent!
Water calling water.
Awkward crawl
head out of water
crazy seven year old treading water.
mad dog paddle.
Mom watching, feet in water,
not really there,
but cool and wet on a hot, hot day.
O Wenonah Lake!
Canoes, boats, rafts,
big fat guy, belly up,
floating.
The only husband here today.
Me, watching housewives,
watching kids,
splashing dad,
slap of hand on water.
Ripples that go all the way to shore.
We're all at the lake!
We've brought everything we need.
Life jackets, blankets, sunscreen, towels, badges, bands,
balls, rubber killer whales, sunhats, sun glasses, coolers,
cocktails cleverly disguised as lemonade, water,
watches, buckets to carry water and
desire.
All for the lake!
On a hot, hot day.
We go to the lake for the water.
Come in!

Come in!
Come in!

That's my lake. That's my town. Soon it will be summer and the snapping turtles will be on their logs, the bass will be leaping from the middle of a small brown lake and children will be screaming at their friends. Oh God. This is a beauty that can never be recovered.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:12PM (-04:00)

Third Grade

Tuesday, May 01, 2007

Oh and this brings us finally to Third Grade. Mrs Ferrara. The dawn of life. Kennedy and Nixon. The birth of my sister, Mary Louise. The beginning of my rich life outside of my house. Models and games and fun! Desperate attempts at learning. 1960 and the dawn of the new decade!

Where oh where to begin. We all went to school again with just each other. In Mrs Ferrara's third grade classroom. Mrs Ferrara from Pitman, NJ. Mrs. Ferrara, loud and brassy and fun. I read To Kill a Mockingbird. I walked to school and I wasn't the rough tough creampuff. I played in a baseball league. I tried to be an altar boy. I was confirmed by the Catholic church as a soldier of Christ. I began to be me. I found Superman and Batman and the Flash! I found Aquaman and Hawkman and the Justice League of America! What a glorious time. It's true I still dressed like some awkward child of the Depression. It's true my mother still could not cook. But we began our rich life of play and imagination and creation.

Here then are the children of the sixth decade of the 20th century in all their stupid glory. Black and white and dumb but ready to learn.

God I loved this year.

Picture to follow. Terry and Bob and all my friends...let's give us all names:)

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:07PM (-04:00)

My brothers and I

Tuesday, May 01, 2007



In the absence of my third grade class picture here are two unforgettable portraits of myself and my brothers. One is all three of us together. The second is Mick and I on the fishing pier of the 59th street pier in Ocean City. In 1962 this pier would be a part of the ocean.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:19PM (-04:00)



Termites & Decay

Wednesday, May 02, 2007

Today my co worker David remarked that I like to talk to people about termites. It's true. Termite treatments and termite behaviors are clear and orderly and rarely rely on anxiety. I'm basically sick to death of talking to my clients about mice. Or bedbugs. Or unknown odors. They should man up. It's not that big of a deal but they're rich and angry and they've been on the internet or they're humanists or kind or thoughtful or decent. They think killing mice is bad but they have no qualms about killing American cockroaches or termites or ants. I'm a little tired of their speicism. Kill one, kill them all. But no, if it has fur they want to relocate it. Or worse they find it unacceptable that they're paying a gazillion dollars a month and they have mice. As though if you were rich you couldn't get the flu or cancer.

Mice in New York are most often of the genus House Mouse. That means they live in our houses. They have small territorial ranges and they like us and our meager amounts of food and water we provide. Some people want to relocate them to a more hospitable environment. A field perhaps. Sadly mice from our homes don't have the faintest idea of how to survive in a field and will come to a horrible death.

It's like Iraq. We'll fix everything by giving them democracy. And if democracy is messy and weird and involves them not being our friends we're shocked. Duh.

I don't advocate killing every mouse on the planet. I like the little guys. They provide me with a good living. But if they live in your house and eat your food the only way to get rid of them is to kill them. That's not so nice.

I love democracy. I am willing to deal with democracies that don't like the US of A. Pragmatism is both a virtue and a curse.

So, set your mice free in fields to die at the hands of rats and hawks and starvation. Grant various republics democracy and watch with horror as they act contrary to your expectations.

If it makes you feel better remember that it's spring.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:24PM (-04:00)

Mrs Ferrera's Third Grade Class 1960-61

Friday, May 04, 2007



Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:45PM (-04:00)

Little Men

Sunday, May 06, 2007

Third grade began with a momentous Christmas. First, I caught my parents assembling bicycles for Mick and I. Then I told Mick and destroyed his faith in Santa. Actually he held on for about six hours until we came downstairs and found the gleaming new bikes. Then I got a bike! A beautiful red bike, a two wheeler, a giant red bike...so big I could barely get on it. Mick received a smaller black bike. We were both really excited but it was too cold that Christmas to do more than look at them. What a curse. Then there were little men. Army men. Plastic figurines of WW II soldiers and Civil War soldiers. Mick was entranced by the Civil War and both of us were fascinated by WWII. These were the years of war movies and heroism, japs and jerries getting blown to bits by brave GI's.

We set up our men throughout our room or the second living room or outside in the digging yard and made gun noises. I can still do a creditable machine gun. Later in life we bought Airfix HO scale soldiers from nearly every army in the world. Suaves and grenadiers and doughboys marched everywhere in the Wiler home. They were melted and torn apart and lost forever down sewers and drains and in holes. My mother and father unearthed them for years in the vegetable garden they planted in the digging yard once we'd moved out.

The figures frozen forever tossing grenades or half crouched firing tommy guns. Officers urging the GI's to greater glory, pillboxes to hide and fire machine guns. Planes and rafts and cannons and mortars and barbed wire all to serve our brave soldiers as they moved across the roots of a great black maple or tunneled deep in the digging yard.

The Airfix men became part of great tableaus we created in a box that had once been a baseball game. It had sides about two inches high and was roughly 3' by 6' and we'd fill it with dirt and rocks and create vast battlefields. We strung model planes on thread from the basement ceiling and lit them afire to have molten plastic land on our hapless heroes. All to the chatter of guns and the shrieks of children playing at war.

We played at war constantly. We invented our own game for the summers, based loosely on Kick the Can or Capture the Flag, which we called "The Gun Game". One person was it and had a gun. The others scattered in hiding to evade capture. The person who was it

simply had to see you and call out your name and rough location. "Mick, behind the bush" or "Jack, in the tree" or "Chris, in the sewer" and you had to go back to the base. All the captured or basically living dead players could be freed by one person running in while the person who was it was away and touching the base. No warning or siren gave notice this was happening. This meant it could be a long night for the person who was it. Sam Stewart was our prize chump. He must have spent thousands of hours patrolling my yard looking for us in the garage or in the crawl space or up a tree or just beyond the porch. The borders could be expanded to include the McQuades yard but that was it. Even with just two yards it was tough to win. Almost like being on patrol in the Nam or walking a line in Korea. Except people laughed at you instead of trying to kill you.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:41PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Little Men](#)

- JimMaddox

October 22, 2007

Once in Woodbury Heights, the battle of the Alamo was recreated. Kids from my side of town, the lake side, gathered their arms and attacked the kids from the other side of Glassboro road. St. Margaret's was being built, and a huge mound of dirt became the fabled Spanish Mission of San Antonio. We from the lake side were of course, the hated Mexicans. We dragged our Johnny Reb cannons, waved our banners and marched down the streets to the imagined strains of our martial band. we assaulted the heights of the earthen Alamo, to be repulsed by a hail of dirt bombs and the brave taunts of the defenders. At the end of the day, the Alamo was taken, the dirt bombs brushed off. The bugles sounded and the field of battle was cleared. We marched in triumph back to Walnut and Glenwood and Lake avenues, stopping at Trackies's store for Tastykakes and sodas. It was a day of glory.

1960 and News

Thursday, May 10, 2007

I was going to write, yesterday or today or tomorrow, about the news that affected our little family in 1960 & 1961. I still am, a little, but for a moment I'll bring in 2007 as well. In 1960 a new President, John F Kennedy, was elected President. He took the oath of office on a cold day in January of 1961. For the young men and women of my generation he was a hero. Young, strong, committed. I'll talk later about JFK because my family had other news in roughly October of 1960; my mother was expecting a child. It had been four years since my younger brother Ted was born. Mick, and Ted, and I pranced around my Nonny Glading's kitchen chanting, Oh no, not again! We were thrilled to have a new child join our merry band. This being 1960 we did not know if it would be a girl or a boy. But to get more to the point; last night my niece Louise had a daughter. Makenzie Marie was brought into this world sometime yesterday evening. Her mother, a young woman, is doing well. The news of this young girls birth struck me with a force I hadn't anticipated, made me feel odd in ways I hadn't anticipated. I'll explore those thoughts in my poetry and in my conversations with my brother and my niece. But last night I also had a dream. I dreamed Acme Exterminating was moving. We had to move quite suddenly to new headquarters and when we arrived we found our headquarters had no roof. There was a storm brewing and Luis and I and Willa were hastily moving things into a small enclosed

room. Some of the things were my books. Books from my childhood. We were moving not just Acme but our own possessions. The owner of the company was weeping over the death of his father many years before.

I woke suddenly and wrote this down. It's three am. Acme Exterminating is in fact moving in just a little while for the first time in many, many years. The man who founded the company, Harry Stien, will not be moving with it. He died a few years back. He was a big, ebullient man of great joy and passion. He served his country well in WWII and left his son and his employees a company with a proud record in an industry known for it's family businesses.

What does this dream mean? What do any dreams mean? John F Kennedy was a new President in a young country that had just fought a bitter war across the globe. The men and women of his generation sacrificed much, achieved much, and believed that they could do anything. They passed that belief along to boys and girls like me and Mick and Ted and my soon to be born sister, Mary Louise.

Harry was JFK's contemporary, though from a very different background. He walked out of WWII and built a business in one of the toughest markets in the world.

Bob and I and Luis are the heirs of that business. Luis and I and Willa and Bob are a family as much as Mick and Ted and Mary Louise and I are a family. There is a roof over our heads in the new Acme Exterminating. That's a bit of what the dream means.

I was wrong. There is a roof over our head in the new office. The new office is just around the corner from the old.

So Makenzie Marie...welcome to a world that is the same and different. Just a few moments ago you weren't here. Now you are. Everything we tell you, everything your mother and father tell you will be the truth. None of it will be the truth. You will wake up one day in the year 2064 and look around you and say, wait, where is the roof? Why is it raining? When did we move?

Then you'll realize, as we all do, it was just a dream. A beautiful dream we hold in our hearts for a short span of years. Like all dreams it's filled with terror and sex and laughter and tears. Cherish your dream Makenzie as we cherish you.

Goodnight Mr President. Goodnight Harry. Goodnight Luis and Willa. Goodnight Ted. Goodnight Mick. Goodnight Mary Lou. Goodnight Louise. Sleep tight wrapped in your cherished dreams.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:09AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: 1960 and News](#)

- Louise

August 21, 2007

I just read all your blogs and this is very beautiful and i know one day she will enjoy as much as paul and i did to see it!

More News

[Thursday, May 10, 2007](#)

Isn't it funny how you can leave some things out? Did any of you read Henry Adams autobiography? I did. I loved it. Then my friend Mack asked me if I noticed anything. I said, yes, the guy didn't have many girlfriends. Turns out Henry skipped over being

married and his wife's suicide.

I forgot to mention in all the rush in my last posting that my CT Scan was approved and I'll be sliding through a tube on Friday to see how large or small my spleen is. Once that's done on May 25th a surgeon will remove my spleen. Hopefully nothing bad will happen.

You might ask how much else I've left out of the story of my life in Wenonah or what's not in my poems. I might tell you.

I might not.

I'm also walking in the New York AIDS walk the Saturday before my surgery. Those of you of a charitable bent are invited to go to the AIDSWalk NY site and find me (John Wiler) and donate in support of my efforts. It's my second walk. I did the first in 2003 in Philadelphia.

What else am I leaving out here? I can't remember. Oh well, tomorrow's another day and I'm sure it will come to me.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:07AM (-04:00)

Venting Spleen

Wednesday, May 16, 2007

I haven't posted in several days. Not because I don't have anything to say but more because I've been preoccupied. I mentioned needing a splenectomy the other day. Actually I don't require a splenectomy, instead my physician hopes a splenectomy will allow my body to tolerate the ravages of the treatments for hepatitis C. When I take the treatment it works very well with me as far as the Hep C goes. The problem is that, like chemo, it's designed to kill fast growing cells in the body.

It also totally wastes my bone marrow. The first time I went on the treatment I required a transfusion. The second time I had most of my platelets destroyed. We won't go into the OCD aspects. The spleen removes waste products of the immune system from your blood. This includes platelets. It keeps your platelet count in balance. By removing it I should produce tons of platelets thus giving me more chance of staying on the treatment that much longer.

I'm not particularly happy about this.

I'm losing time from work, I'm going to miss Memorial Day, people are afraid around me. I have to eat hospital food. Doctors aren't real clear about what recovery entails. They just say x number of days. Will it hurt? Will I be able to walk around? Not a topic of discussion. I haven't even been able to talk with my doctor's scheduling aide. So later this morning I'll drive to South Jersey with a picture of my innards, a CT Scan, to see if my spleen is small enough to be removed without cracking open my chest.

Perhaps you can see why this means I don't particularly give a fuck about JFK or Mrs Ferrara right now.

I'm going to dutifully post about 3rd grade day after tomorrow. I'm hoping to scan in a copy of my report card because I can't remember what subjects we studied. I've forgotten what I learned. I can remember the name of Mrs. Ferrara's son, Raymond, but not whether we had Social Studies or not.

I dreamed the other night I was in an auto accident. I was waiting with my friends after the accident for the EMT's when I glanced down at my shoes and saw they were soaked in blood. I pulled my pants down a bit and saw I'd been pierced in the upper thigh by a sharp object and I'd been bleeding profusely.

The blood was warm and thick against my skin and starting to dry in some places. I gather the dream has something to do with a sense of dread. You would think that having survived one near death experience you could gut out a little thing like a minor organ removal. I don't even want to drop off the CT scan. I'd rather talk to people about mice. The oddest thing is how much this feels like the week or two before I went to the hospital in October of 2001. Everyone is going about their normal business, including me, and around the corner is something I know is waiting but can't grasp. Quite.

In 2001 I lost everything I had except for a few pieces of furniture, some bits of clothes and my television. I woke up in South Jersey alone. I have spent the past six years recovering all that was lost. Part of me feels like this was all a futile dream. A good dream but a dream. Trying to recover your life with things seems foolish. Yet I love my new car. I cherish this little computer and my iPod and my new telephone. I relish the chance to work. I take great joy in joking with my friends at work and at home and there are moments when I'm sitting on my porch watching Johanna and her friends and the dogs that life has never been better.

So dear friends, forgive my lapses of judgement, my bad taste, my failures to properly thank you on one occasion or another. Forgive my audacity in writing this story. My foolhardy attempts to capture life. Forgive me and grant me some absolution. I promise to write again of the boys and girls of Wenonah, my brothers and my new born sister. My parents and my grandparents. But it will have to wait a few days till I know better if my chest will be broken open and my heart exposed to the air.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:34AM (-04:00)

More vented spleen

Sunday, May 20, 2007

Hello all, I'm just back from AIDSWalk NYC and wanted to thank everyone who donated to sponsor me. Plus I have good news in that my surgery will be laproscopic and should go off without a hitch. Finally I screwed up with my 3rd Grade report card and won't be able to post till tm'w. Many apologies.

Till tm'w then.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:22PM (-04:00)

3rd Grade Report Card

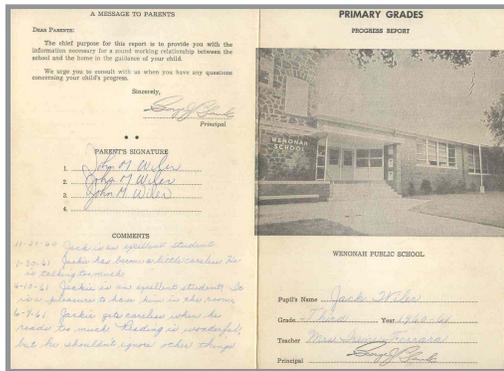
Monday, May 21, 2007

EXPLANATION OF MARKS		GRADE	
A—Very Good Progress		1	2
B—Good Progress		3	4
C—Acceptable Progress			
D—Unsatisfactory Progress			
READING			
1. Your child is reading at the level indicated			
Pre-primers			
Primer			
First Grade			
Second Grade			
Third Grade			
2. Attacks words independently	A	A	A
3. Reads with ease	A	A	A
4. Understands what he reads	A	A	A
5. Reads aloud well	A	A	A
LANGUAGE			
1. Copies whole letters well	A	A	A
2. Expresses ideas easily	A	A	A
3. Participates in group activities	A	A	A
4. Spells correctly except last of words	A	A	A
5. Spells correctly in written work	A	A	A
NUMBER WORK			
1. Knows the facts of the grade	A	A	A
2. Thinks through and solves arithmetical problems	A	A	A
3. Applies and uses everyday number experiences	A	A	A
SOCIAL STUDIES AND SCIENCE			
1. Brings in helpful material	A	A	A
2. Gets information and contributes to the group	A	A	A

HABITS		1	2	3	4																																																																		
WORK HABITS																																																																							
1. Works well with others		A	A	A	A																																																																		
2. Begins promptly		A	A	A	A																																																																		
3. Completes work		A	A	A	A																																																																		
4. Is neat		A	A	A	A																																																																		
5. Is careful with materials		A	A	A	A																																																																		
6. Is self-reliant		A	A	A	A																																																																		
SOCIAL HABITS																																																																							
1. Is a good group member		A	A	A	A																																																																		
2. Shows self-control		A	A	A	A																																																																		
3. Speaks clearly and promptly		A	A	A	A																																																																		
4. Respects the rights of others		A	A	A	A																																																																		
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Promoted to Fourth Grade

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:10PM (-04:00)



My Grades

Monday, May 21, 2007

Well, now it's clear. I was an egghead. Although an egghead with poor cursive writing skills. And after looking at Mrs. Ferrera's handwritten notes I know I was far from her goals for my cursive writing. Looking back I was grateful for the day that I could just print in caps. I do that well. Thank God for Industrial Drawing in 8th Grade.

In the meantime we can deconstruct this relic from the past. The black and white photo of an entrance to the school none of us used. The teachers comments. Her references to me as Jackie. The fact that I read too much. Read too much! What a curse to spend my time doing what they taught us to do!

Note too the principals signature rubber stamping our efforts and the signature of my father. John M. Wiler. A signature I would use a million times as an adult as I am his namesake. Seeing it there chills the spine.

Another man signing your name again and again attesting to the scholarly efforts of his son. A man who knew little of what happened in his son's classroom. Who assumed, rightly, that the same things were happening there that had happened in his third grade classroom. Who sent me to school alone each day with barely a nod. In fact, if I remember correctly he was usually gone by the time we left. We were home for his arrival at days end. It was almost always a celebration. Of what I'm not sure. But happy we were to have him back in the house. Like dogs waiting for their beloved master, tails wagging, twitching with expectation. Oh sweet joy.

Jackie loved third grade. He loved to read. He read too much. He didn't learn enough but how much he didn't learn is for the subject of later posts.

In the meantime we'll id our classmates and talk about the impending birth of my beloved sister in the next posting. See you all on the other side of my splenectomy.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:12PM (-04:00)

Waiting

Tuesday, May 22, 2007

Well, I'm consumed with wait and worry, so while I'm waiting and worrying here's a poem from me and Mario:

Mario Infirmes Says Wait.

He inhales his Pall Mall and holds it for what seems like hours.

He lets the smoke out slow.

He smiles just a little, he reaches into his pocket, removes his wallet and opens it.

He says.

How long did that take?

I said,

I don't know, a minute?

He says, I could have taken longer and the same thing would have happened.

Wait.

Wait for the bartender.

He knows you're here.

He'll be down this way eventually.

He'll mix your drink and place it in front of you.

Wait.

Wait for your son to walk across the room.

Watch him wobble and lurch.

He's about to fall.

Wait.

He doesn't.

His sudden rush sends him the last few feet into your arms.

Put your head deep in the crook of his neck and breathe.

Wait.

Wait for the smells to rise from his skin.

Breathe them in and wait.

Wait for your wife to come.

Watch her shudder waves of pleasure or is it terror.

Wait.

Wait for the boss to bring you your check.

Wait.

Wait for the rain to reach you from across the bay.

Think of that scene in the Renoir movie where the rain moves across the water.

Think how long he waited for that to happen.

Think how it might never have happened if he hadn't waited.

What would come to you if you'd only waited.

What have you lost by rushing?

Wait to hear what your lover is saying. Don't start talking before they're done.

He's saying he wants you more than life.

If you talk before he says it you'll never know the truth.

Wait for the truth.

Wait for things to happen.

They always do.

Wait to find out what they are when they do happen.

Wait for all the surprises that are just out of your grasp.

Wait for someone else to pick up the check.

Wait for the newspaper.

Wait for the bus.
Wait for your son to be born.
Wait for your father to die.
Wait for all the things you're afraid of and wait for all the things you want.
There's plenty of time for action.
For now just enjoy this drink, this quiet conversation, this soft music,
this oak bar, this cigarette.
It will all be over soon enough.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:29AM (-04:00)

Spleenless in Jersey City

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

Hello all! I'm home again and without my spleen! I was released on Monday afternoon and have been feeling good and improving daily...only one pain killer today so far! I will be returning to Wenonah and my postings tomorrow but wanted to say thank you to all the folks at Virtua Voorhees, especially my Surgeon, Dr Balsama. Also Leah, Tricia, Kusuma (hope I got that right!), Renee and all the folks on the floor! Everyone was wonderful and made my recovery a snap! I'm thinking of going back and having my gall bladder removed in a month or so.

More importantly my numbers are on the rise and soon I can move head on against the Hep C. God is good!

To all of you in New England: I'll be at the Stonecoast MFA on 7/7 for a reading and then at the Frost Festival of Poetry from 7/31- 8/5. Hope to see all my poetical friends up north at one or the other event! Lots more on the horizon in 2007!

Hope you're all writing and reading and enjoying this beautiful summer weather.

Yr pal,

Jack

Posted by Jack Wiler at 01:41PM (-04:00)

1960 JFK Mary Lou and more

Friday, June 01, 2007

So it's 1960 and for the first time I'm aware of a presidential election. John F Kennedy is running against Richard Nixon and we watch the news and see the Kennedy's the Nixons and more. My mother is pregnant with my sister, Mary Louise. I'm in third grade and life in Wenonah is sweet.

I walk to school each day with my friends Terry and Dottie. I go to class with children I've known now for two years. We are friends in a way I hadn't experienced friends before. After 2nd grade I'm now closer to boys and girls a grade ahead. Chief among them Chris DeHart who lives down the block from me on South Lincoln. Chris has two older brothers, Tommy and Stewart and a southern mother, Clara. She's passed along a lot of her heritage to her children and they share many of her beliefs and ideals. Chris' father is in the family business, DeHart Trucks.

Terry has two older brothers as well, Mike and Tim. Mike and Tim are smart and handsome and cool in ways a geek like me can only vaguely comprehend. They make

fun of me for reading all the time. I go to Terry's house to play early every weekend, when I wake up. Terry's family does not get up when Mick and I wake up. Everyone sleeps till 9 or 10 in the morning. Mrs. Fleming greets me at the door, a vision in hairspray and gruff Irish beauty. She can't figure out why in the world I'm awake.

At school we're excited when Kennedy is elected. A new generation with new visions has taken the reins of power. At least that's the way it feels to us little kids. We have long passionate arguments about civil rights and white flight. We're in third grade or fourth grade so these arguments are stupid to say the least. Chris takes the traditional southern view. If niggers move in his family will move out. Not that there was any chance of that happening but still we discuss it at length.

Meantime my brothers and I anticipate Mary's arrival. We're hoping for a fourth boy but I can bet my mother is praying for a girl. We were a handful. Mick and I and Ted drove her crazy. She was quiet and bookish and sweet. We were loud and insistent and out of control. Years later my Uncle Ed, my father's brother, would tell he thought my father had no control of us.

We played football, tackle, in the backyard, with only the rudiments of understanding of the rules. We watched TV from 7:30 to 8:00 and went to bed. I read and read and read. It seems to me that I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in third grade. That might be historically impossible and I have no intention of verifying that. But the central theme of the book, the battle against the poison that was racism and the heroism of black and white men and women in fighting it struck me with all the force it struck the rest of the nation.

I read the Hardy Boys too. Every last Hardy Boys book. My mother's brother, Al, had some of them in his collection from the forties. I ran through them in a few months. Roadsters and gangsters and smugglers and mysteries and all in New Jersey! The Hardy Boys were from a shore town in Northern New Jersey but from my perspective they were from strange place by the shore with cliffs and caves and violence. In Wenonah the only violence was child on child violence.

I began to learn to ride my bike. It being too big I had trouble stopping it so I adopted a strategy of running into curbs to stop. Mick and I launched our sibling rivalry in earnest. Each of us was what the other wanted to be and this would extend for years.

Mick was athletic and personable and funny. I was smart and awkward and I don't know what. We began a series of battles each day at breakfast. Mick would look at me across the table and start in. Bla, bla bla bla eh eh eh. Nonsense syllables that drove me crazy. I'd scream at him to stop and he'd do it more. My mother would say, ignore him and he'll stop. Might as well ask the sun not to come up. Ignore him? How? He was relentless in picking the scabs of my insecurities. I never figured out that it was me that made him nuts. We'd end up rolling around on the floor kicking and punching till our mother booted us out.

And out we went into the extended games we all played. We discovered the woods. Clay Hill and the Mantua Creek were just two blocks from our house and all of us spent hours there each afternoon. Walking through the woods imagining ourselves assaulted by dinosaurs or Russians or god knows what. Shooting our plastic guns at imaginary monsters and rolling for cover.

Chris invented most of the games. That was his forte. He saw more movies than any of us and when he'd return he'd tell us the stories and we'd reenact them. Frankenstein or Dracula, Wolfman, Liberty Valance. All of them elaborately choreographed plays Chris would direct. The two most intense were Frankenstein and Liberty Valance. Each of us would be assigned a role and Chris would give us lines and tell us when to enter. We

revelled in the detail. Liberty Valance was my personal favorite because for once I wasn't a geek. I usually played the Jimmy Stewart character, Rance Stoddard. Chris was always Liberty Valance. Terry was John Wayne's character. Gary Condell played Pompey. My brother and his friends played everyone in the town.

Years later when I saw the film in Livingston College in Al LaValley's film class I was astounded to realize I knew all the dialogue. Chris had drilled it into us. Pompey hand me my gun.

We played with our school work. Walks to school had us telling stories based on our spelling words. We each tried to use our spelling words in elaborately crafted stories. Monsters and GI's and war figured heavily in everything we wrote. We tried to top each other with the best story till we forgot about the spelling words.

A note here...I've been away from the past for the last few weeks and am just getting back into 1960. It's odd to put yourself back again, especially when you're worried about the present. Forgive the disconnect. Bob Thomas has been helping put names to the picture. I hope to be done soon. In the meantime I'm going to post his most recent reconstruction and if any of you can help fill in the pieces I hope you will.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:50PM (-04:00)

Third Grade Only One Girl Left Unnamed

Sunday, June 03, 2007



Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:15PM (-04:00)

Ed Campbell

Sunday, June 03, 2007

Third Grade you'll note was taught by a woman. A woman with a young son. First and Second as well were taught by women and Fifth and Sixth. Teaching was widely perceived as a woman's job in America in 1960. It was underpaid and the women who held the jobs were considered either to be in search of a husband or supplementing a man's income in the family. My world and Mick's and Terry's and Chris' was filled with women. We left for school without seeing our fathers. We returned from school to our mothers. Many of the men in town took the train to work in Philadelphia. We'd see them walking home just before dinner in their suits and hats. They were far away figures. We had yet to participate in organized sports. We had no coaches and few if any male teachers.

Wenonah Elementary had two exceptions, my Fourth Grade Teacher, Mr. McIntyre, and Ed Campbell. Ed Campbell was assigned the problem classes. The Second and Third graders that posed a difficulty. My classes were filled with good cooperative kids. Mr. Campbell's were filled with kids with learning problems, with discipline issues. It was thought that only a man could bring them in line.

Mr. Campbell was that man. He'd served in the Korean War. He was a father as well. But more than that he was a robust, energetic man who engaged his students in ways our teachers didn't. If a kid wasn't paying attention he'd toss an eraser at his head. Mike Smith, the younger brother of Michelle, was once hung out the window till he cooled down. He played football and soccer with us on our gravel schoolyard. Especially soccer. We played a robust game with few rules and lots of contact. The only referee was Mr. Campbell and unless you were a bully or a cheat you got away with everything within the rules. It was always a joy when we were allowed to join with his classes in soccer or football.

In summers he was a lifeguard at the Wenonah Lake. He'd plant himself on the raft in the middle of the lake and take on all challengers. We'd try to take the raft and he'd toss us off. He was a war hero and a man and everything we could want to be. He was fearless. Of course, he was dealing with boys and girls under the age of twelve so it's doubtful he was physically afraid of us.

You had the sense though that he expected better of you. That you could be a better man, a better person, a better scholar, by following in his footsteps. He was, most importantly, not our father. He didn't belittle you or make you feel stupid. He simply asked you to do the work you were assigned. He was never my teacher except in the way a male role model is for a young boy. Like my Uncle Al or my Uncle Ed he showed me the way to be a man.

It was a strange world not having men in it. Your father, my friends fathers, never involved themselves in our lives the way fathers do today. They came home, had a cocktail, ate dinner, asked you about your day, chatted with our mothers and went back to work. Their life was a mystery. But Ed Campbell was there with us daily. Striding the schoolyard like the cock of the walk. Loud, boisterous, argumentative, challenging.

In my town most of the men went to war. WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War were all a real part of the landscape. The county draft board was headed up by a man who lived in Wenonah. Nolan Cox. He lived in a large, dark Victorian home off the park. He seemed to take great pleasure in sending young men to battle.

Ed Campbell was one of the men of South Jersey who served and then came home to serve again in a largely woman's world. I have no idea how he might have felt working with the women in the school. He certainly never would speak of it. He seemed to say you should live your life as though every thing you do matters. As if it could all be gone in a second. We responded to that with an energy almost unchecked. Every boy, from the smartest, wimpiest among us to the most nasty, bullying thugs, loved him. And when he brought us together we played together. The private wars we had vanished in the joy of kicking a ball or tossing a football or stopping a run. My brother Mick had a good deal of trouble as a boy with scholastic endeavors but he worked hard for Ed Campbell. His friends and mine loved the man.

So.

I can imagine Ed Campbell feeling diminished each time he saw a man step off the train at 5:40 after a days work in Philadelphia while he spent his days with boys and girls. I can imagine him trying to learn what drew him to this vocation. More than that I can

remember going to his house each Halloween and having him take the time to guess who each and every one of us was beneath our monstrous masks and grotesqueries. He was never wrong. No one ever took the raft.

Maybe you think about your job and what it means. Maybe you have sons and daughters and try to raise them up right. Maybe you fret about the men and women who teach them each day.

But in Wenonah in 1960 no one worried about this. You went to work and did the work you had to do to feed your family. You came home and ate your dinner with your cold milk and bread and potatoes. You smiled at your children and asked how they were doing and probably barely listened to their half hearted recitations of the days events. You trusted your children's lives to women and a few men with little or no knowledge of who they were or what they did.

It still amazes me I know almost nothing of their lives. I know Miss Quigley married a few years after I left Second Grade and became Mrs. Scott. I know Mrs. Kaufman lived at the end of my block for twenty odd years but I never had an adult conversation with her till I was in my thirties on the 4th of July. I knew Mrs. Fuller's son Greg but nothing of her or her husband. But Mr. Campbell strides through my life like a God. Strong and brave and fierce. A man like I wanted to be. He made books seem less like the world of ladies and more like the world. Not a bad thing for a guy in a little town in South Jersey.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:11PM (-04:00)

Public Men and Women

Tuesday, June 05, 2007

I talked last of Ed Campbell. One of the few public role models we had as young boys and girls. You might ask who else we saw during the day in Wenonah in 1960. Not a great number of people but several, several. There was George Bowker and his wife Jane who ran the grocery in the middle of town. There was Tony Sacca who ran the butcher shop attached to Bowkers grocery. We had one police officer. His name escapes me but he lived at the end of Jefferson Street by the lake and his primary duty was helping us cross the street by the corner of Mantua and West Street each day coming and going from school. He was a pleasant enough man with little or no crime to combat. The firemen in our town were volunteers. They were our fathers and neighbors and so, for the most part invisible except when a fire swept through a house or yard or on the 4th of July when they had an open fire house with beer and hot dogs and gave rides on the firetruck for children at the park.

There was G. Wayne Post who ran the men's store in town. He had a small business cleaning men's shirts as well and delivered my father's crisp white shirts each week in a cardboard box. This served two purposes, one my father looked sharp and two I had ample supplies of cardboard for school projects.

There were various men running a Sinclair gas station in the center of town, though Chuck Forsman ran the more popular establishment just across the Wenonah Creek in Mantua. Chuck dressed as a clown each 4th of July and pattered up and down Mantua Avenue on a small motor bike for the amusement of the children and himself.

There was the local librarian, who beginning in 1962 or so was my mother, Louise Wiler. Later Dot Nugent assisted her in her duties. There were, of course, the teachers and administration of the school, the post men and women, and a few other local

businessmen. Among them was an insurance man, Don Mawson. Don's shop was on Mantua Avenue just before the gas station in the center of town. Don's best friend was Milton Webb.

Each morning and each afternoon we passed Don on the way to school. He was, how to say it, a fag. At least, that's how we described him. Young boys and girls with no real sense of what we were saying. He was unmarried, dressed well, and lived by himself, though he had one close friend, Milton Webb. Both men seemed vaguely effeminate, though by the standards of later years hardly flaming queens.

I don't know if Don was a vet but Milton was, having served honorably in the Korean War. Milton spent several years as a prisoner of war. Both men were ridiculed by us as figures of public humiliation. Both men lived honorably and bravely in a small town with small minds.

Milton Webb passed away several years ago, shortly before I returned to Wenonah, ill with AIDS. He died of natural causes and had many dear friends in the community. He was in many ways one of the town's historians and worked with a number of people in South Jersey to keep our mostly unremarkable history alive. My landlord in 2001, 2002, and 2003, Rachel Knisell admired him and his work on the town's history. He was active too in keeping the town green, helping to establish, along with Mr. Campbell, Mr. Eggert, the Middleton's, the Lentze's, and others a band of green woods around our town in the early 70's.

I don't know for certain if Milton Webb and Don Mawson were gay or homosexual, though, if Johanna were to have met them, I'm certain she would say yes. I'm sure she would say, "I can smell my people". Certainly, all the small, little bigots of my acquaintance, including myself, thought they were and worked tirelessly to make them feel unwanted and out of place.

When I came back home, sick with a disease that ravaged the gay world, I thought a great deal about Milton and Don and their world. There were a few more gay men and women in Wenonah by then. Some of them worked hard to help the sick and damaged beginning in the eighties. Their legacy was real and brave. But I can't help but think, that like Ed Campbell, Milton and Don were heroes too.

Milton was a war veteran just like Ed Campbell. He served honorably and then faced the Chinese in their camps. He braved far worse than a dozen or so idiot children ridiculing him behind his back. He involved himself in his world though his world often turned its back on him.

Courage is a funny thing. Role models take lots of shapes. There were lots of people in Wenonah when I was growing up but only two men that I could say seemed to be gay. Only one black family. No Jews. Six Catholic families. A town where being different was a curse.

I'm off to Wenonah again this year for the 4th of July. With luck I'll return with many pleasant memories and some pictures. Here are two from my memory. Ed Campbell racing down a soccer field, laughing and screaming at a bunch of ten year olds. Don Mawson on his porch, graciously saying good morning to us as we walked each day to school. Tall, dressed impeccably, enjoying a crisp fall day in a small town in southern New Jersey.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 01:36AM (-04:00)

Tommy Woods, Madelaine Pillings, and Me

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

I mentioned Tommy Woods several postings back. He's the odd looking kid in my first and third grade photos. He seems twisted up just looking at him. I remember Tommy not because he was my friend or an acquaintance but because he was odd. Strange. He wasn't stupid. He was in our class after all and my classes in Wenonah Elementary were the smart classes. You'd think in a town this small it would be hard to separate children based on anything but we were separated. Based on abilities. Sometimes this was obvious. I could read easier and faster than other kids my age. I might have a lot of trouble playing dodgeball but I had no problems with Dick and Jane. Other kids had problems with things that were easy for me. Schools in the fifties and sixties segregated us to make our lives easier, better. I'm still not sure if this was good or bad. It wasn't always obvious at the time, although after some years even the dullest of us could figure it out.

But Tommy Woods was always in my classes. Tommy could barely figure out how to walk and chew gum. I can't remember any examples of his intellectual prowess. I can only assume that he tested high somewhere down the pike but that the tests erred on his social abilities. That left him meat for our games. We were cruel, vicious shitheads and Tommy Woods was our prey. Even for me Tommy Woods was an idiot. He was lost in social encounters. His clothes were odd, his abilities to interact with us were non-existent, in short he was fair game for everyone. Even geeks like me. Tommy got caught in his own chair at school. He had difficulty talking. He was odd.

Madelaine Pillings was equal meat for the opposite reason. She was everything Tommy couldn't hope to be. She was bright, socially able, and knew the rules. Too well. She was, in short, a teachers pet. She would rat you out in a heartbeat. That meant she was hated with every breath we had. She was like some wicked version of a Hollywood star dumped in our laps. Like Hayley Mills or Shelley Fabares but without their cunning. She didn't know how to appease us only adults. She could pick a side and she always picked the wrong side. She assumed that since adults ruled the roost they were the ones to pay attention to. Bad pick.

We vilified her relentlessly. Her clothes, her smile, her demeanor were all fair game. We hated her. Hated her more than we hated anything or anyone. I honestly can't think of anyone who played with her or went to her house for fun. She was doomed. Doomed. You'd think the rough tough cream puff would have an ounce of compassion for misfits like Tommy or Madelaine. You'd think that and you'd be wrong. There is a pecking order everywhere in human society and these two chowderheads were at the bottom of ours. Worse than bullies or sociopaths. Worse than kids that set cats on fire. They were neither feared nor admired. My friend Terry sent a note about Milton Webb after my last posting. He expressed his distaste for how our little world didn't allow an ounce of compassion because of it's rigid conformity. Well, Tommy and Madelaine were the bottom of that society and suffered all the pains that we could inflict in all our myriad ways.

Not that we would beat them up, or steal from them, or deprive them of food or water. Only companionship and friendship and the worlds we provided each other. They were kept apart from us with a vehemence that was surprising and vicious and real.

Ask me anything about these two children and I can at most provide you with a few anecdotes making fun of them. Even our teachers made fun of them at times.

Here in this little town, with no problems, no worries, and pleasant surroundings we found a way to punish people with a cruelty that was unshakeable and unmerciful. We were more like monsters than we could understand. I might have been Atticus Finch in my dreams but in my real life I was a nasty little bigot. Ha ha ha.

We ran through the woods defending America from German troops and invading Russians and then each day in school punished the easiest marks we could find. And it was fun.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 12:19AM (-04:00)

Clay Hill

Friday, June 08, 2007

I've said we played in the woods at the end of Lincoln Avenue. But mostly we spent our time on Clay Hill. Clay Hill was the remnants of a washed out railroad trestle. At its base in the Mantua Creek were the worn stumps of the railroad trestles. Where the railroad went and what it was for were long forgotten. It was just a hill in a small woods at the end of our street. Most of the forest there was new growth. The trees were less than twenty years old. We raced through them as though we were in a forest in an ancient world. To the left of Clay Hill were the swamps of the Mantua Creek. They resumed again some hundred yards away to the right till they reached their largest point right by the bridge between Wenonah and Mantua.

The swamps were filled with cattails and skunk cabbage and muskrats. I suppose there was other wild life but we paid little or no attention to it. The creek had catfish and some sunny's and a few smallmouth bass. It meandered its slow way to the Delaware from a point a few miles from Wenonah. Once it had been larger but it had been dammed off by various developers over the years to make lakes and ponds and now was largely ignored by everyone but children.

For us it was heaven.

It was a world without parents or rules or a point. We fought wars on Clay Hill. We refought WWII. We fought WWIII. We saved the world from alien invasions. We eventually got up the courage to run through the swamps. We'd leap from hillock to hillock all the way to the railroad trestle by the Parker's house. We braved quick mud and mosquitoes and we were rangers in a guerilla war. My favorite Christmas present for many years was hip boots so I could run through the swamp.

We'd come home and my mother would send us into the basement to strip and clean. We smelled like swamp.

We smelled like skunk. All within two hundred feet of our homes. No adults went into the woods. No teenagers went into the woods. Just us and our ilk.

One day in a pitched battle between Chris DeHart and my friends I found myself staked out and had ants dropped on my chest. I was petrified with terror. My brother Ted raced home to get my father to save me. From what?

Terry nearly had his ear blown off by a firecracker on Clay Hill.

Kids were shoved from the top of Clay Hill on bikes and narrowly avoided spilling into the creek. For some reason none of us would swim in the creek. We'd sit for hours at the base of the hill and talk and talk and talk about bullshit. We speculated about everything. Where babies came from, what sex was, would we kill a man in battle. We argued about baseball and football and organized our mad events. Our theatrical presentations, our

athletic games, all were hatched here or on my porch or in the DeHarts house or in Terry Flemings basement.

Clay Hill was as large as the world got at that time and place. It was huge and seemed to go forever. It had mystery, access, and privacy. It was perfect. We built forts in groves of sticker bushes. We made tree forts and dug foxholes. We dammed a stream further down by the old dump and flooded the woods for hundreds of yards. We were very busy but of course told no one about any of it. Till we were older, with kids of our own.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:36AM (-04:00)

Gone Daddy Gone

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

I haven't posted in nearly ten days. Mostly since I ran out of pain killers. I spent a few rough nights trying to gut it out and finally on Thursday, slept through the night. Johanna and I spent the weekend enjoying the beautiful summer weather and yesterday, late in the afternoon, I went to the Bowery Poetry Club to honor one of my heroes.

Hersch Silverman, the bard of Bayonne, was the subject of a loving tribute by his poetic children. As Danny Shot said in his promo piece... "he's the Grand Daddy-O of us all". For us New Jersey poets that's especially true. Danny and Eliot and I as well as many of our friends were all fans of Ginsberg and Kerouac and Corso and to be able to hang with Hersch was like being with them. But like us, Hersch stayed home. Instead of following his muse Hersch stayed in Bayonne, running the Beehive, and raising up two great kids. In the early eighties, following the death of his wife, he re-entered the world of poetry and we met him seemingly everywhere.

Danny and I published a lot of his work in Long Shot. Danny put out his volume "Lift Off" and Hersch was always a featured reader at our benefits. Listening to that man swing with words was just a rare joy. And he worked for a living! Not a bad thing to do cuz we were all working for a living. He was and is the man!

The night was great! Jazz and the poetry of jazz, Bob Holman's wild words and music, a gorgeous duet with Hersch and Danny. Wild reworkings of Hersch's words and Joel Lewis telling Hersch's story. Of course, this being a gathering of New York poets there were poems that had nothing to do with Hersch and bad work and strange dissonant moments. But Steve Cannon was at the bar heckling with his little blonde helper and the bartenders were swift and the beer was cold and Danny's sons Casey and Levi were hiding in a corner. It was a night of beat poetry in the most gone town on the south side of Jupiter, man. It was gone, daddy, gone. Like so many people that should have been in the room.

So, here's a toast to Hersch and Bayonne and the Beehive. Here's a nod to Allen and Gregory and Andy and Jack. Drink up my friends and drink deep!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:29AM (-04:00)

Divina

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

You know how stuff sneaks up on you. How you know something but don't know something. Today Johanna and I got the deeply sad news that her friend Divina had died. Johanna had known Divina since they were teenagers in El Salvador. She was a strong and real presence in our lives. When Johanna's father passed away this February Divina was here for her. She passed away in May and no one knew how to get in touch with her friends or family. What a great land America is...we got a call from an investigator from the hospital today telling us the news. Telling us Divina was gone. I can still picture her whistling Heigh Ho, Heigh Ho, It's off to work we go to get the dogs to go for a walk. They loved her. They knew she was here before we did.

Now she won't be here except in our hearts. Divina was a joy and a friend and gave Johanna a deep connection to her home. We both miss her with all our hearts. It's so sad that there is so little words can do when you lose a friend.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:34PM (-04:00)

An apology

Monday, July 02, 2007

Dear readers,

I guess there are ten or twelve of you. I apologize for my lack of posts over the past several days. The death of Divina was devastating to us both and we've been struggling to rejoin the real world.

Now the real world drags me in whether I want to go or not. I'm off to Wenonah on Wednesday early in the morning with my friend Suzy Parker. We'll watch the parade and drink some beers at the firehouse and visit my friends and family. No doubt I'll say hello to my old landlords Ralph and Rachel and stop by the O'Conner's for a beer during the parade.

I'll say hello to many old friends and fail to recognize far more.

From there it's down to Suzy's parent's house in Townsend's Inlet and then for me...back to NYC on Thursday. Friday I go to the Stonecoast MFA program in scenic Maine to read my poems and talk about poetry. I'll see my dear friend Baron and some newer friends and perhaps drink a bit too much. I'll yell and scream and raise the roof.

Then back to home Sunday and off to work again

I'm going to read some poems I've written about Divina in Stonecoast and hope I make it through them without embarrassing myself. We shall see.

Have a wonderful 4th of July! It's my second favorite holiday and I'll be in the town where it's done right. The Pitman Hobo Band and the Bonsal Blues will play their tunes, the children will amble down Mantua Ave and for a few moments it might almost be 1959. It's been like this for so many years. What a rare joy! What a deep pleasure!

God Bless America and for what it's worth screw Dick Cheney!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:50PM (-04:00)

The Glorious Fourth

Thursday, July 05, 2007

Well, I spent most of the day in Wenonah. It was, as always, a treat. I saw many old friends and passed the word about the blog. Dottie Chattin, Barb Conway, Chris DeHart, Suzy Parker, Doug, Jack, and Dick Wesh, the giant Seville clan, Margie Loving, my brother's friends, my step brother's friends, Richie "ratkid" Young, Paul and Dave Earnhart, Carey DeGeer, my sister's friends, my parent's friends, Ralph and Rachel, Dave, Steve, Helen, and Mr. O'Connor, Mrs. McQuaide, Victor Anderson, so many, many good friends and so many memories.

Too much to deal with today but next week should spawn a host of posts. Dottie and Barb have said they'll help id the girls in the photos, Chris and Dottie both provided me with mucho grist for the mill, from the Wildcats to the Bike Game to Who Looks the Deadest. It was a long, long day.

Suzy and I drove down at six am from Jersey City and arrived at my brother Mick's at 8am. We jetted over to Wenonah with a brief stop at the Hollywood Diner for sustenance and arrived just as the flag and Uncle Sam and his nephew arrived at Jefferson Ave. As we were parking we ran into Debbie Mix, ne Lake, and her husband Mike.

I grabbed a small beer at the O'Connor's blast and the hunt was on.

I know for now I've neglected many, many potential memories but they will have to wait.

Tomorrow I leave for work at 7am and at noon leave for scenic Portland, ME and the Stonecoast MFA. For some reason they have hired me to sound my barbaric yawp from their stage. I'm psyched, tired, and anxious. It's all a wild ride Mr Toad...hold on to your hats!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:40PM (-04:00)

The Bonsal Blues Hobo Band Throw Down

Thursday, July 05, 2007



Here's an out of focus shot of the infamous battle of the bands, mid parade. Note the contrast between the militaristic Bonsal Blues and the Hobos. My brother Ted was weeping.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:48PM (-04:00)

Altar Boys, Baseball, and more

Monday, July 09, 2007

Well, I spent the 4th in Wenonah. Chris DeHart and Dot Chattin and Suzy Parker have filled me with memories that will be addressed. But for now I thought it would be good to talk about vocations and recreation. My parents volunteered me to be an altar boy at the Church of the Incarnation when I was in 3rd Grade. It was winter and I went several times a week to learn the rituals of the mass. When to ring the bells, when to fetch the wine and host. We learned our pieces of the mass. It was Latin then. Ad deum qui latificat juventutem meum. The first words of the mass.

We learned our places before the altar. We were issued our robes and prepared to serve mass.

As I completed my training it was time to try out for minor league hardball in Wenonah. We played for American Legion Post 109 and all or most of the boys in town that were 8 years old turned out for tryouts. We ran down flies, caught line drives, ran bases, and in general embarrassed ourselves. I sucked.

After two weeks they announced those boys who would join the team. My name was not included. My brother's was. I was devastated. I rode my bike home in tears. Hours later my father came to me to say there was a mistake. It was me that should have been named. I was so happy. In retrospect I think this was all bullshit. I think, because I know I sucked and my brother didn't, that they really picked my younger brother. I think my father prevailed upon them to put me on the team and they did.

Because baseball conflicted with some elements of serving mass I had to resign my post as an altar boy. I was not sad. It seemed weird and stupid and strange and I much preferred right field to standing in front of the throne of God.

And right field was where I went.

When you stink in baseball and you're young you get right field. That's because young batters have trouble hitting to the opposite field and there aren't many left handers. This means you spend your time standing in the outfield in terror that someone will hit the ball to you.

The good part was no one ever put me in the game. This was before the time when kids were played routinely regardless of skill levels. In the early sixties if you stunk you didn't play unless your team was either killing the other team or so far behind it couldn't hurt. There was no eleven run rule.

I got two at bats that year. I had a baggy thick woolen uniform that I loved. I had a Ted Kluszewski autographed model glove and I cherished it with all my heart. It had been my father's.

I was horrible but I loved sitting in the dugout and I loved chatter in the outfield. Come batter, come batter, batter. He can't hit, he can't hit, he can't hit.

I love practicing sliding, I loved catching ground balls and I eventually could catch flies. What I couldn't do was throw for distance. Thank God for cut off men.

So my brother Mick had to wait a year to be a better player than me. And God had to wait a bit more for me to serve Him.

But I learned the crack of the bat, the smell of neatsfoot oil, the cold sodas we got at Margies after a game. Digging deep in the cooler for a grape or pineapple soda. Hanging around with boys who played baseball better than you but still there. Still in the game.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:11PM (-04:00)

Fourth Grade

Monday, July 09, 2007

I'm tired of Third Grade. Who knows what we learned or didn't learn. It was in Fourth Grade that life began in earnest. It began when we rode our bikes up to the school at the end of the summer to see who would be our teacher. Mr. McIntyre. The toughest teacher in Wenonah. I was to be in a split 4th and 5th grade class with the toughest teacher in school. Life was about to get very weird.

Mr. McIntyre was tall and gawky and rough edged and rude. He had no niceties. He was intellectually superior to us which wasn't hard because we were in 4th and 5th grades. He was sarcastic. He was tough. He brooked no excuses. From day one it was very clear things were going to be very difficult.

At the same time this class was a bonding year for my friends Chris, Terry, and myself. All of us were smarter and more aware and starting to be more in the world for good or ill. To have a teacher like Mr. McIntyre was not a bad thing but not a good thing either.

His tests were not like anything else we'd ever seen. Before this it was True or False. It was A, B, C, or D. It was the answer to 2 and 2 is four. Not in his class. His history classes had tests with essay questions. Write everything you know about the battle of Gettysburg. What? Huh? Everything I know? We were fucked.

Then there was recess. He loved football and he played it with abandon. The problem was we were four feet tall and he was six four or more. He'd do end runs with his sport coat and tie flapping in the breeze and a dozen little chowderheads chasing him down field. He knew he had us beat and reveled in it. And we hated him for it and tried to beat him whenever we could.

He assigned us spelling words. Only we had to write stories with the words in them. We fixed him. We wrote brilliant stories! Variations of Twilight Zone episodes or horror movies or westerns all chock full of his words. We walked to school and compared stories. Whose was best? Whose was coolest?

We had to memorize poems and recite them out loud. We were give little yellow booklets with crap like the Frost is O'er the Pumpkin. We plumbed our parents meager poetry reserves and memorized The Highwayman or Gunga Din or the Charge of the Light Brigade. He couldn't break us. He wouldn't break us. We were smarter than him.

My grades sucked.

I'll post them tomorrow.

But he roused us all to levels we didn't understand.

Wild man running down the gravel holding out the ball for anyone to take. Laughing at our puny attempts.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:33PM (-04:00)

Mary Louise Wiler and May of 1961

Tuesday, July 10, 2007

In our rush to move to the present what are the things we overlook? To begin with the birth of my sister, Mary Louise. She was born on May 19th 1961. My brothers and I had been eagerly anticipating our newest family member for months. When she was born we were stunned. A girl. A tiny, little, beautiful girl. What do you do with this?

Our boy brains were incapable of coping with this new development. We had no way of dealing with girls. They were alien creatures. Now there was one in our midst. So we just stared at her in her crib. My mother and grandmother held her up to Mick and I to hold. We were scared to death. She was so small. So tiny. So easy to break and we were so prone to breaking things. Her crib was in the dining room, a room filled with light. Her birth was a great day but for our mother a difficult day. Like many women my mother suffered from post partum depression following Mary's birth. She required care and my father enlisted first my mother's mother and then a neighbor, Mrs. Paolo, to take care of this while he cared for my mother.

My sister was born ten years after me. After her birth there were no other brothers or sisters. Who cared? We had each other. Mick and I tormented each other and in turn tormented Ted. Ted in his turn tormented Mary Lou. Each of us envied the others relative freedom as our parents grew older and more relaxed in their parenting.

But for now, on a warm day in May, my sister lay in her crib. My uncles and grandparents and brothers and parents pressed in around her. What a gift. What a day.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:08PM (-04:00)

Final Photo Third Grade; Everyone Id'd

Monday, July 16, 2007



Thanks to Barb Conway for the last piece of the puzzle and to Bob Thomas for the update. Here's the photo with everyone's name:

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:27PM (-04:00)

Who Looks the Deadest

Monday, July 16, 2007

It's the summer before fourth grade and then it will be the fall of fourth grade and we're in front of Terry Fleming's grandparent's house playing my favorite game. It was my favorite game because I was good at it. The game was "Who Looks the Deadest". I've heard of variations of the game played elsewhere. To my knowledge though it has no real provenance. Kids just invented it. Maybe through some kid network it spread but certainly not via any real world network. Not on tv or radio or in a magazine or newspaper. My parents didn't know about it. But we did. And we played it like it was the last game we'd ever play.

The rules were fairly simple. One person, usually Chris DeHart, was IT. He sat on the steps of Terry's grandparent's house with a play gun of some sort. BB Gun, air rifle, plastic Thompson Sub Machine Gun, pistol, Civil War rifle, didn't matter. You just needed

the porch and a gun. Terry's grandparent's front lawn had two large pines flanked by a circular sidewalk leading to the steps. We'd crouch behind one or the other of the pines and wait on Chris or whoever was it. Then he'd call a name. The person whose name was called would run out into the open, charging as though in a battle, and Chris would shoot. Boom. Then you'd drop dead. And stay dead. Chris would call another name. Another dead kid. Till the front yard was littered with four foot corpses in various poses of the dead. Then he'd walk among us. Evaluating our deadness. Looking for faint signs of breathing. For movement. He'd evaluate our fall as we took the fatal bullet. He'd combine the fall with the death pose and come up with the winner. Whoever he picked was IT. He was the one who looked the deadest.

It was a great game.

It was of a piece with our general paranoia and fascination with war. In the fall of 1962 things moved to a head but throughout our childhood we learned the rules of war. We learned to duck and cover. We learned how many blasts of the fire whistle meant an enemy attack. We learned how to prepare for nuclear disaster, how to live on canned goods for months. We learned some of us would probably die. We weren't stupid. We read about the range of an atomic blast. We knew we lived just south of New York City, just east of Philadelphia and it's Naval Yard, and not too far north of DC. We were fucked. Wenonah was just going to be one big sheet of glass.

We read about Hiroshima. We saw Japanese monster movies...Godzilla and Gorgo. We were ready. If we lived we'd fight the Russians in the swamps like the Swamp Fox. If we died we knew how to look cool. We were ready to die young and leave a beautiful corpse. Then we got up, jumped on our Schwinn's and rode off to Clay Hill to blast the dinosaurs that threatened our families.

The world was a dangerous place. Next posting...the little red house and Mickey Killer Islands.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:29PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Who Looks the Deadest](#)

- ChrisDeHart

July 19, 2007

I can remember trying to lay completely still, literally trying not to breathe. . . then feeling something tickling your ear or some blades of grass brushing across your closed eyes- or when you were really good you'd try to leave your eyes open.

Condell always over sold his death scenes. You couldn't be too dramatic in our neighborhood, we prided realism.

Mr. McIntire's 4 & 5 Grade Class 1961-62

Monday, July 16, 2007

Here are the students of my fourth grade along with my fifth grade confreres

Top row from left:Me, Jack Wiler, Jimmy Marchione, Mario Contarino, Dave Porter, Chris DeHart, Rob Lowe, Dave Trost, Barry Stockinger, Ken Fell, our teacher, Mr. McIntire, Bruce McWilliams, Dave Moffit, Doug Kummer, and the ever stylish, Tommy Jenkins (note the cool tie).



Bottom Row from left, Diane Evans, Caroline Stens, Sandy Fay, Terry Howarth, Diane Eberly, Michelle Smith, Janet Shoemaker, Ruth Hammell, Jane Bowker, Madelaine Pillings, Linda Smith.

I'm getting smoother at this thing as we move up in years. Both Ruth Hammell and Madelaine will have crucial roles to play in the coming year. Ruth in particular will live forever in Wenonah history as one of Mr. M's unwitting victims. Jane Bowker's family ran the town grocery store. The fifth

graders were impossibly cool and the girls impossibly beautiful. Especially Diane, Terry, and Ruth, with Janet coming in a neat fourth as an Amazon goddess.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:28PM (-04:00)

Mr. McIntire and Discipline

Tuesday, July 24, 2007

When I was getting better a few years ago I went with a friend of mine to Wenonah school to work with the children on poetry. When I arrived I was shown to a classroom in one of the two older parts of the building. I was sitting, comfy, and looking around and realized I was in my fourth grade classroom. I looked to my left and there was the supply closet. I asked the young woman who was my escort if this had been a fourth grade classroom and she replied yes it had been and I started to tell her about Ruthie Hammell and she cut me short. Yes, she said, this was the closet where Ruthie Hammell was locked in.

I was shocked and sat quietly for a moment. She said, were you there? My big sister told me all about it.

Yes, I was there. Mr. McIntire, besides being large and stern, was a famous disciplinarian. One afternoon we were all going crazy. Talking and laughing and in general acting like 4th and 5th graders. Mr. McIntire suddenly turned and said that would have to stop and picked one of us, Ruthie Hammell, as the most guilty of us all. He directed her to stand in the supply room. It was a large closet holding our lined notebook paper, our Ticonderoga #2 pencils, our paste, and other materials necessary to our education. It was about 10' by 20'. She went to the closet and sat. Mr. McIntire spent the next two hours lecturing us on this and that.

The bell rang and we all went home.

The next day we returned to find that Mr. McIntire had forgotten poor Ruthie. He went home as well. She was discovered several hours later by our erstwhile janitor Nick.

She became instantly famous. Mr. McIntire never said a word of this to us.

I would imagine he was chastised by his superiors but we heard nothing. We only knew that he was almighty, all powerful, and not a man to be fucked with. No one challenged him again.

We learned fast and we learned well.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:17PM (-04:00)

Back to the Blog

Monday, August 06, 2007

Sorry for not posting for some time. I've been in Franconia, NH at the Frost Place Festival of Poetry and haven't had the chance to post. But I'm back and will have new stuff up tonight or tomorrow.

I had a great time in Franconia, met lots of great poets, went swimming and in general lived life the way I'd prefer to live it. Now I'm back to reality and bugs.

Props to all the folks I met in Franconia, old friends, and the beautiful words that everyone spun out!

Later my friends.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:54AM (-04:00)

UV Lights, Madelaine, and Science

Tuesday, August 07, 2007

When last we visited 4th grade Ruthie Hammell was locked in a closet. The janitor Nick was soon to release her and we were soon to return to our classroom. In 4th grade I encountered something I'd never bumped up against before. Work.

Mr. McIntire was a harsh taskmaster. His tests were essay types. "Tell me all you know about the Civil War". His comments were brusque and nasty. He had no worries about public humiliation.

On top of this my childhood asthma jumped into high gear. And I wet the bed. And my father, in an effort to help me with my studies, got a lamp for my desk. Unwittingly he outfitted it with a UV bulb for plant growing. My eyes hurt each day following my arduous studies. I was forced to wear sunglasses even in the classroom. I was wheezing. I could barely compete in sports and when I did I was wearing shades. 4th Grade being a poor place for non-conformity this did nothing for my self esteem. I was shuttled to various doctors to determine the problem with my eyes. I kept saying I thought it was the light. Finally after months one doctor asked to see the bulb and solved that problem.

I still wet the bed. I still wheezed like a steam engine. I still failed class after class or more accurately muddled through. The only good part was all of us were just muddling through. There were no stars in Mr. McIntire's class. Though there was one pretender: Madelaine Pillings. She of the pixie collars and flounced skirts and turned up nose. If we knew the right language we would have called her by her right name: stuck up bitch. Sadly we just muttered under our breath: "Teachers Pet". Though this was not true.

For miraculously Mr. McIntire detested her right along with us. It was the first time in our little lives we realized adults might think and feel as we did. She was a little dickhead and he hated her right along with us. It's just that he had a job and couldn't torture her like we did.

Now, in retrospect, Madelaine might have been a fine and decent young woman. She may have grown up into a beautiful adult woman, had wonderful children and now lives in a great house with her husband, her kids and a dog named Waldo. But that seemed unlikely at the time. As unlikely as I would become a poet or play softball or ski or marry or stop pissing the bed.

The quintessential, well not really, Madelaine event was one afternoon when Mr. McIntire

had to leave the room for some reason. He told us we must be good and he appointed Madelaine our monitor. He gave her permission to rat us out on his return. Sure as shit we were little monsters screaming and running wild and tormenting Madelaine. She was shrieking and crying and upon Mr. McIntire's return did just as he asked. Then he declined to punish us. Then she wept bitter tears. But they hate me! She cried. And hate her we did.

He looked at her and slowly, with great deliberation, said, "I feel for you Madelaine, here..." and fumbled about his body as though for his heart, "or here..." and fumbled again. She leapt from her desk and ran from the room in tears. We were in kid heaven. This was not right. Mr. McIntire displayed little or no empathy. Madelaine was a rat. We were justly vindicated and walked home telling the story again and again. We tell it to this day on the sidewalk on the 4th of July. Like a Greek myth or a great lesson.

I went home that night and had an asthma attack. I wet the bed. I woke up and went back to school.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:26PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: UV Lights, Madelaine, and Science

- Karen

August 08, 2007

What was it about 4th grade, anyway? That's when I started having a hard time in school too. See you Mon at your reading.

My 4th Grade Report Card

Tuesday, August 07, 2007

EXPLANATION OF MARKS		Marking Period	
MAJOR SUBJECTS - Achievement		Year	Grade
A	84 - 100	1996-97	4
B	83 - 83		
C	75 - 84		
D	70 - 74		
E	Below 70 - Failing		
No.		Average work	
Achievement		Attendance	
1 2 3 4		1 2 3 4	
LANGUAGE ARTS English - Usage B C B B Reading B C C A Speech B B B B Spelling B B B B ARITHMETIC C B B C SOCIAL STUDIES C B C C History & Civics Geog. & Civ. Events SCIENCE C D B C			
MINOR SUBJECTS S - Satisfactory U - Unsatisfactory			
Handwriting S S S S Phys. Ed. & Health S S S S Music S S S S Art S S S S Guidance Prep/Seveng CITIZENSHIP B B B B			

FACTORS AFFECTING GRADES	
Circle factors which are used to compute	
1. Attendance	
2. Active interest and attention to class work	
3. Adequate study preparation	
4. Test marks	
5. Cooperation	
6. Reading effectively at grade level	
7. Respect for persons and for school property	
8. Completion of required work on time	
9. Understanding and application of basic skills	
10. Workable use of study time	
11. Exercise of judgment and direction of own behavior	
12. Participation with the group	
13. Following of directions	
14. Courtesy and respectful conduct	
15. Assumption of responsibility for own independent work	
16. Evidence of use of library facilities	
17. Working below grade level	
Parent-Teacher conference advised	
TEACHER COMMENTS 1. 2. 3. 4. <i>Student shows little interest in school work. He is often absent and does not do his homework. He is a very poor student.</i>	

Here is the real and true record of my dismal failure in 4th grade. Note the level of my anxiety. I merely received a few "c's & d's" and that alone was enough to send me into a tailspin. Miserable wretch! On my next post we'll talk about the most horrid event of 4th grade: Projects!

But in closing let me say that my hard work and good study moved me into the safe haven of 5th grade!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:44PM (-04:00)

**Pupil Report
Grades 4 - 8**

WENONAH PUBLIC SCHOOL

Child's Name: *John Miller*

Teacher: *John Miller*

	Child	Days Absent	Days Tardy	Days Present
1	<i>John Miller</i>			
2				
3				
4				

Maps of Flour Salt & Water

Thursday, August 09, 2007

This was the year teachers began to make us do more than make gifts for our parents. We were asked first to make maps that showed geographical forms and places using a paste made of flour, salt, and water. You would first draw a map on a piece of card board. Usually the cardboard was the cleaners cardboard from your fathers dress shirts for work. My dad got his from G. Wayne Post. It was the only men's store/dry cleaner in Wenonah. G. Wayne was a good guy. A little droll, sharp dresser, and as I recall, a pencil mustache. He would deliver the shirts of the men of Wenonah each week and their wives would stack them neatly in their shirt drawer.

Then when you had a project of some kind there was cardboard without end. Okay, so you draw a map...say, the state of New Jersey, then you identify the important rivers and mountain ranges. The Delaware, the Kittatiny's, the swamps of the the Delaware Bay. Then the important metropolitan centers. Of which you know nothing. Elizabeth, Newark, Jersey City, Trenton, Atlantic City, Camden. Then you mix the paste. Here's a link for the r e c i p e f o r t h e p a s t e : <http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/IGA/Geographers%20Have%20High%20Standards/Salt%20Dough%20Landforms.htm>.

You spread it evenly over the area of the map. Where there are highlands or mountains you apply more, wetlands and lowlands and shore lines, less. For mountain areas you use your fingers to lift up mountains. You take a number two lead pencil, say, a Ticonderoga, or a Dixon, made in Jersey City, NJ, and trace the rivers. Then you let it dry. It only takes a few hours. Then using water colors you paint the areas green, or blue, or brown, depending on their geographical make-up. Brown...mountains, green...forests, blue...bodies of water. Then you write with unerring hand the names of these places. Then you carefully pack your finished project in a paper bag, or box, and carry it to school for judgement.

If you are artistic, or have an engineering bent, or can color within the lines, then all is well.

If you are, say, like me, then you are fucked.

You spend hours screaming at your inability to create a beautiful object filled with information. The paste is too watery, it cracks, your colors run, your outlines are blurred, you are in short a miserable, abject failure. Doomed to a "B" in Citizenship.

Doomed to watch others succeed. Doomed to fail again, and again, and again. The only

way you escape this terrible mess is to grow up.

No one does this shit after 6th Grade. Thank God, Praise Jesus!

For me in 4th Grade it was a map of my failures I made over and over and over and over.

With rivers and creeks and mountains and miserable printing and poor choices of color.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:05PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Maps of Flour Salt & Water](#)

- JimMaddox

February 06, 2008

We made the same thing in 4th Grade in Woodbury Heights too. We made geographic features, like an isthmus or a peninsula. I had to do a mountain that was next to a cove. It seemed to me that the paste we used was kind of like soap, at least that's what it looked like. My paint job wasn't too impressive either.

The Little Red House

Thursday, August 09, 2007

Wenonah is ringed with woods. They were our favorite places. They weren't wide or deep but they were nearly unvisited by adults or anyone but children. Beyond the woods were the swamps of the Mantua Creek. Once, back in the 1800's the creek was wide and deep. But towns up and down the creek dammed off feeder streams to create ponds and lakes for recreation and decoration and by the time I was young it was a stream about 16 feet wide surrounded by swamp. The swamps were home to muskrat and cattails and birds and had a deep swamp smell. They were scary and inviting.

You could run through them once you knew how. How to avoid the deep mud, find the hillocks and firm places. We did so with abandon. I think it was in 4th grade we found the Little Red House. It was down by the sewer plant at the end of Mantua Avenue on the North side on the Mantua border. You had to walk down a dirt road past the sewer plant a few hundred yards and there it was...an old abandoned shotgun shack. Red. Empty. Falling apart. Me, Chris, Terry, Ed Mossop, Mick, and a few others went several times there to explore. To walk through it's empty rooms and just look.

It was eerie and weird and frightening. And just beyond were the swamps. One day we all walked out to the swamps. We got perhaps thirty feet out when we hit quick mud. This was deep mud that sucked you down. The more you pulled to get out the deeper you went in. Ed Mossop went out furthest and got caught up to his waist. We struggled with panic and terror to free him. It was low tide. If we couldn't get him loose who knew what might happen. He might be sucked all the way in and die. He might drown. Hours of struggle ensued. Mud sucked and pulled and we pulled and Eddie came loose. No shoes. Covered chest deep in swamp mud. We stumbled back. Stunned. Frightened. It was the first time in our lives we confronted a situation in which we might die. We were terrified. Exhilarated. Stunned.

It became legend.

We never went back. The house sank into oblivion. But the struggle became our story.

We learned how to walk on the swamps. How to avoid quick mud. How to leap and dance and play in the swamps. We ran up and down the length of them from the bridge to the trestle. Perhaps a half mile but it seemed like a league.

We began to find weapons. Cattails were spears and hammers once wrenched loose. We waged epic battles up and down the creek. We tore open skunk cabbage and relished it's funk. We were gods.

We learned you could make money on the swamp. You could set traps and catch muskrat and sell them to fur traders. You made more money selling a muskrat than you could on a newspaper route. We knew how to set leghold traps and live traps and we knew where they lived. My Uncle Al from Pennsylvania told us that in the late 40's he sold muskrats to the black people in his town for food. We were stunned. Amazed.

We loved our swamp. More than the woods. Anyone could walk in the woods...only a skilled kid could navigate the swamps. We fought wars with kids from Mantua across the creek. We cherished Christmas gifts of hip boots so we could slog across streams and even the low points of the creek.

When we came home, covered in muck, my mother banished us to the basement to strip our clothes. Rich with the funk of mud and death and life.

When I was much older my father in law fed us a meal of channel catfish caught in the south. It tasted of swamp. I couldn't eat.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:42PM (-04:00)

Comments and Gateway Regional Class of 1970

Tuesday, August 14, 2007

This will be a brief post. I'm writing to ask those of you who read the blog, who have thoughts and comments and memories to post them as comments. It will help expand the world of Wenonah into a larger place.

Also, just a brief note, my friends Suzy Parker, Barb Conway and her boyfriend Charlie, Dottie Chattin and her husband, Greg & Joyce Jones, Chris and Stephanie DeHart, Gary and Debbie Lundquist/Przywara, and Mitch and Terri Chambers have been conspiring to put together a reunion for us knuckleheads. Anyone from the Class of 70 or who knows folks from the Class of 70 please write me with contact info, etc. We're shooting for a gathering in July of 2008, tentatively the 5th. Please help...these people are driving me nuts.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:29PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Comments and Gateway Regional Class of 1970](#)

- JimMaddox

October 22, 2007

I was one of those people who never really belonged to any one circle or group or clique. I kind of floated through Gateway in my own world. I only came to life when I was given the opportunity to have an audience, whether it was a book report or some other type of stand up in front of the class and tell us what you know kind of thing. I was shocked when told I was to be a member of the National Honor Society. I forget who dared me to join the school newspaper, but I did in my senior year, and Jack and Gary and Bruce and I wrote what we thought was finally a paper to be proud of. The administration did not think so, and we had to change or resign. We resigned. I finally screwed up the courage to audition for the school play, The Mouse That Roared, and damned if I didn't get the lead. If enough people had dared me to do more, I may have been less of a loner. Anyone who remembers me and would like to give a shout, I'd like

to hear from you.
jimnpattym@comcast.net

The Twilight Zone, Spelling, and Poetry

Wednesday, August 15, 2007

In 4th Grade my bed time was 8:00pm. Maybe 8:30 on a special night. This was good for my parents and bad for me. Everyone I knew stayed up later. They got to watch shows I only knew from their stories or from listening to the tv from my upstairs bedroom when my parents were watching in the 2nd living room. We had, like all our friends, a black and white tv. We got three stations. 3, 6, & 10. My favorite show was Combat but the show I most wanted to see was the Twilight Zone. It was on after my bedtime so I never saw it till I was older but I heard it...in shards, in pieces. This was a show that answered all my story telling needs.

On the way to school the day after a Twilight Zone episode Terry or Chris would tell us about last nights show. About the tank battalion trapped at Custer's Last Stand. About Burgess Meredith in the ruins of WWIII losing his glasses. About the slot machine that haunted a gambler. Brilliant stories told on the way to school in the fall and winter and spring. The walk to school took perhaps twenty minutes. Eight or nine blocks. Two different routes. On the way to school we usually walked up Mantua Ave and crossed at the proper corner by the park. On the way home we trekked over the railroad bridge and down West Street. All the time telling stories. On the way out the stories of the tv on the way back the stories we invented.

In 4th grade Mr. McIntire made us use our spelling words in a narrative. A story. Each of us tried hard to use the lessons of the Twilight Zone to top the other. Stories of O'Henry filled with irony. Stories of gore and death. Stories to scare ourselves. After a while we stopped caring about the spelling words and cared only about the stories. It was a challenge to top each other. Like poetasters or slam poets or screen writers we wanted to be the best at what we did. I can't remember any of our stories but I know where they all came from.

In 4th and 5th grades and I think in 3rd we were given little yellow booklets with popular poems. Poems from the late 1800's and early 1900's that had a place in the popular imagination. The Frost is O'er the Pumpkin, Trees, etc, etc, etc. We were required to memorize one of these each week and recite them to our peers in class. This too became a challenge. Especially when we were given leave to expand our selections. To move out from the little pamphlets and into the books of poetry that might be in our homes. We were boys. So we found Rudyard Kipling and Stevenson and Tennyson. We craved the poems of gore and horror and tried to top each other with tougher and gorier poems to recite. I memorized The Charge of the Light Brigade and Gunga Din. I mastered The Highwayman. All to top my friends. To show them I was the man.

What an odd pastime. Middle class white kids in the 60's memorizing the heroic dramas of English poets. For glory. For honor. For power.

Years later I read my own poetry out loud at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. I had never read my own work out loud. I was, I guess, petrified with terror. But I'd done this before. I knew the drill. When I finished the drunk crowd of Puerto Ricans gave me a standing ovation. I knew it was the thing I wanted to do again more than anything else. The same night a professor of mine read and was booed off the stage. Of course. She didn't know the drill.

She was interested in her work, in it's care and concerns. She didn't understand that when you stand up in front of people and read you've got an obligation to deliver. It didn't have to be loud. It didn't have to be hard to understand. It almost didn't have to be good. What it had to be was better than the last poem they heard. Like our stories. Like the poems we chose to memorize. Who knew that Mr. McIntire was preparing me to be a poet. Who knew he was teaching me to love words. Who knew that five little kids walking down the street in Wenonah were learning to be artists.

Not all of us are artists in our real lives. Chris worked for automotive interests. Terry works for health care interests. My brother is in law enforcement. But all of us know how to tell a story and engage an audience and we want that audience to listen and attend.

They always do.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:16PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The Twilight Zone, Spelling, and Poetry](#)

- BobThomas

August 16, 2007

Jack,

This is great stuff. Please keep writing! I check it everyday.

Please let me know about plans for 2008,too. I'd like to attend.

Thanks,

Bob Thomas

[Re: The Twilight Zone, Spelling, and Poetry](#)

- ChrisDeHart

August 19, 2007

Forty plus years later, and I'm still hanging on every word. Just your mention of the poetry recitations brought back getting knots in my stomach over trying to remember the words to Paul Revere's ride in front of McIntire's class.

Chris

Death and Football

Tuesday, August 21, 2007

September of 1961 brought another change in my life. In September my grandfather Wiler died. He'd been ill from Emphysema for many years but over the last few months of that summer he took a turn for the worse. Emphysema is a progressive chronic illness that can take years to kill you but when it does it comes on quickly. Technically my grandfather probably died from a heart attack, since his heart would have had to work twice as hard to get enough oxygen from his damaged lungs.

He'd been a life long smoker and that coupled with a stint in the mines as a young man along with a genetic predisposition to Emphysema was all it took. That fall we were involved in a venture of our own and his death, while anticipated, barely brushed me. One day men were lugging oxygen tanks up the porch to his room, the next he was gone.

He'd loved Mick and Ted and I but his illness prevented him from being much fun around us. He was a distant figure to us, unlike my grandmother, and I had no real feelings about him or his death. His wife, my Dad's mother, was another story.

My grandparents had moved to Wenonah when my grandfather became ill and needed more care. They bought a house up the block from us on the corner of W. Mantua and S. Jefferson. It was one of the earliest homes in Wenonah and had been owned by the Cattell family, a South Jersey family with deep roots. The house still had the original barn behind it, now used as a garage.

Mick and I played in the garage whenever we could. It held secret passages built by other children long ago and you could jump out the hayloft onto a compost heap below. One half of the garage held my grandmothers gardening tools and insecticides. She was an avid gardener and worked hard at it. As a consequence the smell of DDT and Dieldrin filled the barn. Dusts and concentrates sat in heavy brown glass jars on her work bench. When I went to work as an exterminator I recognized those smells immediately.

In the house, on the sunporch, was where she painted. She was a painter of landscapes and still lives and worked in oils with a knife. Her work was extraordinary but devoid of life. Bare empty warehouses, telephone poles, crumbling chimneys in an empty field. Brilliant and cold and scary. The room smelled of oil paints.

In the next room was the dining room and just off it the kitchen. My grandmother didn't cook and a succession of maids and cooks kept house for her.

My brothers and I were a source of constant irritation with our yelling and noise and roistering. As a consequence we were generally banished to the outdoors at family gatherings.

So here we are in September of 1961 and what am I really involved in. Football. My friends and I have started a football team. The Wenonah Hawks. We've had lemonade sales and raised money to buy uniforms. We've recruited enough boys to fill out a full football team. We found a coach, a man who was a boyfriend of one of my neighbors, Al Frank. We've begun to practice each day. We are a bunch of little kids with no organization that formed a football team in a town with no organized football program and we challenged the local midget football teams. There were teams in Deptford, Mullica Hill, and Center City. We played them all. We played in a 110lb league despite the fact that only Ted Glenn, our center, weighed 110 pounds. Our defensive end, Chuck Lake, might have weighed 65 pounds on a good day. All I cared about that fall was our team and our practices and our games. My grandfather died and my clearest memory of his death is the smell of hay from the knees of my pants from football practice as I watched the technicians delivering oxygen tanks to my dying grandfather.

Our team was pretty good, and very small but we made it to the Lions Bowl in Glassboro that year where we played the champions from Mullica Hill. A boy we knew from Woodbury, Jim Coombs was on the team. They were large and hard and the game was played in January on a frozen field in Glassboro. We got our asses handed to us. It was wonderful.

So, yes, my grandfather was dead. And yes, my grandmother remained. But we had football glory. Skinny little geeks in green jerseys covered in blood and grass mixing it up with the big boys. And we did it all ourselves. Me, Chris, Gary Condell, Terry Fleming, my brother Mick, Herbie Danner, Ted Glenn. We were hard. We were strong. It was glorious. Not unlike the poems we memorized.

After the Lions Bowl there was a banquet we were invited to. The Mullica Hill team had tough black kids on their team. They all got up at the end on the stage and danced the

Pony. We all knew we couldn't dance the Pony but we could hold our own on a frozen field in Glassboro.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:42PM (-04:00)

Famous Monsters of Filmland and Comics

Wednesday, August 22, 2007

I've neglected something truly important in my youth. Forrest J. Ackerman, the editor and publisher of Famous Monsters of Filmland. Our favorite magazine. We ran to Margie's luncheonette to buy each month's issue. It detailed the great and near great horror films of the 20's, 30's, 40's, and 50's. It was a beautiful mixed up hodge podge of memorabilia by a man who loved horror movies. Today I read in the Times that Ray Bradbury's first work was published by Forrest in the late 30's. He loved monster movies and we loved them with him.

Our personal favorite was The Thing that Came From Outer Space. A movie that scared the shit out of us. But Forrest turned us on to Ed Wood and Frankenstein with equal approval. He didn't diss Ed Wood as an oddball. Plan Nine from Outer Space was as important as any Bela Lugosi film. We were mesmerized.

Chris had seen one of the Frankenstein films and we acted it out in the shell of a house under construction at the end of Jefferson Street. Gary Condell was the Monster. Chris was Baron von Frankenstein. We were various participants in the drama. We all knew how to act even though we'd never seen the movies.

Which brings me to comic books. We devoured them. First, Superman and Batman and the Flash and the Justice League of America, but then Marvel Comics. I bought the first issue of Spiderman as a birthday gift for Ted but took it back. It was too good for him. We devoured all of them. The Fantastic Four, The Hulk, Dr. Strange. It was a wide world open for the taking. All on display in Margie's once a month.

We all wanted x ray specs. I suspect some of us ordered sea monkeys. I know my friend Jack Shephard filled out the forms so he could be an artist!

There were no real monsters in Wenonah. We lurched like Frankenstein in half completed basements. We assembled like frightened villagers to destroy the monster but really nothing was there. It was a joy. A pleasure.

We mounted a play the summer of 1962 to mimic the movies we'd read about but never saw. Gary Condell was the monster. Chris the mad scientist. One of us, who knows who the hero. We wrote a script, sold tickets and were prepared to sell refreshments. Then Joel Cook saw the monster in rehearsal. He was terrified. He ran home in hysterical tears. His parents shut down the production before it ever happened. Little Ed Wood's stymied in our artistry. Mick and I were punished and banished to our rooms. We sat and ate the candy we were going to sell while our friends played outside.

Oh, the vagaries of the artistic life!

But still, perhaps there were aliens among us. Perhaps we were at risk of imminent demise.

Perhaps the siren of the fire whistle might portend more than a minor fire in a kitchen somewhere in town.

Then came the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Now we're talking.

Now it's all real.

Now all the duck and cover nonsense made sense.

Now everytime we heard the fire whistle it meant that Russian missiles were streaking our way. And when they detonated we'd have hell to pay. Zombies walking among us. No food. Horror.

All the stories we made up on the way to school seemed to get a little pale. A little shallow. Maybe we were children in a world not quite so safe.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:18PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Famous Monsters of Filmland and Comics

- JimMaddox

October 25, 2007

I grew up surrounded by comic books.

My uncle Pat was an employee of the city of Woodbury, and he worked at the city dump. He would collect all of the comics and Mad magazines and Cracked magazines, and give them all to me. My brother and I would spend hours surrounded by Superman, Batman, The Flash, Justice League of America, Sad Sack, Little Dot, Sgt Rock, The Haunted Tank, etc. The wonderful smell of pulp and ink. The exciting covers beckoning you to come inside and spend your day in fantastic adventures. Comic books even urged you to read literature; Classics Illustrated gave you a taste of all the great books, whetting your appetite for the whole story. We read them over and over, they weren't collectibles then; they were our cherished friends.

The Cuban Missile Crisis scared us all shitless. Duck and cover, hide under your desk or stand in the basement of the school. We had seen the nuclear test films and the images of Hiroshima. We knew we would be vaporized. How gullible the government thought we were!

Walking to school in Woodbury Heights during the Missile Crisis, I remember us singing this to the tune of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer:

Kruschev the bald-headed Russian,
Had a very shiny head.
And if you ever saw it,
You would even say it's red.
All of the other Russians
Used to laugh and call him names.
They never let poor Kruschev,
Join in any Commie games.
Then one foggy launching night,
The Russians came to say,
Kruschev with your head so bright,
Won't you guide our sa-tell-ite.
Then how the Russians loved him
As they shouted out with glee,
Kruschev the bald-headed Russian,
You'll go down in his-to-ry!
It helped us laugh when we were scared to death.

Re: Famous Monsters of Filmland and Comics

- Anonymous

January 27, 2009

I too grew up in Wenonah, and Lynn Condell and I were blood sisters, closest of buddies, confidantes. Though older than you youngsters, we all knew each other. After all, Wenonah was the perfect backdrop for all we kids to run free and explore our fantasies, wasn't it?

Grace Paley

Friday, August 24, 2007

Grace Paley is dead. I read the news in the Times this morning. I'd met Ms Paley a few times at the Frost Place over the years and had the chance to hear a distinctive American voice. Grace was living in Vermont when I met her but she was all New York City. A beautiful voice filled with the rhythms of New York. Strong and clear. She was to have read this summer with Maxine Kumin, Donald Hall, and Galway Kinnell but her failing health kept her away. Her absence that day was a deep and palpable thing. All of the poets that read are men and women confronting the end of their lives in real life and in verse. It was a wonderful afternoon of stunning power.

Losing a voice in American letters is never a good thing. Tonight I was listening to my ipod shuffle and Robert Frost came on. Right after Bruce Springsteen and right before Dave Brubeck. How wonderful. His clear and distinct reading of Stopping by Woods was a little gift on a hot summers night. Maybe you can remember a poetry reading that took your breath away. Maybe after hearing some poet in a bar or a barn or on a stage you stumbled out into the night thinking this is what poetry is about.

Losing those voices is such a sad thing. Keeping them in our hearts is all we have. Raise a glass to dear Grace. Wish her well on her journey. Hers was a voice that could not be stopped. It sings forever, like all the best writers. We lose great people every day. Fathers, mothers, friends, children. It's always sad and it's inevitable but that doesn't take away the sting.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:43PM (-04:00)

The Things We Ate

Sunday, August 26, 2007

I'm starving tonight. I just came off a stomach flu and didn't eat at all yesterday and tonight, although I've eaten 5 times, I'm still hungry so I thought I should talk about the food we ate in Wenonah.

It was horrible. It was regular. For breakfast every day my mother made us Tang and we had pop tarts. Before pop tarts we ate Frosted Flakes or Cocoa Krispies, or Rice Krispies, or Corn Flakes but it all sucked. Then for lunch we had sandwiches made from this fake ham. I can't remember the name but it will come to me by the end of this post. We drank milk with every meal except after Memorial Day when we had iced tea until Labor Day. Then it was back to milk.

At dinner we had a succession of dull dishes. Tuna casseroles every Friday (we were Catholic), frozen beef in frozen sauce, chicken croquettes, lima beans.

Lima beans.

The cursed vegetable of my youth. My brother Mick may have vomited up lima beans on at least twelve occasions. And we had no dog to feed the food we hated to under the table. It was eat or die. Once a week my mother would make a dish we liked, say cheese steak sandwiches. She would make eight cheese steak sandwiches for six people. Which meant if you were hungry you had to eat fast to get one of the two left over sandwiches. It was a race to hell. Sometimes I won, sometimes Mick won. Ted always lost.

My father loved chipped beef on toast. I have no idea why he felt this was a good thing to

eat. But my mother loved him so we ate it. And we had spaghetti. From a can. Not spaghetti O's but close. When I got to college and had to make my first meal for my roomates I went to make spaghetti with Ragu and my roommate Shelley corrected me. She said, no, this is how you make spaghetti sauce. I had to learn how to cut onions and peppers. I learned that there is a thing called a garlic clove.

Some of this was because we weren't well off. My mother had to struggle to make ends meet. This was something I was unaware of at the time. Some of it was because my mother was a lousy cook. She was. A lousy cook.

My grandmother Glading, Nonny Glading, was on the other hand a great cook. She made us meals each weekend that were marvelous. Truly stunning. Fresh ingredients, meat from the butcher, cooked slow and with care. We had Yorkshire Pudding and roasts that were ungodly. Then we went home to honey loaf. That was the name of the fake ham. Honey loaf. Call it what you want but it was fake ham. Not ham on the sandwiches at Nonny's house carved off the ham with mayo and mustard and crusty bread.

My Nonny Wiler, while she didn't cook, served great meals as well. The best roasts I've ever had. Rich and full of flavor. I've never had a roast beef like she served...ever. We sopped the blood up from the cutting board on pieces of white bread with butter. That's the one thing on all my tables when I was young. A loaf of white bread. A pitcher of milk. A quarter pound of butter.

But all of them, my mother, my grandmothers, my uncles could roast Turkeys. They all knew how to make stuffing. They all knew how to fill us up one day in November with food that made you sleepy and happy. And at the end we had Breyer's ice cream with Creme de minthe and sat back happy. The last pieces of mince pie sitting on our plates. Too tired to argue. Too happy to fight. Years later I had the opportunity to serve Christmas and Thanksgiving meals like those. They are and were a gift. Whether you make them or eat at them. I ate with friends in Staten Island one Thanksgiving and they served LeSeour brand baby peas just like my mother and my grandmother, and they had creamed onions, and there was some dumb ass squash soup but who cared. There was cranberry sauce and wine and beer and people laughing.

So the food was lousy but we fought over those cheese steaks. My mother made iced tea from scratch. The mashed potatoes were on every table, with or without gravy. My brothers and I were arguing. We fought and fought and yelled and we sat together every day at dinner. Like a family.

Yesterday I made barbequed chicken for my friends Oscar and Douglas and Louisa and Frank and Johanna. They made beans with jamon and rice and drank Corona and laughed and smoked weed and I went to bed early with the flu. Could you ask for more?
Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:39PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The Things We Ate](#)

- BobThomas

August 27, 2007

Jack,

Fresh sweet corn of South Jersey, jersey tomatoes, peaches, apples - didn't your family ever stop by a farm stand?

Bob

Other things we ate; with apologies to Bob Thomas

Monday, August 27, 2007

Bob reminds me of the fact that South Jersey is the home of the Jersey tomato, sweet corn, ungodly peaches and more fresh produce than you can shake a stick at from July till Sept. My mother and father were not monsters. Yes we got fresh tomatoes and corn all summer long. In fact we grew our own in the digging yard several years. I should and will talk more about that later.

To this day I love going home so I can buy bushels of tomatoes for next to nothing that cost bundles of dough from the same farms in the Greenmarket. I was cranky and hungry last night and could only remember the honey loaf. Thank God for the tomatoes, the apples, the peaches, the corn, the lima beans. That's right fresh lima beans...all summer long. Poor Mick. Poor Jack. Now I have to say something. I love lima beans. Ha ha.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:05PM (-04:00)

Bicycles

Tuesday, August 28, 2007

We loved our bicycles. We lived on our bicycles. Everywhere we went we went on bicycles. Schwinn's and Rahleights. English and American. Big ass old school one speed bikes with fat tires that had one up hill speed...slow and one downhill speed...fast. We put baseball cards on them to make noises as they fluttered in the spokes. We shined the chrome and cleaned them and oiled them and knew how to patch tires and change tubes. We rode our bikes up and down the streets of Wenonah, to and from school, to the pool and back. We rode them in snow and rain and sun. We rode them in wild packs of boys, carrying fake plastic and wooden rifles prepared for war in the woods of Wenonah. We rode them with complete abandon.

I vividly recall riding down Cherry St. by Terry Fleming's house en route to Clay Hill for a game of guns one beautiful summer afternoon. We were all riding no handed and shooting our imaginary enemies as we rode. Suddenly my front tire blew. Pow! The bike bucked up a foot or two in the air then came down and sent me skidding down newly macadamed Cherry St. In seconds I was covered in scrapes and the scrapes were filled with tar and stone and dirt and blood. A passerby asked if I was okay and of course we all assured him I was. Then we ran home as fast as we could to my house. I burst into the living room where my father and my Uncle Al were drinking glasses of whiskey and stood in front of them. Blood was running down all my extremities and my face. They laughed and laughed and laughed. Then I shrieked and burst into tears. Up to then I hadn't cried at all. I was being a man. But seeing my father and my Uncle laughing at me left me bereft. I cried and cried; they laughed and laughed.

Then my mother got out the Hydrogen Peroxide and the bandaids and went to work. In a few workmanlike minutes I was covered in bandages and smarting from the burn of the peroxide. My friends were yelling outside so out I went. We had a game to play.

We played one terrible game called the Bike Game. In this game Stewart DeHart and Bobby McQuaide and maybe Jackie Brangan would ride their bikes back and forth in Lincoln Ave in front of the DeHart residence. We huddled in the grass strip between the

sidewalk and the street. At their command we ran across the street and they tried to run us down. It was the most terrifying thing I've ever done. No one of us was a winner. We were all mauled and bloody and ridiculed. It was all we could do to get them to stop playing and let us go home.

We organized bike races. Older boys delivered their newspapers on their bikes. All around town bikes were scattered like leaves in front of houses where children lived. We customized our bikes. We loved our bikes.

One day we rode our bikes from Wenonah to Woodbury. Seven miles. Up Mantua Avenue, left on Glassboro Road and all the way into Woodbury. We bought sandwiches and ice cream and sodas and rode back. We were proud little explorers. Then our mothers found out and that was our last bike hike till seventh grade.

In the days before we turned 17 bikes were our only freedom and we loved them. If they were animals they would have loved us back.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:16PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Bicycles

- JimMaddox

October 26, 2007

Your bike was your freedom, your independence and a gateway to other worlds. Magnificent steeds of steel and chrome powered by legs and imagination. My bikes were all from West Germany by a company called Rixe. I was the only kid with a German bike, and I felt somewhat more sophisticated; more exotic. I fought in the skies over Europe in world wars I and II. We rode as the seventh cavalry on horses with shiny chrome fenders and chains black with grease. In Woodbury Heights you rode the ultimate challenge: soaring down Chestnut Hill at breakneck speed, the wind rushing through you so hard you almost closed your eyes. If you were going fast-I mean really fast, your momentum carried you over the smaller rise at the base of the hill and carried you on to Boundary Line Road into the next town. Being born so close to Christmas meant that your birthday present was often a new bike, the biggest and best gift you could possibly get. You could be Marlon Brando in The Wild One, or Ichabod Crane riding in terror from the Headless Horseman. Ah bikes! Ah glorious freedom!

Re: Bicycles

- JeanMaurieangelsloveyou

December 09, 2007

Yep I remember so well riding my bike over to Mantua and beyond. What fun it was feeling the freedom of it all. Mom wouldn't let me ride my bike in the street til I was ten. Sheesh, but after that "magic" age I was gone. This was from 1946 until about 1952.

Bobby McQuaide was my cousin. Lived next door. Again, small world.

Hope you keep writing, this is fun and brings back memories.

Re: Bicycles

- bcsmillsriver

December 09, 2007

Jean Maurie is my sister and Bobby McQuaide & I did some devilish things as youngsters. I heard tell of one or both of us putting sugar in gas tanks, and then there was the incident of throwing bricks in the air when one hit me in the head...guess I've never been since LOL

Re: Bicycles

I remember removing the fenders & chain guards. Then adding a banana seat & ape hanger handle bars then painting the entire bike flat black to be KOOL. Ride ALL over town everyday.

Cemetery Hill

Thursday, September 06, 2007

South Jersey doesn't get much snow. Maybe a few storms of 4 to 6 inches a year. When I was young it was a particularly snowy era but not really and truly deep snows. In Jersey City in 1996 we got over three feet of snow. That never happened in Wenonah. But we cherished snow. We lived for snow. We waited for it from December till March and it always seemed to come.

When it came we went sledding. You might recall that I've said Wenonah is relatively flat. Flat is not really the word for it. Devoid of contours would be more appropriate. There was only one real hill near Wenonah and that was in Mantua in the cemetery named Wenonah. It was just across the Mantua Creek and every kid from Mantua and Wenonah flocked there once there was an inch or two of snow. There were three main sled ways in the cemetery. The steepest had no graves and led directly to the woods and beyond the creek. The second was just to the right and had a few strategically placed headstones for your slaloming pleasure. The third was the road that wound through the cemetery. The road wasn't always idyllic but since snow was sparse but cold was not the snow would freeze and present an crazy iced run to hell.

The minute snow started falling we'd pull our Flexible Flyer's and Flying Saucers out of garages and wax them up. Then legions of bundled up nitwits would head down Mantua Avenue to the Wenonah Cemetery for the joy of hurtling downhill at breakneck speeds on iron and wood.

Each winter gave up it's own delights. Deep snow here that allowed you to surf standing up on your sled. Icy roads that let you run headlong for hundreds of yards down the road. Snows that let us build ramps so when you got to the end you'd soar, oh, maybe a foot or two in the air, before you crashed like a knucklehead into the brush.

Little kids with older brothers, parents in cars with young kids, teenagers, all of us flocked to the cemetery. To fly like wild people in the snow. Cold as hell, terrible mittens that never kept you warm, jeans soaked in snow and soggy long johns and down and up we'd plunge.

Cold and sun and snow all around us. Ignoring, not really even noticing the headstones of our forebears all around us. When my mother died my father bought a plot overlooking the creek for them both. When I was very ill I went to visit my mother's grave but couldn't find it. But I could see every route our sleds took! I could see us proud as lions standing on our sleds jetting to our doom.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:10PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Cemetery Hill

- JimMaddox

October 28, 2007

Ride your bike for any length of time and you come to realize that South Jersey is not flat, it undulates. Every now and then, you come across a staggeringly steep rise and find yourself hitting a "wall". It's much like the other false impression of New Jersey that most people out of state have: we are just an extension of New York City with a turnpike running through the center, lined by factories belching smoke.

South Jersey in the 50's and 60's was mostly rural with small towns like Jack's and mine breaking up the stretches of woods and fields and farmland.

We prayed for snow as kids. It brought us new adventures, new ways of having fun and risking our lives. The center of all winter activity in Woodbury Heights was the lake area, extending out to include Freund's cliff and Chestnut Hill. The lake was for ice skating and hockey. Swarms of adults and teenagers gliding along in the glow of streetlights and a fire built on the shore. There were those whose ability on the ice made us watch in awe as the skaters danced in the glow of moonlight. I was one of those awkward types. I could never get my ankles to co-operate, so I spent most of my time on the ice-well, on the ice.

Sledding was a different story. My brother Carl and I and my friend Keith and others braved the tree-lined slopes of Freund's cliff, parts of which had the ominous nickname, "Suicide". We had one Flexible Flyer, but I was insane enough to prefer the metal Sno Disc. You sat in the center of your silver shield, held on to the straps and went down backwards, exposing yourself to bone cracking injuries of every type imaginable. The discs spun as you descended, increasing the likelihood of death or maiming. Once I actually hit full force the entire length of my spine into a sapling tree. For several minutes I thought that I had finally done it; my back was broken. After the shock wore off, I was up and hurling myself down the trail again. My brother had a vinyl coat which he sometimes used to propel himself. He would pull up the cloth collar, lie on his back and go down head first defying the odds. He did eventually break his foot and leg while sitting up dangling his legs over the side of the only real sled we had.

The sane people would use Chestnut Hill. Chestnut Hill was the steepest part of Chestnut Ave., so it was a frozen street that provided a safer sledding experience. Adults were there to supervise and it was a family event for the entire area. We would use Chestnut Hill when it was really icy, but the siren call of "Suicide Hill" and all its inherent danger always drew us back for more.

The Music of Fourth Grade

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

You could say there was no music. You'd be wrong of course. On our trips to my grandmothers my parents listened to WIP. Their station. Sinatra, the Mill's Brothers, Mancini, Dean Martin. You could say in 4th grade I didn't get music and then you'd be right. I didn't. My parents bought us records of folk music and classical recordings and we'd play them on the radio/hi fi in the second living room. They had Mitch Miller's Sing a Long With Mitch and the records they bought that I guess they thought would connect me with music.

On one level it worked. I know all the words to John Henry. I know the words to Erie Canal. When I hear the new Springsteen sessions in Dublin it's like being in the living room listening to that stuff over and over. But really, I could have cared less. Music meant almost nothing to me. But it was everywhere. The Mills Brothers singing "cross the river from the Alamo was a Pinto pony...", the theme to Hatari, the distant sounds of rock and roll which to us 4th graders might well have been the sounds you hear on a tv on in a room you walk through.

We paid no attention but it was everywhere. We knew about Elvis. When we took music

the teacher would invariably try to talk about Elvis but we were totally befuddled. This was a town where music, classical, folk, rock, experimental, popular was confined to background noise for young people.

My parents might be swaying to Frank. They might know about the new Tony Bennett. But me? I knew nothing. I was a knucklehead, soaking in the noise of the radio in the backseat of the Chevy on the way home from Nonny's. In the Still of the Night, See the Pyramids along the Nile all sounds filling the back seat. Watching the houses as we drove home. To Wenonah.

Where we went upstairs to our rooms to listen to the crickets chirping. Buddy Holly had no place there. Not yet.

We sang in school. We heard music all the time. But none of it mattered.

In less than ten years that would all change. I imagine for some young men and women in Wenonah it had already started to change. Otherwise why would our music teacher be talking about blue suede shoes and Gene Krupa? For a little while music was only the thrum of baseball cards on our bike's spokes, or the themes of TV shows we loved. But in a few short years it would grab us by the back of our necks and drag us into a world we didn't even know existed.

Be Bob a Lula. Rock Around the Clock. I boogied in my room and I boogied in the hall, I boogied in my fingers and I wiped it on the wall. She walked up two flights two flights more. Rock around the clock tonight. Rock around the clock. Yakkety Yak don't talk back. Next year the Beatles came to America and stuff starts to get interesting.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:15PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The Music of Fourth Grade](#)

- brotherTed

September 13, 2007

How could you forget "Famous Train Whistles" Or the day we ruined Dad's 78s? All great memories though

Childhood Illness

Tuesday, September 18, 2007

In fourth grade my body broke. Not on purpose and not through any fault of my own. My childhood asthma became much worse, probably aggravated by our cats and my parents smoking. On top of that in an effort to help me with my studies my father got me a desk lamp to help me do my homework.

Unfortunately the light bulb in the desk lamp was not a standard bulb but a UV bulb. Hours working under the UV bulb caused damage to my eyes. No one could figure out why my eyes were being damaged. We went to the doctor again and again until after several months one doctor listened to my stupid complaint that it was the light from the desk lamp. For weeks I'd been wearing sunglasses to deal with my eyes sensitivity to light. The doctor said, what kind of bulb is in the lamp and when we told him we solved the problem.

That didn't solve the asthma dilemma. I spent most of fourth grade in a haze caused by the only drugs available for asthmatics at the time. Epineprine. It stopped the asthma but made me a zombie. Concentrating was difficult if not impossible. But I was a kid. You

don't blame drugs when you're a kid. You just soldier on. So I went to class and floated in a numb state through the year. And as I've already said it was a hard year.

In retrospect I would have been better without my cats. In retrospect my father should have known what kind of bulb was in the desk lamp but in that place at that time there was really only me bumbling around with a terrible breathing disease wearing sunglasses and struggling to be a good kid.

You'd think this would prepare you for stuff. But it didn't. It only meant I had to lay in bed while my friends were playing and I was wheezing. I had trouble reading because of my eyes. It was a fourth grade disaster.

We changed the bulbs. In the next several years we found an allergist. I got allergy shots. My asthma vanished for the most part. But for two or three years the only place I felt safe was in my house reading. Not a bad place because I loved books. My parents taught me how wonderful they were and they were indeed life saving.

In books I could breath. In books I could see. In books I was smart and resourceful and brave. In real life I was a skinny kid who got picked last and barely made the baseball team.

On top of all this I wet the bed. This would become a major impediment when I joined Boy Scouts but for now it was just an embarrassment that meant I couldn't stay over at my friends house.

What do you do with this? As a grown up I'm comfortable talking about it. As a fourth grader I felt like a monster trapped in his room. A skinny troll unable to be like anyone else. Only in comics and in books was I alive.

Years later when I became truly ill this was a help. I think I'd prefer that I hadn't had the training. Just as I'd prefer I hadn't gotten ill with AIDS. Shit happens and it has it's benefits but all things considered you might wish you had a pick.

Theodore Roosevelt was my hero because he was an asthmatic as a young boy and he exercised and fought back. I used his example to try to get better. Now I think that just by dint of labor you can't fix anything. But then it served it's purpose. I had a goal. Not to be sick. Not to be limited. To be like everyone else.

What I never asked was what was everyone else like. What were the trials they faced.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:05PM (-04:00)

Pets

Wednesday, September 19, 2007

Pets were a big, big part of being a kid in Wenonah and most likely all of 1960's America. God only knows why. Pets of all shapes and sizes. Mice and cats and rats and hamsters and guinea pigs and dogs and horses and ant farms and sea monkeys. Our homes were littered with pets of one kind or another. Okay, snakes were few and far between...you usually had to find one in the woods and bring it home and then after a few days in a cardboard box your mother would make you let it go. But after that everything was a pet...toads and frogs, box turtles, birds limping around with broken wings, bunny rabbits, everything...literally everything. Our backyard was a vast pet cemetery. Small wooden crosses over graves filled with rotting creatures.

Most of my pets were of the conventional variety. We had two cats for many years, Timmy and Surprise. Surprise was the oldest and Timmy the youngest. Each of them was actually a purloined cat. They showed up at our back porch and we fed them and then

they were ours. They were with us until 7th grade. That's when my mother found out we were allergic to them. Then they were sent to a "farm". This is a euphemism rarely used but essentially my mother lied and had them slicked at the vets.

We had a few half hearted attempts at dogs but my father didn't do dogs well and dogs are a grown man's job, even in Wenonah. We had a dalmation that died of distemper and a shaggy dog my dad brought home from a gas station on Admiral Wilson Blvd in Camden. He lasted not much longer than the dalmation. Towards the end of my time in Wenonah my mother found out poodles are relatively allergen free so we had two small poodles. They hated my brothers and I but loved my mother.

Mostly we loved the cats. Who were killing us.

Of course we had turtles and tropical fish and we'd save various dying wild animals and all that but really it was the cats to which we had a real connection. I remember to this day the horror of finding Timmy on the back porch one day after he'd been gone a couple days. He'd been shot by a hunter and his left rear leg was shattered by buckshot. We took him to the vet and he recovered but it was a rare brush with death in our little happy world.

Which leads me inexplicably to our experiments with the toad. One day Chris and Terry and Gary and Mick and I and who knows who else found a toad and decided to test it's endurance levels. We buried it in a box for an hour. It survived. For two hours. Survival. Three, four, five, ten hours and still it's beating heart pumped life.

Then overnight. Surely that would kill this lousy toad. But no it rose from it's shoebox grave heart beating strong. Ugly, gray mottled monster. Stronger, smarter, more worldly than we...so we crushed it with the back of a shovel.

Life is short and pets come and go. I have had five dogs now over the years that I treasure as I would a child. Still, I raised up that spade and crushed that little toad with all my might. Later we set fires in the basement. Ha ha

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:58PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Pets](#)

- brotherTed

September 24, 2007

Did you know that one time me and Joby DeHart were setting crickets on fire with gasoline in his garage when we decided to light a whole bunch of them. Needless to say, the whole side of the garage went up in flames. I forgot how it got put out.

Timmy & Surprise

Thursday, September 20, 2007

What I didn't talk about in my last post about pets was my feelings about my cats. What they meant to me. I loved those little guys. They each had their own personalities and they seemed to love me back in the way cats love you back.

Remember, they did come home every day. In Wenonah in 1961 you just let your cat out the back door in the morning and it ran around all day long and came home when it wanted. Pretty much that was true of dogs as well. My friend Terry's dog Susie wandered the neighborhood for years. Half blind with what looked like five tails she meandered around from kid to kid, yard to yard, always coming back to Terry's garage.

Same with Surprise and Timmy. Each night they came to our room and laid down on the beds with Mick and I. I can remember with utter clarity sitting on the edge of the bed watching one particularly terrible thunderstorm with Surprise. She lay next to me purring contentedly while lightning and thunder shook the sky and rain poured down in thick sheets.

My mother would go to the Tony Sacca's butcher shop once a week and buy them liver. They ate canned food and drank milk. No water. No dry food. No feline leukemia. They were fierce animals that craved our companionship and we honored them.

My Nonny Glading hated cats. When she came to visit she'd shoo them out of the house with a broom or pour water on them. She swore they'd smother Mary Lou in her bed by trying to drink the milk off her lips.

There was one other animal in my life that meant the world to me. My father's mother and father had an Irish Setter named Happy. He was in their family when I was born and lived well into my youth. He let me tug his ears and flop on his side while he lay on the floor. He was a great and handsome animal in the way dogs are great and handsome.

This love of pets led me to get a dog in my twenties. A lab retriever. Named Boo. Actually Boobs a Lot after the Fugs song "You've got to like boobs a lot". My ex-wife Kathy named her but she was my dog to the bottom of both of our hearts. Just before Boo died my girl friend at the time bought me another lab, Lucy. When we split up I got a beautiful Rottweiler, Lulu. Now I have two wild dogs running through my apartment...Cookie and Milo. Cookie's a lab and Milo is a shelter dog and they both enrich my life in ways I can't understand. Linda has two dogs, Ike, a Newfie, and Tina a runt lab and I love them too. God, dogs and cats are wonderful. Too bad for the toad.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:14PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Timmy & Surprise](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

April 27, 2008

you are ridiculously cute in this.

What We Wore

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Children in the early sixties resembled children in the early fifties who resembled children in the early forties. Look at our photo. With the exception of Tommy Jenkins we may have been in a photo from the dust bowl by Walker Evans. When we were out of school we wore dungarees and t shirts. Or sweatshirts. When we were in school dungarees were forbidden. Note I do not say "jeans". That's because no one would have known what the fuck I was talking about. They were dungarees. These could be made seasonal by purchasing lined dungarees for winter.

We also wore flannel shirts in the winter. My Aunt Gert used to use our old flannel shirts to make flannel board presentations for her bible classes so at least there was another life for them. Flannel board presentations. Just thinking about that shit freaks me out. There are times when I feel like Henry Adams in the 1910. Besides all his other peculiarities Henry Adams lived from 1838-1918. This meant he went from sailing ships



and horse drawn carts to airplanes, telephones, cars, and tanks all in one lifetime. He had some other shit going on as well and you should read his autobiography, called "The Education of Henry Adams".

Okay, so we're in flannel and denim and cotton. And for school we wear our "school clothes" which as I recall consist primarily of khaki pants and some sort of patterned shirt. Girls were fucked. They had to wear dresses and apparently the dresses had to be ugly. I don't possess the appropriate vocabulary to describe their dresses except

to say they were uniformly ugly. Not one girl was cool. Not even Sandy Fay or Dolores Lorenz. Then they would join Brownies or Girl Scouts and get uglier more. That is a poor construction that accurately describes the terrible descent into fashion hell that takes place when you put on a Girl Scout or Brownie uniform. These uniforms are not even vaguely Hitler Youth. Whoever had the bright idea to put young girls in uniforms should be sentenced to a year as Naomi Campbell's personal assistant.

Tiny white collars, puffy skirts, plaids, little shoes, white socks. It must have been a curse to be a girl. At least our clothes were functional if dull. Sure we could have been midget accountants or garage mechanics but we could run and play and have fun pretty much the same as if we were wearing our "play" clothes.

Then there were our "church" clothes. This consisted of my only suit which was bought for me at Robert Hall. Here's my picture. Snappy is not the word for how cool I looked. Trapped, forlorn, and stupid might be adjectives that leap to mind.

The tie is a clip on. I learned to tie a tie when I was twenty eight. Before then it was clip on all the way. Much like the food we ate. If it was easy that's what you picked. Shoes. Shoes were from Ernie's Shoe Post in Mantua. Usually Buster Brown. "Does your shoe have a boy inside, what a funny place for a boy to hide. Does your shoe have a dog there too? A boy and a dog and a foot in a shoe. Well, the boy is Buster Brown and the dog is Tige his pet and they're really just a picture but it's fun to play pretend." This is an actual jingle played on TV and radio intended to trick us into buying these shoes. As though we had a choice. As though I could somehow cajole my mother into picking Buster Browns if there was something cheaper. Not going to happen. It might work with Frosted Flakes but not with shoes. Shoes were clothes and clothes were her game. We had no say in what went on our backs and feet. We trudged behind her each August and each April and she pulled stuff off racks and held it up and sent us into tiny rooms where we tried it on and then that's what we wore.

Not that I cared all that much. We had occasional flirtations with motorcycle jackets or Chuck Taylor All Stars but the bottom line was the only pieces of clothing I ever wanted were long johns and hip boots. Beyond that I could give a fuck. They all wore out and tore and got small and then my poor brother Ted had to wear them. Ha ha. Too bad for him.

This would all change in Seventh Grade. Let me close the door then gently on Mr. McIntire and Fourth Grade. It's time for Jack to begin his time as a teenager or near teenager. One door closes and the other opens. It's Fifth Grade and our teacher is Mrs. Fuller. We're seated in our class wearing our new fall school clothes.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:58AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: What We Wore](#)

- bcsmillriver

December 09, 2007

Jack, you might be interested to know I was born in this house April 1948! Shortly thereafter my father passed away and the house was sold, i ended up in south Florida where I grew up. Small World huh?!?!?

Fifth Grade

[Wednesday, October 03, 2007](#)

Fifth grade was different. I was entering new worlds. I was done with Mr. McIntire. My eyes were better. I was better read. I was happier. I was discovering girls and feeling like a different person. Fifth Grade begins not in the fall but in the summer. We belonged to the Wenonah Swim Club now. The swim club had it's heroes and heroines. Great swimmers that competed year round. My friend Terry's brothers and kids from Woodbury were stars in the world of swimming. They walked like gods across the grass of the club. Their parents played cards and perhaps sipped cocktails and we ran like maniacs about the pool. As usual my summer began with two weeks in Ocean City and then I returned to Wenonah. Hot and humid now. Deep greens and thick air. We'd ride our bikes to the pool and drink cokes and eat cheesesteaks and watch the teenagers, cool and serene. We played our swim games, swim tag and we took diving lessons and we were still kids but we were changing. Learning. We showered in the shower before we went in the pool. We wore speedoes and we admired the kids that won meets. I wasn't a kid anymore. I wasn't a teenager either. I was a skinny kid watching how to be.

Then we rode our bikes to the school at the end of the summer to see where we'd be in the fall. Mrs. Fuller's class. Now we were all together. The kids who were smart. The kids who weren't in Ed Campbell's classes. Now we were treated differently. There were still classes well above us. All the way to 8th grade but that would change. In two years we would go to a new junior senior high school.

Suddenly what we had on our backs made a difference. All of a sudden we noticed girls and girls noticed us and we were all dancing an odd dance with no practice and no experience.

We started playing games in the summer nights with girls. We watched them intensely. We watched how some boys were smoother with girls. I always felt awkward. I guess in retrospect all of us did but it was intense for me. But still for two years my ability to know things seemed to make a difference with girls. They seemed to like me. And I like that.

Class was easier than Mr. McIntire. After him everything was cake. I knew the drill. I seemed almost magically to know how to write paragraphs and reports and make them the way teachers wanted. In fact, the thing that most amazes me is that I started to understand I knew what teachers liked.

Our games began to change. Our play began to become more focussed. We were being sucked into the world.

But not in a bad way. We were acknowledged for knowing what we knew. We were encouraged. We read our Weekly Reader and talked about it as though it mattered. We

talked about elections. We talked about the world.

It was the oddest transformation and it accelerated exponentially over the next few years. But at least for a few years in Wenonah Public School it was sheltered. We all knew each other. Me and Tommy Jenkins and Kenny Fell and Ralph Leeds had a shared history that kept us kind to each other. We, jeez this sounds dumb, liked each other.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:28PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Fifth Grade

- carey

October 08, 2007

Hey, Jack. I stumbled across your blog...I can't wait to go through it and all your Wenonah stories!

I can't remember anything about anything anymore, so it'll be fun to go through and see what you have to say.

Hope all is well..

Re: Fifth Grade

- JackWiler

October 09, 2007

Carey,

Write me if you get a chance. Jack@jackwiler.com.

Nice to see you writing about your sister's cirrhosis. It's fun to have a fucked up liver:)

It was good seeing you on the 4th. You look great!

Later,

yr pal,

Jack

Mrs Fuller's Fifth Grade Class 1962-63

Wednesday, October 10, 2007



Top Row from left: Stanley Landis (thanks Bonnie), me (Jack Wiler), Tommy Jenkins, Bob Stokes, David Moffat, Terry Fleming (in a typical class photo pose), Ralph Leeds, David Earnhardt, Don Davis (though I could be wrong), Tim Sellen, Ken Fell, and Johnny Hindman

Middle Row from left: Christine Sabetta, Kathy Gillan (sp?), Kathy Collinge, Sharon Hoffman, Suzy Parker, Bonnie Mecholsky (Thanks again Bonnie, let's hope I get this

right in 6th grade), Caroline Stens, Nancy Garrison, June Lang, Irene Thomas, Barbara Conway, and Mrs Fuller (oddly enough)

Bottom Row from left: Madelaine Pillings, Susan Abbott, Margie Loving, Ruthie Felch, Michelle Smith, Dottie Chattin, Jane Shiflet (thanks Bonnie!), Elisa Contarino, Dolores Lorenz, Linda Smith

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:28AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Mrs Fuller's Fifth Grade Class 1962-63](#)

- Anonymous

October 10, 2007

Hi Jack!!

Your southern accent was Stanley Landis and the unknown girl was Jane Shiflet. My memory isn't what it use to be but I think the correct spelling for my last name is Mecholsky!!!

Bonnie

Identification Issues

[Thursday, October 11, 2007](#)

I should actually be saying something meaningful about Wenonah but instead I'll give a shout out to Terry Fleming who called roughly four hours after this went up to start puzzling over the names of people and to Bob Thomas who wrote to complain about my formatting...I guess I could rescan this photo but the reality is I made a pdf when I scanned it then had to change it to a jpg to upload it and, well, Bob can't make it as big as he'd like. I'll think about rescanning:)

Then this morning there was a very helpful post from Bonnie Mecholsky with Stanley Landis and Jane Shiflet's names and her correct spelling. How cool is that? Thanks to this blog and you guys I've now officially talked more with all of you in the past six months or so than I did over thirty years since we left Wenonah. There's a lot to be said for the internet.

Again, several folks from Gateway Class of 1970 are working on a reunion. Tentative date is July 5th and thanks to Greg Jones, tentative site is the Holiday Inn in Bridgeport. Greg thinks some of us will get smashed and not be able to move. I think he's probably right. On the other hand we could all rent limos to drive us home. Please send me your names and addresses if you see this so I can keep you up to date as the day nears.

Much as I'm petrified of going back to 1970 I think it will be fun.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:35AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Identification Issues](#)

- Anonymous

October 14, 2007

Jack,

I'm pretty sure that the girl after Chris Sabetta is Cathy Gillin. She lived on Jefferson and had a brother named Fred.

Bonnie

Girls Against Boys

Wednesday, October 17, 2007

So here we all are in Mrs. Fuller's class. Girls and boys. Boys and girls. All next to each other. For some reason things seem different. Normally, at least up until now, boys were repulsed by girls. They were in the parlance of the times, icky. We were gross. But suddenly for some reason none of us could put a finger on we wanted them to think well of us.

Being boys we really didn't know how to accomplish this and also because we couldn't put a finger on it we were somewhat ambivalent about it. That resulted in mixed messages. I doubt seriously that any girl is really interested in skunk cabbages or dead frogs but for some reason we thought they might be. We suddenly felt okay with them playing games with us. Not all games but certain ones. Kick the Can and the Gun Game in particular. Also we moved the location of the games to their houses.

All of a sudden we were playing Kick the Can at the Collinge's which was a half block from my house on W. Mantua Ave. Kathy lived next to the Cook's on one side and Sharon Hoffman on the other. The games spilled through all three yards. The Collinge home had a large palazzo type front porch with rock walls and slate flooring and we were able to execute daring leaps to escape capture.

The Cook's house had a small playhouse in the rear corner which was also an ideal hiding place. I think the main attraction of all these games was hiding in close proximity to young women. We weren't sure what that would mean but we certainly looked forward to it.

I developed my first crushes on both Kathy and Sharon and they continued, switching from one to the other till the end of sixth grade. I'm still not certain which of them I preferred. Kathy was bright and Sharon was cuter so maybe it would have been better if they could have become one person. At any rate when I look at their picture I'm quite certain it was not their stylish outfits that drew me to them. Nor mine.

There were older girls who were far more attractive and even more scary. From Peggy Sacca to Cheryl Furey to Donna Hambrecht the world was filled with girls changing into women and really I had no way of coping.

I'd spend my afternoons on my paper route spinning elaborate fantasies about saving them from an invading Russian Army and taking them to live with me and my band of brave guerilla warriors in the swamps of the Mantua Creek. Of course the woodland there was roughly a hundred yards wide so I'm certain I would never have been found by determined Russian soldiers.

I'll leave you then with me on my new red, Schwinn Typhoon. Riding one handed down Cherry Street with a basket of Woodbury Daily Times in a bag in the front. I rise up to toss one to the Fleming house and a Russian drops dead from my well thrown knife. Like a ghost I travel these mean streets. A vengeful, sexy, killing ghost. Alone. Cool. With a

flannel shirt and lined dungarees and the sure knowledge I had to be home for dinner in a half hour.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:47AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Girls Against Boys](#)

- BobThomas

October 19, 2007

Jack,

Thanks for another great tale from the 60s in Wenonah. Monday I was able to bicycle home from work and I went by a driveway where someone was burning some leaves. Ah, the aroma!

Raking leaves - what a soothing easy "job". Those deafening leaf blowers had not yet been invented to plague us.

There were lots of oaks planted to replace maples that were dying off from various causes. Some years the roads would be almost covered with acorns that would crunch as cars drove over them.

Do you remember touch football games in the crunching leaves?

Did you do a post on Halloween yet and how most of the people would know most of the children and really try to guess who they were?

Another neat thing - the really good hoagies the girl scouts and Brownies made for fund raisers. I don't think we ate as much pizza then as now and buying hoagies for dinner gave Moms a night off from food preparation.

The first frosts - while the leaves were still around - skim of ice on leaf enhanced puddles that could be jumped on and broken and you could kick the pieces of ice up the sidewalk.

The squeal of milk truck brakes in the morning.

I Danced Till a Quarter To Three

[Monday, October 22, 2007](#)

I've been to a hundred weddings, including two of my own. I've danced with women I don't know and will never see again and had a wonderful time. I've danced to dj's and bands from the fifties and punk bands (my wedding). I've eaten tons of bad food and watched people behave like chumps. At my second wedding my wife, Mary, made me leave after our dance because she couldn't deal with people looking at her. The wedding band was so good that people on the streets in New Brunswick were dancing outside of our wedding but I was in our hotel room with my new wife. Commiserating.

On Saturday night my niece Louise married the father of her daughter. Her husband is Paul. The ceremony was sweet and brief and real. We went from there to the Hollywood Diner for beers and thence to the hall for the reception.

It was the best reception and wedding I've ever attended. I went with Johanna who was

scared she wouldn't be accepted. She said to me on the way if someone gives her shit we're out. I said okay. As it turns out she was the hit of the night. We danced and danced. Johanna was dancing with an older Italian woman who'd just had a hip replacement. Everyone was happy. My brother Ted tried and failed to do a split. The music was perfect the food was divine and we rocked till we dropped. I almost never dance but I danced all night. With Johanna, with Louise.

It was a marvelous night. Young love is so special and weddings for young people even more special. Mick and his friend Greek and Johanna and Brian Moody another friend of Mick's and their wives and Eileen sat up till all hours yelling and happy. God was smiling on us all.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:04PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: I Danced Till a Quarter To Three](#)

- carey

October 23, 2007

Well, you Wilers always know how to have a good time.

Mick's a grandfather and you're a grand-uncle. Sheesh! It's hard to believe little Louise is all grown up. I'm sure she looked beautiful.

[Re: I Danced Till a Quarter To Three](#)

- Louise

October 24, 2007

Uncle Jack, that was just beautiful! i am so glad u were there and got to be part of our special day! i love you and johanna both very much! thank you again for everything!

Ruthie Felch and the Man in the Woods

Saturday, October 27, 2007

In 5th Grade we did not understand sex. Oh sure, one day the year before at Chris DeHarts we found out how babies were made. It seemed strange to us. How could your penis make a baby? I mean you pissed out of it. Did you pee into the girl? It didn't quite make sense but enough older boys (Stewart DeHart and Bobby McQuaide) had told us so we bought into the whole thing. We were interested in girls, like I said earlier, but it was all inchoate.

One day in school something odd happened. Our teacher came in the class to tell us Ruthie Felch had been molested by a man in the woods by the railroad tracks. She warned the girls to stay away from the woods. Molested. What did that mean?

There was much speculation and no clear facts. This was after all a time when no one talked about sex. Remember that we learned where babies came from because older boys told us. Having a parent or teacher explain this to you at 11 would be unthinkable. That meant we were all at a loss to understand what actually had happened to Ruthie Felch. In fact, to this day I actually have no idea what happened. Was she raped? Did he expose himself? Did he touch her? No one but Ruthie and the teachers and the man know what happened.

But this incident brought a bit of darkness into our bright little town. Suddenly there was danger all around us. Much like the Soviet Union menacing our borders there were

perverts in our back yards, lurking in our woods.

I had read a number of adult books by now, including "To Kill a Mockingbird", but when sex parts came up I just breezed by them. They made no sense. The author might as well have been describing strange habits of an alien race.

But still, there was a man in the woods. We all knew about the tramp who lived out by the Parker's at the dump. Boys said that he did bad things to them. What those things were we had no idea but we never went past the Parker's in our excursions in the woods. The dump behind the Parker's was by the side of the creek but our trips up the Mantua Creek all stopped at the railroad trestle. We had no wish to find out what the man might do.

So we'd run home from school and play our games and watch tv and go to sleep and dream untroubled dreams. No lurkers in the woods. No communists torturing our families. No danger anywhere in our happy sleep.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:11AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Ruthie Felch and the Man in the Woods](#)

- MarkKrusch

December 14, 2007

Do you remember the name of that "tramp"? I'm thinking it might have been Everett Richman? He used to live out there by the dump and collect golf balls from the golf course - and he was always walking into town by the baseball field! He used to go to the Methodist church services sometimes too.

JFK and all that

[Sunday, October 28, 2007](#)

5th Grade is the year we began to understand the world. We were all fans of our president. He was young and he was cool and his wife was beautiful and he had two beautiful children. This was a time before the time we live in. The press allowed us to indulge in this fantasy. If he had a terrible back problem and was a womanizer and if his wife was not so very nice and if their marriage was less than perfect and if maybe he wasn't the best president in the world we'd never know because it wasn't good form to talk about such things in the press. Thanks be to God.

So me and Terry and Kenny and Bob picked up Our Weekly Reader and read about the latest events of the world. We learned how we should join the Peace Corps so we could help save the poor Africans from starvation and ignorance and we learned about how we should exercise and go on fifty mile hikes. This particular bit of presidential insanity somehow rubbed off on my old man who decided Mick and I were flabby little nincompoops. Nincompoops we may have been but flabby was far off the mark. I weighed all of 60 lbs in 5th grade and I may be stretching it at that. In my Sophomore year of high school I weighed in at a cool 115lbs without even trying. Mick was no better. Nonetheless my father challenged us to see how many push ups we could do. Not many, not many. Which led, somehow, to the Royal Canadian Air Force Exercise Manual. A series of isometric and other calisthenic exercises which we were encouraged to indulge in on a daily basis. And like little puppies we did...for a while.

But being good little boys we also indoctrinated our friends and that led inexorably to the Wenonah Olympics. That's right. We staged our own Olympic games in Wenonah. Of

course we didn't have a track and we didn't have a discus and we didn't have a shot to put and we had no arenas but we had willing acolytes (Ted and his little friends) and we had imaginations and we did the best we could under the circumstances. We ran the fifty yard dash and someone had a stop watch they borrowed from their dad. We had relay races. We tried as hard as we could using bamboo poles to do a pole vault. For some reason the pole vault more than any other Olympic or track and field event captivated us. We wanted with all our hearts to be able to launch ourselves twenty feet into the air and land on a soft cushion to the cheers of the crowd (Ted and his little friends).

Sadly we never got over three or four feet. We did a credible long jump and we enjoyed race walking because you looked like an idiot and we passed race walkers in Fairmount Park in Philadelphia so if adults could walk like idiots so could we. And we ran. But then we ran anyway all day long. It was the one thing we did beside ride bikes.

What did this running and jumping and cheering have to do with John Fitzgerald Kennedy and his bride and their two young children? To them, nothing. To us, everything. We were walking in their footsteps. We were playing touch football just like they did. We were active. We were committed. We believed. That's the key word here. Belief. Because now if you picked up Our Weekly Reader you'd say what a bunch of shit. You'd say this is just propaganda or hokey or nonsense. You wouldn't give a shit if they were building a great bridge from Staten Island to New York City because you'd be sweating the costs. You wouldn't care about bringing water to a small African village because you'd be worried about the ozone or the price of gas or your kid who's got a drug problem. But we believed. We believed we should be better. We believed we could be better. We believed that by dint of hard labor and imagination you could change the world. This was to have dire consequences but for now we were just a bunch of kids in dungarees racing around the block as fast as we could trying to be the best and fastest kid on the block.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:33AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: JFK and all that](#)

- BobThomas

October 29, 2007

Jack,

Remember what a bright sunny day that it was when JFK was shot? It was warm for late November. My class was outside on the playground. A teacher came out to say something to Mrs. Ferrara and we went inside early - somberly. The word was that JFK had been shot in Dallas, TX. A short while later the word that he had died was passed to us and we were sent home early.

Dreams crushed.

Time stopped.

The longest Thanksgiving Weekend we ever went through.

Chemistry Sets

Sunday, October 28, 2007

My parents, like all the parents of their day and most likely like parents today, felt a need to improve our minds. We needed to learn and explore the world around us. Because they didn't actually observe what we did when we were in the world around us they supplemented the world with "educational" gifts. Sometimes these sucked. Like classical recordings. But sometimes they were marvelous. Like chemistry sets.

A chemistry set was the best birthday or Christmas gift you could receive short of an actual bb gun. Chemistry sets had beakers and test tubes and things to hold the test tubes and bunsen burners and most importantly...chemicals. Shit in it's purest form. Shit you mix up and use to ruin the world. You were Dr Frankenstein or Einstein or the inventor of the next best, great thing to be invented. Since none of my friends were engineers or inclined in that direction we had no real scientific method. We just mixed shit up and watched what happened. These were actual, real, potentially dangerous chemicals. Now they would come with a host of warnings. Then they came with nothing. Oh, wait...there was an instruction book that we never read.

So we took my chemistry set down to the basement. Set it on our play shelf and began to make poison gases and toxic fumes and potent liquids that would peel the finish off our furniture. Bubbling, smoking, egg shell stinking chemical messes.

We were in heaven. We might have been in Bhopal but to us it was heaven. Naturally we supplemented the meager amount of chemicals the kit came with by appropriating chemicals from our homes. Cleaning solvents, pesticides, paints, and other liquids that appeared similar in nature were added to the toxic brew. Oh the wonders of science.

Many of our skills would come in handy in college when we had to measure and sort various illegal substances but that was really the last time any of this would matter. What I learned was that shit stunk and that it was fun to mix shit up and set it on fire.

When I was working at my company Fleetrak I had the opportunity to work on a regular basis with engineers. These are very strange people who actually understand the inner workings of things. If an engineer gets a toy for Christmas he takes it apart to see how it works and then makes it work better. He does it in an orderly, logical manner. I've had engineers ask me what algorithm we were using in our GPS engine. I told him I didn't have any rhythm but if I did I wouldn't name it AI. He didn't laugh.

We were not engineers. We didn't follow any rules. We didn't try to learn anything. We weren't under the direct supervision of a parent or guardian and so we were more like imps in the machine. We just fucked with shit. And had fun. Lots and lots of fun.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:01AM (-04:00)

Money and Children

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

It's time for filthy lucre to raise it's head. You've gathered by now that my family was not rich but happy. Nonetheless there was not a lot of cash to go around. In, I believe, 3rd Grade I got my first allowance. 25 cents. Not a lot but much more than Mick's dime. At the time that would buy two comic books and five pieces of penny candy or one candy bar. My friends, for the most part, got a bit more. But I was fairly happy with this.

What I wasn't happy with was my father's new found insistence on work. Suddenly after we finished Church School on Saturdays we were enlisted in a number of "chores" to earn our meager allowances. Raking the lawn, taking out trash, scrubbing the kitchen floor. All tasks that we did poorly and begrudgingly.

By 5th Grade I was raking in 50-75 cents a week but had also discovered entrepreneurship. We could earn money by doing chores for older folks in the neighborhood. And they paid way better than my father. Everyone in my family treated money differently. I spent like a drunken sailor on Saturday night. Mick hoarded and binged. Ted just hoarded. Mary Louise was too small to have any money.

But we did manage to save money to spend when we went to the shore each summer. Money to purchase toy soldiers and rides on the amusements, etc. But mostly we spent our money on frivolities. Spiderman, Famous Monsters of Filmland, Superman, wax candies, jawbreakers, twizzlers, sodas, etc, etc, etc.

I need to talk a bit more about how begrudgingly we performed our chores. My father would invariably grab a rake from our hands and rake the leaves himself screaming that this was the proper way to rake leaves. He was right. It was proper for him to rake leaves. Standing there shaking really wasn't hard work if you think about it. On the other hand we had a penchant for putting tasks off. This was particularly bad with snow shovelling. New fallen snow, even heavy, wet snow, is easily removed. Snow packed by dozens of travellers and frozen into slick patches of ice is not. We never learned our lesson and instead spent hours after school with an ice chopper going over small patches of concrete trying to free them of their ice.

On the plus side we had dough for baseball cards and we could pick up tons of cash by shovelling the Sacca's house. Sometimes even getting up to five dollars! Five, freaking, dollars. More money than I would see for weeks from my allowance.

Oh sure, we also got money from well intentioned relatives at Christmas and birthdays but that was always removed and placed in our savings accounts at the Farmer's and Mechanic's Bank. The Farmer's and Mechanic's Bank. Jesus. And we would have periodic flurries of collecting soda bottles from various families and trading them in at Margies for the deposit money. But mostly there was raking leaves, mowing lawns, and shovelling snow. Hard, hard work done fitfully and by surly little urchins. Wet cranky little dickheads.

It wasn't till sixth grade that I began my misadventures with newspaper routes. But they would come. They would come.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:33PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Money and Children](#)

- JimMaddox

November 03, 2007

Remember when money was something? Real silver that rang when you dropped it? The weight of a dollar coin in your palm. A silver dollar was a special gift at Christmas or a birthday; pirate booty in your pocket! The buying power we had. Pennies of real copper and penny candy to spend them on. A pocket full of change could bring you a numismatist's dream. Dimes and quarters and half dollars from the 30s and 40s still in circulation. A Franklin half dollar was a singular fortune, and one could spend hours just thinking about what to spend it on. Real silver and copper, a Midas hoard, an Aladdins'dream.

Interiors

Thursday, November 08, 2007

One thing about money and work. It brought you into contact with a lot of people you didn't really know and more than that it took you into their homes. Not all the way into their homes, just into their homes. Usually just inside the front door. From there you got a glimpse of their lives. Just that. A glimpse.

Wenonah was made up primarily of Victorian homes and a scattering of homes built in the 1920's. On the northeast corner there was a development built in the fifties. But for the most part we're talking homes with porches and entry halls. What someone in a Jane Austen novel might call a parlor. My own house had it's front hallway, complete with a small bathroom which we called the powder room, and the stairs leading to the bedrooms. Just to the right was a living room with a bay window. When people came to visit they entered by this front door and hallway. When friends came they went to the back or side door.

So it was with me and my friends when we went to earn money. When we knew the people, or more precisely, their children we entered the home from the side door or the back door. In Terry Fleming's case the side door was the garage door, for instance. When we didn't we knocked or rang the bell at the front door. Some period of time would elapse and an adult would open the door a bit, perhaps a foot or two, and say hello and ask us what we wanted. We wanted work. But in asking we were also asking to look inside and look we would.

We'd peer around the adult for the secrets within. Most of the homes were a little dark, maybe that was just a trick of the light, or maybe it was a natural inclination to save electricity on the part of older people. The furniture might be old or modern. You almost never heard a tv in the background. There might be a dog barking at their side. The Marx's dog once leapt up and bit me on the elbow. Hard. Don't come in too far. You never know.

Some of the adults were well dressed, some disheveled. Sometimes a man would answer the door on a weekday and that was strange. Sometimes they would hide from you. Especially if you were collecting for the newspaper. You could hear them inside and you would ring and ring yet no adult would come to the door. That was an interesting lesson.

Sometimes a beautiful young wife or stunning teenage girl would answer the door. That was scary and wonderful all at once. The smells that came from inside were also always different. Musky, perfumes, lavender, pinesol, all the different smells of a house. All just drifting two or three feet away, just past a hulking adult figure asking what did you want after all. What indeed?

Why was the door not opened wide? Why wasn't it flung open? Why didn't they ask us in for a coke or a little talk? It was the rare person who would do such a thing. They had something we wanted and they weren't going to give it up easily. We would have to work hard for what we wanted. To get beyond that door and have them open their wallet or purse and pull out a few crumpled singles for our little hands. Maybe they thought we wanted something more. Maybe we did.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:38AM (-05:00)

Secrets

Wednesday, November 14, 2007

I'm going to cheat today. Because it's important, because it matters. The last post was about what we didn't know about in the homes we entered. What we didn't know about, more than anything, was secrets and those secrets were sexual in nature. We didn't know because we were barely sexual. Because we were children. Maybe we had inklings but it was that and nothing more.

For everyone in Wenonah being sexual was to be a freak. Odd. You married and had children and they came from sex but how that happened was never spoken of. If you had sex and it had nothing to do with making a child it was even more unspoken. Of course there were affairs. Of course there were men and women that had sex. Teenagers, young adults, men and women with great longing, men and men and women and women. But you never spoke of any of this because to speak of this made you a freak. Like Mr. Webb.

Why should this bother me. I'm a grown man who has been a sexual being his whole life. I think sex is normal and natural and important. I've never shrunk from expressing my sexuality. My desires. My needs. That is a lie. Of course I have. I couldn't speak of anything outside of sex which wants a child. Not hetero or homo or any other sex. To think of desiring another for sexual reasons was unspeakable and to think that you might be a person who lives for those reasons. Well. You're a freak.

I live with a gorgeous, generous, person named Johanna. She is not a woman. She is anatomically a man. She is a woman. She is a man. She is everything you could want in a lifemate but according to the world in which I grew up she is a freak. And that makes me a freak by association.

When I came home to Wenonah, sick with AIDS, none of my childhood friends came to visit me. My family and a few neighbors, my friend Crystal and my landlord Rachel and my neighbor Mrs Seville were some of the few who said even hello. I was first angry, then saddened. They didn't come because I was different. First, I might die. Second, I was clearly gay, Third, I was nearby. We can all take pity on those in suffering at a distance but to do so with those nearby requires courage and strength most of don't possess. I walk by people everyday who are in deep pain. So, with my childhood friends.

Johanna came to me some months into my recovery and brought me two bunny rabbits. She relished the joys of a spring in Wenonah. It was not where she belonged but she felt it's great beauty.

In a week or two it will be World AIDS Day. People with far less resources and family than I are dying and suffering everyday throughout the globe because of shame and secrets. The simple fact of the matter is that the virus of AIDS doesn't give a fuck about you or your desires or needs or virtuosity. It's a virus. By virtue of your inaction or stupidity or lack of knowledge it finds a host and lives and thrives and the host dies. Or doesn't.

All of us can do each and everyone of our fellow human beings a great service by remembering this. We can spend a moment on World AIDS Day remembering someone or perhaps more people we've lost and we can commit to never allowing secrets, shame, and being other to destroy a life. We can reach out to people that aren't like us and realize that all of us are exactly the same. Naked. In the eyes of the Lord. In need of prayer and succor.

So please, this Thanksgiving, take a moment to reach out to the people nearest you and

least like you and give them some small kindness. And then reach into your pockets and give to those who die from hunger and AIDS and cancer because people don't give.

We can all of us give, everyday, in every way.

God Bless and Happy Thanksgiving!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:19PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Secrets](#)

- carey

November 15, 2007

Thanks for the reminder, Jack. Happy Thanksgiving to you too.

[Re: Secrets](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

April 27, 2008

this is beautiful.

Models

Sunday, November 18, 2007

Enough serious crap. Let's move on to more important concerns. What to do during the cold months from January to March if you're a fifth grade boy. Models. And not Heidi Klum type models. No. Real, scale models of cars and aircraft carriers and monsters and superheroes. Testors glue and paint and instructions and newspapers strewn across a small desk under a little light at 8:30pm.

My first model was one my father gave me. A Sunbeam. That's this weird car made in the 60's that was half a Volkswagon, half a Fairlane. It was two toned, usually a pale blue with white. It was ugly and we owned one. It was the car my mother got to drive. I guess that's why he gave it to me. As per usual I was given the kit, the glue, and the paint and set to my own devices. Now, in fifth grade I was as awkward as I'd ever be which is to say unable to master any technical skill. Delicate was way beyond my fingers abilities. I could barely color within the lines. This meant I spent several days screaming and yelling at myself and begging my father for help till it was done.

My next model came that Christmas. The Visible Man. This was both an incredible gift and some horrible torture. It had ten zillion parts that had to be glued and painted and then carefully fitted together because it came apart! Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as my father would say. My Visible Man resembled the Terminator in late stages of decay. Some parts were painted, some were not, I may have left out the liver. Glue was smeared all over the clear skin of the Visible Man making him more the translucent, smeary man.

I moved up in class. Hot Rods. These were gorgeous models by Aurora that required incredible amounts of patience and skill. I had none. My friend Terry had all of them and more in reserve. He could apparently assemble a model in ten minutes, not counting drying time, and it always looked just like in the magazines or on the box cover. Tommy Jenkins actually spray painted numerous layers of candy coated red on his cars. They gleamed like they were in a car show. The wheels moved. You could almost see some cool cat from California in a white t shirt sitting next to a leggy blonde in a huge bee hive. Mine looked they'd gone cross country with the Joads.

Up to monsters. Frankenstein, Dracula, the Mummy. Terry's looked real, mine like

monsters, only gluey, misshapen attempts by pathetic, arrogant humans to take on the power of God. Stitched together, missing parts, dripping red everywhere except where it should be.

My room stank of glue and paint. My new desk was splattered with red and green and little hillocks of plastic cement. On the plus side one day Terry's mom found him almost passed out at his desk because he'd inhaled so much plastic cement fumes. That could never happen to me. Before that would have happened I'd have tossed the piece of shit plastic torture machine across the room in a fifth grade rage. Then I'd stalk downstairs and sit in my favorite chair reading Classic's Illustrated and sucking a jaw breaker in a stink of frustration. God, life was good.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:11AM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Models](#)

- JimMaddox

November 18, 2007

The damn decals would never go on right. They'd stick to your fingers or go on crooked and if you tried to straighten them out, they'd tear. Oh, the agony.

Happy Thanksgiving

Thursday, November 22, 2007

This has nothing to do with nothing. Everyone have a Happy Thanksgiving. It's a gorgeous morning in Jersey City and Johanna and I are off to Bobby Murphy's house for the Wiler/Murphy feast. We're gathering in Barnsboro for a great meal with people we love. May all of you have the same opportunity.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:39AM (-05:00)

Leftovers

Friday, November 23, 2007

Yesterday was spent in the bosom of my family at my step brother Bobby Murphy's house in Barnsboro. He and his girlfriend Beth live there with Beth's son. It's a beautiful new home at the end of a long gravel driveway. Johanna and I drove down and after negotiating the NJ Turnpike and its traffic arrived at Mick's to meet Mick and my nephew Doug. From there it was on to my niece Louise house in Oak Valley to pick up Louise and her new husband Paul and their infant daughter Mackenzie. It was a warm Thanksgiving day and we arrived moments later at Bobby's. The house was full, my brother Ted and his children, Kelly, Mark, & Justin, my sister Mary, her husband Will, and their son Billy. And then all the Murphy's; Bobby and Beth, Kathleen and her husband Nick and their children, Nick & Victoria, John and his daughter Nicolle, Kenny and his wife Lori and their children, Owen and Gracie. Bah, humbug.

At any rate the garage had a tv in it with the football game on and there was a fridge stocked with beer and cheese and crackers and my sister's signature dip and veggies with other dips. Actually Kenny and Lori came just 45 minutes before the dinner but they

were most welcome as they brought the two turkey's we would consume.

We drank and laughed and then sat down to the feast. My brother Mick was loud and big and funny as only Mick can be. He and I embarrassed Doug who was handsome and thoughtful. Johanna spent the night holding Mackenzie and looking beautiful. There were calls for more Beaujolais and beer and then the pies and coffee and more talk and laughter and then the sad parting.

It was a grand night.

Johanna and I drove back to Mick's where we couldn't sleep so at 11:30, a bit sobered up, I drove us home. Where we slept like babies with Cookie and Milo.

Happy Thanksgiving to all of you and most of all to Mick and Doug. You'll note your names occur more than anyone's. While I was in South Jersey Doug asked me why he was never in the blog. I reminded him it's primarily a memoir of my life in Wenonah in the early sixties. He said why don't you have me travel back in time and then I could be in it. Well, Doug, here you are and it's in 2007 and everyone is happy and there is no misery or sorrow and what could be better? What indeed?

God Bless us All! Remember those who have less than us and offer what you can, not just during the holidays, but all the year round.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:27AM (-05:00)

Smells

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

The world of childhood is very, very small. One or two blocks, a school, some friends, your parents, your grandparents, your brothers, your sisters. Nothing much else. And as it shrinks smaller things grow. Like smells, like odors, like scents. Only an idiot wouldn't be on Proust's side. Of course his Madelaine's could conjure up a world. Of course.

But what smells and where. Start in our basement at 206 W. Mantua Ave. The chlordane wafting from beneath the porch, the smells of melting plastic toys over the ping pong table, the chemistry set and it's sulphur, the oil from the oil tank, the oil for the tools, the bleaches and soaps and detergents. The smell of Lava for removing the oil from the tools and the tank. Maybe the floor had just been painted deep red so there is the smell of the new oil based paint. The mildew. The cool rush of cold from the freezer and the smell of that cold as it fills your hot face on a summer's day. The smell of your dirty shirts and socks piled by the washing machine.

Then up the stairs and into the kitchen and of course there is the smell of food. But also the ever present cigarette smoke and the wax your mother applies to the linoleum and the dish detergent. Joy. And on the kitchen window sill there is an old ceramic bowl with an old, old hard boiled egg and one day the egg breaks and there is that dense sulphur too. And garbage on a hot summer day. Bacon frying on a Saturday morning and butter browning in the iron skillet to make scrambled eggs. On the holidays a turkey in the oven and stuffing and those glorious smells and then out the back door to the garage and the smells of all the things stacked there.

Around the garage the wisteria, purple and thick with scent driving the carpenter bees insane as each of them devour the garage. The tar of the roof shingles, the oil on the floor of the garage from the cars, the three in one oil for the bike chains, the smell of chrome polish, the odor of the wax candle as you rub it on your sleds runners. The paint

cans, the cobwebs and dust, the dry smell of old, old wood, dry in the South Jersey heat. Just to the side the smells of the vegetable garden, the rotting lettuce, the tomatoes thick with smell, the sweet corn, the deep rich brown earth, nearly black and thick with the scent of decay and rebirth, behind the garden the compost and the tree and the scents of barks and old rotting leaves. The air in fall always thick with the smell of rotting leaves. When Johanna and I were in Barnsboro for Thanksgiving we sat and watched thousands of leaves swirling from the trees in the wind and she said it never smells like this in Jersey City and it never does. The smell of burning leaves mingled with the smell of the cigar from the man tending the fire in the street mixed with the scent of new macadam. Almost like licorice.

And grass and hay. New mown grass, piles of rotting grass, fresh uncut grass. Hay, and weeds, and skunk cabbage. Dead squirrels on a path. Dead mice under a log. The swamp smell of the creek and the creek mud. The smell of your wet woolen shirts and gloves.

The smell of your dog or your cat just in from the rain. The smell of the air just after a thunder storm. The smell just before it snows. The smell of the chlorine pool, the cedar lake water, the smells of my grandmother's paints.

Too many to name too many to remember.

Not enough time to sit back and inhale and recollect. They come rushing in like unwanted ghosts at inopportune moments. When I was very ill and lying in my bedroom I realized my room smelled just like it did when I was six. How odd. How unbidden. How unwanted. The smells of your first sex and your first after shave and your first blood wiped from your nose in your first fight.

Breath them in. Breath them out. It's like watching or listening. Attend.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:20PM (-05:00)

Comments

Re: Smells

- JimMaddox

November 29, 2007

Your parents would smell of Old Spice and perfume on the nights they would "go out". Kiwi shoe polish and lipstick, and Aquanet hairspray and then they'd be gone.

Interferon and me

Friday, November 30, 2007

Remember when I got my spleen removed? Not so long ago, really. End of May. Anyway the reason for taking out a perfectly good, working organ was so I could tolerate the medicine for Hepatitis C. That would be Interferon. It's one great drug. You know how most drugs say they can cause skin irritation or diarrhea or shortness of breath? Well this little concoction has, as it's principal contraindication, SUICIDAL IDEATION AND SUICIDAL ACTUALIZATION, and it looks just like that, all in caps on the rather lengthy label. Nice.

The secondary problems are pleasant as well. Flu like symptoms. Anyway I started my interferon regimen last night and spent the next six hours shaking like a leaf in a storm. Teeth chattering, heart pumping, holy shit kind of "flu like symptom". Then I got up and went to work.

Tonight I do it again. You might be asking how long are you supposed to take this nasty drug Jack? 9-12 months I would reply. Every fucking day for 9-12 months I get to induce flu like symptoms. We'll leave off the drastic personality changes and the likelihood my red cells will all die or that my hair, such as it is, will fall out.

Still and all, the alternative is being dead. So my friends, to bed, to flu, to life!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:35PM (-05:00)

The Sears Catalog

Sunday, December 02, 2007

It being the holiday season it seems pertinent to mention the Sears and Roebuck catalog. The catalog came to us on a quarterly basis and in many ways was our primary shopping vehicle. School clothes, spring wardrobes, bathing suits. All from Mr. Sears and Mr. Roebuck. This is from a time when there were no shopping malls. When people had to go to Philadelphia to Wanamaker's to shop. There was an actual Sears and Roebuck store in beautiful downtown Camden but we rarely went there even though it was 20 minutes away.

But the catalog that mattered most was the Christmas catalog. It came out, as I recall, sometime in mid November and we eagerly grabbed it and began our gift choosing. Army men, Easy Bake Ovens, Chemistry Sets, dolls, football helmets, bikes, everything, everything was in the Sears catalog.

But they weren't just in the catalog. No, things were laid out so you could see just how great they were and how you could use them. These layouts were spectacular. The army men were storming the beaches, the tubes and vials of the chemistry set were bubbling with sinister potions, men and boys were playing energetic games of touch football in authentic NFL jerseys wearing authentic NFL helmets. The bikes had gear aplenty, rear view mirrors, dangly shit that hung off the hand grips, lights and mileage devices. It was mesmerizing. It also was perfect for pointing out exactly what you wanted to your clueless parents. Left to their own devices god knows what they might pick but with the Sears catalog you could clearly circle your first, second, and third choices.

The bulk of the catalog was in black and white but the cover was in glorious Christmas colors. It, more than any religious event, marked the beginning of the holiday season. Fuck Thanksgiving, fuck Advent, this was the real deal. And by arriving well before Thanksgiving it stretched out the gap between whatever day it was and Christmas to near unendurable lengths. Ninety years till Christmas, only sixteen thousand shopping days till Christmas. The gap between getting the catalog and the lighting of the tree on Christmas morning was the size of the Snake River canyon. Unfathomable.

So we'd soldier on, day after day after day, the only thing keeping our hopes alive the catalog. In the last weeks before Christmas we'd begin the hunt for hidden toys. This was hard on everyone. Usually the gifts arrived at the Post Office in town while we were in school so Mom had time to squirrel them away before we got home. Over the years their hiding places became more and more obvious. The problem was that if you found them you didn't really know whose gift anything was. It was as if God had created some cruel laboratory experiment in envy. Part of you would be pleased you found a gift, part would think it was for your brother and your parents hated you, then another part would hate yourself because you begrudged your brother a gift. Cruel cruel fate.

The only way your hopes and dreams would be revealed was on Christmas morning.

Then we'd run down the stairs to see the tree ablaze with light, our parents in their robes and dozens of wrapped packages scattered about the room. At that instant you were sure you'd get everything you wanted. In that moment Christmas was glorious. It would inevitable come crashing down around you as you opened the gifts. Cold economic realities would raise their head. No radio controlled planes in the Wiler house. Yes, we'd get a set of army men but it was the second best set, yes, we'd get a chemistry set but not the complete set in the catalog. A little knowledge is a dangerous, dangerous thing. Still and all there was always next Christmas. And at least we could use the Johnny Reb cannon to blow the Christmas balls off the tree one by one. Then there'd be turkey and a week of no school. Not bad, not bad.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:33PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: The Sears Catalog](#)

- JimMaddox

December 03, 2007

Too true Jack. For toy soldier junkies it was manna from heaven.

Parker's Lake

[Wednesday, December 05, 2007](#)

The cold weather and light snow, as well as the coming holiday, remind me that in 5th grade I received my first pair of ice skates. As per usual my brother Mick received a pair as well. Mick got a pair of black figure skates and I got a pair of hockey skates. It's my guess that my parents had no idea of the difference between the two and that my father thought hockey skates might be more manly and make me feel more grown up. Or not. In any case sometime in early Jan of 1963 my Aunt Gert (I believe this was the case though I could be wrong) took Mick and I to Parker's Lake to ice skate. Parker's Lake was the premier ice skating location in Wenonah. It had a dock for changing your shoes to skates and an island with a fire going all day and all night long. You walked the length of S. Clinton Ave and then down a long dirt road till you came to the lake. If it was frozen of course you just walked across to the dock. Above the dock, up a steep hill, was Dewey and Edna Parker's house. It was the childhood home of my friends Suzy, Danny, and Billy. Behind it Dewey ran his West Jersey Biological Supply business (the rat farm). But we could care less. For us all that mattered was the lake.

There were other lake's to skate on in Wenonah. At the end of Jefferson by the Wenonah lake was Davidson's lake, perfect size for ice hockey, and upstream from Parker's Lake was a much larger lake, Langston's. We didn't much go there till we were in our teens. Over in Sinnott Tract there was Sinnott's lake. We'd skate on any one of these lakes but during my youth everyone in town went to Parker's.

It's gone now. A hurricane in the 80's wiped out the dam and NJ DEP restrictions made it too costly to rebuild the dam so no more lake, no more skating.

In any case that cold January day my Aunt Gert dragged me and Mick and our brandy new skates down to the lake. This is probably going to come as a shock but I sucked at ice skating. Over the years I've attained a measure of competency so I don't look like a complete klutz but that afternoon was disaster piled upon disaster. Most of which were

caused by the fact that no one with me, including Gert, knew how to skate on hockey skates. Everyone had figure skates. All over the ice people were executing twirls and figure eights, and tearing up clouds of ice with their toes. But hockey skates have no teeth on the tips of the skates. You stop on hockey skates like you do on ski's. Sideways. With edges. But no one knew that, least of all me.

So once again I was hurtling around on a new Christmas gift with no way of stopping. Except to fall face forward. I grew colder and colder. Mick got better and better. The day dragged forever. The young girls in my class skated around me like I was a lump of coal skittering across the ice.

I'd like to give you some epiphany here. Say that I at last mastered skating that day and executed a gorgeous turn and stop. But I didn't. I hurtled into the dock, banged my knees, cursed what little curses I knew and tore the skates from my feet. I'd be back the next day, and the next, and I sucked just as much.

There were some benefits to this little bit of torture but they bore no fruit till I was in my late teens. In the meantime I looked like the rough tough cream puff at a time when I wanted to glide like a god.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:35PM (-05:00)

Comments

Re: Parker's Lake

- JimMaddox

December 06, 2007

Jack, I can still feel my chest slamming into the ice.

Re: Parker's Lake

- carey

December 06, 2007

I remember going to Parker's too, but skating was never my thing either. I think the fact that it was so damn cold probably had something to do with it.

Now, of course, I wish I knew how.

Re: Parker's Lake

- JeanMaurieangelsloveyou

December 09, 2007

I don't remember a lake called Parker's, but I remember Warner's Lake. I also remember the Sinnot property. It was near Littlegrange, where my grandparents lived. We skated on the lake there sometimes. Of course this was in the 1940s.

5th Grade Report Card

Friday, December 07, 2007

Well, here's my report card from 5th Grade. As you can see I'm doing quite a bit better than I was with Mr. McIntire. Also you'll note Mrs Fuller has nicer handwriting. After a year of hard, hard work 5th grade was proving to be cake.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:29AM (-05:00)

Jack Miller

EXPLANATION OF MARKS

GRADE SUBJECTS - Achievement

A	94 - 100
B	85 - 93
C	75 - 84
D	70 - 74
E	Below 70 - Failing
In.	Incomplete work

Marking Period: Year 1993-94 Grade 5

FACTORS AFFECTING GRADES

1. Attendance
2. Active interest and attention to class work
3. Adequate study preparation
4. Fair marks
5. Cooperation
6. Reading effectively at grade level
7. Respect for personal and for school property
8. Completion of assigned work on time
9. Understanding and application of basic skills
10. Worthwhile use of study time
11. Exercise of self-control and direction of own behavior
12. Participation with the group
13. Following of directions
14. Courteous and respectful conduct
15. Assumption of responsibility for own independent work
16. Evidence of use of library facilities
17. Working below grade level

Parent-Teacher conference advised

TEACHER COMMENTS

Jack Miller is the best student I have ever had. He is a very bright student and is very cooperative. He is a very good student and is very cooperative. He is a very good student and is very cooperative.

MINOR SUBJECTS

I - Satisfactory	
II - Unsatisfactory	
Handwriting	S
Phys. Ed. & Health	S
Music	S
Art	S
Civics	S
Shop/Training	S
CITIZENSHIP	S

Promoted to Grade 6

PARENT COMMENTS

1.
 2.
 3.
 4.

Pupil Report
Grades 4 - 8



WENONAH PUBLIC SCHOOL

CHILD'S NAME *Jack Miller*

Parent's Signature *John H. Miller*

ATTENDANCE DATA

	Total Absences	Total Tardies
1. <i>John H. Miller</i>	5	0
2. <i>John H. Miller</i>	10	0
3. <i>John H. Miller</i>	10	0

Comments

Re: 5th Grade Report Card

- JimMaddox

December 07, 2007

Jack, not only do our blogs weave in and out, so do our grades. Our 5th grade report cards are almost identical.

Re: 5th Grade Report Card

- JeanMaurieangelsloveyou

December 09, 2007

Hey Jack,

Just found out that picture of your house is the house I GREW UP IN. I didn't recognize it until I sent it to someone and they told me. My brother was born in that house.

What a small world. Where do you live now? We moved from Wenonah to Lake Worth, Fla, lived there for 47 years. Now we're in the mountains of NC.

Maurie

Re: 5th Grade Report Card

- alex

September 21, 2008

Ha! Wenonah Elementary was still using pretty much same report card templates in the early 90s, when I was attending. I recognize a few discrepancies (93-100 became an A, for instance), but otherwise, the entire format and layout, including the front photograph, are identical). Surely, the thin folded yellow cardboard-paper stock is the same as well (although I remember the cards being blue in certain grades).

Interior Decorating

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

It's true that most houses were viewed for just a second from the porch. The exception was the houses of our friends. We spent lots of time in our friends homes and we were being taught lessons, about what rooms were for, about where we could go, and about what we could do.

My own home was decorated in a mix of hand me down furniture and store bought couches. The basic motif was "colonial". At least that's what my mom said it was. Lack of

money meant some pieces of furniture were periodically repainted to fit some new color scheme my mom came up with. Some chairs were periodically reupholstered. Once in a while a new couch or chair came to the house from Sears or the furniture store. Once in a while. Not often. It was always a sensible piece. And it was "colonial".

My friend Terry Fleming's house was the exact opposite of ours. One of the few contemporary homes in our neighborhood it boasted fireplaces and a finished basement. The look was "modern". Probably Danish modern but I'm just guessing. There was a kidney shaped table made from weird wood. There were thick odd carpets. There were glasses in the cabinets with racy sayings on them and skimpily clad girls. Downstairs in the basement there was a slot machine that worked.

A slot machine! In Wenonah! You couldn't do anything bad in Wenonah but in the Flemings you could gamble. Sadly you couldn't keep your winnings but then you didn't have to use your own money either.

The basement had wood panelling as did the kitchen and small first living room. Everyone in the Fleming house slept late. Mick and I were up at 6am and banging on Terry's door at 7:30am. Mrs. Fleming would open the screen door and stare at us as though we were martians. Terry was asleep and that's where we should be. Boom. The door would shut and we would meander out to figure out what to do till 10am when Terry woke up.

Mrs Fleming was fascinating to me. The house was filled with the smell of her Toni hair treatments. She was a tall, loud, brassy Irish woman. Big hearted and filled with noise. The exact opposite of my house. Years later I met her sister. She had sung with the Dorsey brothers in the forties and was married to a NY stockbroker. Their son was "damaged" in Nam and spent his days flying a biplane. Their daughter worked at MOMA. The Flemings went to clubs. The Latin Quarter. Philly. They drank and laughed. They were like grown ups on TV.

Mick and I would go back to our colonial home and bumble around with our soldiers or read some comics then back to Terry's and the slots. It was like going from Christmas in Connecticut to Viva Las Vegas every day.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:48AM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Interior Decorating](#)

- BobThomas

December 13, 2007

Jack,

Great stuff. You'll have to sometime mention Mrs. Fleming's venture in to the world of commerce - What was she selling in that little shop that was once a ticket office, then a police station and then a taxi stand - then a sweets shop (Mrs. Fleming?) and then a flower shop.

She used to love to tan and would have a lounge chair on the sidewalk soaking up the rays in her bathing suit during the quiet hours of the morning and afternoon. What would be a busy hour in Wenonah anyway?

Happy Birthdays and Gifts

Friday, December 14, 2007

So, tonight is my 56th birthday. Johanna is making a sopa de carne for her friends and I've eaten half a pepperoni pizza from Pizzamasters. I'm drinking champagne and reading the New York Times. I'm slightly whacked from the Infergen and a little tipsy.

What I'm not is forgetful. In 2001 I spent my 50th birthday throwing up. Danny and Patty came to visit me. I proceeded to puke vast quantities for most of the day. I weighed under 100 lbs. I was very, very cold all the time. My brother Mick's birthday gift to me was a warm throw blanket. Now my dog Cookie uses it to sleep in the evenings.

I may not feel 100%. But I weigh a lot more than 100lbs and while I get chilly I don't need a throw rug. I'm alive. God has given me a great and wonderful gift and I will fight with all my heart to be true to that gift.

So tonight I'm raising a glass of thanks and joy. Prosit. Cheers. Nostrovya. Salud. Lift one with me please my friends. It's the beginning of winter. If we all drink deep and sing loud the spring will come and then the summer and all this will be but a dream.

God bless everyone who helped me through my first illness. God bless all of you who hold me up now. Life is a rare blessing. Cheers!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:38PM (-05:00)

Margie's Luncheonette

Sunday, December 16, 2007

Downtown Wenonah didn't have much in the way of shopping. There was a BP gas station on the corner of West & Mantua. Across the street was Bowker's grocery store and in the rear of Bowker's was Tony Sacca's meat market. Next to Bowker's was G. Wayne Post and a woman's hair salon. There was a bank further up North West Ave., the Farmer's and Mechanic's National Bank and next to the bank was a building that was first a police station and then a small store run by Mrs. Fleming and Alice Brangan, the Village Shoppe. Across the street on E. Mantua Ave. was another building that housed various businesses and a second where Margie's Luncheonette was located.

Margie's was the center of Wenonah. It was directly across from the park and almost dead center in town. It had a lunch counter, a magazine rack, several booths, school supplies, and a candy counter. It could be said to be almost heaven. In 5th Grade I was finally allowed to eat lunch at Margie's on rare occasions rather than returning home. This meant a grilled cheese or hamburger and a chocolate shake. It was also mega intimidating since all the "cool" kids ate and hung at Margie's. The counter was generally filled with local businessmen and the booths in the back with teenagers and 6th, 7th, & 8th graders. Most of my time in Margie's was spent not in the booths but at the candy counter or magazine rack. Comics and candy. A dual addiction. There was also a cooler filled with sodas on ice. Cokes and vanilla soda and grape and pineapple. You'd stick your hand deep into the cold water and pull out what you wanted. All for a dime.

Candy was still penny candy, which was good if your allowance was .25 cents. My particular favorites were jawbreakers and a sour english candy whose name escapes me. While staring at the counter and making your selection you would steal glances at the kids in the booths. Girls in cashmere sweaters and guys with leather jackets and

pompadours. Cool kids cracking wise and all no doubt laughing at me in my cowlicked glory. The Gernaga brothers, the older DeHarts, the Brangans, Bobby McQuaide, and a dozen other kids all too cool for school were back in the booths blowing straws at each other and sucking down fountain drinks. Hanging out.

I was forbidden to hang out. I'm not exactly sure why but I do know that Earl Rowland was one of the kids in the back and he was a real bad egg. Ralph Parkinson and his crew were there as well. Some girls my age were there, Dolores Lorenz, Sandy Fay, Jane Shiflet. All fast girls. Way too fast for me who know idea what any of this meant.

So I'd get my two comics and five pieces of candy and walk slowly home through the gathering dark. Inventing fantasies where the girls would dig me and I'd save them from evil. Then I'd be the cool cat. Then they'd see. They'd know who I really was inside. The fantasies of young boys are deeply disturbing and I'll leave you now to contemplate my terrible revenge. If Bobby McQuaide and Stewart DeHart could hang me in a closet by a fan belt, well, fine. But soon they'd know who they were messing with. I was smart. I was brave. I weighed 65 pounds soaking wet. My hair stuck up in the back and my shoes were scuffed and worn. My shirts screamed loser. My pants had flannel lining in the winter. Oh they'd soon see who they were messing with, yes, indeed.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:20AM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Margie's Luncheonette](#)

- BobThomas

December 17, 2007

Jack,

Great description of Margie's. The entrance to Margie's was interesting - two or three steps on an angle and then (as I recall) a wooden door with many glass windows and you were onto a black and white floor right by a counter with about 8 or 10 red topped stools. Definitely Norman Rockwell material. When I first went in there a Tastykake pie was a nickel and so was a fountain Coke.

Some kids used to like "dishwater" which was Coke with milk in it.

Didn't they have a screen door in summer for a number of years - before the world became air conditioned? The screen door "push plate" was a cigarette ad - perhaps for Kools? I remember adults smoking a lot of Pall Mall and Winston cigarettes. Of course anyone was welcome to smoke wherever and whenever they pleased.

I remember going to see Dr. Wolfe in Woodbury Heights and he put a cigarette down to do an exam on me.

[Re: Margie's Luncheonette](#)

- SteveSmith

March 31, 2008

And don't forget directly across the street... Hanging out at "Wenonah Park".

[Re: Margie's Luncheonette](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

April 27, 2008

i think I had my first "suicide" there...

The Holiday Display

Thursday, December 20, 2007

The coming Christmas celebration gives me a moment to weigh in on one of the vexing issues of our day. The holiday display. We had one in Wenonah, in the park, on E. Mantua Ave, across from Margies. The Lion's Club erected it shortly after Thanksgiving and the display consisted of a creche (life size figures of Mary, Joseph, the Wisemen, and baby Jesus all 2 dimensional cutouts), several pine trees decorated with lights and carols piped through a sound system. There may have been Santa and some reindeer but I can't remember. I do remember baby Jesus.

It was cheesy and nice. It mostly had a place in our collective little hearts but as a sincere demonstration of the miracle of Christ's birth it might have been lacking. Not that I don't think piped in carols would have made the manger in that long ago Bethlehem a better place but really I would have preferred just reindeers and Santa and we could leave Jesus in church where he seemed to look a lot better.

Last year I visited Suzy Parker's folks in Townsend's Inlet after the 4th of July. Dewey, Suzy's dad, told us about one year, maybe three or four before my 5th grade celebration, when he was in charge of the music for the Lion's Club. He allowed a young woman whom he and his friends found attractive to pick the music for the display. She picked "Rockin Around the Christmas Tree".

Needless to say this did not go over well in little Wenonah. But listening to Dewey tell the story reminded me of how cool it used to be that just a dumb old rock and roll tune could set everybody into high dudgeon. We were blessed with our small town nincompoopery and it's crazy little battles.

I don't know that it matters whether Jesus is in the park on Christmas eve if he's made of colored pressboard. I do think it matters that he's in the hearts of people that profess to believe that's important. I believe that Christmas is a joyous holiday. The Druids, the Christians, the Jews, all of us knuckleheads shaking in the dark, lighting candles and singing songs. God Bless Us Everyone!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:07PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: The Holiday Display](#)

- CresceNet

December 31, 2007

Gostei muito desse post e seu blog é muito interessante, vou passar por aqui sempre =)
Depois dá uma passada lá no meu site, que é sobre o CresceNet, espero que goste. O endereço dele é <http://www.provedorcrescenet.com> . Um abraço.

[Re: The Holiday Display](#)

- Anonymous

November 07, 2009

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2008 and on beyond zebra

Wednesday, January 02, 2008

You've probably wondered what happened to me and my posts. Well, it wasn't Christmas or New Years...it was Infergen. The meds for the hep c wiped my holiday spirit, energy, appetite, and apparently my platelets yet again. I'm off the meds for a bit while we evaluate what's the what.

In the meantime to anyone who didn't hear from me or Johanna over the holidays please accept our apologies. You are in our hearts.

God Bless You all and Happy, Happy New Year!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:44PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: 2008 and on beyond zebra](#)

- Karen

January 04, 2008

Sorry to hear this Jack. Hope this gets resolved for the better soon.

Back in the world; Sort of

Friday, January 11, 2008

Sorry it's been a few days. I went off the Hep C meds 12/31 but came down with the flu on the 3rd of January. I've been sick as a dog since. On the plus side I feel almost alive now and am already thinking about my next post, my next poem, and my new play. God Bless this world.

Stay tuned cats and kittens we're still in the mix! It's time for cars that turn into boats, JFK and Camelot, more fifth grade and Easter and that's just in the next month. Who knows, I may throw in Negroes, Jews, and Quakers into the pot just to see how it tastes.

Happy New Year! God Bless America! Yay Obama! Hooray for Hillary! Vote for John McCain! A vote for Fred Thompson is a vote for Law and Order!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:33PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Back in the world; Sort of](#)

- Anonymous

January 13, 2008

Love it ...My Dad was police Chief
in Wenonah ...

[Re: Back in the world; Sort of](#)

- JackWiler

January 14, 2008

Thanks for your comment...not Chief Haines? Who was your father?

Getting Sick in 1960

Monday, January 14, 2008

Since I've been sick maybe this is an opportunity to talk about being sick.

When I was young I was sick often. Mostly asthma. But also all the routine illnesses that were a fact of life in the fifties and sixties: measles, mumps, chicken pox, 24 hour flu, 48 hour flu, whooping cough, scarlet fever, and more. A horrible litany of illness waiting to claim our frail bodies. The sad part was, we couldn't wait to get measles and shit!

You got enormous days out of school, bragging rights for the most dire disease, your parents bought you comics and were nice to you. Hell, getting sick was almost a good thing! So good, in fact, that we soon figured out faking it. And it didn't take a genius to realize a good day for a sore throat was the day you had a math test.

It must have been weird for our parents to wake up one morning and realize we were 45 lb con men.

What a terrible loss for them. Innocent sick infant one day, malingering liar the next. Surely they saw where this all might lead, jail, divorce, disgrace and dishonor.

But for the moment there was only lying in your bed with a Superman or Justice League of America and buttered sugar cinnamon toast and a cup of tea. Bliss. Later, when you were feeling "better" you could go downstairs and watch I Love Lucy reruns or Truth or Consequences or The Price is Right. Then lunch, soup, and back to bed you poor boy. At dinner you might feel like a criminal or a liar with your brothers staring at you but who cared. The only real down side to being sick in grammar school was going to bed really early.

Unfortunately fake sick days had a bad habit of biting you in the ass. Because you still had to turn in the book report, take the math quiz, write the history essay. In other words you were just deferring your own complete and abject failure to complete what you should have completed.

So, you slogged your way into school and got your crummy grade and then several days later got chastised for your poor study habits and inability to understand the times tables or whatever. But in your heart it was almost worth it. Almost.

And what of real illness? What of true disastrous childhood diseases. Well, like sex and race they were squirreled away in each families private closet. Retarded children, cancer, operations, all of these were known and not known. Talked about and not talked about. Girls went away for three month vacations in their teens. Kids left for awhile and never came back and often their families left as well. A void.

But then there were other real illnesses that were mega real and glorious. Third Grade. Jack. Stomach flu. What would now be called a Novovirus. Then...24 hour stomach flu. But more than that it's me in the sixth row, suddenly nauseous, holding up my hand to go to the bathroom and Mrs Ferrara doesn't see for years, decades. Then she calls on me and I lurch to the fifth row, the fourth, the second, and then it blows. A vast projectile vomit that lives forever in the lives of my classmates. They sent everyone home the class stunk so bad. Poor Nick had to clean up vomit for two rows. Jesus. That was the flu.

So now, when I'm home feeling guilty about being sick and wondering when I can go back to work, I remember fifth grade. I'm coughing, I'm sure my throat is scratchy, I don't feel well at all. My mom asks how I am and I croak back, OK. We'll see in the morning and then I know I'm home free, good to go, sick as a dog, out of school, no class tomorrow, mom loves me, bless us oh lord for these thy gifts.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:54PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Getting Sick in 1960](#)

- JimMaddox

January 16, 2008

I was sick a lot in Grade school so I didn't fake it too much. After having Measles, Chicken Pox, Whooping Cough and Strep Throat it was easy to pretend. I got good grades, so my mother was cool about it. High School was a different story. Your mother was wise to the scam, so faking it was a little more difficult. I liked to bail out on gym class days, or when I couldn't stand another minute of Algebra 2. Why did we take that, anyway?

Law Enforcement in Wenonah

Tuesday, January 22, 2008

There was a comment a few weeks back from a woman whose father was a former Chief of Police in Wenonah. There haven't been all that many Police Chiefs in Wenonah. When I was young the Chief was Chief Haines. He lived in a home across the dirt road from the Wenonah Lake. He was a likeable guy whose primary job, so far as we kids could figure was acting as occasional crossing guard at Mantua Avenue. I'm sure he had other duties but honestly, crime was not a big issue in Wenonah until the late sixties and even then it was kind of tame.

When I got sick and went back to Wenonah they were just finishing the new Municipal building. Previously it was in the Fire House at the rear on the 2nd floor. Before that the Police Department was a two room building next to the Farmer's and Mechanic's Bank that eventually became the Village Shoppe. The Village Shoppe was owned by my friend Terry's mom, Mrs. Fleming.

You get the picture. We're talking lazy days with not much to do. Still this is a regular town with regular people which means there was domestic violence, drunk driving, even drug abuse. Every once in awhile a team of burglars would target homes in Wenonah over a two or three week period. Then there were black people and other undesirables walking through town. They'd be subjected to an interrogation to determine their destination and intent and sent on their way.

Any major crimes in Wenonah were for the most part swept under the rug. Which is not to say that there was no punishment only that the punishment might not involve jail time and might mean you got to move your ass out of town.

Still, there was the occasional radar trap on Mantua Avenue, speed limit 25 and built for 50. We'd sit on the bus bench at Lincoln and Mantua Ave and wave to the soon to be ticketed. Just behind them the old man we knew as "Parnelli" would speed through town at a blistering 7 miles an hour. Who's to say committed the greater crime?

Teenagers would occasionally act up and commit acts of vandalism. Eventually there was a Juvenile Board that would assess penalties for the crimes and misdemeanors of the malcontents that crossed it's threshold. Maybe you got caught soaping windows on Mischief Night, or trashed an empty house, or got caught drinking your folks liquor. Chief Haines would drag you in and you and your parents would stand one night in front of a group of people who would decide your fate.

Sometimes I think the worst punishment was that you would have to stay in Wenonah forever. Other times I think it was that you would be banished forever. Either one was a curse.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:02PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Law Enforcement in Wenonah](#)

- JimMaddox

January 26, 2008

Woodbury Heights didn't have police in the 50s and 60s. If there was real trouble, you called Deptford or the State Police. Small stuff was handled by the town marshals. Marshals were like volunteer firemen; neighbors with badges and guns.

Volunteer Firemen

Sunday, January 27, 2008

Bob Thomas suggested I write a bit about the Wenonah Volunteer Fire Dept. since I had just covered the Police Dept. When I was in fifth grade the firehouse was a two story building on South West Ave. It was a white building and the one fire truck was kept on the first floor with the second floor functioning as a social hall for the volunteer firemen and other community functions. On Election Day the first floor was where the voting took place. On top of the firehouse was a loud whistle which was sounded to summon the volunteers should there be a fire. You could hear it everywhere in town. The number of whistles indicated (at least this is what us chowderheaded kids thought) the severity of the fire. It also was sounded at 8:00pm each evening to tell all the children to go home. It was called the Eight O'Clock Whistle. On the 4th of July it was sounded to let everyone know the parade was about to begin. It was also supposed to be sounded as an air raid siren. There would be tests of the air raid function when we were young and if we were in school we either a) got under our desks and put our hands over our heads or b) went into the hall to do "duck and cover". I guess this made people feel safe. I know that in fifth grade we were fairly certain that if there were a real nuclear war we would be toast by the time the dopey whistle went off. We lived about ten or so miles from Philadelphia and the US Navy Yard as well as some of the largest oil refineries and chemical plants on the east coast. There was a Nike missile base in Pitman and it seemed like the Russians would probably know to hit Philly. We read John Hersey's "Hiroshima" and that was just a little bomb. An H Bomb would cook us all. But still we did as we were told.

I wasn't the child of a volunteer fireman so my experiences with the fire department were limited to rides on the truck on the 4th and watching the volunteers speeding to the firehouse when there was a siren. My brother Ted joined the department as a young man and it was then that I found out that one big feature of being a volunteer fireman was that you hung around and drank beer. That probably explains much of the appeal in a town like Wenonah, with no bars and lots of young married men with children. Plus every once in awhile you got to put out a brush fire or a fire in a kitchen. Bob reminds me that Ed Campbell would leave school for fires and return covered in soot and smelling of smoke. I don't recall anyone ever dying in a fire in Wenonah. I actually don't recall any really big fires. But still there were fires and danger and men willing to help for no pay at all. They still do. In a bigger firehouse with two trucks (at least) and serious training and probably

the same amount of beer.

I go to the firehouse each 4th of July to drink beer and meet old friends and remember the good old days. We watch the parade and try to egg the firemen into pulling their sirens. They're not supposed to but they do anyway.

It's kind of strange that a town as small as Wenonah was divided up in little ways. I don't know much about the holiday displays and the care and work that went into them because my father wasn't in the Lion's Club (until much later) and whatever danger the men who volunteered to fight fires faced is something I know nothing about because my father wasn't a fireman. But divided up or not divided still men got together for business or pleasure or to help their town and did it all for free. For free.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 01:43PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Volunteer Firemen](#)

- Paul

February 19, 2009

I got drunk for the 1st time at the fire house on the 4th of July. We lived around the corner from the fire house (on Park Avenue) and I wandered over and found the keg. I have a vague recollection of Mr. Campbell helping with the tap, but it could just be an apocryphal self-made myth.

The Lives of Others

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

When I put up the last post I was disheartened. I realized as I wrote it that I knew nothing about the lives of the men and later women who protected our homes and property. Yes, I rode on the trucks and watched the parade and went home dutifully at 8:00 each evening but what it meant to have your life disrupted by a loud, insistent whistle, what it meant to perhaps see the home of one of your friends in ruin, those were things that meant nothing to me. And why should they. I was a fifth grade boy with a boys concerns. Cub Scouts, grades, book reports, games, baseball, all those things were important. Sure firemen seemed brave but that had been drilled into me constantly as a boy. Why it was a brave thing to be a fireman was not immediately apparent. This may seem dumb but the actual fact that you could die putting out a fire was not something that occurred to me. Burnt beyond recognition was not a phrase that would ring a bell with me. Yet the men who manned the trucks were for the most parts vets of the Korean Conflict and World War II. Many, if not all of them, had seen men "burnt beyond recognition" and far, far worse. Still when the whistle blew they pulled back the covers and rushed into danger. But this rumination is not just about their bravery it is mostly about my ignorance. And the ignorance of most fifth grade boys and girls in South Jersey in 1963 in the second year of the Kennedy administration. Yes, we saw war on TV and read books about it but it was all a movie or a cartoon. After all, the Coyote always came back alive. And beyond our ignorance of real things like death and sorrow and ugliness there was our ignorance of the lives of adults. We knew precious little about what it meant to be a man or a woman. That was not on TV for the most part. I learned the facts of life in fifth grade from Chris DeHart on his porch. It seemed absurd. You stuck your wee wee in a girls wee wee and some milk came out and then she had a baby. You might as well believe the moon was

made of green cheese. We were just a few years away from sexual maturity but centuries away from wisdom.

When our parents had parties we sat upstairs and listened to the Mills Brothers and Frank Sinatra and the loud, sudden laugh of a woman in her thirties. Raucous, rough sounds that were the sounds of a world so far from our own they might as well have been coming from India. Work was just a few chores. Raking leaves or pulling weeds or putting our clothes away. Our fathers left each morning and returned each night but what they did while they were gone bore no relation to anything we could imagine. Death? Oh, maybe your great grandmother might pass away or the grandmother of a friend but no one I knew had lost a brother or a sister or a father or a mother. But wait, I'm lying there. My mother and Aunt's distant relative (sort of a cousin), Madelaine, had lost her brother in a "tragic accident. They said he had hung from a rope on his bunk bed. Suicide? Accident? Who knew, because it was not talked about. It was mentioned among adults and then never spoken of again. That was how death moved in and out of our childhood. We romped through the quick mud in the swamp and rode our bikes no handed down Cherry Street and threw ourselves and our sleds down Cemetery Hill with no thoughts of death or injury or the future. There was only a huge and nearly perfect NOW and that was where we lived.

So, my apologies to all the firemen and women of Wenonah for not taking the time to really envision your lives. I am writing this primarily from my perspective as a child and so that leaves out pieces. Some of them we pick up along the way. Like sex or injury, but many of them won't happen to me until this part of the blog has faded into dust.

One request, if anyone reading this has a photo of the old Wenonah firehouse or Police Station please send it my way. I tried to find one on the net but apparently none exist. Thanks my faithful readers:)

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:48PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: The Lives of Others](#)

- carey

January 30, 2008

Hi Jack. My FIL is an honorary (retired) fireman, and he and his crowd (the Dominys and Harts) still attend the annual banquet, which is coming up 2/23. (I've been to a few as well.) MIL is still in the auxillary. I'll ask them if they can come up with a picture.

The firehouse vibe of today is nothing like it was back in the day. They used to have a lot of fun and got into mischief with other departments. Some really great stories. Now, not so much.

GIANTS!!!

[Monday, February 04, 2008](#)

One word: Giants! Two words Gi Ants! Three words: New York Giants! The best superbowl ever! Yes! Never bring your super model girlfriend to the game.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:51AM (-05:00)

Spring et al in Wenonah

Tuesday, February 05, 2008

Wenonah in Spring is always beautiful. When I was in 5th grade my father and mother would give my brothers and sister Easter gifts. Just one and a piece of clothing along with our coconut egg and jelly beans. In 5th grade I got a Sears fishing rod and reel. I'd used fishing tackle as a boy down the shore but this was different. It was a spinning reel. In this case, closed face. I also got line and some hooks and a bobber and a lure or two.

My father knew pretty much nothing about fishing. That meant that my brothers and I took to reading the instruction book and practicing in the back yard with the rod and reel. I mustered a few casts and then it was off to Davis Lake to catch some carp. In Wenonah there were about two fish you could catch. Carp and small mouth bass. None of us caught small mouth bass. That's probably because we just put balls of wadded up bread on a hook and tossed it into the lake. Oh, sometimes you'd get an eel or a minnow but mostly you caught carp. Carp are basically giant goldfish that grow in little lakes. They eat vegetation and that's about it. They are not, repeat, not, sport fish.

They do struggle a bit when you hook them but pretty much any idiot with a hook can catch one. What you do with them after you catch them is somehow unhook them and throw them back in, only to catch them again. For all I know there is only one carp in all of Davis Lake and I caught him dozens of times along with my friends.

Under a certain age you don't need a license to fish so we were able to stand there like idiots for free and catch carp. Once in a while we'd go to Sutton's Lake or down to the Mantua Creek. The creek actually had fish in it you might eat. There were catfish in the creek and they were catchable and if you were ballsy enough you could skin them and cook them and eat them. I never got past the trying to skin them phase. Catfish for those of you who didn't grow up in a rural or semi-rural environment are some weird prehistoric fish like sharks without scales. You have to peel their skin off them. This is neither easy nor pleasant and they are not happy about it. They're ugly, nasty, and don't like dying. Pretty much like every creature on the face of the earth.

So there we were in the middle of the woods, lines in the stupid little lake, waiting for carp. All around us the dogwoods and peach were erupting in bloom. The scent of blossoms, lilacs and hyacinths and a thousand other flowers filled the air. We didn't notice. We were looking at a muddy little pond stocked with ornamental junkfish and trying to be like the men we read about in Boys Life.

There is a horrible lesson to be learned here. I do remember at times forgetting I was fishing. Just lying back in the new grass on the shore of the creek and breathing in the air in the warm spring breeze. That might have lasted for twelve minutes. It should have been savored. Perhaps it still is.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:40PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Spring et al in Wenonah](#)

- BobThomas

February 06, 2008

Fishing in Wenonah -

I used to fish with Randy Weber in Davis Lake and at the Wenonah Lake. Somehow

Mrs. Weber would get someone to unlock the gate for us and we would sit on the dock and drop our lines in the water. We used dough balls too. Sometimes we caught sunfish besides the fish that you mentioned.

Other days we used worms for bait. I remember Mr. Davis would let us dig in his compost pile for worms. His compost had lots of coffee grounds in it. The worms that had been feeding on the coffee grounds were thin and spindly and smelled worse than the other worms when you put them on the hook.

One time we went on the other side of the road from Wenonah Lake to the spot where the culvert lets water spill into a pretty deep pool. We saw a snake there trying to swallow a catfish and we threw rocks at the snake that was "stealing our fish." I don't know how the snake ever got hold of the catfish, but it was still alive and struggling against the efforts of the snake.

Perhaps the catfish had been injured by being caught and released by a fisherman.

[Re: Spring et al in Wenonah](#)

- JimMaddox

February 09, 2008

Keith Madden and I used to go rake fishing at the lake in Woodbury Heights. Pulling fish out of the water and yanking hooks out of their mouths wasn't all that appealing to me, I preferred catching turtles and such in the shallows. You would take a good sturdy garden rake, thrust it into the mud and pull it towards you. In all the muck and goo we would find tadpoles, painted turtles, minnows, snails and the occasional baby eel. Sunshine, mud and creatures squirming in your fingers. Couldn't ask for a better day.

[Re: Spring et al in Wenonah](#)

- MarkKrusch

April 16, 2008

Hah - You sure didn't know what you were doing fishing Jack! lol - Sonny Mecholsky introduced me to fishing and I took it from there! Wenonah had and still has lots of fish to catch. There's largemouth bass, crappies (what we called smallmouth bass), pickerel, roach, sunfish, bluegills, as well as the "junk" fish you named - catfish and carp.

The Mantua Creek has huge carp that migrate up it to spawn each year in June - carp that exceed 30 pounds.

I rarely go fishing in Wenonah any more, but I have lots of good memories of my time spent fishing in Langston's, Davis', and the Mantua creek. (No real fisherman would fish in Wenonah lake as there were only junk fish in there!) ;-)

One of the best spots was a stream that ran off the creek right by the trestle - Remember that?

Hospitals and Fun

Thursday, February 07, 2008

This post is only a little about Wenonah, although everyone in Wenonah probably has a similar story to tell. I've spent the past two days caring for Johanna. She developed a severe infection from a sinusitis and we had to go to Christ Hospital. The hospital was deluged with flu patients and she was very ill and so for a variety of reasons there was no bed immediately available. I've been at her side most of the past few days along with her dear friends Sandy and Oscar and Douglas and Teresa. Finally after nearly two days she got a bed and was able to rest in comfort.

Maybe you've been ill. Maybe you have a friend who has been ill. You know what I'm

talking about. The long hours waiting for doctors to make decisions, the stressed emergency room workers, the poor sick people who fill the ER. It's not a broken system but it's a system that is often ill equipped to deal with actual people. Johanna's nurses and caregivers were kind and thoughtful but we sat in a cold room with little information for hour upon hour upon hour. It's tempting to say it was because she was undocumented or because she was HIV positive or whatever thing you want to put out to make yourself feel angry but the simple fact is that the American system for caring for the ill is totally fucked the fuck up. We make rules to help people and we make rules to protect ourselves against litigation but we don't make latitude for care.

I watched a young latin girl leave the hospital because she didn't get pain killers fast enough. She was angry and in pain. Her sister was filled with rage. They screamed at all the women in the ER that it was their fault. When I arrived this morning Johanna wanted to leave. No rest. No solace. No calm. No beds.

When I was ill it was the same. When you go into a hospital you are a patient. And sadly that's what you must become. Patient. Patient while you are in agony. Patient while you are afraid. Patient while you are at the mercy of people who have dozens of other people in the same straits.

You could say fuck this shit. Maybe we should. Maybe litigation and money have changed the landscape of healthcare so that it makes no sense. But all I could think about while we were sitting there was men in Civil War hospitals and the men and women who cared for them. For them there was no medicine for the most part to save anyone. There was only solace and kindness and concern.

I think we should go back and look at what the fuck we're doing in healthcare and identify the core of healthcare. Care. Solace. Understanding. For patients. For caregivers. For the men and women who wipe shit off our backsides and listen to us scream in agony.

It's not money that we need to focus on. It's how to deliver care without regard for procedure, regulations, or money. We don't need as many machines. We need more nurses. We need more doctors. We need to stop separating people by their race and disease and personality.

It's very sad when the most wonderful moment in the day is that you get a hospital bed. The most wonderful moment in the day should be when you feel well. When someone claps you on the back and says thank you for saving my mother's life. When a doctor can say I've done my best and I've been successful. I guess I don't believe there are really that many sick people that we couldn't really find a way to address this. Many people here were there only because they had the flu. What the fuck is that. You have to go to the hospital because you have the flu?

We're voting over the next year or so for someone to change this shit. Fuck Iraq. Fuck Afghanistan. Fuck Al Queda. The worst thing we can do is ignore our humanity. I'm on the side of Walt Whitman who tended the dead and dying. All he had to give was kindness. No penicillin. No morphine. No beds. Only care. If we go back to care maybe we can sort this shit out.

I am the lucky beneficiary of healthcare. I would have been dead 20 years ago. I'm not. Nor is Johanna. But no one should be treated like a piece of meat in a hallway by rules and regulations.

People should be able to see their doctor for the flu. Not a hospital. People all people should be able to ask for help. Documented, undocumented, uninsured, insured. Who really cares. I know this is idealistic and stupid and naive. But maybe we need to go back to that.

There was a young man in the hospital named Eric. He greeted patients by name and engaged them in a real way. He made them feel like he could help. He helped cut through red tape and talked to doctors and nurses to make things move along. How sad it was only one man and not an entire hospital.

God Bless men like Eric and God Bless the women who cared for Johanna and gave her solace and goddamn the stupid rules and regulations and bullshit that stand in the way. If you vote over the next months vote for people that care. Vote for a country that cares for all it's citizens, not just the well to do or the privileged. We are a rich nation built on hope. Vote for hope.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:42PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Hospitals and Fun](#)

- JimMaddox

February 07, 2008

I don't know Jack. Maybe it's because mediocrity is the norm, and customer service is just lip service. Maybe it's because the wealthy and the privileged are the ones who control everything and they don't give a rat's ass about the rest of us as long as they get enough people to believe their bullshit long enough to put them in office. Maybe it's because doctors' offices and hospitals are just patient mills and people are just products on an assembly line. Maybe it's because those of us who used to be idealistic gave up a long time ago when we shouldn't have. Maybe.

Athletics in Grade School

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

First, as an aside, an update: Johanna is well and doing fine. As am I and our three nincompoop dogs. Thanks to our friends and the doctors and nurses.

Next, on to more important issues. In Wenonah there were three kinds of athletics in elementary school: Organized sports, like Minor League or Pony League or Babe Ruth League baseball. School sports, like softball or touch football or dodge ball. And our own disorganized sports, like our Olympic Games around the block or golf in the back yard, or wiffleball, or street football. Each type had its own odd conventions and values.

Let's start with organized sports. When I was young all there was in Wenonah was hardball. You started in Minor League ball, moved up to Pony League and thence to Babe Ruth League. A few gifted young men went on to play American Legion Ball. This was a kind of semi-pro hardball with actual stakes. Each league consisted of one team from several neighboring towns and games were played twice a week, either home or away. Wenonah's baseball field was wonderful, with actual dugouts. It had once been the field for the Wenonah Military Academy in the twenties and so was pretty much regulation. No fences though. Right field was the railroad tracks and left and half of center were wooded. But it was a good 325 to any boundary so not many people banded one that far.

Back in the day you weren't put on the field to boost your self esteem. You were put in the game based on your abilities. If you sucked you went in in the 9th inning. That was if we were winning. I played a couple games a year and got one or two at bats. No hits. Several missed flies. I was always in right field which was a blessing because nobody

could hit there except southpaws and no one was a southpaw till Pony League. At the end of the season, in the fall, we would have a banquet to honor the Most Valuable Player, the Most Improved Player, etc in all the various leagues. We went with our dads and wore suits or sport coats. At the end of the awards and the dinner there was an inspirational talk by a professional athlete. I remember Tom Brookshire but that's about it. They weren't too inspirational but we had seen them on tv and they autographed our programs. Most of these athletes had regular jobs so this was a quick \$200 bucks for one night. A lot of money back then.

School sports were just stupid. Rarely enjoyable and never allowed to be played to their conclusion. The only time it was fun was when we played touch football or soccer in the snow. That was a gas. Otherwise you'd play for a very brief time and then back to numbers and books all hot and sweaty.

Disorganized sports were our metier. We developed 18 hole courses in our backyards. I remember excelling at chip shots over the garage roof in particular. We played hour upon hour of street football. Everyone, everywhere, knows that gig. Ten steps, cut behind the Cadillac and I'll hit you. Chris you go long. All day long.

We played dozens of games. Workies Up, Horse, you name it, we played it. We invented our own version of the Olympics with everything from the 100 yard dash to pole vaulting (a failed experiment involving bamboo poles). High jumping was done over yard fences, etc.

The odd thing was that I learned from all of them. I actually became okay at hardball. I learned fundamentals even though I rarely played. I learned strategy and good sportsmanship and how to razz the opposing pitcher. I learned how to have fun playing our sports. Hell, I even developed a fairly good golf swing. Years later, never having actually ventured on a course, I had to play for business. My first drive on a real golf course went 200 yards, dead straight, off the tee. Not too shabby.

Playing was serious business for us. So serious that we played from sun up to sundown with no let up. So serious that we played with bloody knees and lips and elbows. So serious I would run the 100 yard dash again and again and again till my asthma was so bad I had to take my meds and lay in my bed and cry because I couldn't run again. It was as serious as work. Sometimes it was fun.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:06PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Athletics in Grade School](#)

- JimMaddox

February 14, 2008

I didn't play organized ball until my teens. I was talked into joining the Woodbury Heights Babe Ruth team. I was a good ball player if it was for fun, but somehow wearing uniforms and having people expecting something of you intimidated me. I was condemned to the purgatory of right field as well. My first season I could hit, but my fielding was awful. The second season I worked on my fielding so hard that I could catch anything, but i couldn't hit a thing. I remember sitting in the Wenonah dugout and marveling at how "professional" it all seemed. We lost almost every game, and it wasn't fun at all.

[Re: Athletics in Grade School](#)

- carey

March 04, 2008

And I played softball for your dad with Patty Condell and Elsa Olimski and I don't

remember who else. No cleats then for girls...we wore cutoff shorts (and they were short!) tube socks and a good polyester Wenonah shirt, not the crap t-shirts kids get now.

Needless to say, I must've enjoyed playing, because I still do, nearly 40 years later!

We had Larry Bowa speak at our banquet one year. Yawn.

Boys in Groups

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

Most boys in the 60's were shunted to some kind of youth group or another. Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Explorers, Indian Guides, Summer Camp, Bible studies, whatever. I was no different. Being at the total direction of peer and societal pressure as well as parental orders what would be would be.

My own first brush with organized groups of young boys was in Woodbury, NJ when I was in Kindergarten. This was my fathers weird attempt to bond with me and other boys and young fathers. God knows what popped into his brain to hatch this scheme. My father may be the least outdoorsy type on the planet. While he is athletic and loves sports he has no clue what to do in the wild. Camping is not something he would do unless all the houses and motels in the world burned down. But being a dutiful 50's father he dragged me to one or two groups of kids and dads where he participated in some oddball Indian like rituals and made crafty things. Then, much like his association with Catholicism, he stopped at the first chance he got.

Which brings me to Wenonah in 4th and 5th and 6th grades. I was a Cub Scout. Wolf Pack. God knows what group of Cub Scouts, it was a long time ago but I had a little blue and yellow uniform and a whittling knife and I went once a week with several other assorted losers to meet and whittle and learn woodcraft and dream of being Boy Scouts and living life in the woods. Cub Scouts is kind of strange because you don't ever camp out or cook over a fire or any of that shit. Instead you make stuff out of wood and leather and recite oaths and generally act like probably the biggest geeks on the face of the earth. I'll throw up a picture of me and my Pack for your perusal. You'll see what I mean. The biggest nightmare for me in Cub Scouts was the Soap Box Derby. For this little exercise in humiliation you were given a balsa wood body of a racing car, two spindly metal axles, four tires and a couple decals and told to craft a racing car that would carry you and your Pack to glory in the Soap Box Derby. Let me be clear. This involved several skills at which I did not excel. Whittling or rather slicing off your fingers, painting (refer to the post on models), and design. I'm an artist not an engineer. This meant that even in the world of geeks I was a bigger geek.

My mis-applied decals, smeared paint job, hacked up hunk of wood would invariable finish last. Thank God. Till next year. The only time Cub Scouts got interesting was in Webelos. Webelos. What kind of nincompoop name is that for an organization? Fake Indian, like Wenonah, but rich in recently manufactured tradition. But at least in Webelos we learned actual shit you could do. Like tie knots or make a fire or cook food.

All of this would prepare me for the humiliation of Boy Scouting. Did I mention I wet the bed? Oops! Big problem on camping trips. After years of preparation, purchase of a nice green uniform, and cool induction into the local Boy Scout Troop, Troop 50 it would all go to shit because of one minor problem. That's right, I washed out on my first overnighter to

Elk's Neck Campground in Maryland. Pissed my sleeping bag and out of humiliation, quit. I re-upped when I was 16 but that's for later on.

In the meantime there were of course many other boys organizations you could join that didn't require adult consent. "The He Man Woman Haters Club" for instance. Terry, Chris, and Gary started this one up. The high point of the club, after the scary oath was melting wax on your skin.

Years later in New Brunswick I had a roommate who did this for sexual pleasure. We did it because you could drip fire on your arm and it didn't set you on fire. It was just a little warm. So you looked brave but with little or no actual danger. Aside from setting the house on fire because in general we held our ceremonies in crawl spaces with poor ventilation and old dry wood just ripe for burning.

The nicest thing about all these groups was no matter who you were you always felt like you didn't belong. Cool. None of us felt like we belonged. I was wetting the bed and wheezing, Mick was struggling in school, Sam Stewart was fat, Tommy Wood was everything wrong. We were all broken and all trying to get in some group that would accept us. And they all did! Problem was we all still felt like geeks and losers. Thank God we've grown up. That's sarcasm. Or irony. I forget which.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:47PM (-05:00)

Gateway Regional Class of 1970 Reunion

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

Oh! By the way, I've thrown up a site for our wacky reunion! You can go and log on and make yourself feel part of another group that never really accepted you! Here's the link: www.GatewayClassof1970.classquest.com.

Please if you read this, visit the site, set up a profile and invite all our other loser, geek, jock, motorhead, prom queen, cheerleader, egghead, friends to visit and join us in July. There's room for everyone under the tent. Plus alcohol. Plus cheesy sixties music which I'm certain will feature line dancing. Plus hot chicks and fat guys! Or bald guys! Or skinny old guys! Or fat guys that are now fat girls! Should be a gas!

I'm going to be there with bells on! Pass it on my brothers and sisters! We have a need for the geator with the heater, the Bristol Stomp, and slow dancing! See you all in July!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:17PM (-05:00)

Wenonah Wolf Pack

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

My fellow cub scouts left to right (thanks to Bob Thomas)

Top Row: Unknown,Robbie Cook, Jackie Russell, Me, Unknown

Bottom Row: Don Eberly,Chris Anderson, Rickie Alexander, Don Fisk.

My brother Mick was thoughtful enough to tell me I'm an idiot and that it wasn't Bobby Holt but Donny Fisk. Oops! I need the names of those two twins. Help!!!!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:50PM (-05:00)



Comments

[Re: Wenonah Wolf Pack](#)

- JimMaddox

February 20, 2008

Great photo Jack. I've got nothing from my days in the gold and blue. Woodbury Heights was Troop 222, Den 13. Maybe we raced each other in the Pinewood Derby and never even knew it. Be square and obey the laws of the pack.

Practice Runs; Summer, 1963

Friday, February 22, 2008

Well, my year with Mrs Fuller came to a close and another glorious summer began. I seem to recall this summer being the summer my father and mother felt it would be good to teach us something and show us America. "See the USA in Your Chevrolet" was the operating phrase here. We didn't venture too far afield but after a week in Ocean City we took to the road in a series of trips designed to stimulate our young minds and get us out of Wenonah.

We visited Gettysburg, PA, and on the same trip, Strasbourg, PA and the railroad museum, Pennsylvania Dutch country and many other cheesy tourist sites en route. This particular trip was a big favorite for all us boys as it involved Civil War battlefields. Mick and I were mad Civil War fans with Mick even more rabid than me. We had our Civil War hats and our muskets and flags and our Civil War soldiers and games and books and so the chance to see where some Civil War battles actually happened was a rare treat. Or so we thought.

We arrived in Gettysburg after a trip of several hours and headed straight to the Diorama. This was a major tourist attraction and consisted of a huge miniature layout of the battlefield. Lights flashed, music played, and smoke billowed. Still and all it was just little men on paper mache but we loved it. We bought a few souvenirs with money we'd earned from shoveling snow and then it was off to the battlefield proper.

This proved to be a modest disappointment. No, a major bummer. It was just fields. Well mowed fields! No dead guys! No bones! It might as well have had corn growing in it and in fact did in some places. We were not real clear on the fact that dead guys were probably right under our feet and that this was essentially a vast military cemetery and

memorial built after a terrible battle. Screw that! We wanted gore and guns and what we got was birds chirping.

Oh, there were some pictures of dead guys. Enlargements of Matthew Brady photos were placed at strategic intervals to illustrate the carnage and that was cool and all. I mean back then you didn't usually see actual pictures of dead people on the news or in print so seeing the dead rebel sniper by the big rock was cool. Beyond that though we were probably happier swimming in the motel pool.

On our way back we visited the stupid railroad. We went to Strasburg cuz Ted was a railroad lunatic. Ted was an odd little child. He didn't grow hair till he was like five and he took enormous interest in arcane pursuits and subjects. Railroads were on of them. Old railroads in particular. To give you a real sense of how weird Ted was one year his birthday gift was a push lawnmower from Sears. He loved that mower! Mowed grass for hours when he got it.

Anyway, then we saw the Pennsylvania Dutch people who it turned out weren't Dutch but German and really not much to look at cuz they were working on their farms most of the time. They're called Amish apparently and our parents didn't bother to mention or didn't know that they were a weird religious sect from Germany that came here to escape persecution. What they got was people following their carts in station wagons taking pictures and buying sho fly pie from them or pretzels. Pretty sad and not way up on the must see list for 11 year olds.

Our next big adventure was a drive down the Skyline Drive in Virginia. I'm fairly certain this was my mothers pick because she was real impressed with the scenery. We could give a fuck about that and mostly moaned about being hungry or tried weird southern food like hominy grits. It was mostly a long, long drive with three yelping boys and two hot adults (no ac in the car) through tourist trap after tourist trap and then back to Wenonah. If I recall correctly Mary Louise was parked with Nonny and Aunt Gersh for this one.

All these trips were, I think, test runs for the mother of all trips. The next summer we were going to drive across country to visit my Aunt Gert in Ventura, CA. You'll get more of the lurid details on that one in a few months.

The rest of the summer was spent in blissful play. Well, swimming in the pool, running in the woods, and then getting bored. Really, really, really bored because after two months there was nothing to do. What fools we were. Had we known then what we know now I'm certain we would have felt otherwise. Instead we hunkered down on the front porch for marathon games of Monopoly and Risk for the last two weeks of summer and cried like girls because we were bored. My parents must have thought we were insane. I certainly think we were.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:44PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Practice Runs; Summer, 1963](#)

- brotherTed

February 26, 2008

I loved your account of Strasburg and me, we even went there on vacation when I was 40! Just to see the trains! The kids and wife just roll their eyes when I talk about train trips.

Summer 1963

Friday, March 07, 2008

Oh the vagaries of life! I thought I'd write and write and then work and stuff gets in the way and next thing I know I'm getting yelled at by Carolyn in the office that I haven't written anything.

So.

I've spoken in the past about the 4th of July in Wenonah but I've sort of left off how it was different then from now. The principal difference was the dancing. I know, you say what dancing. Well in 1963 and I would imagine for years before there was a dance band that performed on Mantua Avenue after the traditional Pitman Hobo Band concert in the park. The fire department would hose off the street in late afternoon and all us knuckleheads would go to get knocked down by the spray from the hoses. Then immediately following the concert a smart dance band playing all the hits of the fifties and early sixties would set up and every one in town would dance in the middle of town across from Margie's luncheonette and the park.

The sweet sounds of swing and Sinatra would waft across the night air and grown ups and kids would fill the street. This was both weird and cool. In 1963 I was in love with Diane Evans and wanted to dance with her with all my heart. I got my wish. Like some weird little wind up child I approached her and we danced and that might be the last time I ever spoke with her. The same night something stranger happened.

Young people from out of town tried to join the fun. A fight nearly erupted. An alarm spread through the celebrants. The tiny police department and the firemen and the town elect banded together to expel the intruders.

What the fuck?

We might have been in a tiny village in England in the Middle Ages. We might have been Miller's Men doing our spring dance for the Maidens. We repelled the invasion of alien peoples from our sacred precincts. I don't know if the kids were black or white, tough or stupid but they were sent packing. This was for our town...not for anyone else.

When people talk about racism and shit like that they forget that all of this was based on tiny little towns scared to death of strangers. Of the other. So when some kids came to our town to dance they were beaten back. Huh?

Meanwhile the strains of Glenn Miller filled the air. It was hot and wet all at once. I was dancing with Diane Evans. Life was as good as it might ever get.

The only other thing I truly remember about this is that I was small. There comes a time in a child's life when he is suddenly as tall as everyone else. This was not one of them. I came up to everyone's waist. That's how I saw the world. Maybe that's still how I see the world. Maybe that's how you see the world.

Next post... Mrs Myers and 6th Grade. Jack has his last shot at cool Stay tuned.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:09PM (-05:00)

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Next post... Mrs Myers and 6th Grade. Jack has his last shot at cool Stay tuned.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:24PM (-05:00)

6th Grade, September 1963

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

We pick up our bikes from the grass of my front lawn, me, Chris, Terry, Gary, Mick, & Ed Mossop, and wheel up to the school. It's the last week in August. On the window of the school are the classroom assignments. Terry and I are set for Mrs. Myers. We've never heard of her. It's her first year teaching at Wenonah. But we're in the same class so that's good. We're excited and happy and ready for a new year. We're almost the oldest kids in school. Chris will be in the last 7th grade class at Wenonah and there's one last 8th grade class but after this the school goes to K-6. Next year we'll be in the new regional high school in Woodbury Heights. Gateway Regional High School. So this is our chance to shine.

This is the year the Beatles break big. This is the year JFK buys it. This is the year of long hair (or what passes for long hair in Wenonah), worrying about girls, and being big kids. Finally. Big kids. We rule. Kind of. Almost. In our heads.

There will be much to talk about over the next few months but this was a momentous year of tremendous success. Meaning we didn't do much of anything and thought we were all that. Tomorrow you can see us in all our pre-teen glory.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:56PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: 6th Grade, September 1963](#)

- JimMaddox

March 15, 2008

I would watch them build Gateway Regional High School from my back yard. They'd tear down most of the woods that I played in as a little kid. Someone very close to me would die in 1963, and I'd learn the meaning of despair.

[Re: 6th Grade, September 1963](#)

- MonitordeLCD

March 18, 2008

Hello. This post is likeable, and your blog is very interesting, congratulations :-). I will add in my blogroll =). If possible gives a last there on my blog, it is about the Monitor de LCD, I hope you enjoy. The address is <http://monitor-de-lcd.blogspot.com>. A hug.

Lull in the Action; Fun Being Me

Tuesday, March 18, 2008

Hi everyone! I'm afraid I have to take a three or four week break from the blog and dear Wenonah in order to focus on a project of mine. A very talented young man named Steven McCasland has adapted my two books into a one man play called, oddly, "Fun Being Me". It has its premier on April 12th and 13th at Pace University in downtown Manhattan at 8pm. I'm excited and scared and overjoyed. Steven has done a fine job of locating the points where the books intersect and has woven them into a moving theater piece. Sadly he hired me as the actor. Oh well, you get what you pay for and he's not paying me.

If you'd like to attend you need to RSVP to Steven at this address:

GroupTherapyProductions@gmail.com. There is a suggested donation of \$5 that goes to the charity of my choice...in this case the GMHC of New York. What a shock, a guy with AIDS picks one of the finest organizations in NYC to donate money to. I'd love to see you there and talk with you after. Here's what Steven said in his email publicizing the piece:
Hello, friends--

I am proud to be a participant in the world premiere of poet Jack Wiler's beautiful one-man play, FUN BEING ME. Jack speaks candidly life with AIDS, living the life of a poet but working as an exterminator to pay the bills, and the difference between life and death. I was given the opportunity to adapt his poetry into a play and direct him in it and I'm proud to say that the work he is doing is stunning and beautiful. He is a wonderful man and his poetry is absolutely gorgeous.

We're presenting the piece of Saturday April 12th and Sunday April 13th at 8pm in Pace's Multipurpose Room. It is presented by Group Therapy Productions, a student theater group I co-founded with Kerrie Bond, Michael Rehse and Theresa Johnson, and Pace CARES. All of the proceeds raised will benefit Gay Men's Health Crisis.

We ask that you donate \$5.00 for admission, though it is not required. The performance should last about 45 minutes, followed by a talk-back with Jack and I. Attached you'll find the ad for the performances.

If you'd like to attend, please e-mail GroupTherapyProductions@gmail.com.

I hope to see you there!

Sincerely,
Steven McCasland

Okay, you're saying where's the attached ad? I'd post it but it's a pdf file and blogger doesn't let you upload pdf's. God knows why. Write me and I'll email it to you. To all you sad sack South Jersey knuckleheads, this is your chance to come to the big apple for a bit of culture. To everyone else in the metropolitan area I'd love to have you in attendance to buoy my spirits.

Till April 14th then, Godspeed and Happy Easter!
Jack
Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:49PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Lull in the Action; Fun Being Me](#)
- ToughBird

March 19, 2008

Wow, this is amazing, Jack. I'll be there.
Karen

[Re: Lull in the Action; Fun Being Me](#)
- glundquist

March 26, 2008

Hey knumb-knuts! , (its OK, people, I knew him in High school, before he was poet) now I have to figure out how to get to Lyndhurst on the day before tax day. Seriously, I doubt I can get there, but if at all possible, I will.

gl

[Re: Lull in the Action; Fun Being Me](#)

- Anonymous

March 31, 2008

Congratulations...

"Break a Leg" on April 14th.

Sincerely,

Steve Smith,

A friend that lived his "Wonder-Years" in Wenonah the same years as you.

Sixth Grade 1963-1964

Wednesday, March 26, 2008



Mrs. Myers 6th Grade Class

Front Row from left: Elisa Contarino, Dolores Lorenz, Irene Thomas, Susan Parker, Nancy Garrison, Dottie Chattin, Caroline Stens, Margie Loving, Michelle Smith, Susan Abbott

Second Row from left: John Hindman, Ken Fell, Steve Smith, Tim Sellen, Bunny Allen, Sharon Hoffman, Kathy Collinge, Bonnie Mecholsky, Linda Smith, Don Davis, Me, Bob Stokes, Tom Jenkins

Back Row from left: Terry Fleming, Dave Earnhart, Ralph Leeds, Dave Moffit, Mario Contarino

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:04AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Sixth Grade 1963-1964](#)

- Claudia

March 28, 2008

wow. Reenie Thomas. Susie. Bob Stokes (lost my cherry to him and now, he is in prison..)
this is so much fun!
thanks!

Names in the Photo

Thursday, March 27, 2008

Hi all, I know I promised I wouldn't be posting but this was relatively simple and required no thought:) Thanks to Barb Conway for id'ing Nancy Garrison and "Linda" Smith, not Susan Smith who was equally hot but much younger. A few other comments on the photo. First, check out my cowlick. Jesus I look like Alfalfa. Second, go back over the past years and look at Terry's expression in every photo. He always has the same odd look. Is it the holly poking him in the back? Who knows?

Barb reminded me as has Bob that one of the cool things about being in Ed Campbell's class was that he would leave to go to fires and come back smelling of smoke. That's devotion.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:16PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Names in the Photo

- Claudia

March 28, 2008

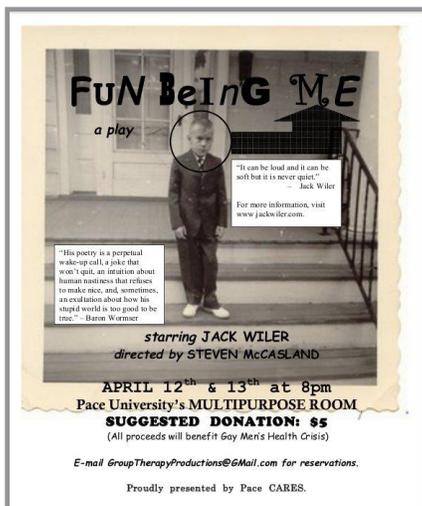
Hi, Jack,
thanks for the nice comment! Now I am looking at your blog and your poems!

so glad to have found them.....

peace,
claudia

Play Flyer

Wednesday, April 02, 2008



Bob Thomas was kind enough to do the conversion of the pdf to a jpg so here's the flyer! I do hope some of you will be able to attend! Please, if you are coming, remember to rsvp to grouptherapyproductions@gmail.com by Tuesday of next week. I need all the moral support I can get!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:32AM (-04:00)

Comments

If you've never read Jack's poetry, I can tell you this; it will kick you in the gut, it will make you squirm and feel uncomfortable. You will know darkness and suffering. At the same time you will know that life is full of wonder, and the simplest things have a glory all their own. For those of you who can attend, I will be envious. For those of you who can't, read a copy of Jack's book. This is how it made me feel.

I read your book, Jack
And you succeeded.
You grabbed me by the hair
And shoved my face
In a bucket of cold water,
And I recoiled,
Gasping for breath.
I lied, Jack.
There isn't just one poem
That grabbed me.
Not one, but two or three or more
So I couldn't put it down on Christmas Eve.
I was in that ragged line of march
On that other December's night
With hail and sleet and cold
Stinging my face
Bowed against the wind,
My feet wrapped in rags
Leaving blood in the snow.
I read your book, Jack,
And I can't say
I understood them all
Because I'm not that intellectual,
I don't always grasp
The abstract too well.
But even those
Put pictures in my mind
That I can't dismiss.
I read your book, Jack,
And I cannot say that I understand
Because I'm not you
But I have a clearer picture now
Dark as it is.
I read your book, Jack
And I saw things
And felt things
I didn't know were there.
I read your book, Jack
Damn you.

Fun Being Me...THE PLAY!

Wednesday, April 09, 2008

Hi everyone, I'm psyched for Saturday and Sunday and hope to see some of you. If you're planning on coming and haven't RSVP'd please do so toot sweet as there are security concerns. An email to my director, Steven, will do the trick. The appropriate email

is grouptherapyproductions@gmail.com.

I hope to see you all as I blow my lines, vomit on stage, and crawl, weeping from the stage. Or not. This is theater, who knows whats in store. No dull poetry here. Come one, come all, all for a measly five bucks!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:33PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Fun Being Me...THE PLAY!](#)

- Roux

April 12, 2008

I so wish I could come see your play. Unfortunately for me, I am visiting colleges for virtually the whole weekend. Regardless, I'm sure it will be amazing.

I wanted to thank you again for coming to my school today. Your poems are wonderful and refreshing. You really managed to touch me. We share a lot of idealogies and views of society, which was really cool. In short, thanks for just being you and sharing it with us.

Sincerely,
Roux (of EBHS)

Day One Redux

[Sunday, April 13, 2008](#)

Well, I did it. Or really, we did it, Steven and I. Or more appropriately Steven, Kerrie, Teresa, Johanna, and I. Because each of them had a hand in this thing. Johanna for giving me the space to rehearse and memorize and for living with me while I was basically insane. Kerrie for helping Steven with the sound and set and actually making believe it was a good play so I'd calm down. Teresa for introducing me to Steven, helping to shape the play, and sitting in on our rehearsal. And of course Steven, the shaper of my words and the man who taught me how to act.

I think we did good. I think we'll do better tonight so I hope that those of you who couldn't come last night will be there this evening. It was fun. So...I'll see some of you tonight!

Meantime, thanks to some marvelous suggestions, especially you Jules, we're already working on ideas for how to expand this for a wider audience. Look for more Fun and less Me. Until I return to normal on the morrow, I remain, your thespian correspondent.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:58AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Day One Redux](#)

- ToughBird

April 14, 2008

Congratulations Jack for taking this risk and forging new ground. I enjoyed the show and look forward to seeing how it evolves.

Karen

The Play and the World

Friday, April 18, 2008

Okay, I've done my stint on the boards. Perhaps there is more to come but that's for another day and another post. For now just let me say thank you to Steven McCasland, my director, my collaborator, my friend and to Teresa Carson for her help, and to Johanna for her patience. I had a chance to see how another world of art works. I'm not clear where I stand within that world but it might be we can expand on that. I think I should tell you that it was scary as shit to act. And scarier more to go back to the time when I was sick. I haven't been there in a long while and each time we rehearsed and each time I practiced and memorized I went back. Not good. Not good.

The night after our first performance I dreamed about illness. People filled with cancers and pus and their heads splitting open and then when I awoke I saw a little demon scurry off the bed.

Like they were waiting for me still. Like they wanted me still. No normal person wants them to come back and I'm not that abnormal. On the other hand the work seems to resonate in ways I hadn't expected and perhaps we can put it out into the world and make it a positive thing in ways poetry isn't. We shall see. We shall see.

Today I got to see a production of Steven's of Medea. It was rich and strong and clear. The man has a talent and a vision and he will be a great director and producer. His actors were powerful and passionate and you could hear their pain and anguish. Not too shabby.

So, for now my theatrical ambitions are tabled but they will rise again. Tomorrow we return to 1963, Sixth Grade, Dear Mrs Myers, Kathy Collinge, Sex, the Beatles, oh, the horror, oh, the horror. Ha ha. Back to Fun.

God bless Steven and his vision and God take pity on me.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:37PM (-04:00)

Sixth Grade September 1963

Saturday, April 19, 2008

It was always nice to go to school in Wenonah. The first days were warm with that beautiful September warmth and you had the idea that you'd do great this year, really great. Sixth grade marked a change for us. In order to get us used to moving around like robots in our new high school we would move around in Wenonah school. From teacher to teacher, subject to subject, classroom to classroom. In theory this would have us up and running on day one at the new HS. In fact it was sort of stupid. We knew everybody. We'd had all these teachers. My math teacher was Mrs. Fuller from last year for God's sake! I think we had Ed Campbell for History but jeez louse this was no stretch for any of us. I mean, what, walk upstairs to a classroom or down the hall twenty feet to another and all with the exact same people? We would not, repeat not, be ready for Seventh Grade.

But we felt all cool and shit and that meant a lot. For the first time in our little lives we felt like we were in control. It was a lie but it felt like it. After school we'd ride our bikes to my house and sit on the curb and talk about the Beatles. There was some weird rule that you had to pick your favorite Beatle. As if I gave a fuck. So I picked George who really didn't do anything. One thing about the Beatles, and the Beach Boys, and some other bands

was they had long hair. Okay, not really long, but long enough.

This got me thinking about growing my hair and wearing cooler clothes. Bad thoughts all. My hair was a disaster. Three cowlicks, no hope. Cool clothes? We shopped at JC Penney's for Christ's sake. I couldn't even get Converse sneaks...I had to get the cheap Penney's knock offs. We did go to a mens wear store in Pitman though to pick out our fall clothes. I actually had some vague say in what I wore. I have no idea what I picked only that in all my pictures I still look like a geek.

And our new classes? We were learning about New Jersey history. Apparently over the summer the state decided we should know something about this pisshole so they taught us about the Lenni Lenape and Governor Morris and we had to know all the counties and stuff. As if in Gloucester County we had the vaguest conception of Jersey City or Hoboken or Newark. There were only two negroes in our school!!!

But we were cool, we were cool. We passed through the hall like little gods, lording it over the 5th and 4th graders. When we got home we'd make fun of Chuckie Holstein and his little friends. We'd break their club house and laugh and laugh. We ruled.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:47PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Sixth Grade September 1963](#)

- JimMaddox

April 20, 2008

Over in Woodbury Heights our school was being remodeled, so they took the Sixth Grade and moved us to the classrooms at the St. Margaret's Catholic School. That was the only thing that changed. We were in our own private world, carrying on with old friends, not knowing what would happen the following year. They didn't prepare us for it at all.

The Play in Various Forms and Permutations

[Monday, April 21, 2008](#)

Well, over the past several days two interesting things occurred. First, Bob Thomas thoughtfully recorded the first night's performance. If you'd care to listen to me on opening night here then is the performance, warts and all. Just follow the link: <http://pumphousegardens.com/JackWiler/FunBeingMe.html>

Let me know what you think.

That night there was a talk back following the performance. You can catch the recording of that event, again, courtesy of Bob, on You Tube. Here's that link: <http://hk.youtube.com/watch?v=CeIGffkfQ0U>.

Finally, during that talk back there was discussion about others doing the performance. I had sent the script to my friend Jim Maddox who recorded it in his voice. I'm still too stupid to figure out how to upload the mp3 so for the time being, if you'd like to hear Jim's take on me in NYC please send me an email and I'll send it along.

To all of you who came, many thanks...to those who couldn't here is a meager substitute. Of course you don't get to see my acting talents in all their glory but what the hey.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:04AM (-04:00)

Poetry Derived from Play

Monday, April 21, 2008

Oh, by the way, here's a poem that came out of the work I did for the play. Enjoy.
Dreaming of Imps

Last night there was an imp in my bed.
Well, not really an imp;
a small demon, I guess.
I woke up and must have frightened it
because it scurried off to hide in the shadows.
But I saw it.
The color of a young roach.
Twisted.
Mean.
Then it was gone.

There was a time such things were with me daily.
Demons and imps and shrouded ghouls.
Lingering by my bedside as I lay sleeping,
dreaming horrible dreams of a good life.
A life where I had a job and friends and ate food
in restaurants.
A life filled with nice clothing and cars.
People who laughed at my jokes and forgave my foibles.
The demons watched me twitch in sleep and giggled
at my travails.

I was very sick for a time.
I came so close to death it seemed almost like I was dead.
I spent much too much time with demons and angels.
I ate too little and slept too little and sweated through the night.
I woke each morning drenched from my dreams.

I haven't been sick for years.
Not like that anyway.
Oh, a flu now and then, or a sore throat,
but that's been it.
Till that imp leaped up and licked my face.

Perhaps they never left.
Perhaps I'm still desperately ill.
This is the dream I dream.
My car, my dogs, my new suits, my beloved.
All just fodder for their little jokes.
There should be an insecticide for demons and imps.
There should be some poison I could set out

for them to find and eat.
It might be unpleasant to find their swollen little bodies but
except for a day or two of stink it would be better to have them gone.

But it seems to me that there is no poison they wouldn't love.
No death they couldn't cherish.
No desire or whim that wouldn't amuse them.
Dreams and imps.
Poisons and wishes.
All things to think about as we kneel at the foot of the bed
to say our little prayers.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:26AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Poetry Derived from Play](#)
- ClaudiaHayesHagar

April 26, 2008

jack,
this is so beautiful.
i love your writing. thank you for sharing yourself with us.
claudia

Newspaper Routes

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

It was in the fall of 1963 that I began my first real job. Up until then I'd mown some lawns, raked a few, and shoveled sidewalks when it snowed but basically had no real daily responsibilities. Then my friend Chris DeHart offered me his Woodbury Times newspaper route. On the surface it sounded like a good deal. You delivered the papers daily, collected the weekly subscription fee on Friday or Saturday, had Sunday off and lived like a prince. It turns out there were some minor problems with the economic model. I believe at the time the Woodbury Times, now the Gloucester County Times, cost five cents an issue. Five cents! I would deliver them to people and my cost would be three cents. Thus netting me a profit of two cents for each paper delivered. Each customer would receive six newspapers a week, so my weekly profit, per customer, would be twelve cents. I had twenty five customers. That meant I stood to make the princely sum of three dollars per week. For this three dollars I would drive my bicycle around my neighborhood for perhaps forty five minutes a day, tossing newspapers onto porches or sliding them through mail slots or whatever particular quirk a customer might have for accepting the paper. This meant I was working...around four and half hours a week to make three dollars. This puts my hourly rate at about \$.60 cents per hour. This was a lot of dough. I think. I mean my allowance was twenty five cents for Christ's sake! But it turns out there were some negatives.

Number one was people didn't pay you. I'm talking grown up, mature men and women stiffing some little twelve year old kid for the vast sum of thirty cents. But you still had to pay the man. That's what the guy from the newspaper was called. The man. He would come by every Saturday and collect your three cents per paper. You had to have that

money no matter what. This created numerous problems. Like, number one, what do you do if significant numbers of people don't pay? Or what happens if you're a lazy nincompoop who doesn't really make a sincere effort to collect the money because you're scared to ask grown ups for money? Or, just for the sake of argument, suppose you don't exactly deliver the papers in the orderly, on time fashion your customers expect? And then they say, "I'm not paying for that paper, I never got it!". This could lead to serious cash flow issues. Your vast three dollar profit could end being at most seventy five cents or less. And this for hours of hard works! Or, to be honest, less than committed, hard work. Actually, kind of lazy half hearted rolling around the neighborhood on your bicycle daydreaming and not doing a very good job kind of work. That would probably accurately characterize my work ethic at twelve. Non-existent. To be very honest I'd fire my ass if I worked for me now. i sucked. I was unmotivated, lazy, bored, and lost in a world of fantasy. Delivering the news of the day in a timely fashion was the very last thing on my mind. Collecting funds from surly, angry old people was definitely not something I wanted to do.

I lasted three months or so. I was an abject failure and happy to turn in my bag and go back to playing football and running in the woods. I would try this money making approach again, more on that in the years to come, but I should have looked closer at the business model, the employee profile, etc. I was doomed from the start.

Some boys are born newspaper delivery boys. Others were made to daydream about repelling Russian hordes. I think I fit in the latter category.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:06PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Newspaper Routes

- JimMaddox

April 24, 2008

I never had my own paper route. I did substitute for a few kids, so I did deliver the Woodbury Times and the Philadelphia Bulletin. I had heard the other kids talk about how difficult it was to collect from their customers, and I didn't want all that hassle. It was more fun to fight Nazi ME-109s and Russian Migs on your bike anyway.

Re: Newspaper Routes

- BobThomas

April 27, 2008

Jack,

That was the problem with an afternoon route - there were so many other things to divert you from the task. A morning newspaper route was - get up - bundle up for the weather - fold the papers and hustle through the route in time to have some breakfast, take a shower and get dressed for school - if things went well I would lay in my bed for a 10 or 15 minute nap after my shower before getting my school clothes on.

Besides almost freezing some winter mornings I also got to see bunches of nice sunrises.

Collecting could be a hassle, but the good paying people overshadowed the bad paying ones. I certainly would've wanted to try it in parts of Camden. Tips around Christmas amounted to about 1/4 of the income from the route for the whole year.

Things we didn't know we'd learn; 1963

Sunday, April 27, 2008

I know what you're thinking. I know I've waited many years for this post, two to be exact, and I've hesitated for two or three days thinking about what else to say about 6th grade and the fall of 1963 but really this is the thing that matters most. It's some time around the middle of the afternoon on a lovely late fall afternoon. It was warm. I remember that. We were in Mrs. Fuller's math class. God knows what we were learning. Some dim precursor to Algebra? It couldn't have mattered. Mr. Campbell walked in and pulled Mrs. Fuller out and they talked, like adults do about things that matter to adults, and Mrs. Fuller walked in to tell us the President had been shot. President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, Texas in the afternoon of November, 22nd, 1963 and we were shocked. Huh.

That seems stupid saying that but we were. Shocked. Stunned. Only one other event in my life made me feel like this and that was in September of 2001 when I watched two airplanes hit the World Trade Center. But back then this was something you didn't even know how to acknowledge. What did it mean? Why was he shot? I mean, really? Why would anyone shoot the President of the United States. It wasn't a Russian. It wasn't like we had just ended a great Civil War. So we all sat in class like little fools and looked at each other and then we were sent home. After an hour or so our teachers sent us home. To be with our parents.

They were no better than us. Ed Campbell who had witnessed the slaughter of Korea and who rushed out like a hero to put out fires, Mrs. Myers who seemed stalwart and brave and strong, Mrs. Ferrera who laughed with us and told ribald jokes, they all looked like little puppets who had had their strings cut and they said things and did things but they didn't know why or what they were saying and we walked home.

When I got home my mother was sobbing.

When I got home my mother was sobbing.

Her ironing board was in the living room and she was in the first living room and she was crying. I don't believe I am making this up. This is what I remember. It was embarrassing but she was in tears. The tv was on and there were people talking about the President and by now it was clear he was dead. He'd been shot in Texas by a man and he was dead.

It seems so stupid from this great remove to say we loved this man. We did. He was a joy. He and his family were funny and real and just like our own even if later we were to find out this was all a fiction. He was like my father. He played touch football. My father did. He had back problems. My father did. His wife was beautiful. She looked like my mother and my aunts and my beloved Irish cousins. Jesus.

My mother had been watching a soap opera. She never watched another to the end of her life.

The facts played out on television like nothing we had ever seen; though they would play out that way again and again over the next several years. We were exiled to play but everytime we ducked into the house the President was dead.

You could make up lots of dumb shit about this. We were, after all, only sixth graders. We knew absolutely nothing about politics. To us he was like God. We admired and loved him and his family. We had not had the tragedy of WWII or WWI or the Civil War or any other horror brush up against our stupid little lives. This was like getting smacked really hard with the hand of reality and no one tells you it is reality.

I would imagine there are worse things than public tragedy. I know my mother's death affected me more than the death of the young man who was President. But I know that this event marked my childhood just as clearly as the two towers falling marked my adulthood. That's an odd thing. How public events become private events. How you can remember every smell and hesitation. The ironing board. The quiet streets. The shocked looks of adults. The newsreels, the tv news, the man with a gun the twisted body of Lee Harvey Oswald, the smoke drifting across Brooklyn, the candles burning in doorways all over Jersey City, the ironing board, the gun, the smoke.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 12:23AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Things we didn't know we'd learn; 1963](#)

- JimMaddox

April 27, 2008

Great post, Jack. It was so somber. We didn't know how to act. We wanted to play and watch TV, but it felt wrong for us to want to do those things; the joys of childhood had to be put on hold for several days. We had to sit back and watch our parents and the nation grieving. There was nothing we could do.

[Re: Things we didn't know we'd learn; 1963](#)

- Paul

February 20, 2009

I was in Mrs. Ferrara's 4th grade. We were making turkeys by tracing our hands and then coloring the thumb as it's head and the other fingers were its feathers. It is like it was yesterday. I wasn't aware of Mrs. Ferrara leaving the room, but I remember her coming back in, crying and telling us the the president had been shot and we were being dismissed and we all had to go straight home. My mother was ironing and watching Walter Cronkite who had just announced that the president was dead. Being the stupid little good Republican boy that I was, I asked if that meant Nixon would become president. That weekend is emblazoned on my memory.

I still measure my life before the assassination and after the assassination.

The Digging Yard

Friday, May 02, 2008

Behind our garage was a small yard. At one end was a black maple and at the foot of the maple there was always a compost heap. There was a path between the rear of the garage, the tree and the heap and then a stretch of ground roughly, twenty five feet by twelve that was "The Digging Yard". Oh! The Digging Yard. This was the center of huge parts of our life. It was here I destroyed my brother Ted's beloved Tonka trucks. It was here we built huge oil drilling landscapes of used pipes and trucks and it was here that we dug and dug and dug. We loved digging and we loved digging in the digging yard. In 1963 we all went to see "The Great Escape". It was the coolest war movie we'd ever seen. It had motorcycles, valor, Steve McQueen, Nazi's, motorcycles, English cool, Steve McQueen and marching music. We loved that movie. And of course, of course we had to make it true in our back yard. So we began to dig holes and then tunnels between the holes. And as we got better the holes got deeper, the tunnels longer and more complex. We were chowderheads covered in filth and having the time of our lives.

All of us dug the holes. Mick and Ted, Chris and Terry, Robbie Hill and Eddie Mossop, all the little brothers and neighborhood wanna be's were all there with shovels and pails and dirty faces.

Our exploits culminated in one glorious giant hole. We dug till we hit water. Now, in many parts of the United States that could mean digging for hundreds of feet but in Wenonah which was barely above sea level according to the US Geological Survey marker sunk outside the Grosscup building that meant going down roughly twelve feet. Which while it may not be much is a great distance in a yard 12x25 when you're barely four feet tall to begin with and many of you are between 3 & 4 feet tall. The hole began wide and expansive and narrowed and narrowed and narrowed until finally after days and days of labor we hit water.

Water!

We felt like we'd struck gold! Like we'd understood some great principle of Geography or Geology! We were explorers in a downward spiral. We were engineers. We were builders. We were escape artists. Soldiers. Geniuses. We were also very dirty and stupid. It turns out our giant hole wasn't a good idea. Joel Cook fell in and all the little kids panicked and that led to my dad stumbling out from his cocktail to say "What the hell...?" and then all the dirt went back. I think it could be said that Joel Cook functioned as the weird conscience of our stupid behaviors since everytime we did something that would get us in trouble it was Joel that revealed the trouble and caused the punishment. He was an odd boy but useful.

I should mention that after the giant hole our attraction, or at least Mick and my attraction, waned. My parents began to use the digging yard for a straggly vegetable garden. But for years after, as they tilled the soil, the rotted plastic corpses of small army men came to the surface. Like some weird field in France. Men clutching grenades and crouched with semi-automatics, buried for years in rich loam, then thrust into the light of 1970's daylight. Like Japanese soldiers on deserted islands long after WWII has ended. They remained. Brave guardians of our misspent youth.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:39PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The Digging Yard](#)

- JacobRussell

May 22, 2008

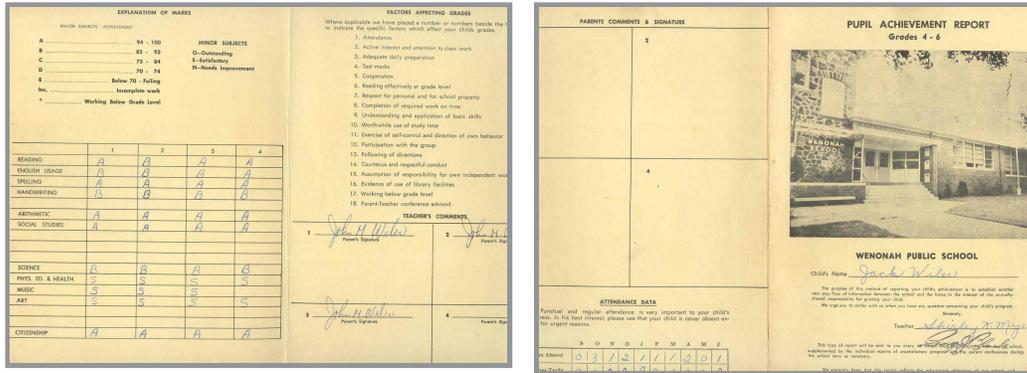
Boys digging holes--gotta be genetic!

Sixth Grade Report Card

Friday, May 02, 2008

How smart was I. Just you look!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:59PM (-04:00)



Little Things

Tuesday, May 06, 2008

It's nice to see the world from the standpoint of big stuff that happens. But honestly President's don't die every day and other things matter more. What kind of things? Things we smell and taste. Things we eat. Things we do.

Like Testors glue.

Like the smell of swamp mud on your boots. Like the way the leaves act right before a thunderstorm. Like when you go away for summer vacation and when you come home the world is a deep, hot, humid green. Or sneakers. Clean and white at the beginning of summer and then by the end a dull gray. Their deep funk. Or hiding in some little place in a game that no one knows about and watching the spiders and smelling the mildew. Or clambering into the sewers for an adventure that isn't really an adventure because it's just a pipe and it goes no where. Nowhere.

Like lying in your bed watching a summer storm. Lightening. Thunder. Wind. Trees thrashing this way and that. Or the smell of your grandmothers house. Or going into a friends house and it's not like any place you've ever been before. There's the smell of hairspray or cologne or cleaning agents and you step back for a second. Shocked. Seduced.

Or spring erupting with a magnificence you can't understand and the stink of skunk cabbage and the deep mud and dead animals strewn on the swamp.

Crayons. The smell of wax. Paste. The way it tastes.

All the candies in the world.

Neats foot oil.

Hay.

Tar.

Your mothers cigarettes.

Incense at the church at high mass and it's stink.

Floor wax.

Termiticides in the crawl spaces of your house.

Must.

Death.

Life.

Sweat.

Soap.

All the different kinds of soap.
Lava.
Handsoap.
Moss.
Lilacs
Your mothers perfume.
Chanel number five.
The books in the basement of the library.
Your aunt as you sleep next to her.
Dirt.
Clay, which is different than dirt and loam and top soil and swamp mud and leaves and new mown grass.
The way the air smells just before a winter storm.
Lightning.
Fear.
Rubber.
Burning rubber.
Rubber cement.
Rubber balls.
The truck running down the alley behind the post office spraying for mosquitoes.
Paint thinner.
Paint.
Shellac.
Chrome cleaner.
Gasoline.
Leaves burning on the curb.
Bleach.
The dead mouse in the crawl space.
So many things with so little reason. Except they shape your life.
Except they shape your life.
The loud cry of the fire whistle.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:48PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Little Things](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

May 06, 2008

Hi, Jack.

I loved this post and it confirmed that you are a paste eater. I suspected as much!
claudia

Other Stuff to Think About

[Tuesday, May 20, 2008](#)

I'm a little lazy and consumed with Spring fever lately and haven't posted. My sincere apologies to my readers. Posts will come next week. We have much to talk about. But in the meantime I have a couple personal items to put out into the world.

The first is my friend Baron Wormser's new book, "The Poetry Life: Ten Stories", is out on the Cavankerry imprint. This is a gorgeous book, rich and clear and wonderful. For the reader and writer of poetry it strikes a chord few books can even hope to strike. Baron has used the voices of ten invented people, one of whom resembles him, to talk about a poet has impacted on them and the world. The voices are wonderful, the understanding of poetry and how it is apprehended is done without affectation or bullshit and because of that the poetry itself is like a clear bell. What a grand, glorious book! I urge you to buy this book. It's not just some dumb book about writing. It's fun and compelling and filled with passion and emotion. To quote my first wife Kathy, "I laughed, I cried, I ran the full gamut of human emotion". You should buy this motherfucking book.

Second, I know a lot of you folks from the Frost Place check in now and again. It is the 30th anniversary of the Festival and Jim and this years crop of faculty and staff would love to have all of us in attendance. I'm journeying to the North Country once more to immerse myself in words and I urge all of you to dig deep in your jar of pennies and come up with the cash to go. I think it will be a wonderful week and I hope you will join us. If you can't come as a participant then come as an auditor or a visitor or a friend but come, come!

Finally, to all you Gateway Gators: It's crunch time you chowderheads! Time to put up or shut up! Go to the dopey site and register and then RSVP or if you're so old fashioned and weird that you mistrust the internet then mail Joyce Murphy Kiner a check but show the fuck up on July the 5th for our wacky little reunion! I know you're old, I know you feel you're a miserable failure, your kids are assholes and you look like shit, but really that would be true of all of us so show the fuck up! You could be dead in a year! Plus, what if you're the best lawyer in Sioux City or one kicking Jaguar mechanic or maybe you do orthodonture like nobody's business, this is your chance to make everybody that treated you like shit for six years feel like a moron. I know I can't wait to line dance but that's my weird thing. I know Suzy is wishing we had the Geator with the Heater there but we'll always have the Dovell's and that, my friend, is a fact. Sign up! Sign up now! If I can tell all of you I have AIDS then you can drag your fat bald headed ass to Deptford and drink a few cocktails and have a great time!

Well, that's it for now. Time for my favorite movie, Rear Window.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:47PM (-04:00)

Getting Bigger

Friday, May 23, 2008

Here's something we hardly ever talk about. Size. Well, maybe we talk about it a lot but not in the way I'm interested in. I'm thinking more about that time when you start to be the same size as everyone else. In 1st Grade and up until 6th I spent most of my time looking at people's thighs or waists. As a consequence I thought nearly 90% of the planet was made up of grown ups. Parents. Figures of Authority. If you towered over me you knew what the fuck was going on. If you were my size or smaller you were like me. Lost. Confused. Stupid.

It's kind of like when you realized how to speak English (assuming of course you're from the USA). First you're a baby and then one day, like a little miracle, you understand everything people are saying. One day you're staring at knees and everyone is a grownup and the next you're looking in their eyes or their chests and you start to realize

there are hierarchies of adulthood. Of course, you're still a kid, but you start to get that 8th graders don't really have any clout in the world beyond being able to kick your ass. And that your mother is different in status than say the lady at the supermarket. You start to see teachers as having personalities that you can manipulate and control. Oh, what a wonderful moment.

But just like that moment when you realize how to ask for milk instead of burbling some incomprehensible syllables you still don't really get it all. That my friends is a blessing and a curse. Not so much for 6th Graders. We were consigned to one of the outer circles of Hell. But say when you're a Senior in High School and you have a crush on your teacher and she's talking with you at graduation sort of like a girl talks to a boy. This can be very confusing and it's confusing because you're a dumb schmoo. You think she's a grown up but she's really only 4 years or maybe only 3 years older than you. In just ten years you'll start to have trouble figuring out how old people are if they're between 20 and 30 but right then, with a little beer in your gut, it just seems odd and you don't know why.

What if you knew everything right then in 6th grade? Would that be a blessing or a curse. Part of me votes for curse. I'd no doubt have told some older kid he was a stupid jerk and get flattened for it. Another part of me votes for blessing. We were all dumb chowderheads stumbling through the halls of Wenonah Elementary. Students, teachers, administrators. Trying to do our best and fucking it up too often. But some of us were big and some of us were small and for Wenonah that was a good enough dividing line.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:18PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Getting Bigger](#)

- Lauren

May 24, 2008

Jack Wiler, you are a spectacular man! I just want to say that it was an honor meeting you on Thursday. Best school day of my life!

[Re: Getting Bigger](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

May 26, 2008

jack!

interesting ruminations about size. gotta tell you I never thought about it but I think it's a guy thing. we girls wanted to be smaller.

[Re: Getting Bigger](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

May 26, 2008

jack!

interesting ruminations about size. gotta tell you I never thought about it but I think it's a guy thing. we girls wanted to be smaller.

[Re: Getting Bigger](#)

- Anonymous

December 10, 2009

Good day !.

You re, I guess , perhaps curious to know how one can make real money .

There is no initial capital needed You may start earning with as small sum of money as 20-100 dollars.

AimTrust is what you thought of all the time

AimTrust represents an offshore structure with advanced asset management

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Waist Deep in the Big Muddy

Monday, June 02, 2008

I might be wrong on the timeline here but I don't think so. The Christmas of 1963 brought me my 1st pair of hip boots. Waders is another name for them, especially among fishermen, but for us they were hip boots.

They were my best gift ever! Better than army men, better than sleds, better than money. Hip boots gave us mastery of the swamps! Now the water & the mud could not keep us back! Now we could go anywhere! As long as it didn't go over the top of our boots. Then there was a problem. A boot filled with mud & water was not a good thing. Especially in the winter.

The boots I got were black and from Sears or maybe from Polsky's Army Navy in Woodbury. They came to the top of your thighs and you put them on over your regular shoes, kind of like a giant pair of galoshes. I had many pairs over the years, sometimes because I was growing but more often because I would get a hole in them. Even a small hole was a disaster as your foot quickly filled with cold, cold water. Once you had a hole in the boot they were shot and we did any number of stupid things designed to make holes. Running headlong through sticker bushes for one; walking through mud with no thought as to what might be beneath the mud for another.

But the boots freed us from the tyranny of mud and water. Where once we turned back from mud flats and pools of water now we could walk straight through! We could even cross the Mantua Creek at a few shallow points at low tide. Of course there were other difficulties. Hip boots were not possessed of any real grip. In fact they were sort of like wearing giant ice skates when you were walking on slippery underwater surfaces. What sort of surfaces? Well, say, half submerged logs or rocks by the trestle. That sort of thing. So you'd be walking out where disaster lurked, feet dry as a bone and then, boom you slipped off the log and were drenched to the bone. This would invariably necessitate a run back to the house, to the basement, to strip out of wet clothes, then race upstairs to change into dry clothes and out the door. Behind, in the basement were the wet jeans stinking of swamp mud and swamp water. Mom loved that.

The other big problem with hip boots was quick mud. If you got caught in some really

nasty mud you might be up over your knees when it first got you. You're fifty feet from any solid ground with your friends staring at you like you're a knucklehead and you're sinking slowly into the deep swamp. Then they'd form a little chain and with a stick or some shit reach out to you and pull you free. Leaving your boot sticking up in the mud. Like the foot in Fargo in the wood chipper but with almost the same consequences. You had to get it out or there'd be hell to pay. This would mean an hour or so of calculations, planning and effort that would eventually pay off and leave you with wet, muddy socks and shoes trudging up Mantua Ave dragging a boot caked in mud. What fun!

Hip boots eventually led us to our next money making enterprise. Trapping animals for their pelts. But more on that in my next post. If you're squeamish about dead muskrats and river rats don't worry. We sucked at trapping them.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:40PM (-04:00)

Imps; reimagined

Thursday, June 05, 2008

Hi everyone, a few weeks ago I posted a poem I wrote in response to my play. I've rewritten it and will post it below. Also, some news! Steven and I are doing four nights of "Fun Being Me" at PACE in early August. The dates are: 8/5,6,7,&8. I'll be doing the performance on the 5th but some marvelous young actors will be taking my place (thank the Lord!) on the subsequent nights. I'd love to see you at one of the performances. I'm writing some new material to enlarge the work and think you'll enjoy this night of theater. For more info stay tuned in the coming weeks!

Meantime, here are my little imps:

Dreaming of Imps

I was very sick for a time.
I came so close to death it seemed almost like I was dead.
I spent much too much time with demons and angels.
I ate too little and slept too little and sweated through the night.
I woke each morning drenched from my dreams.

Last night there was an imp in my bed.
Well, not really an imp;
a small demon, I guess.
I woke up and must have frightened it
because it scurried off to hide in the shadows.
But I saw it.
The color of a young roach.
Twisted.
Mean.
Then it was gone.

I haven't been sick for years.
Not like before anyway.

Oh, a flu now and then, or a sore throat,
but that's been it.
Till that imp leaped up and licked my face

There was a time such things were with me daily.
Demons and imps and shrouded ghouls.
Lingering by my bedside as I lay sleeping,
dreaming terrible dreams of a good life.
A life where I had a job and friends and ate food
in restaurants.
A life filled with nice clothing and cars.
People who laughed at my jokes and forgave my foibles.
The demons watched me twitch in sleep and
giggled at my travails.

Perhaps they never left.
Perhaps I'm still desperately ill.
This life is the dream I dream.
My car, my dogs, my new suits, my beloved.
All just fodder for their little jokes.
There should be an insecticide for demons and imps.
There should be some poison I could set out
for them to find and eat.
It might be unpleasant to find their swollen little bodies but
except for a day or two of stink it would be better to have them gone.

But it seems to me that there is no poison they wouldn't love.
No death they couldn't cherish.
No desire or whim that wouldn't amuse them.
Dreams and imps.
Poisons and wishes.
All things to think about as we kneel at the foot of the bed
to say our little prayers.

That's it for tonight gang. Go back to sleep and dream happy dreams. I'm getting ready
for a day at Sandy Hook and Gunnison Beach on Sunday. See you all there! Of course
you'd have to be naked:)

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:59PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Imps; reimagined](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

June 06, 2008

nice, Jack--I am glad you kept that ending.

[Re: Imps; reimagined](#)

- JoyLeftow

July 31, 2008

I'm glad I'm here reading you since you welcomed me to fb and it's hard to be welcomed first anywhere.

I'll keep coming back for more.

Obama, Hillary, et al

Thursday, June 05, 2008

You'll probably notice the hopeful little logo next to everything else. I was a big Clinton fan but now it's time to change gears and engage the enemy in his lair. Barack is our man and I urge all of you to support him and his campaign. It's time to toss the nitwits out of Washington and pay some attention to what's going on here at home.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:09PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Obama, Hillary, et al](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

June 06, 2008

right on!

[Re: Obama, Hillary, et al](#)

- JimMaddox

June 07, 2008

Sorry jack, but unless Americans stop voting for democrats and republicans who are one and the same, this country will never change for the better.

Hip Boots

Wednesday, June 11, 2008



Bob Thomas wrote in with the proper definitions of hip boots vs waders. Waders are chest high and hip boots come only to the top of the thighs. Waders are used by stream fishermen in particular. Bob also sent me a nice little ad for hip boots. It may be a tad politically incorrect but it's still a hoot.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:31PM (-04:00)

Comments

really? a hoot?

Hip Boots and Unhip Guys

Thursday, June 12, 2008

Ah, the vagaries of posting on your blog. My dopey attempt at humor has failed miserably. Claudia is peeved and no one is amused. Such are the trials of men. I know my swamp trudging twelve year old self would have been totally enamored of this ad. My grown up 56 year old self is mostly amused that people think hip boots and fishing gear can be sold by hot babes with hardly any clothes on. But I am after all the editor who recommended we put a vintage photo from the 50's of a woman holding up two halved melons in front of her breasts as a cover for Long Shot. I should have recalled the near total lack of positive responses. I'm like a rat that keeps pushing the same button and getting shocked. Oh well.

My reunion is a mere two weeks away. I'm excited and scared. All of us are old guys and women now. Some of us have grown in wonderful ways and I'm sure some of us are exactly the same. It should be a gas. I'm looking forward to lots of Dave Clark Five and Motown and toasts and mad stupidity.

Meantime I'm almost done my 3rd book and am totally pumped about that. Life is proceeding fast apace. As it should, as it should.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:15PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Hip Boots and Unhip Guys
- JimMaddox

June 13, 2008

Jack, I got the irony and the sarcasm in your post with the woman in hip boots. Men, and some women too, enjoy looking at attractive, scantily clad young ladies. This will go on until we destroy the planet once and for all. It's an ad for calendars, and for as long as I can remember, women have been posing for them, clad or not. Political correctness be damned once and a while. If it was a 12 year old, well then we'd have something to worry about.

Poetry, Theater, Money and life

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Sorry I haven't posted in a bit. I've been involved in two big projects. One was to put together a large proposal for pest control at a large NY University and the other was to finish the manuscript for my third book. I accomplished both but boy was I beat. Each of these projects carries the same fears and anxieties.

Did i do my best? Will the powers that be appreciate and accept what I have done? Will I be successful?

Jeez Louise!

But other than that things are wonderful. Saturday is the Coney Island Mermaid Parade, next Sunday the Gay Pride Parade in NYC, and then the week after the 4th of July in Wenonah followed by our goofy little reunion. I can't wait for any of these events. Well, actually I'm not psyched about Gay Pride but the boat ride that evening.

I hope I'll see many of you in Wenonah on the 4th and at the Adelphia on the 5th.

Later, Gators!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:23PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Poetry, Theater, Money and life](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

June 20, 2008

glad to hear another book is on the way, Jack.

i only wish I could be at the Gator reunion with you all. Next one. I promise. Have a beer for me and dance the Jerk. Oh, and if you could dedicate the song "FLOWER GIRL" to me, I would be much obliged....

claudia

The End of Days

[Tuesday, July 01, 2008](#)

Okay, you've probably noticed I haven't written shit. Because I haven't. Because it's summer. Because there are tons of bugs to kill. Because I'm a lazy fuck.

But I'm willing to move forward and in order to do so I'm skipping most of 6th grade. it was fun but dull and not a challenge. Yes, I discovered girls but not in real earnest till the summer and the next few years. So fuck it, it's gone.

But I think it's important to note that the end of 6th grade was the beginning of a rise in music that nobody was ready for. The Beatles, the Beach Boys, Motown, the Dave Clark Five, and on and on. Plus these bands all looked different than the rest of America. Long hair for one. Wild clothes for another. We weren't stupid. We caught on.

Mick and I spent most of 1964 trying to grow our hair. The clothes were out but we thought we could muster Beatle haircuts. We were doing modestly well when my family decided to go to California the summer before 7th grade. For reasons only an evil parent can explain my old man decided to give us both crewcuts the day before we left. We were going to the land of surfers and the Beach Boys with shaved heads! Disaster, Ruination! Humiliation! Total Humiliation. We were mega fucked.

Plus we were going to the land of cool with our parents and grandmother and aunt. Not cool. In a station wagon. "Little GTO" this was not. We're talking a chevy with a roll down window in the rear, no AC, and a UHaul storage thingie on the roof. Basically pre-teen hell.

So we bundled up all our shit at some god forsaken hour. My old man believed in leaving early so it was probably 6am and off we went. Me, Mick, Ted, Mary, Nonny, Aunt Gersh, my old man and my mom. Things could only go downhill from there. And they did...more to come!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:39PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: The End of Days

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

July 04, 2008

dude,
nice to read you tonight.
give my best to the Gators tomorrow. I was looking through pics tonight and I do wish I could be there.
love,
claudie

The 4th and all that

Saturday, July 05, 2008

Before we rejoin my Mom and Dad, my Grandmother, Aunt Gersh, Mary Lou, Ted, Me & Mick we take a brief side trip to Wenonah in the year 2008. It is fifty years since I moved here with my family and as with most years I made my way to Mantua Ave for the parade at 8:45. Well, actually, I got up at 5:12, showered, threw my shit in the trunk and drove to Wenonah at 5:50 to arrive at 7:50 for the parade at 8:45. It was raining a bit but I was smart and even though I was stupid and left my umbrella I went to CVS and bought one. So I spent a few minutes walking the streets of Wenonah, past my old house, my grandmother's house, the Fleming's house, the Condell's, the homes of Sharon Hoffman and Kathy Collinge, Robby Cook's house and then up to the park. I spent a few minutes in the park reading the names on the memorials to those who served their country.

Not so many in WWI but around 34 young men in WWII and then those in Korea and Vietnam. The WWII memorial is hard to look at. So many men on there were the fathers of my friends. There are stories that were common across America but up close it takes you back a bit.

Then I called Barb Conway and went to wait at her house for her husband Charlie (a fireman) to call and tell us whether the parade was on or not. On it was...so we were off. Off to the best 4th ever! Everyone was there Chris and Steph DeHart, Terry and Arlene Fleming, Dottie Chattin, Suzy Parker, my brother Ted, Ron Fay, you know, if I listed all their names that's all this post would be. The Bonsal Blues and the Hobo Band faced off in front of O'Connor's! I spent a good half hour talking shit with Victor Anderson about the Buddha and our wild acid trip of summer 1971.

Jim Maddox and I spent a great deal of time talking with Carey DeGeer about blogs and writing. Beer flowed. Fortunately there's a Porto-Potty at the O'Connor's!

Then on to the Firehouse. Bought my mug, got my three tickets, and there was the whole rest of the Wenonah universe!

Three wonderful things happened there. The first was that several people who I didn't know, or barely knew came up to me and said how much they liked the blog. Sweet. One wonderful woman even asked after Johanna! Very sweet!

The second was I found out I was on the History Channel! I'd thought I got left on the cutting room floor. Now my ego is the size of Chicago!

The third was I found out that Judy Kiernan had died. Now this might not seem wonderful news but in fact it was. Judy was a much picked on woman from my class in school. She was large, slow, and socially awkward. We smart guys loved making jokes about her. We

were assholes.

Anyway Judy's ambition in the yearbook was to be happy in the convent. I remember going home one college vacation and reading this while I mega high on acid. It was the saddest thing I ever read. So to get to the happy part...Judy died in the convent. One hopes she was happy.

We thought we were such smart kids. Fools. This woman who we all humiliated had more depth and courage than any of us. Tonight at the reunion I'll lift a glass in her memory...and in memory of all those who seem broken or lost. They redeem this world. So, enough mush! After the firehouse we repaired to the Telford for food and the party just kept growing...Jim Combs and his wife, Charlie from the firehouse, Suzy, her brother Billy, Terry, Arlene, Chris, Steph all of us talking and talking and talking. It augers well for tonight.

After the Telford I went to my niece's. She was having a keg party. No one, well one guy with his 20 yr old girlfriend, was even close to my age. They were heedless and happy and smoking and drinking and it was like being in Wenonah in 1971 all hopped up on our energy and power! Beautiful.

Then tired from standing I went back to Mick's and fell asleep at 7:30pm. Old man Wiler. Ha ha!

Tomorrow I'll give you the straight dope on our reunion. Oh, and for Terry and Suzy: Lundquist you chicken, get on a plane and get your ass out here!

Peace!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 12:09AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The 4th and all that](#)

- carey

July 10, 2008

7:30? You ARE an old man! ;) And where DID that tailgating car in the Pine Barrens disappear to anyway?

Reunion and all that

Sunday, July 06, 2008

Okay. It was ungodly cool. But it was so cool I need a couple days to think. In the meantime shoutouts to Ruthie Felch, Sheri Wakley, Sheila McGlauglin, Suzy, Linda Lewis, Joyce Murphy, Terri Sergonne, Joyce Hoefers, Karyl Carter, Bruce Zahn, Grant Karsner, Terry Fleming, Chris & Steph DeHart, Jim Combs, oh shit...I'm almost mentioning everyone. Oh, Jill Springer. Don Davis. Jeff Schultz. And more. And more. We all know it was weird and cool and disorienting but aren't we all better people now? Love you all! More to come! Manana!

Muchas Gracias for the best night!

Barb Conway... You rock babe! Dottie...You too! And Margie...Wow!

Life is but a dream.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:27PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Reunion and all that

- Bruce

July 15, 2008

Jack, this is my first response to a blog, so be kind while I write. Yes, we had a great time, too. I vaguely recall going to the 20th reunion, since I was so scared that everyone was all grown up, and I'd be so out of touch with the "adults" who were already working on becoming grandparents before I even had a child! OK, actually, I didn't know what to expect, but I didn't think anyone knew me, and that they'd all bounce me out for being a nerd. As it turns out, the nerds were all there too, and they weren't so bad as I thought. Of course, there were many non-nerds there as well, but they were just as kind. So kudos to the organizers of this awesome undertaking. For me, it was like brushing my teeth with really powerful toothpaste, and left a really clean taste that I'm sure to remember for a good while. Thanks, all (and don't forget to keep brushing)!

Re: Reunion and all that

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

July 16, 2008

jack,
know that I was thinking of all of you on that day.
looking forward to hearing more from you about the reunion and determined to come to the next one!
will there be a 39th?
gator love,
claudia

Re: Reunion and all that

- Dean

July 16, 2008

Oh yeah, the reunion. It was OK, Jack.

First Leg

Thursday, July 10, 2008

Okay, back to the trip, back to 1964, back, basically to hell on wheels. To refresh your memory we have me and Mick and Ted in the back with our heads buzzed, my midgety baby sister who's only three, my Grandmother Glading (Nonny), my Aunt Gersh, my Dad and my Mom jammed in a 1963 black Chevy station wagon with a rear seat driving west on the PA Tpk heading towards the promised land. LA. Or to be more precise my Aunt Gert's house in Ventura.

We have a U Haul storage rack on the roof to hold our shit and my Dad and my Aunt are the primary drivers. My mom is teaching us all stupid car games to keep us from killing each other and we're motoring along at 60-65 mph to heaven. Our first stop is scheduled for Columbus, OH or thereabouts. We not only achieve that, we break down in Columbus, OH. If I remember correctly we blew a head gasket which necessitated emergency repairs which somehow were completed in enough time for us to leave the next morning. But we were delayed.

For the old man this was a disaster. Delay was tantamount to being in hell. We spent the next night some place in Indiana. In a Holiday Inn. We spent all our nights in Holiday Inns. For a good reason. My old man figured out we knuckleheads would immediately go to the pool, my Grandmother and Aunt or some variation would take care of Mary Louise

and Dad and Mom could go to the bar for a cocktail to recover from eight hours of driving hell.

We were not good children on the road. We really weren't good children not on the road. As I've mentioned previously Mick and I fought like cats and dogs. Well, that only got worse in close quarters. Plus Ted had finally found someone he could pick on. Top that off with the old man and Gersh arguing about routes, speed, gas, etc and you have a toxic stew.

Tomorrow we end up in Missouri. Which we all liked. Then Amarillo. But, more to come. For tonight, sleep tight my little readers and dream about all the nightmare trips you and your families ventured on. Remember having to pee and needing ice cream and getting backhanded somehow from your Dad in the front seat. Life was wonderful and we were evil little monsters.

With no hair.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:03PM (-04:00)

The Western Edge

Wednesday, July 16, 2008

Join our merry band of travelers as we move west. First to Rolla Missouri. What a wonderful place! And what a glorious Holiday Inn. For the first time we are into the rhythms of the road. We disembark from our Chevy wagon and pile into the pool and thence to dinner. Candied apples! I'd never had candied apples but we had them at dinner. Everyone was nice and pleasant and all of us were nice and pleasant despite our crewcuts and the trip and the closeness.

Next day is Amarillo Texas. Not so nice but it's called Amarillo and now we're officially in a place not like the east coast. Dry plains and Mexicans and weird shit. We're going west on Route 66 and from here the trip gets good and bad and fun. My dad never stops but after Amarillo we drive through desert and visit the Petrified Forest and the Great Canyon and I almost faint in the desert it's so hot in the car. This is going to another planet. Then we wind up a mountain pass and we're in Flagstaff, AZ. Pheonix Arizona, don't forget Winona, Kingman, Denver, San Bernadino. It's Route motherfucking 66!! We've watched the TV show, we're entranced, we're hot as motherfucking hell. Remember, no AC.

Then after Flagstaff it's a long slow coast into Las Vegas. My grandmother and aunt love Las Vegas. So do me and Mick. We know what to do with slots from Terry Flemings basement. We're pumping nickels in the slot machine in our hotel and we're making real cash! Not like Terry's house where you had to give it all back. Then we're shut down. Apparently only grown ups are allowed to lose nickels. Bummer of bummers. But it's Las Vegas! Neon and heat and gambling and then the long ride into southern California and Ventura and my Aunt's house. Where I would turn into every dickhead teenager in the world. More on Friday.

Surfers, skateboards, Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, me watching TV and not having fun.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:27PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: The Western Edge

- JimMaddox

July 17, 2008

While you were on your trip from hell, we were heading to the World's fair in New York City. I believe we went twice that summer.

My sister was only 2 years old, and pretty much ignored by me.

I always had the crew cut look, perpetually un-cool.

Re: The Western Edge

- msscalz

July 21, 2008

Jack I love reading your words. They bring me home and send me on journies at the same time. I'm Loretta Ward's third of four...ok translated, means I'm a few years behind you, but still relish the happenings of Wenonah. I wish I could recall more of the train tressle and the woods behind the lake where the old pill factory was. Remember them?

If so, write!

Thanks for the fun,

Karen

Re: The Western Edge

- Anonymous

December 19, 2009

Hello !.

You may , perhaps curious to know how one can collect a huge starting capital .

There is no need to invest much at first. You may start to receive yields with as small sum of money as 20-100 dollars.

AimTrust is what you thought of all the time

AimTrust represents an offshore structure with advanced asset management technologies in production and delivery of pipes for oil and gas.

Its head office is in Panama with offices around the world.

Do you want to become really rich in short time?

That`s your choice That`s what you really need!

I feel good, I began to get income with the help of this company, and I invite you to do the same. If it gets down to select a proper partner utilizes your money in a right way - that`s AimTrust!.

I take now up to 2G every day, and what I started with was a funny sum of 500 bucks!

It`s easy to start , just click this link <http://ajinilam.arcadepages.com/kivexa.html>

and lucky you`re! Let`s take our chance together to get rid of nastiness of the life

Mutant Rats and Me

Friday, July 18, 2008

In case you didn't know it (and you probably didn't) I was part of a History Channel documentary on "Mutant Rats". Total bullshit but kind of fun to watch. When I sound like the most normal person on camera you know something's wrong. Check out the genuine New York denizens. It's a real gas! Here's the link to the YouTube postings: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lksnp81UHU>

Have fun!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:32PM (-04:00)

All the World's a Stage and I'm stuck on it

Sunday, July 27, 2008

Hi everyone! Just a note to let you know I'll be performing in the one act play Steven McCasland and I put together. Here are the particulars:

FUN BEING ME

by Jack Wiler, adapted for the stage by Steven McCasland

Jack works as an exterminator for ACME exterminating. But he goes home to write poetry in Jersey City in an old armchair and a window looking out over Palisades Avenue. On top of it all, Jack has AIDS. Through illness, he rediscovers himself and reclaims his life. Jack's beautiful book of poetry sings and made a perfect adaptation for the stage. The one-man play was workshopped in April and starred Jack Wiler in the autobiographical piece. For four nights only, Group Therapy revisits the revamped text, with new poetry by Jack. Each night, a different actor will step on stage and fill Jack's shoes. Gender and race do not matter in his tale. Join us for an exciting and emotional journey.

August 5-8, Pace University's W501 Blackbox Space, 8pm
1 Pace Plaza, New York, NY 10038

[Across from City Hall Park, Pace is located at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge and is accessible by the 2, 3, A, C, J, M, Z, 4 and 5 trains.]

All tickets at the door are \$10.

Reservations are STRONGLY encouraged as space is limited.

The performance schedule is as follows:

August 5, 8pm: Jack Wiler

August 6, 8pm: Martin Cohen

August 7, 8pm: Steven McCasland (Adaptor/Director)

August 8, 8pm: Kerrie Bond

Directed by Steven McCasland

Lighting and set designs by Steven McCasland

To reserve your ticket, simply respond to this e-mail: steven.mccasland@gmail.com or call (631)-374-7886.

We look forward to seeing you at the theater and wish you a happy, healthy summer!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:52PM (-04:00)

Play, Robert Frost, et al

Wednesday, July 30, 2008

Hi everyone!

Please if you're planning on seeing the play send Steven a note. His email is steven.mccasland@gmail.com. I'm off to Franconia, NH for the Frost Place Festival of Poetry. This means I'm incommunicado for a few days. I'll finish my tales of California upon my return. In the meantime...see you in the funny papers!

Jack

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:10AM (-04:00)

Ventura on my Mind

Saturday, August 02, 2008

Well, we arrived in Ventura, safe & sound. But in my case, angry. Angry at my haircut, angry at my parents, angry, pretty much, at the universe.

My aunt lived in a new development that butted up to lemon groves. She was happy, married, with new hip California friends. Instead of calling her Gert for Gertrude they called her Gigi.

She also had way better tv stations than us and this was to prove my escape. Instead of visiting stupid mission churches I'd stay home and watch movies. No messy human interaction, no one to see my crewcut, my uncool self.

Of course, my standards dropped when it came to Disneyland or Knott's Berry Farm, but all rules are made to be broken. Even mine.

At Disneyland Ted got a Derby hat which made him adorably, insufferably cute. At a surfing tournament he was besieged by young (girl) reporters. My blood boiled.

We did find that skateboarding was much easier here than in Wenonah. No gravel & macadam streets, just smooth asphalt for blocks & no one outside in the day.

Alas our little tour had to end and back we drove to Wenonah in murky, hot midsummer. The return trip uneventful, lost, no things to recall.

It was time to begin the long slide into the hell of Gateway Regional HS.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:23PM (-04:00)

Frost Place

Sunday, August 03, 2008

I've just returned from Franconia, NH and the Frost Place. I spent three wonderful days talking about poetry, arguing about poetry, and yelling about poetry. It was marvelous. I drove up with Cat Doty and we yakked for hours. I don't think I stopped yakking till I got home to Johanna.

If you're a poet and you value words then you should go to the Frost Place at least once for their Festival of Poetry. It's a gas. Plus you get to hang out at Robert Frost's house and listen for ghosts.

Now it's back to killing bugs and talking to rich people about mice. Life is hell. If any of you have the time or inclination I'd love to see you at one of the performances of my one

man play...in this case only one night is me. The rest is young people pretending to be me. And doing it well.

Life can be scary but life is never dull.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:06PM (-04:00)

Walking the Boards

Wednesday, August 06, 2008

So, in theory I'm done for awhile with this acting thing. With this play. With my past. What does that mean exactly? I don't know. I know that each time I do it I'm seduced by the freedoms of memorization. I know that each time I do it I sense the power of the things I said another way and enjoy the saying of those things. People after the last performance praised the 'authenticity of my performance'. What is that?

As a poet I know what I've left out. Here are some things...my nurse Maria, the man who brought my meals, Ron, the woman from visiting nurses, Caroline. What I've left out is their deep commitment to my return to health. No. To my acknowledgement of illness and the ways we return to health. I leave them out all the time. As though they were never there. I slight my brothers and my father and my mother and my sister and my friends. It's always about me and my indomitable spirit. Hah.

It was my selfishness that impeded my return to the world and it was their unselfish love that allowed my return. I acknowledge my fears and weaknesses but not the fears and weaknesses of my friends and family and nurses and doctors.

Let me say this. It is easy to get up in front of people and say you almost died. It is much harder to hold that person up. And hold me up they did. Cranky and angry and sad and difficult as I was they comforted me and gave me courage and strength.

I think this is a way of looking at your life. We think we blunder through the world alone. We don't. The whole time there is a web of kindness that keeps us whole.

So what.

So you should sing their praises and worship their weaknesses and strengths and give them the knowledge they saved you. As they will save others. As you must save others. As we all do, almost by accident everyday.

God Bless those who saved me. God Bless those who never knew.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 09:41PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Walking the Boards](#)

- Anonymous

January 01, 2010

Sie sind nicht recht. Geben Sie wir werden es besprechen. Schreiben Sie mir in PM.
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Sweet days of summer

Saturday, August 09, 2008

Okay, they're not always sweet. But this summer, the summer of 1964, the summer before we entered Gateway Regional High School was my last blissful summer. Summer in Wenonah was always rich. But also filled with dread and the sure knowledge school was coming. Wenonah summers are hot and humid. Sometimes it feels like you're walking around in a swimming pool with trees in it. We returned from California ready for the rest of the summer and like all rest of the summers it stretched wide before us.

We could go to the pool, or ride our bikes, or play guns, or kick the can, or the Gun Game, but either way there were a million things to do. And we did them but by mid-August time had shifted into a weird sort of warp. On the one hand it was rushing forward with a terrible pace bringing the fall and school with it. On the other hand it had slowed to a near crawl. We'd exhausted all the fun in the world and nothing was left except Risk and Monopoly.

Oh, sure, we got to vote on the name of the new Gateway athletic teams. The mascot. Woodbury was "The Thundering Herd", Deptford was the "Spartans", West Deptford the "Eagles" and we became for reasons I've never, ever understood, the "Gators". For some insane reason alliteration triumphed over location, desire, and anything remotely related to the idea of a school mascot. "Hoyas" makes more sense than "Gators" (a little snide nudge at Lundquist there). There are no alligators in South Jersey. Maybe the occasional rattler or water moccasin, or garter snake. some toads and frogs. Box turtles. Catfish and sunnys and carp. But alligators? You'd have to go to South Carolina to just see one. We were bummed. What about the Jersey Devil, or the Gladiators?

Nope.

"The Gateway Gators" with some natty little cartoon of a gator for us to stare at blankly.

After that it was just a waiting game.

A waiting game spent on my porch with Mick and Sam Stewart and Chris DeHart and Terry Fleming and Gary Condell. A waiting game spent conquering the world or else taking over the now decrepit Atlantic City. Sure, we fucked with the games. We combined two, three Risk games to create huge amounts of available armies. We also used rules from Chris' original Risk which decreed each throw of the dice killed but one army. This insured epic, lengthy, battles.

We did the same with Monopoly. Bags of money were everywhere, like in the Hague administration in Jersey City. Hotels sat two and three high on a property. We played on, we played on.

My brother Mick, for some stupid reason, always tried to take Asia. Gary Condell was in love with America. Me, I preferred to take Australia and stack up box after box of armies waiting for armageddon. And it would come, it would come. Then, when I'd exhausted my opponents armies I'd sweep out across the board and ruin everyone's dreams. We'd begin again. Broken and bruised but ready to battle for days, weeks, even if that's what it took.

And it did. The games sat on the porch day after day waiting for us to hunker down, pick up the dice, and launch our evil little dreams.

Risk is a game where everyone eventually ends up hating everyone else. No other game elicits the deep level of personal hate that this game does. It was like taking some evil drug everyday for weeks.

Years later I taught a poetry group consisting of teachers. One of the teachers wrote a poem about a game of Risk between herself, her new boyfriend, and a newlywed couple. At the end of the game the wife is sobbing in another room, her boyfriend storms out to buy cigarettes and she and the husband share a brief sexual interlude. The last line was "I was Queen of the World". Indeed.

We battled and schemed and waited. Waited for the doors to open in our brand new school. Waited to meet the dozens of strangers from the four sending districts. Waited for the unknown. It would come. It would come. Till then my armies are massed in Indonesia for a final battle against Gary Condell and the Asian hordes.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:34PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Sweet days of summer](#)

- JimMaddox

August 10, 2008

Long days in August in South Jersey.

Hot, humid sweltering days. My Risk was an old one, the pieces made of wood. Over in Woodbury Heights We battled as you did, for days at a time. We were Napoleon and Attila and Hitler and all the rest, and we coveted the world as we rolled the dice. Steve Kay and I and others played war outside the Episcopal Church where his father was the priest. We built the North African Desert in his basement and fought World War II with Airfix soldiers and HO gauge tanks. Gateway regional was built right behind my house, and I'd wonder what my life would be like now that I was a "Gator."

"Gator?" How lame!

[Re: Sweet days of summer](#)

- BobThomas

August 11, 2008

I know that you will think that I am being picky but...

1. National Park
2. Wenonah
3. Westville
4. Woodbury Heights

5. "The Swamp that spawned the gator?"

Bluebird Buses and Me

Saturday, August 23, 2008

The crisp smell in the air. The morning a little darker. The trip to Pitman to pick out our school clothes. The sure and perfect signs we were going to school. And we were. To Gateway Regional High School. Woodbury High School was too small to accommodate the children of the baby boom and thus was born GRHS. Woodbury Heights, National Park, Westville, and Wenonah all sent their children to GRHS. If memory served the first classes were just 7th and 8th graders. We would be the first classes to go elsewhere; our parents had all gone to Woodbury HS but we would be part of the new generation. We were a little social experiment.

For the little knuckleheads from Wenonah it was to be our first bus ride to school. Our first interactions with the larger world. Our first time out of the little world we grew up in. We

got our class assignments, our instructions on how to get on the bus and then on the first Tuesday after Labor Day we got on the bus. A Bluebird yellow school bus.

We boarded our bus at the corner of Jefferson and Mantua Avenue. In the beginning my friends came to our house first and then on to the bus. That would end soon. The bus took us up Mantua, made a left on Glassboro Rd and then a right through Deptford, past the pig farms, till at last we reached our mostly completed school. I say mostly because the auditorium, the auto shop, and the gym were not yet complete. They would be soon but we had to go to school so fuck it.

We ate in the cafeteria. Thirty five cents bought you a lunch and a milk. A dime bought an ice cream sandwich. There was no soda or salad or ice tea. Just lunch and milk.

It was all very exciting. I was assigned to class 7C. I was to stay in that class for most of my HS life. I can remember most of my fellow classmates by alphabetical order because I heard it time and time again. My memory begins at the L's. Lundquist, Maddox, Parker, Percival, Springer, Stens, Troccoli, Wernig, Williams, Wiler, Zahn. I'm sure I've fucked it up and someone out there will correct me. As they should. Lora Banks, John Camp, and all the others before Gary Lundquist are lost to the fog of memory. But we were all joined together in this great experiment. Separated by some weird system based on intelligence and personality that was established by tests we didn't even realize we were taking. Little lab rats in madras shirts and khaki pants sitting in neat little rows waiting to learn the new facts of life. And we would. And we would.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:22AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Bluebird Buses and Me](#)

- JimMaddox

August 23, 2008

I believe there was a small class of ninth graders as well. We were the charter class, though. The first group to go all the way through. Your buses zoomed by me as I walked down Egg Harbor Road, not knowing what to expect.

Home room, lockers and classes all over the building, separated from most of our classmates from home.

Gary Lundquist would be my locker buddy from day one, and I knew he would be a guy I would come to like. I heard this kid named John Wiler talking about Marvel comics, so I figured things weren't all that bad, I could find people to connect with. Some other names to remember: Albright, Fleming, Fell, Hoefers, Jenkins, Karsner and Leeds.

The New Class Struggle

[Monday, August 25, 2008](#)

Before I continue my story I should correct a few minor issues that my beloved readers noted. First, that first year GRHS was only a Junior HS and the sending districts sent 7, 8, & 9 graders. After their 9th grade year was up they moved onto Woodbury HS. Second, apparently, in Wenonah at least, you could choose either Woodbury or Pitman HS. Bob Thomas reports that in the case of one of his neighbors two siblings elected to go to different high schools.

But to get back to the matter at hand. We were to be divided in classes in our new found school As I mentioned I was in 7C. Naturally that means there was a 7A, 7B, 7D...and on

to 7F. Similarly in 8th grade. We were also nominally assigned to homerooms based on our last names. The classes were divided based on tests we'd been given over the years, teacher evaluations, etc. 7C and 7E were college prep. The others...maybe not. Initially we were only vaguely aware of this structure but over the years it would become more and more apparent. This would have positive and negative consequences but mostly it meant smart kids and geeks hung with smart kids and geeks and greasers hung with greasers and jocks with jocks. The only time we all got mixed together was in the halls, the cafeteria, the auditorium, and gym class. This would have dire consequences for me in particular.

But more than my personal difficulties with the various groups of young men and women who had suddenly become my classmates there was the fracturing of long standing friendships from our old schools. Kids who once were my dearest friends found other, cooler, friends. Kids I barely paid attention to became my new friends. The small, close knit world of Wenonah Elementary was shattered. If I was smarter or more worldly or braver this would have been a time to reinvent myself. Instead, inside I was still Wacky Jiler, the Rough Tough Creampuff, and I was certain everyone in this new school knew it as well as my friends knew it. I was scrawny with a stupid haircut and clothes from G. Wayne Post's or Sears. I was fucked. And like every other knuckleheaded teenager I had no idea everyone else felt the same way. Of course, even if I did I wouldn't have the balls to use it in any intelligent, thoughtful way. Self knowledge for teenagers is not always a good thing. That's why football heroes act like arrogant assholes. Or why geeky nerds trudge the halls with their heads down hoping no one notices. It's dangerous to be noticed sometimes.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:50PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The New Class Struggle](#)

- JimMaddox

August 25, 2008

It seemed to me that all my friends from Woodbury Heights save one, had forgotten me. Steve Kay and I remained close, safe in our world of toy soldiers and Avalon Hill war games. We kept our heads down as much as possible, and I was double cursed, being both naive geek and perpetually crew cut. It was up to me to find new friends from the other towns.

[Re: The New Class Struggle](#)

- Bob

August 26, 2008

Gateway was certainly a world apart from Wenonah Elementary. One other place you got to mix with the rest of Wenonah was on the bus to and from Gateway. If you somehow took a late bus you might even ride with some kids who had gotten detention, plus the bus would take you all around to all the stops in town.

[Re: The New Class Struggle](#)

- CherylMaddoxSmithGRHSCla

August 26, 2008

That's pretty cool to find out about the meanings of the classes. I was in 7C also and thought it was just how smart you were. I was in the business courses and no where

near college prep. Maybe it changed after the years.

Still the same classifications though within the groups.....

Re: The New Class Struggle

- PaulBirkby

November 09, 2008

For the class of 1972, our experience also began in the alphabet 7th grade, but the powers that be were less subtle with our class - 7A, my section, were the really smart kids (which only added to my sense of imposterhood) like Dale Lundquist, Mark Karsner, Harry Shoemaker. 7B were the next smartest kids, etc.

The World of Gateway

Friday, September 05, 2008

This was a new junior high school. In fact, it wasn't even finished. The gym wasn't quite done, the auditorium a work in progress, everything was new and half done and odd. But we were all there. Disgorged from our buses and thrown together. Several hundred students from four districts with little in common. Westville and National Park were largely working class, factory towns. Wenonah and Woodbury Heights more middle class. There were points where we all intersected and points where we veered widely apart. I've been thinking about this first year for a while now. In part because it was a huge leap in my life and in part because I had to confront things I'd never had to confront before. No one knew me here. No one knew many many people. New friendships would be formed and old ones changed. But for me the hardest part of seventh grade was going to my locker. Each day when I went to my locker a kid who I will leave nameless would confront me and assault me. We're talking punches and insults and general bullying. In Wenonah I'd feel comfortable dealing with this outside of the school but here there was no outside of the school. I was taught not to behave badly in school and fighting would be definitely a bad thing. I took my licks. I took punches to the stomach and arms and insults every day at the beginning and every day at the end. It was a bad, bad experience. One of the boys who bullied me was in my gym class. Our gym class instructor was a man named Chuck Williamson. Mr. Williamson. Old school. Not a man prone to sympathy. Towards the end of the year we were playing softball at one of the newly completed ball fields and I was playing first base. The boy who bullied me stole second and I threw the ball hard to second. It drilled him dead center in the back. He turned and he and his lackey chased me for a good ten minutes before Mr. Williamson put a stop to it. Ten minutes. It didn't help my self esteem and it didn't make me a man. It made me a scared little rabbit running from a kid who'd flunked two grades and had two feet and fifty pounds on me. This was not fun. The other part that was not fun was losing my friends. This is harder. We continued to engage in play after school in Wenonah but in school they had new friends, cooler friends. The gap grew larger and larger. It would close in later years but it felt weird and was painful. I came to understand that growing up wasn't just about knowing new things but about losing old things. I've never been good at that and it always hurt. The funny part is that all of us felt this way. Even the kids that bullied us. We were all in the same strange boat. Unmoored from our safe little towns. Our rituals. Our games. We invented new ones. Some nasty, some joyful, some stupid. But nonetheless we were on our own in this creation. There was no one there to tell us how it would be. No rules. No guides. Just knuckleheads set loose. Bullies and bullied. Cool and uncool. Stupid and

smart. Ugly and beautiful. And at the end of the day some Boy Scout furling the flag. Uncoolest of the uncool. A volunteer to stupidity. Next post: the geography of Gateway
Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:37PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The World of Gateway](#)

- JimMaddox

September 06, 2008

Our safe comfortable world was shattered, and we weren't prepared for it. I was a rat in a maze, avoiding those people were intimidating, trying my best to seek out someone who may have the same interests.

Gym class was a stone nightmare, with Mr. Williamson conducting close order military drill, treating us like marines in boot camp. In gym class you could tell who the bullies were, the wise guys and the rest of us just hoping to survive.

My grades didn't suffer, but my insecurities grew.

[Re: The World of Gateway](#)

- Anonymous

November 04, 2009

miley cyrus nude miley cyrus nude miley cyrus nude

Fall and Gateway Regional

Saturday, September 20, 2008

Perhaps I should tell you more about my new school. Not the bickering and backbiting and meanderings of seventh graders but what my school looked like. Gateway was brand new. Brand motherfucking new. We had new lockers, new hallways, new teachers, new desks, and new classes. Instead of Science we had Earth Science. Instead of History we had Social Studies. Instead of Reading or Language Arts we had English. And we had to learn a new language. You got to pick your language. I picked French. We also had new desks. The desks in Wenonah Elementary were old school. Wooden desks that were separate from the chairs. Desks that opened up and you put your books in them. Your books sat there all year unless you took them home for homework cuz you had the same seat all year long. Gateway had desks attached to chairs. The desks in Wenonah had been carved up and inked by years and years of students. Gateway and its desks were clean and free of taint. Gateway was laid out like a grid. A long rectangle with a center entrance. At one end was the Auditorium and flanking that Wood Shop and Home Economics. At the other end the Cafeteria. Just before the Cafeteria was the Gym. The Gym had a huge dividing wall that could be opened for athletic events but was closed during gym classes because boys and girls did not exercise together except on rare occasions. God knows where that might lead. This was an era where sports were the province of boys. The important sports were all boys; boys football, hardball, basketball, wrestling and track. Girls could do field hockey, girls basketball (note the "girls" in girls basketball), and softball. They might have had track but I doubt it. The school had two floors and if I recall was divided in quadrants by class. Seventh graders were on the 2nd floor. I have no idea where everyone else was. Our principal was Charles Korkuch and our superintendent was John Lelko. God only knows what a superintendent did then. We certainly had no clue. There were 32 teachers on the faculty. I spent few hours today

looking at my yearbook trying to figure out who my teachers were that first year. Couldn't do it cuz they blurred together. Perhaps one of you can help. Over the next years I had nearly all of them for one class or another. When I returned in my thirties for a poetry in the schools gig most of them were still there. I don't know if that is sad or beautiful. Or both. To be honest going through the yearbook was a trial. We all look like creatures from another century. And not the 20th. Children taking Personal Typing. Mechanical Drawing. The Dance Band! Irma Fean our school nurse. Object of ridicule for most of my later years in school. When basketball players feigned illness for a cheap time out we'd all shout: "Irma!, Irma!" The pictures of the children are hideous. Giant beehives, huge ears poking out from the sides of heads, all the boys in sport coats, all the girls with head bands. We all look earnest and young and stupid. I think we were. We were all jammed together in this school. Headed for the future and with no clue that everything we knew, everything our parents knew, would be turned on its head in 7 years. Jesus the world is strange. Stranger still that at our reunion this summer most of the tiny photos from my yearbook in 1965 turned out to be my classmates in 1970. This was a world where no one left. Next up on the blog...book reports! Scholastic achievement! Touch football with Jane Shiflet in the afternoon. Sex rears its ugly head and brings with it dances and fashion. Ugliness abounds.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:45PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Fall and Gateway Regional

- JimMaddox

September 20, 2008

Jack, some of our Seventh Grade teachers were: Mrs. Oglesby-Language Arts and Social Studies, Mrs. Conaway-Reading, R. Emerson-Mathematics, F. Larkin-Science, Mr. Parrish-Mechanical Drawing, B.Patton for Art and V. Thompson for Music. Last but certainly not least, Madman Williamson for Gym.

I was out sick in the Spring for over a week, and I think it was you who brought me my Mechanical Drawing assignments. The cafeteria! Oh, the horror!

Re: Fall and Gateway Regional

- JimMaddox

September 21, 2008

A mystery food moment: Turkey on a stick-what was that all about?

Re: Fall and Gateway Regional

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

September 21, 2008

so, jack, since I didn' t come til ninth grade, when did Mr. Bartelson come on as Principal? I think we called him Mr. Noseltrab...??is that right, or did all the drugs do a number on me here? :) agreeing with Jim on the cafeteria... those horrid tables... claudia

Autumn in Wenonah

Sunday, October 05, 2008

So high school wasn't that much fun. So I was alienated from my long time friends. So I rode around on my bike feeling sorry for myself and read comics and books and in general acted like a moping teenage boy. But it was fall in Wenonah. A wonderful time of year. And this year, just to spice things up, we began daily touch football games in the yard behind Jane Shiflet's house. Co-ed touch football. With some piling on and inappropriate laying on of hands. Things were stirring in my body. The hormonal soup was on the stove and coming up to boiling. After an afternoon of boys and girls ostensibly playing sports I'd head home for dinner and then sit down with my family to watch tv. On a black and white tv. This was the year of The Man From U.N.C.L.E. and Bewitched. Gilligan's Island, Shindig, and Hullabaloo. The next day in school we'd all talk about the shows and the bands. Music. We were discovering music. Paul Revere and the Raiders. the Dave Clark Five. Motown! I'd read under my covers with a flashlight for awhile then off to sleep. Then back to Gatorland and my trials. But it being fall there was also Halloween. Mischief Night. Mick and I would guard our house from eggers and keep kids from soaping our dad's car's windows. We'd lay in the bushes with a garden hose and soak anyone who came near. One year Dave Porter threw an egg at a house and blinded an old lady in one eye. My father was on the Juvenile Committee and at night he told us what had happened and how terrible it was and why we should never throw eggs on Mischief Night. We were suitably impressed and worried. But the next night we'd don our costumes and set out with our trusty bags for goodies. Terry, Mick, Gary Condell, and I would walk from house to house, covering the entire half of town up to West St. Back then the adults would take the time to guess your name and we took great pleasure in fooling them. What a strange thing that was, it seems almost like a Booth Tarkington tale. The whole town walking out at night. A town of wandering children with bags of candy. We should probably have been scared. But we weren't. The only thing that brought us in was our parents calling our names, time for bed, come home, come home. And home we went to sleep and dreams. Dreams of towns filled with wandering children dressed as monsters and ghouls, wandering in search of candy.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:07AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Autumn in Wenonah](#)

- JimMaddox

October 05, 2008

In Woodbury Heights I did the hiding with the hose thing as well. Mischief Night was out for me; my parents would not allow it.

Fall was the smell of burning leaves, crisp evening air and hide and seek on Sunday evenings. The Munsters and The Addams Family and The Outer Limits on TV, and raging hormones wreaking havoc with my mind and body, and I could see Gateway High from my bedroom window.

[Re: Autumn in Wenonah](#)

- Bob

October 05, 2008

Didn't seem like there was anything to be afraid of in those days - weren't the children the reason for the existence of the town? At times - that's what it seemed like.

But then you think back to the old old books in the school library and the lack of grass on the school playground and you can begin to wonder.

How many towns were the right size that most parents would know a lot of the children? Mothers being able to stay at home and see all the children walking to and from school helped a lot.

The walking to school and home for lunch and back helped with a lot of things. All those hours out of your house in full view of the town. All Wenonah was a stage and we were the players.

Re: Autumn in Wenonah

- mscalz

October 07, 2008

Wenonah was indeed the small town where everybody knew your name...and your mother's name and her mother's name!!! Ironically, on Halloween, my mom Loretta, would make homemade Toll House cookies. So when we were through tramping through town, we'd be certain to come home to a house smelling of REAL chocolate and warm with love. The TV would be showing the Wizzard of Oz. Of course we had a black and white tube, so the magic of transporting from the farm to Oz was lost on us Wards. Trick Or Treat!

Re: Autumn in Wenonah

- Anonymous

October 23, 2008

house to house, run home, dump the bag and go out for more. The scariest house to visit had to be Synnott's- if you had the guts as a youngster to enter the iron gates and trek down his driveway, had to reach up to grab the "hand" door knocker. Mr.Synnott didn't give out candy he handed me 5 pennies from his gloved hand. I thanked him and ran like hell!

Margie's Luncheonette

Thursday, October 09, 2008

Let's talk a bit more about Margie's Luncheonette. Especially now that I'm in seventh grade and more and more of my friends spend time there. The counter is at the front and is usually full in the morning with working men having coffee and a bite or not. In the afternoon the booths were full of older elementary students and then finally after the buses from Gateway arrived; the high school students. Margie's was both a town meeting place and a place to learn to be cool. What to drink, what to eat, how to dress, how to talk, what music to hear, what music not to hear. You were allowed to go there or you weren't by your parents. A lunch at Margie's was a treat. I remember my grandmother Glading asking where Margie was and getting a long convoluted answer. Where she was, was not there. The waitresses were older and smoked cigarettes and cracked wise. The counter man was brusque with us kids but that shouldn't be surprising. We were fools and who gives a fuck about little kids. Margie's was where we bought models for ourselves and for birthday gifts. Margie's was where we bought comics. Margie's was where we got candy and school supplies and it's the only place in the world where I ever shoplifted. Yes, it's true. In seventh grade for about two months I stole erasers and

pencils from Margie's. Like I needed or wanted them. We ate cheesesteaks and hamburgers and drank shakes and cokes and dreamed of being old. Had we had a brain and looked at the men at the counter we might have thought twice about that but we were young and stupid and this was the center of Wenonah. Which made it the center of the universe. Almost.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 08:15PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Margie's Luncheonette](#)

- carey

October 11, 2008

And we also drank delicious dishwaters at Margie's and added to the historic rainbow-colored layers of gum under the booth tables. And if we had a little extra money in our pockets--what, maybe a nickel or a dime--we'd treat ourselves to a buttered roll in one of the secret back booths.

[Re: Margie's Luncheonette](#)

- Anonymous

October 23, 2008

and a nickel would buy an endless stream of paper dots from the candy counter....

[Re: Margie's Luncheonette](#)

- PamCassidy

October 31, 2008

I drank Chocolate cokes at Margies. And that's where I learned to smoke. Liberated women that I was, I fell in love with the brand "Eve", featuring a longer, slender cigarette imprinted with a naked women. So much for womens rights!

[Re: Margie's Luncheonette](#)

- Anonymous

March 31, 2009

Great memories. My grandmother would walk from the school everyday to have lunch there. I had completely forgotten about the gum under the tables at the booths. Great grilled cheese sandwiches.

Keith Kaufman

The 1964 Phillies (a cautionary tale)

Tuesday, October 28, 2008

I'm going to break from my goals tonight because of the prodding of Bob Thomas. I jetted past the summer of 1964 without acknowledging the greatest Philadelphia Phillies collapse of all time. The Phillies were the only game in town by the '60's. Of course before the Phillies they had shared the city with the Athletics. For decades Connie Mack and the Athletics were the closest thing to baseball glory folks from Philly and the tri state area could brag about. The Phillies were wretched. They even played their games in the shadow of Connie Mack as their stadium was named for the old gentleman.

Connie Mack Stadium was in a ruined part of town. When we went to games my dad would dip into his pocket for a quarter for a neighborhood kid to "watch" our car. Basically extortion money.

The stadium itself was quintessential old school baseball. Dirty, decaying and cool. You were right in the game and the decrepitude of the interior only amplified the beauty of

emerging from the runways into the light of day or the glare of the stadium lights. The world was green, white, and brown and the giants of our youth were right there in front of us.

Sadly none of them were on the Philadelphia Phillies. It is a sad measure of their lack of skill that most of us picked other teams to root for during the season. Terry revered the Yankees, my team was my Dad's team, the Reds, Mick had his beloved Pirates and on and on. Christ Kenny Fell preferred the hapless Mets to the Phillies.

But to continue...in the summer of 1964 the Phillies were in first place for 73 consecutive days. They had a huge lead coming into the final days of the season. This was before wild cards and extra divisions and shit so they were going to the World Series if they could just hold on for a few more games.

They couldn't. Along with the collapse of the Mets in 2007 there has never been a more ignominious end to a baseball season. Of course Phillie fans knew it would happen. Most loser towns (Chicago for one) accept this as a matter of course. No way their hopes will not be dashed and dashed they were.

My favorite part of this entire train wreck was watching Sally Star on tv coming apart day by day as the Phillies committed more and more bonehead blunders. By the time they'd blown the whole thing it looked as though she was going to have to spend a few weeks in the loony bin.

It wasn't till I was long out of Wenonah that the Phillies found baseball glory and tonight they're knocking on the door. Let's hope the ghosts of '64 aren't walking down from old Connie Mack to help them along.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:04PM (-04:00)

Miracle in South Philly

Friday, October 31, 2008

The Phillies won! The curse is over! My brother Ted has not thrown himself in front of a train! Now if the Eagles can keep it together...

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:32AM (-04:00)

HO Racing

Sunday, November 02, 2008

I feel foolish talking about this shit now. Our country is at a crossroads, the world is in turmoil, the dogs of war are barking everywhere. But in 1964 we became Aurora HO race car enthusiasts. We got our Aurora kits and laid out our layouts and began to race our little cars on little tracks in our basements. At the time there was a nationwide craze for 32nd scale tracks. There were racing tracks built all over the nation for people to bring their cars and race them against each other. Not us. We bought the smaller size. Speed was the gig but speed on a small, small scale. Nonetheless the ability to make your car faster became a dominant impulse. We bought magazines and parts to soup up our cars. We were mini Ed Roths. We bought slicks for the rear tires and learned how to make our cars super fast. We envied our friends layouts. As usual Terry had the coolest layout in the land. Trees and shit and the fastest car. All laid out on an 11' piece of plywood. Mine

was small and in my basement and no one came to try out their cars. We bought containers to carry our cars and we bought extra parts and we were mini mechanics. We sat like demented enthusiasts for hours at a time making little plastic cars race around and around and around. Not far from playing video games and killing aliens hours after hour after hour. I remember one night in mid winter walking home from Terry's with my little beige plastic box and taking a bad spill on the ice and all my precious cars spilled out into the street. I cried. I raged. I was filled with humiliation, not just for the fall and the loss but because my cars never were as good as Terry's. I was incompetent. I was just a chump. A fool. When I got sick and fell outside my home one frigid January night I was made acutely aware of the parallels. When I got home that night in the early sixties I told no one of my humiliation. I went upstairs and lay in my bed and felt smaller than I'd ever felt in my life. I wanted more than anything to be able to make my cars race like the wind. To have a cool track. To have people admire me and my passion. Instead I spent that night picking up little electronic parts and rubber tires and tiny pieces of plastic under a cold January moon. The things we care about seem so foolish. I could name dozens now equally stupid and I'm a grown man. Jesus.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:52PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: HO Racing](#)

- JimMaddox

November 03, 2008

My brother and I had the Pike's Peak HO set out of the Sears catalog. It looked cool, but the cars always flew off the track going up and coming down unless you went really slow, but who wanted to go slow?

There was a 1/32nd scale race track in the old Pioneer Store building at the corner of Elm Ave. and Glassboro Road in Woodbury Heights, but the racing craze didn't last too long, and before you knew it, it was gone.

Election 2008

Monday, November 03, 2008

Well, it's crunch time. Time to put up or shut up. Vote. If you don't you own what comes next. Make a statement. Obviously I'd prefer Barack Obama. But vote for someone. Don't sit home and say it doesn't matter it's just same old, same old. It's not. We have an extraordinary event happening right in front of us. A black man who could be elected President. A woman who could be Vice President. In our lifetime! Who would have thought. A black man couldn't have gotten elected dog catcher when I was young and women didn't leave the home. What an astounding moment in history. Sure racists might give the office to McCain or Obama might turn out to be Jimmy Carter without a cardigan. Any number of things could happen. But one thing is sure...we're rid of Dick Cheney and Karl Rove and their merry band of thieves. Fuck em. I've been waiting eight years for this day to come. Let them slink out of town with their tails between their legs. I'll be at the Christa McAuliffe School casting my vote at 6:15. I'll be voting for my rights, for peace, and to preserve this great land. If people in Iraq can give a fuck about voting so can we. Vote. ps: Jeez was this a NY Times editorial or what? I don't think it's a good idea to have that knucklehead Sarah Palin a heartbeat from the Presidency...especially when the

President would be very, very old. Not a good plan. If she gets in we're more fucked than we were with bushcheneyrove. Vote for Barack Obama.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:28PM (-05:00)

President Elect Barack Obama

Wednesday, November 05, 2008

Wow! What a wonderful night! What a great country! God Bless America!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:21AM (-05:00)

My Name is Jimmy Carl Black and I'm the Indian of the Group

Friday, November 07, 2008

I'm going to skip ahead a bit to senior year. Only because tonight I read that Jimmy Carl Black of the Mothers of Invention had passed away at the age of 70. The Mothers of Invention were one of the finest bands of the sixties. Weird, truly experimental, and, well, fun. They were funny and inventive and crazy. I loved them the first time I heard them and I wasn't even on dope. Besides Frank Zappa, the leader of the group, Jimmy Carl Black and Ian Underwood were my favorites. Jimmy because of the quote that opens this post and Ian Underwood because of one of the finest sax solos of all time on Uncle Meat with Ian Underwood whips it out. God, I loved that band. Because brown shoes don't make it and we could always make the water turn black. Impish, insane, fun, musically complex. The best sixties rock band ever. Better than the Stones or the Beatles because they didn't give a fuck about the music industry. In fact they were totally anti establishment even as they made fun of hippies and doo wop and everything under the sun. In some ways what is even more interesting about Jimmy Carl Black is not his work with Francis Vincent Zappa but his life. His obit says that after the Mothers disbanded and his band failed he went to work painting houses with Arthur Brown. Arthur Brown of "Fire"! What a bizarre house painting company that must have been. After that he worked in a donut shop. One of my musical idols working in a donut shop while I was driving a truck after college. If you had told me senior year in HS that in the late 70's me and Jimmy Carl would be on the same economic strata I'd have said you were nuts. My friends from Rutgers and I went to see the Mothers at a Halloween show at the Capitol Theater in Passaic. It was a raucous joy from beginning to end. Within two years they were no more and Jimmy Carl was painting houses in West Texas.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:28PM (-05:00)

Street Football

Sunday, November 09, 2008

I guess every kid in the US of A has played street football or some variant of it. We certainly played our share of games. A day like today would have been perfect. Mild weather, the trees nearly stripped of their leaves, nothing much to do on a Sunday afternoon. We played on S. Lincoln Ave and mostly in front of my house. The game was

a passing game. Take ten steps down the sideline and cut across, Mick, you go long, then the snap and the count 1 Mississippi, 2 Mississippi, 3Mississippi, 4 Mississippi, 5 Miss... and the rush and the pass. Or take ten steps and cut behind the Marx's Cadillac or everyone go long or the crisscross. Terry Fleming and Chris DeHart were often quarterbacks but sometimes they'd gang up on us and it would be me and Mick and Sam Stewart vs Gary Condell and Terry and Chris. This was a lopsided game because Sam couldn't catch a football to save his life and I had no arm but we played like it was the most important game in the world. Sometimes we won but mostly we'd lose. The game was played on a macadam street so if you fell, or were pushed, you'd slide a few feet along the rough stones and ding your knees or your elbows. The palms of your hands. We'd play all afternoon. Changing sides, changing players, new guys coming in, guys going home for dinner or a family trip, the game kept going. Once in awhile my father or Al Frank or my Uncle would join in to make us look like the knuckleheads we were. I remember one memorable day when Father Kernan from the Church of the Incarnation showed up. Running routes in his robes and smoking cigarettes. Might have been a curse or two. There was a fierce competition to the games but there was great joy. The long bomb through the trees, the unexpected sight of Sam pulling down the ball in front of Chris DeHart, the sack, the surprise play, the Hail Mary, the hidden ball trick. It was a game with few rules and many, many arguments. Interference, he pushed me, you went before the count, how can we win with this team, at least give us Gary. Skinny little kids running for hours, my asthma would kick in but we'd keep playing. Ed Mossop or Johnny Hindman or Stewart DeHart and Bobby McQuaide would pass in and out of the games. A blur of hikes and counts and passes and the unexpected run or Charlie Flitcraft, fast as lightening turning a four yard toss into a touchdown. The goals were undefined, the scores forgotten or argued about. No kicking. Plenty of shoving. The sun setting, the ball dark against the sky, the hands reaching, reaching, reaching.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:42PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Street Football](#)

- Bob

November 09, 2008

Great description Jack,

You'll have to cover touch games that turned to tackle in the park sometime. Or touch in the field next to the tiny Episcopal Church on North Monroe.

Isn't it a wonder that we rarely if ever used the baseball field down by the Mantua Creek.

Remember the Bill Campbell "bullet" passes that would almost go through you?

Or playing "kill the guy with the ball" with Kingsley Lentz in the yard behind the DeHart and Mossop houses. No one could tackle Kingsley. He cut and dodged and made it look so easy. Perhaps he was a good runner because he never rode in a car - his parents refused to buy in to the car culture and lived carless forever as far as I know.

Your blog certainly draws people in. I heard from Paul Birkby today - I don't think that I have seen him or said anything to him since 1971.

Thanks for the great writing.

Thanks for the blog.

[Re: Street Football](#)

- Bob

November 09, 2008

No Duh..

I should have typed "Ed" Campbell.

[Re: Street Football](#)

- JimMaddox

November 16, 2008

To my knowledge there wasn't much street football in Woodbury Heights. We always had access to someone's big yard or the athletic fields off of Helen Avenue.

Not much touch football either, mostly tackle, even when the girls played. My side yard, the Gerber's huge side yard, and later on the big front yard at John Marccone's house on Chestnut Avenue.

As we got older we made up teams and played the kids from the "other side of the tracks".

We'd meet at the ballfields and played unsupervised, no adults screwing things up.

There were bitter arguments and sometimes fistfights, but it was pure football. There were some broken bones and lots of sprains and bruises-once I was kicked in the groin so many times I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to walk home. It was all just a love of the game, and no concerns about safety. A bunch of guys, a ball and a crisp sunny day.

Dance Lessons

[Thursday, December 11, 2008](#)

I may be off a bit here. In my dotage I'm not sure if these events took place in 7th or 8th grade. I asked several classmates and they were as clueless as I am. So I figure since it's my blog I'll make it 7th grade. In Wenonah when I was a teenager the parents all felt we required some education in the social graces. Specifically ballroom dancing. None of us shared their opinion but this seemed to be a non-negotiable issue. By banding together the parents insured that none of us could say, "but Jack Wiler doesn't have to go". Even worse they used social pressure and hounded us as we visited each others homes. So it was that in early winter we were herded to the Presbyterian Church along with the grade below us to learn how to dance. We had two instructors, a man and a woman, and they loved their work. We did not. We began with simple steps; the Box Step, the Fox Trot, and moved onto more elaborate things like waltzes and sambas. It was torture. Torture for so many, many reasons. First we had to dress up in good clothes, second we had to dance with girls or vice versa boys, third, we were not given a choice of who we would dance with. Our partners were assigned according to an arcane formula. And so we whirled across the floor of the multi-purpose room of the Presbyterian Church, twenty or thirty young men and women with pimples and greasy hair or odd clothing or weird heads. All of us forced to comport ourselves as ladies and gentlemen. We did this for about eight weeks. The final week we had a formal dance (suits and ties, dresses) and a dance contest. And we all wanted to win. Go figure. This thing we hated we now wanted to excel at and we took pride in our ability to glide effortlessly across the floor. I'm sad to report that this class has really had only one benefit in my life...when I go to a

wedding I can do a mean foxtrot. Otherwise in the real world of young men and women dancing it was a waste of time. Next...going to my first dance at Gatorland.
Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:16PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Dance Lessons](#)

- lorrainecrown

December 14, 2008

Mine was 7th grade, too. Only we had to learn western dancing in school. Dosey-doh was so radically uncool in 7th grade. Lucky for us we had a weekly venue for real dancing, Friendship Hall. Motown, in the dark. Until they discovered we were all making out and doing drugs. Then it was Motown with the lights on.

They're Dancing in the Streets

[Saturday, December 13, 2008](#)

It's an easy segue from my stupid dance lessons to my first dance. Spring, 1965. The cafeteria is converted into a wonderland and the girls and boys of Gateway go to their first dance. Hop. Keep in mind that in truth I had no idea how to really dance to the music that was popular among young people. In fact, I hardly listened to music that was popular. Oh sure, I knew about the Beatles and every once in awhile I'd hear music on the radio or watch Shindig or Hullabaloo but my musical world was largely shaped by my parent's listening habits. Which means I was raised on the Mills Brothers, Andy Williams, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett...ad infinitum. And the worst of all the worst: "Sing Along With Mitch". No, there were actually worse acts but my mind has graciously deleted them. So now I was going to Gateway to dance to the music of my generation. At least as it stood at that time. I was going to gyrate wildly to the Twist and the Mash Potato and the Swim and swig soda and fall in love and kiss a beautiful girl under the moon. Then ride home with my folks and sleep happy with a smile on my face. Wrong. I was going to get dressed in a stupid Madras jacket with a clip on tie and tight cords and walk for the first time into the most uncomfortable experience of my life. Sure, I talked to girls in school. You kind of had to. And yes I wore clothes and I'd taken dance lessons and I knew about music. But I had no idea how all these things went together and I was about to find out how little I really knew. I should tell you that, at least in Westville, there were CYO dances that kids had been going to for awhile. Some kids from Wenonah might even go earlier in the year. This means that they had a leg up on us chuckleheads. This means that they were more comfortable, knew how to dance, had cool clothes, a cool haircut and could walk up to any girl they knew and ask for a dance. I, on the other hand, was expert at standing next to the wall. So this is the way things were. A row of a dozen or more skinny boys with their backs pressed against the newly painted cinder block. Groups of girls with cups of punch huddled together, giggling, looking here and there. And in the middle girls and boys all with cool clothes and hair dancing and having a great time. This great divide was to be my world for the next 4 years or so. Cursed and alone we geeks clustered together like fools. Out on the floor girls and boys laughed and hugged and kissed and had great fun. The saddest part is how all of this is about confidence and courage. In fact all of us felt the same way. It's just that some of us said fuck it and walked away from the wall.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:11PM (-05:00)

Comments

Re: They're Dancing in the Streets

- Anonymous

December 16, 2008

I remember the Tinsel Twirl at GRHS. I wore a tin foil silver sheath and silver shoes and went with Dennis Nate. I looked like an icicle, but felt cool! There was something magic about the darkened gym, scent of CocaCola and sweat, and all that forbidden music.
Pam Cassidy

Re: They're Dancing in the Streets

- carey

January 26, 2009

Oh, god, we had Sing Along with Mitch too. What was THAT all about?

Holly, Jolly, Christmas in 1964

Wednesday, December 24, 2008

I talked earlier about our Christmases but think it's worth revisiting since Mick and Ted and I are all older and we have a young sister, Mary Lou. In December of 1964 I was officially a teenager, thirteen. Mick was eleven and a half and Ted seven and a half. Mick and I were hip to Santa being our parents but Ted and Mary Lou still believed. Ted had serious doubts but Ted worked hard at holding onto the good things in his childhood and didn't want to let Santa go.

Our Christmas ritual was to put up the lights outside on Thanksgiving weekend. This effort took about half a day and Mick and I "helped" our Dad. Our help was limited since we were inept but we were able to untangle the lights and hand my Dad various tools. We had a wrap around porch surrounded by bushes so the bushes and doors were ringed with lights.

After my birthday and my father's birthday (14th & 15th) Dad would buy the tree. The tree was always, always, gigantic. We had twelve foot ceilings so we'd get a twelve foot tree. The tree sat outside in a bucket filled with water in an alcove off the front porch. It would not be put up till Christmas Eve morn.

We might also go to Gaudio's to see the light displays and pick out ornaments. Gaudio's was a garden center in Woodbury, long vanished, that had a huge selection of Christmas decorations to supplement their gardening business. If we went to visit our Grandmother Glading in Pennsylvania we'd drive back admiring the various light displays. Not as elaborate as todays but to us, astounding. I'm telling you this because really and truly none of us cared that much about anything except Christmas morning and that never came fast enough.

Finally it would be Christmas Eve! My mother would spend the day baking cookies and making stuffing for the turkey. My father and Mick and I would lug in the tree and set it in the stand my parent's had owned since I was a baby. Christmas tree stands pretty much

sucked back then so we'd use wire to keep the tree from falling. My Dad would stand on a chair and nail one end into the wall then wrap it around the tree and repeat the process till the tree was stable and straight. Or kind of straight. Then it would sit all day, unadorned, till after dinner so its branches could fall.

Mick and I would go to our rooms in the afternoon and attempt to wrap the presents we'd purchased for our parent's and our brothers and sister. I mangled package after package. Then dinner, hopefully pizza or cheesesteaks, and then we'd trim the tree. My Dad had a system and Mick and I learned it well. Large balls at the bottom, medium balls in the middle, and small ones at the top. We'd alternate between tinsel and garlands depending on my mother's moods. Then we'd hang our stockings in the 2nd living room on the bookshelf and sit down together in the living room. My mother would sit with Ted and Mary Lou on either side and read, first the Christmas Story, about the birth of Christ and second, Twas the Night Before Christmas. It was wonderful. Cheesy but wonderful.

Finally we'd place our gifts beneath the tree, set out Santa's cookies and milk and then it was off to bed. Mick and I had recently been relegated to the attic for a bedroom and we went up and tried to sleep. The night passed. Slowly. Santa's reindeer landed, somehow found a way to get him in our house, and left to spread more Christmas cheer. We tried to sleep. We played chess. We tried to sleep.

Then it's 6am and Christmas morning and we all run to our parents room to wake them up. It's the house rules that you can't go downstairs Christmas morning until Dad checked to make sure Santa wasn't there. Once we'd get the all clear we hurtled down the stairs to see the heaps and heaps of presents. Mom and Dad would pass them out from piles they'd set up the night before (or rather Santa had set up the night before) and we'd tear them to pieces.

After we'd finished with the presents we'd empty our stockings. Our stocking stuffers were a kind of weird mix of the 1930's and the present. We'd get little toys or funny things but also, always, a tangerine. A tangerine? I never understood this until I realized late in life that this would have been a rare treat for a child in an America still stuck in the Great Depression. For us though it was just a piece of fruit. Admittedly we didn't often have tangerines in the Wiler house. Most of our experience with actual fruit, not canned fruit, was limited to apples, sometimes grapes, bananas, and in the summer peaches and blueberries. Oranges and Tangerines would only show up once in awhile...too expensive I think.

After opening the presents Mom and Dad sat on the couch and watched us play with our new gifts. They always seemed very happy. Mick and I would then go to our friends houses to see what they'd gotten and Dad would be left to pick up the mess with Mom. When we returned we'd walk up the block to visit our Grandmother Wiler and get gifts from her. Finally we'd sit down to turkey dinner. Sometimes relatives would drop by with relative gifts. My fathers Uncle John and Aunt Eleanor or our Grandmother Glading and our Aunt Gersh all might stop by to share the day.

It was and is my favorite holiday. I don't look at it with cynicism or dread. Tonight Johanna and I will be joined by her mother and sister and nephews and our dear friends. We'll eat

and drink and sing and laugh. It's Christmas! In the words of Tiny Tim, "God Bless Us, Everyone!"

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:46AM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: Holly, Jolly, Christmas in 1964](#)

- BobThomas

December 24, 2008

So good to have you writing again! Who could sleep on Christmas Eve? What a long night. Did you go to Mass on Christmas Eve sometimes? When I was in the church chorus we had a Christmas Eve service. It helped to use up some of the time and tire you out a bit. My parents would deliver my Philadelphia Inquirer route on Christmas to take away that excuse for anyone getting up too crazy early.

[Re: Holly, Jolly, Christmas in 1964](#)

- JimMaddox

December 25, 2008

It was if you never fell asleep, and then all of a sudden it was morning and nothing could keep you in bed.

The tree had to be supported by a wire strung between the walls in the corner of the living room. We never put out anything for Santa, though. It was a magical time even as you grew older and wiser.

[Re: Holly, Jolly, Christmas in 1964](#)

- Anonymous

December 03, 2009

[url=http://community.bsu.edu/members/buy+online+Viagra.aspx]Viagra without script[/url]

[url=http://eterporno.ru/volgogradskie-znakomstva.php]волгоградские знакомства[/url]

[url=http://eterporno.ru/seks-znakomstva-chernigov.php]секс знакомства чернигов[/url]

[url=http://pc.eterporno.ru/index.php]интимсити ру сайт[/url]

[url=http://pc.eterporno.ru/blyadi-piter-vhod.php]бляди питер вход[/url]

[url=http://pv.eterporno.ru/seks-partnera-ischu.php]секс партнера ищущий[/url]

[url=http://pv.eterporno.ru/murmanskieshluhi.php]мурманские шлюхи[/url]

[url=http://px.eterporno.ru/prostitutki-moskvy-deshovye-vyezd.php]проститутки москвы дешовые выезды[/url]

[url=http://px.eterporno.ru/intim-znakomstva-novgorod-novost.php]интим знакомства новгород новость[/url]

[url=http://pz.eterporno.ru/ulichnye-prostitutki-pitera.php]уличные проститутки питера[/url]

[url=http://pz.eterporno.ru/sayt-znakomstva-moskva.php]сайт знакомства Москва[/url]

[url=http://pz.eterporno.ru/blyadi-chelnov.php]бляди челнов[/url]

New Year's Eve

Monday, January 05, 2009

When I was young my brothers and I were banished to my grandmother's house on New Year's Eve. There we drank half an illicit beer and ate ham sandwiches and watched Guy Lombardo ring in the new. That is if we didn't fall asleep because of the beer.

Or else my grandmother and Aunt Gersh would come to the house and we'd do the same thing in Wenonah as we would in Bala Cynwyd. My parents were engaged in adult fun. We had no idea what adult fun was. So far as we could tell from our few exposures to a grown up party it consisted of laughing loud, drinking, and smoking and staying up late. This did not seem fun. Plus they played the Mills Brothers and Perry Como.

They did not go out to fancy night clubs, they went to friends houses and checked in by phone. No real need to do that as we had been trained well and staying up till midnight was extraordinarily difficult. So it was that my brothers and my little sister and I rang in the New Year of 1965. It may have been that year that my parents had the party at their home. I can remember vaguely one such party so let's call it that one.

I was sitting at the end of my bed with my cat, Surprise. The warm tones of Frank Sinatra filled the night. There was a woman's high laugh. The light from our back porch shown out onto the lawn and the clear night sky was lit up with a thousand stars. Happy New Year and noise and fireworks and honking and then the music again and sleep. I woke the next morning to a house full of half-empty glasses that smelled of whiskey and ginger ale, overflowing ashtrays, and a house as quiet as a morgue.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:03PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: New Year's Eve](#)

- JimMaddox

January 05, 2009

Lots of noise when my parents would throw a New Year's party at our house. The cellar would be full of people going up and down the stairs and in and out the kitchen door. My bedroom was right next to the only bathroom in the house, so there was no quiet for me or my brother. How they expected us to go to sleep I'll never know. Loud music, lots of laughter and people drinking and smoking all night.

Then the mess in the morning, and the torture of watching the Mummers all day.

So Much Time So little work

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Hi all, Sorry I've been a lazy fuck. So, before I give you my post about Wenonah in 1965 let me remind you of three things dear to my heart. First, Barack Obama was sworn in as President of the United States of America. Given that there was only one black girl in my class at Gateway Regional HS and given that I drove through a black neighborhood with outhouses to get to high school this is a wonderful moment in American history. Second, two events dear to my heart and poetry were set aside this year. The Geraldine R Dodge Poetry Festival and the Frost Place Festival of Poetry. I could say lots of shit about this but mostly it sucks that money kills an art that makes no money and enriches peoples lives. Manana... or maybe Friday... Book reports, Rebecca, and the Last of the Mohicans. God Bless, Good Night, and my regrets on the passing of my dear friend Rick Sonnenberg, known to many of us as Rick Lopez. Death comes and steals away and the best are caught in his arms.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:34PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: So Much Time So little work](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

February 08, 2009

always good to hear from you, jack. and I do not believe this "lazy fuck" stuff. looking forward to more Gateway!

The Book Report from Hell

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

Let's go back again to 1965 and Gateway Regional HS. For the first time in our lives we move from class to class. There are announcements on the loudspeaker. We pledge allegiance to the flag along with a disembodied voice. We have new classes, English instead of Reading, Earth Science instead of Science, Mathematics not Arithmetic, and on and on.

My English teacher was Mrs. Oglesby. For our first book report we are asked to do a presentation along with several other students. The presentation would summarize the book and illustrate the reasons you liked it. Nightmare. Horrible, horrible nightmare. Our loud performance was not my thing in 7th grade. You can probably understand since I was a midgety, skinny runt with a cowlick. My voice was as high as a birds. I felt like some monstrous geek and I was.

But there was no way out. As I recall I was hooked up with Jim Maddox and Steven Kaye and the book we selected was "Last of the Mohicans". This was just about the only part of the assignment I liked. I was a James Fenimore Cooper freak. I read all his books. Books that were universally reviled by any competent writer or critic. But they had war and Indians and sacrifice and forests and blood and an acceptable amount of romance. The girls all picked "Rebecca".

This killed us right from the git go. "Rebecca" is a fairly easily summarized story while "Last of the Mohicans" has a jumbled up plot that isn't clear for a hundred pages. Plus the girls were better at this. Their presentations were funny and inventive and informative. Thank God I can't remember ours. I do remember it was a miserable failure. We tanked. I remember slinking away from the front of the class thankful only that we'd finished.

This deep sense of embarrassment and humiliation was to walk just behind me till senior year. You can only imagine what a joy it was to go to school each day.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:35PM (-05:00)

Comments

[Re: The Book Report from Hell](#)

- JimMaddox

January 28, 2009

I remember thinking, "Hey, I know this story, because I had read the Classics Illustrated comic book version and I had seen the Randolph Scott movie. Indians, British soldiers, war and adventure. I don't remember if our report was bad or not, I was always comfortable talking in front of a class. I don't remember much about actual class time

from Seventh Grade. We'll have to search Canada to find Steve.

Re: The Book Report from Hell

- Anonymous

February 13, 2009

Loved looking back in time..and glad someone else remembers and puts it in writing. Graduated 74 Gateway/Wenonah too ! Our school memories are so different than the school shootings and machete attacks my kids will remember from their schooldays(in what was/is town much like Wenonah). At least the girls were safe from wearing the blue bloomer gym outfits we had! Keep writing!

Fashion and the Sixties

Saturday, January 31, 2009

My actual favorite part of HS and Junior HS was clothes and hair. Not my clothes and not my hair but everyone else's. Girls in particular were hotter than hot. Beehive hairdo's, white boots, over use of mascara and eye shadow. Guys got to wear skinny pants and skinny ties and sharp shoes. My erotic ideals were all formed in the mid-sixties. In fact when the punk era reigned supreme I was happy as a pig in shit. All the women looked like really fierce versions of my high school crushes. It was like heaven because this time I could do something about it. Of course in 1965 I could do nothing about it. It was the first year my mother let me choose my own clothing. We drove to Pitman and went to Jack Lang's the premier men's and boy's clothing outlet in our little corner of the world. This made our little corner of the world very small. We could have driven to Philadelphia and I could have gone to Brook's Brothers or Wanamakers but we didn't. We went to Pitman. I picked out my spring school clothes. An chartreuse Izod LaCoste polo shirt and a pair of vaguely lime green, glen plaid pants. Also a zip up spring jacket. We drove from there to Ernie's Shoe Post in Mantua. At Ernie's I picked out a pair of desert boots. Plus a pair of PF Flyers. I was ready to go. I was going to be one snappy dresser. What a dope I was. I would make these mistakes with clothing dozens of times over the years but this stands out as one of my worst. I walked through the school like a green lollipop. At least my desert boots were cool. But I turned no heads. Instead I retreated further into the world of books and history and all the attendant bullshit of my tiny world. Next up...Ocean City.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:05PM (-05:00)

Comments

Re: Fashion and the Sixties

- JimMaddox

February 21, 2009

Mostly plaid shirts and cotton pants for me. Flannel shirts and corduroy pants in the winter. I managed to convince my mother to get me a pair of desert boots too. We shopped at Korvette's and Kresge's and JM Fields; bargain stores only for my mom. I spent a lot of time in the Goodwill Store too. At least she didn't buy my school clothes there. Cool I never was, especially with my perpetual crew-cut hair.

Re: Fashion and the Sixties

- BobThomas

February 27, 2009

Wasn't there a push for the Madras plaid shirts? Corduroy pants? Wing tip shoes at some point - Bostonians if you could get your parents to dish out the cash?

Re: Fashion and the Sixties

- BobThomas

February 27, 2009

Your comment about the green lollipop cracked me up! You are so inventive with your imagery. You're so brave in exposing our worst fears. I know eventually you will deal with raging hormones of the teens as well.

Re: Fashion and the Sixties

- Anonymous

November 25, 2009

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Re: Fashion and the Sixties

- Anonymous

January 03, 2010

Your blog keeps getting better and better! Your older articles are not as good as newer ones you have a lot more creativity and originality now keep it up!

Ocean City 1965

Monday, March 02, 2009

I'm bored with 7th grade. Okay, I barely remember 7th grade, it being a long time ago and me being old and forgetful. So let's cut to the summer of 1965. A great year no matter how you cut it. My family went on vacation this year to Ocean City where we took up residence in two buildings along with several other families from Wenonah and my dad's brother and his family. It was kid heaven. Our apartments were right on the beach and we were there for two weeks. A few times we even got out of school before the year was over to go. The apartments were all the way at the end of OC. I think between 56th & 57th streets but I'm sure I'm wrong and someone will tell me in a day or so. They were simple buildings built in the late fifties. Living room, sort of dining room, bedrooms, bath, shower outside. We spent maybe 8 hours a day inside unless it rained. Besides my family we stayed with our parents friends. The Lakes, the Shepards, the Pistilli's, the Nugent's and others who came and went but these were the standby's. This meant we had tons of friends. Charlie Lake, Debbie Lake, Jack and Joe Shepard, Bruce Nugent, Dave Pistilli. It also meant we had our own little world on the beach. On the Saturday we were to leave it would invariably be foggy or rainy and we'd be whining about not being able to have fun and my Dad said, always, don't worry it will burn off. And it always did. We drove to OC the back way through Glassboro and Buena, past the Mexican movies in Buena, past the old lost taverns along the way until we arrived at the 34th street bridge and in just twenty odd blocks were at our shore place. We'd unpack like demons, throw

on our trunks, grab our towels and race to the beach and the water and OH MY FUCKING GOD THE WATER IS FREEZING!. And it was. This is the 2nd week of June and the water temperature on the Jersey shore is typically 52-56 degrees. This is bone chilling cold. Your little balls would get sucked up deep inside you, your ankles would ache a terrible terrible ache but you had to go in, you had to go in. Our parents would arrive moments later and spread the chairs and blankets around like some rude compound. Maybe an umbrella, maybe not. We'd run in and out of the water, hike to the point south of 59th street, explore the gullies and the rocks and our fathers would scope out babes while our mothers...actually I don't know what they were doing. Probably scoping out young men but this is 1965 so maybe not. We were there for two weeks. We played box ball, which is some weird combo of handball and baseball, in which Mr. Lake would usually crush my foot and break my little toe. We'd play handball. We'd play frisbee. We'd body surf. We'd go to the boardwalk! The boardwalk! The boardwalk! The Pavilion! Salt water taffy! Mack and Manco's pizza! The cool hobby store that sold Airfix little men! The Taylor Ham Pork roll store with Pennsylvania Dutch Root Beer! And of course, of course, Gillian's Wonderland! The ferris wheel, the merry go round, the rides, the cotton candy, the sheer pleasure in pissing away all the money you had from shoveling snow or raking leaves or from your lazy uncles and aunts at Christmas! It was the greatest place in the world in 1965 for a mess of chowderheads from South Jersey. We body surfed, we played, we ogled Penny Pistilli and my Aunt Simone's bikini. We cursed in a stupid 7th grade way. We wore clam diggers and stupid hats right out of Beach Blanket Bingo. We were in heaven.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 05:49PM (-05:00)

Comments

Re: Ocean City 1965

- PamCassidy

March 02, 2009

We spent every summer at OC at our place on 15th St. I remember the smell of the ocean and the humidity dissolving in the air. We body surfed on those canvas rafts until my brothers and my nipples were raw. We walked the boardwalk every night, but not with each other. My brother liked the arcades and Smugglers Cove with the whales teeth(you could buy them then). Me? I liked to walk and pretend I was older than I was. And hope to meet a guy so we could go under the boardwalk!

Re: Ocean City 1965

- JimMaddox

March 04, 2009

Seventh Grade for you and me was life as the small fish in the big pond. Close order drill in gym class. Industrial Arts with no experience using power tools. Wandering around hallways looking for classrooms, and making new friends with kids from other towns. You and I shared our love of history and Marvel Comics.

Re: Ocean City 1965

- BobThomas

March 09, 2009

Your post made me think about the neat boats the lifeguards used - who made them and where.

Here's a link to more info on the boats
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/legacies/NJ/200003319.html>

<http://outdoors.webshots.com/photo/2907559320102988870drzFlx>

<http://www.pbase.com/njsux/image/101935100>

Re: Ocean City 1965

- BobThomas

March 09, 2009

Some more Ocean City info -

We stayed in the Sindia apartments right above the boardwalk one summer. Life was good!

<http://sindia.net/news/news7.html>

<http://www.thesindia.com/news/news4.html>

Re: Ocean City 1965

- Anonymous

November 05, 2009

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Re: Ocean City 1965

- Anonymous

November 21, 2009

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Re: Ocean City 1965

- Anonymous

November 22, 2009

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Re: Ocean City 1965

- Anonymous

December 24, 2009

[\[color=#99aadd\]Музыкальная группа \[url=http://dejavu-group.ru/svadba.php\]Dejavu-group\[/url\]](http://dejavu-group.ru/svadba.php) - это коллектив виртуозных вокалистов и музыкантов.
[\[url=http://dejavu-group.ru/index.php\]Deja Vu\[/url\]](http://dejavu-group.ru/index.php)- один из лидеров в области
музыкального оформления праздников, дней рождения, шоу-программ,

корпоративов, торжеств и дней рождения.
В копилке Музыкантов DeJa Vu более 3000 произведений.
Живая музыка. Диско, хиты 70-80-90-х, джаз, ретро, шансон, современная музыка, европейские хиты, фоновая музыка, поп .
Музыканты Dejavu-group обладает мощной качественной музыкальной аппаратурой, позволяющей наполнить приятным уху звуком как компактное помещение (фуршет), так и огромное пространство (корпоратив до 1000 человек).

Игорь +7 916 623 4047 [/color]

Boy Scouts of America

Sunday, March 08, 2009

Well, I'm going to break my cardinal rule. I'm going back a bit in time so I can talk about something I forgot. I talked a bit about this in an earlier post but realized that I had much more to say. I forgot that in the fall of 1964 I joined the Boy Scouts. I'd been a Cub Scout and a Webelo (how's that for a weird name) and it was my goal to become a Boy Scout. So I joined Troop 50. I was happy as a clam. We met every Thursday (I think) in the Methodist Church. There'd be a reading of the minutes, some discussion of various upcoming events, talk about camping trips, a bit of Scout lore and then we'd play various physical games. Chief among them was British Bulldog. I have no memory of what this game consisted of; only that it involved mashing into each other very hard. There must have been rules but who knows. Our Scout Leader was (and I could be wrong here) Ralph Leeds father and the senior leaders were guys like Kingsley Lentz. What a great name. Kingsley. It was all about the outdoors. I couldn't wait to go on my first camping trip. I was excited and happy. I forgot one minor thing. I wet the bed. So we decamped to Elk Neck, Maryland and on the first night I wet my sleeping bag. You can imagine this might have been a tad embarrassing. It was. In fact it was humiliating and then I got to do it again the next night. I'd wet the bed for my whole life up until then. My parents took me to Children's Hospital in Philadelphia looking for help, we tried various homemade cures and strategies but nothing worked. Like clockwork each evening I pissed in my pants. This was only pleasurable for about two minutes. Then it was cold and wet. My bed had plastic sheets. I couldn't sleep over at other friend's houses. I told no one about my problem. It was my little secret. Then my little secret was hanging on a rope in the middle of our camp site. My soaked sleeping bag. I quit the Boy Scouts after that. I did rejoin several years later but we'll get to that. Later in the year or perhaps it was Fall of 8th grade my parents found my cure. It was a rubber mat that they put under the sheets. When liquids hit the mat it set off a loud, loud alarm. I would wake up. Pretty soon I would wake up before the alarm went off. I was Pavlov's dog. It worked. Within a week or two I stopped wetting the bed. But I've never forgotten the alarm. I can't stand a bell that rings for more than a moment or two. I pick up calls before everyone at every job I've ever had. I've never forgotten my sleeping bag. Isn't it odd how secrets come back to haunt you?

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:39PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: Boy Scouts of America

My mother and Mrs. Lentz were good friends - I think they grew up together or went to college together or something, I'm not sure. Maybe they went to the Episcopal Church with us. Anyway that's not the point. The point is I know how the Lentz boys got their names. Kirby was Mrs. Lentz's maiden name, hence Kirby Lentz and Kingsley (I swear to God) was named because his parents opened a phone book and randomly pointed at a name and the name was Kingsley.

1965: Year of the World's Best Music

Sunday, March 29, 2009

I talked a little about the music of that summer of 1965. But the whole year was filled with ungodly tunes. Hit after hit after hit. When I was living in New Brunswick in the '80's there was a band that only played music from 65 & 66. They played at my second wedding. But Jack, you say, it couldn't have been that good. You must be just fondly remembering it; every year is pretty much the same when it comes to music. Well, here's my proof: The hits of 1965: **The Ad Libs** - The Boy From New York City - 02-65 - Blue Cat **Jewel Akens** - The Birds And The Bees - 03-65 - Era **Herb Alpert** - A Taste Of Honey - 11-65 - A&M **Eddy Arnold** - Make The World Go Away - 12-65 - RCA **Len Barry** - 1-2-3 - 11-65 - Decca **Fontella Bass** - Rescue Me - 11-65 - Checker **Shirley Bassey** - Goldfinger - 03-65 - UA **The Beach Boys** - California Girls - 08-65 - Capitol **The Beach Boys** - Do You Wanna Dance - 04-65 - Capitol **The Beach Boys** - Help Me, Rhonda - 05-65- Capitol **The Beatles** - Eight Days A Week - 03-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - Help! - 09-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - Ticket To Ride - 05-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - We Can Work It Out - 12-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - Yesterday - 10-65 - Capitol **The Beau Brummels** - Just A Little - 06-65 - Autumn **The Beau Brummels** - Laugh, Laugh - 02-65 **James Brown** - I Got You (I Feel Good) - 11-65 **James Brown** - Papa's Got A Brand New Bag - 08-65 - King **The Byrds** - Mr. Tambourine Man - 06-65 - Columbia **The Byrds** - Turn! Turn! Turn! - 11-65 - Columbia **Freddy Cannon** - Action - 09-65 - Warner **Mel Carter** - Hold Me Thrill Me Kiss Me - 08-65 - Imperial **Alvin Cash & The Crawlers** - Twine Time - 02-65 - Mar-V-Lus **The Castaways** - Liar, Liar - 10-65 - Soma **Chad & Jeremy** - Willow Weep For Me - 01-65 - World Artists **Cher** - All I Really Want To Do - 08-65 - Imperial **Petula Clark** - Downtown - 01-65 - Warner **Petula Clark** - I Know A Place - 04-65 - Warner **Sam Cooke** - Shake - 02-65 - RCA **Vic Dana** - Red Roses For A Blue Lady - 04-65 - Dolton **The Dave Clark Five** - Any Way You Want It - 01-65 - Epic **The Dave Clark Five** - Catch Us If You Can - 09-65 - Epic **The Dave Clark Five** - Come Home - 03-65 - Epic **The Dave Clark Five** - I Like It Like That - 07-65 - Epic **The Dave Clark Five** - Over And Over - 12-65 - Epic **Jackie DeShannon** - What The World Needs Now Is Love - 07-65 - Imperial **Dick & Deedee** - Thou Shalt Not Steal - Warner **Ronnie Dove** - One Kiss For Old Time's Sake - 05-65 - Diamond **Patty Duke** - Don't Just Stand There - 08-65 - UA **Bob Dylan** - Like A Rolling Stone - 08-65 - Columbia **Bob Dylan** - Positively 4th Street - 10-65 - Columbia **Shirley Ellis** - The Clapping Song - 04-65 - Congress **Shirley Ellis** - The NameGame - 01-65 - Congress **Wayne Fontana & The Mindbenders** - Game Of Love - 04-65 - Fontana **The Fortunes** - You've Got Your Troubles - 09-65 - Press **The Four Seasons** - Bye, Bye, Baby (Baby Goodbye) - 02-65 - Philips **The Four Seasons** - Let's Hang On! - 11-65 - Philips **The Four Tops** - I Can't Help Myself - 06-65 - Motown **The Four Tops** - It's The Same Old Song - 08-65 - Motown **Freddie & The Dreamers** - I'm Telling You Now - 04-65 - Tower

Marvin Gaye - Ain't That Peculiar - 11-65 - Tamla **Marvin Gaye** - How Sweet It Is To Be Loved By You - 01-65 - Tamla **Marvin Gaye** - I'll Be Doggone - 05-65 - Tamla **The Gentrys** - Keep On Dancing - 10-65 - MGM **Gerry & The Pacemakers** - Ferry Across The Mersey - 03-65 - Laurie **Bobby Goldsboro** - Little Things - 03-65 - UA **Dobie Gray** - The "In" Crowd - 02-65 - Charger **Roy Head** - Treat Her Right - 10-65 - Back Beat **Herman's Hermits** - Can't You Hear My Heartbeat - 03-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - I'm Henry VIII I Am - 07-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - Just A Little Bit Better - 10-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - Mrs. Brown You've Got A Lovely Daughter - 04-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - Silhouettes - 05-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - Wonderful World - 06-65 - MGM **The Impressions** - Amen - 01-65 - ABC Paramount **The Impressions** - People Get Ready - 03-65 - ABC Paramount **Horst Jankowski** - A Walk In The Black Forest - 06-65 -Mercury **Jay & The Americans** - Cara Mia - 07-65 - UA **Jay & The Americans** - Let's Lock The Door (And Throw Away The Key) - 02-65 - UA **Jay & The Americans** - Some Enchanted Evening - 10-65 - UA **Jack Jones** - The Race Is On - 04-65 - Kapp (written and recorded first by country singer George Jones at the same time on United Artists) **Tom Jones** - It's Not Unusual - 05-65 - Parrot **Tom Jones** - What's New Pussycat? - 07-65 - Parrot **Bert Kaempfert** - Red Roses For A Blue Lady - 03-65 - Decca **The Kingsmen** - The Jolly Green Giant - 02-65 - Wand **The Kinks** - All Day And All Of The Night - 02-65 - Reprise **The Kinks** - Tired Of Waiting For You - 04-65 - Reprise **Brenda Lee** - Too Many Rivers - 07-65 - Decca **Dickey Lee** - Laurie (Strange Things Happen) - 07-65 - TCF Hall **Barbara Lewis** - Baby, I'm Yours - 08-65 - Atlantic **Barbara Lewis** - Make Me Your Baby - 11-65 - Atlantic **Gary Lewis & The Playboys** - Count Me In - 05-65 - Liberty **Gary Lewis & The Playboys** - Everybody Loves A Clown - 10-65 - Liberty **Gary Lewis & The Playboys** - Save Your Heart For Me - 07-65 - Liberty **Gary Lewis & The Playboys** - This Diamond Ring - 02-65 - Liberty **Little Anthony & The Imperials** - Hurt So Bad - DCP **The Lovin' Spoonful** - Do You Believe In Magic - 10-65 - Kama Sutra **Martha & The Vandellas** - Nowhere To Run - 04-65 - Gordy **Dean Martin** - I Will - 12-65 - Reprise **Barbara Mason** - Yes, I'm Ready - 07-65 - Artic **The McCoys** - Fever - 12-65 - Bang **The McCoys** - Hang On Sloopy - 09-65 - Bang **Barry McGuire** - Eve Of Destruction - 09-65 - Dunhill **Roger Miller** - Engine Engine #9 - 06-65 - Smash **Roger Miller** - England Swings - 12-65 - Smash **Roger Miller** - King Of The Road - 02-65 - Smash **The Miracles** - The Tracks Of My Tears - 08-65 - Tamla **The Moody Blues** - Go Now! - 04-65 - London **The Newbeats** - Run, Baby Run (Back Into My Arms) - 11-65 - Hickory **Patti Page** - Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte - 06-65 - Columbia **Peter & Gordon** - I Go To Pieces - 02-65 - Capitol **Gene Pitney** - Last Chance To Turn Around - 06-65 - Musicor **Elvis Presley** - Crying In The Chapel - 05-65 - RCA **Elvis Presley** - I'm Yours - 10-65 - RCA **Elvis Presley** - (Such An) Easy Question - 07-65 - RCA **The Ramsey Lewis Trio** - Hang On Sloopy - 12-65 - Cadet **The Ramsey Lewis Trio** - The "In" Crowd - 09-65 - Argo **The Righteous Brothers** -Ebb Tide - 12-65 - Philles **The Righteous Brothers** - Just Once In My Life - 05-65 - Philles **The Righteous Brothers** - Unchained Melody - 08-65 - Philles **The Righteous Brothers** - You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin' - 01-65 - Philles **Johnny Rivers** - Seventh Son - 06-65 - Imperial **The Rolling Stones** - Get Off Of My Cloud - 10-65 - London **The Rolling Stones** - (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction - 06-65 - London **The Rolling Stones** - The Last Time - 04-65 - London **Billy Joe Royal** - Down In The Boondocks - 08-65 - Columbia **Billy Joe Royal** - I Knew You When - 11-65 - Columbia **Sam The Sham & The Pharaohs** - Wooly Bully - 05-65 - MGM **The Seekers** - I'll Never Find Another You - 04-65 - Capitol **The Shangri-Las** - I Can Never Go Home Anymore - 12-65 - Red Bird **Del Shannon** - Keep Searchin' (We'll Follow The Sun) - 01-65 - **Amy Silkie** - You've Got To Hide Your Love Away - 11-65 -

Fontana **Simon & Garfunkel** - The Sounds Of Silence - 12-65 - Columbia **The Sir Douglas Quintet** - She's About A Mover - 06-65 - Tribe **Sonny** - Laugh At Me - 09-65 - Atco **Sonny & Cher** - Baby Don't Go - 10-65 - Reprise **Sonny & Cher** - But You're Mine - 11-65 - Atco **Sonny & Cher** - I Got You Babe - 08-65 - Atco **Sounds Orchestral** - Cast Your Fate To The Wind - 05-65 - Parkway **The Strangeloves** - I Want Candy - 08-65 - Bang **The Supremes** - Back In My Arms Again - 05-65 - Motown **The Supremes** - I Hear A Symphony - 11-65 - Motown **The Supremes** - Nothing But Heartaches - 09-65 - Motown **The Supremes** - Stop! In The Name Of Love - 03-65 - Motown **The Temptations** - My Girl - 02-65 - Gordy **Joe Tex** - Hold What You've Got - 01-65 - Dial **The Toys** - A Lovers Concerto - 10-65 - Dynovoice **The Turtles** - It Ain't Me Babe - 09-65 - White Whale **The Vogues** - You're The One - 10-65 - Co & Ce **Jr. Walker & The All Stars** - Shotgun - 03-65 - Soul **We Five** - You Were On My Mind - 09-65 - A&M **Ian Whitcomb** - You Turn Me On - 07-65 - Tower **Wonder Who?** - Don't Think Twice - 12-65 - Philips **Glenn Yarbrough** - Baby The Rain Must Fall - 05-65 - RCA **The Yardbirds** - For Your Love - 06-65 - Epic **The Yardbirds** - Heart Full Of Soul - 09-65 - Epic **The Zombies** - Tell Her No - 02-65 - Parrot

Look at all these names! The Beatles, The Stones, James Brown, Bob Dylan, The Supremes, The Temps, Barry motherfucking McGuire, The Zombies, The Turtles, Sir Douglas Quintet, Dean Martin, Roger Miller, Sonny & Cher!!!! All mixed up together. Patty Duke next to Sam the Sham and the Pharoahs! The Yardbirds & Patty Page! Herman's Hermits have more hits than the Beatles, more than Elvis. The crummy and the great all tossed together! And all of us chuckleheads walking around humming those tunes, strolling down the beach with all that music in our heads, all that wild world.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 11:10AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: 1965: Year of the World's Best Music](#)

- BobThomas

May 07, 2009

Want to hear some of those hits - bop on over to

<http://gatewayfirstfouryears.com/node/40>

I have been putting together the list and the recordings of the songs on youtube.com

try it - you'll like it

Wenonah in the Summer

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

We'd leave the shore at the end of June, beginning of July, and return to Wenonah. Two weeks in the relatively balmy climate of a shore town. We'd pull into a near tropical climate 45 minutes later. South Jersey in the summer is hot and humid. Very hot and very humid. The trees by now were a deep, deep green. The garden we'd begun in May was filled with weeds and vegetables bursting out all over. The grass was high and thick. The house close and hot.

There was no air conditioning in the Wiler house until a few years later. We cooled off with a big ass attic fan that sucked air from below and blew it out a window, essentially

creating some sort of breeze. We lay in bed in our sweat and listened to the crickets. We'd wake up early and run to our bikes and head right to the pool. We spent the day swimming and getting a great tan and working up the nerve to flirt with girls. Of course we never did. Some of our friends were on the swim team. The Wenonah Swim Club had a great swim team for a little podunk town in South Jersey. I hated swimming on a team. Way too much work. In fact, although I liked swimming in general, the swim club itself could be a trial. I wasn't a particularly fast freestyle swimmer so in our games of tag I was always it.

But then, you've probably heard that before.

We'd end up back at the house for dinner. Then we'd head out to play the Gun Game or Kick the Can or just sit on the porch and watch the world walk by. It was as if we were in heaven. The night was filled with the sounds of cans rattling down the sidewalk, lightning bugs, the chirp of crickets and the sound of sneakers slapping cement. No, it wasn't as if we were in heaven. We were in heaven.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 04:21PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Wenonah in the Summer](#)

- BobThomas

April 05, 2009

Don't forget the buzz of the locusts in the trees. Other noises were the train whistles and the 8 o'clock whistle.

The swim team kids were tough to beat because they had two practices a day - one in the morning when it was relatively cold and "freezing" when you got out of the water and also just so darned early. I'm glad that I didn't have to do it. Then they had an evening practice. Wasn't their coach Mr. Clark, from Woodbury, cute Jackie Clark's father?

Music or muzak at the pool - trying to balance kids choices with adult's "relaxation" music was tough. Best bets were rainy or at least cloudy days when most of the adults were gone and the lifeguards got to pick the station.

[Re: Wenonah in the Summer](#)

- Paul

April 08, 2009

I was a legacy on the Wenonah Swim Club swim team. My older brother Bruce had been this great swimmer and diver and so, of course, all I heard was, why couldn't I swim like Bruce. Well, because I was a fat, scared little boy who was deathly ashamed of his body. My biggest photographic demon is the 1965 team picture. Too painful to share here. I remember having my legs tied together so they wouldn't separate when doing the butterfly kick. I did once get a 3rd place ribbon doing the back stroke. I think I remember that one of the coaches was Mr. Black. I've emailed my brother. I'm sure he'll remember their names.

My parents were charter members of the pool. Tony Sacco got them to join and I'm pretty sure it was so the black developer that wanted to build a tract on the same property couldn't.

My favorite memories were of the snack bar (of course) and hanging out with all the older, fast girls. (Who knew - my first fag hags!)

[Re: Wenonah in the Summer](#)

- CherieEhlers

April 21, 2009

I swam on the swim team for most of my childhood. I also swam for Sea Jays in the winter. My family was a charter member as well. I think I was 1 or 2 years old when the club opened. The swim team was hard work and I hated the early morning swim practices. But the hot choco afterwards made it much better. My favorite memories of the swim club were the splash parties and the end of the season party. I also remember the thunderstorms coming and us running for shelter to wait out the storm.

[Re: Wenonah in the Summer](#)

- JimMaddox

April 21, 2009

Cherie, remember the swim you and I took to bring a dead body to shore in the summer of 1971?

[Re: Wenonah in the Summer](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

April 26, 2009

I lived a couple houses up from the pool on North Stockton. I learned to drive in that parking lot.

I need to know about the dead body asap! Do tell...

[Re: Wenonah in the Summer](#)

- BobThomas

April 26, 2009

Claudia and others - Jim Maddox has put the whole story including the body on the WWW - it starts here

<http://gatewayfirstfouryears.com/node/16>

the truth is stranger than fiction

[Re: Wenonah in the Summer](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

April 26, 2009

Bob, thanks for the link. I will read it tonight.

Glad to see you are writing. What happened with your job search? Hope you are well.

[Re: Wenonah in the Summer](#)

- ClaudiaHayesHagar

April 26, 2009

Bob, Jim an Cherie, I just read the dead body story. Yikes! Not sure I should have done that right before bedtime, but that is an amazing story.

Poetry in the Schools, 60's Style

Sunday, May 03, 2009

And so we return to school in the fall of 1965. The 9th graders of last year have vanished, they're off to Woodbury HS. Now all of us are bound together for the next four years.

The school is now complete. The auto shop, the wood shop, the gym, the auditorium. All done. We're settled in with our teachers for five long years.

I think, though I can be wrong because I am old, that this is the year teachers began teaching us with methods designed for the kids. You may ask, what are you talking about

Jack? What I'm talking about is the horrible, misguided attempt by older men and women to relate to teenagers by incorporating various elements of the teenagers life into the education process.

In our case it was bringing Simon and Garfunkel into poetry. And as I write this I realize I'm off by one year (because my enfeebled old guy brain remembered the album came out a year later) but I'll continue anyway because I just finished National Poetry Month and participated in dozens of examples of teaching for the kids. Not all misguided but all spotted a mile away by their charges.

In our English class the teacher and God alone can remember who that was brought out the Sounds of Silence by Simon and Garfunkel and played "I am a Rock". Then she played "The Sounds of Silence". Then she asked us what we thought the songs were about. I should note at this point I was an egghead. Which meant I had to have an answer or I was a failure. So were most of my classmates. We instantly shot our hands in the air and offered our various thoughts on the meanings of these songs. Keep in mind that before this moment I'd never thought a song meant anything other than some vague, undefined feeling, like being sad or happy or lonely or brave. Now I intellectualize shit like this all the time but back then I had no idea this might be important to anyone.

Suddenly like a bolt of lightning we all understood "poetry"!!!! It was full of secret meanings and codes and all we had to do was figure them out! The "Rock" was something other than a rock. The sounds of "Silence" weren't just silence but something else that only we the smart kids could understand. Oh, and the artists who made the songs and poems.

We also got to swing away at Edgar Allen Poe and his "alliteration" (the bells, bells, bells, the tinkling tintinnabulation of the bells) and a couple other minor league knuckleheads. I suppose if we were older they'd have tossed in Dylan and Baez but for now we got Art and Paul.

Years later I found out that every kid in every NJ HS in 1966 had the same lesson plan. It felt like the Ed Sullivan Show had come to all our schools with one for the kids. Then they went back to the jugglers and Perry Como and Topo Gigio. No wonder we hated poetry. Our teachers had no idea how to teach it so they resorted to some cookie cutter technique that seemed hip (they were all young) that they learned at the teachers convention in Atlantic City that fall. Poetry was as alien to them as it was to us. They drove to work listening to the Dave Clark Five or the Beatles or if they were older Elvis and Sinatra and then had to find some way to talk about something that looked like it had just landed from Outer Space.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:12PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Poetry in the Schools, 60's Style](#)

- BobThomas

May 03, 2009

Jack,

The female teachers of English at Gateway? Limited to Mrs. Bartow - who eventually bought a house on N. Monroe Ave - would have been 105 N. Monroe - the Wolfe family used to live there - Harry Shoemaker connected the Bartows with the Wolf family and was given the realtors cut of the sale as a finder's fee.

Making poetry real by connecting it to popular music was a great idea - kind of stole poetry away from the "Dead poets" - to the living "artists" that we could actually see "live" on TV or even go out to a concert and see totally actually live.

As you know from appearing before HS groups - when a live person - appears to "do poetry" the whole meaning of the "act" of poetry takes on another dimension.

Thanks be to "whomever".

[Re: Poetry in the Schools, 60's Style](#)

- JimMaddox

May 03, 2009

Our Language Arts and Social Studies teacher in 65 was Miss Joella, but who we had in 66 is lost on me. I didn't "get" poetry until our Junior year when we were confronted by possibly the finest teacher we ever had - Mr. George Stoll.

[Re: Poetry in the Schools, 60's Style](#)

- carey

May 16, 2009

This crap continued into the 70s, in a jr. high English class called "English Through Rock Lyrics." Mr. Howard (who's a Wenonah councilman now, I think) taught it (he must have been right out of school then) and we learned all about Dylan and the Beatles and I forget who else--this was early 70s, so maybe Bread? Alice Cooper? lol. But I do remember one of my projects was based on a Robert Palmer song called "Get Outside."

I learned, from that song, that when the going gets tough, the tough go outside.

My English is much better now. ;)

Avalon Hill and the World at War

[Saturday, May 09, 2009](#)

In 8th grade I fell totally and completely into the role of geek and egghead. I hung around with the weirdo's in my class, I read books even more than before if that's possible, and I began playing extraordinarily complicated board games. Principal among these were the games put out by Avalon Hill.

These games were simulations of historical battles (with one exception) such as D-Day, the battle for North Africa (Afrika Korps), Guadalcanal, and the Battle of the Bulge among many. You used small cardboard squares that represented some military unit such as a brigade or a division and moved them on a hexagonal grid superimposed on the map of the battle in question. Each game had slightly different rules to address geographic and supply issues but once you learned one the others were easy to master.

Battles were fought and won with the roll of a die using a chart to determine the outcome.

A single game might take a week or more to play and this, along with the complexity of the games and their attempt to simulate reality made them geek heaven. We would play for hours and hours. Pale, pasty, greasy haired eggheads sitting around a card table discussing the arcane realities of battles that were twenty years old. Could the New Jersey beat the Bismarck? Should you play 1914 using the original line of march or choose your own innovative strategy? And then there was Blitzkrieg which wasn't an historical battle but an attempt to simulate a wide ranging war across a modern Europe using today's weaponry.

That meant atom bombs were on the table. Of course the game ended way to quickly if you used the nuclear option.

This was not a recipe for socialization. We learned no people skills other than how to trick people into doing something they shouldn't by lying. No girls played these games. No athletes played these games. No greasers played these games. Just kids with good grades and few friends who had nothing better to do than sit around for hours playing at war. Frittering away our adolescence. Squandering our youth. Behaving like any other kid with a Play Station or an Xbox blasting away at aliens. Had we an Xbox we would never have picked up those cardboard squares but geeks use whatever is at hand to hide from the world and for us it was games of war played out with cardboard squares moving across a colored board.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 10:13AM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Avalon Hill and the World at War](#)

- JimMaddox

May 09, 2009

It all began with Tactics II. The first board game that gave us a sense of warfare without the hassle of chess. Then came Gettysburg and Afrika Korps and all the rest. Steve Kay had them first, and he and I spent many evenings and weekends moving those blue and pink cardboard squares across the battlefield. It was an obsession, and it was a magnificent one.

[Re: Avalon Hill and the World at War](#)

- JimMaddox

May 13, 2009

I believe we spent just as much time playing Risk, Stratego and Monopoly. Later on it was Pinochle. It's just that the Avalon Hill games were just way too cool.

Building a Library Builds Character

Friday, May 22, 2009

Teachers and parents spend a lot of time trying to "improve" children. In the sixties in grammar school one of their tactics was the Arrow Book Club or Scholastic Book Club. Each month we'd get a newsletter with different books and we would take them home and show our mothers and then buy one or two. Then we'd do book reports on them.

“Encyclopedia Brown”, “Homer Price”, and many others.

In Junior and Senior High School we were introduced to the Bookmobile. This was a trailer filled with bookshelves and books. We would be given time each day for several days to visit the bookmobile and select books and purchase them. The selection was more sophisticated than in grammar school and the reading levels ran the gamut.

For me and my friends this was a chance to buy books on war. History books, war story books, anything with Nazi’s and bombs would do. Our other obsession was science fiction. This was one place I was allowed to purchase whatever I wanted. I just asked my mom for money at the beginning of the week and we were off to the races.

Since we were becoming young adults we were now being permitted to choose our own books for book reports. Bruce Catton’s Civil War books, Shirer’s Hitler, and a million other books on WWII. We read Heinlein and LeGuin and Bradbury and in general tried to find the coolest book to report on in class so we’d look cool.

Of course this was a serious error since only eggheads think reading is cool. But there we were, at the front of the class reading our reports on illustrated men and the battle of Midway and D-Day and robots.

We were reading...that was good. But we were still separating ourselves from everyone else. We were on a slippery slope to meaninglessness and didn’t even know it. By the time we woke up to see what we had done it was too late. Being smart wasn’t a skill set you needed in 1965. Nobody sent us the memo though so we went on raising our hands and buying our books and trying to out know it all each other. This is a habit that persists in me to this day. Perhaps it’s no accident that in my office my nickname is Encyclopedia Jack.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 01:47PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Building a Library Builds Character](#)

- JimMaddox

May 22, 2009

The Bookmobile was Nirvana. We were also introduced to Kurt Vonnegut as well. The know it all within persists with me as well. My former manager once told me I was too intelligent to be working in her department. I still have a military history obsession.

Paper Route Redux

Monday, June 08, 2009

I could be wrong but I believe 1965 is the year I got tricked into a paper route all over again. Not only a paper route but a bigger, harder, more complicated paper route. This kid in town, Bob Coccozza, approached me and asked if I’d like to take over his route. I’d need a bike with a basket because this was a Philadelphia Evening Bulletin route with over 50 customers. He said I could make a lot of money. He was a year or so older than me so I believed him.

I went to my Dad and told him all about the route. How much money I’d make, the responsibility it would teach me, etc. Basically all the bullshit parents want to hear and kids know they want to hear so they buy into it. Everyone involved knows it’s a lie but they want to believe. In its simplest form this usually results in Mom walking a dog at 6am

every morning in the rain. In my case it had no real hardship for my Dad. Only me, only me.

My Dad wouldn't buy me a bike however. He said if I wanted a bike he'd buy it and I'd have to pay him back. It was the first of thousands of times in my life to come where I made an insane calculation and told him I could do it. So off we went to Woodbury to the bike store. Both Mick and I bought bikes. Mine was a red Schwinn Typhoon. Basically a hunk of iron with a foot brake and one gear. Since Wenonah was largely flat this wasn't a real problem.

We bought a basket as well and I was off to the races. For two weeks I shadowed Bob and learned the route. Every afternoon after school we'd drive to the Earnhardts and pick up our papers. We'd wrap them in rubber bands, put them in our bags, then in our baskets and off we'd ride. Bob's route covered primarily the south side of Wenonah. He had customers on both the east and west sides of the railroad tracks but there were a lot of them.

After our first week Friday rolled around. Friday was collection day. This was the day we got off our bikes and walked up to the doors of the customers to ask for the meager amount the weeks worth of papers cost. Your collection money would pay for your cost of the papers and provide you with a profit. That profit depended on everyone paying. Therein lay the rub. They didn't all pay. So there you'd be Saturday morning driving around hitting up customers again before you went to see "the man".

This was a guy in his thirties or so who serviced the routes. Nowadays he'd be the sadsack driving around with the papers in his mini van with his wife at 5am but back then he got to be a sadist with an army of minions. Besides badgering you constantly for money he weaseled you into being a circulation agent. Contests would be formed for you to grow your route. You'd ride around with an extra twenty papers to distribute to new potential customers. After they'd gotten a free paper for a week how could they tell a thirteen year old boy they didn't want the paper? How indeed? Let's keep in mind there were only x number of houses in Wenonah so all these people had been hit up by generations of bike riding paperboys. They were cold hearted monsters and they weren't buying our spiels.

Or at least not mine. My friend Don Adams and later my brother Ted used superior customer service to expand their base and improve their bottom line. I did not. I used lazy paperboy skills coupled with zero follow through to shrink my route and my bottom line. I was no better at this shit now than I had been when I was younger. Just bigger.

There were benefits to being a paperboy however. More about that in my next post.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:01PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Paper Route Redux](#)

- JimMaddox

June 09, 2009

Never had a paper route of my own. I did substitute for some of my friends when they were on vacation, and that was enough for me. The horrors of collecting, and the overbearing attitude of the circulation guys kept me away from that. Lawn mowing for me. Your own boss, your own hours, and the sweet smell of freshly cut grass.

[Re: Paper Route Redux](#)

- Anonymous

November 23, 2009

...please where can I buy a unicorn?

Pedaling for Dollars

Tuesday, June 09, 2009

A paper route is not just a job. It's an adventure and not a good one. At least I picked the Bulletin for my route. This meant I worked after school, ate dinner, did homework all like a normal kid except for the work part. My brother Ted was dumb enough to be an Inquirer paperboy. That meant getting up at 5am. No way I was getting up at 5am.

The main bad part of a paper route was collecting money. Adults have a lot of trouble saying no when other adults ask them for money they owe them. Especially if it's fifty cents. But for some reason they had no qualms saying no to us. Not just once, repeatedly, till you got sick of asking them. Finally they'd cancel owing, like, ten dollars and leave a 13 year old holding the bag. You had to go back to "the man" and tell him and he'd read you the riot act. Would he help you talk to the asshole who wouldn't pay you? No way, Jose. You were on your own. A miniature collection agency with no muscle behind you.

Sometimes it was funny when they didn't pay you. They'd hide from you. You could see they were in the house but they wouldn't answer the door. That was really pathetic.

If you've ever seen the movie "Better Off Dead" and you were a paperboy you know that movie was the revenge fantasy for every kid everywhere. "Give me my two dollars".

Ideally people would tip you but this was a Methodist town and they watched their pennies and I was a lazy, indifferent paperboy so the tips were meager...even at Christmas.

There was a good side to collecting money too and that was you got to go to peoples houses and often young women answered the door. Maybe it was the woman of the house, say, a hot 22 year old or maybe it was a girl a few years older than you. You would ring the bell and they'd answer and you'd just stare for a long, long, long minute like an idiot. Stunned. Unable to speak. Eventually you'd squeak out that you were collecting but in between was lingerie or tight blouses and jeans or shorts or long hair or red, red lips and that was the best part of being a paperboy.

Actually being a paperboy was good preparation for being a poet. You got to see the inner lives of people and you rarely made money. Perfect.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:23PM (-04:00)

Me & Mick and Foreign Tongues

Thursday, June 25, 2009

1965 was also the year my brother Mick entered Gateway. As you know from reading this blog Mick and I had a serious sibling rivalry. His entry into Gateway would not make things better.

When we were young we appeared to be polar opposites. I was a bookworm who tried but failed at sports. Mick was good at sports and had his struggles in school. Oh, Mick was also attractive to young teenage girls and could talk with them while I wasn't attractive and was petrified when in their presence. This dichotomy put us in many awkward situations.

As you'll recall my parents weren't very good at academic coaching. This worked out fine with me because I'd muddle through somehow and get good grades. With Mick it was a trial for all. They'd try all kinds of strategies to help him get better grades. They'd sit with him at the dining room table and go over his math. They'd send him to summer school. And best of all they bought him the ALM records for learning Spanish.

In Gateway in the sixties we learned foreign languages by listening to records and repeating what was said. Classes were assigned a foreign language and mine was French. Mick's was Spanish. If I could write in French I'd write out my favorite phrase from our first year. Remember, these were records so they weren't always perfect. This particular record had a flaw so it slowed down when it came to this one phrase and went from normal to very deep and slow. We'd laugh every time we heard it.

But getting back to Mick; he listened to his records every night for weeks. I don't know if it ever helped him but I learned "Hola Isabel, como esta?" right away. Then I had to listen to it seemingly forever.

I took French for two years. I couldn't say anything in French at the end of those two years. I couldn't read French at the end of those two years but somehow I got an okay grade.

Mick did the same. Except for the good grade part. Although he did better in Spanish than in his other classes.

When I look back at this it seems there was some profiling going on. First we were all put in classes with kids with similar grades. Then we were assigned different languages. Kids with poorer grades got Spanish. Kids with better grades French. French was a high class language while Spanish was spoken by Mexicans and immigrant laborers in Buena.

Finally I got a good grade just for muddling through and Mick a poor grade for the same effort and understanding. Merde!

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:21PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Me & Mick and Foreign Tongues](#)

- JimMaddox

June 25, 2009

Ou est la bibliotheque?

If I remember correctly you were given the name Jacques, and John Camp was given Jean. There is no other name close to James in French, so I had to settle for Pierre.

[Re: Me & Mick and Foreign Tongues](#)

- JimMaddox

June 27, 2009

Our teacher was Miss Margie Viola.

[Re: Me & Mick and Foreign Tongues](#)

- BobThomas

June 28, 2009

Miss Viola had once done some Go-Go Dancing from what she told us.

At some point there was a Miss Urban - some said she had her own zipcode.

[Re: Me & Mick and Foreign Tongues](#)

- Paul

July 04, 2009

I had Miss Urban for French in 7th & 8th grade ('66-'67 & '67-'68). My recollection is that she always wore black flats on the verge of being worn out and that she shuffled when she walked. The only French I remember had something to do with telling your friend who had fallen in the snow while skiing to come on and get up. As soon as I had a choice, I took German, which seemed easier to me.

The Glorious 4th

Friday, July 03, 2009

Okay, I'm sick as a dog, I feel like shit but come hell or high water I'll be at the corner of S. Lincoln & W. Mantua Ave when the three one minute blasts go off. Keep in mind I'm giving up the Macy's fireworks in the Hudson. Seriously there is no better 4th of July in all the world like Wenonah's! See you there.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 06:03PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The Glorious 4th](#)

- Anonymous

July 03, 2009

Got that right, Jack- the Bonsal Blues, the Hobo Band, the Boy Scouts....the fire trucks going by tossing candy to the kids. Fun at the lake after the parade, with the fire house opened up and parties going on all over town. A time to catch up with family and friends.

Well, I've got Cape Cod- just back from a superb ball game- a parade tomorrow afternoon, another game, then fireworks over the harbor. Not a bad consolation prize, but wenonah is special- may have to pull out a couple of DVDs with those parades from the 60s and 70s on them.

Jim

The Trestle & The Pill Factory

Friday, July 10, 2009

In eighth grade we began to expand our geographic horizons. We moved further afield from the woods by Clay Hill, venturing past the Lentz's house all the way to the railroad trestle. This hike required we cross a huge downed tree and it passed an area of the creek where you might actually be able to swim. There was one home with a huge German Shepherd that you would have to sneak by. The trail ended up in an area we called Boy Scout Island. It wasn't an island but occasionally the different scout troops would do overnights there. Just past Boy Scout Island was the trestle. The trestle was huge and loomed far over our heads. The creek itself had it's only "white water" as it rolled over rocks from the construction of the trestle.

We'd scale the trestle from the bottom or simply walk up the sides and then venture out on the trestle itself. None of us knew when a train might come so this was initially terrifying. We later learned we could move off to a side area of the trestle and wait till a train passed if we were trapped in the middle when one came through. But in the beginning we were too stupid to figure this out.

After spending a beautiful Fall afternoon dodging death we'd walk down the tracks throwing rocks at the telegraph wires to hear the weird sounds they'd make. A high whine. After a bit we'd drop down the grade and pass by the Pill Factory. By the time we were kids the Pill Factory was abandoned but for years it had been one of the few industries in Wenonah. Now it was a scary abandoned white building. As I recall we were too frightened to go inside but I could be wrong.

We'd end up by the Mecholsky's and then back home. Another day of artificially induced terror and adventure. Four or six or eight teenagers lost in their own little world.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 12:16PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: The Trestle & The Pill Factory](#)

- JimMaddox

July 11, 2009

If I had lived in Wenonah and was hanging out with you I would have been a spoil-sport. Being the son of a railroad man I had it drummed into me that one NEVER played anywhere near railroad tracks. My Dad had to supervise the clean up of the remains of people unlucky enough to have a close encounter with a train.

[Re: The Trestle & The Pill Factory](#)

- JimMaddox

July 11, 2009

I don't remember if it we were in Ninth or Tenth Grade, but guys from Woodbury Heights went over to Wenonah to play football against you. We walked along the railroad tracks to get there, and even though I was older and wiser, and the line was barely used anymore I still felt uneasy about doing it and I could still hear my father's warnings in my mind.

Crossing the Trestle

Sunday, July 12, 2009

I should mention that several years ago at a poetry reading in Warren County I ran into an old poetry associate, Charles Johnson. I had just finished my reading and one of the poems mentioned the tracks and the trestle. Charles walked up to me and said "I crossed that trestle". I was surprised and asked what he meant. He told me he'd taken the walk down the tracks and crossed the railroad trestle. Just as my friends and I and generations of kids had done over the years. The difference is that Charles was from Haddon Heights or Jericho and he was black and for a young man from Jericho to cross that trestle in the early sixties was far braver than any other little kid worrying about trains. There were real threats if he walked through Wenonah and the threats were the people. They're talking about finally building the light rail from Philly to Glassboro through Wenonah using the old rail bed again. As usual the anti light rail group is worried about black and spanish folks getting off in Wenonah. As though any black kid would want to get off in Wenonah. As if they wouldn't get escorted to the town line and sent home. Some things never change. So my congratulations to my brave friend and to all my friends who helped walk that line. Don't forget there is still a line. Watch each others back.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:39PM (-04:00)

Pavlov's Jack

Sunday, August 23, 2009

As you'll no doubt remember I washed out of Boy Scouts (literally) because I wet the bed. That was when I was eleven. I continued to do so till I was fourteen. I think that puts me in eighth grade but even if it doesn't I'm thinking about it so in it goes. My parents took me to many doctors over the years trying to figure out why I peed myself at night. Shrinks, urologists, you name it. They also never really told me why we were talking to these folks. I was dragged from health care center to health care center and I still woke up in a sea of piss every morning. Then one day my parents brought home a new device. It consisted of a rubber pad that went under my sheets and an electronic device. The device worked thus: when liquids hit the pad it triggered an electric signal that rang a loud bell. A REALLY, REALLY, REALLY LOUD BELL!!!! No one explained to me how it actually worked except to show me the bell going off and setting things up and sending me to bed. That night I slept like a baby, pissed myself and MARY MOTHER OF GOD WHAT IS THAT BELL, WHY IS IT RINGING, WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE LORD IS THIS SHIT. I peed again the next night and I think the next two nights but then a miracle happened. Right before I had to piss I woke up and went downstairs and pissed in the toilet. I didn't wet the bed. And I didn't wet the bed ever again. I thought at the time this was a miracle. I still do for the most part. But I've since learned about Pavlov's dog and I realize I was a Pavlovian dog. I heard the bell before I peed and woke up and went downstairs. This was good because I didn't wet the bed. It was bad because I hate bells. I have to pick up a phone on the first ring if not sooner. Loud noises freak me out. Oh, and I don't like to piss or shit in any place other than a toilet or the wilderness (or pee in a back yard late at night when I'm drunk and happy). This was a real liability when I became ill with AIDS because peeing and shitting yourself are kind of day to day

possibilities. But that is for a post much, much later. For now I'm in eighth grade and my sheets are dry and the bell is muffled.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:27PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Pavlov's Jack](#)

- Anonymous

August 23, 2009

Jack,

You already did this one on 3/8/09!

[Re: Pavlov's Jack](#)

- JackWiler

August 24, 2009

Ah, tis true, tis true! What a chowderhead I am. Now I have to come up with another idea:)

At least if it's a rerun it's been changed a bit. Think of it like "Bedwetting Part II".

[Re: Pavlov's Jack](#)

- Karen

August 26, 2009

Jack Wiler, you are amazing. You can talk about the most awful stuff and still make me laugh. It's a gift.

Thanks,

Karen

An Apology

Sunday, August 23, 2009

Many (well two) people have been asking when I would post again. They apparently were sick of the trestle. To all of you bored people I apologize. I'm undergoing treatment for Hepatitis C which requires me to take a chemo therapy drug every week. It sucks the life out of you. I don't care about food or sex and I can't come up with an idea to save my ass. So bear with me. This too shall pass and we can leap back with abandon into the heady days of the Beatles and the Dave Clark Five and Lyndon Baines Johnson and Vietnam. Life stretches out before us.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 03:38PM (-04:00)

APBA Baseball

Wednesday, August 26, 2009

One thing I hate about this blog is the early sixties. Stuff is mixed up in my head time wise and I don't have a way to anchor it to a year or a class. Things extend between years, pop up again and vanish. Boy Scouts, for instance, were part of my life at two very different occasions in the sixties. The same is true of APBA sports games.

ABPA is a game much like Strat-o-matic. Each is a combination of dice, player cards, and result boards. Each game has demented enthusiasts. In Wenonah my neighborhood was filled with APBA Baseball and later football, basketball, and golf enthusiasts. Terry and

Chris were the first to purchase games and soon all of us had one. The games were played either in Terry's basement or my front porch.

We were deadly serious about the game. We played full seasons, used real score books and kept detailed statistics. There were leaders in HR's, batting average, and ERA. Just like the big boys. Terry had the Yankees and my team was the Reds, Gary Condell loved the Cardinals and Mick the Pirates. We'd sit for hours in Terry's basement rolling dice and yelling cheers, all the while listening to Mary Flemings collection of show tunes and Frank Sinatra 45's.

We were surrounded by Doc Flemings Yankee memorabilia and bar supplies and the air was damp basement air. The kids who weren't playing were playing the slot machine.

The competition was fierce although it seems the Yankees always won...just as they did in real life. Later we bought into old time teams. I had the 1940 Cincinnati Reds and Terry had the 27 Yankees. He won game after game after game. Every player on his team was light years better than any other player on any other team. Babe Ruth hit a homer every other at bat. It was hopeless.

Once again I was a loser. I had lots of company but the Reds weren't really all that good. I loved them and wanted them to be good but the numbers didn't lie...they were not a championship team vs any other team. Had I known that in the 70's the Big Red Machine would rear its head I would have given any thing to travel into the future and come back with those cards. No more block of k after k after k. I'd be a winner and they'd all be losers. Fat chance. I was stuck in 1965 in a basement getting crushed day after day after day by better players, better strategists, and cooler kids. I was a loser.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 01:55PM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: APBA Baseball

- Anonymous

August 26, 2009

Good memories, Jack- George Dunn and i used to drive my mother crazy with the rolling of the dice- but as george has said in later years, she was really a good sport about it- we were just fanatical. I remember my first set was the 67 baseball season- George got 68.

Actually, we're still playing as we hit 50- it is all done on computer now, and played against guys all over the country. I'm about ready to play a series of all time players that George heads up.

Jim

Re: APBA Baseball

- JimMaddox

August 29, 2009

I'm not sure of the time line for me either. I was a Strat-O-Matic player. I ordered it from the ad they ran in comic books. John Marcone and I played that game for hours and hours on the weekends. I believe we may have started that in 1966. I was a Yankees fan, so I ordered a lot of the great Yankees teams from the past. John Marcone used to keep meticulous records of our teams' performances. A few years later Dave Yurkow from National Park became my main opponent and we bought a lot of the old timer team packages.

Friendship and it's vagaries

Monday, September 14, 2009

The Gateway years mark the beginning of my slow inexorable slide into being a complete non-entity. In Wenonah, while I may have been picked on occasionally, I still had a certain presence and friends who I'd known for many years. High school however completely confounded me. I was unable to find a persona that worked. It seemed to me that all my friends were able to change, to grow up, to be a cool person. Having worked with high school kids for many years now I know that I was wrong on at least that count. The odds are that every one of my friends and acquaintances felt as goony as I did. The difference was that they felt goony with cool kids and I felt goony all alone.

I've always been a big reader and this isolation made me a bigger reader. Books were a place I could go to and imagine myself as someone different. A brave soldier, or a lawyer fighting for the common man, or a wilderness scout in the 1800's. Anything other than a kid in corduroy pants, a plaid long sleeve shirt, and two giant cowlicks. The only thing I was spared was pimples. Thank God for small favors.

My cool friends would hang out with me now and again and in class kids I admired would talk with me and listen to me but once that was done I was back to geekdom. Me, Jim Maddox, Grant Karsner, and Bruce Zahn sitting at the cafeteria table just hoping nothing bad would happen to us for the next twenty minutes.

Meanwhile kids were walking around wearing desert boots and jeff caps and Beetle jackets and had cool dress shirts with fairy loops. Not this boy. We were still shopping in Pitman for clothes and Pitman was anything but cool so you can imagine a men's store in Pitman would be the antithesis of cool.

Eighth Grade! Five long years stretched out in front of me till I could go away to college and ditch these losers. It seemed like my life was to be an eternal torment and that was not a bad prediction at least for the foreseeable future.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 02:52PM (-04:00)

Comments

[Re: Friendship and it's vagaries](#)

- BobThomas

September 15, 2009

Jack,

You didn't seem all that goony to me. I remember going camping with you down to Cape Hatteras one spring weekend. The weather could be almost as nice on the Cape as in FL with much less driving while South Jersey was still stuck in the end of winter grayness.

Whose VW bug did we have with the brakes that would sometimes go all the way to floor? I remember us flying through a toll booth because we couldn't stop - actually we went by it - not through it - and lucky we were that no one's car was blocking the booth. We had to back up to pay and the toll collector was pretty upset with us.

We may have financed the trip by doing an overnight printing delivery for Mr. Lundquist to some firm in Raleigh?

Were you driving or was I?

It was a good trip though - nice weather till the winds picked up the night before we had to head home - but lots of stars and wind and waves and fun.

Edgar Allen P-38s! Remember?

There were some bright days in those gloomy high school years, eh?

[Re: Friendship and it's vagaries](#)

- JimMaddox

September 16, 2009

The perceptions we had of ourselves at the time were reinforced by our behavior. I also retreated into books, but along with that I had my friend Steve Kay who shared many of the same interests. You were fortunate not to be cursed with pimples; I did not escape that until our Junior year when my skin decided to calm down. I also had that awful crew cut which made me stick out even more.

The Unseen World

[Tuesday, September 22, 2009](#)

In Eighth grade my father decided Mick and I needed a room of our own. So that summer, well, that August, he labored mightily to renovate our attic into a bedroom. My dad wasn't the handiest guy on the planet but he made a closet out of window shutters and we spackled and painted and soon Mick and I were settled in our new room. It was a nice big room, the biggest in the house, and it would become a sanctum over the years for good behavior and bad.

Mick and I had shared a room before when we were young. That never went well. We spent most of our time fighting and as it happens Mick periodically walked in his sleep. I remember one fine night when he took a whiz in our closet, mistaking it for the bathroom a few feet away. This time things went better. No fights. No petty bickering. Maybe we were growing up.

Now our house was an old house. It was built in 1888 and it had its peculiarities. It made noises at night when it settled and it had the odd shadow that seemed out of place. We didn't know much about the people who'd lived there before us except for the family that we replaced, the Sacca's. We knew them because they lived two doors down and Peggy Sacca walked me to school that first day of first grade. We also knew them by the charcoal graffiti in the attic (before we painted). I particularly remember one little note: "Peggy Sacca says her mom smokes cigarettes". A damning note to say the least.

At any event a few weeks into our tenure on a stormy Fall night (well, maybe not stormy) Mick and I were talking when from out of nowhere an object in the middle of our dresser slid two feet and dropped off the dresser. You heard me. It just slid to the edge of the dresser and then it fell off. No minor earthquake, no truck rumbling through, no kid brother behind the dresser tipping it. So we naturally assumed it had to be a poltergeist. Or a ghost.

In any event Mick picked up his blanket and pillow and went downstairs to my old room at

the foot of the attic stairs, never to return. I stayed. It was my bedroom, except when I was away at college, till 1974. Me, the ghost, and the graffiti.

Posted by Jack Wiler at 07:16AM (-04:00)

Comments

Re: The Unseen World

- Janice

October 23, 2009

RIP Jack.

Though I only met you several times, I've heard lots about you.

Glad you are not suffering now.

Re: The Unseen World

- JimMaddox

October 25, 2009

Jack felt that during our Junior year at Gateway that he was getting over his "geek" faze in life.

During our Senior year he believed that things were turning around and that he and I were no longer un-cool.

Jack became the editor of the Polaris, the school newspaper at Gateway Regional High School and I became the news editor. During that year we attended the anti Vietnam war rally in Washington, D.C., and Jack began dating. We parted company after graduation in the spring of 1970. We re-kindled our friendship in 2007, and now due to his passing, we've parted company again.

Goodbye Jack, thanks for being my friend.

Re: The Unseen World

- PamCassidy

October 25, 2009

My last email from Jack was on 10/9, and I wrote to him on 10/18. Don't know if he read it. He was a hero to me in high school, and he never knew it until a year ago, when we hooked up again. Jack, I have your poems, your emails and your memory. You are missed, my pen pal!

Re: The Unseen World

- Anonymous

November 17, 2009

It was rather interesting for me to read that blog. Thanks for it. I like such themes and anything connected to this matter. I definitely want to read a bit more on that blog soon.

Re: The Unseen World

- Anonymous

November 26, 2009

hi, jackwiler.blogspot.com!

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Re: The Unseen World

- Anonymous

December 12, 2009

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Re: The Unseen World

- Anonymous

December 16, 2009

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Re: The Unseen World

- Anonymous

December 18, 2009

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Re: The Unseen World

- Anonymous

December 23, 2009

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Re: The Unseen World

- Anonymous

December 28, 2009

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