

“Remembering” with Ryan Wilensky

“Tons of firsts” is how Larry Burrows describes everything he learned at West End House Camp. Larry first came to camp in 1963 as a 2-weeker. His uncle, Harry Borofsky, suggested camp to his parents and they agreed. Larry went to the West End House Club on Blossom Street and had an interview with Camp Director, Allie Coles. Mr. Coles was smoking a cigar at his desk and wanted assurance that Larry did not wet the bed. He passed the interview. Larry was only supposed to come to camp for 2 weeks that first year, but had such a great time he persuaded his parents to let him stay for the full 7. Larry had 9 wonderful summers, 5 as a camper and 4 on staff.

When Larry first came to WEHC, he remembers seeing the layout and going to the Council Ring, which he described as the “Center of Gravity.” It was a great place to hang around. Then he discovered the waterfront and what seemed like an infinitely long walk up the inner path. “Everything seemed big.” Larry remembers some funny stories as a camper as well. “Our counselor Bobby Aisner took toothpaste and jumped on it and it squirted all over the bunk.”

What were those “firsts” that Larry learned at camp? “I learned to become a catcher, how to compete, coach, play ping pong (outside Gottlieb), waterski, eat fried clams (at Dalls), how to throw shot put on 4th of July, camaraderie and friendship.” Larry loved being a baseball catcher and enjoyed Leagues and Watermelon.

Larry grew up in Brookline, like many of his contemporaries such as Peter Nason, Peter Kaplan, Neal Beberman, Steve Rubin, Steve Lepler, and Steven Marcus. He played catcher on the Baseball team with Peter Nason at Brookline High. Before that, as campers, Larry and “Nase” were playing intercamp doubles at Robin Hood and they lost a match they should have won. Nason did not throw his racquet in disgust. Instead he unplucked every single string, one at a time in frustration.

Larry is most proud of the time he passed the Red Cross Senior Lifesaver Test. Jerry Feld was the head of the waterfront and a certified UDT (Underwater Demolition Team), which was the precursor to him joining the Navy Seals. Larry said, “Jerry could do 4 lengths (one side of the dock to the other) underwater.” (As someone who has seen 25 Color Wars, the most underwater swim lengths I’ve seen is about 1.5.) In order to pass the Sr. Lifesaver Test, Jerry swam to the middle of Long Pond and would pretend to drown and Larry had to drag him all the way back to shore. When Larry saw Jerry at a recent Old Timers Week and brought up the Lifesaver Test, Jerry was embarrassed by how far he pushed the kids back then. Larry disagreed and felt it was a great achievement. I asked Larry if there was a canoe or boat next to him during the test. The answer was “No.” It was a far different time and safety was not stressed like today.

Like many in that era, Larry’s favorite camp meal was the tuna fish and french fries. He also enjoyed Cake and Milk as a good time to mingle. One time Larry was at the local store in Cornish to get an Ice Cream Frappe. He asked for a Mocha Frappe and they did not know what that was. “Do you have coffee, vanilla, and chocolate?” A week or so later Larry returned to that store and he saw a sign “Introducing a new flavor, Mocha Frappe.” Some 30 years later, in 1996, Danny Walsh walked into the Kezar Falls House of Pizza and asked “Why don’t you make a Buffalo Chicken Calzone?” It has been a bestseller ever since. Larry Burrows and Danny Walsh, culinary pioneers of the Sacopee Valley region!

Many of Larry’s favorite memories were as a Color War coach. Larry coached on the Blue Archers, Great White Hope, White Olympians, and White Vikings. The Great White Hope were captained by menacing football legend, Mike Finn. Larry clearly remembers that Tug of War. They were losing and Mike was about to be pulled over the line. “Then he got possessed and pulled the entire team over the line.”

It was the 1971 Color War, Larry’s last, for which he has the fondest memories. As Head Coach of the White Vikings, Larry’s team was down the entire war to the Jan Singer coached Blue Comanches. “We were down 100 after 2 days, and 44 going into the last day.” The Vikings had to sweep the Omelette games and win Song Night by 15 or more to win. They swept the Omelettes and won Song Night by 20. It was the only time the White Vikings ever led the 1971 Color War. His captains were Ricky Schwartz and current Camp Director, Steve Lepler. “Leps was a tremendous competitor, great guy. I

enjoyed being around him. He always gave it his all.” Some 40 years later, Steve Lepler was still playing Watermelon Softball with the determination of Pete Rose.

During setup week of that last year, Larry was working on preparing the baseball diamonds. They needed to delineate the 1st and 3rd base lines and had a “bright idea.” He decided to pour a line of gasoline down each line and light a match to create a perfect line. “Needless to say, we caught the field on fire. I think we spent the first few weeks of camp with a dirt infield. Again, safety was not stressed like it is today.

Bill Margolin in that era was “a legend in the making.” Larry told a story of a recent Old Timers Week that exemplifies the level of respect Bill has earned from all generations. “A bunch of counselors were at the head table on their phones. Something came on the TV; it was a tribute video to Bill. The counselors watched the entire video and were glued to the screen.” Only Bill can get a teenager off a cell phone.

Larry credits camp for teaching him self-confidence, resilience, how to work hard, and a love of competition. “Being on my own, I really developed a level of confidence.” He made many great friends and “as soon as you get back with the guys, it’s the same.”

About 20 years ago, Larry was with his in-laws on vacation and convinced them to drive an hour and a half to camp. “We got to sit at the head table.” Larry remembers being in awe of the old timers that would visit and sit at the head table. He was now one of those guys. Around that time, Larry and his wife sent their godson, Perry Cosier, to camp from Alexandria, Virginia. Larry had gone to college with Perry’s father and thought it would be a great place for his friend’s child to go away for the summer. It was a wonderful escape and experience for Perry.

Two years ago Larry had a random camp sighting. He was in Manhattan at Penn Station and heard someone in front of him needing a ticket exchange for what seemed like a major mistake. He overheard the conversation and was taken by the kind way in which the unhappy customer said “I know you aren’t the bad guy; you are doing your job.” It was Steve Dushan. Typical Dush, playing peacemaker. They hung out at the station, as if they were in the Council Ring, until one of them had to catch their train.

Larry ran a home building company in Washington DC and Seattle, WA. He then ran a global wood products company. After living in Seattle for 6 years, Larry is now retired. He and his wife Dawne live in Annapolis, Maryland. Each year, Larry sponsors a “Midshipman” at the US Naval Academy, as a host family. He has made lifelong friends with several of the students.

Larry Burrows wanted to dedicate something in honor of his Uncle Harry, the man who introduced him to the West End. In the Dining Hall, near the water fountain, there is a plaque on the wall that says “In memory of my uncle, Harry Borofsky. Who introduced me to The Spirit of the House -Larry Burrows.” The PA system next to it was Larry’s way of honoring his Uncle Harry for the gift of becoming a West Ender. That system is still used in the Mess Hall and fittingly in the Council Ring for evening activities, where Larry used to hang out and play Wiffleball. Larry continues to be very generous to the camp in many ways!

Being part of the West End House Camp family means being “part of a club, a brotherhood that means everything.” When Larry was first dating Dawne, she had no concept of why he would want to go back to Old Timers’ Week from so far away. For Larry, “It’s a fraternity, lifelong memories. It is where the fundamental building blocks were laid.” Thank you, Larry Burrows for “Remembering” West End with me. Like a good catcher, Larry is smart, selfless, and does not let anything get past him. Especially a Mocha Frappe.