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The Underground

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MEMOIRS OF A MONSTER

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Today is father's day. My father was a big handsome Irishman named Gerald F. McCarthy. To many adult Bostonians he was known as, "The Monsignor", and, to even more children, he was "Popo". He was just "Dad" to me and I never really knew what he did for a living. He wore many hats.

When I was about ten years old I went with him to the Franklin Sports offices outside of Boston. Franklin Sports makes sports accessories like batting gloves, boxing shorts, hats, helmets, and all the small things teams need, besides uniforms, to play the game. My dad had an appointment with the head of the company and he took me and one of my brothers along.

My dad had recently figured out that my home town was lacking a Recreation Department. He did the town a favor and founded the first, "Marshfield Recreation Department" and seated himself as it's commissioner. He was now visiting Boston area sports manufacturers looking for equipment. He had a budget but my dad believed in bartering and corporate donations. We were going to Franklin Sports to see what my dad could get, "for the kids".

When we got there my dad offered to take the head honcho of Franklin to lunch at a local restaurant. The Franklin guy told my dad about a place he would rather show my dad. We followed him, in his Jaguar, to the local high school. Around back we entered what looked like an old gymnasium. It had been converted into a restaurant staffed by kids taking vocational classes on everything from cooking to management. The kids did everything.

The Franklin Sports guy was a frequent patron of this educational experiment. It was part of an inner city program attempting to provide students with jobs and training. Our host ate there often to do his part, "for the kids". This was a man my dad could get along with.

My dad wanted a couple of truckloads of sports equipment from Franklin. He wanted it for free. He explained that the 'Franklin' logo on all the gear would influence the kids that got to use it. The fond memories associated with Franklin Sports would carry over to adult purchases. My dad explained that donating now, was an investment in the future. My dad also promised to promote their company in city hall and at WSBK, channel 38, two places he had 'juice' with.

The guy agreed that the 'Franklin' brand would benefit from early exposure to future buyers. He would donate all my dad was asking for. Franklin Sports asked for nothing in return. He, personally, would be grateful for any exposure my dad could get for the restaurant we were eating in. Very few people knew about it and the lack of clientele was threatening the program. My dad appreciated the guy's unselfish concerns and told him not to worry, he'd put the place on the map.

We followed the guy back to his office at the Franklin Sports headquarters after we ate. Him and my dad went and signed some papers that would deliver two tons of sporting goods to our garage. He then took us out back to the warehouse, where he stuffed our station wagon with all it could hold.

My dad was promoting the restaurant when we stopped for gas on the way home. He talked it up

to everyone he met. He did not stop until the local Boston TV station, channel 38, did their segment on it. They called it, 'philanthropic fine dining', and the 'coolest place to eat in town'. It was harder than Fenway park to get into for the next year.

The sports gear went to good use. My dad hired high school kids as coaches/baby sitters. We each had a park or school where parents could leave their kids from ten to two each day. We would try to involve them in sports. Some days we would travel and pit one park against another in games like baseball. Each park/school was well stocked with sports equipment and four counselors. (Two boys/two girls) It was a great summer job for the older kids, great fun for the younger ones, and a wonderful free service for moms who used it as day care. I had the park at 'Brantrock' with the Whalen twins, both dumped me at the end of the summer more graciously than I have been dumped since.

Everywhere I was in my young life there was an abundance of sports equipment. I worked in two stores called, 'Gerry McCarthy & Son's Sports'. One was in Boston, right down the street from our house where I went to school. The other was at the end of our road where we spent our summers. Neither were real sporting goods stores. They were stores my dad had where he stored, and gave away gear from, all the tons of excess junk people gave him. He never made a dime out of either enterprise. He might have 3000 Franklin boxing shorts, ten dozen Northland hockey sticks (all lefties) and a weird amount of stuff with 'Harvard' written on it, but he did not have the typical sporting goods fare. My dad's biggest

selling items were off beat bumper stickers that had something to do with the Red Sox, politics, or both. They listed for, 100 for a buck. Make offer. I never saw my dad say no to any offer.

If any kid walked in to our store needing to outfit himself for any sport other than baseball he'd be out of luck. If him and his team had no dough for some sport they wanted to play, my dad would start a league, and, make sure every player had all he needed to play. If you needed skates, lacrosse sticks, a glove, bat or ball to borrow, just come to the house. Some one was always there.

My dad managed a 'Park League' baseball team. I am not sure what category off 'semi-pro' this league would be today, but a lot of great pro's played for my dad. I have seen my dad referred to as 'Mr. Baseball' in Boston newspapers.

Cleveland Circle Park, across the reservoir from Boston College, was my dad's home field. I remember when my dad got the city to install lights for night games. My dad got Coca Cola to give away free cokes from a big coke bottle shaped truck at his games, it was parked right next to the free hot dog truck. Me and whatever brother was, age appropriate cute for cash collecting, would shakedown the crowd for donations. We would pass the batting helmet down the rows of fans like the adults did at Mass.

Funding for my dad's teams was tough to find. He had ten kids at home and probably even more jobs going on, outside the house, at any time. I remember when Mass Envelope stopped supporting his team. When my dad lost that last booster, and he was paying for all the teams expenses, he named the team, 'The Gerry McCarthy Club'.

"I'm a Gerry McCarthy," does not have the same ring to it as does, "I'm a Celtic." (or Patriot, Bo-Sox, Brave, ... etc) so a friend of my dad's, Bob Wolf, big time celebrity sports star attorney, stepped in. My dad's team became the 'Wolf Club', and he was then able to concentrate on coaching and bring home trophies bigger than me.

I always remember my dad getting dressed, and, going out at night for work. I never saw my dad not shaved or with his hair not perfectly combed. He would leave us each night, smelling of 'Old Spice', for his work for the Polaroid Corporation. What he did there, besides get people jobs, was always a mystery to me.

Last night a question on 'Jeopardy' had a dad connection for me. The answer was, 'polarization', and the question had a guy's name in it my dad once introduced to me as his boss, Dr. Land. This inventor of the instant camera explained to me his invention came about when his daughter, who was about my age, wanted to see the pictures he had taken of her, right now. He created Polaroid to pacify his little princes.

When I was in Jr. High this guy gave my dad more money than a house on Cape Cod cost, to put together a Christmas party. My dad let me, and my friends, get in on all the money being spent. When he hired a Santa, and several elf assistants, from a local costume company, he also picked up all the Disney character costumes. He then called Disney and found out how much 'Mickey' was paid for an appearance. This prince's ransom he paid to me and each of my ragamuffin friends for keeping the Polaroid people's brats busy while they celebrated the birth of our Lord in high fashion.

I earned a windfall of funds, greater than I had totaled in my young life so far, for playing 'Goofy'. Leave it to my dad to make the one time in my life, being goofy, paid off big.

Having me for a son was a chore. We had this barn that sat almost a half a mile from our house. My brother kept his ponies there. Before I got my license, I used to get to drive by, 'going to feed the animals'. Never did I do this for the animals or for my brother. It was a long walk in the snow, I did it to drive.

When my dad came home with his new 'Monte Carlo' my interest in the animals welfare increased. One wintry night I volunteered to go feed the animals so I could smoke pot in the warm confines of my dad's bitchin' new car while listening to blaring Rolling Stones and cruising. The dirt road that ran from our house to the barn was a straight shot of a dirt road running right next to a private, small plane runway, owned by F. Lee Baily.

About halfway along the road was a small bump that, if hit just right with one side's tires, could give the stoned, illegal, driver, the feel of a two wheeled circus stunt. I am still a bad driver. Then I was horrible... and stoned. The car got away from me and went skidding off the road, through the snow and took out a small pine sapling with the passenger side door, leaving a dent.

I was so anxious to distance myself from that vehicle that the animals went hungry that night. I opened all the windows and got that car parked in front of our garage as fast as I could without wrecking again. I backed the car into it's parking position so my dad would not have to see the dent when he left that night and scrambled to my room.

It worked... for a while. My dad thought his car got hit by a bad parker in the Polaroid lot that night when he came out to find the dent after work. I was in the clear until a few days later when my dad was taking my brother, and a group of his friends, to the circus in the city. One of the little brats found the bag of pot I had stuffed into the seat and forgot about in my rush to get away from the damaged car. When he pulled it out asking, "Hey, what's this?", my dad put the whole thing together and knew it was mine, why I had parked backwards that night, and where his dent came from, in a second flat.

My dad dramatically threw the bag from his window as they were driving over the North river bridge leaving Marshfield, while explaining the dangers of drugs and the misery, some, sons can bring. I got whupped, but good, for that one.

I was afraid of my dad 'till the day he died. I do not mean constantly and daily, but when I had a well deserved whupping coming. I believe I can beat any man alive, I always have. I never even entertained the notion that anything other than standing there and taking what he was dishing out, was the smartest survival strategy. I made my dad whup me... often and diligently.

In my home town is Camp Milbrook. It's a summer camp for rich New York kids. It is run by Bob Branum, the ex-Celtic who lived across the street from us. When the kids go home it becomes the Celtic's training center. Me and my brothers got to meet all the players working there. I remember Jo Jo White asking me if there were any 'sisters' in my town. I told him I had three. When he told me he meant, African American women, I told him, no.

When I got me, and all the other workers fired, because of a riot I drunkenly started, my dad was not happy. I did not know it at that time, but, my mom was dying and that is why there was so many of my family at the house when I got sent home. My dad was my boxing coach. He knew I had skills because he taught me them. He was not happy about me using them to get fired, and, embarrass our family. He tried to get me to show him how tough I was down stairs in his room full of trophies. I did, and said, nothing while he gave me what for. When he was done with me, and I went upstairs, a couple of my big brothers worked me over some more, saying, "Your gonna kill him." They were afraid my dad would have a heart attack from having to constantly whup me so hard. They were probably right.

My dad spoke in parables that took me years to figure out. One night when I was about fifteen years old, my dad layed a line on me I did not get until twenty five years later. It was ski season. Me and my friends would leave for the slopes in New Hampshire from my house in the early morning hours. Everyone would sleep over so we could pile in a car, packed and ready to go, before it got light out. We would stay up most the night partying.

As my dad passed me and my, stoned and drunk, friends on his way to the kitchen, at three in the morning he came across us drawing on a passed out Scott Staples with indelible ink, magic markers. We were having a grand old time and woke him up. On his way to the fridge, in his boxers, he said to me, "It's a long road to Montréal." Everyone laughed and Tommy O'toole said, "Man, your dad's weird. What's he mean by that?" I had no idea.

Twenty five years later I was watching some, 'Where are they now?' thing on ESPN, when they mentioned a guy who had medalled at the Olympics in Montréal in 1976 in the welterweight division. He was never heard from again. I knew him.

My dad had made that comment about two years before the Montréal games. I was then at the top of my fighting game. My dad had coached me to an undefeated record for the past two years in the 'Police Athletic League' (P.A.L.). My dad did not believe all my partying was appropriate training.

The guy ESPN mentioned in their 'Where are they now?' segment was the last guy I ever boxed. I beat him. It was one of the few knock outs I ever had. I never had any dreams of being in the Olympic games. I fought because it was fun and helped my roll as a 'hatchetman' on my hockey team. I now wish my dad beat me more and had made me stick to his training. I have a feeling, had I won that medal, I would have parlayed it into much more than did it's winner, or I have since, without it.

I recently received a copy of a story that ran in a Boston paper. It was a piece about the 25th annual Gerry McCarthy Memorial Easter Egg Hunt. As far back as I can remember my dad had huge Easter Egg Hunts for the kids of inner city Boston. My family would be busy as bee's for the weeks leading up to Lent. My dad would get local merchants to kick in with what ever they could 'for the kids'. Me and my brothers would hide hundreds of eggs with scraps of paper inside, telling the kid who found it, what wonderful prize they won. The kids, almost all from the 'projects', got toys and candy filled baskets. just for showing up.

The story told of how, even though it was a terrible, wet, rainy and snowy day, the Mayor of Boston showed up for the event. My brother who sent me the article added a foot note saying it was only appropriate, as the Mayor was once the bat boy for my dad's team we called 'Mouth' way back then. The article also referred to my dad as as, 'Child advocate, Gerry McCarthy'. I can think of no greater thing to be called.

This fathers day my many brothers will celebrate being dad to their sons and daughters. I won't. I will forever be the son looking up to my dad the 'Monsignor'. Me and him did not always see eye to eye. He was a great man and I am, well... me. He did not live long enough to see me go to prison. I am glad, it would have killed him... right after he killed me.

