

Saving Citizen Kane

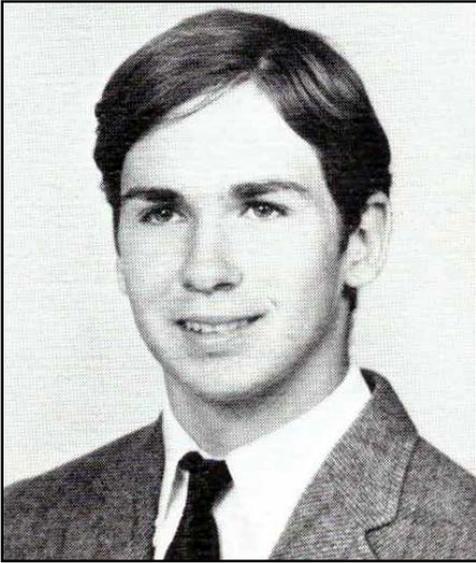
By John O'Hara

I was part of the summer honors program in Math. What that meant was I went to school in the summer before freshman year and started to study Algebra. I remember looking around this full class of students and wondering, "Why in God's name are we here?" Summer was for going to the swimming pool, playing baseball and traveling to the Euclid creek reservation for hiking and general life experimentation. Mark Bezik and I once decided it would be of the utmost importance to see how long you could ride a bicycle in the actual creek. The very scientific results of this venture were buried in some basement file cabinet. Needless to say my wandering heart did not embrace the concept of summer school. I remember sitting in that classroom with sweat dripping off my forehead listening to Mr. Palowski droning on about $a+b$ divided by c equals...my eyes are glazed over.

The results of my summer adventures in Math were I developed a dislike for the subject that I actually enjoyed in grade school. By the time junior year rolled around I was no longer in the "advanced" math program. I found myself in a Statistics class taught by Eugene Oberst. His teaching methods were impressive. He somehow choreographed his speech with the movement of his hands. He was a large man and when his hands opened wide you could imagine him picking up a student by the crown of his head moving him around as if he was a chess piece. Upon walking through the door on the first day of Statistics, I was taken by the fact it was a split class, there were actually seniors included. At the front of the room in the first seat closest to the door was a senior named Kane. I recognized him from grade school. He had the honor of being excommunicated from the daily Mass serving corp. It seems he was alleged to have performed a wine tasting session in the sacristy.

In the back of the class sat John Shinsky and Jim Moore. Now Shinsky was an impressive man. He looked like he showed up at high school his freshman year and never changed his clothes.





They fit like a membrane that accented every movement of what was a truly impressive muscular display. Jim Moore another hulking member of the football team sat next to him and by that I mean their two desks were side by side in a communion of togetherness. No one questioned this. My place in the class, well I was the 5'8" 120-pound stick in front of the two congenial oaks. I soon discovered that my calling in this class was to explain to Shinsky and Jim what was going on in the class. We progressed through the year attaching new meaning to the words mean, medium and mode. The variation on the mean, concerning life skills, was the conduct of Kane. There were several verbal confrontations between student and teacher. Mr. Oberst often had the look of a person walking shoeless on the hot sands of hell when talking to Kane. One day about halfway through one class Mr. Oberst was called out to the hallway by another teacher. He gave his standard request that we maintain quiet and behave ourselves. For Mr. Kane this was show time. He was up carrying on, loudly practicing his monologue for the high school version of the Tonight Show. Obie (that's what the Shinsk called him) moved back into the room with the subtlety of a glacier. I don't know what happened in the hall but when he saw Kane cavorting around the class he began taking some actions for which the words "you need to take a time out" were invented. Now Obie was a strong man. His family lineage included a father who was one of the Seven Mules who cleared the way for the Four Horseman of Notre Dame lore. Kane was proceeding cautiously back to his seat in the front row where the two met. Mr. Oberst spread his fingers flat then wrapped them around the front of the desk and lifted. It was a show of strength well exceeding the standard deviation from the mean. He lifted both student and desk off the ground. Teacher and student were eye to eye, one face of crimson the other ghastly white. A silenced awe filled the room...then a voice filled with authority and concern from the back of the room proclaimed, "Obie No!" The Shinsk had spoken. Mr. Oberst's anger waned, the sickly greenish overhead florescent lights came back into focus, the smooth bell curve of order was restored. Class was dismissed.

OBIE No! + Shinsky squared=Kane-Rosebud over file saved
(My apologies to math lovers everywhere.)

Editor's note: Eugene Oberst was a congenial dedicated teacher who bent over backwards to help you learn. This day is just one we've all experienced where the lid is blown off the pot.