

Jack Wiler on Wenonah 2009

Tuesday, September 22, 2009

[The Unseen World](#)

In Eighth grade my father decided Mick and I needed a room of our own. So that summer, well, that August, he labored mightily to renovate our attic into a bedroom. My dad wasn't the handiest guy on the planet but he made a closet out of window [shutters](#) and we spackled and painted and soon Mick and I were settled in our new room. It was a nice big room, the biggest in the house, and it would become a sanctum over the years for good behavior and bad.

Mick and I had shared a room before when we were young. That never went well. We spent most of our time fighting and as it happens Mick periodically walked in his sleep. I remember one fine night when he took a whiz in our closet, mistaking it for the bathroom a few feet away. This time things went better. No fights. No petty bickering. Maybe we were growing up.

Now our house was an old house. It was built in 1888 and it had its peculiarities. It made noises at night when it settled and it had the odd shadow that seemed out of place. We didn't know much about the people who'd lived there before us except for the family that we replaced, the Sacca's. We knew them because they lived two doors down and Peggy Sacca walked me to school that first day of first grade. We also knew them by the charcoal graffiti in the attic (before we painted). I particularly remember one little note: "Peggy Sacca says her mom smokes cigarettes". A damning note to say the least.

At any event a few weeks into our tenure on a stormy Fall night (well, maybe not stormy) Mick and I were talking when from out of nowhere an object in the middle of our dresser slid two feet and dropped off the dresser. You heard me. It just slid to the edge of the dresser and then it fell off. No minor earthquake, no truck rumbling through, no kid brother behind the dresser tipping it. So we naturally assumed it had to be a poltergeist. Or a ghost.

In any event Mick picked up his blanket and pillow and went downstairs to my old room at the foot of the attic stairs, never to return. I stayed. It was my bedroom, except when I was away at college, till 1974. Me, the ghost, and the graffiti.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [7:16 AM](#) [91 comments](#) 

Monday, September 14, 2009

[Friendship and it's vagaries](#)

The Gateway years mark the beginning of my slow inexorable slide into being a [complete](#) non-entity. In Wenonah, while I may have been picked on occasionally, I still had a certain presence and friends who I'd known for many years. High school however completely confounded me. I was unable to find a persona that worked. It seemed to me that all my friends were able to change, to grow up, to be a cool person. Having worked with high school kids for many years now I know that I was wrong on at least that count. The odds are that every one of my friends and acquaintances felt as goony as I did. The difference was that they felt goony with cool kids and I felt goony all alone.

I've always been a big reader and this isolation made me a bigger reader. Books were a place I could go to and imagine myself as someone different. A brave soldier, or a [lawyer](#) fighting for the common man, or a wilderness scout in the 1800's. Anything other than a kid in corduroy pants, a plaid long sleeve shirt, and two giant cowlicks. The only thing I was spared was pimples. Thank God for small favors.

My cool friends would hang out with me now and again and in class kids I admired would talk with me and listen to me but once that was done I was back to geekdom. Me, Jim Maddox, Grant Karsner, and Bruce Zahn sitting at the cafeteria table just hoping nothing bad would happen to us for the next twenty minutes.

Meanwhile kids were walking around wearing desert boots and jeff caps and Beetle jackets and had cool dress shirts with fairy loops. Not this boy. We were still shopping in Pitman for clothes and Pitman was anything but cool so you can imagine a men's store in Pitman would be the antithesis of cool.

Eighth Grade! Five long years stretched out in front of me till I could go away to college and ditch these losers. It seemed like my life was to be an eternal torment and that was not a bad prediction at least for the foreseeable future.

Wednesday, August 26, 2009

[APBA Baseball](#)

One thing I hate about this blog is the early sixties. Stuff is mixed up in my head time wise and I don't have a way to anchor it to a year or a [class](#). Things extend between years, pop up again and vanish. Boy Scouts, for instance, were part of my life at two very different occasions in the sixties. The same is true of APBA sports games.

ABPA is a [game](#) much like Strat-o-matic. Each is a combination of dice, player cards, and result boards. Each game has demented enthusiasts. In Wenonah my neighborhood was [filled](#) with APBA Baseball and later football, basketball, and golf enthusiasts. Terry and Chris were the first to purchase games and soon all of us had one. The games were played either in Terry's basement or my front porch.

We were deadly serious about the game. We played full seasons, used real score books and kept detailed statistics. There were leaders in HR's, batting average, and ERA. Just like the big boys. Terry had the Yankees and my team was the Reds, Gary Condell loved the Cardinals and Mick the Pirates. We'd sit for hours in Terry's basement rolling dice and yelling cheers, all the while listening to Mary Flemings collection of show tunes and Frank Sinatra 45's.

We were surrounded by Doc Flemings Yankee memorabilia and bar supplies and the air was damp basement air. The kids who weren't playing were playing the slot machine. The competition was fierce although it seems the Yankees always won...just as they did in real life. Later we bought into old time teams. I had the 1940 Cincinnati Reds and Terry had the 27 Yankees. He won game after game after game. Every player on his team was light years better than any other player on any other team. Babe Ruth hit a homer every other at bat. It was hopeless.

Once again I was a loser. I had lots of company but the Reds weren't really all that good. I loved them and wanted them to be good but the numbers didn't lie...they were not a championship team vs any other team. Had I known that in the 70's the Big Red Machine would rear its head I would have given any thing to travel into the future and come back with those cards. No more block of k after k after k. I'd be a winner and they'd all be losers. Fat chance. I was stuck in 1965 in a basement getting crushed day after day after day by better players, better strategists, and cooler kids. I was a loser.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [1:55 PM](#) [3 comments](#) 

[Pavlov's Jack](#)

As you'll no doubt remember I washed out of Boy Scouts (literally) because I wet the bed. That was when I was eleven. I continued to do so till I was fourteen. I think that puts me in eighth grade but even if it doesn't I'm thinking about it so in it goes.

My parents took me to many doctors over the years trying to figure out why I peed myself at night. Shrinks, urologists, you name it. They also never really told me why we were talking to these folks. I was dragged from health care center to health care center and I still woke up in a sea of piss every morning.

Then one day my parents brought home a new device. It consisted of a rubber pad that went under my sheets and an electronic device. The device worked thus: when liquids hit the pad it triggered an electric signal that rang a loud bell. A REALLY, REALLY, REALLY LOUD BELL!!!!

No one explained to me how it actually worked except to show me the bell going off and setting things up and sending me to bed.

That night I slept like a baby, pissed myself and MARY MOTHER OF GOD WHAT IS THAT BELL, WHY IS IT RINGING, WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE LORD IS THIS SHIT.

I peed again the next night and I think the next two nights but then a miracle happened. Right before I had to piss I woke up and went downstairs and pissed in the toilet. I didn't wet the bed. And I didn't wet the bed ever again.

I thought at the time this was a miracle. I still do for the most part. But I've since learned about Pavlov's dog and I realize I was a Pavlovian dog. I heard the bell before I peed and woke up and went downstairs.

This was good because I didn't wet the bed. It was bad because I hate bells. I have to pick up a phone on the first ring if not sooner. Loud noises freak me out. Oh, and I don't like to piss or shit in any place other than a toilet or the wilderness (or pee in a back yard late at night when I'm drunk and happy). This was a real liability when I became ill with AIDS because peeing and shitting yourself are kind of day to day possibilities.

But that is for a post much, much later. For now I'm in eighth grade and my sheets are dry and the bell is muffled.

Sunday, July 12, 2009

[Crossing the Trestle](#)

I should mention that several years ago at a poetry reading in Warren County I ran into an old poetry [associate](#), Charles Johnson. I had just finished my reading and one of the poems mentioned the tracks and the trestle. Charles walked up to me and said "I crossed that trestle". I was surprised and asked what he meant. He told me he'd taken the walk down the tracks and crossed the railroad trestle. Just as my friends and I and generations of kids had done over the years.

The difference is that Charles was from Haddon Heights or Jericho and he was black and for a young man from Jericho to cross that [trestle](#) in the early sixties was far braver than any other little kid worrying about trains.

There were real threats if he walked through Wenonah and the threats were the people. They're talking about finally building the light rail from Philly to Glassboro through Wenonah using the old [rail bed](#) again. As usual the anti light rail group is worried about black and spanish folks getting off in Wenonah. As though any black kid would want to get off in Wenonah. As if they wouldn't get escorted to the town line and sent home. Some things never change.

So my congratulations to my brave friend and to all my friends who helped walk that line. Don't forget there is still a line. Watch each others back.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [2:39 PM](#) [0 comments](#) 

Friday, July 10, 2009

[The Trestle & The Pill Factory](#)

In eighth grade we began to expand our geographic horizons. We moved further afield from the woods by Clay Hill, venturing past the Lentz's house all the way to the railroad trestle. This hike required we cross a huge downed tree and it passed an area of the creek where you might actually be able to swim. There was one home with a huge German Shepherd that you would have to sneak by. The trail ended up in an area we called Boy Scout Island. It wasn't an island but occasionally the different scout troops would do overnights there. Just past Boy Scout Island was the trestle. The trestle was huge and loomed far over our heads. The creek itself had it's only "white water" as it rolled over rocks from the construction of the trestle.

We'd scale the trestle from the bottom or simply walk up the sides and then venture out on the trestle itself. None of us knew when a train might come so this was initially terrifying. We later learned we could move off to a side area of the trestle and wait till a train passed if we were trapped in the middle when one came through. But in the

beginning we were too stupid to figure this out.

After spending a beautiful Fall afternoon dodging death we'd walk down the tracks throwing rocks at the telegraph wires to hear the weird sounds they'd make. A high whine. After a bit we'd drop down the grade and pass by the Pill Factory. By the time we were kids the Pill Factory was abandoned but for years it had been one of the few industries in Wenonah. Now it was a scary abandoned white building. As I recall we were too frightened to go inside but I could be wrong.

We'd end up by the Mecholsky's and then back home. Another day of artificially induced terror and adventure. Four or six or eight teenagers lost in their own little world.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [12:16 PM](#) [3 comments](#) 

Friday, July 03, 2009

[The Glorious 4th](#)

Okay, I'm sick as a dog, I feel like shit but come hell or high water I'll be at the corner of S. Lincoln & W. Mantua Ave when the three one minute blasts go off. Keep in mind I'm giving up the Macy's fireworks in the Hudson.

Seriously there is no better 4th of July in all the world like Wenonah's! See you there.

Thursday, June 25, 2009

[Me & Mick and Foreign Tongues](#)

1965 was also the year my brother Mick entered Gateway. As you know from reading this blog Mick and I had a serious sibling rivalry. His entry into Gateway would not make things better.

When we were young we appeared to be polar opposites. I was a bookworm who tried but failed at sports. Mick was good at sports and had his struggles in school. Oh, Mick was also attractive to young teenage girls and could talk with them while I wasn't attractive and was petrified when in their presence. This dichotomy put us in many awkward situations.

As you'll recall my parents weren't very good at [academic](#) coaching. This worked out fine with me because I'd muddle through somehow and get good grades. With Mick it was a trial for all. They'd try all kinds of strategies to help him get better grades. They'd sit with him at the [dining room table](#) and go over his math. They'd send him to summer school. And best of all they bought him the ALM records for learning Spanish.

In Gateway in the sixties we learned foreign languages by listening to records and repeating what was said. [Classes](#) were assigned a foreign language and

mine was French. Mick's was Spanish. If I could write in French I'd write out my favorite phrase from our first year. Remember, these were records so they weren't always perfect. This particular record had a flaw so it slowed down when it came to this one phrase and went from normal to very deep and slow. We'd laugh every time we heard it.

But getting back to Mick; he listened to his records every night for weeks. I don't know if it ever helped him but I learned "Hola Isabel, como esta?" right away. Then I had to listen to it seemingly forever.

I took French for two years. I couldn't say anything in French at the end of those two years. I couldn't read French at the end of those two years but somehow I got an okay grade.

Mick did the same. Except for the good grade part. Although he did better in Spanish than in his other classes.

When I look back at this it seems there was some profiling going on. First we were all put in classes with kids with similar grades. Then we were assigned different languages. Kids with poorer grades got Spanish. Kids with better grades French. French was a high class language while Spanish was spoken by Mexicans and immigrant laborers in Buena.

Finally I got a good grade just for muddling through and Mick a poor grade for the same effort and understanding. Merde!

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [2:21 PM](#) [4 comments](#) 

Tuesday, June 09, 2009

[Pedaling for Dollars](#)

A paper route is not just a job. It's an adventure and not a good one. At least I picked the Bulletin for my route. This meant I worked after school, ate dinner, did homework all like a normal kid except for the work part. My brother Ted was dumb enough to be an Inquirer paperboy. That meant getting up at 5am. No way I was getting up at 5am.

The main bad part of a paper route was collecting money. Adults have a lot of trouble saying no when other adults ask them for money they owe them. Especially if it's fifty cents. But for some reason they had no qualms saying no to us. Not just once, repeatedly, till you got sick of asking them. Finally they'd cancel owing, like, ten dollars and leave a 13 year old holding the bag. You had to go back to "the man" and tell him and he'd read you the riot act. Would he help you talk to the asshole who wouldn't pay you? No way, Jose. You were on your own. A miniature collection agency with no muscle behind you. Sometimes it was funny when they didn't pay you. They'd hide from you. You could see they were in the house but they wouldn't answer the door. That was really pathetic.

If you've ever seen the movie "Better Off Dead" and you were a paperboy you know that movie was the revenge fantasy for every kid everywhere. "Give me my two dollars". Ideally people would tip you but this was a Methodist town and they watched their pennies and I was a lazy, indifferent paperboy so the tips were meager...even at Christmas.

There was a good side to collecting money too and that was you got to go to peoples houses and often young women answered the door. Maybe it was the woman of the

house, say, a hot 22 year old or maybe it was a girl a few years older than you. You would ring the bell and they'd answer and you'd just stare for a long, long, long minute like an idiot. Stunned. Unable to speak. Eventually you'd squeak out that you were collecting but in between was lingerie or tight blouses and jeans or shorts or long hair or red, red lips and that was the best part of being a paperboy.

Actually being a paperboy was good preparation for being a poet. You got to see the inner lives of people and you rarely made money. Perfect.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [2:23 PM](#) [0 comments](#) 

Monday, June 08, 2009

[Paper Route Redux](#)

I could be wrong but I believe 1965 is the year I got tricked into a paper route all over again. Not only a paper route but a bigger, harder, more complicated paper route. This kid in town, Bob Cocozza, approached me and asked if I'd like to take over his route. I'd need a bike with a basket because this was a Philadelphia Evening Bulletin route with over 50 customers. He said I could make a lot of money. He was a year or so older than me so I believed him.

I went to my Dad and told him all about the route. How much money I'd make, the responsibility it would teach me, etc. Basically all the bullshit parents want to hear and kids know they want to hear so they buy into it. Everyone involved knows it's a lie but they want to believe. In its simplest form this usually results in Mom walking a dog at 6am every morning in the rain. In my case it had no real hardship for my Dad. Only me, only me.

My Dad wouldn't buy me a bike however. He said if I wanted a bike he'd buy it and I'd have to pay him back. It was the first of thousands of times in my life to come where I made an insane calculation and told him I could do it. So off we went to Woodbury to the bike store. Both Mick and I bought bikes. Mine was a red Schwinn Typhoon. Basically a hunk of iron with a foot brake and one gear. Since Wenonah was largely flat this wasn't a real problem.

We bought a basket as well and I was off to the races. For two weeks I shadowed Bob and learned the route. Every afternoon after school we'd drive to the Earnhardts and pick up our papers. We'd wrap them in rubber bands, put them in our bags, then in our baskets and off we'd ride. Bob's route covered primarily the south side of Wenonah. He had customers on both the east and west sides of the railroad tracks but there were a lot of them.

After our first week Friday rolled around. Friday was collection day. This was the day we got off our bikes and walked up to the doors of the customers to ask for the meager amount the weeks worth of papers cost. Your collection money would pay for your cost of the papers and provide you with a profit. That profit depended on everyone paying. Therein lay the rub. They didn't all pay. So there you'd be Saturday morning driving

around hitting up customers again before you went to see “the man”.

This was a guy in his thirties or so who serviced the routes. Nowadays he'd be the sadsack driving around with the papers in his mini van with his wife at 5am but back then he got to be a sadist with an army of minions. Besides badgering you constantly for money he weaseled you into being a circulation agent. Contests would be formed for you to grow your route. You'd ride around with an extra twenty papers to distribute to new potential customers. After they'd gotten a free paper for a week how could they tell a thirteen year old boy they didn't want the paper? How indeed? Let's keep in mind there were only x number of houses in Wenonah so all these people had been hit up by generations of bike riding paperboys. They were cold hearted monsters and they weren't buying our spiels.

Or at least not mine. My friend Don Adams and later my brother Ted used superior customer service to expand their base and improve their bottom line. I did not. I used lazy paperboy skills coupled with zero follow through to shrink my route and my bottom line. I was no better at this shit now than I had been when I was younger. Just bigger.

There were benefits to being a paperboy however. More about that in my next post.

Friday, May 22, 2009

[Building a Library Builds Character](#)

Teachers and parents spend a lot of time trying to “improve” children. In the sixties in grammar school one of their tactics was the Arrow Book Club or Scholastic Book Club. Each month we'd get a newsletter with different books and we would take them home and show our mothers and then buy one or two. Then we'd do book reports on them. “Encyclopedia Brown”, “Homer Price”, and many others.

In Junior and Senior High School we were introduced to the Bookmobile. This was a trailer filled with bookshelves and books. We would be given time each day for several days to visit the bookmobile and select books and purchase them. The selection was more sophisticated than in grammar school and the reading levels ran the gamut.

For me and my friends this was a chance to buy books on war. History books, war story books, anything with Nazi's and bombs would do. Our other obsession was science fiction. This was one place I was allowed to purchase whatever I wanted. I just asked my mom for money at the beginning of the week and we were off to the races.

Since we were becoming young adults we were now being permitted to choose our own books for book reports. Bruce Catton's Civil War books, Shirer's Hitler, and a million other books on WWII. We read Heinlein and LeGuin and Bradbury and in general tried to find the coolest book to report on in class so we'd look cool.

Of course this was a serious error since only eggheads think reading is cool. But there we were, at the front of the class reading our reports on illustrated men and the [battle of Midway](#) and D-Day and robots.

We were reading...that was good. But we were still separating ourselves from everyone else. We were on a slippery slope to meaninglessness and didn't even know it. By the time we woke up to see what we had done it was too late. Being smart wasn't a skill set you needed in 1965. Nobody sent us the memo though so we went on raising our hands and buying our books and trying to out know it all each other. This is a habit that persists in me to this day. Perhaps it's no [accident](#) that in my office my nickname is Encyclopedia Jack.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [1:47 PM](#) [1 comment](#) 

Saturday, May 09, 2009

[Avalon Hill and the World at War](#)

In 8th grade I fell totally and completely into the role of geek and egghead. I hung around with the weirdo's in my class, I read books even more than before if that's possible, and I began playing extraordinarily complicated board games. Principal among these were the games put out by Avalon Hill.

These games were simulations of historical battles (with one exception) such as D-Day, the battle for North Africa (Afrika Korps), Guadalcanal, and the Battle of the Bulge among many. You used small cardboard squares that represented some military unit such as a brigade or a division and moved them on a hexagonal grid superimposed on the map of the battle in question. Each game had slightly different rules to address geographic and supply issues but once you learned one the others were easy to master.

Battles were fought and won with the roll of a die using a chart to determine the outcome.

A single game might take a week or more to [play](#) and this, along with the complexity of the games and their attempt to simulate reality made them geek heaven. We would play for hours and hours. Pale, pasty, greasy haired eggheads sitting around a card table discussing the arcane realities of battles that were twenty years old. Could the New Jersey beat the Bismarck? Should you play 1914 using the original line of march or choose your own innovative strategy? And then there was Blitzkrieg which wasn't an historical battle but an attempt to simulate a wide ranging war across a modern Europe using today's weaponry.

That meant atom bombs were on the table. Of course the game ended way to quickly if you used the nuclear option.

This was not a recipe for socialization. We learned no people skills other than how to trick people into doing something they shouldn't by lying. No girls played these games. No athletes played these games. No greasers played these games. Just kids with good grades and few friends who had nothing better to do

than sit around for hours playing at war. Frittering away our adolescence. Squandering our youth. Behaving like any other kid with a Play Station or an Xbox blasting away at aliens. Had we an Xbox we would never have picked up those cardboard squares but geeks use whatever is at hand to hide from the world and for us it was games of war played out with cardboard squares moving across a colored board.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [10:13 AM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Sunday, May 03, 2009

[Poetry in the Schools, 60's Style](#)

And so we return to school in the fall of 1965. The 9th graders of last year have vanished, they're off to Woodbury HS. Now all of us are bound together for the next four years.

The school is now complete. The auto shop, the wood shop, the gym, the auditorium. All done. We're settled in with our teachers for five long years.

I think, though I can be wrong because I am old, that this is the year teachers began teaching us with methods designed for the kids. You may ask, what are you talking about Jack? What I'm talking about is the horrible, misguided attempt by older men and women to relate to teenagers by incorporating various elements of the teenagers life into the education process.

In our case it was bringing Simon and Garfunkel into poetry. And as I write this I realize I'm off by one year (because my enfeebled old guy brain remembered the album came out a year later) but I'll continue anyway because I just finished National Poetry Month and participated in dozens of examples of teaching for the kids. Not all misguided but all spotted a mile away by their charges.

In our English class the teacher and God alone can remember who that was brought out the Sounds of Silence by Simon and Garfunkel and played "I am a Rock". Then she played "The Sounds of Silence". Then she asked us what we thought the songs were about. I should note at this point I was an egghead. Which meant I had to have an answer or I was a failure. So were most of my classmates. We instantly shot our hands in the air and offered our various thoughts on the meanings of these songs. Keep in mind that before this moment I'd never thought a song meant anything other than some vague, undefined feeling, like being sad or happy or lonely or brave. Now I intellectualize shit like this all the time but back then I had no idea this might be important to anyone.

Suddenly like a bolt of lightning we all understood "poetry"!!!! It was full of secret meanings and codes and all we had to do was figure them out! The "Rock" was something other than a rock. The sounds of "Silence" weren't just silence but

something else that only we the smart kids could understand. Oh, and the artists who made the songs and poems.

We also got to swing away at Edgar Allen Poe and his “alliteration” (the bells, bells, bells, the tinkling tintinnabulation of the bells) and a couple other minor league knuckleheads. I suppose if we were older they’d have tossed in Dylan and Baez but for now we got Art and Paul.

Years later I found out that every kid in every NJ HS in 1966 had the same lesson plan. It felt like the Ed Sullivan Show had come to all our schools with one for the kids. Then they went back to the jugglers and Perry Como and Topo Gigio. No wonder we hated poetry. Our teachers had no idea how to teach it so they resorted to some cookie cutter technique that seemed hip (they were all young) that they learned at the teachers convention in Atlantic City that fall. Poetry was as alien to them as it was to us. They drove to work listening to the Dave Clark Five or the Beatles or if they were older Elvis and Sinatra and then had to find some way to talk about something that looked like it had just landed from Outer Space.

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

[Wenonah in the Summer](#)

We'd leave the shore at the end of June, beginning of July, and return to Wenonah. Two weeks in the relatively balmy climate of a shore town. We'd pull into a near tropical climate 45 minutes later. South Jersey in the summer is hot and humid. Very hot and very humid. The trees by now were a deep, deep green. The garden we'd begun in May was filled with weeds and vegetables bursting out all over. The grass was high and thick. The house close and hot.

There was no air conditioning in the Wiler house until a few years later. We cooled off with a big ass [attic fan](#) that sucked air from below and blew it out a window, essentially creating some sort of breeze. We lay in bed in our sweat and listened to the crickets.

We'd wake up early and run to our bikes and head right to the pool. We spent the day swimming and getting a great tan and working up the nerve to flirt with girls. Of course we never did. Some of our friends were on the swim team. The Wenonah Swim Club had a great swim team for a little podunk town in South Jersey. I hated swimming on a team. Way too much work. In fact, although I liked swimming in general, the swim club itself could be a trial. I wasn't a particularly fast freestyle swimmer so in our games of tag I was always it.

But then, you've probably heard that before.

We'd end up back at the house for dinner. Then we'd head out to [play](#) the Gun [Game](#) or Kick the Can or just sit on the porch and watch the world walk by. It was as if we were in heaven. The night was filled with the sounds of cans rattling down the sidewalk, lightning bugs, the chirp of crickets and the sound of sneakers slapping cement. No, it wasn't as if we were in heaven. We were in heaven.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [4:21 PM](#) [8 comments](#) 

Sunday, March 29, 2009

[1965: Year of the World's Best Music](#)

I talked a little about the music of that summer of 1965. But the whole year was filled with ungodly tunes. Hit after hit after hit. When I was living in New Brunswick in the '80's there was a band that only played music from 65 & 66. They played at my second wedding. But Jack, you say, it couldn't have been that good. You must be just fondly remembering it; every year is pretty much the same when it comes to music. Well, here's my proof: The hits of 1965:

The Ad Libs - The Boy From New York City - 02-65 - Blue Cat **Jewel Akens** - The Birds And The Bees - 03-65 - Era **Herb Alpert** - A Taste Of Honey - 11-65 - A&M **Eddy Arnold** - Make The World Go Away - 12-65 - RCA **Len Barry** - 1-2-3 - 11-65 - Decca **Fontella Bass** - Rescue Me - 11-65 - Checker **Shirley Bassey** - Goldfinger - 03-65 - UA **The Beach Boys** - California Girls - 08-65 - Capitol **The Beach Boys** - Do You Wanna Dance - 04-65 - Capitol **The Beach Boys** - Help Me, Rhonda - 05-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - Eight Days A Week - 03-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - Help! - 09-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - Ticket To Ride - 05-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - We Can Work It Out - 12-65 - Capitol **The Beatles** - Yesterday - 10-65 - Capitol **The Beau Brummels** - Just A Little - 06-65 - Autumn **The Beau Brummels** - Laugh, Laugh - 02-65 **James Brown** - I Got You (I Feel Good) - 11-65 **James Brown** - Papa's Got A Brand New Bag - 08-65 - King **The Byrds** - Mr. Tambourine Man - 06-65 - Columbia **The Byrds** - Turn! Turn! Turn! - 11-65 - Columbia **Freddy Cannon** - Action - 09-65 - Warner **Mel Carter** - Hold Me Thrill Me Kiss Me - 08-65 - Imperial **Alvin Cash & The Crawlers** - Twine Time - 02-65 - Mar-V-Lus **The Castaways** - Liar, Liar - 10-65 - Soma **Chad & Jeremy** - Willow Weep For Me - 01-65 - World Artists **Cher** - All I Really Want To Do - 08-65 - Imperial **Petula Clark** - Downtown - 01-65 - Warner **Petula Clark** - I Know A Place - 04-65 - Warner **Sam Cooke** - Shake - 02-65 - RCA **Vic Dana** - Red Roses For A Blue Lady - 04-65 - Dolton **The Dave Clark Five** - Any Way You Want It - 01-65 - Epic **The Dave Clark Five** - Catch Us If You Can - 09-65 - Epic **The Dave Clark Five** - Come Home - 03-65 - Epic **The Dave Clark Five** - I Like It Like That - 07-65 - Epic **The Dave Clark Five** - Over And Over - 12-65 - Epic **Jackie DeShannon** - What The World Needs Now Is Love - 07-65 -

Imperial **Dick & Deedee** - Thou Shalt Not Steal - Warner **Ronnie Dove** - One Kiss For Old Time's Sake - 05-65 - Diamond **Patty Duke** - Don't Just Stand There - 08-65 - UA **Bob Dylan** - Like A Rolling Stone - 08-65 - Columbia **Bob Dylan** - Positively 4th Street - 10-65 - Columbia **Shirley Ellis** - The Clapping Song - 04-65 - Congress **Shirley Ellis** - The Name Game - 01-65 - Congress **Wayne Fontana & The Mindbenders** - Game Of Love - 04-65 - Fontana **The Fortunes** - You've Got Your Troubles - 09-65 - Press **The Four Seasons** - Bye, Bye, Baby (Baby Goodbye) - 02-65 - Philips **The Four Seasons** - Let's Hang On! - 11-65 - Philips **The Four Tops** - I Can't Help Myself - 06-65 - Motown **The Four Tops** - It's The Same Old Song - 08-65 - Motown **Freddie & The Dreamers** - I'm Telling You Now - 04-65 - Tower **Marvin Gaye** - Ain't That Peculiar - 11-65 - Tamla **Marvin Gaye** - How Sweet It Is To Be Loved By You - 01-65 - Tamla **Marvin Gaye** - I'll Be Doggone - 05-65 - Tamla **The Gentrys** - Keep On Dancing - 10-65 - MGM **Gerry & The Pacemakers** - Ferry Across The Mersey - 03-65 - Laurie **Bobby Goldsboro** - Little Things - 03-65 - UA **Dobie Gray** - The "In" Crowd - 02-65 - Charger **Roy Head** - Treat Her Right - 10-65 - Back Beat **Herman's Hermits** - Can't You Hear My Heartbeat - 03-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - I'm Henry VIII I Am - 07-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - Just A Little Bit Better - 10-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - Mrs. Brown You've Got A Lovely Daughter - 04-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - Silhouettes - 05-65 - MGM **Herman's Hermits** - Wonderful World - 06-65 - MGM **The Impressions** - Amen - 01-65 - ABC Paramount **The Impressions** - People Get Ready - 03-65 - ABC Paramount **Horst Jankowski** - A Walk In The Black Forest - 06-65 - Mercury **Jay & The Americans** - Cara Mia - 07-65 - UA **Jay & The Americans** - Let's Lock The Door (And Throw Away The Key) - 02-65 - UA **Jay & The Americans** - Some Enchanted Evening - 10-65 - UA **Jack Jones** - The Race Is On - 04-65 - Kapp (written and recorded first by country singer George Jones at the same time on United Artists) **Tom Jones** - It's Not Unusual - 05-65 - Parrot **Tom Jones** - What's New Pussycat? - 07-65 - Parrot **Bert Kaempfert** - Red Roses For A Blue Lady - 03-65 - Decca **The Kingsmen** - The Jolly Green Giant - 02-65 - Wand **The Kinks** - All Day And All Of The Night - 02-65 - Reprise **The Kinks** - Tired Of Waiting For You - 04-65 - Reprise **Brenda Lee** - Too Many Rivers - 07-65 - Decca **Dickey Lee** - Laurie (Strange Things Happen) - 07-65 - TCF Hall **Barbara Lewis** - Baby, I'm Yours - 08-65 - Atlantic **Barbara Lewis** - Make Me Your Baby - 11-65 - Atlantic **Gary Lewis & The Playboys** - Count Me In - 05-65 - Liberty **Gary Lewis & The Playboys** - Everybody Loves A Clown - 10-65 - Liberty **Gary Lewis & The Playboys** - Save Your Heart For Me - 07-65 - Liberty **Gary Lewis & The Playboys** - This Diamond Ring - 02-65 - Liberty **Little Anthony & The Imperials** - Hurt So Bad - DCP **The Lovin' Spoonful** - Do You Believe In Magic - 10-65 - Kama Sutra **Martha & The Vandellas** - Nowhere To Run - 04-65 - Gordy **Dean Martin** - I Will - 12-65 - Reprise **Barbara Mason** - Yes, I'm Ready - 07-65 - Artic **The McCoys** - Fever - 12-65 - Bang **The McCoys** - Hang On Sloopy - 09-65 - Bang **Barry McGuire** - Eve Of Destruction - 09-65 - Dunhill **Roger Miller** - Engine Engine #9 - 06-65 - Smash **Roger Miller** - England Swings - 12-65 - Smash **Roger Miller** - King Of The Road - 02-65 - Smash **The**

Miracles - The Tracks Of My Tears - 08-65 - Tamla **The Moody Blues** - Go Now! - 04-65 - London **The Newbeats** - Run, Baby Run (Back Into My Arms) - 11-65 - Hickory **Patti Page** - Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte - 06-65 - Columbia **Peter & Gordon** - I Go To Pieces - 02-65 - Capitol **Gene Pitney** - Last Chance To Turn Around - 06-65 - Musicor **Elvis Presley** - Crying In The Chapel - 05-65 - RCA **Elvis Presley** - I'm Yours - 10-65 - RCA **Elvis Presley** - (Such An) Easy Question - 07-65 - RCA **The Ramsey Lewis Trio** - Hang On Sloopy - 12-65 - Cadet **The Ramsey Lewis Trio** - The "In" Crowd - 09-65 - Argo **The Righteous Brothers** - Ebb Tide - 12-65 - Philles **The Righteous Brothers** - Just Once In My Life - 05-65 - Philles **The Righteous Brothers** - Unchained Melody - 08-65 - Philles **The Righteous Brothers** - You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin' - 01-65 - Philles **Johnny Rivers** - Seventh Son - 06-65 - Imperial **The Rolling Stones** - Get Off Of My Cloud - 10-65 - London **The Rolling Stones** - (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction - 06-65 - London **The Rolling Stones** - The Last Time - 04-65 - London **Billy Joe Royal** - Down In The Boondocks - 08-65 - Columbia **Billy Joe Royal** - I Knew You When - 11-65 - Columbia **Sam The Sham & The Pharaohs** - Woolly Bully - 05-65 - MGM **The Seekers** - I'll Never Find Another You - 04-65 - Capitol **The Shangri-Las** - I Can Never Go Home Anymore - 12-65 - Red Bird **Del Shannon** - Keep Searchin' (We'll Follow The Sun) - 01-65 - **Amy Silkie** - You've Got To Hide Your Love Away - 11-65 - Fontana **Simon & Garfunkel** - The Sounds Of Silence - 12-65 - Columbia **The Sir Douglas Quintet** - She's About A Mover - 06-65 - Tribe **Sonny** - Laugh At Me - 09-65 - Atco **Sonny & Cher** - Baby Don't Go - 10-65 - Reprise **Sonny & Cher** - But You're Mine - 11-65 - Atco **Sonny & Cher** - I Got You Babe - 08-65 - Atco **Sounds Orchestral** - Cast Your Fate To The Wind - 05-65 - Parkway **The Strangeloves** - I Want Candy - 08-65 - Bang **The Supremes** - Back In My Arms Again - 05-65 - Motown **The Supremes** - I Hear A Symphony - 11-65 - Motown **The Supremes** - Nothing But Heartaches - 09-65 - Motown **The Supremes** - Stop! In The Name Of Love - 03-65 - Motown **The Temptations** - My Girl - 02-65 - Gordy **Joe Tex** - Hold What You've Got - 01-65 - Dial **The Toys** - A Lovers Concerto - 10-65 - Dynovoice **The Turtles** - It Ain't Me Babe - 09-65 - White Whale **The Vogues** - You're The One - 10-65 - Co & Ce **Jr. Walker & The All Stars** - Shotgun - 03-65 - Soul **We Five** - You Were On My Mind - 09-65 - A&M **Ian Whitcomb** - You Turn Me On - 07-65 - Tower **Wonder Who?** - Don't Think Twice - 12-65 - Philips **Glenn Yarbrough** - Baby The Rain Must Fall - 05-65 - RCA **The Yardbirds** - For Your Love - 06-65 - Epic **The Yardbirds** - Heart Full Of Soul - 09-65 - Epic **The Zombies** - Tell Her No - 02-65 - Parrot

Look at all these names! The Beatles, The Stones, James Brown, Bob Dylan, The Supremes, The Temps, Barry motherfucking McGuire, The Zombies, The Turtles, Sir Douglas Quintet, Dean Martin, Roger Miller, Sonny & Cher!!!! All mixed up together. Patty Duke next to Sam the Sham and the Pharoahs! The Yardbirds & Patty Page! Herman's Hermits have more hits than the Beatles, more than Elvis. The crummy and the great all tossed together! And all of us

chuckleheads walking around humming those tunes, strolling down the beach with all that music in our heads, all that wild world.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [11:10 AM](#) [1 comments](#) 

Labels: [Music of 1965](#)

Sunday, March 08, 2009

[Boy Scouts of America](#)

Well, I'm going to break my cardinal rule. I'm going back a bit in time so I can talk about something I forgot. I talked a bit about this in an earlier post but realized that I had much more to say. I forgot that in the fall of 1964 I joined the Boy Scouts. I'd been a Cub Scout and a Webelo (how's that for a weird name) and it was my goal to become a Boy Scout. So I joined Troop 50. I was happy as a clam. We met every Thursday (I think) in the Methodist Church. There'd be a reading of the minutes, some discussion of various upcoming events, talk about camping trips, a bit of Scout lore and then we'd play various physical games. Chief among them was British Bulldog. I have no memory of what this game consisted of; only that it involved mashing into each other very hard. There must have been rules but who knows.

Our Scout Leader was (and I could be wrong here) Ralph Leeds father and the senior leaders were guys like Kingsley Lentz. What a great name. Kingsley. It was all about the outdoors. I couldn't wait to go on my first camping trip. I was excited and happy. I forgot one minor thing. I wet the bed. So we decamped to Elk Neck, Maryland and on the first night I wet my sleeping bag. You can imagine this might have been a tad embarrassing. It was. In fact it was humiliating and then I got to do it again the next night.

I'd wet the bed for my whole life up until then. My parents took me to Children's Hospital in Philadelphia looking for help, we tried various homemade cures and strategies but nothing worked. Like clockwork each evening I pissed in my pants. This was only pleasurable for about two minutes. Then it was cold and wet.

My bed had plastic sheets. I couldn't sleep over at other friend's houses. I told no one about my problem. It was my little secret.

Then my little secret was hanging on a rope in the middle of our camp site. My soaked sleeping bag.

I quit the Boy Scouts after that. I did rejoin several years later but we'll get to that. Later in the year or perhaps it was Fall of 8th grade my parents found my cure. It was a rubber mat that they put under the sheets. When liquids hit the mat it set off a loud, loud alarm.

I would wake up. Pretty soon I would wake up before the alarm went off. I was Pavlov's dog. It worked. Within a week or two I stopped wetting the bed. But I've never forgotten the alarm. I can't stand a bell that rings for more than a moment or two. I pick up calls before everyone at every job I've ever had. I've never forgotten my sleeping bag.

Isn't it odd how secrets come back to haunt you?

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [3:39 PM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Monday, March 02, 2009

Ocean City 1965

I'm bored with 7th grade. Okay, I barely remember 7th grade, it being a long time ago and me being old and forgetful. So let's cut to the summer of 1965. A great year no matter how you cut it.

My family went on vacation this year to Ocean City where we took up residence in two buildings along with several other families from Wenonah and my dad's brother and his family. It was kid heaven. Our apartments were right on the beach and we were there for two weeks. A few times we even got out of school before the year was over to go. The apartments were all the way at the end of OC. I think between 56th & 57th streets but I'm sure I'm wrong and someone will tell me in a day or so. They were simple buildings built in the late fifties. Living room, sort of dining room, bedrooms, bath, shower outside. We spent maybe 8 hours a day inside unless it rained. Besides my family we stayed with our parents friends. The Lakes, the Shepards, the Pistilli's, the Nugent's and others who came and went but these were the standby's. This meant we had tons of friends. Charlie Lake, Debbie Lake, Jack and Joe Shepard, Bruce Nugent, Dave Pistilli. It also meant we had our own little world on the beach.

On the Saturday we were to leave it would invariably be foggy or rainy and we'd be whining about not being able to have fun and my Dad said, always, don't worry it will burn off. And it always did. We drove to OC the back way through Glassboro and Buena, past the Mexican movies in Buena, past the old lost taverns along the way until we arrived at the 34th street bridge and in just twenty odd blocks were at our shore place. We'd unpack like demons, throw on our trunks, grab our towels and race to the beach and the water and OH MY FUCKING GOD THE WATER IS FREEZING!. And it was.

This is the 2nd week of June and the water temperature on the Jersey shore is typically 52-56 degrees. This is bone chilling cold. Your little balls would get sucked up deep inside you, your ankles would ache a terrible terrible ache but you had to go in, you had to go in.

Our parents would arrive moments later and spread the chairs and blankets around like some rude compound. Maybe an umbrella, maybe not. We'd run in and out of the water, hike to the point south of 59th street, explore the gullies and the rocks and our fathers would scope out babes while our mothers...actually I don't know what they were doing.

Probably scoping out young men but this is 1965 so maybe not.

We were there for two weeks. We played box ball, which is some weird combo of handball and baseball, in which Mr. Lake would usually crush my foot and break my little toe. We'd play handball. We'd play frisbee. We'd body surf. We'd go to the boardwalk! The boardwalk! The boardwalk! The Pavilion! Salt water taffy! Mack and Manco's pizza! The cool hobby store that sold Airfix little men! The Taylor Ham Pork roll store with Pennsylvania Dutch Root Beer! And of course, of course, Gillian's Wonderland!

The ferris wheel, the merry go round, the rides, the cotton candy, the sheer pleasure in pissing away all the money you had from shoveling snow or raking leaves or from your lazy uncles and aunts at Christmas! It was the greatest place in the world in 1965 for a mess of chowderheads from South Jersey. We body surfed, we played, we ogled Penny Pistilli and my Aunt Simone's bikini. We cursed in a stupid 7th grade way. We wore clam diggers and stupid hats right out of Beach Blanket Bingo.

We were in heaven.

Saturday, January 31, 2009

[Fashion and the Sixties](#)

My actual favorite part of HS and Junior HS was clothes and hair. Not my clothes and not [my hair](#) but everyone else's. Girls in particular were hotter than hot. Beehive hairdos, white boots, over use of mascara and eye shadow. Guys got to wear skinny pants and skinny ties and sharp shoes. My erotic ideals were all formed in the mid-sixties. In fact when the punk era reigned supreme I was happy as a pig in shit. All the women looked like really fierce versions of my high school crushes. It was like heaven because this time I could do something about it.

Of course in 1965 I could do nothing about it. It was the first year my mother let me choose my own clothing. We drove to Pitman and went to Jack Lang's the premier men's and boy's clothing outlet in our little corner of the world. This made our little corner of the world very small. We could have driven to Philadelphia and I could have gone to Brook's Brothers or Wanamakers but we didn't. We went to Pitman. I picked out my spring school clothes. An chartreuse Izod LaCoste polo shirt and a pair of vaguely lime green, glen plaid pants. Also a zip up spring jacket.

We drove from there to Ernie's Shoe Post in Mantua. At Ernie's I picked out a pair of desert boots. Plus a pair of PF Flyers.

I was ready to go. I was going to be one snappy dresser. What a dope I was. I would make these mistakes with clothing dozens of times over the years but this stands out as one of my worst. I walked through the school like a green lollipop. At least my desert boots were cool. But I turned no heads. Instead I retreated further into the world of books and history and all the attendant bullshit of my tiny world.

Next up...Ocean City.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [2:05 PM](#) [5 comments](#) 

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

[The Book Report from Hell](#)

Let's go back again to 1965 and Gateway Regional HS. For the first time in our lives we move from class to class. There are announcements on the loudspeaker. We pledge allegiance to the flag along with a disembodied voice. We have new classes, English instead of Reading, Earth Science instead of Science, Mathematics not Arithmetic, and on and on.

My English teacher was Mrs. Oglesby. For our first book report we are asked to do a presentation along with several other students. The presentation would summarize the book and illustrate the reasons you liked it. Nightmare. Horrible, horrible nightmare. Out loud performance was not my thing in 7th grade. You can probably understand since I

was a midgety, skinny runt with a cowlick. My voice was as high as a birds. I felt like some monstrous geek and I was.

But there was no way out. As I recall I was hooked up with Jim Maddox and Steven Kaye and the book we selected was "Last of the Mohicans". This was just about the only part of the assignment I liked. I was a James Fenimore Cooper freak. I read all his books. Books that were universally reviled by any competent writer or critic. But they had war and Indians and sacrifice and forests and blood and an acceptable amount of romance. The girls all picked "Rebecca".

This killed us right from the git go. "Rebecca" is a fairly easily summarized story while "Last of the Mohicans" has a jumbled up plot that isn't clear for a hundred pages. Plus the girls were better at this. Their presentations were funny and inventive and informative. Thank God I can't remember ours. I do remember it was a miserable failure. We tanked. I remember slinking away from the front of the class thankful only that we'd finished.

This deep sense of embarrassment and humiliation was to walk just behind me till senior year. You can only imagine what a joy it was to go to school each day.

Posted by [Jack Wiler](#) at [2:35 PM](#) [2 comments](#) 

Monday, January 05, 2009

[New Year's Eve](#)

When I was young my brothers and I were banished to my grandmother's house on New Year's Eve. There we drank half an illicit beer and ate ham sandwiches and watched Guy Lombardo ring in the new. That is if we didn't fall asleep because of the beer.

Or else my grandmother and Aunt Gersh would come to the house and we'd do the same thing in Wenonah as we would in Bala Cynwyd. My parents were engaged in adult fun. We had no idea what adult fun was. So far as we could tell from our few exposures to a grown up party it consisted of laughing loud, drinking, and smoking and staying up late. This did not seem fun. Plus they played the Mills Brothers and Perry Como.

They did not go out to fancy night clubs, they went to friends houses and checked in by phone. No real need to do that as we had been trained well and staying up till midnight was extraordinarily difficult. So it was that my brothers and my little sister and I rang in the New Year of 1965. It may have been that year that my parents had the party at their home. I can remember vaguely one such party so let's call it that one.

I was sitting at the end of my bed with my cat, Surprise. The warm tones of Frank Sinatra filled the night. There was a woman's high laugh. The light from our back porch shown out onto the lawn and the clear night sky was lit up with a thousand stars. Happy New Year and noise and fireworks and honking and then the music again and sleep.

I woke the next morning to a house full of half-empty glasses that smelled of whiskey and ginger ale, overflowing ashtrays, and a house as quiet as a morgue.