

Jack Wiler on Wenonah 2008

Wednesday, December 24, 2008

[Holly, Jolly, Christmas in 1964](#)

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 today's 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 [11:46 AM](#) [3 comments](#) 

Labels: [1964](#), [Holidays](#), [Wenonah](#)

Saturday, December 13, 2008

[They're Dancing in the Streets](#)

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 [3:11 PM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Thursday, December 11, 2008

[Dance Lessons](#)

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.

Sunday, November 09, 2008

Street Football

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 lightning 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 [4:42 PM](#) [3 comments](#) 

Friday, November 07, 2008

[My Name is Jimmy Carl Black and I'm the Indian of the Group](#)

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.

Sunday, November 02, 2008

HO Racing

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.

uesday, October 28, 2008

The 1964 Phillies (a cautionary tale)

I'm going to break from my goals tonight because of the prodding of Bob Thomas. I jettied 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 [2:04 PM](#) [1 comment](#) 

Thursday, October 09, 2008


[Margie's Luncheonette](#)

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 [8:15 PM](#) [4 comments](#) 

Sunday, October 05, 2008

[Autumn in Wenonah](#)

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.

Saturday, September 20, 2008

Fall and Gateway Regional

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 [5:45 PM](#) [3 comments](#) 

Friday, September 05, 2008

[The World of Gateway](#)

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

Monday, August 25, 2008


[The New Class Struggle](#)

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 [7:50 PM](#) [5 comments](#) 

Saturday, August 23, 2008

[Bluebird Buses and Me](#)


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 [4:22 AM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Saturday, August 09, 2008

[Sweet days of summer](#)

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 [2:34 PM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Saturday, August 02, 2008

[Ventura on my Mind](#)

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.

Wednesday, July 16, 2008


[The Western Edge](#)

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 [10:27 PM](#) [4 comments](#) 

Thursday, July 10, 2008

[First Leg](#)

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 [9:03 PM](#) [0 comments](#) 

Sunday, July 06, 2008

[Reunion and all that](#)

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 [5:27 PM](#) [3 comments](#) 

Saturday, July 05, 2008

[The 4th and all that](#)

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 [12:09 AM](#) [1 comments](#) 

Tuesday, July 01, 2008

[The End of Days](#)

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!

Monday, June 02, 2008

[Waist Deep in the Big Muddy](#)

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.

Friday, May 23, 2008

Getting Bigger

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.

Friday, May 02, 2008

[Sixth Grade Report Card](#)

EXPLANATION OF MARKS

MARK SUBJECTS: A-B-C-D-E-F
A = 90 - 100
B = 80 - 89
C = 70 - 79
D = 60 - 69
E = 50 - 59
F = Below 50 - Failing
NA = Incomplete work
- = Working Below Grade level

MARK SUBJECTS

D - Outstanding
S - Satisfactory
N - Needs Improvement

	1	2	3	4
READING	A	B	A	A
ENGLISH USAGE	A	B	A	A
SPELLING	A	B	A	A
HANDWRITING	D	B	A	A
ARITHMETIC	A	A	A	A
SOCIAL STUDIES	B	B	A	A
SCIENCE	D	B	A	B
PHYS. ED. & HEALTH	S	S	S	S
MUSIC	S	S	S	S
ART	S	S	S	S
CITIZENSHIP	A	A	A	A

FACTORS AFFECTING GRADES

(Where applicable we have placed a number or number in circles to indicate the specific factor which affects your child's grade.)

- Attendance
- Active interest and attention to class work
- Independent study preparation
- Effort/effort
- Cooperation
- Reading proficiency at grade level
- Ability for personal and for school property
- Completion of assigned work on time
- Understanding and application of basic skills
- Memorable use of study time
- Degree of self-reliance and absorption of class material
- Participation with the group
- Following of directions
- Courtesy and respectful conduct
- Assumption of responsibility for own independent work
- Efficiency of use of library facilities
- Working below grade level
- Parent-teacher conference advised

TEACHERS' SIGNATURES

1. *Jack Wiler*
2. *John H. Miller*


3. *John H. Miller*
4. *John H. Miller*

PARENTS' COMMENTS & SIGNATURE

1. _____

2. _____

PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT REPORT
Grade 4 - 4



WENONAH PUBLIC SCHOOL

Child's Name: *Jack Wiler*

Teacher: *John H. Miller*

Parent: *John H. Miller*

The purpose of the report of Pupils' Achievement is to provide parents and teachers with information regarding the child's progress in the various subjects during the reporting period. It is not intended to be a final report of the child's achievement. It is intended to be a guide for the parent and teacher in planning for the child's progress.

The report of Pupils' Achievement is to be used by the parent and teacher in planning for the child's progress. It is not intended to be a final report of the child's achievement. It is intended to be a guide for the parent and teacher in planning for the child's progress.

ATTENDANCE DATA

Present and regular attendance is very important to your child's progress. For the best results, please see that your child is present absent or for regular reasons.

	S	O	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
PRESENT	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
ABSENT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

How smart was I. Just you look!
Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [7:59 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

The Digging Yard

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.

Sunday, April 27, 2008

[Things we didn't know we'd learn; 1963](#)

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.

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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 [12:23 AM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

[Newspaper Routes](#)

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.

Saturday, April 19, 2008

Sixth Grade September 1963

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.


Thursday, March 27, 2008

[Names in the Photo](#)

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 [8:16 PM](#) [1 comments](#) 

Wednesday, March 26, 2008

[Sixth Grade 1963-1964](#)




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 [11:04 AM](#) [1 comments](#) 

Wednesday, March 12, 2008


[6th Grade, September 1963](#)

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 [7:56 PM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Friday, March 07, 2008

[Summer 1963](#)

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 littI 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 [10:24 PM](#) [0 comments](#) 

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Next post... Mrs Myers and 6th Grade. Jack has his last shot at cool Stay tuned.

Friday, February 22, 2008

[Practice Runs; Summer, 1963](#)

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 [3:44 PM](#) [1 comments](#) 

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

[Wenonah Wolf Pack](#)

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. Ooops! I need the names of those two twins. Help!!!!


Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [2:50 PM](#) [1 comments](#) 

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

[Gateway Regional Class of 1970 Reunion](#)

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 [8:17 PM](#) [0 comments](#) 

[Boys in Groups](#)

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 overnighther 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 [7:47 PM](#) [0 comments](#) 

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

[Athletics in Grade School](#)

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 banged 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 [8:06 PM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Thursday, February 07, 2008

[Hospitals and Fun](#)

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 [9:42 PM](#) [1 comment](#) 

Tuesday, February 05, 2008

[Spring et al in Wenonah](#)

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.

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

[The Lives of Others](#)


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 [4:48 PM](#) [1 comment](#) 

Sunday, January 27, 2008

[Volunteer Firemen](#)


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 [1:43 PM](#) [1 comment](#) 

Tuesday, January 22, 2008

[Law Enforcement in Wenonah](#)

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 Chief's 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 its 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 [7:02 PM](#) [1 comment](#) 

Monday, January 14, 2008

[Getting Sick in 1960](#)

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 downside 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.