

A black and white photograph of a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a dark tie. He is standing in front of a brick wall. The image has a slightly grainy texture and some light-colored scratches or marks on the right side.

Memories Of Mark

from West Side Stories

Jerry Waxman

Memories Of Mark – West Side Stories

[Please note: The creator of this booklet (Jerry Waxman, DBA Olameinu Publishing) recently was the victim of Financial Fraud, and had all his funds completely wiped out. As you may imagine, it is extremely difficult to reach out to friends and family for help. But this is rather urgent. Please consider helping out. You are much appreciated.]

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{Opening memory: A faint vision of a station wagon rolling along as distancing voices sing, “John Jacob Jingleheimerschmidt, that’s my name too....”}

[Another memory. Early early Monday morning, July 14, 1969]

In the dark of the morning, I can hear Dad talking on the telephone. I cannot hear the words, just his voice. I stay in bed a few more minutes. Then I get up. I get dressed. I go up toward the kitchen and I see that Mickey is ready. Dad comes down the stairs, still buttoning his shirt. He says to me, “Mickey and you will go to work without me today. Mickey can drive. I have to fly out to Seattle.”

[Hold this memory for later. I am not ready for it yet.]

[Backup to Saturday or Sunday, June 7 or 8, 1969 – They were happy times, they were confusing times. It was 1969.]

It was a weekend, and we did not have to go to work. Mickey and I had just started working at Hallmark in a special summer program. I don’t remember what department Mickey worked in. I was in outdoor maintenance – cutting grass. We had just completed our first week.

Even in that first week, we had a routine going. We all would get up early in the morning. Dad, Mickey, and I would get into the Volkswagen and drive along 95th Street to Stateline, head up to the Ward Parkway parking lot, cross the parking lot over to Ward Parkway, head north until somewhere we got onto Brookside Blvd., cut to the right just after passing Twin Oaks Apartments, go up Oak Street to about 45th, cross over to Gilham, and go north right up to about 26th where we’d find a way over to McGee for parking.

Half the time, I would drive, with my learner’s permit probably not exactly permitting me to drive on the Missouri side, Mickey in the back, and Dad in the instructor’s shotgun seat. Sometimes Mickey would drive.

Everybody in the extended family had a lot going on that summer. My family was moving out of the ranch house on Buena Vista up to Lindenhouse. We sold the ranch house to the first black family in the neighborhood. Apparently that did not sit too well with one of the neighbors, and Mom felt she needed to bring the neighbors some baked goods as a peace offering.

In the summer of 1969, Mickey was getting ready to go to college. A massive change for him, but I was too self-absorbed to pay it any attention.

At 16, I was just getting to know something about the culture of working people at Hallmark, while my hormones kept my mind thinking about Linda Brown, a girl I had met just before the end of the school year. Nothing ever came of this particular relationship. But I want to remind you – and me – how teenage love-infatuations can color your perceptions of life. Remember?

Remember how wonderful and awful the feelings can feel? Remember how intense colors and sounds can be. I mean 1969 the airwaves were filled with psychedelic music, soul music, bubblegum music, folk music, and the Moog Synthesizer had its own album. Hallmark Cards held a menagerie of art – not classic art – just art, like greeting card art, pop art, black-light art, weird art.

That's where I was at in the summer of 1969. All these new things were happening to me, and around me, and at me, while my hormones were having their own field days, and still I was expected to face life with a straight face.

So what does this all have to do with the weekend of June 7, 1969? First of all, it has to do with the whole summer of 1969 because it says something about my perceptions. And my perceptions matter, because I'm telling the story. Your perceptions matter, too, because you are beginning to remember things you haven't thought about or felt for 55 years.

Back to June 7 or 8, 1969. That afternoon we had a whole big family gathering in Prairie Village at the home of Irwin and Irma and the three little girls. It seems that Prairie Village had become the place for family gatherings. My memory may be off, but I think we celebrated an anniversary of Dave and Jane there. June 7th or 8th was also special. We gathered to celebrate Grandma's 75th birthday.

We were all inside the house. Everybody in position. Somebody from the Missouri side, or maybe Irwin himself, drove Grandma to Prairie Village. Very routine. When she walked in the door, we all made some noise, but I think she knew something was up. She was all smiles, seeing so many of her kids and grandkids all gathered in her honor.

But wait. The big surprise came when who should walk into the living room out of hiding? Lil and Iz Kupperberg. They had come all the way from Albany. Grandma was elated, just elated like we never saw before – or since.

[Forward to the summer of 1971 – Still evading the memories of July, 1969]

In the summer of 1971 Joel and I had jobs at Hallmark. Night shift. It was my third summer at Hallmark. It was Joel's first. We were both on the maintenance crew. He was buffing floors, and I was hauling trash.

We continued to use the same Volkswagen as Dad, Mickey, and I used in 1969. It was my car, more or less. I was about to give it up because once the summer was over, I was leaving home. I was going away to college, to the University of Washington. I had never been to Seattle before. I was so looking forward to seeing mountains and the Pacific Ocean, and to being on the West coast. I was so looking forward to being independent.

I don't remember exactly where Mickey was in the summer of 1971. Somewhat earlier in the year, he left college and went on his own little voyage. I think he was back in Lawrence by that summer. I'm pretty sure I saw him before I went to Seattle.

That summer Aunt Lillian and Uncle Izzy came in from Albany for a visit. I don't remember who they stayed with. Aunt Lillian had to stay in the hospital for a while. I don't remember why. I just remember going to the hospital to visit her.

Izzy was there. A couple others were there. Lillian was a bit groggy, but she was lucid. We talked. We talked about Broadway plays among other topics. I told her about my going to New York and Washington, D.C. earlier in the year on a field trip that included students from the Drama departments of two Shawnee Mission Schools. Izzy and Lillian enjoyed talking about Broadway plays, and music, and cultural things.

Then the discussion came around to my going off to college. Uncle Izzy asked me, "So what are you going to study, girls?" I didn't have an answer for that. Izzy continued with his uncly talk, "You know, there are lots of things to do – lots of activities, you know? That's how you get to know people."

I didn't have much to say about that, either. I didn't have much to say about anything, really. I was in the middle of pulling away from the family, going 2,000 miles away to be independent. But then, Aunt Lillian pulled me back in.

Aunt Lillian was quite sleepy. But she knew what she wanted to say. She very wearily closed her eyes and turned her head slightly to her right and said, "Just remember one thing . . .," and she drifted off to sleep.

I was stunned. I was absolutely stunned by my own ineptitude, and self-centeredness, and blockheadedness. From the time I sent an application to the University of Washington to that very moment in the hospital with Uncle Izzy and Aunt Lillian, I never thought about Mark being there. Way in the back of my mind, of course I knew, but Mark had nothing to do with my decision to go there. It was so far in the back of my mind that I didn't even realize how much pain my aunt and uncle were in just talking about my plans.

This part of the story is not so sad, though. All during the time I was at the University of Washington, Uncle Izzy and I wrote letters back and forth. About once a month we would exchange casual letters about what was going on in our lives. Sometimes he would talk about his Jerry (Jerry Kupperberg) or his oldest son, Larry. But we would never mention Mark.

The next summer, the summer of 1972, I told Izzy about my plans to do some traveling to California. He sent me the address and phone number of his brother Abe, in San Francisco. When I got to San Francisco, Abe was expecting me. So I got to stay with him a few days, and got acquainted with that part of the family. Still, nobody ever mentioned Mark.

In later years, I visited Albany on several occasions. I tried to spend equal time with both sides of my family, half the time with Lil and Iz, and half the time at my mother's Aunt Hilda's. I think I was on everybody's good side because I would just listen, and not say much.

One time, I was alone in the house with Lillian, not long after their house had been burglarized. Lillian talked a little about security issues, and what the police were doing. Then she said something about what was taken. If the burglars had taken jewelry or furniture or something of value, it was not evident in Lillian's discussion. The only thing she cared about were some pictures. A very distraught Lillian wondered, "What do they want with those?"

After a few moments of weeping, Lillian hugged me hard and kissed me on the cheek.

{“John Jacob Jingleheimerschmidt, that's my name too. . . .” }

In the dark of the morning, I can hear Dad talking on the telephone. I cannot hear the words, just his voice. I stay in bed a few more minutes. Then I get up. I get dressed. I go up toward the kitchen and I see that Mickey is ready. Dad comes down the stairs, still buttoning his shirt. He says to me, “Mickey and you will go to work without me today. Mickey can drive. I have to fly out to Seattle.”

[Early early Monday morning, July 14, 1969]

[I got this memory started again. I'd better let it run.]

“Do you have business in Seattle?” I asked.

Dad measured his words, and I could see that Mom was holding back tears in the background.

“Apparently your cousin, Mark, was in an accident. A mountain climbing accident.”

“Is he okay?”

“Apparently he was killed.”

{**Go to black. Go to black.** Everything from that moment to the second I got in the car with Mickey is a blur. There was some talk of having to keep an eye on Izzy, with his condition. But it's all a blur.}

Mickey drove, and I sat shotgun in the Volkswagen. Mickey, of course, would never break. So I couldn't break, either. We were men. Men don't break.

The whole drive from Overland Park to Hallmark Cards in Kansas City was in complete silence. Not one word. Not a single word from Mickey, and not a single word from me. Complete silence. That's what Mickey, my big brother, did for me. He stayed quiet so he could pretend he did not notice me breaking.

I turned my head away and pretended to look out the window. I was sixteen years old, and I think my hormones were giving me some slack. They turned off all the love-infatuations and introduced me to a new rite of passage. Pain.

When you tighten up, the pain is worse. When you loosen up, it's less.

I loosened up and allowed memories of my cousin to play in my mind. He was my favorite cousin. Probably everybody's favorite cousin. He was my friend when I had no other friends.

One time, when I was about 8 or 9 years old, in Nebraska, I came home from school a little bit excited. Grandma was coming to visit, and she would be there when I got home. I got off the bus, walked to the house, and as soon as I opened the front door, sure enough I could smell baking and cooking coming from the kitchen.

I walked toward the kitchen, but before I got there, very suddenly and surprisingly I saw Mark sitting in a chair. In half-a-second after I noticed him, he stared at me straight between the eyes, stuck out his tongue, and did a quick raspberry. Have you ever been greeted like that by a favorite cousin you weren't expecting to see?

Another time, Mark was traveling with us. I don't remember where we went, but there was a museum. It was kind of a strange museum with movable parts. For example, it had one or two player pianos. I wandered around with Mark. He never made me think he didn't want me hanging around him. He came to a little machine that cost 10 cents to operate.

I had no idea what the machine was. And I think Mark didn't know what the machine did before he put in a dime. He looked into a viewer while he turned the crank. Then he said, "Hey, come look at this." When you turn the crank, you see a series of pictures of a dancing lady creating the illusion of motion, like a motion picture.

He went to another little machine that had no explanation, and this one cost a nickel. He turned a little knob and peanuts flowed out. Mark grabbed my hand to catch the peanuts. I imagine the peanuts had been in that machine a long time and were pretty old. Still, I was moved that he would share them with me after using his own nickel.

Our family moved around, and we never really got to spend much time with any of our cousins, let alone the Kupperbergs, who lived so far away, and were so much older than us. Just the same, I always liked it when Mark was around. I can't imagine anybody not liking it when Mark was around.

The Best Days

The picture you see here was taken in 1964 at Mickey's Bar Mitzvah. I imagine Mark was about 20 years old at the time. I don't know where he was living, or what he was up to, but he took the time to come to Chicago to be part of this historic family event. And he was in the group photo with us kids, his cousins, not with the adults.

Those were good days. I think of Mickey's bar mitzvah as a milestone event because, as far as I know, it was the last time so many folks from the same two families got together, flocking from different corners of the country, to put together an event like this. We provided our own food, and our own entertainment. No caterers so far as I know. No hotels either. I am so happy today that Mark was there to be a part of that.

A year later, in 1965, that's when I got to know Mark the best. It was also the last time I saw him.

Here's how that came about:

In 1965, many months before we moved to Puerto Rico, Mickey got sick. He always had problems. He always had to take medicine for something. But this time he was really sick. I remember us all riding in a car and Mickey hunched over in the back seat with a blanket over him, and he complained about being cold. It was shocking. Mickey never complained about anything. So something must have really scared him.

I don't recall all the events of that time period. But I know that Mom and Dad took Mickey to doctors many times.

One day, Aunt Jane (Waxman) came to Illinois by train. I don't know why, exactly, but I suppose she was on her way to or from Michigan. I don't even remember Jane staying with us for any amount of time. What I do remember was that Jane took one look at Mickey, said he had pneumonia, and the next thing we knew, Mickey was back in Kansas City in a hospital.

A whole whirlwind of events happened in 1965. We were moving to Puerto Rico. With Mickey's extended hospitalization and therapy, the family left Illinois and took up temporary residence in Kansas City. As this stay was running into the summer months, I imagine our family might have represented an imposition on the Kansas City relatives. Our cousins had their own schedules, their own camps to attend, and we might just be a nuisance, hanging around all day every day.

We ended up getting the best deal: We ended up staying for many days at the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ) at a local military base. It was probably Richard Gebauers, but I'm not certain. For many days, Joel and I shared a room, while Dad and Mom and Dael stayed in another room. It was absolutely one of the best times for me. The BOQ was tidy and had good solid beds and everything. The swimming pool was practically right outside the door. There was a pool table in the building. There was a snack bar and a diner – of course not very useful when we had no money.

We were free. We didn't see our Kansas City cousins but once a week, maybe. A few times we got to see Mickey, and sometimes even took him out of the hospital. But staying at the base was great. I went to the swimming pool every day. I read comic books and paperbacks. And I got to spend time with my cousin Mark.

Yeah, I forgot to mention that part. Mark had a room at the BOQ, too. He went to the pool every day, too. When we went someplace as a family, Mark came with us. It was really cool, because I was 12 years old, and Mark was comfortable talking guy talk with me. When he needed to use a restroom, he would say, "I've gotta take a leak." Occasionally, he might see a girl and comment on her apparel.

In the car, Dad asked Mark how he liked the pool. “Well there is a girl I’ve been watching. She wears an interesting bathing suit.”

“How’s the water?”

“The water’s good.”

“How about the diving board?”

“She used the diving board, too.”

Mark knew all the folk songs – like songs people sing at camp. He taught me some of them. He taught me, “She waded in the water,” and “John Jacob Jingleheimerschmidt.” and some others. And Mark had a whole slew of knock-knock jokes. He got me on the first one.

Mark: “Hey, you want to hear a knock knock joke?”

Me: “Yeah, sure.”

Mark: “Okay, start it off.”

Me: “Knock Knock”

Mark: “Who’s there?”

Me: ???

That was the last time I saw Mark. We moved to Puerto Rico. When we came back three years later, Mark was in Seattle.

The Rainier Connection

I don’t think I ever told anybody this story. I don’t think I’ve ever had an opportunity to tell this story, especially since we never talk about Mark.

One day, I think it might have been in 1971 before I left for college, Uncle Izzy bought a nice, wooden chair and brought it to Lindenhouse as a gift for my dad. What did my dad do, exactly? If you remember, my dad was called on Monday, the 14th of July, and went to Seattle that day. Obviously, since the call came early that morning, the accident must have happened a day earlier, on Sunday, the 13th of July. What I heard was that when Dad arrived in Seattle, on the 14th of July, the bodies had not yet been recovered. They were still up on the mountain.

I don't know who else was in Seattle with my father. I don't know if anyone else from the family went there with him, or who, if anyone, went there with Izzy, from New York. But here is what I believe happened:

When there is an emergency like this, nobody can say they have a lot of experience and they can handle it. My father never said anything like that. He would just take charge and figure things out as he went along. So, I imagine that Dad took charge of whatever he could take charge of, kept Izzy calm however much he could, and assigned himself the duty of escorting the body back to Albany.

To us it may not seem like an awful lot. But if you put yourself in the shoes of a man who just lost a son, there is no end to the gratitude.

Now, my unique story

In 1972, still in my first year at the University of Washington, I became good friends with a guy in my dormitory named Pete Olds. Pete was from the outskirts of Seattle and was the oldest of a bunch of brothers and sisters.

At the end of the spring semester, hearing that I had no place to go, Pete brought me to stay at his parents' house. They welcomed me to their family, and I did things with them.

One day, I was on a call with my dad and mom, and they wanted to know what I was up to. I told my dad that I was planning to go up to Mount Rainier with my friends. There was a pause, and then Dad said, "Jerry, I don't want you going up there."

There was another pause and then I said, *“Dad, we’re going by car, not by foot.”*

My parents were relieved that I was going by car, of course, but the initial fear made me think.

Pete Olds asked me what my father had said. So I told him about his reservations about me going up to Mt. Rainier. I also told him about my cousin who had an accident up there.

At that point Pete and his father sat me down. And they said, “Jerry, we were there. We were on that expedition when your cousin had the accident. We didn’t know your cousin, but we were there.”

Pete and his father continued, “We were in a party ahead of your cousin. We were on the descent. At one point we heard guys yelling behind us. We looked around and we saw them sliding down the glacier. Two guys went over into a cravasse, but the third guy didn’t go over. He survived.”

“We went back up to help with the rescue. That was a pretty long day and night. When the bodies were recovered, our party carried one of them down the mountain.”

I didn’t say anything. All these years, I’ve wondered if I should’ve said thank-you, or something. But I didn’t say anything. I just got my coat and got ready to go with them, in a car, up to Mt. Rainier. And I will tell you, there was nothing really special about that trip. I mean, I like nature and mountains, and everybody enjoyed the car ride up and down the mountain. But I’ve been on similar trips up mountains, and I don’t have any special memories about going up Mt. Rainier – except one.

I don’t know how to say this. I don’t even think there is any way it makes sense. Maybe it doesn’t have to make sense. Here it is:

It was pleasing to know that Mark was there with the same people I was with.

Memories Of Mark

Mark Kupperberg's 55th Yahrzeit. We lost our favorite cousin 55 years ago. And then we never talked about it. We never talked about him. Why? This little collection of memories is not only about Mark, but also about us. About the time period, and what was going on with us in 1969.

