

N... Town Road

by McCabe Coolidge

When I was growing up in a small town in Michigan my dad knew most of the merchants along Michigan Avenue. The main drag. But one of his favorites was the Wigent Brothers Sunoco. They filled the tank, checked the tires, washed the windshield and had tires in stock and were ready to change the oil and filter.

So when I pulled into the parking lot of the Sunoco in Thomaston a few months ago I expected a warm welcome. The guy behind the corner listened for a moment when I asked if he knew where Peterborough Road was and he nodded his head but then asked me,

“Where are you from?” His blue and white long sleeved work shirt had ‘Don’ printed on it. ‘Hmm, I thought to myself, he is wondering if I am a local?’

“Oh, I am staying over at Owl’s Head for a couple of days.”

“No, No! What I mean, is where are you really from?”

“Oh! Well I grew up in a small town in southern Michigan. Marshall, though I doubt whether you have heard of it.”

Don, digs his finger into his blue jeans and pulls out an old, worn brown wallet, searches around and picks out a photo.

“This is my mother. She came from Scotland and settled down here in Maine. That is where I am from.”

“Oh, well I am a McCabe, my family comes from Ireland and they settled in Duluth.”

Don nods his head to a man standing off to the side, about our age and asks him “Eric, Where do you come from?”

“Well, yep my grandparents, they came from Sweden and they were quarrymen...” Don nods his head and said, “You bet. My father worked at all the quarries around here. They shipped granite to New York City, Philadelphia, Boston.” A proud smile beams off both of their faces.

“They worked hard,” Eric says softly and looks wistfully out the window as a late 1970’s gray, Lincoln Continental pulls up next to one of the pumps.

“So you know where Peterborough road is?” I remind Don.

“That’s easy, go south on the highway, cross over the bridge and turn left and take your first right. That’s Peterborough Road. It’s not much of a road since the railroad tracks went through there and the bridge busted and fell in. What’s your interest in that road?”

I try to pick out an easy way to describe my curiosity. “Well I went to a lecture in Rockport last Sunday and a woman said there was an African American village out that way, just south of South Pond.”

“Well there was but not anymore. Everybody left or died.” Don turns his head and looks out at the Lincoln. “Well here comes Pete, he knows all about that area. He’s been a logger here for years.”

The door opens and Eric and Don greet a guy with a jaunty black cap, a ruffle of a pony tail, dark jeans and a ten day growth on his face.

“McCabe, here is your man, Pete has been here all his life. He knows all about Peterborough Road.”

“Oh you mean N...town Road? Sure I have been all over that place but you know it dead ends at the railroad tracks now; that old bridge has been gone for years. Now you have to go in on the Sandy Shore road and turn left then a right and keep on going. Just foundations out there now. My skidder fell into a foundation, took me two days to get it out of there.”

Eric and Don are gazing at the scratched up linoleum floor after Pete blurted out N...town Road. And I do not know what to say. Let it go? Take him to task? I remain silent, steaming.

“They’re all gone now; must have been 60 to 70 of them at one time; had their own school and church.” Don interrupts, “McCabe you ought to track down Sid Peters... he would know a lot about that community,”

“Jeez Don, Sid died a couple of years ago. More than a few years ago. But he was a logger all right, cut firewood, he was some handyman, a good guy.” Pete adds.

“Well, I heard there was some KKK activity around here?” I say and look Pete straight in the eye this time, watching for a reaction. Here is what he said.

“Oh, that KKK thing! Two former Confederate soldiers moved up here and formed that group, god damn, it was just a social club, just like the Elks, nothing to it.” He waves his right hand, dismissing both my question and his unwillingness to talk more about the Klan.

An uncomfortable quiet surrounds us as Pete puts a ten dollar bill on the counter. “Comes to 8.32” Don adds.

“I’m a little slim on cash these days. Going to be a long winter.” Pete mutters as he counts the change, tips his cap and walks straight to his Lincoln. No goodbyes. We stand in silence for a moment.

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Down Main Street with Phil Groce Only an Apprentice

Only? Allow me to introduce, Lance Lee, well-known in nautical circles in Rockland and the world, and who is now in the 3rd and last phase of a 60-year career in developing experiential education. He lives and works in a little house encroaching South Main, and many of us remember it as Peggy’s Kitchen. If you walk into the front door you first see a remarkable wooden Rushton guide-boat on the right extending through the house, and along that way are book chapters stacked here and there on the floor. A stairway climbs to a living room with comfortable chairs and an expansive view of Rockland harbor.

“I grew up in the Bahamas in the 40’s in a salt-water farm community based on fishing, farming, and boat building where everyone had to share in order to survive. A grocery store with 3 shelves, no electricity, no library. With no refrigeration, if they killed a wild boar or caught a large turtle, everyone shared. As a boy, I thought the whole world lived that way. The boats were strong, light, fair, very quickly built, and FAST, with emphasis on aesthetics and most important, function. Unfortunately, that entire community was devastated by hurricane Dorian in 2019. That disaster has made me work toward my goal. At 81, I may not have a lot of time left.

“In 1972, it was that discipline of community-bonding that David Foster and I perpetuated at the Apprenticeshop in Rockland. We developed, what we called, ‘Labor for Learning,’ as it was impossible to have a school complete with docks, tools, supplies, all the overhead, without the work of the students. That model now also exists in France, Russia, and the Basque area of Spain, as well as the U.S.

“Learning has become passive in the U.S. with all the electronic devices and with virtual reality and A.I, and that focus leads to certain types of jobs which make people very wealthy; but it is tearing our culture apart through college debt, and wealth inequality. Passivity leads to greater passivity. In apprenticeships, however, you can build capability, self-esteem, and reverence for the good that existed in the past. I have seen this work in many countries, including Russia, where I visited six times. I am now writing a short book, Apprenticing--a Manifesto, about apprenticeship which will be clear and specific and pertain to all types of materials from wood, glass, metal, whatever.” What is the principle behind all this?

“Hands and mind must fuse together, as has been the case in all of civilization of the millennia, and the focus must be on the kids. Believe me, kids WANT to learn and be empowered in that way. In New Bedford, Massachusetts, in the Azorean community, they are revitalizing the handling of 1918 whale boats which they built in association with the Apprenticeshop. They call it the Azorean Heritage Maritime Society, and through the infectious leadership of Sara Quintal, they draw kids from the community into their experiential education.” How does that translate into the modern world?

“It is the experience to THINK both pragmatically and abstractly, and in the process, the boat builds the apprentice.” In that way, the student becomes the path? I asked. “Yes, extremely, and in the process, there is knowledge imbued about the WHOLE, being able to judge materials, what’s best where, what fastenings to use, how to control expense. Much of the learning comes from mistakes.” Yes, education is expensive and demanding, no way around it, I mused. “But this is learning that one does not obtain in a classroom.” What is your vision?

“First, I want to see apprenticeships return to schools and impel regular education. Second, I want to see BOTH active and passive promoted in education. I want to legitimize apprenticeship as a passport to success as much as a college degree. And keep politics out as much as possible. It is for success, for kids. So many industries need young people coming into employment with the skills of experience and learning, and not to be relegated to lowly positions. Positions should not be filled just with people with ‘acceptable’ degrees. This has remarkably been a problem in the development of the forest economy of Maine. I learned that in Rumpf.” Did you have a model for this?

“Since 1966, ‘The Islands of Healing’ has governed my life, a precept originated by Kurt Hahn, the finest educator I have ever encountered. He escaped to Scotland from Germany as Hitler came to power, and he started what we now call Outward Bound. Integral are Fitness, Expeditions, Projects, and especially Service. Service is the most important, and this becomes a template for life and success as an adult.” Sounds like a way showing how one can learn to love life? “Very true. I also saw the Peace Corps of that era as a model.” What is your method of bringing together your learning?

“Consider a checkerboard with the light and dark squares. I learn more from the dark squares.” Would it be the same if you look at the negative of a photograph, and if you concentrate on the dark images, you discover the light? “Interesting enough, it was going through a painful character assassination that impelled me to start the Apprenticeshop. Yes, both the positive and negative build strength in us. For me, it is a way of empowering the self, a way of life, not so much involving school. I know schools, and I am no enemy of academics. I graduated from Bowdoin.

“I see this all being played out in my 2 children and their lives of service and focusing on experiential education with the grandchildren. My son, previously a veterinarian in Rockland, is now on a sailing expedition with his family, with strengthening through challenge. Few ways to get that experience except through travel, with any type of vehicle. My daughter works internationally in sustenance: food/clothing/shelter. I am proud of both.”

Only an apprentice? Think again. It could be a wave for the future.

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FRIDAY, MARCH 6:

- Oceanside High School Art Club Fundraiser and Student Exhibition, 4 to 6 p.m. at Rock City Coffee in Rockland. All money raised from the party and online auction will help fund the club's trip to New York City to visit galleries and museums. Meet student artists and view their art exhibition. For more info, contact lhyde@rsu13.org.
- Friday Open Mics, in Warren, Saint George River Cafe, 310 Main Street, second and fourth Fridays, at 6:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 7:

- Owls Head Community Cabin Fever Reliever, from 2 to 4 p.m. at Owls Head Community Building. Get out of the house and gather with neighbors for games, snack foods, and fun. Bring your favorite indoor games. Sponsored by the Owls Head Baptist Church. More info, 542-8426, dkallan@netscape.com.

SUNDAY, MARCH 8:

- Sunday Jams in Rockland, Sail, Power, & Steam Museum, 75 Mechanic Street, 1:30 p.m.

MONDAY, MARCH 9:

- "March Motifs" Art Workshop Series at Rockland Public Library, 11 a.m. Catinka Knoth leads the free Monday classes. Work with pencil, colored pencil, crayon, and papercutting, with a focus on drawing in color. All materials provided. This week the focus will be on the Iditarod dog sled races.

TUESDAY, MARCH 10:

- Tuesday Jams in Thomaston, Federated Church, 8 Hyler Street, at 7 p.m. Folk, country, blues, gospel. FMI: 273-2914.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11:

- St. George MSU Budget Workshop, Wednesday, March 11, at 6:30 p.m. in the Art Room, St. George School.

THURSDAY, MARCH 12:

- "Badass Women Making Maine Herstory," 6:15 p.m. at Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland. The Collective Voices Series presents Maine women telling stories about Maine women. "Chips in the Glass Ceiling," by UMaine student Harley Rogers, is about Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith. Artist Lois Anne, inspired by her lifelong muse Edna St. Vincent Millay, shares "Vincent and I: Art and Unconventional Lives." And "An Unexpected Legacy" is Peta vanVuuren's story about Eliza Steele, Rockland's legendary nurse and executive director of Rockland District Nursing Association.
- Author Susan Conley at Rockland Public Library, Thursday, March 12 at 6:30 p.m. The author of four critically acclaimed books reads from her latest, "Else, Come Home," and takes questions. Her writing has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Harvard Review, Ploughshares and others. She is a cofounder of the Telling Room, a creative writing lab for kids, in Portland. Free.
- Thursday Karaoke in Thomaston, Threshers Brewing Company, 1 Starr Street, 7 p.m.
- Thursday Jams in Warren, Saint George River Cafe, 310 Main Street, 6 p.m.

FRIDAY, MARCH 13:

- MOFGA Organic Certification Services Taking Applications, through June 30 for the 2020 growing season for organic certification of crops and most livestock products. Find forms and more information at MOFGAcertification.org

Around Town is compiled by Chuck Gifford. See expanded listing online at wrfr.org. Submit calendar items to Chuck at gowrfr@gmail.com. Our thanks to The Free Press for sharing its calendar with us.

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Around and after the Civil War, Peterborough had 82 'mixed race' inhabitants. Work was in agriculture, ship building and fishing. It was pretty much a self-sufficient community. The largest 'mixed race' community in Maine.

Amos Peters, an African American, fought in the Revolutionary War and then declared himself to be free. Married Sarah and she in time legally sought her freedom and won. Peterborough grew from these two. But in the next century, shipbuilding declined, alewives and shad were fished out. Citizens had to move to find other jobs. As Pete says, 'just foundations now.'

Coincidentally my wife Karen and I have just purchased a lot and an R.V. out Sandy Shores Road, adjacent to South Pond. By the time May rolls around, I will be taking my compass, maybe a rough map, and start searching for the Peterborough community. My hope is that I will find the cemetery. No lives are ever lost.

Doing some research, I have discovered that after Baton Rouge struggled through Hurricane Katrina, outsiders, bigots, insensitive citizens started to call Baton Rouge 'N...town.'

In my neck of the woods, central North Carolina, citizens are saying "No more!" Streets and buildings are being renamed. My wife has joined others in asking for an apology from the Greensboro City Council for the slaughter of protesters by the Klu Klux Klan in 1979. Hard work, patience and steady commitment. I am proud of her, of that small group.

Pete received a free pass from me. I am sad. I have no excuse. I don't know what would have happened if I said to him, "Pete, I'd like it if you said 'Peterborough.'" That honors all those folks that built a school, a church and a cemetery. It was a safe and vibrant place to live."

I will have another chance. I know I will. I believe I have two allies in Don and Eric. I'll start there. I will bring up that conversation. Maybe the three of us can see eye to eye and heart to heart. For me that is the right beginning.

Karen and I spent Thanksgiving 2019 in Montgomery Alabama walking and touring the Legacy Museum and the lynching memorial and the history of slavery along theriver. This began my research, starting in my hometown which had a history being a port for the Underground Railroad.

When I was ten, my dad and were driving along Michigan Avenue going west and he pointed out Hazen Hatch's house, my godfather and said "That house used to be the site of the Underground Railroad." All I could think of was a series of tunnels, stretch south.

Finding information was easy: two different newspapers and an NPR radio station plus the local historian Harold Brooks reported on a clash between supporters of abolition and those indebted to slavery. A family....were safe harbored in the basement of Hatch's house when the bounty hunters came to town. That night they snuck them out on a stagecoach to Jackson, then the train to Detroit and by boat to Canada. All this in my hometown and I never heard about in school nor gossip in the neighborhood.

So standing the Sunoco gas station I am fascinated that both Knute and Don knowing the history of Peterborough and Pete's racist narrative all in the same room.



Let's See Where this Takes Us Monday, 12 to 1 pm, on WRFR

Hosted by Stephen Grima. The show encompasses a mix of music, opinion, and storytelling. Each week will be a little different, but always embracing a "stream of consciousness" style format. The fun is in the journey! Stephen has lived and worked locally for most of his life. He has been a drummer in local bands for the better part of 20 years, and hosts a regular D&D game with friends. His love of music, characters and storytelling lends itself to his recent involvement in radio.

Rockland Metro Show on Short-Term Housing

Fletcher Smith and Melanie Trott from the Rockland's ad hoc committee on short term rentals will be joining us this week on WRFR's Rockland Metro show. Tune in Wednesday 5 to 6 pm: 93.3 fm Rockland, 99.3 fm Camden.



The view from Lance Lee's house on Maine Street

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