

The Prairie Light Review

Volume 39 | Number 2

Article 63

Spring 5-1-2017

Mr. Leahy

Joseph Ward
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr>

Recommended Citation

Ward, Joseph (2017) "Mr. Leahy," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 39 : No. 2 , Article 63.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol39/iss2/63>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact koteles@cod.edu.

I wonder how neighbors decide to keep their yards separate. I imagine each homeowner is responsible for a back fence. Ours must have been a nice quaint, traditional white picket fence at some point.

My older brother Billy always complained that his little brothers got Good Humor bars.

“Mom, how come we didn’t get ice cream?”

Well maybe Brian and I got ice cream but the older kids had a swing set in the backyard and a full fence that might have stopped an errant baseball from rolling into the alley. Speaking of the alley, I watched the men as they paved, a nice bright concrete over the dirt, maybe cinders? A rut in the middle allowed drainage to sewers. Across the fence, a worker with an accent spoke to me. He asked if my mother could make a pitcher of iced tea. I went in and asked my mom; she did.

Back to the fence. By my time, one swing remained on the wobbly, rusted set and my dad took it down not long after. I’m not sure what had happened to the fence. Maybe it wasn’t sunk properly. I recall a bit of erosion where the grass met the alley. Maybe it was kids coming over to play on the swing set, climbing on and hopping over the fence. So many things as a kid just are, you know? You wouldn’t think to ask, they just are. As the fence was then, pickets were missing, two or three in a row sometimes, like a second grader’s smile on picture day. Some attempts at repair had been made, unpainted, mismatched wood. Somehow the gate stood strong!

And of course our back fence was one of the few on the block. East from the tracks, the Harmon’s, the Post’s, and the Stanley’s parked in their garages, all lined up. East of us, Mr. Robinson, old Harry, he had a garage. Most every house on the block did, in fact. A few didn’t. We were one. I’m not sure why, even after the alley was paved. We could have had a basketball hoop! Why didn’t we depend on Danley? My folks parked on the street. Instead of a garage, we had a swing set. At least Billy did.

No garage meant we kept our bikes in the basement. Had to carry them up the stairs and out the back door in the morning and right back down at night. Quite a production for a five kid family. My job—as the youngest—was to hold the door. During the day when the bikes were not in use,

they would be lined up on the sidewalk in the backyard, from gate to back door.

The question of property, whose was whose, side to side, remains? To the east, the Robinson's sturdy chain link fence separated theirs from ours. On the west, I think, was a white picket fence, in pretty good shape I recall. And if I recall correctly, the fence seemed to face out so maybe the white pickets that separated ours from theirs was part of the same fence in the back. Which means it was probably ours. I dunno. From my side, The Stanley's were nice enough people, four or five older girls, two or three barking Irish Setters, dad Bud, a bit gruff, mother seemed odd. I broke one of her windows playing basketball. I don't know why I would have expected her to be more pleasant about it; she wasn't.

Such was the condition of the fence one Saturday night, summer, early 70's. All was quiet. Brian and I were home alone. One of the Robinson's daughters had been married that day and many from the block were away celebrating. We'd just brought the bikes in from the back yard. Brian carried; I held the door. Not five minutes later, we heard a tremendous crash, loud and long. I walked down to the back door and looked out through the screen.

Brian asked, "What's going on?" (It's never so quiet as after a sudden noise, is it?)

"There's a car in the backyard," I answered, as a matter of fact.

A light blue sedan, had easily mowed down the remains of our fence, tore through the yard and rammed into the Robinson's fence, uprooting two or three posts, metal, in poured concrete, moored a foot deep, before it had stopped. Oh, and the car had been driven in reverse!

Brian and I peered out the screen door, probably not quite aware how close our bikes, and ourselves, had come to destruction. We recognized Mr. Leahy from across the alley, one house west, as he got out of the car and began yelling, loud and incoherent. We didn't dare move. Luckily, just a moment later, we heard Mr. Robinson arrive home from the wedding.

He walked down the gangway, eyed the vehicle, and quipped, with typical sardonic humor, "There's a new one!"

Events proceeded quickly from that point. My folks and the neighbors

trickled home from the wedding, backyard lights switched on. The car was stuck, tangled in chain link and posts. The cops came, spoke with Mr. Leahy, cited for negligent driving, spoke with my dad and Mr. Robinson. Promises were made to fix the fences. The excitement quieted, lights out, bedtime.

The noise returned early Sunday. A tow truck tugged while Mr. Leahy, the morning after, worked to clear the remains of a once great fence tangled under the back wheels of his blue sedan.

Joseph Ward

Screech Owl - Grey Morph
Drawing by Cheryl Rausch

