

## Meditation

Bill Schafer led his professional orchestra in the privacy of his den. He stood before his stereo set with baton raised high as he proceeded to lead the London Symphony Orchestra in a rousing rendition of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. He was covered in sweat as he took his bows at the grand finale.

As for umpiring, Bill studied the Boston Red Sox professionals at Fenway Park. From behind the bathroom door, he would pretend he was the home plate umpire by declaiming, "Three Strikes, You're OUT!" With ball cap turned backward on his head, Bill extended the thumb of his right hand from a clenched fist high in the air. We guessed that he had made a critical umpiring decision as a definitive clicking noise from his mail-order counter recorded the moment.

Bill wasn't drawn to the decision-making part of umpiring nor the need to become a famous conductor of orchestras. He simply loved the theatrics of it all. He certainly had the moves down pat. As for baseball, after each Sunday morning bathroom practice session, he faced the raucous Sunday crowds at Quonnie's ball field. 'Throw the bum out!' and 'Fire the Umpire!' were common complaints expressed by the softball fans from the bleacher seats. With counter in hand, Bill remained cool-headed in spite of the mixed reviews from the crowd. He never missed a game in twenty years.

Unlike conducting orchestras and umpiring professional baseball teams, picking blackberries was Bill's reality. It not only yielded tangible results but allowed him the only opportunity to retreat from his world of insurance claims, unreasonable bosses and mind-numbing paperwork. Yes, the blackberry patch beckoned to him each summer and he yielded to its solitude.

Acres of juicy blackberries ripened under the warmth of Quonnie's July sun. Buckets in hand, Bill headed toward his secret berry patches with his Boston Red Sox cap slightly tilted back on his head. Sworn to secrecy as to where the berry patches were located, I vicariously lived his passion. Other than a couple of 'Damn its' whenever a pail full of berries tipped over, we worked in total silence. I decided that blackberries were to Bill as apples were to

Johnny Appleseed. Both men were very passionate about their fruit and both DID something with that passion.

So it came to be that Bill Schafer, my dad, regularly sat in the middle of Quonnie's wild and prickly berry vines contentedly filling his buckets each summer. To dad, blackberries had a meaning far beyond the picking. It was all about meditation; his way of withdrawing from the demands of the business world in which he had become increasingly anxious and dissatisfied. Blackberry picking was a cheap but effective form of psychotherapy for him. The solitude of the berry patches allowed him time to reflect. Knowing my father, he probably tried to solve the world's problems in addition to taking care of his own.

Dad and blackberries will be connected in my mind and heart for the rest of my life. Why, even today, I bought a half-pint of blackberries. Standing with the expensive boxed berries in hand, I paused, and I saw my dad again sitting cross-legged in a blackberry patch, arms badly scratched, itchy insect bites, a sunburned neck, pails of freshly picked blackberries around him and lost deep in thought. I'm sure he was either conducting a symphony orchestra, umpiring a professional baseball game or...just perhaps.... he was meditating.

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