

Hynes is 70 (and so am I)
Bill McArthur
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I met Bill at the Fort Morris Hotel in Shippensburg. The main images of that place etched in my mind are of Bill at his table and Father Bob at his spot at the bar next to the hot dog machine. The universe was irrevocably changed for the worse when "the Fort" was torn down. That was a place where Gary Robinson and Jack Williams could both hold forth and where one could hear deep philosophical statements such as: "There are more horses' asses than horses.", "Thou shalt not boogieth.", and "A man's second wife always looks like his first."

Back in those days, Bill and his cohorts in the Art Department shared the third floor of Shippen Hall with the Mathematics Department. I remember their little electric kiln that they used to heat pizza for lunch as well as to fire pots. Bill had to build his own gas kiln to remedy that situation. My job for early firings on Bill's kiln was to convert temperature readings between Celsius and Fahrenheit. I have no idea why I needed to do that, but I vividly remember cold nights, huddled against the kiln wall for warmth, calculating temperature conversions on a scrap of paper.

Bill introduced me to the game of handball, which we played on squash courts. I originally tried the game of squash, but was banned from that game for sweating too much in my white outfit. Handball was a manly game, where too much sweating produced what we called "summer handball", which was total mayhem with the ball skipping around the court like a super ball on steroids. I was inducted into a secret society of left-handed handball players: Hynes, Hanlon, and McArthur. We had a cut-throat tournament on the first day back to school each fall. The winner received the coveted "blown jock" trophy at the annual S&D (stimulant and depressant) Banquet, necessarily held at a different restaurant each year. The banquet always included our annoyed and embarrassed wives, poems, speeches, and, at one of the banquets, the passing of bare-butt photos of two of the members around a room filled with unlucky diners who were unwilling participants. Bill always called me "Bear", which became my handball nickname. My Appalachian Trail handle is "Beachcomber", and my kayaking nickname is "Wild Bill". On the streets of Shippensburg I've been called "One of the Smith Brothers", because I sported a beard, and "You bearded SOB", because I didn't use the proper turning lane at the Treat.

I never made it to Oil City, Bill's hometown, but I know more stories about Bill's high school days than I know from my own high school experience. I knew Mumsy Hynes quite well, but only met three of Bill's brothers and my only lasting memory of them was the famous "Hairs versus Straights" touch football game. If we replayed that game today, which is a hilarious thought, I'd be on the other team. Bill had two friends named McArthur, both with roots in Altoona, PA, but it took him about 20 years to realize it and get them together. I know this is a non sequitur, but I just thought of it.

I joined Bill's Art League and tried my hand at ceramics. I never really figured out how to center the clay on a throwing wheel, but I vividly remember Bill helping a little blond center the clay by taking the position made famous by Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore in "Ghost". All that was missing was "Unchained Melody" playing in the background. My proudest accomplishment in ceramics was to take a handful of Raku clay out of the bucket, shape it into a bowl, fire the bowl in Bill's ad hoc kiln, and drink beer out of the finished product, all within a half hour. I still keep that bowl on display in my home; well, I'm homeless just now, but I did keep that bowl on display in the home we used to have; now it's in storage.

I sat in on Bill's introductory course, "Art in the Dark", one semester. The class took a field trip to Washington, DC, where I learned to appreciate Jackson Pollack's work. I used to think his work was just random paint spots, but I found out that his work was random paint spots generated by a madman. This helped me understand things better at Peggy Guggenheim's museum in Venice, famous for the screw on and off penis on an outside statue on the Grand Canal.

Somehow Bill and I ended up in a gourmet club with our wives and three other couples. In the planning sessions for each monthly meeting, the guys worked on selecting the appropriate spirits, while the women selected the appropriate food courses for the theme of the evening. For example, for a Norwegian dinner, we had aquavit; for a Mexican dinner, we had tequila; and for a Greek dinner, we had ouzo. The biggest highlight that I can remember is Bill holding the head of a suckling pig like a puppet, with his finger for the tongue. This was a great hit with the ladies. There was always a betting pool concerning which guy would be the first to pass out before the dessert course. It was always Bill. There were many other incidents which I'm not at liberty to discuss.

There were infamous wine tasting parties following the tapping of kegs of home-fermented wine which included the kidnapping of Dick Weller, singing of "Am I Blue", and Lutheran Subs.

Bill designed a back patio for our house in Shippensburg. After the concrete was poured and finished, the workers found their way to the Tollgate Tavern where they spent the afternoon drinking with some local plumbers who taught them the basics of plumbing (hot on the left, cold on the right, and poop don't run uphill). After we were kicked out of the joint, the Fly Swatter Incident occurred, which I'm not at liberty to discuss.

The Dan Mack Going Away Party was an annual affair, occurring during final exam week in the spring. Dan was always thought of as sort of a temporary fixture in the Chemistry Department and we partied heavily to ensure that Dan would remember us in case he didn't reappear for the fall semester the following year. Frankly speaking (pun intended), I don't remember much about those evenings except for the many forms of substance abuse and the Loggerman's Breakfast at HoJo's early the following morning. If not for my memory lapses, I'm sure there were many other incidents which I wouldn't be at liberty to discuss.

Bill and I and my son Bill attended the Theta Chi fraternity's Fall Ball and Spring Fling in order to show support for the fraternity which I was an active member of at Florida State University during my lost year of debauchery. Young Bill was exposed to (pun intended) extreme beer drinking and wet T-shirt contests. He continues to suffer from the mental trauma of those Saturday outings.

Big Brother/Big Sister ceramics parties with Dr. Z, the wet Raytheon Room Affair, Tailgate parties, the Studio, numerous field trips I had sense enough to to avoid, and drinking at many other Shippensburg bars are beyond the scope of this document.

Bill and I always felt some kinship with George Carlin. We were all Irish, about the same age, and had the same high regard for scatology. I thought that Bill kinda looked like George at times, but I never thought I looked that old. Well, we both are old now, which really means we have more good memories of the past. ***Happy Birthday to us!***

Postscript (12/29/10): group photo from Bill's birthday celebration near Oil City, PA:

