

The Wildcat

For as long as I can remember I've been forgetting and losing things: big things, little things, watches, coats, sweaters, books, credit cards, and eighteen-month-old children. Fortunately, I later found my little boy. Actually, someone else did. I didn't even know he was lost. One of my prized possessions that I lost was my high school senior ring. Then the wedding band for wife number one, lost. Then wife number one herself, lost. Wedding band for wife number two, also lost.

Another prized possession was my high school annual, or yearbook—fifty years lost.

At the time that I lost wife number one I owned a lot of stuff but the judge awarded almost all my stuff to her. The house, the car, the furniture, the chess set, the *Wildcat*. No, not our pet feline, just the aforementioned yearbook—the 1957 *North Little Rock High School Wildcat*. Wife number did get the pet feline.

Years later, she returned the 1957 *Wildcat*. At least I now have that again. And the memories it conveys. But then I remembered that those memories weren't all that memorable. Now I remember why I had lost the damn thing in the first place. I never wanted to open that yearbook again. Wife number one knew that. *She* has a *good* memory. That's why she returned it.

Yesterday, I opened it. The blank flyleaf is a very special part of a yearbook. That is the space often reserved for one's dearest friend, of the opposite gender, to write his/her most private intimate feelings about you. I presented the *Wildcat* to Carolyn Harper and told her that I had saved that space especially for her. There Carolyn emptied her heart. She told me how much she ...*liked* me. That I was nice, and sweet, and cute. And a good speller. She wrote that if I stayed nice and sweet that God would reward me with life's greatest blessings.

Hated that entry. Still do. Didn't want to be remembered by Carolyn as nice and sweet and cute.

We had met in Study Hall Room 2 at North Little Rock High School in 1956. It was the beginning of my senior year. She was a junior. She was beautiful. She had shiny, jet-black, Audrey Hepburn hair, soft blue eyes, rosy lips, and...and...but I stray. She sat in front of me. I knew she would never talk to the likes of *me*. She would be too stuck up. Like all beautiful girls. But she wasn't stuck up, maybe because she was a bad speller. But she was *nice* and *sweet* and *cute* and God had already rewarded *her* with life's greatest blessings.

Despite what she said, I was not cute. Words fail me in attempting to describe my physical attributes at that time. The word nerd had not yet been invented. My 120-pound frame, the horned-rimmed glasses that greatly magnified the size of my eyes, and the aluminum slide rule dangling from my belt were not indicative of the image I had *wished* to portray to lovely Carolyn—that of a sultry, untamed stallion.

I was confused. How does a seventeen-year-old, introverted boy behave around a beautiful other-worldly creature? That's when I noticed that Carolyn was not only pretty but she was uniquely

different than the others in study-hall. She actually *studied*. So did I! I was encouraged. Perhaps we had something very special in common! Something upon which to build a meaningful relationship! I hastened to inform her that I was...a good speller. In my nervousness, that's all that came to mind. I can't remember just how the subject had come up in such a hormone-charged atmosphere in study-hall in the fifties, but it did. I was, nevertheless, an opportunist and now deeply *in love*. She, however, was only *in like*. I needed something to close the gap.

Fortuitously, I further learned that Carolyn was a Bible-thumping Baptist. She attended church every Sunday. She had even been saved! Heavenly Father had just given me the sign I needed. An opening. I pounced. I informed the object of my affection that *I* was a Mormon, quickly adding that I didn't smoke or drink anything alcoholic, had never consumed neither tea nor coffee, that I didn't talk nasty and that I obeyed all the ten commandments—including that of chastity. She was apparently impressed. I could tell by the little smile dancing uncontrollably on her pretty lips. Or it may have been suppressed laughter.

By such cunning and clever maneuvering, I felt I had slowly gained Carolyn's confidence. Would I now be capable of taking our budding relationship to the next level? By asking a girl for something I had never asked a girl for before? A date!

I think she may have had an inkling of where I was headed. She blurted out that she had a boyfriend! A sailor, for God's sake! A wayward one who didn't attend church and hadn't been saved! That information was a bit non sequitur. Why was she sharing that unwelcome information? Perhaps she had decided it was time to move on from the sinning reprobate? The sailor, she went on to inform me, kept telling her that he loved her, but she wasn't sure. She suspected that when he went to sea he may have cheated on her.

"Ralph, do you think he really loves me or is he just saying that?"

Of course, the Philistine was just saying that! I didn't want for her to be stuck with some ne'er-do-well, lying, cheating, slimeball SAILER as a boyfriend when she could just as well have someone, like me, whose garments were white as the driven snow. I would *never* cheat on my virtuous little Carolyn. On the other hand, what did she mean by saying he was *cheating* on her? Had she and the sailor themselves...did that mean that they had actually....? Did she need to be saved again?

"Well, Carolyn, if you have those questions and doubts there is probably a very good reason for your concern."

"Do you really think so, Ralph?"

"Yes, Carolyn. I do. Definitely!"

Carolyn then dumped the sailor! Halleluyah! But he was quickly replaced by someone else. A marine I believe it was. Someone again not *nice* and not *sweet*, and not *cute*. Someone *nasty*, who couldn't spell and whom God would most certainly *not* reward with His greatest blessings.

Praise God that I never asked Carolyn, the *wildcat*, for that date!