

Crossed the 50 Page Mark

March 31, 2021

The characters have been very busy over these past few days and threw me a curve ball by accelerating a major plot point because they knew far better than I when the time was right. By doing so, they created a plausible element of surprise - hell, I was surprised -- that will create a firestorm that will take us through the end of the first act. Well done. Stay tuned.

TEN PERCENT IN - NINETY TO GO

March 30, 2021

I have a target page number of 300 for this finale to the Claire Trilogy, which will make it the longest of the three books. There's a lot that has to happen here, and a lot has already happened and I'm only just over ten percent into my estimated page count. The damn characters keep taking over the narrative, but I've really enjoyed watching them perform. The book will ultimately end up as long as it needs to be to reach where my mind wants us all to end up. Be patient and make sure you spread the word on TWA -- honestly, if you like it, tell all your friends and family because I want this trilogy to be a modern day classic, and keep posting those positive reviews, I read and appreciate every one of them -- and then cue up for AAA as soon as pre-sales start in the fall and repeat the process all over again. I, on my part, will keep working as hard as I can to provide you with the most entertaining story Claire and the others will share with me. Stay tuned.

The Worm Turns

March 29, 2021



Always liked that phrase. Generally speaking it means that someone's situation can suddenly change so that a person who has been sick, unlucky, unsuccessful, etc., can become healthy, lucky, successful, etc. And that suggests that no matter how bad it may seem, there is always hope that your circumstances can always turn for the better if you just hang in there. Any writer/musician/artist out there -- or anyone else for that matter -- has to always keep that in mind.

Where there is life, there is hope. I signed my first publishing contract at 63. So never quit.

That's a photo taken yesterday during the wee hours of the "Worm Moon" (one of the 4 super-moons this year) setting above the foothills at the far end of Foothills Estates, from Pam Ervin's property (Hi Pam, Tique, Wicker, Briggs and Puppy). It was just so beautiful I had to stop and grab a shot of it. The Worm Moon is the harbinger of Spring, and reflects the worms rising to the surface of the earth, which in turn invites the Robins back into your area. It reminds us that the beauty of our immediately surrounding world is returning. So hang in there.

For anyone who gives a rat's ass, Novel 3 is progressing (finished chapter 7), and its working title goes by the acronym KMAG.

Chapter five

March 28, 2021

Absolutely amazed where these characters are taking me.

Chapter 4 in the bank

March 27, 2021

Just a quick update that I completed another chapter this morning and to report that this latest installment seems to be unfolding organically before me. I came into this project with a general idea of the big picture, but when I sit down to write I really have no clue of how my characters are going to lead me there. I am often delightfully surprised when one unexpectedly steps up and throws their conduct or dialogue into the mix at just the right spot. Nothing is forced and they always remain in character, but sometimes they mine a new depth of their personality that I never anticipated, but once completed, appears totally reasonable. And that's the real fun in writing. Sit back and watch your story unfold, and if your fingers get tired, let your elves handle the typing (mine do a much better job).

Book 3 Progress - AND BACK WHEN DM LOST HIS SOUL

March 26, 2021



Managed to get to the end of Chapter 3 (4 including the Prologue) and I am pleased with the progress so far. I find that the writing is going a little more slowly than in the past, as I have to carefully reintroduce the important characters with enough backstory to appease the reader who may pick up this book first and allow the story to proceed if need be as a stand alone. But you don't want to recreate the wheel

and bore the readers of the prior two novels. At the same time I have to establish the new story line that flows seamlessly from where the last segment of the existing story ended. Now that that is all done, everything should start accelerating. I'm quite excited to see where the characters are taking the story.

Speaking of fiction, I would like to share with you the apocryphal story of how Danny Moriarty lost his Catholic soul.

It goes something like this:

Back in the day in St. Margarets' Grammar, most classes were taught by ancient nuns. It was believed that these nuns were hundreds of years old and that every fifty years or so, the Dioceses just took an existing nun out of circulation, gave her a new coat of paint and a new male name, and then reinserted her back into the rotation teaching at another catholic school.

Given these nuns were all the Brides of Christ - which looking back at it now suggests the polygamous seeds of Mormonism - they were imbued with unnatural physical abilities to go along with their unnaturally long lives. For example, it did not matter how old or feeble looking a Catholic nun may appear, as they each had the strength of ten Lumberjacks, which would be regularly demonstrated by the vicious beatings they could inflict upon the troublesome male students in their pastoral care. Indeed, it often only took one blow from an angry nun to end the mischief by even the largest and most athletic boy in the classroom. Anyway, one of the greatest scams executed by the mischievous males in St. Margaret's was being assigned messenger duty (this was long before the ubiquitous cell phone allowed for instant text messaging. Indeed, smoke

signals had just been replaced by this newest form of unpaid servitude.)

If you could land the coveted position as class messenger, you got to roam the hallways with your note and avoid actually having to sit and learn something in the classroom. You also got to skip out at a time when the nun was checking whether you did your homework the night before.

You could also raise mischief by stopping by the classrooms of your friends and relatives and peek in above the upper door glass. If you were really daring, you could sneak outside the Old School doors by Delafield Avenue and sneak a cigarette (or so Serrano and Matty Burke told me).

Anyway, one particularly pernicious nun, named Sister Aloysius, taught fourth grade to the more dependable students - I had Mrs. Fitzgerald - one of the few lay teachers in St. M's - who bore a striking resemblance to the actor, Marty Feldman, if he were in drag. Sister A wore the long black robe with the rosary belt tied around it and the black wimple that was shaped like a cone that is used to keep your dog from licking its ass. I think it also substituted as a old school method of capturing even the softest whispers by disobedient students. Sister A used to make a big deal of reading Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe to her class each year. She would sit her tiny body (maybe five feet tall and 80 pounds soaking wet) up on the front of her desk and read a chapter a day to the class right after lunch. Once she began reading, she would not suffer any interruptions by God or man.

Anyway, the story goes that this one afternoon Danny was sent as the messenger to Sister A's class at the time of her afternoon reading session. Danny politely knocked on the door but she refused to acknowledge him. He knocked

again with the same result. Then he cracked the door open just enough so that the students could see his face through the opening. Never shy, Danny began to amuse the captive audience - well tired of hearing about the woes of Uncle Tom at the hands of Simon Legree -- by making faces at them and he continued until one of them finally blurted out a major guffaw.

At that point, concentration broken, Sister A demanded that the student account for this frivolity and the student, knowing it was a "me or him" situation, pointed to Danny in the doorway. What happened next will be remembered through the annals of Christendom.

Sister A slammed her novel closed and tossed it on the desk, then leapt off the wooden monolith with the springing ability of a gymnast. She strode to the door and yanked it open with her superhuman strength, pulling Danny, who was securely holding the outer brass knob, into the classroom. She grabbed Danny by his tie, yanked him down to her level, and proceeded to pummel his face with her free, gnarly, petrified fist.

After beating Danny into semi-consciousness, She released the tie, turned and strutted toward her desk, with the full intent of completing that interrupted chapter. And that's when it happened.

When she had covered half the distance to her desk, Danny regained full consciousness, and with Satanic fire in his eyes, he rapidly followed up behind the smug nun and like an NFL field goal kicker, torqued his leg backward and released. His foot planted squarely on the nun's tiny ass and propelled her forward past her desk, causing her to land on both knees where her momentum carried her across the remainder of the floor like Bob Fosse in *All That Jazz!* She came to rest with an audible thump on the tall radiators by

the windows facing Riverdale Avenue. By the time the witnesses looked up from the tiny crumpled black heap, Danny had not only left the classroom, he had left the school completely, never to return.

Anyway, some of the nuns were later overheard in the hallway stating how Danny Moriarity would surely suffer instant excommunication for his dastardly act, and would be forced to join all of the other soulless children destined for Limbo, if not Hell itself, who attended our closest public school, P.S.81.

But to the rest of us good Catholics, Danny Moriarity became an instant myth and legend whose story lives on a half century later.

STEIN'S KEEPER OF MEMORIES IS DELIA!

March 25, 2021



Someone in the Riverdale Alum group, I believe it was BC - because he proves first hand that the devil is in the details - noted that given that Stein appears in a lot of the old photos, that unless I was right about his quantum ability to be in two places at once, that someone else must have been taking the photos that we have all recently seen and shared. Stein finally fessed up, that it was Delia, the once lost and now found love of his life, who had been chronicling our shared history.

Thank you Delia, from all of us. You were (are) the best. The photo above, taken on a Montauk excursion, shows Stein and Matty Burke sitting in back, Kathy Cullen sitting front left, and my birthday twin, Danny Boy Moriarity, flexing front right.

While I don't have the time for a full blog - I'm up through Chapter 3 in the third novel -- let me just share this about DM, I remember I ran away once when I was 14, and Danny volunteered to run away with me just out of friend loyalty.

He had no problems at home (I didn't either, I was just an asshole), and no reason to do it, but he stayed with me hunkered down in an abandoned car (it was an old, 1960's black sedan with tail fins -- probably stolen and left on Delafield Avenue by the Old St. Margaret's Schoolyard). I remember it pissing rain that night and watching as my poor mother and grandmother (Posie) and my sister scoured the area to see where I was. The memory reinforces how stupid I was as a kid and how loyal Danny was. It's those little things that stay with you.

Danny caught a lot of crap when he finally went home the next day, and I got my just desserts as well. As I write this down I cannot believe what a pain in the ass I was to my parents growing up. But I promised to be honest in my recollections - as filtered through my Lateral Parietal Cortex - and so if that means showing warts and all, so be it. But I will return soon to tell the apocryphal(?) story of how Danny Moriarity lost his soul in fourth grade. Stay tuned.

Thanks again Delia Augustyni!

PROLOGUE AND CHAPTER ONE

March 24, 2021

More snow but the good news is that I have the Prologue and Chapter One completed. Have to take Jeter for a trim this morning at 6:30 am my time so not sure how much writing will be done today. Will give it my best shot.

PRAYERS FOR BOULDER - AND FOR MURRAY COLLINS

March 23, 2021

Just read about the Boulder Kings Sooper shootings.

Psychos and pussies will always pick the soft targets where they are comfortable that no one will be shooting back at them. Special prayers for the officer who lost his life protecting the innocent. May this shooter-asshole burn in hell.

Stein had a copy of the Riverdale Press from April 1, 1976 (above) which he circulated among some of the Riverdale Alums. The cover story concerned the car crash that took the life of Murray Collins. March 23, 1976, 45 years ago.

That accident not only robbed this world of another amazing person, the article closes with the statement that Murray was an excellent student at Alfred University, which we all knew, and that he wanted to be a lawyer - which I didn't know. As I look back over that particular year, Murray's death may have been the catalyst that changed the lives of so many of his friends. I cannot help but be reminded of the character Phineas, from the novel *A Separate Peace*, by John Knowles. Shout out to Theresa, Jeannie, Michael, Eileen (thanks for the permission), Maureen, Anne, Billy, Mary and Brian ("Peanut"). And a shout across the veil to Dutch, Mamma C., Murray, Kevin and John, and Michael's first wife Susan.

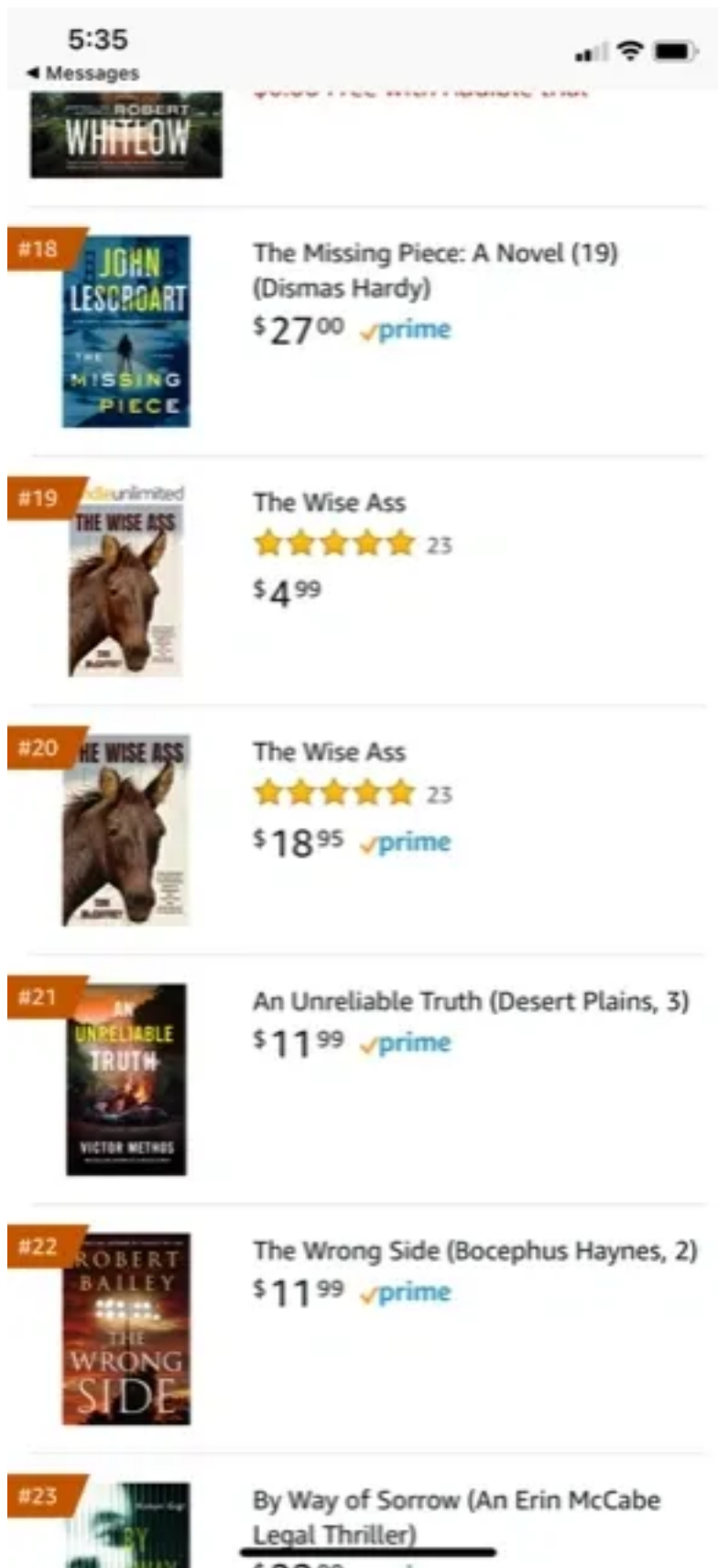
BOOK THREE BEGINS

March 22, 2021

Another night of snow compounded chores delayed me getting back in front the computer, but the good news is, Book 3 now has its opening paragraph. Let's see where it takes us. Stay tuned.

POOF ITS GONE - TWA DISAPPEARS FROM AMAZON'S LIST

March 21, 2021



Went to bed Friday night comforted in knowing that both the Kindle and paperback versions of TWA were side by side at

19 & 20, respectively, on the Amazon Hot New Releases - Legal Thrillers List. The paperback version was alone on the list from January 14th to February 1st, when it was joined by its digital twin, which had just been released.

Since that time they have gone up and down from the mid-teens to the high thirties, sometimes switching the lead but always no more than 10 spots of each other.

Yesterday at 2 am I was confused by waking up to find Kindle all alone on the list healthily bouncing around in the low twenties. But Paperback was gone completely.

Now don't get me wrong, I was thrilled by Kindle staying up there, it was an absolute blessing to me, but I have to say, continuing my attempts to be honest with my five blog readers, since Paperback was my first introduction to the publishing world and is something I have now physically held in my hands and inscribed for others numerous times, that it is the form of the novel that made the whole thing real for me.

But my pain was not yet over. This morning I awoke to find that Kindle, which was last seen yesterday evening in the twenties on that list, had also disappeared completely. Poof.

I knew it had to happen sooner or later and I am forever thankful for the honor of TWA's 2+ month run on that list.

But I would be lying to say it doesn't bother me. As I have mentioned in the past, I am very competitive, even with myself.

Moving on, I completely understand the convenience and economy in purchasing Kindle versions of any book. If you have your phone with you, you carry your entire library at all times. For books I want to read to quickly gain knowledge or information, Kindle is perfect. If I want to take a chance on a new writer, investing five bucks will never leave me

feeling ripped off. But if I intend to read something for pure pleasure and enjoyment, for example, anything by Nelson De Mille, or I want to keep it visually handy for me and/or those visiting my home to see those books I return to time and time again, give me that physical copy.

Moreover, for those who are, for the first time, considering purchasing TWA, remember, I can only keep my promise to inscribe a physical copy. The inscription process has been a lot of fun for me and I hope for those whose copies I have inscribed. I have done my best to make every inscription as personal to the recipient as I can, so that the world can see that I made a personal connection with the owner of that copy. No generic messages. And hopefully, up until this point, I have done that each time. I feel that connection towards everyone who has been generous enough to patronize TWA in any form, I thank every one of you, but I can only express that gratitude for posterity on a physical copy.

It's just something to consider for anyone planning on coming to the first public reading at Side Tracked in Berthoud on Sunday April 25th at 1 p.m.

Anyway, this feeling of sudden loss may be the added kick in the ass (no, not you Claire) to put some fire in my belly as I begin the third novel. It also provides a harsh reminder that one must never get complacent in anything one does. I take none of my readers of my literary work (or even my five blog readers) for granted. Enough said. Time to move forward. Waiting anxiously but patiently for that first sentence of the third novel to force its way into the forefront of my consciousness.

I remember staring at the blank page/screen for a while on September 15, 2020, when first I sat down to write AAA, and thinking to myself, "I didn't think it was going to be this hard."

Voila, just like that, Jimmy took off on his next series of exciting and unexpected adventures with the mystical members of his crew. So keep your eyes peeled come late summer and early fall for the appearance of AAA for pre-sale on all major on-line distribution channels.

I do have the tentative title in my head for number 3, but I don't want to share it just yet because I don't want it leading to any false suppositions. It's just a colorful and cheeky title that offers me a lot of options. Stay tuned.

SPRING EQUINOX - TIME TO FINISH WHAT I STARTED

March 20, 2021



Yesterday, I sent my final Word draft of *An Alien Appeal* into the publisher. The story is now locked in. And to be absolutely honest, I'm thrilled with where this story has gone in its first two installments. If the process now follows the same course as last time with TWA, we'll start working off the publisher's drafts of the manuscript (which for me is

really exciting because it actually looks like a real book, and not a legal brief or university term paper), and any edits and changes will be included on a spread sheet and submitted to and be incorporated by BRW. It actually makes it easier to spot any errors or typos at this stage because when you read something through a hundred times in Word, your brain has a tendency to read over any errors and fill in the missing word. However, when I get to read it over in the same galley font and format as it will ultimately appear in the printed final product, the publisher's staff (I unintentionally tortured poor David -- the publisher's design guy -- last time) and I (and my editor Jimmy F) will (hopefully) spot any errors we may have missed up until this point. I'm sure there is some psychological explanation for it.

Today is the Spring Equinox, Alban Eilir, life begins anew (my Druid blood-line compels me to follow these things). So now, no more excuses, it's time to take the Claire Trilogy to its incredible ending (trust me, Hollywood doesn't have a budget to put this on film).

So let me explain my process. I daydream my story into existence. I don't story board or create a written outline.

Once I sit down to write, I literally see the story unfold for the first time from beginning to end as a video in my brain. Up until now, I've just seen the trailers popping in and out, like a coming attractions commercial (I actually stop what I'm doing for a moment and will say out loud "How cool!" I get a lot of weird stares from the public when this happens while I'm out and about. And I'll always tell Claire what trailers I've seen that day when I'm out feeding, grooming or just shoveling shit (there's a metaphor), and she's always interested, although Honey gets impatient if my story telling gets in the way of her eating schedule). Once I start to actually write, I hit the play button and then start typing like a

Court Stenographer. The characters have already formed and been rehearsing among themselves in some cloud storage space outside of my mind - something like Lynn McTaggart's, *The Field* (absolutely brilliant concept and book, highly recommend it) -- and once I turn my full attention to their particular network, and hit "play," they just go out there and do what they do, they perform for me, and I write it down. I do get to hold onto the TV remote controller - I know, I know, its such a man thing, just ask Freud -- and it has a pause and rewind button -- which I use freely because sometimes I'm so blown away by what my characters do or say in a particular chapter, I'll stop typing and just sit back and watch it in my head, like one more audience member in a theater. No lie, spoiler alert, there have been times during this second round where I've actually started to weep while I'm writing - but my characters don't care because its their story, and they are far more honest with themselves than I am. Man up! Sometimes, I'll sit there at the end of a scene waiting for the theater lights to come up and then I realize the characters are all staring at me with from their stage with disapproval because I have wasted their time by not doing my scrivener's job, so I have to rewind and replay it again, just to make sure I've gotten it all down and captured the moment in the way they want me to. This also explains why my first draft is always so riddled with phonetically based misspellings (waste/waist, waive/wave) and what I call place-holder words (sorry Jimmy).

The story is unfolding so quickly before me I don't have the time to get it perfect the first time I set it down. I feel like a Courtroom interpreter. I just want to get what they are telling me right. I owe them that much for choosing me as their conduit. The process is that simple, and that terrifying.

I wrote the first draft of TWA in three months (beginning of February 2019 to the end of April 2019), writing mostly nocturnally -- like I am doing now -- and during the daytime on weekends. AAA took two months (9/15/20-11/14/20 - concluding on my birthday, and it was one hell of a present) using the same writing schedule, because I had a running start based on the last chapter of TWA (and all of the chapters that led up to it), and I paid more attention to my process and kept typing, instead of just watching for my own amusement, only to have to replay it all again while I typed.

I also stopped second-guessing my characters, they took me just where they wanted to go with the second part of their story and were all very sure of themselves when they told me when to stop. I trust them. After all, they nailed it in TWA.

Anyway, the downside to writing the third installment, is that I'll be using this blogging time as my primary novel writing time. I know I cannot do both at the same time and expect to do either one well, there's only so much juice in the creative battery, and it is important to my characters (and my readers) that I bring this third one home with a bang. So once I turn to the novel, my daily blogs will probably cease - or become weekly at best, if only to keep my five readers up to date on where I am in the process of writing the novel.

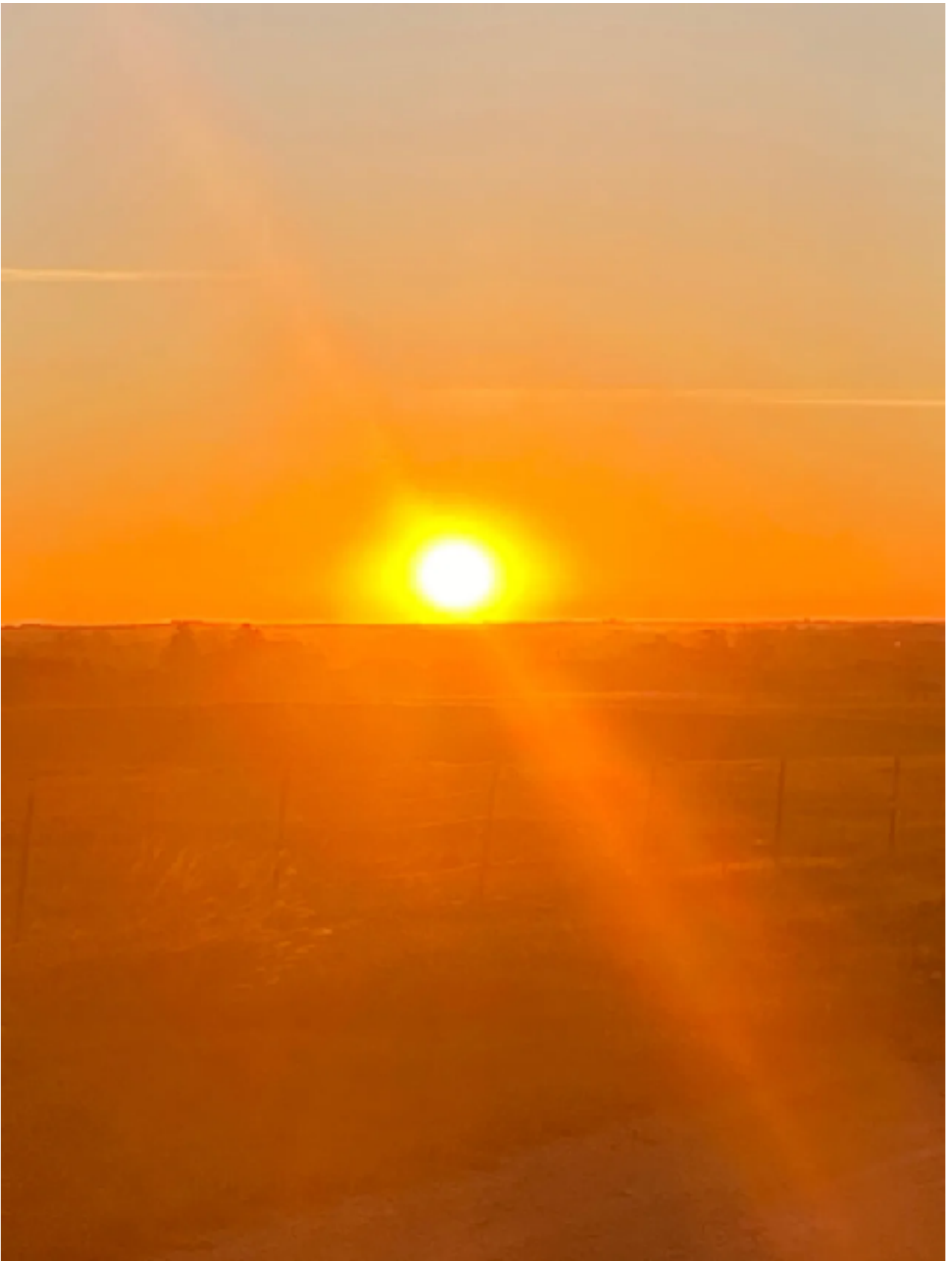
So keep stopping by the website to see if I've added anything new.

So, at some point this week I will suddenly disappear from these pages. The process will have begun. Wish me luck. There, I've put it down on paper. Commitment made.

There's no going back.

Sunrises Give Me Hope

March 19, 2021



One of the greatest things about my morning walks in the Berthoud area is seeing the amazing sunrises coming up over the eastern horizon. Thank God that iPhones have idiot proof cameras, as I have been able to snap a lot of beautiful photos without much talent or effort. Click and shoot. The above is just one of the hundreds of sunrises I have snapped since my arrival here. But it wasn't the first time I had watched the sun rise.

After the Spellman wig debacle, I remember sitting out on my eastern facing front steps of our Riverdale home trying to figure out how to tell my parents that -- through no fault of their own -- I was about to ruin their lives (and my own) by leaving Spellman (remember I was just sixteen years old, so my perception of life was relative). I sat out there the whole night and learned first hand that it truly is darkest before the dawn.

There is a very tall radio tower in the distant Dunwoodie section of Yonkers to the North whose top flashing light is just visible to the left from the head of my front steps. I remember fixating on that tiny flashing light in the darkness as I sat there, focusing on how I had really screwed up my young life (if you read all of my posts you will notice that this was a recurring pattern.) It actually felt like my heartbeat was synchronizing with that light. My world seemed very dark. I did not know how I was going to survive this screw up.

And then the first rays of sunrise began to peak over the horizon. Darkness slowly lifted. The new day started and the world as I knew it rose back up from the shadows. I suddenly realized that no matter what stupid thing I had done the day before, it was truly inconsequential in the big scheme of things, and was not the end of the world, because that sun was going to rise again the next morning

and life would go on. With that new day would come an opportunity to make things right, even for screw ups like me. And that little epiphany gave me much needed hope. I remember that epiphany every time I see a sun rise. Each day is a gift, so don't waste it.

FIRST PUBLIC READING OF TWA - SIDE TRACKED, BERTHOUD CO. - 4/25/2

March 18, 2021



My unconventional intentions always were to have my first public reading and book signing for TWA at the A&W in Berthoud. I wanted to do the first reading in Berthoud because the novel is set in and around this wonderful little town and I hope TWA readers from all over the world will make a pilgrimage here and spend lots of tourist money in

all the local establishments, because it truly is a magical place. Anyway, A&W seemed like a good idea since I mention it in the novel and the owners were graciously open to the possibility (thank you Jordan and Jordan's Dad -- who has the Marlboro man looks to easily play a character on the series *Yellowstone*). However, my always more considerate and thoughtful wife reminded me that given the walk-in clientele at A&W is often made up of younger children, and that most of the fun reading selections are filled with NYC expletives, A&W may not be an appropriate venue after all.

After getting my head around the idea that not everyone learned how to properly curse -- selection, speed, tone and inflection are soooo important -- as a normal part of their vocabulary building exercises at the family dinner table, I finally understood. When I discussed the issue with Jordan, she, with equal understanding and graciousness, saw the potential down side. So we decided that instead, once a sufficient number of the employees at A&W read TWA, that I would perform a private reading exclusively for those employees (and their significant others). If any of the employees - including Jordan, Rachel, Brittany, Chloe, Brooke, Tea (phon. Taya) and Jasmine - read this blog, its now all up to you.

That led me back on the hunt for a new Berthoud-based location for my first ever public reading of TWA. Luckily, Maureen (along with husband Jim), the owners of the Bar/Restaurant Side Tracked, a local Berthoud establishment (in the general vicinity of the Berthoud Post Office), stepped into the breach. Maureen had been one of the first locals on Nextdoor to respond to my postings on the novel and ordered her copy, so I stopped by her place recently to inscribe it. I also have since sampled (twice) the Side Tracked thin crust NYC Style Veggie pizza which is

exceptional. During one of my visits, I explained to Maureen my expletive, live reading, dilemma. Well, as my Irish luck would have it, Maureen finished reading TWA -- expletives and all -- on St. Patty's Day (and really enjoyed it), so, after a few texts that morning, I stopped by again yesterday afternoon and confirmed with Maureen that Side Tracked would hold **my first public reading on Sunday, April 25, 2021 at 1 p.m.** (to give the more God-fearing of her patrons an opportunity to get home from church).

Given it was the Irish Holy Day, there was a hopping late afternoon crowd in Sidetracked. I spotted one of my Grandpa's Cafe's breakfast regulars, Nick, who, despite his constant donning of an Irish lid, is actually a member of the Polish diaspora (as is my wife), but had obtained temporary - good until midnight - Irish citizenship like the rest of the Side Tracked patrons. Nick agreed that Side Tracked could be a fine location for the reading and promised to attend. I inscribed his copy of TWA.

Anyway, if any of my five readers have sections of TWA that they believe would be entertaining to share with the locals with my Bronx accent, please list those sections by chapter and page number and paragraph in the comment section below.

So if any of the locals (or anyone from anywhere else - come one, come all) see this post and are free on Sunday April 25 at 1 p.m. please stop by Side Tracked for my very first public reading of TWA. If you have one, bring a copy of TWA and I will inscribe it for you and take selfies if you like, just so, later on when you are retelling the story to your grandchildren, and The Wise Ass among them challenges your veracity, you can prove to them that you were really there for this auspicious event. Also, as long as Maureen and Jim don't mind, feel free to video it and share it on your

social media accounts (just try and shoot my least bad side if you can find one), because (other than this website) I don't have a social media presence, so the advertising among your own followers will be greatly appreciated. Word of mouth has been instrumental in driving the sales of this novel which, in turn, led to obtaining confirmation that its sequel will be published this December 2021 (thank you Reagan Rothe and BRW). On that note, to the extent any of you have already read TWA and really enjoyed it, please post a 5 star review on Amazon - potential purchasers actually read them - and the larger the number of reviews, the better.

The really good news is that my voice and accent sound better the more alcohol you consume (there are scientific studies that prove this - its the aural corollary of beer goggles), so feel free to tailgate before hand and don't be shy ordering from the bar. Also, while you are there, try that NYC thin crust pizza (and indeed, use it as a prop during any reading of the NY based part of the story). I look forward to seeing anyone and everyone. Thanks in advance.

Finding Friends At Walmart - HAPPY ST. PATTY'S DAY

March 17, 2021



Jesus, what's wrong with me. To all my Irish/Irish American family (blood and adopted). Happy St. Patty's Day. Now for the blog. If you grew up where I did, your only exposure to Walmart was through the multiple (and often repetitive) cheeky (literally and figuratively) internet postings supposedly taken of Walmart shoppers. And I believe that was the limited and biased East Coast/West Coast

viewpoint HRC was shooting to capitalize on in the "basket" reference that helped sink her election.

Before CV, I started shopping at the Longmont WM because its open 24/7 store hours suited my nocturnal lifestyle and because of its unending selection of goods. Even factoring in the great TP shortages of 2020, and the now more restrictive shopping hours, you can still find anything you need within its four walls, even friends. [Note to the Berthodians, I still do most of my daily shopping locally at Hays, a wonderful establishment, but WM happens to be on the direct route between my wife's place of employment and home, so needs must.]

Despite my Hermitic lifestyle, I am by nature, a social animal. And while I will, and do, strike up fulfilling conversations with inanimate objects around my property, and more invigorating debates with Claire, and other animals, I do enjoy a good chin-wag with humans, if the opportunity presents itself. WM provides me with that opportunity on a regular basis.

The employees at my WM are the nicest crew of characters one could ever hope to meet. As you cruise through WM's endless aisles you see these workers busying themselves stocking the long lines of shelves like the elves at Santa's Workshop. I used to work at a grocery store when I was a teenager, and while I could stock shelves with the best of them, back in the day when you actually had to manually stamp prices on cans, I never wasted an opportunity to slack off. You don't find my Grasshopper characteristic among the WM workers, they are all ants. They do their job.

And these workers are always friendly and helpful. If you ask the person stocking the frozen food aisle, where you can find Dog Scoobies, they will often walk you across the length of the store to show you where those delicious canine treats are located. If they don't know the answer to a question, they are on their radios finding it out.

A lot of my more engaging conversations with the WM workers usually starts with a question about my accent, like I was from Bulgaria (when are they all going to learn that my Bronx accent was first sounded in the Garden of Eden - by God - then Adam, and ultimately by Lilith's replacement, (out of the frying pan and into the fire) Eve, and that all of their accents are the result of The Fall, as compounded -- most Southern ones - by the the destruction of the Tower of Babel. Indeed, the first Brooklyn accent was Cain's, which explains Abel's demise). These workers' inquisitive follow-ups usually lead to my telling some fantastical story that always leads to moments of confusion and then hearty laughter. (Note to aspiring stand up comedians, Walmart is a great place to work on your material). WM workers do love to laugh (or they are are really, really polite).

As an aside, given human nature, and their need for routines, I would often meet the same wonderful humans while waiting on one of the inevitable lines one finds yourself on as you wait for the store to open or as you are checking out at the cashier. Quick laughs usually lead to more interesting conversations and established common ground for friendship. For example, Jim and Kathy Fronsdaahl not only helped whip TWA and AAA (and I pray the third novel as well) into final shape as editor and cover designer/

photographer, respectively, but they are now very close BFFs. That all began at the Longmont WM.

Anyway, to make this long story even more so, after a while your noted shopping peculiarities (at least mine) provide you with "regular" status and the workers anticipate that you are going to clean out the large bag of carrots section during your visits -- my Mules have the best eyesight in Colorado - and will often volunteer to go into the back to bring out more if I haven't properly filled my shopping cart, in accordance to their regular perception.

I have mentioned in my blogs that I am, and have always been, terrible with names. It takes me hearing your name at least 3 times before I have any chance of remembering it.

Indeed, I often wear a sweatshirt with "McCaffrey" on it, just in case. But I always remember faces and other physical characteristics. So I apologize in advance now as I identify some of the more visually memorable WM employees with whom I am friendly and have regularly interacted with.

There is a overtly polite and respectful, bald, middle aged and middle eastern (could be from India) man who drives the floor cleaning Zamboni (really great guy), the entire staff in the fruits & vegetable department, including the older taller gentleman with a greying beard and glasses, the shorter woman with glasses and wavy greyish hair and the almost imperceptible hitch in her step - I think her family raises goats - and the sweet and shorter middle aged Latina who always sports a welcoming smile, and each and all of them go out of their way for me each visit. Then there is a shorter young man with glasses who wears a baseball hat in the frozen food aisle, who bears a striking resemblance to one of the members of ZZ Top, and the incredibly spry and

tiny white-grey haired woman who can be found in all departments, who scales and descends loading platforms like a squirrel monkey, takes care of her mother, moves like the Energizer Bunny and is the sweetest person ever. Then there is the young, ginger ex-swimmer who went from cashier to manager. Finally, one particular Tuesday morning cashier, an older woman named Kathy, to whom I gave an inscribed copy of TWA, has now retired, good luck Kathy.

But two other WM employees I will mention by name are the two men you see posed with me in the selfie above -- Bill (photo left) and Tommy (photo right). Bill is the more quiet of these two but only because Tommy, like this Tommy, is a native New Yorker and Retired NYPD to boot. Tommy still retains his Italian Brooklyn-Queens accent (a lot of interbreeding still goes on out there because there are no bridges to separate them, hence their accents are very similar).

These two men open and guard the doors at WM every Tuesday morning when I get to take advantage of my Senior status and shop an hour earlier than the masses. They are a little like the magician duo, Penn and Teller, with Tommy, like Penn, doing most of the talking, which is fine because he is a pisser and it sounds like home. Both men are the salt of the earth and I look forward to and enjoy interacting with them each week.

Anyway, yesterday Tommy and Bill surprised me with a request to sign their copies of TWA and I was absolutely thrilled to do so. Thanks guys, see you next week.

BLIZZARDS ARE A MIXED BLESSING - HAPPY BIRTHDAY MARK

March 16, 2021



Before I start my blog, let me wish my youngest, Mark, a happy birthday (I was shooting for St. Patty's Day for your C-Section - good enough for Caesar - but the OB-GYN was off that day)! Love to your darling wife, Sara, her wonderful sister, Dana (and D's husband Kevin, good luck with that baby!), and of course, best wishes to your father-in-law, the real Jimmy Moran, and his amazing wife, Liz. Go Blue!

Now to the blog:

Blizzards are like Nature's COVID (for the record, in my opinion there was nothing "natural" about COVID). They both show up uninvited and force you into isolation. And if you challenge it, and you are unlucky, it could kill you. I was clearly reminded about the latter point when having to drive my wife, a nurse, through the storm back and forth to work this past weekend. Let's just say that the Angels were really looking out for us as our Toyota RAV 4 (who we call Stella - long before our latest granddaughter received that name) made it through the repeated squalls and snow drifts on poorly plowed (unplowed?) county roads each time knowing that if Stella ever stopped moving forward that was going to be the end of it. Stella was magnificent. A war horse. My being here to type these words is proof of that.

Anyway, despite the obvious fact that having a whole lot of snow (with strong winds) dropped on you at one time really sucks, I was given some perspective about the whole event just before the storm hit, while having my teeth deep cleaned by a member of my favorite team at Berthoud Family Dentistry.

As an aside, the three smart, funny and talented women (and all of the rest of the staff who seem to put up with my histrionics and quirky sense of humor) that have been assigned to me (they drew the shortest straws) in order to provide their herculean efforts to keep these old teeth, (1) in

my head, and (2) looking half way decent, are amazing. I've come to look upon my regular visits there the same way a masochist enjoys a trip to a[n] S&M Dungeon, just the right amount of pain delivered by the right professional at the right time provides a whole lot of pleasure (or so I have been told - I'll have to check that with Lenny, or BC (always the quiet ones), and I suspect Eileen C has mastered the red ball gag and riding crop). For the record, I am not suggesting that the people at BFD cause me any pain (or run a[n] S&M Dungeon). They have gone above and beyond in appeasing my natural resistance to the medical field (despite being married to a Nurse - or maybe because of?), I haven't been to a doctor since the last century, and I could not recommend them more highly then by the fact I've probably returned to them more times since I first walked through their door than the aggregate number of visits to the other dentists in NY over my entire life. They are the best! I highly recommend them and their dental services.

Absolutely amazing.


Anyway, the poor woman who suffers through having to remove the tartar from my teeth - I have to switch my snacks to Milk-Bone - was keeping me distracted during our session last Thursday by telling me about her family farm and the sheep they raise there. I love these kind of conversations, rural life remains so refreshingly new and fascinating to me. She explained that despite the headaches her family was about to suffer protecting their flocks (and a bunch of baby sheep) during the oncoming storm (and she seemed to have it all worked out) that their farm needed the water that this massive amount of snow was about to provide them. You see, if the storm was just rain, it would wash out and run off their land and probably accumulate in all the wrong spots. But the snow just sits

where it lands and will be slowly absorbed into the earth just in time for the planting of crops. So there is the silver lining to this past weekend's Blizzard. And I can accept that it was a mixed blessing.

Anyway, this morning's Mule related chores took way too long in the five foot drifts on my back property, so I got a late start to this blog and will have to cut it short. For anyone who is interested, that is Jack the Spruce wearing his wintery makeup after the storm. Tune in tomorrow.

I'd rather be Wise than just Smart

March 15, 2021

A smooth, light-colored rock with a handwritten quote. The rock is oval-shaped and has a slightly textured surface. It is resting on a white, slatted surface, possibly a chair or a table. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Life is what you make it:
always has been,
always will be.

Despite appearances, I was always a bright kid (just ask my mother - I know a lot of really powerful psychic-mediums that could make that happen). However, if you have been reading my posts, you have probably objectively determined by now that my decisions during my formative years did not always support that proposition.

But if, like me, you play the long game, the repercussions of those decisions -- good and bad -- were not a waste, because they gave me wisdom (and some great stories).

Personally, I prefer being Wise. Because, *a priori*, if you have been lucky enough to acquire wisdom, that means you have survived being just smart (the latter usually surfaced in flashes just in those moments of life and death crises and provided me a quick decisional window to survival). If you look back over history you will see that a lot of smart people ended up dead before acquiring wisdom.

I came across a neat explanation of the difference between Wisdom and Intelligence in a brilliant article that I'd like to share:

"Intelligence can be defined as the ability to acquire and apply the information you collect. Wisdom, on the other hand, is directly associated with experience as opposed to cold, hard facts. It's more complex and personal. When we draw on wisdom, **we're using a rich history of experience to help us make decisions.** Intelligence can be improved, but wisdom must be built." (Stefan Mitrovic) <https://blog.mindvalley.com/wisdom-vs-intelligence>

I highly recommend Mindvalley.com. Talk about brilliant people.

And I like that "building" metaphor, it appeals to my tradesman, working class roots. I have become who I am now by acquiring wisdom one brick at a time. Sometimes I have acquired those bricks by catching them with my head -

often right between the eyes. I've got the scars to prove it.

God bless my Cro-Magnon skull. And each of those bricks have found their place in my wisdom wall. It's not a pretty wall, but it is built on a solid foundation and at this time can pretty much handle anything that is hurled at it.

Anyway, here's a little bit of wisdom that I have acquired through my life of experience. As my youngest brother John likes to say, "Half the battle on the road to success is just showing up."

As I think back on all of my major failures in life, and there's been a few, they occurred because I was so afraid of the challenge before me that I just didn't show up for it. I convinced myself before hand that I didn't have the goods, so I walked away. Sometimes this was a subtle move, my body was present but my brain had already packed up and left town. So the body just continued on its path over the cliff. I was living in default mode, and that default was failure. My rationale at the time was - it wasn't that I could not succeed, but that I purposely chose not to. That is a loser's mantra.

And that mindset comes from pure selfishness. My needs were more important than the needs of others. I just didn't care enough how my actions affected the people around me.

In retrospect, I experienced an epiphany that early morning in late fall 1976 (shortly after Serrano fell out the window the night of my 20th birthday), while I was sitting on the curb, very drunk, outside of C2, with Mike McLaughlin (PWWC). It had to have been around the 1976 Thanksgiving holiday, because a lot of my more practical friends had been around but were leaving to return to college. Everyone I knew was getting on with their lives. I had walked away from college (FU), from people, from my talent, and was working as a

Security Guard at the College of Mt. St. Vincent. The euphoria of drinking each night had devolved into despondency. I could not see a future. Everyone else had gone home after the bar had closed for the night, but for some reason, Mike had stuck around with me. Knowing what a great guy Mike was (and is), he probably sensed that my emotions had hit rock bottom.

Anyway, despite my then present situation, Mike convinced me that I still had choices and opportunities. I just needed to take a hard look at my life and come up with a game plan.

And then I had to follow through. I had to show up.

And that's when I started to change. I found a path forward.

It wasn't a straight path. There was some detours along the route. But whenever I made a decision to move forward, I showed up and figured out a way to execute it.

The first example I can think of was getting my future wife, Lisa, to actually go out with me. She is a very smart woman, and she could see me for what I was at the time. To tell the truth, she would have nothing to do with me. But I kept showing up. I would appear at various spots on campus that I knew she frequented (she was a student at MSV) and do everything I could to show her I had a brain, a future and was worth the risk. There was a lot of justifiable rejection. But I was changing my ways. I had stopped partying ("chasing tale" is how it was referred to back then), I started reading again (all the books I should have paid more attention to the first time they were presented to me in school), and I started writing (mostly the beginnings of short stories and outlining concepts for longer ones, but it was a start). And I would talk to her about these changes in my life. In February 1977, she finally relented, and went on that first date. Wisest move I ever made. The rest, as they say, is history.

Shortly after, I left my job as a security guard and started as a messenger at a Manhattan company that provided computer generated benefit statements for medium sized companies. I was the guy who stopped by the companies, picked up their raw data and brought it back to my company and then delivered the finished product - benefit statements -- back to that company (pre-pre-internet). I saved all the cab money the company provided me for that year -- humped those boxes and walked and took subways instead -- and by that Christmas I had worked my way up being the assistant to the head programmer - shout out to Mike Piccolo (a really great guy -- also color blind) - and had bought Lisa's engagement ring (Serrano's future father-in-law, a scary (but actually wonderful) Italian guy named "Tony" gave me the deal of a lifetime -- maybe someone else's -- on that ring). By the time we were married in July 1978, I was head JCL programmer (the company sent me to the IBM programming school in Chicago). Despite the fact that each challenge scared the shit out of me, I kept showing up. The Universe sorted everything else out. When I told my new wife that I wanted to give that life up and return to college so I could become a writer, she obviously had witnessed enough bricks being laid in that first course of my wisdom wall, that she said go for it. She worked at night to support the two of us so I could go back to school and chase my dream. That wasn't easy, I was doing three years of college in two years, so I was doing 21 credit semesters of 300/400 level courses plus two summer semesters each summer to get it done. Early on, we had our first child, Luke, which could have derailed the whole thing, but Lisa wouldn't have it. She continued to work at night and we traded off the child care when I got home from school everyday. I did my home work once Luke was

asleep. And at times I was scared to death of failing but I kept showing up, at the classes, at the exams, at the tutorials, because I wasn't going to let Lisa and Luke down, and the Universe again sorted it all out for me. I graduated *Magna Cum Laude*.

When Big Jack Vaughan (I loved that man - a surrogate father) then sat me down in late 1980 and told me I had the goods to be a lawyer, I believed him and I showed up for the LSATS, filed all the right applications to Law School, and again, upon entry to Fordham Law School in 1981, despite the overwhelming fear of failure, showed up for classes and exams, and the Universe provided. I ended up working for Cahill Gordon & Reindel fresh out of law school.

Now the past 35 years has not been without its road bumps and failures, there has been a couple of lapses along the way when I should have shown up and didn't. But the wisdom I had been accumulating over that time gave me the resources to check myself, get back on track, and keep moving forward.

When I finally decided that it was time to give my writing another shot, even though I was scared shit that I didn't have the goods, I showed up again, sat down in front of my computer, typed those first sentences and the Universe provided.

So my wisdom has taught me that nothing good is ever going to happen for you if you don't at least show up.

Nothing else can happen until you do.

LOSE AN HOUR AND GAIN A BLIZZARD

March 14, 2021



Woke up at my now usual 1:45 a.m. to find that snow and gusting winds had finally driven my very stubborn but amazingly smart mules into the barn. That's a photo looking out my back door to the back and side property. When the mules do finally retreat to the barn, Honey goes back into the heated stall area - where she likes to poop - and Claire stands watch at the front door. It reminds me of when two desperate women tired of waiting on a lengthy line for the women's bathroom, commandeer a relatively unused men's room (men are so much more ergonomic in their relief process), with one guarding the door while the other does their business. Anyway, I walked down through the gate that takes me directly into the back property - the barn is in the side paddock -- so I could retrieve their snow covered grain dishes and swing back around the other gate that is behind the barn and prepare their breakfast. Of course, Blue ran ahead and told the mules I was sneaking up behind them so as I entered the back side paddock gate, Claire led Honey around the opposite side of the barn and then snuck around the back of it behind me and out the gate I came in. It was like a Marx Brothers movie, with Claire peaking around the back corner of the barn watching until I walked past. Brilliant. All they left me was the poop in the stall.

Anyway, when I got back inside the house, my usual fifteen minute process had turned into an hour and fifteen minutes, as it was now 3 am instead of 2 am. Magic you say! "Let's do the time warp again. . . ."

Well, since I have to go out and shovel my driveway before my wife leaves for work, and I've lost that damn hour, I have to make this short.

I received a totally unexpected text yesterday from one of the older Riverdale crew, Phil Cunningham (we used to call

him Flip, so I will use that name here). Flip was nice enough to reach out through a previously established three way text chain - we had been recently reintroduced by another Ex-Pat Riverdalian, Karen "Cruiser" Anderson/Beck (sister of Ferd/Merlin Beck, cousin of Danny Moriarity)- who lives out in Southern Colorado and has some amazing cowgirl stories to share - talking with Cruiser is a delightful trip! Anyway, Flip had just finished reading TWA and reported that he "enjoyed it tremendously" (absolute music to my eyes/ears). Flip is a scion of the Cunningham/Donahue Clan from Riverdale. A large Irish-Catholic family who are all good looking, brilliant, went to all the right schools, were musicians, were excellent athletes, and now are all successful at their various professions. They were considered by many of us - me included - as the Riverdale version of the Kennedys (the real Kennedys having also lived in Riverdale back in the day). Flip was Marty McLaughlin's contemporary and dear friend, I was Flip's younger sister Chrissy's age - the complete class act - hi Chrissy. If my memory serves me Chrissy, Flip's oldest brother David (?) and cousin Joe are all lawyers. No weak links in that Clan.

Anyway, Flip and I commiserated over the fact that Marty M was the true "Natural" - excelled without any apparent effort in every sport - played baseball for my father (MM was a switch hitter who hit home runs over P.S. 81, beyond right field - a three story monolith) and that Flip was one of Marty's close lifelong friends. I thanked Flip (and Marty by extension) for always being nice to me (and by extension, my friends) growing up, during the occasional overlaps of the various Riverdale herds. Of course once we all made it into C2 (right about 16 years old with Apples' ID proof) it became one big happy melting pot. Want to also mention

another character from Flip's crew back in the day, also a dear friend of Flip's, who also recently passed, "JD Greeko" (His first name was Jimmy, I cannot pronounce or spell his last "D" Greek name). JD was a smart and funny character, who had a strange observational brilliance that now, in my deepest canyons of recollection, reminds me of the patter of Detective John Munch from the Law and Order Series. I'm certain he is missed by family and friends alike. RIP. . . JD. Okay, I've put this off long enough. The snow awaits.

GETTING THE NOD

March 13, 2021

Dear CB -

Thanks for Tom
McCaffrey's wiseass
novel. Another
success in the elite
group of Lehman Irish
writers. I know you're
prolific, and I hope
you're well. This damn
Covid is getting in the
way of Irish plans!

Love to all the family
esp. wee "Billy" —

BC

Okay, so you have all seen my postings about the Irish writer Colin Broderick. If you are lucky enough to read his works, you'll learn that he has not had it easy. But you will also learn that this fine man is an incredibly talented storyteller in so many mediums, and that talent, combined with what I can only describe as his "indomitable immigrant hustle" has taken him from the depths of human hell to the pinnacle of the Irish (and Irish-American) literary world. When Colin first emigrated to the United States at the end of the last century (doesn't that sound ancient), he and his then spouse lived one floor away in the same Riverdale Park building as our family. Given that he came from Tyrone County in "the North," where the McCaffrey's come from, we quickly formed a natural cultural alliance.

The first thing I noticed about Colin was his pluck. This kid (and he was not much more than that at the time) always had dreams of being a great writer. I was working on screenplays at the time during my free time, so Colin and I started exchanging our writings. I was probably one of the first to read Colin's draft of his novel, *Church End*, brilliant then and now. He liked my writing, and when he decided he was going to start a *Literary Magazine*, asked me if I had any short stories. I gave him the one I had written about BJ Delaney called "Why Kings Die" and he published it in his first edition of *Everyman*. I still have my copy of that edition.

(Colin, I really need you to inscribe it).

Anyway, Colin was very bright and decided to attend my (and my wife's) alma mater, Lehman College of the City University of New York.

As an aside, Lehman College is where I really cultivated my writer's voice. I had attended Fordham and The New School which were wonderful schools, but I was either too immature (FU) or too poor (TNS - wrote my short stories

there) to make any real headway. Lehman was (and is) the absolute best bang for the buck, especially if you want to write. Its professors in the English Department were of the highest pedigree and yet unbelievably accessible to their promising students. If you could show them through your hard work and dedication that you were worth their time and attention, they shared both freely with you. If you were selected for the English Honors Society, you were able to socialize with them as well. The EHS had just established their own, on campus "Salon" where their members could hang and share. Clement Dunbar III, who was my mentor and nurtured me through the creation of *Revelations*, and Billy Collins, at the time (late 70s/early 80s) an accomplished Irish-American Poet, but not yet the stratospheric literary celebrity he was soon to become, were two of the more regular attendees at the Salon during the times I could spend an hour after classes. Both professors could hold the room, and were both witty and charming in that Oscar Wilde way. It was heady company. They always made you feel like we were part of something bigger. Anyway, Colin's literary talents were immediately noticed among the Lehman English Department brahman and he was quickly inducted into the EHS. And there he thrived. But one of the most important outcomes of Colin's time at Lehman, was his forging of a deep and lasting friendship with Professor Collins, who was at the time ascending to the loftiest of literary heights, and Colin's writing mentor. Talk about lucky bastards. It was the perfect storm. After graduating from Lehman, Colin immersed himself in the world of experience by channeling his then favorite author, Charles Bukowski (Note the common initials - I remember Colin had travelled somewhere distant to obtain an inscribed copy of one of Charles Bukowski's books, right

before the author died, so it had to be before 1994). To this day, I don't know how Colin survived those times, but since what doesn't kill you does make you stronger, that decade plus of self-imposed degradation led to his first two books, his memoirs, *The Orangutan* (I am the unnamed lawyer/friend he meets with in his bookstore) and *That's That*. That was followed by *The Writing Irish of New York*, his first film, *Emerald City*, a couple of plays, his second film *A Bend In The River* and now his first Novel, *Church End*. Just typing the titles of his prodigious creativity has caused my fingers to cramp.

Colin had risen to the pinnacle of the Irish-American literary world. And the most amazing thing was that Colin not only managed to keep his close friendships with luminaries like Billy Collins, but through his talented writing, had garnered a whole new group of A-List friends, in both the literary world and Hollywood.

And I was soooooo totally (though secretly) jealous of this man. I was jealous of his talent. I was jealous of his pluck.

I was jealous of his stories. Hell, I was jealous of his success as a writer. Through his own force of will, Colin had succeeded where so many others -- including myself -- have failed.

Of course, that jealousy was all of my own making, kept to myself, and never interfered with our relationship.

Throughout the years, Colin had remained a good friend to me who was generous with his time and encouragement of my own writing (which remained on a slow heat while Lisa and I finished raising our children and working at our professions) and also encouraged the brilliant writing of my oldest son, Luke - whose own ascendancy is near (his novels are brilliant). Colin always invited me to the book signings, and premiers. He freely shared his joy. And I was

absolutely thrilled to watch him climb each step of the ladder. I was proud to be able to call him my friend. I still am.

When I finally wrote TWA, Colin was one of the first to read it and offered, without my asking, to provide a cover blurb for the novel. I've gotten a lot of mileage - lightyears worth -- out of his one line: "This is Grisham on mushrooms." I'm thrilled that his name appears right across from mine - on the other side of Claire's nose - on the bottom of the cover of TWA.

He has also been there to generously guide me through the marketing and PR aspects of being a published author.

Hell, he gave me the pep talk needed to start this blogging.

We talk at least once a week about life, work, family -- listening to Colin's brogue is like putting on an Audible novel, delightful entertainment -- and other notables in the industry.

And we talk about how strange it is that we go way back, have taken dramatically different paths to publication, and have the common connection to Lehman college to our credit.

So in a recent conversation, while Colin and I were sharing Lehman stories, Colin mentioned that his dear friend, Professor Billy Collins, was soon turning 80. I then asked if Colin would be so kind as to give Professor Collins an inscribed copy of TWA for me when Colin saw him for his birthday. Colin welcomed the idea and I signed and popped the book in the mail.

Yesterday, Colin texted me a copy of the above handwritten letter from Billy Collins, thanking him for the inscribed copy of TWA. But what sent me over the moon was Billy Collin's -- purely poetic -- reference to my work as, "[a]nother success in the elite group of Lehman Irish writers." I had been recognized by one of the literary greats. I had gotten

the nod. Thank you Professor Collins and thank you Colin Broderick.

MUSICIANS ARE COOL

March 12, 2021



Oddly enough, in our land of the great unwashed (and I use that description of the Bronx and its citizens defiantly and affectionately), there were a lot of musicians among the lads growing up. John Hughes (aka Johnny Seven - a beloved

South Bronx Principal for many years), Joe Serrano (big time Radiologist and the dude playing guitar - while Stein listens -- during a 1976 Montauk road trip in the above photo), Billy Di Nome (brilliant professor at UNC), Mark Sullivan (RIP), Stein (now retired and financially comfortable - have you seen his Bullitt Mustang!), John Smith (not a pseudonym, and I think he's a lawyer), all played guitar, I believe Jackie Vaughan (also a lawyer) played base guitar, and Danny Crown (not sure what happened to him) was an incredible drummer. Marty Quinn (ran the NYC Marathon and stopped to drink in every bar along the route) and Joey Silva (RIP), if memory serves, may have also played guitar as well. Over the years there were various incarnations of local bands made up of some or most of these minstrels. I believe J7 may still play out professionally. I was always batshit jealous of them, as I am not only colorblind but tone deaf. Even my whistling is annoying to people (ask my wife). If I open the bathroom window, my shower singing compels the mules to sing along in the back property just to drown me out. I can bray with the best of them.

But the guys who could play that guitar were instantly cool and in constant demand at every social gathering. In a time before the ubiquitous cell phone with state of the art speakers along with instant access to any song you can think off, these guys would pull out their instruments (now, now) and start jamming and provide entertainment for all of the partying locals, mostly at the various Riverdale hot spots (Woods, Rocks, Courts, Nabe, C2), but also on the many spontaneous road trips that led to the loss of numerous transitional jobs but provided a lot of wonderful stories to tell. Hell, JH, Serrano, Billy D & Stein played at my wedding (I think I shamed them into it because of their repetitive insistence of substituting my name in the closing line of of

the ubiquitous "No Balls At All" -- for great laughs - whenever they played that song locally. I think those rat-bastards sang it at my wedding. I still owe every one of them a beating.) They never ran out of batteries, although if drunk enough, they did pass out.

Another childhood friend and first Riverdale next door neighbor - who was one of the local urchins who helped hassle Junkie and was equally terrorized by Spaghetti (and his lawn shears) - the now renowned Doctor Martin Stransky, was and is an incredible musician. For a while there he even was a member (founder?) of that amazing international Euro-Based fusion band G8:

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1znhe>

My law partner (and dear friend) Robert (he won't let me call him Bobby) Meloni (a big mafia film buff - can recite all the cool lines -- and the basis for the mob lawyer in TWA) is an accomplished musician (every member of the family is musical - I mentioned his gifted mother in an earlier post and his older brother Tony restores and builds church organs - I highly recommend Tony's services to the Cathedral clerics out there), which has made Robert lethal in prosecuting/defending copyright cases. Robert's daughter, Raffaella, is an up-and-coming, talented recording artist with record and publishing deals. She's the complete package - beautiful (obviously skips a generation), amazing voice and brilliant lyricist, who also plays/writes music.

Highly recommend that you check her out (especially if the world allows tours again). She's all over the internet.

A lot of the lawyers I have worked in the entertainment field are wonderful musicians. I remember a couple of late-nights while still at GF&M when I was treated to different lawyers playing haunting music (once Debussy on piano - Michael - and once Miles Davis on trumpet - Nelson) to what

they thought at the time was an otherwise empty office. I was blessed to be a fly on that wall. That shit stays with you.

And I've made my living working in the entertainment field for the past thirty-five years and have been lucky enough to meet and provide legal services for a lot of famous musicians, most living, some dead, all of whom, out of professional ethics, courtesy and confidentiality, will never appear in these blogs. But I will give a shout out to my friend, Tony Brummel (and his lovely wife and Renaissance Woman Delphine Pontvieux - artist, author, actress, scuba/ski/yoga instructor), who founded and built Victory Records into a mythic independent Record, Publishing and Merchandising Company, and who -- because of that latent crazy Irish gene floating around in his well mixed gene pool -- could easily have grown up in my neighborhood. I may have never captured any of Tony's childhood antics, but I will never forget that trip to Xuma.

So, I am absolutely thrilled that all of my grandchildren are getting their music lessons (thank you fairy godmothers) as part of their Renaissance upbringing. None of them appear to be colorblind, so let's pray they can also carry a tune.

There is hope for the Clan!

The Lateral Parietal Cortex

March 11, 2021



**BROOKS
BROTHERS**

I receive these regular emails from an organization called LIVESCIENCE (if you have not done so already, I strongly recommend you sign up for their on-line newsletters, its brilliant stuff) that provides me information that challenges my old brain and hopefully keeps it nimble enough to keep churning out my fiction. One of the items in this morning's email was written by a very bright young woman named Stephanie Pappas, and explains how our brains actually warp our memories through exaggeration so we are able to remember them more clearly. This, of course, is my oversimplification of Ms. Pappas' article, because she is obviously brilliant and I can only work with the tools I've been given, but I think I've captured the gist of it. The actual article can be found here:

<https://www.livescience.com/brain-distorts-similar-memories.html> utm_source=Selligent&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=LVS_newsletter&utm_content=LVS_newsletter+&utm_term=3562774.

Ms. Pappas discusses a recent study published in the respected journal, Neuroscience, which was led by its primary author, Yufei Zhao, a doctoral student at the University of Oregon, and that explains, among other things, that a person's hippocampus is where the brain encodes the memory in enhanced ways that allow us to differentiate them from other similar events, and then that tweaked memory is stored for easy retrieval in the lateral parietal cortex, at a spot at the top and back of the skull. One of the ways our brains tweak these memories to make them easier for us to recall them is by exaggerating the differences between the recalled event and other similar events in our lives. So, simply put, exaggeration enhances clarity.

I want all of my readers to remember this study as they read my recollections of the events listed here in my blogs -

which I keep repeating cannot possibly be true, **except if it refers to Lenny**. So, if, for example, another person who may have been a witness at the same event (Lenny, Stein, Serrano, BC, my brothers, Jackie V, Danny Moriarity, Snapper, every member of the Collins' Clan, especially Eileen, etc.) recalls things a little differently, or a little less flamboyantly, its not because I'm purposely attempting to mislead my audience of five readers, but because, way back in the day, my brain tweaked the actual memory on its way through its hippocampus, so that as I sit here now rummaging through its lateral parietal cortex, that the initial tweaking on the way in, allows me to recall this memory more clearly these forty plus years later. The defense rests.

For those of you wondering about the above photo, it is not only a photo of a certain bag mentioned in TWA, but it is an apt visual representation of what my lateral parietal cortex must look like.

Welcome to the Neighborhood

March 10, 2021



When we first arrived in Berthoud Estates, my wife and I had to sort through a lot of physical manifestations of the past we had brought with us during the move. We had done an initial sorting of over 40 years of life's accumulation before we left the Bronx, but given the time constraints when we moved, there was still plenty to go through once we arrived in NoCo. Most of our worldly excess ultimately found its way to places like Habitat for Humanity - which really didn't lighten the load because we always ended up buying more, different items, back from them than we donated. A lot of our "stuff" ended up at the local recycling plants (I've always been big on recycling) - and finally, some ended up in our weekly garbage pick up - shout out to United Waste Systems! So for the first month, there was always lots of garbage and recycling left at the end of our gravel driveway.

Anyway, when we first moved in we did notice (probably imagined - NY paranoia is a blessing and a curse) that the occasional car that did roll down our road always slowed down when it passed our property. Back in NYC, we call that "rubber-necking" because of the way the passing person's neck had to contort like twisting rubber to keep their eyes on a fixed object outside their vehicle while their own body continued to move inside the vehicle. So back east, you would hear rush-hour radio traffic reporters talking about "rubber-necking delays" on certain major arteries going in and out of the City that would impact your daily commute. Those rubber-necking events usually occurred in tandem with roadside accidents, because driving can be boring and people are naturally curious, especially about the macabre. Often, the accompanying rubber-necking resulted in additional accidents that compounded the traffic congestion - can't say I miss that.

Realizing that our garbage was really not that interesting, and wanting to provide our new neighbors with something new and exciting to think and talk about, much to my ever-so-patient wife's chagrin, I decided to give the occasional passers-by a NYC visual. I had this old mattress and an worn-out pair of work boots that had seen their day, so I combined them in a quintessential NYC street art kind of way (see the photo above), and left it at the end of my driveway in plain sight of the road. In retrospect, the artist in me should have added some ketchup to the presentation, although that might have been crossing the line. My mother - bless her heart - would have called this move "bodacious."

My art installation stayed there for over two weeks before - as a result of my wife's incessant cajoling - I actually put it out with the trash. In the end, I'm lucky I didn't get a welcome to the neighborhood visit from the Berthoud Office of the Larimer County Sheriff's Department - I am such a big fan - or a snarky but well deserved letter from the BE-HOA! Will I ever grow up? Hope not!

DISCO

March 9, 2021



I need to mention Mike Augustyni (a/k/a "Disco" and "Stein" - that's him on the left with me during my perm period - which led to my mistaken identity, custodial engagement with the 50 while out in Serrano's Javelin - taken on the stairs of St. Maggie's church so it had to be a Collins' wedding - there were a million of them -- and I'm not sure who the dude in the background was, but he didn't look happy watching us hug). Stein was a ubiquitous member of the Riverdale crew. He was the one guy who was smart enough to live at home with his folks (and I believe his older brother Frank, Hey Frank), once the rest of us decided it would be a good thing for our parents if we moved out into Aunt Violet's Flophouse (and then Stein crashed at our place 90% of the time). As a result, he was the one guy in our group who had the constant level of disposable income necessary to consistently drive a nice car [I think it was a gorgeous metallic blue Camaro] (I'm not counting Ralph Droz's car - an older equally cool - muscle version of the Camaro- because I'm excluding the PWWC from this post). Stein was always a worker -- his main source of income was delivering pizza -- but he still managed to be around for every major event in the annals of Riverdale history. As I look back on it now, I'm beginning to think that Stein had secretly mastered quantum mechanics. He was the entangled photon that existed simultaneously in two realities. The rest of us were all **Wigner's Friend** (remember that password), fixing Stein's existence through our conflicting observation of his presence in our lives. So while the Pizza Shop owners and their customers all saw one version of Mike every night hauling ass around both North and South Riverdale delivering tons of those tasty, circular, dough-discs of tomato sauce and cheese (I've only found one place out here that even comes close -

Sidetracked), the Riverdale crew simultaneously witnessed the other entangled photon Stein, every night, fixing him as the partier who was always around with us as a witness/participant to every major event. The only other person who appeared to share those same quantum physics qualities was Serrano (Zelig). Serrano was also a pizza delivery specialist. In retrospect, Serrano & Stein may have been the prototype for Bill & Ted, and pizza delivery may be some form of quantum wormhole, like B&T's telephone booth.

They never missed a major event and would appear, like magic, out of the ether, and I love magic.

And Stein could drive like Jason Statham in those Transporter movies (which could explain how he could deliver all of those pizzas and make all that money every night in such a short amount of time). I remember (this must be a hallucination - but Stein has now confirmed it) one night Stein, Serrano and myself (I always got relegated to the back seat - Serrano always got shotgun) were racing south on Broadway along that long, straightaway stretch in front of the Vannie flats, in Stein's car (we liked to frequent the cluster of Donkey bars under the 242nd Street EI). We were driving next to someone else in the crew -- can't recall the name - but someone will tell me -- who also had a decent car. Danny Moriarty (my birthday twin), who was just a little crazy in a fun way (there is a Sister A story that is mythic), was in the back seat of that other car and was offering me a beer out his window as we drove side-by-side.

When I leaned out -- it had to be wiggling through the back corner of Steins drivers window -- for that beer, Danny grabbed my wrist and held on like death. Since I was by that time leaning out the window to my hips, holding onto the back beam with my free hand, and must have been crowding the hell out of Stein's space in his front seat, Stein

still managed to pull his moving car close enough to the other car for Danny to pull me safely through his window into the other car (PSA - do not try this at home - in hindsight it was incredibly stupid - but then again, that was the operative norm in the 70s (at least in our neighborhood) -- and I probably had to cash in on one of Serrano's lives to have survived it, thanks Joe. In fact, let me reiterate my global qualification from an earlier post that nothing I say here is true, **so do not believe a word of this - unless I'm talking about Lenny, which is all true.**) Most other mortal drivers would have lost their shit and panicked, and I would have ended up as road kill, but Stein didn't even curse me out. He just did that strange giggle/laugh of his - a bit like woody-woodpecker - and calmly closed the gap between the moving cars travelling at a very high speed - that artful movement propelled me across the abyss -- until I was safely out of harms way (at least for that moment) sitting next to Danny in the back seat of the other car. The beer was delicious.

As I think back on it now, Stein's backseat was the spot Apples was occupying the night he ended up in the hospital, but that only occurred because Apples made the mistake of getting out of that seat to test the tensile strength of a steel pipe being swung by an asshole (alliteration), with his head. But I digress.

Anyway, I'm running out of time here so I just wanted to mention the coolest thing I know about Stein (and there really is a lot of cool things about Stein - like he seems to have all the photographic evidence of our youthful existence). When we were young, Stein consistently dated an equally cool younger girl named Delia Hecht (who lived in Riverdale Park in the same building as the Vaughans - hey Jackie - I think she was friends with Robin V, who used

to date my brother, the Ginger, hi Robin). Delia was smart and funny and cute, which now makes me wonder why she bothered with any of us, and her and Stein were the perfect couple back in the day - none of that recurring drama that you found among most of the young couples of our crew.

Anyway, as things happen, for some reason they parted (as we all did) and went their separate ways, got married to other folks and moved on.

Decades later, Stein and Delia bumped into each other at a time when they were both going through divorces with their respective spouses. The Riverdale Gods smiled, hurled their love thunderbolt, and the two sweethearts paired up and are now happily married to each other. Belated Congrats to you both. I love a happy ending.

PS, Stein now has an awesome old school Mustang - think Steve McQueen in Bullitt -- sitting in his extremely clean and sterile looking garage - I mean I've seen dirtier ORs in a hospital. Well done Stein!

BOSTON DOESN'T REALLY SUCK . . . MUCH!

March 8, 2021



As a life-long Bronxite, it is ingrained in my DNA that whenever anyone mentions anything about Boston, especially their professional athletic teams, you are duty and honor bound to shout "Boston Sucks!" (You can punctuate this by spitting on the ground for the appropriate flourish). Of course, phonetically, it sounds more like "Boston Socks." And if you are a true Bronxite, you, at some point in your youth and/or adulthood, have gone to Mecca - Yankee

Stadium - and managed to shout this at the top of your lungs at some (many) points during a Yankee/Sox game -- if you are really blessed, that has resulted in some form of donnybrook initiated with some nearby, drunk (they can't hold their beer - something about a missing gene), soulless Bostonians that had the temerity to show their faces in the Bronx, followed by their rapid expulsion from the Stadium by some other New Yorker that is working the Stadium security detail (and I'm talking about the original Stadium, the one that Ruth built), often accompanied by the crowds' rendition of the (Bronx) Belmonts' Na Na Na Na . . .

Goodbye. And once outside the stadium, there was always a chance they would never make it back to their cars, assuming their vehicles hadn't already been stripped or stolen (some visible Boston related sticker would almost guaranty that). It just doesn't get any better than that.

But I would be lying if I didn't admit that the City of Boston is a really cool place to wander, if you have time to walk its historical sections, and if you are (or, once, a long time ago, were) college age, there is really no better town to party in.

And, if I'm going to be completely honest, aren't the Southie and Bronx Irish folks just twins separated at birth? (If you are mystically inclined - Salem, a very cool place, is just a little bit North).

Finally, as I have said before, Tom Brady is the GOAT (but even he, like the Babe before him, finally left Boston)!

But since my relocation to this truly unique and magical area, I've been blessed to learn that there are two Boston-tainted locals (there is no other polite way to describe this affliction) living just Kitty Corner (diagonally a few properties to the left when viewed from my back deck) on the far side of the back property line. Brian and Janice Ericson (pictured above) are wonderful people. She's the cute one on my left,

and he's the devilishly handsome rat bastard on my right who is a year older than me and looks ten years younger (another one of those men blessed with that full head of hair - bastards). But he's funny as shit and can break my balls with the natural ability of a true Bostonian. And I love it - feels just like home. Time to burn those magic candles - the Yankees must dominate the Sox this season or I'm going to have to move.

Anyway, Janice and Brian were nice enough to purchase a copy of TWA and ask me to inscribe it. I know Brian just wanted a sample of my handwriting to send off to the FBI for analysis (or maybe the remnants of Whitey Bolger's crew, hell, aren't they the same anyway), but I fooled him by signing it under my pseudonym with my non-dominant hand. And what the hell, given that he's a Bostonian, Brian probably can't even read. But I had a lot of laughs -- I mean a lot of laughs - Brian is a pisser and Janice is delightful -- and it was an absolute pleasure inscribing the book for them.

Since we are on the subject of pleasurable inscriptions, I also got to sign/inscribe a copy of TWA for Betty (the mother of) Anne and Eric Pederson. God bless you Betty - she's in her 90s - I hope you enjoy it! A&E are my wonderful neighbors directly in the back and are just the nicest couple (although after listening to twenty minutes of my expletive-filled monologue they'll probably be moving)- and I love their dogs, especially Beans (RIP Gus). Eric runs a shredder company so if you are ever in need of getting rid of some paper, or maybe something else from Boston, give Eric a shout.

Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to snap a selfie with A&E, but will do so the next time I see them. Thanks for the support and patronage.

A Bend In The River - KUDOS COLIN BRODERICK

March 7, 2021



Well, it was touch and go there for a moment when this Luddite almost screwed himself out of a wonderful evening, but I managed to finally hit my computer with the hammer just enough times to make my dear friend Colin Broderick's film, *A Bend In The River*, appear on my Computer Screen. What can I say, this film -- about an Irish writer who returns to his small home town in Northern Ireland after a quarter of a century in the US and finds that you really can't go home again -- appealed to me on so many levels. First, visually, as its story is set among the lush green fields, farms and towns of rural County Tyrone, Ireland, where my paternal family finds its roots. The eternally overcast skies and melancholic soundtrack set the somber mood for the story, and made me appreciate every scene with a roaring fire.

Next, the ensemble cast knocked it out of the park. John Duddy (that's him above) led a wonderful troupe of Irish actors - was that Colin's brother as the understandably and

forgivably nasty Declan - who played their roles convincingly and authentically. I was absolutely persuaded that every word, look and movement, was true. As far as the writing was concerned, the story flowed seamlessly with a pace that allowed the viewer just enough time to give every important event one quick second look and listen, just so you didn't miss anything, before being carried on to the next scene. The dialogue was honest and didn't play to the melodramatic, which would be the easy way out for most writers (although the romantic in me would be lying if I didn't hope that the childhood lovers would be reunited). And the occasional narrative overlay was pure poetry -- Billy Collins is surely proud. The writer in me is seething with jealousy but the friend in me is over the moon for you. To sum up, *A Bend In The River* is a fine story, well told. I highly recommend this film to all five of my blog readers (and please tell a friend). Well done Colin! Thanks for the invite.

WHAT WERE THEY THINKING

March 6, 2021



In the 1940s, the Schutter-Johnson Company of Chicago, maker of the popular Bit-O-Honey, created this equally popular candy bar consisting of a crispy fudge and nuts core coated in milk chocolate. It was advertised as 'American's Favorite Candy Bar'. It graced America's store shelves until sometime in the 1960s.

Believe it or not, I came across this photo during my research for one of the novels, and at this moment, I cannot remember the connection or what exactly led me here, beyond the fact that it somehow concerned the

extraterrestrials, who had been on earth since the 1940s. But I'm a bit of a mental hoarder, so I tucked that photo away in my miscellaneous file for some future use. I know I saved it because I had seen this name throughout literature and could not believe someone in S-J's advertising department didn't stop and say, "are we sure we want to be naming our candy-bar after Satan?"

Merriam-Webster Definition of *Old Nick*

"—used as a name of the devil"

And the point I'm making here is that we are all fallible.

Despite our best intentions, we are human - well some of us are -- and we all make mistakes. (Now, for the record, I am not suggesting that calling this candy bar that particular name was a mistake. Hell, it might have been very popular among the clergy, that infernal temptation they could rail against from the pulpit, while secretly enjoying its deliciousness in the rectory (they are really good at that).

But, in hind sight - always 20/20 - and purely as a matter of my own, uninformed, personal opinion, with not one bit of fact to support this personal opinion, it had to be pretty *damned close*.)

And that tiny epiphany leads me to another one: The power of forgiveness is underrated.

You see if one dwells on our own mistakes, its hard to move forward towards something productive, and that's why we all walk this earth - to be productive. All the great inventors and scientists in history made plenty of mistakes along their respective paths towards their biggest successes. So when it happens to you, you need to take a good hard look at your mistake, learn from it, analyze what led you to it, vow that you will not repeat the process, forgive yourself, and move on. If your mistake impacted others, own it, sincerely apologize to the afflicted, and ask for their forgiveness, vow

to change your ways, and make amends to the extent that it is possible. And if that is not possible, if the mistake is truly unfixable, do whatever you can in the moment, but then balance your Karma going forward by repeatedly providing some unexpected but badly needed random act of kindness to another, even to a total stranger - perform a "mitzvah" as my friends and colleagues in the Jewish faith like to say.

Whatever you do, just don't let your mistake make you surrender. Don't give up.

If someone else's mistake impacts you, feel free to rage against the storm. Get it out. Make them fix the mistake if it can be fixed. But when it is all said and done, forgive.

Because life is just too damn short. Don't let someone else's mistake keep you from being the person you should be.

And, no matter what happens, if you have made a mistake, you should not forget it, but you ultimately have to forgive yourself. Otherwise you get caught up in the "What the hell was I thinking -- I am a stupid, bad, person" loop. That will stop you from getting back out there and being productive again. Who knows, you might be the person who finally cures cancer, comes up with the name of a candy bar that is as sacredly delightful as its heavenly product, or that person who provides someone else some silly reading material that puts a smile on their face, if only for a few moments. Just saying. . . . now pass me that candy bar and get thee behind me, Satan!

The Craic Fest - Voices From the Grave

March 5, 2021



My dear friend and brilliant author and filmmaker, Colin Broderick - <https://www.colinbroderick.com> - [that's himself above, taken during my birthday breakfast at Eileens Country Kitchen on McLean Avenue, Yonkers, NY on 11/14/15 - enlarge the photo 1000x and you will see me reflected in his left eye] invited me yesterday to remotely watch the opening night of the 2021 Irish Film Festival known as *The Craic Fest*: <https://thecraicfest.com>. This year's concept is brilliant, 23 films for 23 dollars. Colin's film "Bend In The River" is premiering at the festival this Saturday night, and I just cannot wait to watch it. Anyone who has seen his other film, "Emerald City," or read his two memoirs, *Orangutan* and *That's That*, or his latest novel, *Church End* (all highly recommended to my five readers who, having already devoured *TWA*, twice, wait patiently for *An Alien Appeal* to drop in December) knows Colin is a masterful story teller, both in print and on film. Indeed, Colin's talent is what I, as a writer, aspire to. If you only catch Colin's film on Saturday night, 7:30 EST, the festival would be worth the \$23.00 admission price. So those of you who want to experience the fine art of Irish story telling (I'm pointing directly at you Evan McCaffrey), step up, pay the freight, and tune in sooner rather than later, and no later than Saturday night. you won't be sorry. That's what I did last night. Since I was new at this process of remote attendance at an event (cut my teeth on my youngest son's wedding this past summer - Hi Mark and Sara (Forever NYPD Blue) - truly Love in the Time of Cholera) I made sure I caught the very first entry out of the gate, as a trial run, so I could work out any glitches before Saturday night. I am so glad I did.

Endless Sunshine on a Cloudy Day was tragically brilliant.

The documentary, directed by John Connors and written by

Connors and Tiernan Williams, follows the lives of the closely knit McCann family from Ireland. The principal players in this story are the daughter Jade McCann, and her father, Anthony. Anthony had survived a bout of cancer many years ago, but this story begins with its reoccurrence a few years back. But that is just the tragic entrée of this tight-knit family's challenges, as Jade is quickly diagnosed with her own mysterious and untreatable form of cancer.

And while this film documents the various treatments, traditional and alternative, these two incredible people are subjected too, the story's focus is really on just how beautiful this father and daughter are as human beings, and how close their unbreakable bonds are with each other and with the two other family members. By paying the emotional price of watching this tragedy unfold, and it is gut wrenching, we are rewarded with a glimpse through the clouds of heaven on earth, through witnessing the daily strength and humor of Anthony, and the angelic beauty, tenacity and voice (**think Dolores O'Riordan of the Cranberries**) of his black Irish raven of a daughter, Jade. Cancer scares the shit out of most people, myself included, but if I were ever to be cursed with it, I hope I can demonstrate the same strength and dignity that was shared by the McCanns in this film.

With that promise of an opening, I cannot wait for the main course on Saturday night. Tune in.

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW OLD FRIENDS

March 4, 2021



If you have been following my blogs (I hope someone is reading these things), you will see that I like to tell stories about my old friends. But as I go deeper into the weeds, I've decided I need to add this retroactive general disclaimer to each of those posts (and all future ones). I make everything I write appear very plausible. If I have any "gift" at all, it is that alone. So, to the extent any reader did not personally know the people I mention, or have personally witnessed and/or partaken in the event itself, as described in these blogs, at the times that I mention them, then take this to the bank - everything I said about any of the people I mention in my blogs is a lie. Pure fiction. Literary entertainment. And if put under oath, I would have to challenge my ability, after all of these years, to confirm or deny that any of those events actually occurred. Let us just leave it that these stories could have been repeated examples of my over active imagination (wink, wink - its a sty, I swear). That should do the trick - the old legal double negative. Now that I've completed that little bit of legal obfuscation to protect the guilty, or not, what can I write about this morning. . . .

One of the first people I met during my early walk-about of the contiguous Berthoud and Foothills Estates is a woman named Pam Ervin (that's Pam and me celebrating the release of my novel with an inscription of the copies for her lovely daughters, Hi Jill & Amy, wonderful people - and for the record, I would kill for Pam's hairline). Like her namesake character in TWA, she owns a beautiful Arabian named Tique. Pam is the Queen of tough love. She's smart, no-nonsense, opinionated, strong-willed and yet she's one of the truly nicest people I have ever met. She would give you the shirt off her back, the winter coat off her horse (Tique has a wonderful collection), or half of her last

bale of hay. She loves animals and takes in rescues, like her dogs Briggs, Brody (RIP) and Wicker, and still has room in her heart for the cutest little pup I've ever met. If you are lucky enough to be invited into Pam's circle of friends, you are truly blessed. I certainly have been. And now she is memorialized for eternity as a character (although only a minor one -- she's a tiny bit shy and likes to stay in the background) in the Claire Trilogy.

You see, Pam is actually a major player in the real life story of Claire the mule. It was Pam who convinced me that I could handle inviting Claire into my life. Like me, Pam knows all of the area's animals. Claire was always one of her favorites (what's not to love). When I would stop by Pam's property each morning to share an apple with Tique (who I refer to as the Prom Queen because she only shows an interest in me because I do her English homework - the apple of knowledge), Pam would appear each early morning from the (meticulous) barn - her work ethic exhausts me just watching her -- and share a bit of wisdom and experience on the care of Equines. And we would always talk about Claire.

Once Pam finally convinced me that I probably wouldn't accidentally kill Claire if I did happen to invite her into my life, she came by to inspect the barn I had refurbished and extended, and every inch of my property, to make sure that there were no patent or latent dangers to the magical creature. Having passed that rigorous inspection, I felt confident enough to make the move. Pam talked me through that as well. I will share how that actually went down in a future blog, but while I'm on the subject, before I move on, let me quickly give a shout-out to one of my favorite young families in the Berthoud Estates neighborhood - Mike, Amy, Charles and Delaney (awesome

name). I also want to give a shout out to Silja Knolls (Hi to Darren - highly recommend his AC/Heating Systems work, a real professional and delightful person -- and Anja (future politician) - sorry, I know, I probably misspelled your name).

Silja is another one of my local friends who adeptly realized that I am pretty clueless about Equines (country life in general) and so has been quick to support me whenever I have needed it. Silja introduced me to Mister Rogers and Honey. You are all Godsenders! Thanks to you all.

Anyway, Pam came by to hold my hand the day that Claire arrived to make sure the transition was negatively uneventful. Thanks to her, it was. And she has been there for me ever since. Thanks Pam. You rock! Enjoy the novel!

WHEN HISTORY IS STRANGER THAN FICTION, THE STORY WRITES ITSELF

March 3, 2021

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TOP

I mentioned in my earlier blog how Joe Serrano fell out the Violet's Flophouse fourth floor (attic) window during the early morning hours immediately following my twentieth birthday and ended up, as Carl LaFong, being treated by Dr. Wong (love that rhyme- even sober) in the hospital during the early morning hours that followed (on 11/15/76, remember I was born 11/14/56). I'm sure most of my truly sane readers - there must be a couple of you out of the five readers not infected with the Riverdale virus - scoffed and said, this guy is full of shit. That's okay, I often question my own sanity and wonder, when I listen to myself speak (or as I write something down), how my friends and I have survived this long. But the lawyer in me likes to dabble in cold hard evidence and I knew I had stashed away a document, appearing above, in a cache of Violet Flophouse related documents that I spirited away on the night (actually early morning) we all moved out of the apartment like thieves in the night. I also mentioned that in my earlier blog that the document was safely in the hands of Lenny (who has been protecting this guy's butt since 1971 - that's how he landed the role of US Marshall in TWA). Well, Lenny dug up that invaluable cache of documents and unearthed the carefully preserved proof from the conclusion of that night's event, including the date, the injury and treatment (chest x-ray), the Serrano pseudonym (how's that for phonetic alliteration) and finally the rhyming name of the attending doctor. Lenny also unearthed a classic letter from the Landlord's family castigating their attic tenants for a number of their chronic shenanigans (which I will save for a later post).

Circumstantial, I know, but solid evidence of some of the more outrageous claims from an outrageous night. Its all about establishing a witness's credibility. Like at the end of

the magical movie, Big Fish (if you have not watched it, I give it a strong recommendation).

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they pumped up and down to propel the tandem skyward.

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Anyway, this park was set about 100 yards off the Southbound side of the Saw Mill River Parkway, so many a car with a flat tire would stop to repair it on the corner by the park then return to the SMRP using (at that time) the same on/off ramp. Sometimes the damaged tire was left behind to be commandeered by the children as some additional form of imaginative toy.

This one particular afternoon, I was in the zone on the swings, working my magic, when Joe came rolling over from the corner with this tire. He decided that it would be fun to see if he could roll the tire at the right moment in the path of my moving swing so that tire would meet swing at its lowest decent. The experiment was purely for scientific purposes, there was no malevolence involved, and remember, we did not have videogames that allowed us to vent our childhood frustrations by destroying things. Anyway, it didn't bother me as I too shared in Joe's scientific curiosity. The first two times Joe rolled the tire, his timing was off and he missed my descending swing by millimeters. Joe would then have to run around the outside frame of the swing set to retrieve the tire and then roll it back into place directly in front of my swing path.

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WHEN HISTORY IS STRANGER THAN FICTION, THE STORY WRITES ITSELF

March 3, 2021

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Ed. Lopez

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I mentioned in my earlier blog how Joe Serrano fell out the Violet's Flophouse fourth floor (attic) window during the early morning hours immediately following my twentieth birthday and ended up, as Carl LaFong, being treated by Dr. Wong (love that rhyme- even sober) in the hospital during the early morning hours that followed (on 11/15/76, remember I was born 11/14/56). I'm sure most of my truly sane readers - there must be a couple of you out of the five readers not infected with the Riverdale virus - scoffed and said, this guy is full of shit. That's okay, I often question my own sanity and wonder, when I listen to myself speak (or as I write something down), how my friends and I have survived this long. But the lawyer in me likes to dabble in cold hard evidence and I knew I had stashed away a document, appearing above, in a cache of Violet Flophouse related documents that I spirited away on the night (actually early morning) we all moved out of the apartment like thieves in the night. I also mentioned that in my earlier blog that the document was safely in the hands of Lenny (who has been protecting this guy's butt since 1971 - that's how he landed the role of US Marshall in TWA). Well, Lenny dug up that invaluable cache of documents and unearthed the carefully preserved proof from the conclusion of that night's event, including the date, the injury and treatment (chest x-ray), the Serrano pseudonym (how's that for phonetic alliteration) and finally the rhyming name of the attending doctor. Lenny also unearthed a classic letter from the Landlord's family castigating their attic tenants for a number of their chronic shenanigans (which I will save for a later post).

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CLAIRE & HONEY

March 2, 2021



When Claire first came to live with us (thank you Amy, Mike, Delaney and Charles -- sweetest family in the world) she had the run of the property, including the area we consider the "back yard". That is when she first started appearing outside my office window to extort carrots from me on pain of steaming fresh excrement delivered from source directly outside my office window. Think of a giant mafia controlled sanitation truck dumping its load of fetid garbage outside your insurance resisting restaurant. The rules were that I had a certain amount of time from the moment Claire appeared staring through the office window and peering over the top of my computer screen -- doing her best version of the Vulcan mind meld - for me to get up from my office desk and go down the long hallway, to the back door, stopping only long enough to grab a handful of carrots from the fridge, which I would then deliver to Claire. If I took too long once I left the office, God forbid I stopped at the bathroom to take a piss, she would stand outside the back sliding door and begin to stomp her front right hoof on the concrete patio to show her impatience. When Mr. Roger's joined her at the McCaffrey Holiday Camp, he too had that same unfettered access to the property, back door and office window, and equally enjoyed playing the game of "See Tommy Run." Even after my office hours ended, Claire (MR in tow) would appear at the back sliding doors, doing her knock-knock routine, at any and all hours, much to the consternation of my long suffering wife. Claire knew that if she kept at the knocking long enough, I would respond, like Pavlov's dogs, and pay her her insurance carrots, even in the dead of night. She is truly determined and I am easily whipped.

When we started the outside construction on the house a year ago, Lisa was worried that all the loose nails and other

potential hazards, like falling debris, could injure the mules, and I was worried that they would try to pull an Eileen Cotto (rabid trade unionist) and organize the workers to demand better working conditions, higher pay, free lunch and maybe even a safe space, so we restricted them to the side paddock and the back end of the property. That still allowed them free access to a lion share of the property, the barn, art studio (Geppetto's workshop), pond and all the way up to the top of the driveway, in case they wanted to greet visitors or just watch the slow vehicle and pedestrian traffic on Beverly Drive.

Claire did not like this one bit and told me repeatedly so in no uncertain terms. She realizes that I am the weak link when it comes to household decisions.

Nonetheless, when faced with the Hobson's choice of pissing off the two dominant females in one's life, if one knows what's good for them, its best to err on the side of your wife. So the boundaries remained intact.

By the time the outside construction ended at the end of last summer, I had also planted a small grove (five) of tiny apple trees on the western side of the property, in honor of my grandfather, and given the Mules propensity to devour most small trees and to use the others as scratching posts, we decided to keep the Mules restricted because once they gained access to the backyard, they just had to climb the Giant's Causeway (an ancient oversized curving set of slate and wooden beam stairs that comes down from western side of my property) which they regularly did in the past, and they would have access to the apple trees. Given that it was an absolute bitch to dig the holes for those trees - the earth here is like cement - and the expense of those tiny saplings, I agreed with the continued restrictions.

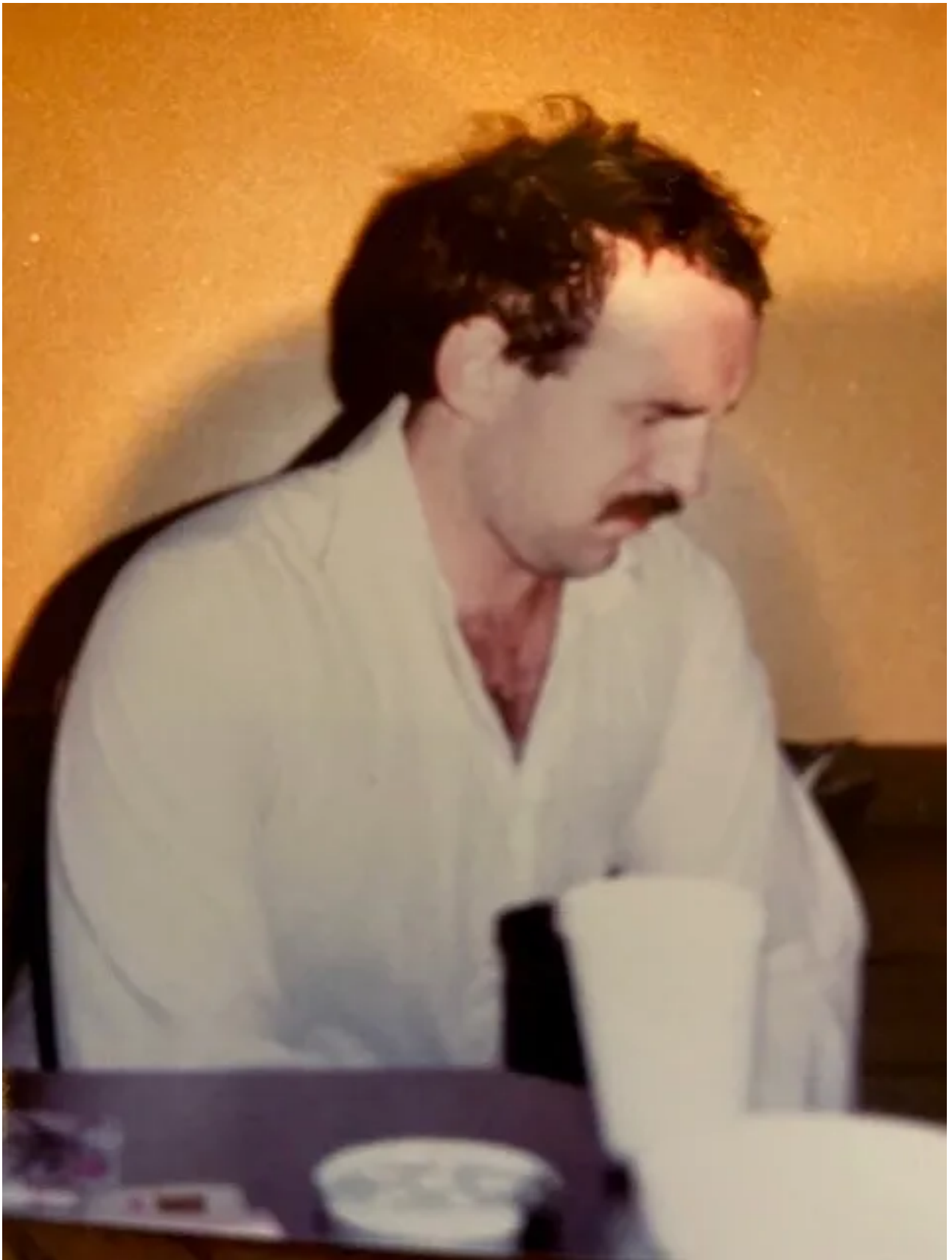
By this time, we had suffered the unexpected and tragic passing of Mr. Rogers and the countering joy a few months later of the arrival of our sweet mini mule Honey (thanks Silja, Darren and Anja Knolls, and the sculptor Cammie Lundeen). Those events are each stories that I will share in future posts. Honey had never had access to the backyard or western upper property and seemed quite content with the otherwise unrestricted freedom she had, with her new big sister Claire.

But Claire never forgets.

Yesterday, while working diligently at my office computer, I felt an ominous presence. When I looked up, there Claire stood, staring down at me with a smile on her lips. My mind was in tatters because I could not for the life of me figure out how she had gotten that slide bolt open on the metal gate (when I later investigated I found some strands of the plastic hay bale rope wedged in the loop of the now open slide bolt - Claire is part MacGiver, part Houdini). But at that moment, my Pavlovian training kicked in and I left my post to retrieve the carrot insurance premiums from the fridge in the kitchenette. As I left the hall way and entered the kitchen area, there they were, Claire and her sidekick, Honey, as bold brass, noses steaming up the door glass, waiting for their orange vegetable delivery. An elephant's memory is nothing compared to Claire's and the foxes line up along the back property for cunning lessons.

WORST HANGOVER EVER

March 1, 2021



I mentioned in an earlier blog that I had to call upon my distant memory of the hangover I suffered as a result of the

night before BC & Nan's wedding when I wrote about a similar experience for Jimmy in TWA. I also mentioned that it was the second worse hangover after the one from my own bachelor party. The good news about the latter was I got to sleep for 24 hours and woke up in a dark room with my soon to be wife placing cold compresses on my head.

I've never slept that long before or after. Its tough growing up Irish.

My memorable BC hangover was compounded by the fact that we drank all night, barely slept, got into numerous confrontations with other guests in the hotel we were staying in and swam that bloody river. I might have slept for an hour. [I blame BC for all of this]. Then we had to basically shower (which actually hurt my skin), put on our Sunday best, force down some coffee and go the wedding. I literally suffered the DT's in church. That photo above captures my self-inflicted trauma. If Rodin was still around he would have captured that face in a bust and placed it right next to his memorable work, "Woman in Agony." [It also highlights my Cro-Magnon brow, which reminds me of the time a very stoned Peter (Rabbit) Betz (RIP) and Michael Collins told me they were certain, if given the opportunity, that they could open beer bottles using the top of my eye sockets]. I guess the third worst hangover was the early morning hours after my participation in one of the Keg races Bruce Stewart and Gary Typher used to regularly sponsor on Saturday afternoons in the summer. They were held in Mush Park. Teams of six would kick in cash and go head to head to see which team had the last member still standing as they tried to empty a keg. Winner take all. The tell tale sign that a team member was about to go down for the count is that they actually became legless. They would lean up against something, a nearby tree or monument and

slowly slide into a sitting position, cup still in hand and a big stupid grin on their face, while all of the other participants would point at you and jeer. Then blackness. During that particular race, I'm pretty sure I saw Danny Moriarity (shared the same birthdates right down to the year, 11/14/56, for those keeping count) start his tree slide just before me, but I can't be sure.

I woke up in total darkness. I was naked underneath a shroud like cover sheet and for a moment I thought I was dead in some morgue (used this as well). Then the headache hit.

Turns out when I passed out in Mush, my older brother carried me home over his shoulder, unconscious, and then held me out the attic window by my belt while I puked myself silly. Evidently, I didn't quite make it to that window for the first heave, which explains why I had been stripped naked and put to bed starkers. It also explained the smell. Eddie had hung a blanket over that front window, which was why it was pitch. That was probably the kindest thing my older brother ever did for me (except when he fought me to try and stop me from fighting one of the older kids in the neighborhood, but that's for a different blog). Thanks Eddie. We started drinking early in Riverdale (same with smoking and sex - not the home run, but the faster kids stole a few bases). I had my first beer in fourth grade (I know Serrano was with me - he was also a notorious baserunner). It was deep in The Woods (see earlier blog for details). It was warm, sudsy and stolen. [Disclaimer - I am a writer of fiction so that anything that looks or sounds the least bit illegal (or fun), even though it may appear real (and fun), is obviously a figment of my over active imagination and cannot be true. That's my story and I'm sticking with it. Plus all of the statute of limitations have past. Finally, as my PSA - Kids

do not steal or drink (or have sex), it is not as much fun as I make it sound (wink, wink), and you will probably join me in Catholic hell if you partake. And that will really suck. But don't worry, we won't be alone. Dante says its chock full of lawyers.]

There is a grocery store on Mosholu (a few stores down the hill from where Dino's is presently located (Hey Sal & Flor)) that used to stack their cases of Schaefer Beer five feet high right by their swinging front door. The Western entry edge of The Woods -- you had to climb a very steep cliff like hill -- ran directly behind this contiguous block of stores right off Fieldston Road (the less toney part). [If this was real] what we would do (Serrano was definitely involved here because this operation required cunning and speed - two of his greatest attributes) is send two guys to the store. At the right moment (its more an art than a science) one of the boys -- who would be scanning the area right inside the store - would grab the door and pull it open while the other would grab a case off the top of the stack and then both miscreants would race down the block and around the corner where they would be met by their accomplices (we were Dickensian urchins) who would quickly grab some of the beers, stuff them in their belts and or pockets, scurry up the hillside like monkeys and disappear deep into the woods. No one ever bothered chasing us once we entered that rat's nest. Not even the cops. Then we would travel through this large wooden area to its South-Western end that overlooked the library (should have spent more time in there), sit up on the large boulders on top of the hill and consume our booty (wait, that doesn't sound right). I mean we would drink our stolen beers.

Now this trick wasn't created by my age group. It was passed down from one class to the next and continued right up until the Moose _____ debacle.

Moose was a Baby Huey kind of oversized younger legacy of one of our classmates. He was a good kid, strong as a bastard and a natural wild man, so he was always good to have around. He was quick to laugh and had a temper. But he was slow in movement, I mean glacier speed, which is why he was only really dangerous in a fight if he could cold-cock you (in which case you were out for the count). But he was hard to put down (I last experienced that at my bachelor party). And he would do anything.

Anyway, for some reason, one day Moose decided he would make his reputational bones by stealing a case of S solo.

This was wrong on so many levels, because those of us who had successfully perpetrated this activity in the past (remember this is fiction), knew that to be successful, it required two sets of eyes, hands and legs and the two who actually did the deed had to be fleet of hand and foot to maintain the advantage. Moose never made it to the corner.

The ensuing scandal was as terrifying as it was fascinating.

The cops were called (who never prosecuted shoplifting crimes back then) but so were his parents - which was far more painful. So after some in-store interrogation (he never gave up the gang) -- Moose was grounded for six months.

But he had forever earned his stripes among the neighborhood urchins (rumor has it he actually grabbed two cases). His legend lives on.

After that, the store finally shifted their beer to the back of the building. We had to get way more creative - and we did.

[Note: There is a truish event (wink, wink) concerning a freight car full of beer that Lenny has memorialized in a

fantastic [fictional] short story (which I highly recommend you all read - make him give it up) -- and which I will filch for the Riverdale Chronicles -- if he does not start getting his work out there. Enough said.]

The last drink I ever had was at my youngest brother, John (and Tara)'s wedding, many decades ago (great wedding).

There is a story behind my ensuing abstinence, for future telling, but that is why I have to reach so far back to re-experience the horrors of a good hangover for my craft. I take some solace in that.