



The View from Right Field

by Rick Ohler

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“Entitlement?”

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It is early Sunday morning at Right Field World Headquarters out here on the village’s western frontier, and your intrepid correspondent is in agony and contemplating a Pepto-Bismol and fire suppressant milkshake for breakfast.

I suspect that the source of this discomfort will ring true for many a townie. Ever mindful of my duties as self-appointed ambassador to all visitors to the 14052, be they ex-patriated townies returning to the embrace of a forgiving hometown, or first-timers, I managed to forget my limitations as a senior citizen and I seriously overindulged. When my boyhood friend Peter Gow stopped in South Wales for a two-day visit with his family, he brought with him cravings for all the delights of Western New York cuisine (that, curiously are not available in his Boston home). I accepted his thoughtful invitation to dinner and arrived to find a smorgasbord of delights from Wallenwein’s: hot wings, beef on weck with sinus-clearing horseradish, a bushel of French fries and a beer-battered fish fry. Fellowship and fried food were never better.

The resulting gastric distress wouldn’t have been so bad if it hadn’t come on the heels of our usual, mid-week, writing class wing-ding. Tradition dictates that after our Creative Writing Workshop at the Senior Center, we adjourn to the local writers’ pub at the southeast corner of Oakwood and Elm for a little D & D (decompression and deconstruction) with a tankard of ale and —what else?— chicken wings slathered in sauces of a varying intensities.

Even those two gourmandic follies wouldn’t have done me in if they hadn’t been followed by the return of my daughter to her hometown. She had just completed a 5000-mile cross-country trek from her home in Glens Falls, NY, west to Arizona, north to Colorado and the Badlands and, finally, back east to East Aurora. And she was hungry. She brought with her friends from Glens Falls who, while they had never been here, had heard the magic words: Bar-Bill chicken wings, best in the

galaxy. Before I could even hear the little voice in my stomach lining that was calling out, “You’re gonna regret this,” I was right there with the 20-year-olds, scarfing down mounds of hot, barbecue, Sicilian, suicidal, Cajun wings drowning in bleu cheese from Bar-Bill along with extra cheese pizza topped with pepperoni, et al. from Del Aureo’s. By the way, the first timers’ reaction to the famed fare? “Yeah, it was pretty good.” They are tough nuts to crack, these millennials.

And not just about chicken wings. Two weeks earlier, before the millennials had departed on their Great American Odyssey, I had given them this old guy’s sage but unsolicited advice: “Keep a journal; you’ll be glad you have some sort of record of this adventure in the years to come. And use a real paper map or atlas, not Mapquest. Trace your route, write on it, then hang it on a wall, as a reminder.” I would have added that a throwaway camera for some actual hold-in-your hands photos would be a great idea, but that would have been way too 20th century for them. They ignored my advice, of course—*carpe diem* being their motto—believing, as you can when you’re 20, that “the years to come” are a long way off and will take care of themselves. I’m sure they would counter my advice by insisting that the 14,237 iPhone photos they took and the Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest, Snapchat, Flutterbox, Sharebear and assorted ephemeral Cloud connections would suffice as a record.

But you and I know darn well that for all the convenience and accessibility of today’s technology, any record of their trip will be long gone into some forgotten, unindexed file or faraway cloud within a month. Or it will live as a one inch by one inch image on a smart phone screen. It’s a far cry from the good old days when the record of any event was handled with handwritten letters and postcards and film that you took to Larwood’s to be developed into hard copy photographs that sit to this day in envelopes, ever ready to take out and revive the experience.

All of which brings me, at long last, to the point of this week’s musing from Right Field. Actually, there’s isn’t so much a point to this week’s Right Field, as there is a question I need your help with.

My parents, both born in the 1920s, were assiduous chroniclers. (Well, my mother was, and my father reaped the benefits.) Like many of their generation, they left behind boxes (which have yielded to plastic totes as the cardboard gradually disintegrated in various basements and closets) of photographs, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, cocktail napkins, matchbooks, dance cards—and in my father’s case—memorabilia of his service in the South Pacific as an Army anti-aircraft automatic weapons operator from 1943 until VJ-Day. There was something else they left, though: letters. Hundreds and hundreds of letters, handwritten in fountain pen, that followed the years of their meeting, their courtship, their engagement, their separation as jobs took them apart for a time, the planning for their wedding in 1947 and their early years together as they made their way to an eventual life on Oakwood Avenue. All these letters sit in neatly in metal boxes right next to me at my desk in Right Field.

Here is my question: Am I entitled to read them? It's not like I need permission; Dad and Mom are 44 and 23 years gone, respectively, each dying much too young. I know they loved each other and led fairly mundane and respectable lives; I can't believe there would be any revelations in the letters as you might expect in a Dickens novel or the *National Enquirer*. Yet, to this day, I can't bring myself to open the envelopes. I am comforted by their presence as ignorant as I am of their contents, but I hate to disturb their privacy. What do you, out in Right Field, think? Thanks.