

MORE FRIENDS, FAMILY AND ANOTHER GINGER

February 28, 2021



I just want to start out today's post with a shout out to my slowly but solidly expanding group of TWA related friends.

Yesterday, I was again honored by a return visit by the ever charming and lovely Dianne R (always a pleasure - you are an absolute sweetheart) - that's her on the upper left of the selfie - and this time she was accompanied by her dear friend, the equally charming and lovely Lori (sorry, I forgot your last name - time to up the Prevagen dose - you are a

doll) - on the upper right of the selfie, who had stopped by for her inscribed copy of my novel. It could have been that they were a captive audience - I did lock the door after letting them in - but they both did appear to enjoy my exercise of the oral tradition (all right my Riverdalian readers, mind out of the gutter, read my earlier blog) as I spent the next hour giving them the cook's tour of the house - including my home office, at whose window Claire likes to excrementally extort carrots -- which forms the basis for Jimmy & Gina Moran's home in the novel, and regaling them with a lot of background stories to both the novel and a lot of these posts. I even briefly summarized the true story of Joe Serrano falling out the window of Violet's Flophouse, which I have yet to share - but will soon - here. You see, I believe it is very important to provide the real backstory, because it is the secret ingredient that sweetens the fiction. Ladies, you are always welcome in my home. I look forward to our next gathering.

But speaking of backstory and expanding groups, I also want to welcome a new and special reader of these blogs named Brian Reinthaler. His totally unexpected appearance as a golden thread in the Riverdale tapestry is a story that I would love to filch (seriously, you just can't make this up).

He is a successful (relatively young) graduate of Georgetown Law school (if you stopped right there, you were already accomplished), and an entrepreneur, with a lovely wife and two amazing daughters (I've seen photos).

He is one of those men who would and does make his parents proud. Brian had the perfect upbringing and came from good stock. Not to get ahead of myself, but after I complete the third book of the Claire Trilogy (which is going to be amazing), I intend to write my next trilogy, which will be called the Riverdale Chronicles (so be prepared my

Riverdalian readers - I have a lot in the vault). If Brian and certain others give me the all clear, I would love to weave their story (if only a mention) into that trilogy. Brian, just know that everything I say about certain stories in these blogs and elsewhere all have their basis in fact. Everything. But even if I never get the pleasure of mentioning you again, you can forever count yourself as a legacy member of the Riverdale Diaspora. We will send you a lifetime membership card, signed by Snapper, Riverdale's Unofficial Mayor for Life, so you will know its authentic. You can reach out directly to me for some (any and all) Riverdale backstory if you like - just hit that contact button. And (imagine a perfectly executed courtly bow -- I do a great one) welcome.

So now that I have completed my blog housekeeping, what to share, what to share? Well since I mentioned it On the night of my twentieth birthday, Lenny, Serrano, Stein, and I want to say, John Hughes, accompanied me on my Celebration at Coaches 2. It was a bittersweet moment, because I had the haunting feeling that because I was leaving my teens, I was also leaving behind that built-in chronological excuse for screwing up. Frankly, it scared the shit out of me, but it ultimately led me grow up (just a little). To commemorate this transition, I decided to try a big-boy drink for the very first time; the Martini. That night, Snapper served me five of them. As I recall, they were delicious, and lethal. I also believe that the rest of the crew had at least one Martini, as well as copious amounts of other forms of alcohol. As we made our way home legless, by foot (Coaches was on Mosholu Avenue and directly faced the southernmost opening to Tyndall Avenue, which presented a 3 and 1/2 block walk to Violet's flophouse), we dropped JH

at his home along the route but fully expected to continue the festivities at the apartment. And we did, sort of.

[I have been contacted by Lenny who had just received his second Covid shot and was going through some walking dead kind of transformation and wanted to make the record clear by adding this additional information before he had completely turned into a Zombie. It turns out that we had closed the bar that night and on the way out had borrowed an amplifier belonging to a performer at the bar. When we got to John Hughes' house on Tyndall, Joe and I had pangs of conscience (which in itself makes Lenny's version suspect), and returned to C2 to put it back. Lenny proceeded home and was in bed at the time Joe went out the window and was awakened by my cries from the bathroom apprising him of the event. That would also explain his arriving at the window after I jumped. Lenny has also explained that Joe's infatuation with that window was related to the fact that Joe had somehow locked himself out of his bedroom, and Lenny had told him during an earlier incident that he had been able to break into Joe's bedroom by shimmying across the exterior of the building from the bathroom window. I stand by the rest of recitation of the events at issue. Proceed.]

The curse of being a male (one of them, anyway) is that when you drink, once you take that first pee of the night, you break the seal and must pee regularly afterwards. Beer in, beer out. By the time we reached the apartment, there was a race to the one bathroom. Serrano's bedroom offered a more direct route, so he beat me there. While I waited for him to finish (standing in Lenny's bedroom - the other access point), I suddenly heard Serrano calling out, "Smokey (his childhood and present nickname for me) cumeere, I want to show you something." I hesitated for a

moment, fearing anything that Serrano may be wanting to show me that had to do with a toilet. But when I finally worked up the courage to open the bathroom door, I was shocked by the sight of Serrano doing his best impersonation of Philip Petite, arms extended to either side for balance, walking the tightrope of the ledge of the now open, double outward swinging window, directly behind the toilet. He was just making his turn for the return crossing southward, when, to my horror, he disappeared out the window and into the night. I shot to the window, fearing the worst.

I arrived just in time to see Serrano complete a perfectly executed swan dive and strike the railing on the French balcony below with his chest and luckily bounce backward onto onto the relatively narrow balcony, with his arms still extended in a very Jesus like pose. He landed momentarily on his feet, gazed upward long enough for me to see the eyes in his head roll backwards, like the girl in the Exorcist, and then fell prone, fully extended on his back.

What happened next is completely the fault of the Martinis.

As you all must realize by now, I am terrified of heights (if you don't know this, go back and reread my bogs).

Nonetheless, and absolutely not thinking and with no plan, I leaped out the window after Serrano, hoping to get to him in the fastest way possible. It worked, sort of.

As my feet reached the wooden platform they continued on right through it's rotting wood so that I found myself wedged tightly to my hips just below where Serrano's feet were positioned. I looked back up at the window and now saw Lenny and Stein leaning on their arms staring down at the two of us. Stein looked horrified. Lenny was grinning. I shook Joe's feet and he started to come to, moaning

"Smmmmoooooooookkkkkkeeeeyyy," so we all knew he was not dead.

Now this deck sat directly outside a bedroom on the second floor, whose occupant was a middle aged spinster, who rented that room from Aunt Violet's family. I could be mistaken but she may have been a ginger. Anyway, her French doors opened on the equally French balcony.

When I looked back skyward, Stein was still there, but Lenny had vanished. The next thing I knew, the lights went on in the adjacent bedroom and I heard a woman screaming. I could now see through the French doors that Lenny had appeared, completely uninvited, in this poor woman's boudoir, thrown on the lights and scared the living shit out of her. He raced across her room, might have leapt over her bed, as she pulled her blankets protectively up on her now sitting position in bed. Lenny then threw open those French doors, lifted Serrano from the deck and tossed him in a Fireman's carry across his shoulders. Then he raced back into the bedroom, causing another chorus of shrieking to occur, and then exited the bedroom. Realizing that I did not want to be the last man standing (or wedged) on that French balcony, I grabbed hold of the railing and with a surge of adrenaline, pulled myself free of the platform.

The poor ginger had just begun to settle down when I now entered her bedroom through those French doors, looking a little worse for wear, which caused yet another chorus of panic at the disco, which was now met with a responding chorus of Aunt Violet sounding an awful lot like the Barn Owls I hear on my property when I go out to check on Claire & Honey at 2 am. "Who. . . . who who, who, who. . . ."

Now the problem was that Lenny had the advantage of entering the lower floor from our apartment through that mysterious dark interior stairwell I mentioned in an earlier blog. I was flying blind. So as I exited the screaming ginger's bedroom, I had no idea where to find that escape route. On top of that, I was met by various members of Aunt Violet's family exiting their own bedrooms, screaming in their respective panics, which added to my confusion. So I spent the next few minutes reenacting a scene from the Marx Brothers' film, *Horsefeathers*, entering and exiting every door I could find, until Stein thankfully threw open the door to the mysterious inner stairway. I quickly disappeared through it like a rabbit down a rabbit hole as Stein pulled it closed behind me and locked it.

When Stein and I reached the top of the stairs, I found Serrano and Lenny drinking some beers and laughing their respective asses off. We could still hear the commotion we had caused rising through the floor below us. Relieved, Stein and I grabbed our own bottles of suds, but before we could flip the caps off, Joe stopped laughing and hugged his ribs, with the complaint, "Jeez, I don't feel so good."

Stein, always resourceful and the least drunk among us grabbed the keys to Serrano's Javelin (yeah, he drove one - "Heyyyy, Javalin!") and shouted, "I'll drive!"

I've only been allowed to drive that Javelin once, and it resulted in me being surrounded by unmarked cop cars and a number of plain clothes officers, with their guns drawn, but that story is for another blog.

By the time Lenny and I helped Joe down the stairs, Stein had backed the car down the long driveway. Now Stein knew cars like Lenny knew food, so it was no surprise when he flew out of that driveway like the opening scene in the 1960s Batman TV show, hooked a sharp right and headed

north to the closest hospital at that time, which was Yonkers Professional.

When we arrived at the Emergency Room, Serrano didn't want to give his real name, so he signed himself in as Carl La Fong (I'm pretty sure Lenny has that document somewhere). As fate would have it, the young doctor who was attending that night was named Doctor Wong. So as the nurses were settling Serrano in one of the ER bays we heard another Nurse on the ER PA system call out repeatedly "Dr. Wong, please see patient Carl La Fong, in room B." Of course, the wonderful rhyme scheme sent Lenny, Stein and I into hysterics (still a little drunk).

It turned out that Serrano was lucky (this guy has used up 10 of his 9 lives), and ended up with just cracked ribs.

While they were wrapping Serrano's ribs up and giving him some pain killers, the rest of us kept busy holding wheel chair races along the hallways. I'm not going to lie, its harder than you think but it was a lot of fun.

When the hospital staff went to handle the final paperwork (and the bill) for Serrano's treatments, the four of us took off out the ER door, hopped into the Javelin and sped off to the Yonkers' Diner where we ended the night's festivities, as we often did, chowing down on some wonderful greasy breakfast. As the great WS has said, "All's well that ends well." (or was that the 3 Stooges?)

THE PWWC

February 27, 2021



You have heard me mention the PWWC in some of the blogs. It was an acronym for "Pre Weekend Warmup Club." It was a dark derivative of Fordham University's Hallowed Maroon Key Society. There were more us than appearing in

the photo, but this was the core, founding group. We basically would start drinking Wednesday night in the Fordham dorms and continue until Sunday morning, when we would then play football in a local bar league, get into some fights on the field, and then drink some more. (this was the 70s). I loved those guys.

The hand sign was meant to be the symbol of the Pie Man (nothing more nefarious, I swear). It represented our founding premise, which was to get piss drunk, prepare a 21-serving chocolate pudding pie (sometimes with a can of vegetables tossed in for the proper consistency), and then travel to a voted on location where we would administer that pie to a preselected victim. (note the empty pie plate in the upper left corner of the sign). The first victim was the ex-girlfriend of one of our members, not shown, Kenny Bialek (who I believe lives in Connecticut). The ex was then a student attending Manhattanville College in Purchase, NY, where my sister was attending at the time, and whose name we used to gain access to the campus, in order to pull off the hit (that story requires a full blog - but picture Carrie in chocolate brown, rather than blood red). Sorry V, but needs must!

I know, we were morons, and this was wrong, and I don't encourage any of my younger readers to try this at home (hell, you'd probably be arrested). But we had a great time, even if it led to my academic disassociation (my polite way of saying kicked out), after such a promising start, with Fordham University. And I have great stories.

That's me, below the sign, looking like a cult leader. I really think I missed my calling. Well, it's never too late! But I digress.

The short guy front left is Tommy McQuillan (I later went to law school with his sister, Hi Beth, fun, brilliant and full of

piss and vinegar). He was the conscience of the group. Tommy first worked for the government and then went to law school a few years later and became some mukka with the Virginia's US Attorney's office. He also started every bar brawl that we got into. Every. . . . single. . . . one. . . . of. . . them! Always with the biggest and meanest asshole in the bar. Pool tables seem to draw out the worst in Tommy and set him off. One Saturday night -- cue Elton John's song -- in Good Time Charlie's in King's Park (thank you Terry Collins - Murray's sister - although I wonder why she would be a regular in such a rowdy establishment) was a classic example. And there were a lot of brawls. Tommy was brilliant and funny as shit. He often provided the live play-by-play - with his interestingly high pitched voice - when the rest of us were engaged in battle (instigated by him). But Tommy was a true humanitarian. I've actually seen him try to warn off others from engaging with my brother Eddie (never ended well). One particularly brutal example in NuRo, Westchester comes to mind. Unfortunately Tommy passed just before I relocated out west. Brilliant send off, lots of clergy - Tommy was himself an anointed Deacon (if I touch Holy Water, ouch). Sending love to his widow, Anne (a really wonderful, sweet and patient woman), and his family, who were brilliant for putting up with us all and often fed us Sunday breakfast in exchange for returning their only son home, safe and sound, Sunday morning. I will share the story of the first meeting of the Riverdale PWWC contingent with his father in a future post.

Then starting directly above Tommy, going left to right, is Mike Higgins (a fun loving guy but quiet and, I suspect, given the right justification, slightly psychotic - he had that smile on his face no matter what he was up to - even brawling). I sent Mike Higgins a copy of TWA, but he really

stays more in touch with Eddie, so I get reports through him. He sounded like Ren, from Ren and Stimpy (alright, alright, deny that you have watched it), whenever he got excited. Hi to Dori.

Ralph Droz (the real charismatic leader of PWWC and probably the most naturally cool guy you could ever want to hang with - I aspired to be Ralph when I grew up, still do - he had this awesome Camaro), Brother Eddie (what else can I say about him -- give me a moment, I'll find something, wait, he looks like an Óglaigh na hÉireann Provo in the photo) and finally Mike McLaughlin (who was the most interesting combination of responsible, practical, smart and crazy you could ever meet). A true Prince (in the Niccolò Machiavelli version).

I have tracked down Ralph (thank you Eddie), who now has read both my novels, and, after 30 years, I am thrilled to be reconnected. When I first laid eyes on Ralph, he was riding in an elevator wearing women's underwear and handcuffs - but that's for a later blog. Love to Debbie. She remains the perfect Texas Lady (stop with that already, I'm grandfathered into being able to use antiquated and purely respectful terms). I pray she still has that twang in her voice.

I think I have seen Mike McLaughlin only once since he was the photographer at my wedding (great shots Mike), and that was briefly at Tommy McQuillan's funeral in Georgetown. (I slipped a copy of the above PWWC photo in Tommy's coffin so he'd have something to laugh about in heaven. It may be the only way the rest of our faces get past those pearly gates.) Mike also worked for the government (rumored to be one of the Alphabet agencies).

There was one particular dawn (after a long night of drinking) where Mike basically talked me off an emotional and psychological cliff -- before I went searching for the

geographical version -- when I thought I had completely screwed up my life (again) after being tossed from Fordham.

I will never forget that kindness. Mike also used to hand-screen print shirts with the running Pie Man on its front, he was known in college as the T-Shirt Tycoon. I think Eddie - still quite an artist - may have drawn the PM character. If any of those shirts survive, I would love one. He was also a star javelin thrower in High School, a feat he recreated one night with a borrowed flag pole (BC and I may have been involved) on a highway in Rockland County NY, but that's for another blog.

Mike McLaughlin was a natural leader. He was born with it.

He led a group of very drunken members of PWWC through many a foray into the labyrinthian tunnel system below FU on many a night (rumor has it that one of our pledges still roams those tunnels). On the night before BC's wedding, Mike led a crew of very drunk wedding guests on a midnight swim across a very wide and currentted Oswego river and back again. I just followed the top of his head as he breast stroked in front of me. (Other than my own bachelor party, BC's night before party provided the absolute worst and most painful hangover I have ever suffered. My skin, hair (still had it) and fingernails hurt. I drew upon its memory when describing Jimmy Moran's Macallan hangover. Thanks BC.)

Mike and Eddie were also part of the four members of the PWWC who were rounded up and briefly detained in the late 70s by the local and federal authorities and questioned because their alcohol laden car -- Eddie had inherited my sister's Blue Rambler by that time -- filled with alcohol laden men happened to be passing (roaring past) the Russian Mission in Riverdale at the exact moment -- around 3 am -- that some professional sniper fired shots from the woods

across the street shattering the front windows of the mission (again, another blog). I have the photo of the PWWC 4 behind bars which I will post to prove this. More infamous than the Chicago Seven. If you see this blog Mike, reach out. Hi to Marion.

Anyway, the PWWC cross-pollinated with the Riverdale gang which led to pre-existing friends like BC, Steve The Greek (the cattle rustler), and Lenny, becoming honorary (non-FU) members. Steve even carried out a pie hit.

masterfully I may add. (Although Lenny later suffered his own particularly viscous pie hit by Eddie "MacDutz"

McCarroll, a rogue pie assassin with no affiliation to PWWC) on the day he left Aunt Violet's Flop House for his new life at the Culinary Institute of America. Funny thing, Karma).

All of these people grew up to become successful and respectable adults (that's their story and they're sticking with it). However, as I have demonstrated time and time again, you are never too old to be foolish. And all men retain the natural ability to be childish. Just need for the right (any?) opportunity to present itself.

Let's see if a few stories won't loosen their grips on respectability. Old stories can sometimes work as incantations. If told in their presence (modern technology has expanded this concept), with just the right cadence and inflection, and just a little bit of alcohol, it can sometimes cause the listener/reader to revert to their old glorious selves. Like Gremlins, if you feed them after midnight and spray them with water. Stay tuned.

NEVER GIVE UP

February 26, 2021



Now that I've actually gotten through the writer's club door based on the first time I sat down and wrote a novel, I realize that, looking at it from the outside, it could look like it was beginner's luck. I'll admit, there was mountains of luck involved, I mean, there was enough luck to fill the Grand Canyon, maybe even the ocean, but I was no beginner.

I first started writing fiction while I was still in St. Maggie's grammar school. In seventh grade, Sr. Marguerite, a tyrant of a teacher with a surprising -- deeply buried -- empathetic soul, decided we should put out a class newspaper. (To all of you teachers out there - I highly recommend reinstituting this practice as early as possible, because the younger the students, the more likely you can instill professional ethics, and please don't turn them into radical propagandists).

Anyway, given my general lack of seriousness in all aspects

of my life, I didn't want to do any real journalism (there was one brilliant kid in my grade (the other class) - who was also a great athlete, and who went on to become a serious journalist. His name was Kevin Flynn. *If you are out there Kevin, Hi.*) but my blossoming ego thought it would be fun to see my name in print. I volunteered to do the "Agony" column, where people purportedly write in with their personal problems and you give your sage advice. No one took that idea seriously, I wasn't sure any of the students had those kind of problems yet, but given my penchant for general foolishness, and the fact that it was a very light news cycle, they let me do it anyway. I had no real life readers submitting any personal problems, so I decided to make one up. Despite regularly taking my Prevacen (highly recommend it), I struggle to remember what that first column was about, but I'm confident it was written tongue in cheek - I know, there's a surprise. Anyway, what was more surprising, was that after the first edition of the paper came out (it was a weekly paper), I found an envelope on my desk. When I opened it there was an anonymous handwritten note inside from one of the young female students talking about a crush she had on a boy in the eighth grade and asking for serious advice. Given the particulars, and my finger on the pulse of the social fabric of my school, I quickly figured out who had written it and who was the unrequited - bad boy - love interest. My first evil instinct (remember I was a young male and my testosterone -- maddening stuff -- was kicking in) was to out the young woman and her crush, kids really can be cruel, but for some amazing reason, as I started to write the column, my tiny heart was infected with by a Cindy-Lou Who virus, and -- given my own worldly experience - I did have "steady" girlfriends since fourth grade - I actually tried to warn this

young lady off her crush, who I knew first hand had demonstrated throughout grammar school the anti-social proclivities of a future serial killer. It turns out, she didn't listen and dated him anyway, but you can't save every puppy in the pound. (Luckily, it didn't last long and the young lady grew up to become a doctor, which is itself interesting to me, because my fourth grade steady also became an MD. God those women were smart.). But I digress. The point I am trying to make here, badly it seems, is that I actually enjoyed not only writing, but writing something that involved trying to impact my reader on a purely personal and emotional level. Well, since our class paper folded with its second edition (I believe its demise was directly tied to the advice I gave the young lady) my writing folded with it. Other than a Haiku I wrote that ended up on a class bulletin board, I stayed my literary hand throughout High School and my first run at college - I blame the incorrigible Lenahan for distracting me from my writing from the ages of 14 to the day I turned 20 (I think it was his own writer's envy - he's a brilliant writer - and no doubt wants to get our childhood stories out before me), but Lenny definitely helped me collect a lot of future stories over that period -- with the one exception of when I wrote the "Ode" which reawakened the writer's itch.

After my darling wife agreed to allow me to return to college while she supported us and our oldest, Luke (himself a wonderful and talented writer), I started writing short stories (they must be somewhere) but I didn't have any success until the beginning of my second and last year of college (80-81) when I wrote a one-act play called "Revelations."

Talk about ahead of its time, it was about a transsexual who returns to his/her hometown to visit his/her one time best friend - who now owns the local tavern (and, as it turns out,

was a secret crush). At the time I wrote it, I was working through my sister's recent privately coming-out to me, and those feelings translated into that particular story, told through a male view point, because I didn't want to out her to our family. It's strange how you are sometimes oblivious to the struggling feelings of those closest to you. (V actually cried the whole time she typed that play for me - she's the best!). Anyway, my favorite creative writing professor at Lehman College, Clement Dunbar, III (thank you Prof. D - who re-instilled that passion for writing), submitted the play for the first City University of New York Jacob H. Hammer Award. Prof. D told me that he knew it was a long-shot, and that it was controversial, but given his strong personality he pushed it through anyway.

I remember how excited I was to learn I had beaten all odds and won the award, and the accompanying check for \$100 (a monumental sum in those days). There was that glimmer of hope that I might have the juice (as Hemingway liked to say).

But then Law School and the profession took me on a thirty-five year detour (during which one could argue that I wrote lots of plausible fiction in my legal papers, as well as a few screenplays, one of which, *Spark of Faith*, has made its rounds with some pretty well know actors and producers - and interest in it still resurfaces today). Damn, dawn is breaking so I have to wrap this up.

On May 13, 1993, *Revelations*, produced and directed by Pat Francis (thanks Pat I owe you) was performed for the first time live at The Village Gate (it was again performed a few years later for a two week stretch at the American Actors Theatre somewhere in the West 50s). I did not watch one moment of any of the performances, but sat in the back watching the impact of that emotional performance on the

audience. And that is the sweet stuff for a writer. I held onto that feeling for years until I sat down in February 2019 and started writing TWA.

So I'm no beginner, but I am very lucky. And I am still addicted to that sweet stuff. More to come.

IT JUST KEEPS GETTING BETTER

February 25, 2021



Yesterday, I signed the agreement with BRW to publish *An Alien Appeal*, the second novel in the *Claire Trilogy*, which is tentatively scheduled to be published this December (hopefully in time for Christmas 2021). I want to thank all of you out there, including my five blog readers, who were kind enough to pre-order and/or order *The Wise Ass* from both the publisher and the on-line distributors, including Amazon, B&N and Walmart.com, as those sales numbers obviously

demonstrated to the powers that be (thank you Reagan Rothe) that there is a market for my madness.

I also appreciate all of you who have read TWA and patiently provided positive reviews on all of the on-line sales venues. As a writer, there is nothing more rewarding than reading someone has read your work and likes it for all the right reasons (hell, I'll take all the wrong reasons). For the rest of you out there, please continue posting those reviews (I know it's a pain in the ass, sorry Claire, not you, but they are so important and greatly appreciated). One never grows tired of hearing -- or allowing someone else to overhear -- that your baby is cute. I read every one of them.

Also, yesterday was made even more special because Claire entertained her first novel-related fan, when Dianne Rosenfeld, who is another East Coast Expat, an absolute delight and my and Lisa's new BFF, stopped by our home to receive her promised book inscription. Dianne is the one on the left, and Claire is the only other pretty face in the photo. Lisa snapped the photo (if you enlarge the photo 1000 times, you can see Lisa's reflection in my eye).

Dianne is the first signing I've done for someone (not blood or adopted family) who has already read the book, and I have to admit that listening to this warm and charming woman's personal and emotional response to TWA literally brought tears to my eyes (it was just the high pollen count, I swear). I'm not sure that people fully appreciate how much an author cares about their potential readers and only wants them to have an enjoyable experience reading their work (novel and/or blogs). [Truth is that I only try to torture people with my legal writing]. When the author learns that

they are successful at entertaining a reader, the corresponding rush of endorphins is almost better than sex (I said almost - I'm not dead yet). So the rest of you potential readers out there get to work, read TWA and post those positive reviews anywhere and everywhere you can (or tell me face-to-face if you see me. I'll keep the Kleenex handy), Papa needs his fix.

And now that AAA is safely in the BRW publishing cue, I can now fully focus on writing the third novel, which I promise is already a blockbuster in my mind - seriously the end is off the charts. With any luck - and your continuing patronage - it will be out in 2022. Thank you all for your continuing support.

SPAGHETTI ON MY SHOULDER

February 24, 2021



As you can see from my earlier posts, and from my novel(s), I worshipped my grandfather, Spaghetti. Now that I am

rapidly hurtling towards Spaghetti age, I impose the same self-sufficient expectations on me, as I did, growing up, on him. If something needed fixing around the family homestead, Spaghetti fixed it. I always try to do the same. But as I explained in yesterday's post, I never quite get it right. Spaghetti would have scampered across that roof top to deal with the Flickers and held onto the lip of the roof with one hand while he held the wood in perfect place with his feet and drilled in the screws with his free hand, all while smoking his ubiquitous pipe. He would have then matched the patch to the surrounding wood color and had it painted and dried before he swung himself back up on the roof, scampered over to where the ladder was set, and then slid down that ladder Navy style. I just don't have those physical gifts. But it doesn't keep me from trying.

Spaghetti knows this, and does what he can from the other side of the veil, just to make sure my natural shortcomings don't lead us to an early reunion on his side.

A perfect example occurred a year ago. We had contracted with a couple of local companies to do different aspects of an exterior remodel of our house. Northern Lights Exteriors did the James Hardy siding, windows, painting and everything else related, and O'Keefe Built, Inc. handled the new front porch and side and back decks, and some shifting of exterior buildings. Let me say right now that throughout their respective tenures, I was a notorious pain in their asses (Pat O'Keefe once wrote me a classic scathing email which had me laughing out loud and which I will forever treasure, Chad kept the project on the rails, and Matt, Mike and Colt worked their asses off). Despite my penchant for butting heads, they were professional, did wonderful work, and in the end provided just what I wanted. I highly and

unqualifiedly recommend them to the local NoCo community.

I also highly recommend Jones Excavating and Plumbing for digging my extensive labyrinth of electric trenches without damaging any buried lines or pipes (and for one other side job which I can't mention), and Randy Porter (who bears a striking resemblance to the actor [John Michael Higgins](#), from Best In Show), my patient, funny and creative electrician (my haunted front door bell still doesn't work). In the end, they gave me back a wonderful home for which I am eternally grateful.

But in the beginning, I was determined to cut costs wherever I could. One striking example was when I decided that I would single-handedly demo the existing back and side decks. I really didn't start out looking to do it all, I had actually began one Saturday morning by removing the perfectly good and architecturally cool looking, original posts and rails on the perimeter of the upper deck so they could be reclaimed and used by another neighbor who was building their own new deck (and did a great job I may add). That's a photo of that railing on the last post. I hate throwing away anything that may have more life in them (including friends and family members). And once I took the railings all down without injury or disaster, I could hear Spaghetti whispering in my ear, "We can do this." Lisa was at work so I thought, "what the hell, why not!"

And so it started. Board by board I started to remove the upper decking in the back. These were four inch wide wooden planks, some long and some short. Not one of them gave up to the pry or pitch bar easy. I started at the furthest end of the back deck with the intentions of completing demo'ing the back part by the end of Saturday and then the side deck and support beams on Sunday. I

thought I was smart working from the outside-in, so I minimized having to walk across the cross beams that supported those planks. At around four p.m., I was exhausted. I had one long plank left on the back part of the deck and as I pried the closest end of it loose, I realized that for some reason the furthest point would not release from the underdeck no matter how much I wiggled and twisted from my position on the remaining covered area of the side deck. So this meant I had to go back out across the skeleton of back deck with my pry bar to loosen that stubborn screw that was defiantly maintaining its grip on the eight foot plank. The cross beams supporting this deck were about 18 inches apart and lined with the remnants of the rusty nails and screws that had surrendered the planks, and below those support beams remained an underdeck ceiling made of some form of plastic sheeting which provided a false sense of stability. The deck frame sat approximately 12 feet up above the original cement deck directly below it. Well, I scampered across those cross beams with the same balance and agility I demonstrated as an altar boy running along the tops of pews in an empty St. Margarets' church during a cleaning detail (another blog, perhaps), and in no time I had beaten that one final screw into submission and freed the end of the plank. I was well pleased with myself. Spaghetti was surely smiling upon me.

I remember gazing off towards the back of my property, looking at some happy horses from the neighbors property communing psychically with Claire and Mr. Rodgers on our property like a couple of neighbors gossiping over a back fence concerning an interesting article in the Berthoud Weekly Surveyor and thinking I was the King of all I could survey. I lifted the eight foot plank, placed it on my shoulder,

started to whistle "Hi Ho, Hi Ho" from Snow White and The Seven Little Persons and took that first step towards the end of the work shift and a soak in the hot tub.

When life throws you those curve balls, it creates slow motion perception that allows you to fully appreciate your screw up in real time.

Then I remember thinking, "Jeez, that doesn't feel like wood," as my foot missed the cross beam and place my full body weight firmly upon the plastic under ceiling. Then I remember saying "f*ck me" in a stage whisper as that plastic held for a split second. And down I went.

Thank God I was wearing a brand new NYPD blue hoodie sweatshirt that day. I didn't feel the rusty nails slice upwards along my chest (from the 'nave to the chops' as WS said in Macbeth) and I didn't feel those nails finally catch hold in the tearing sweatshirt. I'm not sure how I didn't bang my head as I passed through the cross beams and the under ceiling (I have a really big head) and break my neck in the process.

I kind of expected the pain of shattering bones as I landed on the cold concrete below.

Instead, when my head cleared, I found myself hanging from the now bloody rusty nails hooking the front of my sweatshirt while wedged between the cross beams. Once I fully understood that I had not died, I was extremely happy about that, and that there was no one there to help me (my wife is usually the person forced to extricate me from my self-induced predicaments), my mind weirdly went to the thought "I hope the neighbors weren't watching." That is the vestigial embarrassment gene that the Irish have. We don't mind doing stupid things, as a matter of fact, we pride ourselves in the fact that we do "stupid" better than most.

You just don't want to do it in public so that the neighbors have something fun to gossip about at your wake.

Anyway, since I didn't hear any Ambulance sirens in the distance, I felt comfortable that none of the neighbors had witnessed my back deck disappearing act.

But now what?

Because of my weird hanging positioning (the scene where Richard Harris is suspended by leather straps and wooden spikes in his chest in the movie "A Man Called Horse" is the closest analogy) I could only see above me through the cross beams and I couldn't get my arms in a position to reach above me and pull upwards. Then I remembered that I had shifted a now empty hot tub from its place tucked in the back to somewhere out in the open area under the deck, with the intent to shift it out into the yard before the real demo work began on the house. I couldn't remember where I had placed it, so I repeated the same blind foot swinging motion that allowed me to recover the ladder while stuck up on my roof. And voila, my prehensile feet got enough of a foothold on its corner to allow me to shift my body weight and position and literally slide out of my sweatshirt, the way you slide a struggling four year old out of his long sleeve shirts, and safely land on the concrete below.

Sure I had a parallel line of slices up my chest, but given the probable alternatives I had avoided I was one happy man who could not believe his luck. But, looking back on it now, it was so much more than that. It was Spaghetti, reaching across the veil to make sure his "feckin' wee idjit" of a grandson didn't off himself until he managed to make it as a writer. I didn't submit TWA to Black Rose Publishing until immediately after this event. Thanks Spaghetti.

And for those of you readers that, having read my daily ravings, may doubt my veracity - is this moron telling us the truth or is he spinning more of his fiction - I will provide you all with post adventure photos, just as soon as they transfer

over from my iPhone (which is taking forever and is why this post is not going on line until later!).

**YOUTH IS WASTED ON THE
YOUNG BUT STUPIDITY
HAS NO AGE LIMIT**

February 23, 2021



In 2019, Lisa and I decided that it was time to give This Old House a makeover (no, that isn't a euphemism for me, but I could probably use a good sprucing up). The old Cedar exterior of our home had been fighting a losing battle with these creatures called Flickers, which I can only describe as giant, spotted wood peckers. They had eaten two decent size holes in the eastern and northern side of my house, in order to build their penthouse nests and had punched enough smaller ventilation holes everywhere else to make the top of the house resemble a block of Swiss Cheese and to convert the house into a giant Peruvian Pan Pipe system whenever the winds came off the foothills, which is often. I'm telling you, these Flickers were, as my dear departed mother liked to say, bodacious! The summer of 2019 was when I first actually heard them going to work on their northern facing, lofty entryway. Lisa was away at the the annual convocation of the Wallen Witches in Navarre Florida. I was in my basement office working (I actually do work) and heard this pounding, like someone hammering at the wooden front door. I came flying up the stairs (its a relative term) and threw open the front door, but there was no one there. Once I returned to my lair it started again.

Again I flew up the stairs and again no one was at the door. Once more, I returned to my lair and again it started. I was beginning to suspect that my crafty neighbor Everett (yep) was punking me (he is one mischievous extraterrestrial bastard), so this time I went out the back door and circled round to the front hoping to catch him out, but nothing. Just too damn fast I figured.

When I heard the pounding begin again, I grabbed my S&W MP Shield, which was harnessed in its shoulder holster hanging on the back of my office chair, thinking this was the beginning of one of those horror stories - Like EA Poe's The

Tell-Tale Heart -- and someone was in the house trying to drive me mad (a short drive at best). This creeping insanity feeling was enhanced by the fact that neither dog seemed the least bit perturbed by the banging, they just slept their way through it on my living room couch and chair. This time the pounding continued as I reached the main floor and I realized it was coming from what I call the Tower, the upper level of the house. It sounded like someone was pounding on the inside of the door leading into the master suite. I slowly crept up the Tower stairs hoping for the element of surprise, but when I reached the exterior sitting room area, the pounding stopped. I threw open the bedroom door, gun in hand, praying I had actually released the safety but too focused on the doorway to check, but there was no one there.

And then the pounding started again.

I then realized it was coming from the outside of the Northern Bay window of the sitting area outside the master suite. It was jack hammer loud. I crept over the the window and peeked westward and there it was, the largest woodpecker I had ever seen, going at this piece of cedar, hammer and tong. Since I couldn't open the window I started shouting and frantically waving my arms around trying to get its attention, I even pointed the gun at it (I have been told after the fact, that these Flickers are the Antifa of the NoCo animal kingdom, an annoying protected species bent on the random destruction of other's private property) but the creature, comfortable with its protected status, ignored me.

I went downstairs and outside in my back yard area to get a better look (shot?) at the vandal, but I must have arrived during their union mandated coffee break, because all I saw was the baseball sized hole he (its always the males) had

been working on. As this entryway bordered on the bottom of the upper level roof [for the best mountain views] it was thirty feet up from where I was standing.

I may not have mentioned but I am terrified of heights - its one of the reasons I left the construction industry and to this day have not fully explored the beautiful Colorado mountain areas -- but channeling my best Spaghetti, I decided I was going to get up there and seal off that hole before Mr.

Flicker's two hour union mandated coffee break was over.

I went into my workshop and dragged the ladder from its hooks, found a decent sized piece of scrap wood, some screws and my DeWalt power drill - thank you daughter Jackie - and returned to my vantage spot in the back yard.

But the ladder, when fully extended, was too short to reach the hole. What would Spaghetti do?

An epiphany. I realized that if I placed the ladder on the back deck I could climb to the slightly lower roof to the right of the hole and if I leaned out just right, I could pin the pre-drilled wood over the hole while fastening the pre-set corner screws using my other hand with the drill. The plan looked good on paper.

The thing about vertigo is that it only comes into play - at least for me - if you look down.

So I set up the ladder as planned, grabbed the drill and wood and scampered (crawled) up the ladder, which just reached below the lip of the rooftop. Driven by Flicker frenzy, I hoisted the material, tool and myself over the lip and onto the roof, grabbing hold of my nearby Dish Network Satellite dish for security. Once I was safely in place with my legs wrapped around the dish mount, I made the mistake of looking down because Claire and Mr. Rogers had wandered from the back property to the back yard to see what stupid thing I was up to. Claire knows I'm terrified of

heights and brought MR along to watch the show, like a couple of NYC gawkers. When I stared out at the beautiful scenery before me I almost shit myself. I could hear Claire laughing and then heard her whisper to her mate "this is going to be good."

Surprisingly, my unyielding stubbornness and stupidity forced my now literally shaking hands to carry out their work as I leaned out off the lower roof (didn't look down) with both hands, my legs with a death grip around the base of the Dish dish and shuttered the Flicker Penthouse with my piece of plywood. When I pulled myself fully back onto the roof, I placed the drill down upon the tilted asphalt shingles and then watched as it quickly slid off its edge into the abyss below. I heard Claire shout "heads up." That got my attention. It also made me realize that from my vantage point I could not see where the ladder was, as it was mounted somewhere out of sight just below the lip of the rooftop. Panic swooped in with a death grip. I was frozen.

Of course I hadn't brought my cell phone with me.

As I sat there for what seemed ages with arms and legs holding onto the Dish dish for dear life, I started to imagine the worse. That my wife would return from Florida at the end of the week and find to her horror that my corpse was rotting on the roof and I hadn't told her where the Insurance Policies were.

Summoning the last bit of bravery I could muster, I maneuvered myself from sitting position to where I was now face down on the shingles, and while holding on for dear life to the Dish dish base, I slid my right leg back over the edge of the roof and swung it like a pendulum in an effort to locate the out of view ladder. I could hear Claire chuckling below me as I swung that leg in empty space, but she finally must have realized that she would have to go without carrots and

be limited to a pure grass diet for a week until Lisa returned, so I heard her Lauren Bacall voice say "a little more to the right."

And then I felt it, the top of the ladder. Eureka.

When Lisa finally returned from her trip, I proudly walked her around to the back yard and pointed to my slightly off kilter, plywood patchwork with my best four-year old "I did that!" look. She studied it for a moment, no doubt appreciating my machismo and craftsmanship, and then said, "call the contractors, that looks like shit." That is a photo of my finished product, the patch is right below that weather antenna, so judge for yourself. The house is much nicer looking now.

She headed back towards the house, leaving my delicate ego feeling more than a bit bruised.

When she suddenly stopped at the sliding back doors, I thought for a moment that she had reconsidered the entire event, and was going to now lavish the praises I was expecting. Instead she said, "And where do you keep our insurance policies?"

MARK LENAHAN - AN INTRODUCTION

February 22, 2021



Everyone who reads TWA or have read my blogs must wonder who is this guy ML? As I explained in an earlier blog, we met that first day in Freshman year of High School (my rendition of the event is the correct one). We spent the next three years pretty much getting into various levels of mischief everyday. Later we shared Aunt Violet's Flop House for a few years where many other memorable occurrences took place. That is for later blogs.

Mark vacationed in Maine one summer (after my Junior and final year in Spellman - Eddie just graduated) with my family and we raised a little hell up north. Here's a story from that vacation:

Mark was the only one of us who, by that time, had gotten his official driver's license (thinking back, it might have only been his permit). In my neighborhood you didn't really learn to drive in driver's ed., but by "borrowing" other people's cars - they were always returned, perfectly parked I might add, safe and sound a block away from where they were borrowed. The old fogies among my readership will remember those triangular vent car windows that were never locked and the lipped ignition slots that, if you didn't turn them to the furthest "locked" position when you shut off your car, could be turned over with pretty much anything handy - it was practically an invitation. [For the record, this is all theoretical, I do not admit any of it ever happened -- I write fiction]. Anyway, feeling adventurous [a regular state of mind], Lenny, my oldest brother Eddie, and I, decided to drive into [Waterville - thank you Lenny] to see if we could get served in a bar there. We borrowed my sister V's Rambler (she gave us her keys, I swear).

So the next thing we know we are driving along on one of the back roads and we come upon a young male hitch hiker, just about our own age. Lenny and Eddie are in the front seat (Eddie is holding a map - yes youngsters, a paper map) and I am in back. But before we pull over we decide that we will tell this hitch hiker - after he is in the car - that our driver, Mark, is blind, just to see how he reacts.

The boy gets in next to me in the back seat and after some quick exchanges, I tap Mark on the back of the head, and he proceeds down the road. He has his driver's side window open and is leaning steeply in that direction. Once

we start moving the 3 amigos stop talking, except for Eddie, who every once in a while whispers a direction - left/right/stop/go - softly under his breath. Every time the boy tries to speak to make conversation, I shooshed him to be quiet. I am sitting on the edge of the bench seat directly behind Lenny with my hands on either shoulder, tapping my fingers every once in a while on either the left or the right when we come to an intersection, and Lenny then makes the turn accordingly. Lenny is driving along in a bit of a winding fashion down very straight roads, without really turning his head, but with his left ear cocked toward the window. The boy watches this for about a mile and finally asks about our strange ritual and Eddie turned around in the front seat and tells the young man, matter of factly, that Mark, the driver, is totally blind, and that is why we tap out or whisper the directions he needs to follow. He also needs the window open and absolute silence, so he can listen to the road way as he's driving in order to detect potholes or obstructions.

Lenny, playing up the role, keeps interrupting Eddie with a question "which way now?" Well, the young man suddenly shouts "pull over" at the top of his lungs and as we did he screamed "you boys are crazy" and hops out of the car without waiting for us to come to a full stop, certain that he may have just avoided a catastrophic end to his evening.

We laughed the rest of the way to [Waterville]. Of course, Eddie might have been right about Lenny, because, when left to his own navigation he did end up driving the wrong way down a very long One-Way street (didn't know they were a thing outside of NYC) until we were waved over by a frantic, on-coming driver pointing at a sign and yelling at the top of his lungs, with that Maine version of a Boston accent, "One Way, Boy. One-Way!!!"

Well we did manage to get served our beer that night, but as we were sitting in the bar booth about to tuck into our first cold pitcher of suds, Eddie noticed a couple of state troopers enter the premises and start going table to table asking to see ID's. Well the three of us casually slid out from the booth, slowly made our way to the back of the bar by the restrooms and then hotfooted out the back door, forced to return to Belgrade lakes frustrated and parched.

Unfortunately, my blogging time is up, so I will continue with my recitation of the Life of Lenny Gospels on a future morning.

SGT. WILSON HAILS FROM MR. THRIFT

February 21, 2021



Everything is *derivative*.

One of my favorite places to come and browse in Berthoud is a tiny store off the main street called Mr. Thrift. It's in a corner, historic building with real high ceilings and solid wooden floors. It's a family owned operation, and the family, to a person, are delightful, but they have since hired others locally to run the shop on some days. And I like that, because it means that they have achieved some financial success from the risk that they took, and I wish them nothing but a continuance of the same. Please patronize Berthoud's local stores.

Since it has opened, my wife and I have found some treasures in antique furniture, outside furniture, paintings and knick-knacks/bric-a-brac. My understanding is that most of their stock comes from estates of once local families that clear out the personal property of their decedent in one load, rather than let the hoards come by and pick through it, and then sell the dead person's real estate (in a nicely booming market). The owners of Mr. Thrift have also started renting out small spaces to local artisans and entrepreneurs to sell their own recycled items or crafts, and I like that too, because it gives back to the community. Picked up a couple of cool, antique, horse related items from those stalls. I love old things, maybe because I'm one of them.

Sympatico. We have survived the repeated knocks of life and are still standing. Old furniture is made much more solidly than anything you can buy today. I would rather have a solid piece of old furniture with a couple of well-earned dings or even scratches in it, than the pretty, pristine, perfect item from the major outlets that start to wobble and give after a year of real living with it. I am hard on my furniture and expect it to keep up.

And old things carry an energy, an imprint, with them that I love to draw upon. I can actually feel it. They have witnessed their prior owner(s) life, good, bad and ugly (Clint still is the man!). And they are still here, long after their owner(s) have moved on beyond the veil. Luckily Mr. Thrift is giving them a second (third . . . tenth) lease on life, where, as an alternative, they could have ended in a dumpster and then a landfill.

That gives these items a certain melancholy as well. Here they are, survivors, sitting amongst the other items from other families whose legacies didn't or couldn't care enough about that item to bring them into their new homes, to

witness new stories, new love, new sadness and happiness.

Sometimes there is just no family left to care, and that is sad on a whole different level.

And that brings me to the *derivative* Sgt. Wilson. He/she's derivative because I stole his/her name from another Tom in another story about a ocean cast away that, like me, talks and becomes emotionally attached to inanimate objects. I'm terrible with names, always have been, so in order for me to remember them I need to create an imaginary anchor in my mind - a context to confirm a memory. So Wilson it is. I gave Wilson the rank of Sgt. because I imagine Wilson was more of a blue collar kind of non-commissioned officer.

Someone who worked his/her way up from the bottom through his/her deeds during service, and got to lead a group of others because of his/her personal fortitude and attributes. But Wilson was still one of the guys/gals (stop it, I'm old, not sexist) that he/she (there, I've proven it) lead during service.

Sgt. Wilson is a Veteran's Memorial Flag: https://www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/burial_flags.asp.

Anyway, back in late May of 2019, the Saturday before Memorial Day, my wife and I were drifting through Mr. Thrift looking for that magical bargain to come and join our new family, I spotted Sgt. Wilson sitting on a shelf in the back of the store. I thought that it was really sad that whomever had earned that honor had been relegated to this ignominious position. However, given that I am not only a life-long New Yorker, and an attorney to boot, I have a heart that would make the Grinch's (pre-Little Cindy-Lou Who epiphany) look huge by comparison, so I passed on and tried to forget about it.

But as I sat in the car driving back to my home, I started thinking about my own father's Veteran Flag that sits in a

place of honor on the mantle my oldest son's Fireplace (hi Luke- DFD, Georgie, Scarlett, Savanna and Stella), and I realized that it was kept with my family and placed there for a reason. Every time we see it we think of my father, and his service to our country, and take pride in both.

So upon reaching the bend in the road opposite the local fire house, far closer to home than to town, after a "go-for-it" from my ever supporting wife, I turned the car around and went back to Mr. Thrift for Sgt. Wilson. He/she now sits in a place of honor above my kitchenette on the basement level of my home, where I get my coffee, take my supplements (I never go to doctors), feed the dogs, prepare Honey's daily medication (she has Cushing's and mild hypothyroidism - Dr. Steven E. Benscheidt, DVM is a true wizard) and make a huge mess chopping vegetables for every other animal I know before I ultimately wander down the long hall to this very office, coffee in hand. Every morning, when I first arrive at that kitchenette, I acknowledge Sgt. Wilson's existence and service before I do anything else, and I ask that his/her (see, not sexist) spirit looks out for my family, as if we were his/her own. And he/she has done just that, because we are.

ANOTHER FIRST

February 20, 2021



Yesterday I had the honor of inscribing my first book to two total but very lovely (and no longer) strangers (who are neighbors in the Berthoud area and had seen my erratic postings on NextDoor). (I have happily inscribed copies for others locally - in A&W and in Grandpa's, please patronize these and other local shops -- and for the rest in spots across the country with whom I share a love, blood, friendship and/or professional relationship and/or who otherwise appear by name or in some form in the novel).

Kathy Harris, and her husband David, had just received the paperback after purchasing it on-line, and had reached out to me, first on NextDoor (who still ask me each time if I really want to publish that post), and then on this website.

Both avenues reached me pretty much at the same time as I am glued to my iPhone (ask my wife) and have an almost Pavlovian response to that "ping" when something new demands my attention and or distraction. To me, its like receiving that familiar radio signal from your home planet (just ask my dear, dear friends Everett and Michele). ET, well, you know, the thing!

Anyway, given that they were my first paying patrons who bought the book on pure faith alone and not because they know first hand how witty and charming I can be, or were otherwise shamed into it by my incessant badgering, I called Kathy and volunteered to immediately drive to their home and execute on my promise to inscribe anything they wanted onto the cover of the book. Upon my arrival, after entering their property through a long passage that reminded me of a jousting field from one of my many past lives, I was greeted by their adorable black lab who I quickly coopted with a vibrant back rub. Then I heard Kathy's voice from around a corner and she and her husband, David, pretty much simultaneously appeared from different portals of their lovely home.

You know when you meet people for the first time and they are completely disarming? Well, if you live around here that can be a common occurrence because that seems to be the rule in this area. Everyone is so damn innately nice (except maybe Rachel in A&W, who I've mentioned has the yet untapped personality to run a Mafia family, lol). I really feel like that very black sheep in a humongous field of white wool whose color is beginning to bleach from the eternal sunshine. I may need to go back to NYC and ride the subway for about 24 hours - and hopefully avoid the tracks - to regain my edge and my natural cynicism which is slowly

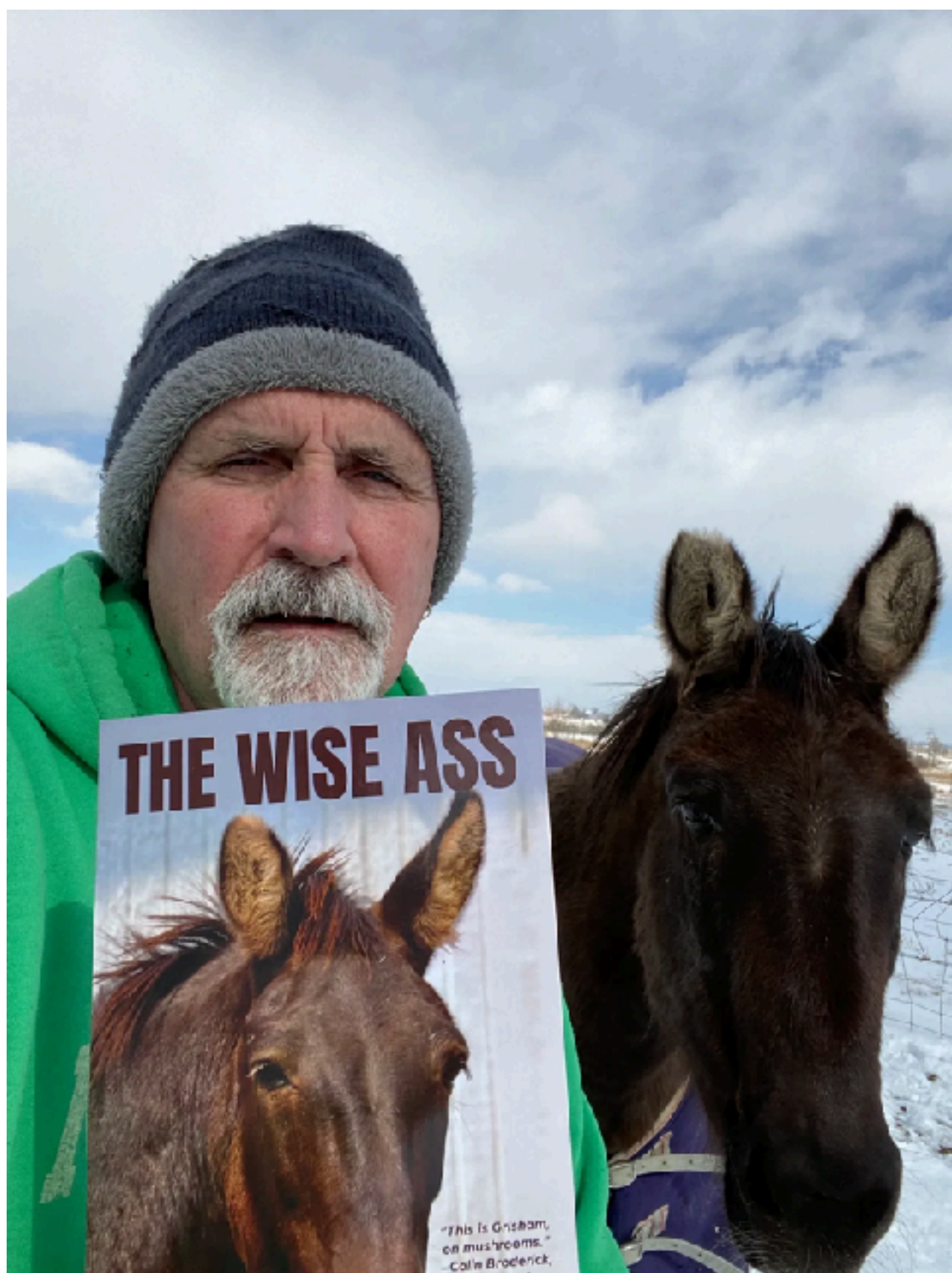
eroding out here from all the positive energy. That New York vaccination booster against feeling truly human!

But back to Kathy and David. They were so warm and friendly to me right off the bat, that I felt I had known them for years. It was like meeting Ma and Pa Walton. Just that nice! They patiently listened to my New York patter for a New York Minute -- I'm sorry K&D, I do have the tendency of prattling on in that Joycean alternate stream of consciousness way -- and then watched as I carried out my official author duties on the front hood of their truck. But best of all, given that I signed the inscription "Tommy" McCaffrey (Kathy sensibly declined the hug), they also agreed to pose for that selfie. So here we are. Does anyone else out there see David's resemblance to my favorite inspirational guru, Wayne Dyer (RIP) [there's a future post there]?

Thank you Kathy and David.

YESTERDAY WAS A HAPPY BLUR

February 19, 2021



Writer's Christmas is over and it was intoxicating. TWA was finally "published" and started shipping out to all of you wonderful and patient patrons. Thank you and enjoy. A surge in sales activity kept the two versions of the book in the top 25 of the Hot New Releases List (Thank you again, Kim Russo, and all of your followers, and absolutely everyone else who shook their respective social media trees, including, without limitation, Bobbi A (yep), Helen L (yep), Chrissy T and Eileen Cotto and her million-member Collins' Clan). Woke up today to Kindle at 17 and Paperback at 21, so I am thrilled. On top of that, the local newspaper, the Berthoud Weekly Surveyor, did a great story on the book (thank you Amber McIver-Traywick - a talented young journalist), another first for me, which lead to some additional local interest from some of my wonderful neighbors (thank you Annie and Pam). Amber thank you for sanitizing my numerous expletives, you have my promise of exclusives from this point onward (now I just have to create a reason for them). I made sure to drop off copies of the paper to my dear friends, editor and cover artist, Jimmy and Kathy Fronsdaahl, before the day was over.

Earlier, Claire and I celebrated with a selfie out on the back property - she kept saying "Hurry up the light is changing, and make sure you get my good side!" (as if she has a bad side). But Claire is the ultimate pro and we got it in one shot (see the "about me" photo on the next page). I was amazed that she hit the same pose she did for the cover of the book (some creatures are just born with "it"). Its no surprise that I have been fielding Claire's casting offers for months now, although she's been holding out for "Wise" Potato chip commercials. I, on the other hand, enjoyed an afternoon of well-meaning and warranted teasing concerning that photo from my lovely and endearing coven

of sister-in-laws (the Wallen Witches) who have been keeping me in close check since 1977 - Raechel (Gary), Cathy (Beau), Leslie (Madge), Michele (Terry), Amy (Lori) and Dina (Randy) (what the hell, life's too short - Hi Lane and RIP Tavo - a great guy and one of New York's Finest). I love you all.

My youngest brother John (yep), a brilliant salesman in the construction industry who is fascinated by numbers and occult algorithms, kept in regular contact with me during the day to see how the sales were shaking out. The real Jimmy Moran (NYPD Ret.) sent his best wishes (a truly wonderful guy), as did his daughter, my D-I-L, Sara (NYPD). Her husband, my youngest child Mark (NYPD) offered his suggestion that I should ask the publisher to release an Audible version of TWA so he can listen to it on his commutes to work in the City (my family will do anything to avoid actually reading my work). He also provided cautionary counsel that I should NOT be the one to record it for fear that my voice would put the listeners to sleep, which would be terrible if they are driving. Safety first. I should have drowned him as a baby.

Other East coasters like Pat F, Tina and Colonel Joey D sent their comical congrats (thank you all).

That wonderful Irish writer, Colin Broderick (buy his books and see his films, they are amazing), sent his best wishes (very much felt like what it must be like having a past champion placing the green jacket on the newest winner of the Masters). Colin reminded me that the brilliant Poet, Billy Collins (US Poet Laureate 2001-2003, NY Poet Laureate 2004-2006), his dear friend and one of our professors at Lehman College (a wonderful breeding ground for writer types - including my son Luke McCaffrey (DFD)), would be turning 80 soon. So Happy Birthday Professor Collins!

(And for those of you who, until now, may have missed the opportunity to truly enjoy poetry - real men read poetry - grab any one of his volumes of work, open to a random page, and you will be hooked. "Dharma" - which seamlessly weaves together a dog, cat, Gandhi and Thoreau -- may be my personal favorite).

Finally, my lovely wife and muse (sorry Claire, but you really are a close second) and I celebrated after work by grabbing dinner at a Longmont restaurant I have been wanting to try since I first saw its name: "Dickens" (its now called Dickens 300 Prime). Its original owner was a cousin of Charles Dickens (and it is haunted), so, to commemorate my new literary status, I decided to play Six-Degrees-Of-Dead-Separation and have dinner with the dead close relative of a very great author. I have to say that the waitress was wonderful (sorry I didn't get your name -- but so the regulars will know whom I'm talking about, you were petite, attractive and had long wavy dark blond/light brown hair). You went out of your way to figure out how to feed this vegetarian in a steakhouse, and your suggestion of that salad was spot on.

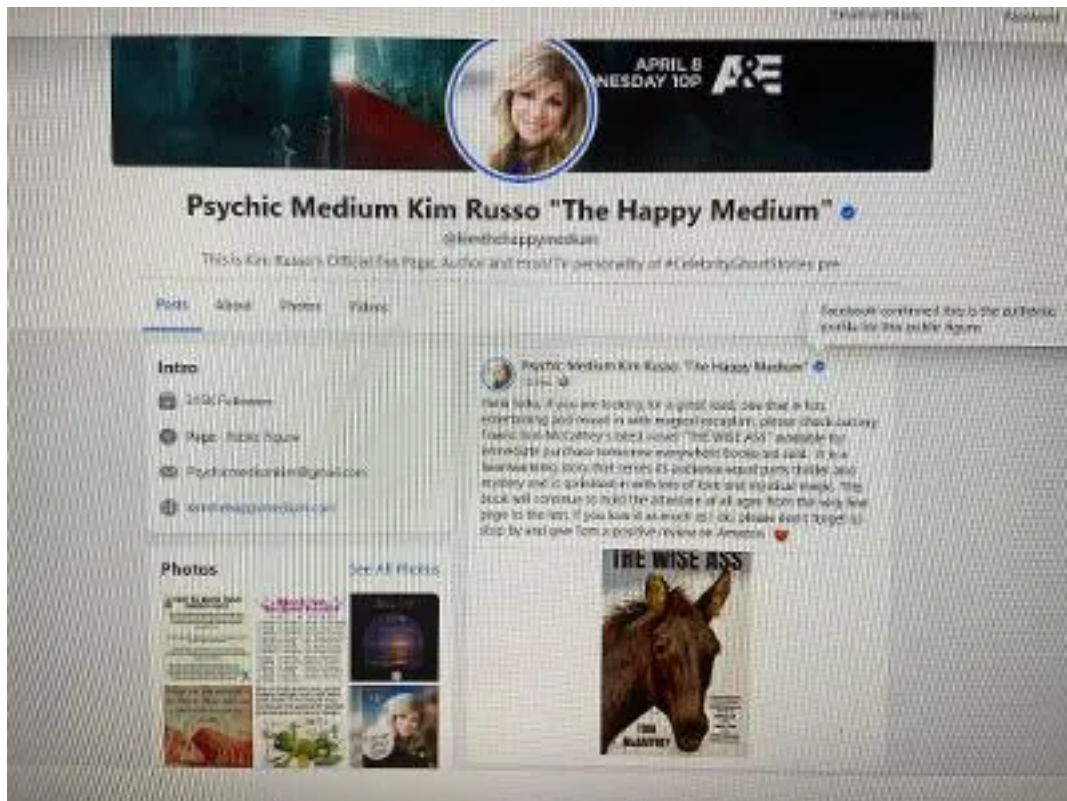
The food was great, the portions generous, prices reasonable and the civil war era ambience was delightful (I swear I saw Mr. Dicken's nodding towards me from the doorway of that old bank safe - say Hi to Charles for me!) I highly recommend this place.

As my postscript, my earliest text yesterday was with my friend Mark L (the grumpy bastard complained that my incessant texting was keeping him awake on the East Coast) and my last one was with Joe Serrano (we played "catch-up" wondered how we survived childhood and had a lot of laughs). Perfect way for me to end the day, so I did.

KIM RUSSO IS MY HERO

February 18, 2021

I just want to thank my dear friend Kim Russo, "The Happy Medium," for her support and yesterday's FaceBook posting concerning TWA: <https://www.facebook.com/kimthehappymedium>. If any of my readers (all five of you) haven't yet followed her and her amazing show on A&E, Celebrity Ghost Stories, you don't know what you are missing. Get on it! Thank you Glinda.



FREE MILK

February 18, 2021



We've all heard the adage (usually repeated to the frustration of all lustful young males - although the concept is more enjoyably delivered in Beyonce's *Single Ladies*) that if you give the milk away, no one's going to buy the cow. Some people have suggested that my blogs are giving away all of my creative milk for free. But I don't think so. I do think each one of my posts is like a cold glass of milk, very satisfying in their own right, but my

novels are like a plate of warm chocolate chip cookies sitting there on the counter. And while my blog readers are sipping that nice refreshing glass of milk, free of charge, they are looking at that plate of warm, delicious and chocolatey fragrant cookies (I bet you can smell them) and thinking, "damn, I'd love one of those."

You see, the milk forms on its own accord. I live my life and constantly collect stories and characters in my mental udder.

Just takes a bit of a squeeze and out it all comes.

Cookies have a bit of a recipe to them. I make them from scratch. I have to grab the basic ingredients from here and there and then mix it together in just the right amounts. The dough has to rise. Then I put them in the oven and watch them bake just enough so that they are warm and delicious.

Must not burn them. That's where the effort comes in.

And the really great thing about chocolate chip cookies is that it is impossible to take a bite out of one and then put it down. In fact, its rare that you'll leave any cookie behind on that plate. And my chocolate chip cookies will make you go back for the crumbs.

I plan on keeping the creative cow so I have plenty of milk to leave out there for you each day, free of charge. All I ask is that you consider buying one of those chocolate chip cookies from my Publisher, Black Rose Writing (thank you again, Reagan Rothe), or on one of the major on-line distributors. That helps feed the cow. Today's special cookie is The Wise Ass. It's publication date has finally arrived. If you've enjoyed my blogs, I can promise you that you will enjoy TWA. The Kindle version is instantly delivered, the paperback will take a few days to get there. And the good news is that I've just taken another order of chocolate chip cookies out of the oven, in the form of my sequel, An Alien Appeal, so when you finally get through that

first plate of cookies, the next plate should be ready. But let that first batch digest just a little.

While that second plate is cooling, I'll be making a third batch this spring. Might mix a little oat-meal into this last batch.

So, while you are waiting for your order of cookies, keep stopping by my website and having that refreshing glass of milk. It's good for your health.

Got milk!

MY SUBWAY INTRODUCTION TO A 9MM

February 17, 2021



During the early summer immediately after law school (shortly after my encounter with the ninja squirrel) I took an eight week, bar exam preparatory course with BARBRI (all these decades later I still recommend this company). This entailed attending their daily seminars in the City (I believe they ended about 2 pm) and then riding the D train from the east side of Manhattan, north under the Grand Course until I reached the Fordham Road station. It was then a 10 minute walk east to the Fordham University Bronx Campus, where I would meet up with a small group of friends at Duane Library, most regularly with my closest friend in Law School, Ray Keane, and we would continue to study until dark.

During my commute this one particular afternoon, I was sitting on the east side of the subway car facing west on the bench seating closest to the middle double doors. I remember that I was reading a NYT Op Ed by the then Governor Mario Cuomo opining on how there would never be capital punishment in New York State during his tenure. Now anyone who remembers what it was like to read the oversized and unwieldy NYT in paper form knows that you had to study origami in order to master folding it into a manageable size so you could read what you wanted without annoying pretty much everyone else in a subway car. I had managed to get this copy down to a quarter of the size of the original paper but it was still large enough to block my view of anything beyond its direct line of sight.

I'm not sure what it was that caused me to peek above the edge of the paper towards the opposite double doors, but when I did I saw a tall, young African American male staring at me. He was holding onto the middle pole and was standing in the western entrance area of the subway car.

This young man wore his hair long in loose Jheri curls, and I remember thinking he facially resembled Michael Jackson (in the "Thriller" stage of his career). The man was over six feet tall and his body was solid. I cannot now recall what he was wearing beyond it being a dark but lightweight summer outfit, but he did have a cross-body matching carrier made of parachute material, with its bag resting on his hip.

I've ridden enough subways to know that nothing good ever comes from engaging in lengthy eye contact, so I finished reading the Op-Ed, and began my next laborious origami exercise to determine what was on the next page. While I was mid fold I heard this voice from the other side of the paper screen ask in a determined but polite voice "Are you a cop?" I tilted the half folded paper towards my lap and saw the same young man staring directly at me and when our eyes met, he stepped closer to me and grasped the hand rail directly above me and asked again, "Are you a cop?"

I'm not going to lie, even then, I looked far more like a cop than a law student, so I understood how someone could draw that conclusion.

Feeling a bit uncomfortable, for a New York second I considered just lying to this man with the hopes that if I said I was a cop he would reconsider his options and get off at the next stop. But that little voice in my head said "don't."

"No," I said, looking up at him while crumpling the paper into a folded mess in my lap to passively demonstrate my annoyance. "I'm not a cop. Why do you ask?"

And then, in one movement, with the fluidity of a pole dancer, this man swung from standing before me into a crouch beside me in the middle doorway of the subway car on my immediate left, removed an item from his parachute bag and slid it beneath the semi-circular arm rest at the end of the bench and pressed it into my left rib cage with just enough force to get my attention. It was hard, cold and uncomfortable. As I looked down to see what it was I heard the young man whisper, "because if you were a cop, I was gonna blow your motherfucking head off." And there it was, shielded from the rest of the strap hangers by his parachute bag and crouched body, a gun-metal grey, 9 mm hand gun.

I took a quick look towards the other passengers to my immediate right and, even though it was a thinner crowd on a summer afternoon, every one of them were sitting with their eyes closed, rocking gently with the motion of the moving subway car, intentionally ignoring the world around them, like ostriches with their heads in the sand, including the situation I found myself in. I could not believe no one else realized what was happening. I would be lying if said I did not instantly calculate how many of these sleeping people would have been killed or injured by the same bullet passing through me if this man decided to pull the trigger. I guessed three. Good riddance.

I would love to tell you that my martial arts training kicked in and I immediately physically subdued this potential assailant, but that didn't happen. The training did kick in, but not in the way you expect. What happened was that my training kept me from doing something really stupid in a lose/lose situation. Instead, I surprisingly managed to keep my composure as I looked up from the gun and into this

man's eyes and said with just a little comedic cheek, "Boy, I'm really glad you asked me."

This unexpected response seemed to have an immediate de-escalating effect on the young man. His eyes cleared, his face softened, and the gun was no longer pressing into my ribs. So I followed up softly, "why do you hate the cops so much?"

And just like that this young man started to spill his guts. To sum up, his name, he said, was Michael [I've intentionally forgotten his last name for this story]. He had two wives and four kids, he had been recently fired by his boss in a Brooklyn button factory for repeatedly coming to work stoned on grass.

"But why do you hate the cops?" I asked, trying to keep him talking.

"Because two weeks ago," he responded, "I was taking a piss between two subway cars and a couple of cops caught me and tuned me up."

"Jeez," I commiserated, "that sucks." And I noticed now that he had returned the gun to the parachute bag and was holding onto the arm rest bar with both hands so he could more fully focus on our conversation.

At that moment the subway pulled into the 125th Street station and the doors opened up and two pretty formidable looking cops peeked into the car, as they do, to spot check and see if everything looked Kosher. Michael didn't even seem to notice them. I thought for a split-second about

shouting "this guy has a gun," but I realized that there would be no way that would end well for me or anyone else in my vicinity if a gun fight broke out. Instead, I smiled and turned back towards Michael to continue our conversation and wondered, as I watched with my peripheral vision as the sliding doors closed and the subway started to leave the station, if that was the last time I was ever going to see 125th Street, or a cop for that matter.

As I reengaged Michael he seemed to be just interested in talking with me. Like the gun threat never happened. He just wanted to vent, and I was the first guy that lent him an ear. He asked me what I did for a living, and I explained that I was a law student, and then he asked me if I could represent him in a lawsuit against the button company. I begged off politely by explaining that I was not yet admitted to the bar, and wouldn't be for quite a while, but if he called the Legal Aid Society, they might be able to help him and he seemed thrilled at that prospect.

By this point we were pulling into the 167th street station.

Michael looked out of the car window at the station signs and said matter-of-factly, "well, this is my stop." He was already standing and intently facing the center rubber of the sliding doors as the subway came to rest. When the doors slid opened, he quickly looked back down at me, performed a child like wave with just his fingertips and stepped out of my life forever.

The physiological impact - the rush of adrenaline and the mild body tremors - didn't come right away. They didn't kick in until I had excitedly repeated the story to my friend Ray

Keane in Fordham's Duane Library, and he responded, "You know, you asshole, you could have been killed."

But as I have said in an earlier blog, I've been blessed many times in my life, and this is just one more example. And the best thing of all is that I came away unscathed and was left only with a very cool New York story to tell, and I just told it. So enjoy.

IN NYC, EVEN THE SQUIRRELS MUG YOU - AKA NO GOOD DEED

February 16, 2021



Kathy Fronsdaahl's adorable photo of the Squirrel Stretching (remember now, get out and vote - like one of those interesting machines - for Kathy's photos) brought to mind another squirrel that had laid buried in my subconscious for decades.

I attended Fordham University School of Law from 1981 to 1984. As the rest of this story will attest, this does not mean I am particularly bright. Fordham Law was then located on

the northern edge of Fordham University's Lincoln Center Campus, just South of Lincoln Center on Manhattan's Upper West Side, indeed, our graduation was held in LC. (In early April 2017, just before my seismic shift west, during my final tour of the City, I stopped by that building only to find it was now the home to FU's MBA program.) Strange how the UWS is a vortex for McCaffreys. My sister, Veronica (a/k/a Ronni to friends) lived on West End Avenue in the low seventies (during the Seventies-Eighties), my partner, Robert Meloni, lives in that area in a very posh building, our law office sits on its southern cusp (do they still call it Columbus Circle, or is that verboten?), and my son, Mark, and my wonderful daughter-in-law Sara (and her lovely sister Dana) diligently and selflessly serve and protect the citizens of NYC with the NYPD in abutting precincts in the UWS. And it is there, right along the western edge of Central Park, where I was mugged by a NYC squirrel. It was May of 1984. I had just completed my last Law School exam. Feeling celebratory (I had the Wall Street job all lined up and was about to make more money my first year than I had made my entire life), I decided to splurge and instead of making my way back to the Bronx on the more economical number 1 subway line (my usual mode of transportation), I would treat myself that afternoon to a comfortable ride on the Riverdale Express Bus. As I made my way towards the bus stop on Sixth Avenue (a/k/a Central Park West), feeling peckish, I stopped in a deli on Broadway and bought myself a large Baby Ruth candy bar. When I arrived at the bus stop, I found I had a few minutes to kill, so I sat down on one of the benches that abut the stone wall that surrounds CP and tore open my prized candy bar, in gleeful anticipation of the sugar rush that was about to

compound the endorphin rush I was feeling from completing law school. I was in a great mood.

As I munched that first bite of peanuts, caramel and nougat covered in chocolate, I was distracted by the loud clicking and chirping coming from the low branch of a nearby tree, just inside the park wall to my east. I looked up and spotted one of the ubiquitous grey squirrels, that like pigeons, had managed to successfully co-exist with humans in this urban mecca. Little did I know that these animals had picked up a trick or two from studying the two legged interlopers over the past few hundred years. There was nothing particularly unusual about this squirrel that should have set off my NYC survival instinct (it can't be taught, you are born with it, or die quickly without it), other than that his intent chatter was clearly meant to draw my attention. As I went to place that second bite of pure delight in my mouth (I should start writing porn), the squirrel's chatter increased to anxiety levels, and I saw that he (a sexist assumption applied in retrospect) had leapt down from the branch and now sat on his haunches on the crest of the wall directly behind the bench. He was now clearly staring at my candy bar. In my fit of bonhomie, I decided to share one of the peanuts with Mr. Squirrel and pulled the largest exposed one from the tip of the candy bar and placed it on the bench beside me. The squirrel landed softly on the bench adjacent to the treat, grabbed it with his prehensile paws, and quickly devoured it like a wood chipper. He showed no signs of fear from my close proximity, only peanut bliss.

By the time he had consumed his treat, I had reached the half way point of my own. Feeling a little more daring, this time I removed another peanut, and using the inherent tackiness from the candy's other ingredients, stuck the

peanut on the tip of my right index finger and extended it towards this very cute squirrel.

And then he struck. With the speed of a fur ninja, he extended his gaping jaws past the peanut and snapped them shut just above the base of my finger nail with the force of a bear trap and held on for dear life. I leapt to my feet and tried to shake him free with all of the strength of my right arm, but he wouldn't release. I was now full-on frantically waving this furry monster at shoulder height, but demonstrating an acute understanding of martial arts, he was using my own strength against me and focusing all of his own in maintaining his death grip. Finally realizing that this was a two handed problem, I released my left-hand's grip on the Baby Ruth, but before I could use it to grab hold of the grey menace (with an absolute intention of choking him), he released his jaws and dropped to the ground.

Before the candy bar landed, he caught it with those prehensile paws, stuffed it into his mouth and in two gymnastic leaps had returned to his original perch in the tree. The sound that he now made, as he stared at me between bites of his plunder, bordered on laughter.

Lucky for him, the express bus arrived at that moment or I would have found a few stones along the wall and taken him out. I realize now, given the timing and efficiency displayed in the attack, that this wasn't this canny little creature's first rodeo. He was clearly a repeat offender and this was his hunting ground. I remember staring at him from the back window as the bus pulled away, high from his own sugar rush, and I could have sworn the arrogant little bastard shot me the bird. No good deed goes un-punished.

A BALMY TEN BELOW

February 15, 2021



We continue to suffer with this arctic cold-front and I remain ever vigilant to ensure that my mules, the stubborn creatures that they are (said the kettle to the pots), survive the night. My weather app promised -15F but my Alexa (we have a thing, but I suspect she may bat from both sides of the plate - for the record, nothing wrong with that, we are all God's children -- given her recent demonstration of friendliness towards my wife with sweet references to her by name) assures me its only -10.

I could try to lock Claire and Honey in the barn but the psychological damage from the sudden restriction to their freedom would be worse than the physical damage to them that I risk if I just leave them their normal access through an open door to its heated stall area and hay racks, which they have often used in the past during inclement weather.

Claire has explained that they don't like being trapped anywhere. And they both have their heavy winter coats on.

This morning they were both standing side-by-side in the dark on the east side of the art studio, which provides a great wind break. They looked like they were doing a bad impersonation of me. Their muzzles were white with the frost from the moisture from their breathing.

Lisa, my wife, had recently suggested that, after more than three decades, I grow back some facial hair - which is a thing out here. The last time I had a moustache and beard, they were brown with tiny streaks of red (latent Ginger genes, which explains some of my troublesome youth). My present combination is grey with almost imperceptible filaments of brown sprinkled throughout. As I gaze in the mirror, I am reminded of the Abominable Snowman in the 1960s Claymation version of Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer, after that annoying little dentist elf pulled out his teeth (which explains my own terror of the Dentist - but I love my reclamation team at Berthoud Family Dentistry).

Even then, toxic masculinity was on the endangered list. I suspect Lisa secretly enjoys the fact that I suddenly look like an old man. Given that, sans stash and beard, I was beginning to look like Uncle Fester, Abominable may be a step up.

Anyway, Claire and Honey have these long dark whiskers around their muzzles that you don't normally see (although if you look carefully at the cover of TWA you can see Claire's),

until times like this, when their breath condensates and freezes. Hopefully the 5 gallons of hot beverage and 1/4 bail of hay I left them will wipe/melt some of that away. If they continue to get away with openly mocking me, the dogs will be at it next and I will have lost all credibility.

Speaking of deep freezes, I absolutely love my local friends and neighbors. I mean this from the heart. They have gotten to know me and have all realized that while I still have all the street smarts necessary to survive a subway ride in De Blasio's New York, I don't have a clue of how to survive in Northern Colorado. So I get those subtle texts in the evenings reminding me to leave the cold water taps trickling on nights like this so my home doesn't suffer exploding water pipes or to make sure I keep my garage door open when I'm warming up my car (its true, I never parked a car in a garage in the Bronx). I appreciate their diligence in keeping me off this year's Darwin Awards List.

Honestly, I would be lost without them.

I also want to take a moment for an impromptu PSA and recommend that my Berthoud neighbors continue to support all of the local businesses in town. This really is a magical place. I've mentioned my love for A&W (and its employees) in past postings and I love having breakfast at Grandpa's Cafe (will be there this morning). The latter's political nuance plays to my Irish Conspiratorial nature, it serves the perfect scrambled egg and cheese sandwich and their servers are wonderful. Also, there is a regular and irreverent group of comparably aged (to me) codgers that I have dubbed "Grandpa's Boys" (together we put the "Grandpas" in "Grandpa's") that make me feel right at home in a NYC way by giving me as much good natured crap as I can handle. (Think of the Muppets "Statler and Waldorf" in blue jeans and Carhartt). Warms the heart.

I went through my last pre-submission, substantive review of the sequel -- An Alien Appeal -- this weekend (I hope you heard me cursing you Pat Francis) and then turned it over to my ever loyal, patient and supportive editor (thank you Jim Fronsdaahl) to take it across the finish line. I am thrilled with it. Vaya con dios. I also was equally thrilled to learn that Jim's wife Kathy (who captured the iconic photo of Claire for the cover of TWA and has designed the cover for AAA) has entered a very cool photo Nature/Wildlife contest with some amazing photos: [https://photocontest.nwf.org/gallery-home-vt.aspx?](https://photocontest.nwf.org/gallery-home-vt.aspx?gallery_id=EC28B1B4-75C7-42BE-9301-08EFC28D25EE&search_term=Katherine+Fronsdaahl)

[gallery_id=EC28B1B4-75C7-42BE-9301-08EFC28D25EE&search_term=Katherine+Fronsdaahl](https://photocontest.nwf.org/gallery-home-vt.aspx?gallery_id=EC28B1B4-75C7-42BE-9301-08EFC28D25EE&search_term=Katherine+Fronsdaahl) (Type in "Katherine Fronsdaahl" in "Entrant Name" and Voila) . Not that I'm biased but would the five of you readers out there please go to that site and cast a deserving vote for Kathy's photos - I particularly love "Squirrel Stretching" which reminds me of the time during law school when a squirrel mugged me in Central Park, but that's a story for a later blog).

This all provided a small - but desperately needed - distraction from my switching back and forth from staring at the calendar at Thursday, the 18th, and peeking at the Amazon Hot New Releases List (the latter is truly a rollercoaster ride for my emotions). Now I just stare at the clock, wondering how Claire and Honey are doing and wishing away the time until Thursday while feeling very, very cold. I better warm up my car.

DEEP FREEZE, A BUNSEN BURNER & A WIG

February 14, 2021



Another sub-zero, 2 a.m. morning here at Claire's Creative Collective in Colorado. Numb fingers are striking the wrong keys despite my best efforts. I can roughly measure how cold it has gotten overnight by the level where the ice cap forms in the mules' water bucket. During an average freezing winter night, the mules usually drink 3/4 of the 5 gallon bucket of hot water (the Irish in me wishes I knew of a tasty, mule friendly tea I could mix with it) that I bring out to them, before nature re-asserts its dominance. This morning the bucket from late last night was 3/4 full beneath the ice.

This made for heavy lifting back to the house for a quick melt and refill, using that awkwardly leaning, one sided tilt to carry it, as you do your best not to slip in the darkness during the descent down to the back property. Sciatica be damned! Must get one of those swiss shoulder yokes and a second bucket to balance it out. Yo De Lay He Ho! Having read my mind, I can hear Honey whisper as I turn back towards the house, "men are such pussies." Claire does her best to stifle a laugh. I'm back in high school and have just passed the Cheerleaders table.

I attended Cardinal Spellman High School in the North East section of the Bronx for three years. Spellman was (and I understand remains) an elite Catholic College Preparatory Institution. [*Sonia Sotomayor, Assoc. Justice of the SCOTUS was a classmate - Orio Palmer, a FDNY Hero of 9/11 - TWENTY YEARS LATER - NEVER FORGET - was another*]. There was a relatively large student body, I believe there was 437 students in my freshman class. I didn't want to go there and had gained admission to other, smaller, elite schools in Manhattan, but my older brother attended there so I believe my parents decided it was the most practical choice. In hindsight, I can see that they were

right. It was a great school and I should have made the best of it. And in my own way, I did just that.

I met Mark Lenahan my first day of high school. He had graduated from St. Gabe's grammar, the next parish south from mine (if you grew up attending Catholic school, you divided the City into Parishes for purposes of geographic identification - I will forever - and proudly - be defined as a kid from St. Maggie's in the Bronx. My mother was forever identified by the Holy Name Parish, my father, Ascension, both in Manhattan).

Anyway, there are two versions of the story of that first day.

Mark's and mine. Mark, himself an incredible writer - honestly, he writes like Bukowski - has penned in one of his short stories that at the time of my arrival, he was indeed chasing a certain young man who has since become a very respectable and successful doctor, around the front desk in the IPF (Introduction to Physical Sciences) lab that functioned as our homeroom. He admits having a hissing Bunsen burner in his hand attached by a long rubber hose to an open gas spigot on the front table but that there was no flame until I offered to ignite it with my silver Zippo lighter (the direct descendant of Döbereiner's lamp, created by Wolfgang Dobereiner in 1823), which I flicked open and sparked in a one-handed movement by rubbing the now rotating flint wheel against my thigh, igniting first the lighter, and subsequently the Bunsen burner as Lenny passed.

While this is indeed a movement that all cool kids practiced at the time, and that I had mastered, and as I replay it in my head in slow motion makes me look bad ass, my more tenable version has me innocently walking through the classroom door and seeing Lenny chasing the other young man with an already lit Bunsen burner. Otherwise, why would the young man be running away except to escape the

live flame? He certainly wasn't worried about dying of gas exposure in a well ventilated classroom. I told you, an eye witness's account sucks.

But, no matter who ignited that Bunsen burner, its flame that morning forged the friendship we have maintained for over half a century (man, am I old!).

There is way too much to tell about our Butch and Sundance relationship over the next three years in this one post. I would like to excuse my consistently bad conduct over this period by arguing that Lenny led me astray but since I only lie for money I will concede to a fifty-fifty split.

But taking a page from the present-day, eternally victimized society, looking back, I can only blame the "system." I was perfectly manageable until Spellman made the uncorrectable mistake of mixing what was then two separate schools - literally split down the middle -- of boys and girls together at the beginning of my second year. From that moment on, all I saw was beautifully sculpted legs (whoever created the first woman's heels was definitely a man) in short (rolled) blue skirts and matching blue tights and blossoming boobs under tight white shirts. I know, as I sit and write this I realize what a pig that makes me sound like (I am since reformed, ask my wife). But I am an honest pig (unless as I said, I'm paid to lie) and I'm trying to add some context to my story. Lenny and I spent most of the next two years trying to get these intelligent young women to notice us with varying levels of success. I say "two years" because I never made it to my Senior year at Spellman.

Lenny and my antics during this period inevitably led us to what is generally known in Catholic circles as J.U.G.

(Justice Under God), but which is more secularly described as detention. Worse, we both found ourselves sentenced to "Indefinite JUG" at the beginning of each semester, which

meant we had quickly committed some (multiple) infractions of the Spellman rules of conduct and were committed, without due process I may add, to daily JUG after school until the last day of that semester, when all sentences were commuted. JUG was basically a forced labor camp where the prisoners (I like to think of us as political dissenters) were compelled to clean classrooms, wash chalk boards, sweep floors and take out the garbage for one hour after school. Our nemesis, Bob Baisley, the Boys Dean of Discipline (sounds like an S&M title) would start off calling the roll from the names on his ubiquitous clip board. [Note, there was a Girls' DOD, Sister Jane, who was equally lethal.] Lenny's name was always the first on the list, mine shifted between second and third, depending on whether or not Chuck Quigley, one of the smartest kids from the St. John's parish, had somehow gotten roped into one of our schemes that particular day, and nailed during a Baisley round-up.

Bob Baisley was one scary dude. He was over six feet tall and powerfully built, with the broad, muscular shoulders of an ex-athlete. He was also brilliant - taught advanced placement (AP) English classes to the more serious students, so there was no way to out-fox him, and trust me, I tried my very best to do it and failed miserably. And he disguised this superhero form just like Clark Kent, with a simple pair of glasses, that always seemed just a little skewed.

Anyway, on top of being generally incorrigible (made far worse by Lenny's influence, no doubt), I also worked very hard at transgressing the dress code. My particular penchant was trying to maintain my longer hairstyle (I knew early on that my follicles would fail me in the not too distant future so I wanted to maintain my luxurious teen locks as

long (physically and temporally) as I could. Spellman's hair code required that a boy's hair not touch the tip of his upper ear on the sides or his collar in the back. During my first two years, circumventing this code entailed learning how to hide your locks using spray on hair products and bobby pins.

This would work for the short term but at a time when corporal punishment was *de riguer* and administered freely to transgressors by the DOD, one good slap across the face usually sent those hair pins flying like shrapnel in all directions. I got lots of slaps. To add insult to injury, once your true hidden hair length was exposed, your JUG sentences were automatically increased, usually to "indefinite" status.

Towards the end of my sophomore year, I learned through the underbelly of Spellman society that there was a soon to be graduating senior who had successfully gamed the hair code by hiding his long locks under a short hair wig. I was fascinated by the audacity and brilliance of his ruse and sought him out on the Spellman Specials (the bus that carried all the western Bronx and Manhattan students back and forth across the Borough each day). Given that he was no longer going to need the wig, I poorly negotiated what was then a hefty price of \$20.00 to take it off his hands come graduation.

My first day of Junior year, I hid what was then an already flagrantly illegal hair length tucked up under that wig. It was an open secret amongst the students but appeared to go unnoticed by the teachers and, more importantly, by either DOD, even during hallway arrests and JUG roll call. With a few weeks to go before summer break, my hair had grown to pony-tail length, which required that I curl it on top of my head each morning before school and pin and spray it into

place, before donning my false hair hat. But as with all good plans, it just took one rat to expose me.

One day in late May, after exams, while we awaited our report cards, Lenny, Quigs and I were sitting around our regular lunch table in the school cafeteria, no doubt planning some caper for that afternoon. Suddenly, the swinging doors at our end of the cafeteria flew open and both DODs marched solemnly in our direction. The three of us did our best to avoid making eye contact, which was the kiss of death that normally lead to you being noticed and pounced on for some transgression, real or imagined.

With my eyes trained on my sandwich, I could feel the imposing presence of the brutal appendage of the School Administration standing over me for a few seconds before Sister Jane, cleared her throat to gain my attention.

"McCaffrey, stand up," she barked. I reflexively complied. I could sense my other two comrades slowly drifting out of Baisley striking range behind me.

"Do you know why we're here?" She continued.

My mind raced to consider a response to that loaded question, as I inventoried the multiple rule infractions I had committed that week. I shook my head, as innocently as I could muster.

"No, sister. Haven't a clue."

Bob Baisley smiled.

At that point, the short-in-stature girls DOD reached up and tugged on the wig, pulling it slightly askew. You could hear a pin drop in the normally noisy cafeteria.

And that wasn't the last pin that dropped.

I was immediately whisked away by the Spellman Secret Police to the DOD's office, where my wig was lifted from its place (like the crown of a deposed King) and the pins unceremoniously removed one by one, by Bob Baisley. I

listened to their muted sound as each struck the rug beneath me.

By that time a crowd of teachers and students had filled the doorway to witness my final humiliation as my pony tail fell to the middle of my shoulder blades. (I really miss that hair).

The summarily imposed verdict - guilty! Sentence:

apologies to the Administration, an immediate haircut (and shave - that five o'clock shadow appeared by 9 am), indefinite JUG for my senior year and all free classes (which were most of them) as a guest of the DOD office.

I went home that day and told my parents I was never going back. And I didn't. That fall, pony tail intact, I took up residency for my senior year at the notorious Bronx public High School, De Witt Clinton. But that, dear readers, is a story for another post.

In a strange turn of events, Bob Baisley ultimately left Spellman to teach and become a Mr. Chips type figure at the lauded Fordham Prep school, where he asked my son Luke on the first day of his Shakespeare class, if he was any relation to "that McCaffrey." I'd like to believe that there are still "whispers" about that event among the present Spellman students that have been relegated to mythic status. C'est moi, Madam Cosquer!

The legend of the "wig" lives on.

A LITTLE SELF PROMOTION

February 13, 2021

Got sidetracked this morning dealing with my mules in -2 degree weather, where even the heated water freezes, so I didn't get to my blog until much later than usual. Its times like this that I hear the "Green Acres" theme song playing in my head (for you young folks out there, look it up).

Thank God its Saturday. My usual weekend schedule of events is that I start at daylight by going around with my wheelbarrow scooping up massive quantities of mule dung around the property - a minimum of 3 wheelbarrows full is my usual haul - and then depositing it in the back end of the property - along what I have dubbed "Hadrian's Dung Wall" with hopes that if there is ever a Zombie apocalypse it will prevent them from approaching the homestead from the North - to freeze-dry and decompose into wonderful fertilizer, which, come Spring, I then use in various spots around the property to try and grow things (tragically unsuccessfully) and otherwise share with anyone in the area that wants it. However, when it is this cold, you cannot just use your plastic pronged, oversized pooper scooper to shift ___it (interesting alliteration) from ground to barrow. You actually have to use heavier tools to free the dark pyramids from the frozen earth and sometimes even a pry-bar. No lie, if your foot catches on a mound, you will trip and if you then land on another mound, you'll crack some ribs. By the end of the morning my hands suffer all of the symptoms of Dupuytren's contracture, which is daunting, given that I cannot yet type with my elbows or my nose.

The good news is that, given the bitter out door temperature, today I can guiltlessly beg off having to do all of the other things that need doing on my weekends (according to my wife) that don't directly impact the health and comfort of Claire and Honey (who are both donning heavy duty winter coats and have a heated area in their barn to retreat to - for which they signal their appreciation by leaving copious amounts of dung on its floor), like mending fences or replacing parts on my whirligigs shaken loose from the volatile wind storms we regularly are subjected to here. It's a never ending battle with the elements, but I love it.

Now here's the seamless transition into the self-promotion. Wait for it. . . .

I intend to use this unexpected free time wisely, by reviewing the last series of comments and suggestions I have received on the sequel (Thank you Pat F - can you hear what I'm mumbling under my breath) and shipping it off to my loyal editor (Jimmy Fronsdaahl, *I would be lost without you*), hopefully finalizing the same before I have to take my Toyota (yes, just like the one in TWA) into the dealer in Firestone for servicing (Stapp Interstate Toyota - they are amazing) by 2 p.m.

However, the sequel will only see the light of day if the sales of TWA warrant its publication (and then repeat the process for the third installment of the Trilogy).

So, this weekend, I need all five of my readers out there to tell everyone you know who has not already invested first-hand in accompanying my wonderful characters (for those that have, thank you, thank you, thank you) -- especially Claire -- on their magical literary journey, to leap off the fence and order a copy in either paperback or Kindle before this Thursday's (2/18) publication date, so that my

surprisingly successful book launch causes my publisher (who I absolutely adore) to think, "Hey, we may have something going on here. Let's publish that sequel." I'm going to make it really easy for everyone to find it:

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Wise-Ass-Tom-McCaffrey/dp/168433635X>

B&N: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-wise-ass-tom-mccaffrey/>

[1138375572;jsessionid=6182FD13127470712963A8AD926CA7EC.prodny_store02-atgap12?ean=9781684336357](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-wise-ass-tom-mccaffrey/1138375572;jsessionid=6182FD13127470712963A8AD926CA7EC.prodny_store02-atgap12?ean=9781684336357)

Walmart.com: <https://www.walmart.com/search/?query=The%20Wise%20Ass>

Some independent bookstores that are showing they will be carrying it - please support them:

<https://givensbooks.indielite.org/browse/book/FIC034000>

<https://www.turnrowbooks.com/browse/book/FIC034000>

And if anyone still has any doubts, **check out the consistent 5 star reviews:**

<https://www.readersfavorite.com/book-review/the-wise-ass>

Damn, now I have to go out into the dark and start my daily rounds to distribute veggie munchies to my other animal friends, bbbbrrrrrrrrrrrhhhhh. I'm taking the Toyota.

ROBERT P. MULVEY WAS A GENIUS

February 12, 2021



"The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers". William Shakespeare, Henry VI, Part 2, Act IV, Scene 2.

Maybe Will was onto something. Sometimes dead lawyers are more powerful than their living brethren.

One of the first things you realize in law school is that you are not likely to come across an Atticus Finch, present company included. Think about it, if we operate under the general assumption that it takes a certain level of intelligence to get into law school, and that there are a lot of smart people in the world, then what is the primary determinant in winnowing down the herd to the limited number who are accepted into my noble profession? Hint: it is not selflessness.

Lawyers are mental gladiators. From the moment they enter the hallowed halls of law school, they are pitted one against each other to achieve the highest grades so that they can land the best jobs in the most prestigious firms.

And it doesn't stop there.

The day you walk into that big firm, you look around and see that the other 44 new lawyers that entered with you are after the same golden ring of one or two partnership spots that will be awarded to your class. And while, in theory, your job at your firm is to be unleashed upon the lawyers from other firms to ensure that your clients are the ultimate victors in their daily battles over the next eight years, you always keep one eye on the achievements of your in-house brethren to make sure that you have taken the most scalps in those daily battles. Then there is the inherent politics that are found in any large organization, you need to be the soldier for the right partner, or your impressive body count may have been achieved in vain. And in the end, the young partners always kill the old, even if they were once your benefactor. It is exhausting.

When it comes to my chosen profession, I am pretty unconventional. I'm more likely to be mistaken for a cop,

fireman or construction worker, than an attorney. I've never been able to wash the grit out from under my finger nails.

I've never pretended to be a class act. After thirty-five years in this profession I'm still rough around the edges. I don't get invited to the parties. And I'm comfortable in that skin. My inherent and redeeming value is that as long as I breathe I still fight. [That's a photo of me above, full nasty lawyer-face on, taken on my birthday, 11/14/14, in Manhattan Supreme Court - I won that motion.]

But every once in a rare while, you come across someone who practices law for purely noble purposes. And I'm not talking about those high maintenance lawyers who take on "pro bono" high visibility cases just to see their faces splashed across the local rags, or to appear as a legal pundit on cable news, or who, like me, just see the law as a means to an end - the best interests of the client, no matter how unworthy. There are men and women in the profession who actually love the law itself and who see it as a means to ensure that justice is served.

Robert P. Mulvey was one of those lawyers.

Bob Mulvey was also unconventional. In a world where appearances matter way more than they should, his suits were always rumpled and his shoes scuffed. His hair was always tousled, and the frustration level impact of his tendency to mumble was always enhanced by his bushy mustache, which robbed his audience of the ability to read his lips. At a time where lawyers still trolled the law libraries for actual books, his office was filled with stacks of them, like a hoarder's home. He was the poster-boy of disheveled.

But Bob was brilliant. There was no legal issue that was too complex for his razor sharp mind. Countless times he was the only lawyer in our very talented firm that could untie the

Gordian knot. Lawyers love to toss around the concept of "Constitutionality" to impress the masses, but Bob was one of the few that really understood what the underlying document truly meant and how it should be applied in every instance. He could recite the great cases chapter and verse from memory. Most of them I hadn't thought about since law school.

He was the last lawyer I knew that wrote every legal brief and letter free hand, on fools cap. He could write a perfect brief in one draft, usually in one sitting, and he made it all look so easy, like Will in Good Will Hunting.

His was the office I walked into, late at night, with that legal problem I could not solve, and despite the fact that he was still there toiling away under his own mountain of work, he would make the time to help me (and countless others). For expediency purposes, sometimes I had to stop his lofty explanation and ask him to boil it down and just feed me the answer like I was a five year old. And he did, countless times. He never sought recognition for that assistance, no matter how good he made others, like me, look.

And Bob was funny, in that dark way that the Irish love.

Posey would have called him blasphemous. He was a great listener, and was one of the few true polymaths that I have encountered in this world. There was no topic that he could not discuss thoughtfully and thoroughly. And he loved to play pool at lunchtime. We were inseparable most of the decade we worked together.

But as happens in the legal profession, lawyers end up going their separate ways. I left that particular law firm when it was absorbed into a mega firm. Bob stayed with them and we lost touch.

The only contact I had with Bob after that concerned a letter he was compelled to write for an attorney I once worked

with, that, in my humble opinion, was a thinly veiled professional attack. It was brilliant and I hated him for it.

When Bob later called to offer excuses for his Hobson's choice, I hung up on him.

One day, years later, I received in the mail at my home a hand-written letter, whose scrawl I instantly recognized to be Bob's. It revisited the events surrounding that letter and apologized for his involvement with it. It then went on to explain how he had fallen on hard times and was terminally ill. It asked for my forgiveness.

I struggled with how I could or should respond, but before I took any action, I received a call from another attorney with whom Bob and I had worked and she told me of his passing. I was devastated. But I was also the ultimate scumbag by default, because I let this wonderful person die without hearing from me.

Many years later, when I was sitting in the home of my dear friend Helen L (yep, her) with another dear friend, an amazingly powerful psychic-medium named Ginger, Ginger suddenly stopped our conversation, pointed behind me and said, "there's an older gentleman standing behind you. He is wearing a suit. It's rumpled looking. He's not family." I hadn't a clue who it could be, and told her that. At that moment, the screen on my iPhone, which was sitting on the coffee table equidistant between us, lit up and began rapidly and repeatedly typing numerous lines of the small letter "b" with dots between them, like "b . . . b . . . b" and continued until it reached the final line on the screen where it then typed "b . . . b . . . bob" and then the light on the screen went off. I almost broke into tears and turned to the space behind me and instinctively said, "Bob, I'm so sorry. I should have reached out to you." Ginger stopped me and said, "he said 'there's nothing to apologize for, we're good.

I'm fine." And suddenly the guilt I had been carrying all of those years vanished with Ginger's words. "He's gone now." And that's the kind of guy Bob was, always willing to go the extra mile to help someone, and more worried in the after life about my feelings than any pain I might have caused him in this one. I am truly blessed by having known him. I received absolution from the grave.

COUSIN APPLES

February 11, 2021



I am one week out from the TWA book launch and, to my absolute horror, late last night I learned that I have allowed a mistake on the back cover to escape notice. I have taken all appropriate steps to correct this going forward, and the average reader should not be able to detect the error, which appears in the name of one of the writers who generously and selflessly provided a supporting blurb (*Mea Maxima Culpa*). For those that may receive the uncorrected version, I hope it somehow increases its value to you, like a double imprinted penny. Also, in an effort to make penitential amends to the offended, I ask my five readers to please also consider buying the books of all the mentioned cover authors, who tell equally mesmerizing stories and who have each, in their own way, inspired my own creativity. You will not be disappointed.

But for now, I need to distract myself from my initial horror by telling another Riverdale Fable (fictionalization protects the guilty).

I first mentioned my cousin Apples (and his spooky half-closing eyes) in my last post, so I thought I would provide a little more background detail.

James McEntee, Jr. was (again this is past tense memory, he's not dead, at least I don't think he is) my second cousin on my father's side of the family. He was the same age as my darling sister V, and Jimmy and his two younger sisters, who in the later years all resided with their dad on Park Avenue in Manhattan, spent plenty of time around the McCaffrey compound. Indeed, Jimmy was of quasi sibling status to us. That gave him legacy status (and protection) among our peers.

Jimmy was shorter and more slender than the McCaffrey brothers (far more so than Eddie and the Ginger), but for me, as a 14 year old, he had all the right hair, eye color,

height and weight descriptions on his Selective Service card (which had no photo) to allow me to use it to gain free access to the world of alcohol (I fought as a welter-weight in the Gloves the year I turned 17, -- what happened to that slender figure).

You see, back in the day, there were purveyors of alcohol, liquor stores, Delis and bars, that really didn't care how old you were, as long as they could maintain plausible deniability with local government agents that they asked you for acceptable proof of your age and you displayed the same. One certain Latin Deli owner, for example could be flashed a Library card, and because of his insurmountable English language challenges, would sell you beer as long as you looked old enough. For the girls in the neighborhood, makeup and a curvaceous figure sufficed. I displayed a five o'clock shadow throughout high school, and grew a beard before my senior year at De Witt Clinton (certainly explains my early male pattern baldness). So all I needed was the documentary back-up, in case someone asked. (For you rat bastard government types who may be monitoring my blog, I found Apples' SS card on the bathroom floor and just forgot to return it to him. And all Statutes of Limitations have run.) But Jimmy was much more than my black market ID provider, he was another one of those honest-to-goodness nice guys (although Snapper remains the Platinum standard) with whom I came into contact. Despite the age difference (at that time 4 years was still a stretch in the clique department), he loved to hang around with me and my friends, which is completely understandable, given we were already doing everything guys his age were doing. Unfortunately for Jimmy, he quickly became my "conscience" (kind of like Jiminy Cricket to Pinocchio) and spent an inordinate amount of time trying to talk me out of

doing the wrong thing. That full-time job might have destroyed a lesser man's soul (and he wasn't even a Ginger). Jimmy also made the mistake of becoming the sibling peace maker, and would often literally step between me and my eldest brother in an attempt to prevent an inevitable donnybrook. He paid a very dear price for that by intercepting black eyes, bruised ribs and swollen jaws that were meant by one angry brother for another. One time near the Rocks he suffered a TKO for his troubles. And, if my failing yet ever imaginative mind serves me, that might have been the night Jimmy received his nick name, Apples. Now there was another inordinately large Irish Catholic family in our neighborhood called the Smiths (what is it with the Irish and their love for fighting and f. . . . g). The father was a Captain in the FDNY and they lived in a modest yet beautiful brick house on Fieldstone Road, just off Mosholu Avenue and just a half block South from the Lee Home.

[Another notable fact from the Riverdale file. The parents of these large families like to churn out their offspring in correspondence to the birthing schedules of parents in other large families, because there is an otherwise inexplicable number of sibling match ups in the various grades in St. Margaret's classrooms. I guess it made it easier to avoid babysitting costs by allowing the similarly aged kids to gather together - in Lord Of The Flies fashion - somewhere in the neighborhood and watch themselves, long before the concept of "play-dates" were a thing.]

Peter "Poofy" Smith (will someone please contact me and let me know how he got that nick name?) was my age and rolled with our clique, along with his one-year older brother Raymond ("Ray-Ray" or "Sweet Ray") Smith (another true character). That's Ray and Poofy, left to right, above. Poofy was a smart-ass who could make anyone laugh and no one

was off limits. With the daring and timing of a Court Jester, he could get away with saying things that could get others killed. Anyway, on the night in question, Poofy was entertaining a small crowd on the Rocks a few feet away from where my brother and I were arguing nose-to-nose - probably over which direction the wind was blowing at that moment - while the rest of the crowd was peacefully drinking beer. Cousin Jimmy, ever vigilant, was standing closely and directly to my left and Eddie's right, turning from one brother to another - like a tennis match official - as we exchanged escalating barbs and threats, in an effort to get a sensible and calming word in edgewise.

Now in my defense, I have never thrown the first punch during arguments with my brother. That is because my brother Eddie was like Michael Meyers of Halloween fame, you just couldn't kill him, and I have honestly tried (there's a story there - see the white bell bottoms reference below).

But, as you may have learned (and some of you may have witnessed), I have a very sharp tongue and liked to use it to my advantage. So physical confrontation was inevitable.

During this particular argument, I must have said something scathing about Eddie which led to the lightning launch of his favored nuclear, overhand right, just as Jimmy was making some completely logical and totally ignored point concerning the wonders of peaceful co-existence, and unfortunately leaned his head into the fist missile's pathway. I could hear its impact (sounded like a pumpkin hitting concrete) and saw out the corner of my eye that Jimmy's glasses (I don't know how they survived) were launched, spinning and air-bound, by his rapidly revolving head. His body was drawn by the torque of his head into that same spin cycle away from the two-man scrum my brother and I had now engaged in (you needed to quickly get in close during altercations with Eddie

to prevent him from destroying you with haymakers.) The obviously dazed Jimmy miraculously stayed up on his feet and pretty much chicken walked away from the now bloody melee, in a zig-zag pattern, in the direction of Poofy and his entourage. He may have been drawn to the peaceful sound of laughter. Ever the humanitarian, Poofy, clearly entertained by the combination of consumed alcohol and the McCaffrey brothers floor show, did just the right thing and offered Jimmy a cold beer for medicinal purposes to be drank and/or placed on his now rapidly swelling jaw line. For some inexplicable reason, at that moment Poofy also chose to enquire of the stumbling and dazed Jimmy's family name (rumor has it that Poofy was entertaining the possibility that he may need to share it with a coroner).

Jimmy, operating on auto-pilot, mumbled the word "McEntee" through a now blood filled mouth, which sounded to one and all like "Macintosh." The now affably inebriated Poofy then declared to the crowd "you mean like the Apples? I'm going to call you Apples." And just like that, the nick-name stuck like Gorilla Glue (long before its existence).

Given that I don't really remember much more of the event or the evening must mean that Eddie ended the fight relatively quickly and that I was again the vanquished. My record stands at 0-1-60 in those sibling confrontations (the one draw occurred on a night I was wearing white bell bottoms, but that's another story).

At some point in the very early eighties, Apples decided that he was done with New York, hopped on a Grey-Hound bus destined for California, and got off, in true Apples' style, somewhere in Colorado (and stayed there.) That decision probably saved his life (there is another story involving an altercation with some pipe wielding miscreants during a

harrowing midnight ride with Serrano and Stein that led to Apples' extended stay in a hospital -- again for a future post). I heard years back, through the family pipe-line, that Apples finished school and, in continuation of his penchant for giving selflessly to others, became a Registered Nurse. I have lived out here in Colorado now for four years, and despite my highly skilled, lawyer research powers, have not been able to locate him. His trail ended in a possible relocation to Las Vegas, Nevada, where it went cold. So Apples, if you happen to come across this blog, or communicate with any of my five readers, reach out to me and lets catch up. I promise you won't get hurt.

AUNT VIOLET'S FLOPHOUSE

February 10, 2021



As I mentioned earlier, Joe Serrano (that's him above, next to half my face - Thanks for the photo Mike Augustyni)), Mark Lenahan (yep), and Murray Collins had moved into what I called Aunt Violet's flop house. That name is not meant to be derogatory, or to suggest that it was not up to regulatory standards (although I'm not sure if there were such things back then). I called it a flop house because that is where everyone in our extended group crashed at one

time or another, always drunk or stoned, often after parties, individually or in mass groupings. People would get wasted and literally flop down onto the floor and then slept it off where they sat or lay. Said flopping sometimes only lasted a few hours, and the affected person would awaken and quietly make their way out the door, down four very long and dark flights of winding, creaky wooden stairs that opened onto an entryway at the back end of driveway that ran along the northern most side of the huge house, and like released minnows, quickly disappear into the rushing current of the night.

Some were still there when the lessees woke up in the morning, where the floppers would be quickly checked for a pulse and then stepped over as we made our way out the door to whatever menial jobs we may have had at the moment to support our transient lifestyles. The floppers were always gone by the time we returned. I'm certain I had a key but I'm not sure I ever needed it to get into the apartment.

"Aunt Violet" was the affectionate name we called our Landlady, who was the owner of the large, multifamily dwelling (one of the largest homes in Riverdale) occupied by a large multi-generational family, plus some other other individuals who rented out rooms on the other floors (one said occupant unexpectedly played a feature role in the Marx Brothers-ish comedy that occurred the night of my twentieth birthday, when Joe fell out that window, a subject for a later posting). The attic was rented out as a block to the locals. I only saw AV a few times, we mostly heard her disembodied voice wafting up the stairs, cajoling us to stop making noise and to pay our rent (we were habitually tardy in that respect). AV was old (a clearly relative term that now applies to me), short, heavy set with silver naturally curly

hair. She dressed in old world fashion, in dark, quality frocks, with an occasional equally dark cardigan. I'm pretty sure she had cankles spilling over dark, practical shoes.

She was the grandmother or great grandmother of one of the other slightly older characters in our neighborhood, whose nickname was "Butch," and who I believe was friends with Joe's older brother Steve. AV was always pleasant, even when she had a full right to be angry, and on those few months we actually paid our rent on time, she always left us a pan of some delicious Italian dish - often lasagna or penne - outside our door as a reward.

The only time I remember AV being truly angry with us was the Night of The Bovines, which I made reference to in an earlier blog. That is a story that will require more care in the telling, but I will make that attempt at some point in the future. I believe Lenny may have the actual note she left us that night that read something along the lines of "Pay the rent and get those God Damned Cows out of the yard!"

I'm also pretty sure Murray, Joe (who I have known since first grade and shared my first cigarette with not too long after - not to worry, I gave up that habit long before I shaved), and Lenny (who I've known since the first day of freshman year at Cardinal Spellman High School - where I walked into home room to find him chasing another student with a live Bunsen burner - and I'm not sure I've ever called him Mark) were not the first occupants of the apartment, although I don't know who may have preceded them there, other than the long list of names appearing on a wall off the kitchen area (which I will describe in more detail later).

There was another tiny space directly beside that Wall of Signatures, where the occasional guest could sleep for a few weeks in a pinch. My cousin Apples (a nick name imposed upon him by a drunken Peter "Poofy" Smith -

another story) used that spot as a bedroom for a few months - he always slept with his eyes half open, really spooky - before he left NYC for good and disappeared out west.

Anyway, after Murray passed, Joe and Lenny offered me the now empty third bedroom. I was sharing an apartment on Netherland Avenue with another kid from the neighborhood, but it was a small one bedroom, with one of us sleeping on the couch in the living room, so I'm sure my roommate was happy to see me go.

As I remember it now, the apartment was large, with lots of dark, quality wood. I believe the interior walls of the apartment were plaster, with that wire mesh a few inches deep (there were many spots where the mesh had become exposed from some sort of impact before my time there - okay, some occurred during my tenure). If any of the readers know anything of the famous Haunted Winchester House, with stairways and hallways that led to nowhere, that was the feel of this place.

The apartment actually began on the small top landing after the many flights of winding stairs (the landing was only large enough for one average sized teen to sleep comfortably after coming home too drunk to make his way into the apartment only to be woken, terribly hungover, hours later by a rightfully angry John O'Hara - another surrogate - and dragged off to work in the construction industry, dragged body bumping down the stairs). There was a separate door on the immediate left that entered directly into Joe's large bedroom, which faced the rear of the building. Joe's bedroom then accessed the rest of the apartment through an interior door that opened onto one end of the long bathroom (the room he fell out of - remember we were on the fourth level of a very large house) whose other door

opened into Lenny's bedroom. Lenny's bedroom had another door which then opened directly into the central large rectangular entrance hallway where the main door of the apartment was located. Immediately to the right was the black hole of an interior stairwell - no lie, you could not see to the bottom - that I only used once as a way to return to our apartment the night Joe fell out that window.

As you turned to your right, and avoided that stairway, the long hallway proceeded towards the living room at its far end and opened on its right into the kitchen. There was a door opposite the kitchen that was locked until we needed to use that locked off space for card games.

Only the center walls of the apartment were 8 feet and perpendicular. All of the exterior walls sloped with the roof that encased the perimeter of the apartment, so you learned quickly to tilt your head if walking in the dark or suffer a surprise impact.

My bedroom opened off the right side of the living room and my bed directly abutted the wall of the kitchen. So if there was a party going on, I heard it from two sides. The far end of my bedroom opened out onto the front of the house, overlooking Tyndall Avenue. There I kept a small wooden desk I had salvaged from the curb of some local home (and where I wrote the Ode and some short stories). The windows of the apartment were old, wooden and single paned glass, so they did little to insulate the apartment, especially when we had a tendency to break those small window panes with hurled objects that missed their human targets (which now invokes memories of Dutch Collins -- another surrogate - providing us a step-by-step explanation of his process of window repair while repeatedly using the term "poody" (for "putty") -- while Joe, Lenny and I roared with laughter (another story). There was a tiny landing

outside the living room windows (also facing Tyndall) which sometimes functioned as dangerous deck where visitors could go and sit and catch some air during those hot summer months. How no one fell off that precipice escapes me.

I had only visited the apartment once while Murray still lived there - when I attended a Vodka party which I can barely remember but ended with me and six other guys - including Lenny, Serrano and John Hughes, if I'm not mistaken, not sure if Murray did it, but would be surprised if he didn't - getting our left ear pierced seriatim by Terry "Goose" Gans (RIP) using a large diaper pin repeatedly dipped in a Vodka-filled shot glass to maintain a sterile field (don't ask me where she got the diaper pin). Pretty sure someone drank that shot afterwards. Probably John Hughes, who would pretty much do anything that would shock the relatively reticent among us, although that is pure speculation. Goose was a force of nature - beautiful in her youth and could have been an Olympic swimmer -- who didn't suffer male whiners and efficiently dispatched her ear piercing duties in just a few minutes. While I cannot be certain, it had to be when I was just turning seventeen. I still wear a gold hoop in that ear to this day. Thanks Goose.

Anyway the first light of dawn approaches from the east and I have to turn back to my real world. I will pick this up in the next blog. Stay tuned.

SNAPPER

February 9, 2021

THE HERALD STAR

A member of The Gannett Group . Serving Greater
YONKERS, N.Y., FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 1977

114th Year — No. 120

Terrorist leader free without k

Holy cow! To him theft of cow is an udder disgrace

This would be a bull story, except
its about two cows.

The cows, rooftop ornaments at
the closed Dell-Dairy on Riverdale
Avenue, were considered one of the
few examples of Pop Art in Yonkers
by Jeffrey Weiner, an art student
and photographer.

Weiner would photograph them
and when the store closed offered to
purchase the cows.

But early today they were taken.
Weiner, said he saw a school bus in
the parking lot about 1 a.m.



WASHINGTON (AP) — A band of
12 Hanafi Moslem gunmen surren-
dered early today and ended a two-
day reign of terror in the nation's
capital. As part of the agreement,
which freed their 134 hostages with-
out further harm, the terrorist leader
was released without bail.

Before Khalifa Hamaas Abdul
Khaddis and his followers surren-
dered, the terrorist leader threat-
ened repeatedly to cut off the heads of his
hostages if his demands for revenge
against Black Muslim leaders were
not met.

The speed with which Abdul
Khaddis was brought to court for ar-
raignment and subsequently set free
enabled the terrorist to reach his
home in northwest Washington at
about the same time many of his
captives reached there.

"See you later," he said to news

Police seek su in rape, sodom

By PETER HARDEN
Staff Writer

A 42-year-old woman was raped
and sodomized late Wednesday night
in a four-hour ordeal that started
when she was dragged into a car on

In my humble opinion (which is the general standard applied to all of my blogs), Peter "Snapper" Lee is the nicest guy ever to ever come out of Riverdale. He hails from one of the few Riverdale families that had staked their claim to the Northwest Bronx before my own Clan settled there. I'm pretty sure my youngest brother dated one of his sisters for a New York minute in grammar school (its bound to happen, Riverdale was a bit of an insulated society and all of the established families to this day have dating/marital ties of some sort or another).

I mentioned in my earlier blog that Riverdale had its cliques and that they usually first developed among your own age group. But each of those cliques were part of a larger evolutionary group (the Riverdale Genus) where, as the various age groups shifted from one geographic area (School Yard, Vanny, Courts, Nabe, Rocks, Woods, Coaches II), there was always some cross-pollinating among the separate herds. The most common occurrence was that the older guys in an older clique would start dating some of the girls in a younger clique. Makes complete sense when you consider how girls always mature so much faster than the boys their own age.

When this occurred, the girl usually moved on to the older clique with her new boyfriend.

There was some younger guy/older girl, cross-clique parings, but they rarely lasted beyond a one night stand because the older girl soon tired of the far more emotionally immature boy. Of course, when that happened, it immediately increased that boy's desirability level among the girls in his own clique. A win-win for the lucky lad.

So by the time you hit high school, the age differential of a clique began to extend a year or two in either direction until you finally reached an age (or physical appearance) where

you could finally be served at the local watering hole (in my day, Coaches II). Then there was no age boundaries to anything. The next generation kept adding into the mix.

And all bets were off.

I bore you as an arm chair naturalist for a reason. As I said, Snapper Lee is the nicest guy heralding from Riverdale (I removed my youngest brother from consideration for this title only because my natural family bias would reek of nepotism). Snapper came from a litter of alpha males and attractive females with generally high IQs and solid educations. The boys did not suffer fools easily. I completely understand that because all of the Lee brothers that I knew, Tommy, Phil (RIP) and Snapper, at one time or another bartended in C2, where they were compelled to converse with everyone else in Riverdale. In my own experience, it was hard enough operating anywhere near their intellectual level when I first bellied up to the bar sober, but after killing a few thousand brain cells with alcohol, it wasn't even worth trying. I'm not saying they were openly condescending, they were always nice enough, but there always came that moment during a night in the bar where you said something that drew that flashing look in their eyes.

After a few rounds I often felt like a Neanderthal ordering primordial grog from one of the Homo Sapiens, and limited my across-the-bar conversation to a brand name of beer and its quantity.

But Snapper wasn't like his brothers. (I use the past tense because this comes from memory, Snapper remains with us as of the time of this writing). Snapper was always approachable, affable, funny and genuinely interested in anything and everything. You could talk with him at anytime and for however long you wanted. No topic was off the table. He always listened and would offer whatever insights

he could provide, most often sugar coated with humor. In the rare moments when the denizens of the bar drew his wrath, it was deserved and yet fleeting. I don't ever remember him barring anyone from C2 more than the remainder of a night of serious infraction.

After writing the "Ode" back in the seventies, I tried my hand at some short stories (alas, since I had just evolved from quill to typewriter, there was usually only one copy of each, and they have all been lost to the ages). One of them was entitled "There's No Cows In Riverdale," and was based on a true event - I believe the headline in the Herald Statesmen read "Holy Cow! To him, theft of Cow is An Udder Disgrace." - which in my purely fictionalized version - involved characters based on my oldest brother, his accomplice, Steve "The Greek" Atheneas (phon.), a couple of life-sized plastic bovines travelling across county lines, Aunt Violet, my Tyndall roommate Joe Serrano, and Tommy McQuillen (RIP) (the PWWCs had cross-pollinated with the Riverdale crew by then).

There was also a point in the story (both real and fictional) where, in order to return the cows (which evidently were of some notable artistic value) to their rightful owners, an anonymous call had to be made to the local police precinct to provide their location and assist in their safe and speedy recovery. Since this was long before the ubiquitous cell phone, and there were no land-lines in the Tyndall apartment, the call in question in the story was made from a pay phone (which if I recall hung on the NE wall between the men's/women's bathrooms in the back hallway of C2) by an anonymous and disinterested observer. Looking back on it now, I'm sure that pay phone got more use than a prison phone, with equally nefarious conversations. To protect the innocent I want to say without qualification that this is a

purely fictionalized account, and none of the characters I have mentioned had any involvement in the actual event. In the purely fictionalized version, Snapper was working the bar in C2. and I believe I wrote that he made that call.

Remember folks, this is fiction. (wink, wink)

Anyway, I remember selecting Snapper as that character at that time because, out of all the other bartenders, he was my favorite.

Snapper was also one of those cross-pollinating older guys I mentioned above who swooped in and dated and then married one of the girls from my age group (Pat Hughes, sister of John Hughes, and cousins to the Betz brothers and sisters). I hear they remain a happy couple with a wonderful family to this day.

But here's the post script on why Snapper retains the title of the nicest guy in Riverdale. My mother was one of a group of women (Mrs. McLoughlin was another) in Riverdale who were long-time friends with Snapper's mom from the early sixties (a St. Margaret's Mothers' Guild connection). Long after Snapper's mom passed, while these older women were housebound and fragile, Snapper used to make large batches of homemade split-pea soup and then drive to each of their homes on a regular basis to deliver this delicious meal to the appreciative women. I remember answering the door on numerous occasions to find Snapper standing on the steps with his savory smelling delivery and every time I would ask him in to see my mom and make the delivery himself, he would humbly beg off with the excuse that he had other deliveries to make. He was Santa Clause for the geriatrics that most of the world had left behind. He wouldn't even take a cookie.

Thanks Snapper.

TOM BRADY - GOAT

February 8, 2021

Congratulations Tom Brady!

I don't watch football anymore. But I was thrilled to wake up at 1 am this morning to the on-line headline that Tom Brady had led yet another team to a Super Bowl victory.

As a life long New Yorker (until recently), I know I'm not supposed to root for the long-time face of our Boston rival, but TB always had my respect.

A sixth round draft pick for NE (199th pick over all), TB came out of relative no-where (figuratively speaking, I'm not knocking Michigan) to earn his starting spot and then lead his team to multiple league championships, and 6 SB wins with NE.

That's just not supposed to happen. I love that.

This season, at a time when he has far surpassed the average age of "great" quarterbacks, he left his NE team, beat the odds, and did it again with Tampa Bay (love the matching initials) and his 7th win.

I love old guys beating the odds! (Especially when they are named Tom.) Tom Brady is clearly the Greatest [Quarterback] Of All Time. Full stop!

COMING OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

February 7, 2021



TWA found its genesis in three things: (1) An exotically attractive - and quintessentially New York - professional employment offer I received many, many, many, many years ago, (2) spontaneously moving from a life-long location (there's that alliteration again) and a City that provided no real personal space and where even the bathrooms are crowded to a place where you have to make a concerted effort to see another human being and, as a

result, actually find yourself talking to inanimate objects - all the statues on my property have names, personalities, and their own wonderful stories to tell (come by, I'll introduce you) -- and (3) last but by no means least, befriending the magical Claire the mule, who became my daily inspiration and cheerleader. Indeed, there is only one other female that has had a greater influence over my life, and I married her (sorry Ma & V (and now b), my lifelong confidants and advisors).

Put that all together, let it gel in isolation for a year and stir in a latent (possibly patent) insanity gene and Voila! Three months of writing early mornings and weekends and you have a novel.

Now during my time out here in NoCo, I also made some human friends who engaged me, in the first instance out of curiosity, and maintained that friendship despite my eccentric personality. I am an acquired taste. I thank them all for putting in the effort. Indeed, because I have no other way of showing my appreciation, many of them and/or their animals have become the basis for characters in TWA (and now in its sequel, An Alien Affair). So be careful all of you strangers out there on the streets of Berthoud, that is an inherent risk in registering on my friendship scale. I collect characters.

But I had a large cache of characters in my bag of tricks long before I stepped foot on Colorado soil. You've seen me mention some of them in my earlier blogs. If you have been paying attention you'll know I grew up in the Riverdale section of the Bronx. It was the early seventies, before AIDS, and sixties love had spilled over into the next decade, still fairly free (and where most resulting maladies could be cured with penicillin or kwell shampoo). In the later seventies, I had the PWWC (whose core consisted of Ralph

Droz, Mike McLaughlin, Mike Higgins, Tom McQuillen (RIP) and my eldest brother, Eddie, all of whom greatly impacted my life), and my first, unsuccessful stint at University, but I'll leave that story for a later blog.

You readers may, from your own experience, also know that a male's brain is not fully formed until its early twenties (and I can argue, anecdotally, much later - hell, some of you readers probably can argue that my brain remains a work in progress). Add to that, the hormonal firestorm that rages through most males from 13 to 19, and you will find that events that occur during that time will have seismic implications as to who that male turns out to be in later life. In my youth, bad guys in NYC were still afraid of carrying guns, because the law (some of you may remember that pre-BDB concept) made sure that if you were caught with one, you went to jail, and if you pulled one out during a crime, completely your choice, you often deservedly died.

No questions asked and no policemen prosecuted. So nobody carried.

And while there was violence back in the day, it was far more controlled.

Given this backdrop, a young man who may or may not have gotten into the occasional alcohol-fueled altercation during those teen age years, never anticipated more than a good old fashioned donnybrook. (The photo above is of our boy Mike Augustyni, after one of his altercations). You fought, and if you won, you bragged, and if you lost, you went home, licked your wounds, and came back another day. You never had to beat someone senseless, or suffer the same fate yourself. Your peers were always there to make sure it never went too far, broke it up once there was a clear winner, and no one ever died (thank God). Black eyes, fat lips, split knuckles and the occasional chipped

tooth were the only residual signs anything had occurred, although furniture was sometimes destroyed if the setting was a bar or an apartment. The combatants' families never went to the police and never sued each other (and a pox on all of my legal brethren out there whose avarice and advertisements altered that mindset). If there was anything patently unfair about the battle, an older, or more talented sibling, cousin or friend settled the score. But sometime those fights taught the loser that there are consequences for doing something stupid, especially to another person. Sometimes it taught the person - winner or loser - how to decide what is really worth fighting over. It also taught those same lessons vicariously to the people who watched the fight (there were no cell phones so you had to be present for the full effect -- although those who mastered the oral tradition [again, not that one] could usually and creatively share the event that night over some beers). And everyone learned from that. Society has forever lost that soft tapping on the brakes to bad decision making.

For the record, I'm not advocating violence. Walking away from it if you can is always the best policy, especially now when unbridled sociopaths think nothing of killing you over any little reason, or no reason at all. There's no talent in pulling a trigger from a few feet away.

However, I became good at defending myself as a teenager out of fear and necessity (hell, just to survive growing up in my family). I never enjoyed a moment of any confrontation, not even when I boxed in the golden-gloves (my father - who boxed for his ship in the Navy -- goaded me into it - and thank you Jimmy Bridenbach, the Mickey to my watered down Rocky) or trained in other forms of martial arts (thank God for Lenny, or I would never have pursued this, and thank you Bob Mahoney, who taught me the true meaning of

the calling). I was fascinated by the scientific efficiency of the fighting process in practice and theory, which neutralized whatever physical disadvantages you may have been born with. You learned how to end confrontations quickly and with the least damage to the assailant and your self. And, most importantly, you learned to walk away with confidence.

Still, I took my knocks. I wasn't born this pretty.

Once I entered law school, my education removed whatever little joy that was left in physical confrontation. From the moment I completed my first-year course in Torts, I saw a hefty price tag above the head of every mouthy douchebag -- many of them my legal peers -- I may have wanted to smack from that moment on. Talk about frustration.

[Although there is great first day in Law School story to tell that involves a prior victim of my brother Eddie].

But I digress.

Life in the early seventies was less complicated over all. It was primal. No one I knew personally thought very much about their future (their parents did it for them). We didn't have access to instant information from the Internet, which may be flawed but was better than what we shared among ourselves. Most of us lived in the moment, which explained a lot of our decisions. Once we discovered sex, some of us earlier than others, that pretty much guided all of our decision making for the rest of our teens. For example, it governed how hard we were willing to work at the various jobs available so we would have the money in our pockets to take the opposite gender on dates, or buy drinks in bars, or have a car and the gas to drive around (and "park") in.

[I'm not sure anything has really changed now that we have grown older. You work hard so that you have a respectable job so you are more attractive to the opposite sex (and to be absolutely clear, in this example I mean my wife), and have

money to take them places or provide them things, and to pay for a nice apartment or house you can "park" in.] I know what some of you may be thinking, but please believe me I am a tiny bit more evolved than I sound.

As a result, when we were still in our teens, my friends and I did extremely crazy, stupid, funny, amazing things in the pursuit of pleasure. A lot of those things ended up creating general havoc and often resulted in physical altercations.

Some, unfortunately, ended in tragedy. I remember most of what occurred, the rest I will call upon my poetic license to fill in the gaps in some future blogs or a novel (after I complete the present trilogy). Because there is just too much gold there to leave unmined. Hopefully, the lawyer part of me will keep me clear of the defamation laws and I promise not to disclose any confidences shared under blood oath (yes, they exist and I expect full reciprocity).

Which brings me back to the opening title of this blog. Once I wrote TWA, out here in the hinterlands, a part of me yearned to reach out to all of those friends from back in the day with whom I shared so much of my formative years.

Mark Lenahan, himself a talented chef and writer, has remained a constant in my life, so he has been along for the entire journey (and is, quite honestly, probably sick of listening to me). Jackie Vaughan, who I mentioned in an earlier blog, and who was my grammar school best friend, and his father, one of my prime surrogates, is now another successful shark in the NY legal ocean, with whom I have maintained sporadic though fond contact. Others like Chrissy T, is almost family, and will always answer the call.

Others took a little more doing to find, like Joe Serrano, who all by himself has created enough stories for a ten novel series, but by reaching him, word reached the others I could not find, like Mike Augustyni ("Stein") and my Collins

kin (already heard from Eileen (Collins) Cotto, thanks for reaching out). With any luck, I'll continue to hear from the rest. Don't be shy. Use the contact button above.

And here is what I find most fascinating. At the first sound of these people's voices on the phone, instant reversion occurs, the years disappear and I'm instantly teenage Tommy transported back to that fantastical time in the seventies, with all of its stories. And you can't fake that.

Stay tuned you five readers!

WAITING FOR CHRISTMAS AND HOPING FOR KARMA

February 6, 2021

Some of you must be old enough to remember what it was like in early December waiting for Christmas to finally arrive.

For those of you who were perfect (while I've never met one of you - you couldn't have remained perfect had we crossed paths - I know you are out there, like Bigfoot), it was an impatient cake-walk, you were just running out the clock to the presumed victory and your just desserts. For the rest of us, the imperfect ones, it was a time of desperate and emotional horse-trading, future promises to the Jolly Old Elf, just before sleep, of Saint-like conduct in exchange for absolution of your past year of misdeeds. Remember, this was a time when you only received presents on birthdays and Christmas. For you younger readers, that must sound barbaric. It was.

Then you grew up (physically, at least), and like most of us, got married and had children, and our roles instantly changed to being St. Nick (sadly, some of us actually grew into that suit). In all honesty, that is by far the most satisfyingly role in life. There is nothing better than trying to make dreams come true for others. Especially children. It is pure magic when you get it right. My sisters, V & B, have mastered that role.

Once I got older, my self-centered seeds of Christmas expanded spiritually into what I came to understand as the concept of Karma (raise your hand if, like me, you just started humming that song by the Culture Club). In its most simple form, it means (at least to me) that if you do right by others and help out without being asked when the situation

presents itself, the universe rewards you. But unlike Christmas, there is no set date on the calendar for that reward and so there is no corresponding last minute bargaining to absolve you of your past sins. You have to put the effort in every day without expectation of a ROI (return on investment). You just try to do the right thing, whatever that is, with hopes (although not expectations) that during those times when you may need it most, someone comes along to offer that magical hand to pull you back from the abyss. With any luck you never need that hand. And that may be greatest Karmic ROI.

Now as as teenager, I stayed on the selfish side of Karma, always looking for that advance against future deposits. As I look back at it now, my mother must have been working as a supervisor at the Central Karmic bank, and was fudging my numbers in the overdraft column (thanks Ma).

Once I hit the magical age of twenty (God, that was so long ago -- there was five martinis that night and a trip for Joe Serrano (a/k/a Carl LeFong), who fell out our - Aunt Violet's - apartment window, accompanied by Lenahan (yep, him) and Mike Augustini, to the emergency room - stay tuned), I realized I was just one cosmic audit away from Karmic Bankruptcy. Leading up to that birthday, I also had been blessed by the intercession of a wonderful couple of my parental surrogates, Dutch and Momma C Collins, who made me understand that I was better than what my record showed (couldn't be worse). I soon fell in final love (thank you Lisa), got married shortly thereafter, and started having children. And I didn't want any of my loved ones to have to answer for my Karmic debts. So I went to work.

And this is the weirdest thing about Karma, looking back over the years, in my personal experience, once you make that commitment to work with it, Karma wipes the past slate

clean (otherwise my poor mother has been paying my debts in heaven), and it starts advancing those wonderful things in life (although you may not realize and/or fully appreciate that it is happening at the time). And you don't always have to get it right. There have been some missteps along the way where I have missed my scheduled deposit of Karmic coin.

Nonetheless, anyone who knows me personally, can attest to the fact that my life has been truly blessed. (Seriously, I tell others I must have been Mahatma Gandhi in my past life - which would explain the legal profession, baldness, vegetarian diet, spectacles, pot belly and the loin cloth I like to wear around the house.) There is just no other explanation.

But here I am, as I write this blog, fighting that urge to be the old selfish Tommy, secretly horse-trading with St. Nick for that perfect present, a successful book launch - and as a lawyer for over three decades, I've gotten much better at negotiating -- while waiting for my new Christmas on February 18th. May Karma forgive me. (Ma, if you are watching, get out your eraser, I may be emptying my account).

Sing with me now, "Karma, karma, karma, karma, karma . . .
."

BYTES OVER PAPER

February 5, 2021

I mentioned numerous times that I've become an unapologetic Amazon list junkie. I know I'm a junkie because despite the fact that it is playing havoc with my heart and blood pressure, and causing terrible mood swings, I cannot keep myself from peeking at the Amazon Hot New Releases List for Legal Thrillers early each morning before I blog to see if and where TWA appears. Its a blessing and a curse. (I actually look at the list out of the corner of one, squinted eye, face half-turned away from the computer screen, the other eye closed, because I fear the worst.)

TWA may not be on the top of the list, but it has been holding yo-yo steadily in the middle. Now, a Kindle version has joined the original paperback version, and, as of this morning, has overtaken it on that list. **Bytes over paper.** In my defense, most of the other books on the Amazon list are either written by an established author, are a sequel to an established series or have posted 4+ star ratings, or all of the above. So I'm at a disadvantage coming out of the gate.

Still, I'm not sure why the literary gods have smiled - at least to a Mona Lisa level - upon this book. Given that I'm a first time author (with no obvious public scandal to drive prurient interest -- I'm working on that) and you cannot post reviews on Amazon until the book's release date, I'm fascinated trying to understand what is getting people to pull the Amazon trigger. Luckily, there have been reviews on other websites, like, <https://readersfavorite.com/book-review/the-wise-ass> - or, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/>

56281694-the-wise-ass - or even, <https://www.ebooklingo.com/ebook-review.php?id=23>, which have been consistently 5 stars, but given that Amazon does not post them, I can't help but wonder if they have played a role here.

My alternative theory for this success is that it might be the work of the prominent television personality, the psychic medium Kim Russo, who blessed me by coming out to her FB faithful followers in December and saying wonderful things about TWA. God bless her. I'm forever in her debt. I hope she sees a film version of the story in my future (hey, it could happen).

It could be that my youngest brother (yep, that one) posted something on Linked-in a while back to his construction based legion of followers, which got over 11,000 looks and drew about 100 comments. Given that there is a tradesman storyline to the novel, it may have appealed to that demographic.

It could be the aggregate influence of all of the others of lesser social media prominence, who I have shamelessly hounded and begged to post something in exchange for a sneak peek at the novel. Truth is, I'm just too old to be shy.

But since I am not on those social media platforms, I do not know whether they have done so or not. It all comes down to faith, I imagine. And I have plenty of faith!

To be honest, objectively speaking, the whole thing feels analogous to being Professor Harold Hill in The Music Man - don't worry, I have sufficient testosterone levels to enjoy musicals and action films - who was masquerading as a band instructor, conning the townspeople into paying him to create a boys' marching band. With TWA, there are no musical instruments to be seen, just a cute book cover (that really is Claire - and she is adorable and magical) and a

couple of wonderful blurbs from established authors (please buy their books as well). However, no one has heard me play a single note, other than a select group of reviewers who have gotten free copies of the novel (I must assume they are bound by their integrity, and are not going to support me if I haven't provided them the goods).

Hell, I don't even have something analogous to Professor Hill's pool hall to frighten people into buying the book.

Nonetheless, if the Amazon readers haven't read those reviews, they must be buying it on pure faith alone. And I thank them for that!

And that is why I blog. I'm trying to show you readers, and potential readers out there, that I know how to play this instrument. Like a street corner busker, I can string together words in an interesting way that may distract you for a moment from the monotony and troubles of daily life. I have also collected a whole lot of fun stories along the way.

I have known a lot of colorful characters, and for some reason I remember them all. I will alter those just enough in the telling to protect the not so innocent. It's pure escapism.

While I may never play this instrument like Beethoven (or even as well as my favorite author Nelson DeMille), I always will tell you a story that will captivate and amuse you. You will never walk away from the experience feeling like you've wasted those moments reading my work. And that's a promise.

Now, where was I? Oh yes, . . . "Seventy six trombones led the big parade . . . "

TWO WEEKS OUT

February 4, 2021

Two weeks from today, my first novel, *The Wise Ass*, will be available for purchase from my publisher, Black Rose Writing (thanks again Reagan Rothe) and also from all the major, on-line, book sellers. At my age, I didn't think there were any "firsts" left. Given the odds, this could be my last first, so I really want it to be special. And I am confident that it will be, if only because I've been waiting for this moment for my entire adult life.

The first time I recall writing anything that was not compelled by a classroom curriculum, it was a poem for a neighborhood friend who had died in a terrible car crash. It was called "Ode to Murray Collins." Denis "Murray" Collins wasn't a childhood friend. If my memory serves me, he and his large Irish family arrived in our neighborhood towards the tail end of my senior year in high school. By then, the hierarchies among those who had grown up in the neighborhood had long been established. High School had indelibly forged the neighborhood reputations of the smart kids, the athletes, the stoners, the boozers, the greasers, the musicians, the lovers, the geeks, the clowns, the brawlers and the delinquents. There were some cross-pollination among members of these categories, depending on the individual's talents.

There were cliques and expectations.

During those high school years, if someone new arrived, they were admitted to these cliques through some existing member. Sometimes this was done in steps. For example, if someone lower down the established social pecking order befriended someone new from another neighborhood, or a

classmate from a school from outside our neighborhood, he/she introduced that new person to someone higher up in the clique pecking order. If the new person hit it off with this higher up person, then that higher up person could walk the new person into the established clique. It was a vouching system. If the right person told the others in a group you were cool, then you were in. Because of the size of most of the Irish and Italian families that populated the neighborhood, you could also gain entrance to the cliques as a legacy. Some older sibling had established a reputation in one or more of the aforementioned categories, and one day the younger sibling tagged along and was admitted. No questions asked.

I know this is going to sound terribly sexist, but these admission rules applied only for the males in the neighborhood. By senior year of high school, the neighborhood girls were, to a certain extent, reputationally identified by the above-mentioned categories. But the truth was that if a girl was attractive, she could join any clique she wanted.

Now depending on your age, your cliques had a general tendency to hang around specific geographic areas in Riverdale. There was "the School Yard" for the younger more athletic crowd, which for most of us meant St. Margaret's, then there was "Vanny" (Van Cortlandt Park) for the more drug oriented, "the Woods" (behind what is now the Russian Mission) for the drinkers and lovers, "the Nabe" (which was the Neighborhood House, a community organization that ran the local pool in the summer months and youth organizations during the winter - a non-confrontational, neutral area, like Switzerland), "the Courts" (the school yard behind P.S. 81) for the athletes during the day and everyone one else come nightfall, "the

Rocks" (a large wall of rising boulders overlooking the Courts and the baseball field) for the older kids, "the River" which was anywhere in the woods along the railroad tracks abutting the Hudson River from 246th Street to the Yonkers City line, and finally, the local bar on Mosholu Avenue, whose name has changed during my formative years from Considine's, Coaches Two, Viggs, and now I believe its Frankie's Place.

During an early summer night at the end of my senior year in High School, I arrived at the Rocks to hang with my clique, and noticed a congregation off to one side of the group, with a lot of laughter emanating from its center. I'm pretty sure the cluster was made up of Joe Serrano, the Betz brothers (Jimmy and Stevie), their cousin, John Hughes, and some others drinking their Buds and talking shit. But there was another unique voice I didn't recognize.

When I looked over, there was this kid, with long brown hair, slim and a little on the shorter side, holding court.

"Who's that?" I asked Jackie Vaughan, one of my childhood closest friends of high social standing among the group.

"That's Murray Collins," Jack said, handing me a beer, "he's cool." That's all I needed to hear.

And, as it turns out, Jack was right. There was really something special about Murray. He became the instant fan favorite of the neighborhood and rose quickly within the clique hierarchy. A Renaissance man, he easily travelled among all the cliques. He was incredibly smart and modestly funny. We were never close in the "best friends" sense of the kind of friendship where you shared your deepest secrets, but our respective social leadership roles in the overlapping cliques threw us together enough times during parties and road trips to form a bond. We had a lot of laughs. And he became close to a lot of my close friends

(indeed, Murray, Joe Serrano and Mark Lenahan (yes, that Lenahan) were the first occupants of Aunt Violet's flop house on Tyndall Avenue - there's another novel there to be sure - I just have to double check the applicable statute of limitations). But I quickly recognized that this kid had brains, talent, and confidence, and could do whatever he wanted to in life. And Murray was well on his way to doing just that, he had the world by the balls, until that night when his car struck that telephone pole.

When Murray died, I found my narrative voice. I wrote a poem to acknowledge his brief existence and a life of promise too early ended. I wrote it in one sitting on an old manual typewriter in his old room in Aunt Violet's, where I moved after Murray's passing. Given my penchant for the spiritual world, I'd like to believe he was there when I wrote it. I gave the poem to his family, who were then kind enough to accept me as one their own. And that's when I really got to know who Murray was. I hope that poem, which used to hang in the home of "Dutch" and "Momma C" Collins, still hangs on one of the family member's walls.

From what I remember, after all, it was so long ago, it was three long stanzas and wasn't brilliant. Probably wasn't even good. Never going to appear in Norton's Anthology.

But it was honest, formed from my limited life experience, and came from the heart. And it gave me that first taste of what it felt like to create something out of the ether that caused an emotional reaction in others. I was hooked.

Thank you Murray.

THE RAOK VIRUS

February 3, 2021

2020 was the kind of year that could understandably send people into a tailspin. I've witnessed what I can only describe as isolation psychosis by people that are so worried about catching the COVID 19 virus that they readily turn publicly on any neighbor who they believe is not taking the virus seriously enough. I've witnessed people in stores shouting at cashiers or other shoppers who either aren't wearing sufficient protective gear or not wearing the gear appropriately to the aggressor's satisfaction. This occurs, even though the aggressor is basically wearing HAZMAT level protection that is impervious to any virus. I've witness similar written tirades on community social media lambasting local stores or citizens who are not adhering to the draconian dictates of a presently clueless and careless government. The recipients of these attacks are often just people and families trying desperately to keep their businesses afloat. I've also noticed a disheartening willingness of neighbors to inform on their less compliant neighbors, like the Vichy French. Quite honestly, this breakdown of the social fabric is disheartening to watch.

And before any of the virus zealots go on the attack, I wear my mask and respect social distancing where ever it is required, and equally respect the needs of the at-risk, pre-morbid to go above and beyond to protect themselves. But I respected that long before this virus hit. The truth is, if I am wearing proper attire, it really does not matter what every other person is doing. So physician, heal thyself. However, to be honest, I am a firm believer in herd immunity and that I, along with the other 99 + % of the population will survive

this menace if infected. If I am wrong, at least I will only have suffered one death, not the thousand deaths the fearful suffer daily, whose self-induced stress alone is compromising their own natural immunity. And it is my constitutional right to choose what happens with my own body? Right?

But during these dark days I also have witnessed the slow but steady progression of the **RAOK** virus. I've seen citizens stop whatever they may be doing to help neighbors.

It is in open display on the streets, in parking lots, and on their properties. These pockets of **R**andom **A**cts **O**f **K**indness are popping up in the most unexpected places.

For example, a week or so ago, I was driving home with my wife after an afternoon of errands. We were travelling on an isolated county road and spotted a car in the distance that had gone off the road to the right and landed nose first in the bottom of a steep gully, leaving just the rear quarter of the car still exposed on the road. I could see that there were people in the front seat of the car, and that they were moving, and that one was on her cell phone. Not sure of what we could do for them (and to be absolutely honest, we almost kept going -- defaulting to a pure New York "I'm sure someone else will help them" mentality) we unexplainably stopped (I swear, someone else hit my brakes, because I definitely wasn't feeling it, and indeed, instantly regretted it).

We approached the vehicle and after ascertaining that the occupants were not injured, but were understandably harried, and that the car itself seemed to still be operable (God was surely working overtime), we almost returned to our car and drove away. But, without thinking, I said the dumbest thing: "maybe we can help you get the car back on the road."

At that moment, the worried husband of the woman in the car appeared in his own car, so with my wife playing look out on the roadway, the husband and I tried to lift the nose of the car upward from the bottom of the ditch while the wife tried to get the back tires to catch on the roadway (they were dangling just an inch above it) and reverse the car out of the gulley (the teenage daughter was now out of the car, watching and no doubt sharing the event with friends on her cell phone - if you are out there and have any photos/videos of the event, please send them to me). We made just enough progress to provide equal shares of hope and frustration, but it wasn't working. When we were about to give up, another much younger man appeared out of nowhere in the ditch beside us and, with the unbridled exuberance of youth and a quick rendition of the story of the little old lady being able to lift a car off a trapped loved one, threw in beside us at the front of the car and the three of us gave it another go. However, despite our best efforts, we remained that one little old lady short to get the car to the promise land. Knowing that my sciatica was planning to make one hell of an appearance at any second, I was about to admit defeat and abandon the effort when we heard the voice of God in the form of another silver haired man in a pick-up truck calling out from the road side, "Can I help?" Without the mythical old lady, I wasn't sure that one more older body pushing on the front of the car was going to get us to the goal line, but then God said "I've got tow chords." Five minutes later, after the husband had secured the tow chord to some solid section of the exposed undercarriage of the roadside rear of the car, with the three amigos popping every muscle fiber in our backs and shoulders while the pick up truck slowly backed the slack out of the line, the now taught tow chord held and the pick-up truck spun its wheels

for a moment before the total cobbled together combination of man and machine synched and with a sudden jerk the car lifted out of the gulley.

I know there must have been some quick high-fives exchanged in that first moment, but by the time I had dragged my sorry old ass out of the gulley the other Samaritans had disappeared, without even a group hug.

After a thankful wave from the driver of the now recovered vehicle, who seemed focused on the fact that she might also be out of gas, my wife and I returned to our car and then our home.

It wasn't until later that night, after a handful of Aleve and a long soak in the hot tub, that I realized that I had been somehow infected with the RAOK virus that day, and that it is insidiously asymptomatic and spreads quickly, through simple visual transmission. It then settles in your heart where it can lay dormant for years, and as of yet, there is no known cure. And despite my sciatica, I just pray there is no herd immunity for it.

The Oral Tradition (No, Not That One)

February 2, 2021

When was the last time you actually **heard** someone **tell** a good story?

I'm not talking about those daily minimalistic social exchanges where you ask someone for specific information and they provide it to you. How was your day? What did you buy at the store? What did the vet say? Where did you bury that body?

I'm sitting here at 2 am, racking my brain for my own memory of the last time I sat around with someone (or a group of people) and listened to them entrance me with some recitation of an event they experienced or heard about and when they were done I felt like I had been totally transported and entertained.

It may be that technology has finally driven the oral tradition into extinction. I'll admit that I now prefer texting to talking on the phone. In this busy world its a more efficient way to communicate. You send your thoughts out to another, or to a group, and they get to it when they get to it, and respond accordingly. You are never forced into a response or follow-up. In fact, its very easy to leave another hanging for days, weeks or months with the ready excuse "Oh, I didn't see it." (C'mon, don't lie, we've all done it.) A text is like a drive-by shooting, you never stick around to see the effects of your words. And as we all know, inflection and nuance are easily lost in typed communication. The true magic of a good story is found in the inflection and nuance.

A good writer can compensate, but its hard to do regularly and one is not always successful.

I grew up around a table of multi-generational bullshit artists.

My great uncle Barney and uncle Bernie could command the family stage just by reciting a shopping list. My father was no slouch either. We'd all gather every Saturday night around our oversized dining room table as my father served his infamous spaghetti (no, not that Spaghetti) dinners whose sauce had to include some form of industrial motor oil and whose meatballs, if propelled from a sling, could penetrate most flak jackets. There was far more palatable and delicious fare served at Posey's Sunday night soirees, but those dinners were not as boisterous, probably because the attendees were more focused on the food than the company.

You never knew who was going to show up at my father's dinners. Most of the siblings, some of their friends, the living older generation (and sometimes the dead), while every pet in the family corralled themselves under the table, vying for the best position to accept that one meatball on our plates that was totally unpalatable to humans. I'm surprised they had any teeth left.

Once plated and served to everyone, the dinner always started with the attendees saying grace (last vestiges of Catholicism), led by one of us, often including an unexpected digression that caused some laughter and a thumping. And then there was an introductory course of lying, as we all commented on how delicious the meal looked and smelled, prodding the impenetrable meatballs with our forks (sometimes sending them skittering across and off the table into the mouths of the awaiting beasts below). My father, beaming, would then commence the meal with a booming "Let's eat!"

When the siblings were still very young, our story telling skills were sharpened by some adult at the table, usually our

mother, outing us for something we had done wrong during the week and pushing us out into center spotlight with the forceful line "Tell your father about . . . "

You then sank or swam. I quickly became the Mark Spitz (Michael Phelps didn't invent swimming) at our table just out of self-preservation. The good news was, I quickly learned that if you could tell a remarkable tale that only tangentially incorporated the cited misdeed in passing but quickly took the audience into an altered universe that completely distracted them (in politics you call it "pivoting"), you avoided a thumping. Another more efficient way to handle the matter was to play verbal bull-in-the ring and quickly refer to another sibling's misdeeds which forced them onto center-stage tale telling mode while you got to recede into the chorus. My brother, the Ginger (yep, that one) was so notorious as a child (and as an adult) that he knew that there was nothing he could say that would save his soul (assuming he had one), so when the misdeeds all started to fly he developed his signature move of excusing himself from the table to go to the bathroom and never returning.

He developed the nick-name "the Wind" as in "Gone With "

When we became too old to thump, the Saturday night table was where the siblings brought those special people in our lives to meet the family. It was the ultimate litmus test. If they could survive that dinner they were designated by the family as "a keeper." Of course, to the siblings, that first appearance dinner was where the most embarrassing stories you could remember were trotted out and delivered with full dramatic display. If you were really good, you took the others' tales about you and with the opening line ("that's nothing compared to when . . . ") flipped them back onto the other's own, far more embarrassing moment, leaving them

sputtering and flushed. Verbal aikido. No wonder I became a lawyer.

These introductory dinners were so expectantly embarrassing, that on the afternoon before the night my eldest brother (yep, him too) was going to bring home the girl he ultimately married, he pulled me aside, pinned me to the wall and threatened my life. It worked. I believe I feigned laryngitis that night. The reward for the surviving outsider was total family acceptance and loyalty, and a permanent seat starting at Posie's next Sunday night dinner.

But the point is that we all told stories around the table. We learned how to embellish them out of pure competition to draw the most laughter and embarrassment from the others.

And the greatest beauty of the oral tradition is that you were not limited by the truth.

You see, as a lawyer I've learned that eye-witness testimony is patently unreliable, because, as humans, we all see what our lifetime of personal experiential conditioning allows us to see. Our hardwired preferences dictate our perceptions.

And that is the true magic to good family storytelling. If you listen to my siblings and I tell a captured audience about the same event, you are bound to wonder whether any of us were actually at that event, given how divergent our versions appear. So if you listened to our family tell stories, you quickly saw that they all were each a separate story in themselves.

Since none of those moments I have described were captured for posterity, let me leave you with of an example of the only time I have witnessed anything close to it on television. There was a fantastic BBC show called *The Vicar of Dibley*, and in one scene, during the first few minutes the characters all recount their differing versions of

the same event - a storm. If you remove the British accents, it comes close to capturing a conversation on any given night around my family table. For those of you who haven't experience this kind of family theater, enjoy (and, for the record, I claim no rights to this video, only making reference to it for "fair use" purposes to make a transformative point.)

[https://duckduckgo.com/?](https://duckduckgo.com/?q=Youtube+The+Great+STorm+Vicar+of+Dibley&t=chromen)

[q=Youtube+The+Great+STorm+Vicar+of+Dibley&t=chromen
tp&atb=v255-7bc&iax=videos&ia=videos&iai=https%3A%2F
%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DBRvUUDYomII](https://duckduckgo.com/?q=Youtube+The+Great+STorm+Vicar+of+Dibley&t=chromen&atb=v255-7bc&iax=videos&ia=videos&iai=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DBRvUUDYomII)

So, the next time you gather in a room with others, put down your phones, pull up a chair and listen. Otherwise you might miss a wonderful story.

WELCOME TO KINDLE (AND VEGETARIANISM)

February 1, 2021

TWA was initially posted on the major on-line distributors for presale in December as a paperback - very fine quality I may add, with lots of inside cover space for inscriptions - but for those on a tighter budget, or those who don't enjoy the tactile experience of flipping and dog earring pages, or making notes in the margin, or carrying around a copy to let others know how cool you are (is "cool" even a thing any more?) to be reading TWA, the good news is that, as of the middle of last week, TWA is now available in Kindle format.

I learned of this while feeding my list addiction early Friday morning and noticing two copies of Claire's face on the Amazon Hot New Releases List. I've just doubled-down on my addiction and face a Sophie's Choice of which one I'm rooting for.

I was one of those cranky old bastards that swore I would never read a novel from my computer, iPhone or designated Kindle apparatus, but then my eldest son (thank you Luke) brought me the latter and suddenly I was hooked. The beauty of it is that you can carry an entire library with you on one slim machine, and I enjoyed being able to read in tight spaces - like a NYC subway car during rush hour -- one-handed (now, its true, you can read a paperback one handed but it often leads to thumb cramps and who knows what subway germs you are ingesting when you lick your fingers to turn the pages). Plus, when you order a Kindle book, the delivery is instantaneous. I've since started reading novels on my iPhone as well, thank god for the plus size models. But you all already know this technical stuff,

lol. If you order TWA on Kindle, I understand that the delivery will occur on 2/18 (but don't quote me on that). For those who do purchase it in paperback (thank you, thank you, thank you), if you live in Berthoud and spot me wandering around the street, or in Hays, A&W, Grandpas, Mr. Thrift, Habitat, or even Hometown Liquors (I strongly encourage everyone to support our local shops), if you want an inscription, and I will write anything you ask, don't be shy, walk up to me and we'll take care of it right there and then.

If you ask me to sign it "Tommy," I'll throw in a selfie and a hug as well (male or female, hugs are gender fluid).

If you don't live in Berthoud, and, after reading it, you would like it inscribed, send me an email using the "contact" button on this page with your contact information and I'll do my very best to make it happen. We'll figure it out. Not sure about the "Tommy" and the selfie/hugs promise, but if you are ever passing through the area, I won't rule it out.

Now for a little more background. I became a vegetarian in a strange way when I was fifty years old. One day, just before Thanksgiving, I was sitting around my home in the Bronx with my then three rescue dogs, Maeve (yes that Maeve, RIP), Shorty (RIP) and Max (RIP), half watching, half listening, to some cable news station, when a story came on about some Korean holiday, where they like to eat dogs. (Note that this is not a knock on Korea, the country is beautiful and its people are wonderful. Indeed, my father spent time there as part of his stint in the Navy during the Korean Conflict, and told us a great story about a giant snake, which I'll save for another blog).

My three dogs all sat up at once in their spots on every chair and couch in the room and stared at the screen - like the RCA dogs - as the sounds of muted dog yelps came across the TV speakers (I wonder if barks are language specific? I'll

have to ask Claire.) which finally drew my full attention to this horrific story. After the conclusion (it was only 30 seconds at most), I looked at my canine family and said matter-of-factly (yes I do talk to my animals) "Lucky for you you're not in Korea, or you would be on the lunch menu."

They all scowled in unison at my poor attempt at canine humor, and curled up into their "ignore this asshole until its dinner time" positions, and probably dreamed of those wonderful yesterdays when they were all wolves and could hunt Cro-Magnon morons like me just for fun.

Left to my own devices, I thought about how barbaric this practice would be for me personally, given that I loved my dogs, and all animals I meet. Then I thought of all the kids on farms who raise livestock, and wondered how it must feel to them to see the calf they've helped raise disappear into the back of some trailer one day. (And for the record, I understand that ranching/farming is a family livelihood, often for generations, so I am not judging anyone who breaks their back every year trying to feed this country and their families, they are a noble breed, for whom I have nothing but admiration and respect.) But for me, at that moment, I realized that I could no longer eat anything that was born to a parent, and who shared a loving bond. [For the record, fish is an easy give for me, since I have never really liked it and almost choked on a fishbone at dinner the night I was given my employment offer at Cahill Gordon, but I digress]. As I said, this epiphany occurred shortly before

Thanksgiving, so as with most major events in my life - the timing sucked. My particular branch of the McCaffrey family had forsaken Turkey for the more delicious (and less Tryptophan fueled, sleep inducing) beef fillets mignon.

There was large hunk of meat aging in the fridge as I sat there with my dogs, which I knew from experience, that my

wife would magically convert into the center piece of the most mouth watering meal for her family on the given day. I am weak. I take mental stands on moral issues all the time and then immediately cave to my more primal physical needs and desires. No excuses. I've never kept a New Year's resolution in 64 years. So, I didn't have much hope. But on this given Thanksgiving day, I somehow found the determination to keep my promise to my pets. I had to wear a bib to catch the tears and saliva streaming from my face as I carved this succulent piece of meat and inhaled its wafting mouth watering aroma. I watched with peripheral vision as my carnivorous clan all wolfed down their thick slices, barely chewing them, while I tried to focus on the vegetable sides I was listlessly moving around my juiceless plate. (I'm pretty sure I made the Close Encounters of the Third Kind potato mountain just to distract myself) and cursed my dogs who were happily (and traitorously) sharing in the beef bounty in the mountains of scraps they were receiving under the dining room table. I was surely shaking with Delirium Tremens by the time the plates were gathered and ferried off to the kitchen sink. But once the dessert arrived, I knew I had made it. Ice Cream! (I never could commit to being a vegan - to quote Clint, a man's got to know his limitations) And I was indeed, Thankful. Like a Vampire, my lust for meat has never lessened over the years (Jesus, I'm salivating as I write this - I'm praying it was the thought of Ice Cream!), but after all this time, I think I've got it licked. Yum, ice cream. At least my present dogs, Blue (yes that Blue) and Jeter (too small for my story), who have never seen me eat meat, are proud of me.