

Remembering with Ryan Wilensky

"I was primed for camp!" Mike Paul first came to West End House Camp as a 9 year old in 1972 for 4 weeks. He and his 2 brothers were fulfilling the lifelong dream of their grandfather, Albert Hollander, who had always wanted to keep the family tradition of West End House Camp going. "Al" was great friends with "Lucky" Boorstein (Sid's father) and Judge Gargill (Michel and Bobby Eggert's grandfather), whose children and grandchildren kept their West End lineage alive. Mike's older brother Steve attended in 1970 and his younger brother Bradley attended in 1978. "Everything revolved around West End." His father owned "Marine Drug" on the corner of Commonwealth Ave. and Warren St., around the corner from the Club. When Mike and his brothers had to go in with him, they walked over to the club to shoot some hoops.

Mike's grandfather was very proud that his grandsons attended camp. Mike was a 6-year camper and spent 2 years on the staff. He came with a crew of friends from Randolph including Carl Leppo and Stephen "Harpo" Goldstein, who got his nickname for having similar hair to Harpo Marx. He became close friends with Ronnie Leppo, Mike Pons, Andy Chaban, Steve Shapiro, Peter Gosule, and Ronnie Klingsberg. He immediately fell in love with camp as Mike was very into the sports. "I was a sports nut." Mike's best sport was definitely Softball, which he coached in Color War for the Blue Cavalry. "We got slaughtered. We were outmanned." Mike had a 2-5 Color War record, only winning on the Blue Train and Blue Family.

Mike and his brothers did not like swimming. "None of us could get out of the shallow end. I had to wear a lifejacket in Waterpolo." One of Mike's favorite things about camp is the time honored/peculiar tradition of eating "Cake and Milk" before bedtime. "I couldn't wait for it. I still have dessert before bed."

Mike's favorite story was the time he and Carl Leppo thought it would be a funny prank to make an announcement over the loudspeaker for the fake "10 and under Rundown (Baseball Pickle) team tryouts." "We had 80 kids show up, had practices, posted the list of kids who made the team. This went on for weeks." They never did actually compete in an intercamp competition, of course. Some pranks are timeless. In 1997, some 20 years later, my friend, Steven Cohn, made a fake "17-Under Fly Fishing Team practice" announcement, to the utter confusion of the camps we were hosting for an intercamp tournament. And in recent years there having been "15 Under LARPing (Live Action Role Playing)" announcements as well.

Mike remembers admiring the staff when he was a camper. "Mike Finn, Reggie Bird, Peter Nason, Tank Sherman, I was in awe of them." Mike doesn't come to every Old Timers' Week because he is a horrible snorer and feels bad keeping people up. However, he does love coming every few years "seeing the people, reliving the good old days, it's a happy place. Everywhere brings back great memories."

Mike credits West End for teaching him the importance of loyalty. "I learned what friendship really was. If I don't see someone for 15 years, then run into them, it's like we were never apart." Mike renewed many of his friendships with his West End pals, in an unexpected place, Camp Pembroke (for girls). "Everyone at West End who had daughters, ended up at Camp Pembroke." Johnny Stoller, Bobby Ryter, Carl Leppo, Neil Shrier, Michael Ashley, John Zinman, Todd Gosule, Doug Andler and Lee Rappaport's daughter(s) all went to Pembroke. Too bad the current West End House Girls Camp was not around in that era!

Mike and his wife raised their 2 daughters in Stoughton, where they live now (and where I am from). His older daughter Erika, who is at UNH studying to be a social worker, won a Stoughton High School scholarship in memory of one of my best friends who passed away 11 years ago. West End is a small world. Mike called me to thank me for helping choose her, but I had to point out that the committee was comprised of 12 people and while I voted for her solely on her merits, I had nothing to do with her winning. Mike's younger daughter, Brittni is a senior in high school and is applying to nursing schools this year.

As with most "of the boys," fellow Randolph native, Bill Margolin has had a major influence on his life. "When you think of West End, you think of Bill Margolin. He knew my parents, family, uncles, grandparents. He wrote my college recommendation; he probably wrote thousands of them. I can't find 1 person who doesn't like Bill. If I could be half the man he is, I'd be okay." Amen Mike!

His continued affiliation with West End is Mike Paul's way of paying homage to his grandfather and his entire family. "My uncle brought Vinny Migliore (comedian/restaurant owner) to camp; they were friends." Mike mentioned if he ever has grandsons, that he would be working on getting them to camp from an early age. "Keep it in the family." Thank you, Mike Paul for "Remembering" West End with me. And for our current campers in the 5s, "Attention, Attention, there will be a 10 under Duck Duck Goose Team practice meeting on the Rec Hall steps after 2nd activity period."