

Michigan Man Newsletter

November 2005

Hello everybody!! The high holy days are upon us. No, I'm not talking about Thanksgiving, Christmas or Hanukkah. In about two weeks northern Michigan will be invaded by about a million armed drunks from suburban Detroit. Opening day of deer season. "It's the hap ...happiest day of the year!!!!" Actually, it is a great time to see old friends, snuggle up in a sleeping bag, fart and not shave or shower for a week. Cool! Just like college!!! I'll be lucky to get a day or two in but my killer instinct has taken the same path as the dodo bird and my hair. So my objective is to see as many old pals as I can and if a deer happens to walk in front of my house, or my truck .. well, chalk one up for Darwin.

I do have some serious music news to finally pass on. I have a new five song Christmas EP (extended play) coming out just before Thanksgiving. It has one and half new originals, "What to Buy Jesus for Christmas" and an updated version of a nineteenth century hymn, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." I wrote a new melody and added an additional verse. The original lyrics were written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. I know. Pretty presumptuous on my part tampering with his words but they could've been written yesterday. They are very pertinent to the times. I've included "Christmas in the Country" which many of you know was on my last CD "One of a Kind." I hope you don't feel cheated. I did a rendition of "O, Holy Night" which was very different than I had imagined but I really like the feel of it and Janine Sabino who sings background did an amazing job. The last song is the classic, "The Christmas Song (Chestnuts...)" which we recorded live in the studio. My long time guitar partner, Dan Valeen and Doug Cassens, an fantastic and talented saxophonist, ran it down a few times then let 'er rip. It came out cooler than anything I have ever done.

It will be available at gigs or on-line at www.comedyhome.com. by Thanksgiving. It is priced inexpensively and makes a great stocking stuffer. (Shameless capitalism, but I digress...) It will also be available at a few retail outlets but other than Ken's Village Market in Indian River and Schultz's Party Store in Wolverine, I'm not sure where just yet.

Quick joke...

The bon vivant of the nursing home was wooing an old widow lady coming on with a proposition, "For five bucks I'll take you over into that rocking chair and give you the ride of your life."

She didn't respond holding her pocketbook close to her chest.

He continued. "For ten dollars I'll lay you down on that plush sofa and make your eyes roll back in your head." Again, she didn't answer.

"But if you give me twenty bucks I'll take you back to my room, light the candles, turn on some soft music and give you the time of your life."

She thought for a moment then reached in her purse and took out a twenty dollar bill.

"So, you wanna go back to my room?" he chuckled.

"Get real," she said dryly. "I want it four times on the rocking chair."

Oops. Kinda early in the evening for a that kind of humor but it's a gamble I sometimes take.

SIDE NOTE

Dear friends,

Don't take this personally but my computer does not open wave files. I am on dial up and it takes up to an hour to receive something I have no idea how to open. If and when I get this figured out I will let you know and you can resume sending files but until then I am at a loss as to how to do this.

Thanks

MY SCHEDULE

November

- 3 Gus O'Connor's in Novi
- 4 Gus O'Connor's in Novi
- 5 Hoops in Auburn Hills
- 9 Four Green Fields in Royal Oak
- 10 Dick O'Dow's in Birmingham
- 11 Gus O'Connor's in Novi

- 15 Pat & Gary's Party Store in Downtown Indian River for the ... BUCK POLE!!!"
- 17 Noggin Room in the Perry Hotel Petoskey
- 19 The Brown Trout in Indian River for the U-M vs. Ohio State tailgate party ...then at the Buckhorn in Trout Lake (da U.P) that evening
- 22 The Oxford Tap in Oxford
- 23 Four Green Fields in Royal Oak
- 25 Noggin Room in the Perry Hotel Petoskey
- 30 Four Green Fields in Royal Oak

December

- 1 Dick O'Dow's in Birmingham
- 2 Gus O'Connor's in Novi
- 3 Hoops in Auburn Hills
- 6 Oxford Tap in Oxford
- 7 Four Green Fields in Royal Oak
- 12 Marsh Ridge in Gaylord (call for reservations 800.743.7529)
- 14 Four Green Fields in Royal Oak
- 15 Dick O'Dow's in Birmingham
- 16 Gus O'Connor's in Novi
- 21 Four Green Fields in Royal Oak
- 22 Gus O'Connor's in Rochester
- 23 Gus O'Connor's in Novi
- 26 Noggin Room in Petoskey
- 27 Noggin Room in Petoskey
- 29 Nubs Nob (3-6) in Harbor Springs
- 30 Nubs Nob (3-6) in Harbor Springs
- 31 Thunder Bay Resort (call for reservations 800.729.9375)

Another side note

Some of you may receive more than one mailing of this newsletter. I am in the process of rebuilding my list so bear with me. Let me know if you do receive two or more. It simply means you are on more than one list. There, now don't you feel better?

COLUMN

As I mentioned last issue my father passed away this summer. A good friend asked if I was going to write a song about him. If I did I wouldn't be able to sing it for quite a while. But a column is a quite different avenue. This was published in the Straitsland Resorter last month. I hope you enjoy it.

The Front Nine with Fuzz

As a lot of you know, I lost my father a few weeks ago and I am truly grateful for the cards, calls and prayers of support and sympathy. It has, as many of you also know, the sweetest sorrow one can know when a loved one, who has lived a long and good life succumbs to the natural processes of time. For a while it is a bit overwhelming when the collision of two images, the walking, talking, living breathing man meets with the present reality. As one friend consoled me, "you get past it but you never get over it."

It became evident just how large a figure he loomed in my life, my psyche. my pleasant pond of memories when I went for a stroll last week with Edwin F. "Fuzz" Ridley on my mind.

He was my best golf buddy. I had played a few times since he died but the camaraderie, competition and general decorum of golf kept me from having that final nine holes with the old man. I finally got my wish last week. With my clubs slung over my shoulder and no one but a few chirping birds and ducking gophers to witness, I teed off on number one. Not bad but not great. I reached in my pocket. Fuzz was never fond of mulligans.

"You only get one shot. Why not make the best of what you're dealt."

Sure, he took a few do-overs on the first tee but the important stuff? He seemed to get it right the first time. He and my mother would've been married fifty-six years this month. Neither one of them needed a mulligan.

Number two, a short par three with a sucker pin tucked back behind the sand trap. Forsaking

caution, a perfect shot would reward me while a slight misstep would land me in the sand or behind the green down a steep embankment

"A faint heart never won a fair lady," he had said.

The old man never backed down from anything. He met whatever came his way and somehow, short of an all out brawl, would figure out how to get the job done. Discretion may have been the better part of valor but Fuzz went toe to toe with life and seemed to enjoy every day of it.

My tee shot on number three was errant and I was cornered up against some cedars. I had no shot at the green. Peeking through the trees I could hear him, "You're a long way from home without a cowbell on."

All his children took turns being the prodigal. One brother and sister had traipsed around the world. Another brother and sister made their homes on the east coast. I had been content to stay close to I-75 but all of us, in one way or another, had wandered off. But we always knew we had a home. The times we had called in desperate need or loneliness graciously grew into the holiday phone calls, the causal how-do's, the post game scores, grandchildren updates and general flow of information in and around his expanding family. We all may have been far from home but he always knew where we were.

Number four left me with a putt up a two tiered green. A misapplication of speed would put the ball way past the cup and playing it tender would send it right back down to my feet to try again.

"Sportin' blood don't turn to piddle." I suspect this was related to the "faint heart" comment but I knew better than to mix the two together.

"Leavin' a putt short?!! If I could have 'em all back I'd put everyone of 'em at least five feet by the hole. At least I'd had a chance."

We may find regret in our mistakes but a sin of omission is often more of lack of empathy, dedication and follow through. Fuzz was a helper who always found time to do the right the thing. His last few years in Florida he was the neighborhood lawn service. Gratis. In spite of his self-admonition he rarely left a putt short.

The woods on the right of the dogleg number five fairway seemed to hold a special attraction for my ball. Drawing the ball back into the bend would always yield rewards and bailing out too soon would propel the ball into the hazard. It always called for strength and courage.

I hit a good one and the old man would yelp like a young boy on a rabbit hunt. "Ha!! Chase old Blue."

I never knew who old Blue was or really what it meant but it was something he invoked every time a ball was well struck. Chase old Blue. Ride high when you're on a roll and keep it going as long as you can.

Number six. I hit a good drive but off into the hard rough on the right. It got a lot of roll over there but came to rest up against a clump of wiry grass, Not too good of a lie. "Nelly's belly," he would say. Play the ball where it lay.

All of us kids flew to Florida and were with him a week before he passed. It was nice to be together and see the old man but we would never wish him back in the shape he was in. A respirator, catheter, intravenous drips and drainage tubes. Not being able to talk he could still smile, squeeze our hands and show his love for us in those sparkling blue eyes. There was no fear or confusion. No doubt or regrets. Better than us, he knew the situation and played it as it lay.

Seven is a tough hole. Another where you've got to cut it close to the trees on the left to end up with a good shot to the green. I hit a pretty good drive but my approach shot caught a low hanging limb and dropped the ball right back down a few yards in front of me. My third shot was pin high left and I sent a near perfect chip that looked like it might go in but at the last minute hit a pitch mark and took a subtle bounce away from the hole.

"The rub of the green. Tough luck but that's just the way it goes. Don't curse the golf gods or the greens keeper or the guy who didn't quite fix his ball mark." Roll with the punches.

Year ago, outside the funeral home when his mother had died, with tears in his eyes he told me, "Son, it definitely ain't no molehill but it ain't a mountain. It's life and it's a bump. It hurts but that's life and all we can do is to hold each other up." He seemed to have the goods on life. He understood the natural progression, could adapt to the changes and lived his life accordingly.

Number eight is a par five with the possibility of getting home in two but it takes good judgment and perfect position.

"Take care of your par fives and par threes and the fours take care of themselves."

There is a grace built into this game. A par three give us a shot at an ace, a hole in one, perfection. But greed, inexperience or just plain bad decisions will often dictate an unwise course of action which in turn produce bad results. A par five usually allows you one bad shot and you can still achieve par. There is forgiveness.

Nine is a par three going downhill to the clubhouse. Not a difficult hole but you must understand the breaks in the green.

"It all comes down to the flat stick, the putter. A two foot putt counts the same as a three hundred yard drive. Once you're on the green it's a whole new game"

Ironically, you and your opponent, no matter how far he has out driven you, are equals. Fuzz had the ability to put things in perspective. He saw the inequity of life but realized that in the end there was a great equalizer. When he spoke of God he would always point with a subtle motion to the sky. It was his way of acknowledging that all he did not understand was safely in the hands of the Creator.

I putted out and retrieved my ball from the cup.

"Take what the game gives you, put it your pocket and come back tomorrow."

He was a natural man. He did have the goods on life and understood only as a man who had lived fully and watched the world with interest and wonder for almost eighty years. He loved his family and his country. He had a personal and very simple relationship with God and found beauty and joy in simple things. Love and laughter. He cared deeply for the important things in life and put the rest in perspective.

My dad and I shared a common love for the game of golf maybe because we both saw the metaphors it offered up. Not that we got all that introspective and philosophic but sometimes the most profound meanings of life are right there in front of you. Golf very simply reveals a lot of them.

Years from now, hopefully, many years from now, just about the time my sons are explaining to their children that "it ain't no molehill but it ain't no mountain, it's just life" I'll be stepping up to the first tee. There a well-dressed fellow with brand new clubs looking fit and trim will be waiting and in a warm and familiar voice remind me, "See? I told you there was golf in heaven."

Take care friends and as the holiday season approaches cherish the love and the time you spend with the people you care for because in the end that is the real currency of this life.
God Bless.

This issue brought to you by a bunch of little turkeys