



My Summer With The Beatles  
A True Story, Mostly

9459 words

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*The thing always happens that you  
really believe in; and the belief in a  
thing makes it happen.*

*- Frank Lloyd Wright*

*A dream you dream alone is only a  
dream. A dream you dream together is  
reality.*

*-John Lennon*

## PROLOGUE

Belief is a life-changer. Once you experience its power and see it work, you'll no more do without it than oxygen or water. When an individual can believe so strongly that it actually can come true, that is power. When a group believes in the same outcome, look out. History is loaded with examples of small groups overcoming great odds. This is my story about belief. It's a story about 250 boys believing in something so strongly, it became true. "Faith can move mountains," Jesus said at the Sermon on the Mount and after the summer of '65, I learned the true nature of belief and faith as one huge mountain was moved. For in that summer, against all odds, the Beatles arrived at my Scout camp and performed a private concert, just for us. We believed and it happened.

1.

The summer of 1965 started off hot. Late June saw the hottest day of the year in our small village just north of New York City and a drought with water shortages was in the news. For my parents that might have been the news. The headlines for me and the boys were that *Ticket To Ride* hit number one on all the radio stations, *Help!* was soon to be released and the Beatles were coming to America again. The summer, and the year, were more or less divided into Beatle segments. Winter was *I Feel Fine* and *Beatles 65*. Then *Eight Days A Week* was #1 by March. *Help!* was on every radio station in anticipation for the fall release of the film. Then *Beatles VI* hit the stores by June. And this is not including their busy recording schedule where they would finish *Yesterday*, *Act Naturally* and most of *Rubber Soul*. But we never saw behind the curtain. All we knew was their music - the LP's, to have and to hold, and to play endlessly. And playing endlessly, stacked on our record changers were all five: *Meet The Beatles*, *Beatles 2nd*, *Introducing The Beatles*, *A Hard Days Night* and *Beatles '65*. Endlessly.

The films and newsreels from then, with the screaming, crying, fainting girls, can hardly show that feeling we all shared, boy and girl alike. They fainted and cried but we boys understood why. Our hearts leapt with theirs when we

heard them on an interview or saw them on TV. Being a teenager my insides were all askew anyway. Add to this the indescribable feeling of indentifying with them and you start to get to the beginnings of Beatlemania. They talked for us. They spoke to us. They sounded like we wanted to sound. All we had were twelve-inch square album covers with the vinyl record inside and we read and listened, and poured over and listened, and gazed and listened some more.

*As it turned out their manager, Brian Epstein, knew this. The four of them didn't understand. Not yet, but their manager was way ahead of the curve. He had already gotten them on the Ed Sullivan Show the year before and scattered performances around the country. By April of 1964 they owned the top five spots in Billboard's Top 100, with twelve in the top 80. They were breaking records and molds everyday. So when impresario Sid Bernstein made his first inquiry about booking them in an outdoor arena, Brian Epstein was receptive. When he was 21, Elvis filled the Cotton Bowl in Dallas in 1956 with 27,000, the record at the time. So the thought of doubling that figure was a calculated risk Brian and Sid would take.*

2.

It was a curious time to be fourteen. We were too young to drive but old enough to be left on our own. As long as we did our homework and stayed generally out of trouble, newly minted teenagers could have a lot of freedom in our little village of Port Chester. The War in Vietnam was still a far-off worry. We were the generation who witnessed the Kennedy assassination in real time as we also watched the space race. We knew each of the Mercury 7 astronauts by name and had posters of them on our walls. We had just visited the World's Fair in Flushing and been awed by its measurement of humanity's recent accomplishments and, more importantly, mesmerized by its description of the what was next, on rides like *Futurama*.

There was no pressure to work, just yet, but some us caddied at the many neighboring golf courses. The spare money from these "loops" went for bicycle adornments, firecrackers, comic books, and records - and most of those records were the Beatles. For sure, I also loved the Kinks and the Stones and the folksiness of Donovan and Simon and Garfunkel but Beatlemania had a hold on me and as they grew, so, it seems did I. And while I had no clue as to what was really happening with them, little did I know in

June that by mid-August, through a series of fateful coincidences, our paths would cross at of all places, our Scout camp nestled in the foothills of the Berkshires.

When I was ten, my uncle had bestowed upon me his *Handbook for Boys*, an early Scout manual from the forties. I fell in love with the world it envisioned, one of unity with the forest through Indian lore and campcraft skills. It answered many questions about life that a 14 year old needed. You know, important things like tracking the snow hare and beaver in winter...and lashing together a monkey bridge to ford a rushing river. And never forget the all-important "how to treat snake bite" in the desert. After pestering my parents for most of my tenth year (admission was only for eleven year-olds and up) with their blessings I joined Troop 11 and I was soon immersed in everything Boy Scout and I loved every bit of it.

We baby boomers helped the Boy Scouts of America enjoy a monstrous leap in membership in the early sixties. When I walked into Our Lady of Mercy's school basement, the troop was overflowing with kids from all over town. I was an outgoing lad and a quick study. Soon I had buddies of my own, and we palled around even out of Scouting. Dennis

and Fitz lived a block from each other in a development on the outskirts of town. Ferrara lived several miles the opposite way. His first name was John but in teenager land, he was dubbed Ferrara and I, Cassone. Our common denominator besides the Scouts was music. And this year the four of us would spend another summer vacation away at Camp Siwanoy together.

### 3.

Camp Siwanoy. Just the name invokes such rich images for me now. Warm summer days filled with the smell of freshly mowed timothy grass, the organic smell of the water from the lake, wood fires wafting in every breeze. And the sounds, static-filled announcements over the camp-wide PA, roars from distant campsites signaling some super activity, and the sounds of kids - kids my age every one of whom had no other responsibilities save those that gave the camp its regimental order. Bugles announced all our movements: Reveille for the morning and Retreat for the evening flag ceremony. Bugles allowed us to run to meals and then to enter the dining hall and bugles lulled us to sleep with an echo-y Taps played through the camp PA. They punctuated an already busy day into manageable segments and we all obeyed

them. Actually most of us loved the discipline and even worked extra hard practicing our marching drills as a unit before we stomped onto the Retreat grounds every evening. When we weren't marching or cleaning, our days were filled with advancement - classes in Scoutcraft that most loved anyway but would yield merit badges and rank achievement. And our nights were filled with campfires, old movies, skits and shows.

Much of this occurred at the center of all our camp life, the Rec Hall, one long complex teeming with action all day long. Surrounded with massive protecting oaks whose shade made the hall a refuge on hot summer days, it was perched at the end of a camp plateau with one side facing the on-coming scout traffic while the other gave a majestic view of the lake below. Some days I would forego the endless ping pong games and just sit on the old dark-brown timbered benches reeking of creosote that lined the perimeter, polished smooth by a timeless line of scout pants before me. I'd sit and look out at the waterfront bustle hundreds of feet below and watch little scouts work their way up the long and winding rock staircase, like little ants coming and going from the nest. And at night, the hall turned into our own theater, with shows about Indians, boxing matches, and every week a repeat of one of

three 16mm films: *The Guns of Navarone*, *Gunfight at The OK Corral*, and *Cat Ballou*. We knew the plots if not most lines, by heart.

By 1965, I had been to Siwanoy three times and was more or less a veteran but I still hadn't crossed over from young and innocent. Not quite yet. Girls, cars and booze were soon to hit my radar but that summer I was still thankfully immune and pleasantly naive. In early January we were already making our summer plans and by plans, I mean, we were deciding who was sleeping in whose tent during which week. The camp was divided into "tribes" based on your locale and Port Chester was the Seminoles. Never mind that they were indigenous to Florida, the Seminoles we were and we knew every inch of that area as it was ideally situated in the camp, close to the Rec Hall and the path to the lake. Eight tents erected on wooden platforms in a semi-circle around the counselors' cabin, an eight-sided shack-on-stilts dubbed the Bird House.

*And as we plotted, schemed and jockeyed for the best camping position, little did any of us know that Sid Bernstein was making the famous phone call to London. To Brian Epstein. The previous October, Bernstein had proposed a "pop" concert at the brand new Shea Stadium*

*with the Beatles as headliners. They had a successful Carnegie Hall show from the previous February under their belts and the Beatles' stock was rocketing up the charts. The staff at Shea had misgivings that many of the 55,600 seats could all be sold. But on that January call to manager Epstein, they struck a deal. The Beatles would get an absolutely unheard of payday of \$160,000 for a thirty minute set. The show would be Sunday, August 15, 1965 and kick off their second US tour. They would fly over several days before and tape an Ed Sullivan Show. With Saturday night free...*

*A perfect storm was brewing.*

#### 4.

So the four of us, Fitz, Denny, Ferrara and myself, all veterans of at least two summers, chose Tent 4: easy access to the "larry" trail yet it backed up against dense woods for shade and subterfuge. And as last summer proved, there were Beatles fans in "The Chateau," a nearby staff cabin. They played *A Hard Day's Night* incessantly, much to all our delight. Our first summers away were only for a two week

stint, a period, fourth period being the most exciting. This year we all signed on for the final four weeks of camp. And it was sometime at dinner with about fifteen days of camp left, when the announcement was made.

Clang...clang-clang...CLANG. The Bell was rung at the front of the dining hall and for all in the immediate vicinity that meant immediate silence. The large brass bell was actually stepped upon, almost like kick-starting a motorcycle. The Bell, as it was called, had the necessary frequencies to cut through the din of several hundred boys' chatter. As Activity Director, Dom Caruso, was kicking the bell with his heel, Fitz made fun of his old, brown shoes that he wore day and night. "The guy musta had polio - that's who wears those shoes," he mocked under his breath. We all cracked up but our counselor, Nate, didn't find the humor in it. He had a little bit of boot camp captain in him. "'Nuther wise ass remark like that and someone's doing push ups all morning." Fitz shrunk between Ferrara and me.

CLANG...clang. Caruso grabbed the mike and took the floor up front near the swinging kitchen doors. "For those of you who have not yet signed up for the fourth period, there is still time." Jeez, it was a lousy commercial. "Yes, indeed. You don't want to miss the excitement of the

fourth and final period up here at beautiful Camp Siwanoy. Excitement like: the World Famous (he paused for effect) THUNDER-BIRD GAMES!" Peals of screaming and cheering erupted in the hall with some tables thumping their benches for effect. CLANG-clang. "Simmer down, Scouts...simmer down. Because there's one more important attraction awaiting you all in fourth period...this year's ...STAFF SHOW!" More screams but by now, we were screaming mostly because we can, and several glasses each of that sugary red "bug juice" was starting to kick in. "Yes, the Staff Show," Caruso, was sounding more like a circus barker now. "The show that ends it all and no one dare misses, because this year...this year we have..."

"*The One Armed Brakeman*," screamed a junior staffer from the side, a planted shill. More screams. The scariest of scout stories told by "Sarge" Sullivan to such effect that more than half the camp would go to sleep that night with a lit flashlight in their sleeping bags. Campfire ghost stories as they should be told.

"And we also have..."

"Bob Clarke!" Yeow, that one touched off some mania. Bob Clarke was a Scoutmaster from Mamaroneck who looked and acted like any other dad on duty except for one serious

difference. Bob Clarke was an artist and one of the "usual gang of idiots" with MAD. As in Magazine. As in the *Spy vs. Spy* Bob Clarke. Anyone who worked on MAD was a star in our eyes. Affable Scoutmaster Clarke loved the spotlight and would get up and entertain a camp full of hyperactive kids with just a Sharpie and his wit, usually drawing caricatures of kids he called up from the audience. And we loved it.

"And for those of you who have already signed up, you are in for the show of your life. You others on the fence, well you won't be on there for long, because to cap off the 1965 Camp Siwanoy Staff Show this year's special guests will be flown in from New York City by a special Marine Corps Helicopter." The murmurs were starting but what, some thought just could not be true. "And they will land on the athletic field after their taping of their second appearance on the ED SULLIVAN Show, and the day after they will play a concert before 55 thousand at the Mets' new Shea Stadium..." The spring was wound tight and ready to burst. "Yes, Scouts, appearing on our humble stage, right here in the Rec Hall on the evening of Saturday, August 14, would be none other..." It can't be, Ferrara mouthed to me. "...than..." The entire dining hall inhaled at once and held its collective breath.

"...the BEATLES!"

Absolute insanity took over. Benches were pounded. Cheers were chanted. Mere applause wasn't enough. Kids were screaming with their arms waving like some whirling dervish ceremony or something. The bell clanged on but no one heard it and the counselors were rather enjoying the camp-wide spasm that was taking place.

"I know, I know, it sounds too good to be true." Caruso was yelling into the overworked sound system, cupping the old Turner mike with both hands. "But just understand this: Someone way high up in the Scouts called in a favor and you better believe it's happening. Now, they won't be here for long, just several songs but WE - GOT - THE - BEATLES!"

Cataclysm. Earth-shaking, roaring cataclysm.

5.

At breakfast I sat next to Ferrara and during pancakes and sausages, I looked at him. I was still in dreamland from

last night's announcement. But the world didn't stop spinning this morning and hardly anyone remarked about it.

"What?" he demanded, scarfing down more butter and syrup than his little piece of pancake could absorb.

"You know what." I was determined to draw this into a discussion. "I mean, last night. Is it on the level?" The rest of the table hushed, waiting for Ferrara's reply, as that would be the cue to believe or not.

"You heard him, our great leader. He said it. The Marines are in on it also. Gotta be real."

Smiles all around and the table broke out into small caucusing discussions filled mostly with unanswered questions. How could they find the time? Why, in the whole country, our camp? And the biggie: Do you think we'll get to meet them?

Good, I thought. They are all believing as much as I. That's a good sign.

We scattered after breakfast and I stumbled out onto the parade grounds still processing last night's momentous announcement. I needed some advice, some wisdom, some sane

adult observation of the situation. Old Sarge is always good for a chat so I made it over to the Craft Lodge to keep myself busy and to ask the old codger what he thought.

6.

The Craft Lodge was where the quintessential leather wallets were stitched for Dad. Where the little baskets were woven for Mom. And where they actually gave us razor-sharp knives to carve skull-shaped neckerchief slides, which was my latest project.

The work benches wrapped around its L-shaped interior with all manner of tools hanging from the pegboard on the walls. I loved the smell it had: a combination of fresh paint, turpentine, leather and sawdust. Oh, and it had a large bomb hanging from the ceiling near the door. The story was that it was a 100 pound dud from World War 2 that they paint a bright color every spring so it's layer-upon-layer of paint has made it something of a marvel. And, yes, it was empty - all the better to resound with a loud clang when it was hammered with a wooded mallet. For woe to those who were stuck in the lodge when it was bonged

because that meant the door was bolted and all Scouts inside must clean the benches and tools.

The place was relatively empty so I found a spot and waited for Sarge to make his rounds to check on me. Ol' Sarge Sullivan was a rusty antique - a gunnery sergeant in Korea who saw real action. Just ask him. He'd be glad to tell you all the details. But his talent lay in the way he could determine who was in need of more than just arts 'n' crafts advice. He was part father confessor and part great uncle with a little best friend in there for good luck. Just the guy I needed to hear from - a warm Irishman with bushy red hair with some flickers of grey flowing over the back of his collar, and his sinewy muscular arms all freckled-skinned under his Scout shirt.

"Hey, Scout!" he bellowed as I found a place at the work bench in the lodge. "Scout" was what he called everyone. It made it simple when he forgot your name. "What's the good word?"

"Well, Sarge," I paused my woodcarving, not wanting to sound like a disbeliever. "I'm all mixed up over the Staff Show next period."

"What? You're not registered? I can get you in if you need..."

I cut him off. "No, it's fine. I'm here til the end. It's just..."

He cocked an eyebrow as his understanding was like a heat-seeking missile. "So you're in a quandary, are you, Scout? You can't disbelieve and you want them to come but, God forbid, you don't believe and miss out on the excitement." I sighed one heavy exhale, yes. "Scout, what does your heart tell you?" He tightened one side of his mouth in a thought-provoking manner so that his walrus moustache highlighted that glint in his eye. He knew the answer and he knew I knew the answer. Clever bastard.

"The Scouts have never let me down before. Jeez, it's the first Scout Law...trustworthy." I was working it out for myself as I spoke. "They must know how much the Beatles mean to all of us." Sarge pushed his lower lip up and his walrus spoke volumes as it expanded. The guy could communicate with just his moustache and his eyes. "The Marines have landed a helicopter here every year I have been here. So that works for me. And my Dad had explained how loyal former Scouts are, even if they are old, like

you." I knew that would get a new facial expression out of him. "Yea. They are coming."

"Stranger things have happened." He just dropped that one out there for me to ponder as he leaned over the shoulder of another kid and checked his lanyard wrap. As he did, I could see some grey appearing in his sandy red hair. "Good barrel, Scout," he praised.

Don't leave me hanging, Sarge. "Like...?"

"Like that time, in the late fifties when President Eisenhower dropped by and inspected the troops during Retreat. Big deal. A BIG deal."

"Come on. Old Ike versus JohnPaulGeorgeandRingo?" It came out like one word. "No contest."

He parried back, "OK, Dion. Ever heard of him?"

"Come on." He was frustrating me. "Runaround Sue." Like it was an answer on a quiz show. I went into the beginning of the bridge, "Awwwwwww...She likes to travel around...yea..."

"OK, OK. But Dion was here, not to perform but to visit a cousin from Pelham."

"I thought you'd understand, Sarge," I responded, almost giving up. "This is different." I looked him in the eye. "It's hard to concentrate on First Aid and campcraft knowing that they are coming."

Old Sarge then showed me why he is so good at being him - just by making sense to this confused teenager. "What good is it to worry, Scout? Your worrying won't make a Pork Chop Hill of beans in the end. If they come or not, you will have blown the reason you came up here." He paused and drilled me, "Why did you come up here this summer? I'm sure it weren't to see no rock and roll."

I whittled a bit to collect my thoughts. "I couldn't miss Siwanoy. Everyone I know is here. And I couldn't miss the last two periods. They're the best. Everyone knows that." My exhale contained more sigh than breath. "But now, well, it's all tossed into a swirling pot and I'm all mixed up. You gotta understand...it's the Beatles he said are coming. You don't throw that around lightly."

That old red moustache wiggled back and forth a bit. I knew an answer was coming. "The way I see it, you got the Scouts which you love...and you got the Beatles who you love, all converging into one fantastic night. Best of both worlds." He's making some real sense now. "Scout, ole

buddy, you can't do nothin' about if they come or not. Outta your hands. Completely. So since you have a whole 'nother six days, whyn't you just be a Scout and concentrate on what's in front of you. That way, you'll at least enjoy summer camp since you're here and your parents spent all their money on getting you up here." A smile broke out on my face and that triggered one on his. "And you can start by watching that carvin' knife. Jeez, you almost took off a digit." Then he made me more of a believer. "Besides, I like 'em, too and I can't wait either."

I was a little calmer and that anxiety that was in my throat had subsided. And as I was just about to thank the old sergeant, in one smooth movement, seen only in some old ninja movies, he spun away from me and half way through his circular pirouette in the middle of the Lodge floor, one hand grabbed a wooden mallet, and as all eyes in the Lodge watched and knew they were way to late, he smacked that big old bomb shell so it bonged all over camp. "Ha ha, you rascals. Gotcha again!" He bolted the big wooden door shut, trapping us all in. The entire cabin sighed briefly and then got to work cleaning up the benches as it was almost lunch time. I actually was kind of happy to do my work this time. Strange how that happens.

7.

*When the Beatles played the famous first show of Ed Sullivan in February of 1964, Sid Bernstein had already set up a performance for them in Carnegie Hall. On a phone call and a promise. The Carnegie Hall box office was overrun with requests - thousands of kids, in the winter, waiting on line with blankets. It was the first of its kind. The box office guy said he could have sold a month of shows at two concerts a day. So Sid thought about the old Garden but Brian nixed it saying "Let's leave them wanting more." Not long after that, Sid had the idea to approach the new Shea Stadium, built as part of the World's Fair complex, for a show the next summer in 1965. The management there was extremely skeptical, but money would talk. The Mets would be on a West Coast swing so Sid would book it for Sunday, August 15. Part of the deal was 2000 security to control the crowd that the Shea people didn't think were coming. Sid, Brian and Ed Sullivan knew better. Sullivan had them come to his NY stage to pre-record a show for him on the*

*Saturday before Shea, at the start of their two week, sixteen show US tour.*

"Tent FOUR! You guys had better not hold us up again!" Nate bellowed from up in the Bird House. We had minutes before lining up for lunch and today's scuttlebutt as we got ready was about some kids from the Iroquois tribe up the hill. A handful of them supposedly found the Devil's Bathtub, an Elysian pool somewhere upstream on the river that feeds our lake. There have been only stories about it, more mythological than scientific and I personally have never met anyone who swam there. "Jenkins said the kids skipped breakfast and one of 'em even missed his parents," Dennis reported.

Ferrara offered, "I heard from the guy at the canteen that they were sliding down the rock tube nude!...It was that smooth." The story goes that over tens of thousands of years of the river flowing over the rock shelf upstream has scoured a perfect Scout-butt-sized slide that deposits one into a deep pool but it's all hidden and few have ever found it. Fitz poked me. "So? Are we going?"

I hadn't yet left the Sarge discussion and now they wanted me to plan some excursion to go swimming. Don't they

have their priorities straight? "Hmmm," I muttered. Fitz squared his shoulders and spun around on his cot so he was man-to-man. "Let me get this straight. We are talking DEVIL'S BATHTUB here. Actual witnesses can testify to its existence now. Something we've been dreaming about ever since we first heard of it in a campfire story three years ago." Fitz waved at my blank stare. "Hello! Anyone in there?"

All three of them took a break from their preening and neckerchief adjustments to await my response. I took Arturio's advice. "Devil's Bathtub. Sure. Wouldn't miss it. Let's go."

"That's the tent mate that I know," chirped Fitz. "We're all skipping our classes tomorrow, so clean your schedule and grab your trunks."

While I have dreamed of the finding the elusive aforementioned bathtub, a cold front in August always means thunderstorms and that was the forecast for most of the week. So I'd be off the hook and could get down to serious obsessing. I needed validation and my next order of business was to pay a visit to the staff counselors in the Chateau.

8.

The Chateau was nestled in the woodsy hillside adjacent to our camping area. Almost overgrown with sumac and barberry, it had the feel of a mountain resort, and all the cool counselors bunked there. More of a screened-porch dormitory than the French villa the name evoked, we all were attracted by its allure: the older guys lived there. And the unwritten law was common Scouts like us were to steer clear. Crazy stories of those who had wandered up there, only to be hazed by the staff for their transgression, were told and retold, often with the term "wedgies" attached.

*I Don't Want to Spoil The Party* was blaring and that was my signal to brave the perimeter and approach the Chateau. Since it was surrounded on three sides by briar patch and kudzu, and it was set back from the trail that meandered through our Seminole territory, its perch on the high ground put all who approached it on the defensive. I crossed into no man's land, up to the screen door and knocked.

"Who goes there?" a voice bellowed over the music which was pretty loud anyway.

"Uh, can I talk to you?" wimpy me uttered.

"Though tonight you made me sad...I-I-I Stillllll-lovvve-youu." Someone was singing along, top of his lungs. It had to be Lucas. He was the Beatle wannabe of the Chateau.

The door squeaked open but the sunlight outside made it impossible for me to see anything. The door remained open so I stepped in. "You sure are taking your life in your hands, Seminole. This better be good." It was Arturio, and he was the friendly one.

"I, I, I..." swallowing, I blurted, "I need your help."

"Sit," was all he said and as I settled into a wooden chair, Lucas flipped the record changer on the turntable and the arm rose from the chime-like 12 string intro to *Words of Love*, the final song on the side. Arturio and Lucas stood there waiting for the reason that they had to stop *Beatle VI* from finishing its side. Maffucci lay in bed, reading some comic book. Missing was the fourth staff member, Eagleton, the only one of the four who was actually earning his salary. It was my turn.

"You gotta understand that I am as big a Beatle fan as anyone around here and I do appreciate you blasting them down to our campsite. But...I can't sleep wondering about the..."

"...Staff Show?" Lucas finished. "Yea, we are all buzzing 'bout it too."

Arturio jumped in. "Buzzing? We can't wait anymore than you can, Scout. Are you kidding me? Them? Coming here? Crazy!"

"So you believe it will happen?" That was all I wanted to know - to get some votes in the plus column.

Lucas fired, "Maffuch has SEEN the paperwork! Marines, you know, the guys who fly up here twice a summer anyway, are clear for a Saturday night landing."

From his cot in the corner, Maffucci barked out the facts in agreement. "Four of 'em plus Epstein. Comin' up in a Huey. Forty minutes from the East River. It's happenin'. End of discussion." Well, that was as official as I was going to get. But did the other two buy it?

Frank Arturio was from my town. "Hey, my dad knows your dad. I see you in church. I wouldn't lie to you. This is the story: some old Scout dad who is filthy rich wants them to play for his kid who is up here this summer. He's ponying up some ungodly amount. I heard a hundred grand, but what do I know?" I stared at him, silent and blank. "You can believe me mainly because I want to see them just as badly as you do. Besides, what's the worry gonna get you anyway, Scout?" That's what Sarge said and what I needed to hear. "Now get outta here before the Eagle returns to his nest. He will tear you up if he finds you here."

"Yea, and us too," Maffucci added. Before the rickety screen door slammed behind me the searing opening of John and Paul resounded from the cabin and washed down over the Seminole tent area.

"Help! I need somebody..."

Again, their lyrics always said perfectly what I needed. I made it to my tent and flopped on the cot, the smell of musty canvas was blown away by the gentle afternoon breeze that was picking up. Rain was on the way.

*On April 10 Sid Bernstein called Brian Epstein while he was staying at NY's Waldorf Towers. He wanted to meet. At that meeting on Park Avenue, Sid gave Brian \$100,000 cash as a down payment for the Beatles' appearance at Shea Stadium in August. Brian was worried that "his boys" would play to empty seats so Sid cinched the deal. He guaranteed \$10 per empty seat. Epstein took the \$100,000 and they had no contract. Only a handshake. Two months later while we were getting out of 8<sup>th</sup> grade on June 20, the Beatles were starting a mini tour of France, Italy and Spain. Of course, this comes after recording most of Beatle VI and filming Help! So their second US tour would start with a taping of a future Ed Sullivan Show on August 14<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon and end by the early evening. Hmmm.*

The week mercifully slipped by for me with classes in canoeing and marksmanship. I needed those merit badges because I couldn't get them back home and if I was to make Eagle Scout this fall, I couldn't let up. Still, my mind wouldn't let it rest. Laying on my cot with tent flaps

rolled up, daydreaming, watching clouds roll by, I played out all the scenarios like little movies in my mind. My favorite had them asking me to sing with them on a song. And they liked that so much they invited themselves over to my tent after the show. "So this is what a scout camp is really like," said Paul in pure Liverpoolian as he stood in awe on my tent steps. "Look, boys, they got it better than we had it in Hamburg."

"Damn rats," said Ringo. "We lived in a basement next to a boiler for that whole winter."

"Grotty little creatures, if you ask me," chimed George. It was my chance to show him I understood "Mod" and answered, "Yea, grotesque." He broke out into that toothy George grin.

The tour guide in me came out, "Well, we have something worse." They all got quiet and stared. "Raccoons!"

"Ooh...they are a nasty lot," said John in agreement. "And that burglar mask makes 'em even scarier!" George and the others did a mock "Ooh, I'm scared," with their hands as John curled his fingers into circles over his eyes. That John, always the playful one.

Paul was the gracious guest. "Well, Chris, it's been a real adventure coming up here to play for all of you and get a taste of real outdoor living but we have a little show tomorrow and we must return."

John saluted, "Yes, the Marines await."

Ringo deadpanned as they all marched out of my tent, "Off we go, lads. No time for paradin'."

"We'll see you again, Chris...Chris?...Chris..."

I finally came back to earth and saw Ferrara at the tent pole. "Chris, what's up with you? You're like, drunk."

"Naw. I just woke up." And that was the truth.

"Cassonee, come with me up to the Ad building, OK?" Perfect timing to clear my head of these fever dreams. Whew.

We sauntered up the hill to the Administration Building, the hub of all camp activity and where the Director ran the show. Scouts flew in and out of the old log building like bees in a hive. There was a noticeable hum if you listened hard enough. I walked in with Ferrara simply to take in any random information that might

possibly help me with my belief about Saturday night's performance. Any doubt evaporated as the entire main office was wrapped with one long brown-paper sign, maybe 20 feet long and 3 feet wide. "Welcome Beatles" in huge letters of multicolor poster paint, obviously a Craft Lodge project. The plan was to hang it over the stage Saturday night. The junior leader behind the desk was in a Beatles wig with a giant "I Love Ringo" button on his Scout shirt as he attended to several younger boys.

Ferrara moved close to my ear. "Either this is a some complicated conspiracy or they really are coming. I'm going with the "really are coming" option." Then he walked up to the counter and bought some stamps. I kept processing it. On one hand, it didn't make sense. Why would they visit our little nothing camp in the middle of nowhere? But if this was real, I better get on board and quit the doubt because the whole camp is buying it. Ferrara got his stamps and we moved outside, both still affected by the scene we experienced. The mid August sun was beating down now that the rain was gone and we sought shade under a window near the pines at the end of the building.

We sat there watching a basketball game of two-on-two play out before us. We both had quit fighting. Inevitability was in the air. Then, the ring of a phone. The hard plastic click of the receiver. The "Hello". "Hi, Richard Heathermont here." We were under the Director's window, almost like spies but with no malice. "Yes, yes, we received full clearance for the copter's landing from the FAA. So we are a go?...Great!" Ferrara almost squealed but I put up my index finger to my lips in the international "shut up" signal. There was more. "OK, we can expect your boys after dinner, with a quick turn around. Good. We will roll out the red carpet. And, may I say, we are honored at your sacrifice. Honored."

Holy...

Ferrara was holding his hand over my mouth now as we both collapsed into a wrestle-like ball in the grass between the court and the building. We rolled away and he whispered, "You heard what I heard, right?" "Uh,huh." Our little joyous romp in the grass was interrupted by none other than Mr. Heathermont himself.

"Shouldn't you boys be getting ready for Retreat?"

"Uh, yes, Mr. Heathermont."

It was all downhill back to our area and Ferrara and I flew through the air with each bounding running leap. Like gazelles across the savannah, well ahead of the pride, we ran on pure joy as our hearts leapt with us. They'd be here tomorrow night. Twenty-four hours. We had to share it with Fitz and Denny. I took the stairs up onto the tent platform in one bounce, and almost took the tent pole with me. Denny and Fitz were almost dressed for Retreat and Ferrara and I were chattering like kids who just saw a UFO.

"It's happening!" Ferrara joined in with me. "Yea, it's happening!" We chanted together: "Happening. Happening. Happening." Then like magic we broke into "*This happened once before, when I came to yo' door...no reply-he-he-eye.*"

"What is wrong with you two jerks?" Fitz spurted. "C'mon. We got only minutes 'til the bugle."

10.

That evening at dinner, after the clanging of the bell, there was no official talk of the Staff Show- only of tomorrow's Thunderbird Games. Got to hand it to these staff guys. They stayed on message and kept us focused.

The Thunderbird was a wooden plaque that the winning tribe would mount upon their large rustic tribal sign at the entrance to their area reminding all who pass under it which tribe was superior. Huge bragging rights and a whole lot of fun in the process. But as we sat through the camp wide campfire after dinner, there was only buzzing about tomorrow night's guests. We had seen all the dumb skits before and, God knows, we couldn't sing the camp song one more time. So we all shared information, especially our Ad Building blockbuster, and waited for the only part of the evening that mattered - Sarge's storytelling.

The guy had this amazing ability to control the psyches of 250 teenagers for about 20 minutes with the most amazingly scary stories you could imagine. These were the days that you could still tell scary campfire stories and Sarge never disappointed. He had several super killer stories in his repertoire.

There was *The Windigo Walks*, an OK Indian scare-a-thon. *Blind Paul* was one that kept the younger Scouts up nights (about a maniac who blinds young scouts with blazing burning sticks.) Rumor has it, one year several Tenderfeet had to call their Mommies to pick them up. But the Pulitzer Scout Prize went to the tale that was the most

real and even scared us older veterans. Like a B vampire movie, if you accept its premise you will be scared shitless. Literally. *The One Armed Brakeman* worked on the nearby New York Central railroad and one day he saw some scouts playing on the tracks while a large engine was bearing down on them. He jumped from his nearby train onto the tracks and saved them but not before losing an arm under the wheels of the monstrous diesel. The story goes on about how he went mad because he lost his livelihood and was admitted into the nearby mental hospital, euphemistically called Wingdale. Who builds a Scout camp next to a psych ward? Actually it was several miles and one large mountain away but close enough to mean everything in the orange glow of a campfire.

"And after he broke out, he walks these hills...at night...looking for Scouts. And when he finds them...he pulls their right arm off in justification of his own injury...he's out there now...so keep on your watch as you return to your tents...and hold onto your right arms, Scouts."

We joked that Sarge had the "D" cell battery concession at the Canteen because every flashlight stayed lit all night after that story. But we had heard it, now

for the fourth time, and our minds and hearts were set on something else. "T minus 24 hours." And counting.

11.

*The Bell UH - 1E "Huey" helicopter was a mainstay in Vietnam that was starting to heat up half a world away. The Marines had their own version and one was parked at Floyd Bennett Field, just across Jamaica Bay from JFK Airport. Flying at a cruising speed of 125 mph, it could make it from the West 30<sup>th</sup> Street Helipad to Wingdale, NY in 33 minutes, probably faster if the passenger list was light. And it was: five to board, with guitars. Round trip with a three song performance: less than two hours. And after the Beatles finished their taping of The Ed Sullivan Show, they went to the Rainbow Room for a quick dinner. A short cab ride to the waiting Huey.*

*It all made sense.*

The last Saturday of the fourth period was melancholy for many of us. It signaled that the end of summer was closing in and that soon we would have to leave this make believe world in the forest. The Thunderbird Games took a lot of that sting away, at least for the day. Essentially they were camp-wide relay games pitting tribe against tribe. Fun Indian warfare that played out on several battlefields: waterfront, athletic field and pioneering tower. The myriad of Scout skills was put to the test. The "J" stroke of the canoe, Morse code flag wagging, pole lashing, and good old fashioned track and field. I honestly didn't think of the Beatles once until the scoring started at around three o'clock. We were free until dinner and the four of us wandered down to the Rec Hall for some canteen treats. They had already moved the huge "Welcome Beatles" banner to the front wall of the Hall above the giant moose head and fireplace. The camp ranger, Jack, was busy unloading extra dining tables that were soon to be the stage. This was enough to get us all fired up again. The stage was right under the moose, a regal head with twenty points mounted above the grand fireplace. John, Paul, George and Ringo would sing *A Hard Day's Night* under our moose. "Too cool," said Denny. Then Fitz brought up a great point. "Where were we going to sit?"

"We'll have no control over that. It is probably first-come." Dennis was right. Now we had to petition our Sachem, Nate, to get us down there pronto after dinner for choice seats.

Most of the early evening was forgettable for me. The usual clanging bell at dinner and screaming for the Thunderbird Awards - the Delawares were sure to win it again, predictably. They had some kind of superman scouts in that town and no one could beat them. Who cared? My neck kept turning back toward the Rec Hall doors as I took note of the stage building progress.

"Ferrara!" I loudly whispered while kicking him under the table. I pointed to the stage with my forehead and mouthed "Drums!" They were setting up a drum kit with several microphone stands off stage. We were vibrating. In the excitement John shot milk out of his nose and the whole table lost it. We pleaded with Nate to get us good seats. He, of course, tied any good will to our department and willingness to "police the camp" - a nice phrase that meant we were on litter patrol after dinner. Fine. I'll pay any cost. Just get us up front.

While we were on litter patrol, things started to really heat up. They were moving tables and chairs into

the Rec Hall at an alarming pace accompanied by all the banging and yelling they could muster. The Chateau was blasting the *Help!* album as we merrily did our dirty work. Then something amazing happened. First, a downshift of a truck somewhere up hill had us all skittery as it sounded a lot like a helicopter. The large army-green work truck came down the main camp road and stopped in the gravelly area just outside the Rec and Dining Hall complex. It towed a searchlight, World War 2 era carbon arc, to be exact. A five-foot diameter dish that put an 800 million-candle power beam five miles in the sky. They were sparing no expense for the excitement side of the event. Maybe so the helicopter pilot will be able to find our little hideaway in the hills.

A bugle call pealed over the camp intercom - the call to Assembly. Nate whistled through his fingers and called for us to line up. Ferrara and I hopped into place. Hurry up. Oh, why couldn't they hurry? Our tribe was the closest to the Rec Hall so by all rights, we should get the best seats in the house. But of all people holding us up, it was Fitz. "Where is Fitzgerald, Tent 4?" he bellowed.

Denny answered quickly, "Up in the larry...fixing his hair." Someone in the back made a fart sound and the whole

group of us laughed and that was the perfect tension release we needed. Fitz came bounding down the trail from the bathroom "larry" (as opposed to the "john", I guess) with his hair in a perfect mop top. Fitz had great hair and several years ago had the best DA of any of us. That's "duck's ass" for the uninformed, the Elvis haircut of the 50's. My wavy hair never let me join in but if I could, I'd have John Lennon hair. No question.

Nate had us in marching formation and off we hupped-HUP..two three, four, HUP...two three, four. Those darn Dakotas from the other side of the camp were first there and got the front and center seats. No worries as we got stage left, directly in front of John. Perfect. Little Scout feet were starting to stomp and tribal cheers were in order.

"Go Back! Go Back! Go Back Into The Woods!"

Troops streamed in and the noise level rose quickly. A couple of the guys with the searchlight started up its generator and then, "C-R-A-C-K! Hummmmmmm." And the giant light arced into operation. It was on a figure-eight swirl and incoming scouts slowed to marvel at the beam it projected into the cloudless night sky.

Caruso bounded onto the stage and grabbed the mike. "Oh, yes, oh, yes, oh, yes...the main event you have all been waiting for. But first, the results of the Thunderbird Games. And with that I will let Assistant Activity Director Arturio read the scores." He walked off stage and up the hill into the darkness, I guess to greet our incoming guests. Arturio dragged out the scoring as long as he could. We actually came in third which surprised even Nate. But the Delawares and their Amazon scouts won again. Fine. Let them have it. Let's get to the show.

Up on stage next was Dave Erwin, the resident Greenwich Village folksinger, who brought his ubiquitous 12-string guitar everywhere. "No," moaned Denny, "not "The Titanic" again." Erwin has been singing the tale of the fabled doomed ship ever since, well, the damn ship went down, it seemed. We had no recourse but to sing.

"It was sad..." he sang and we answered, "So sad"

"It was sad when the old ship went down..."

Me and Ferrara did the bass part together, "To the bottom of the sea."

"Everybody," Erwin urged."

"Husbands and wives, little children lost their lives. It was sad when the old ship went down."

I don't know how we knew, but we knew. Before the chopper was even close, we felt its low thump-thump-thump. Dave Erwin was still in mid stanza when the copter circled low over the camp. A roar went up like you have never known. No one was sitting. Everyone was screaming, yelling, singing, and jumping. Up the hill we heard a police siren. Another bugle call went over the loudspeakers and the searchlight kept circling. Pandemonium.

Then we caught a glimpse of headlights coming down the road from the Ad Building. My God, it was happening. Fever pitch. If there was any crystal nearby, it would have shattered by now. A big old black Cadillac, the kind with long fins, pulled down and across the gravel. We had to stand on benches to get a good view. The back door of the car opened to more squeals. Then a leg emerged. Could it be? The bushy hair and sunburst Rickenbacker told us all it was John. Since I never before was in his presence it took some getting used to. Then George with his Gretsch. Look! It was Paul with his violin Hofner bass. Then Ringo with his drumsticks. The Rec Hall was approaching bedlam. Everyone was on their feet, on benches, on shoulders,

screaming through every pore of their bodies as the four of them ducked through the gauntlet to the stage.

Ferrara and I checked in with each other. The screaming was surging louder as they made their way to the stage as he and I had a moment - a moment that helped define the entire episode. In his eyes I think I read the same emotion I was feeling. Yearning. We yearned for them and no amount of disbelief would do now. We looked back at each other and instantly screamed louder. And for a brief moment I realized that old Sarge was right. Everything that mattered to me was here in this old Rec Hall. All doubt was gone as Ferrara and I became part of the flailing, screaming horde of boys. I looked at him and he was squinting. So that's it! I just had to blur my eyes a little. These were the Beatles and we were going to savor the experience and the entire camp was merging into a unified whole. So our eyes blurred a little. Perhaps our ears blurred as well. I don't know. It was all too much by then.

Their first song was *Ticket To Ride* and we shivered with excitement as John and Paul shared a mike. 250 kids knew all the words. How could they not? The record was part of our summer soundtrack, courtesy of the Chateau.

*Help!* was next and the entire Rec Hall was throbbing like the bass Paul was playing. *A Hard Day's Night* had even the staff singing. I saw old man Heathermont even swaying back and forth. When they finished and took their trademark group bow, I followed George's head down until he was fully bent at the waist...staring at his shoes. Big brown shoes. My heart skipped a beat but there was no time to think. The roar of the crowd swept me away again. Paul waved and said something about a big show tomorrow. And they were gone. Tail lights. Dust. Copter blades. Gone.

Ferrara and I were both stunned. Throat-sore. Emotionally empty. Like what you feel like after laughing, really laughing for a long time. But this was much more. This was part religious conversion and part rapture. Ecstatic and exhausted.

Nate could have marched us over a cliff, we were so pliable. We stumbled up the hill to our tents and our last night in camp. It turned out for me, it would be my last night and this fourteen year old took a turn toward adulthood that night. And I would never look back. We really never talked about what happened in the Rec Hall. It was not on any news shows or in the papers. Maybe it didn't happen. No, I was there. It did. Or was it the

staff? Even if it was Caruso in a Beatle wig, we all cheered louder. Even though many of us really believed that the Beatles would come, it was OK, either way. The Beatles were there for me. A huge lesson in belief and acceptance at age 14. It just took me 50 years to realize it.

I've read about apparitions, so maybe that's what it was. From Moses' burning bush, Ezekiel's wheel, the "fourth man" in the fiery furnace of Shadrach, Meshach and Abnego. More recently, the US Olympic Hockey Team of 1980 believed it and the country experienced a spiritual uplift. Voltaire said, "Faith consists in believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe." In a way, it was a spiritual experience for all of us. We wanted it so badly we made it happen. Or perhaps the Hand of God did intercede and performed that mass miracle just for our fourth period of Camp Siwanoy, BSA.

The next afternoon, the last day of camp, my mother arrived with the big Catalina station wagon to retrieve her eldest. On the long ride back, there was the usual conversation about how I liked it and what I had learned.

"So what was the high point?" she asked.

I thought long and hard if I should even tell her. Then gave her a terse, "Oh, the Beatles played for us last night."

"That's nice, sweetheart." I was grateful for her facetious answer because then I wouldn't have to put it all into words.

There would be more summers and more Beatles. Next summer was *Yesterday and Today* and *Paperback Writer*. 1967 was *Sgt. Peppers*, of course and '68 was *Hey Jude* and the White Album. But nothing like this one, for their music had become a soundtrack for the life of this 14 year old. And I could walk with an inner pride now that I had met them. They were there, on that stage built of dining hall tables under the moose, playing a private concert just for

us. I will always have that. No one can tell me otherwise.  
And it was glorious.

*"As a man thinketh in his heart,  
so he is." Proverbs 23:7*