

*For The Williamsport Guardian*

## **Local Love**

### **What You Love About Small-Town PA**

What I love about small-town life in Williamsport necessarily involves what I do not like. Every coin has two sides. Every glass at some time is half empty and half full. There is no pleasure without pain, and no rollercoaster without its ups and downs. Life is a continuum and, like a river, sometimes flows smoothly and other times bounces over the rapids.

I was born on Second Avenue in New York City, and I was raised in Great Neck, New York, only 18 miles from the great metropolis. I went to college in New York City, and law school in Washington DC. I know something about big cities.

When I was growing up in Great Neck, it was bucolic and there were even a few farms nearby. I used to walk to second grade past a horse farm. My mother spent the first 15 years of her life in a tiny upstate New York town where her parents owned a dairy farm. My father, on the other hand, was a third generation born in New York City kind of guy. The marriage of my parents was a perfect blend between city and country. My mother loved to refer to my father as a “big-wheel city slicker,” and my father responded by noting my mother’s “peasant” roots. If truth be known, however, they each admired what the other had to offer. My mother grew tremendously loving to attend opera and enjoying the advantages of the big city. My father, on the other hand, always wanted to buy a farm in the country and was delighted to learn that I was moving to Williamsport.

Based upon this past, I love the combination of city life and small-town country features which Williamsport offers. I go home to my acre of land within the city limits and can open the windows at night, hearing nothing but the birds. When I get up in the morning, I drive 10 minutes and I am at my office, which is a high-level big city type of practice. We are fortunate in this city to have the Williamsport Symphony Orchestra, live theater companies, performances by virtue of the Community Concert Association, the Community Arts Center, and a host of other opportunities. When I review with big city friends the entertainment we have seen in Williamsport, they are always surprised and impressed.

Williamsport is close enough to outdoor passions that enliven the spirit. For me, those are biking and cross-country skiing. I am also an avid walker, thanks to ownership of an American Standard Labrador retriever. I have walked hundreds of miles with the big boy over the last 7 years of his life. We walk at least twice a day, sometimes jogging, and usually covering 5 or 6 miles. Biking is a bit less fun than it used to be because of rude drivers, but the hills and valleys still provide tremendous challenges to those of us who love road bikes. I would wish for more permanent snow in the winter, but Crystal Lake is a rare jewel of an opportunity for cross-country skiers.

Thank you to Michael Gross for helping me discover that terrific sport and the opportunities which Crystal Lake has to offer.

What is the other side of this most important coin? At times I am surprised by the parochialism, mistrust of outsiders, and rank bigotry that I see in our community. Some of this is understandable and endemic to any homogenous group. For a very long time, Williamsport was pretty much isolated from the outside and people of a different skin color or non-majority religion were looked upon with great suspicion. I remember a number of incidents when I first came to Williamsport which were flat out anti-Semitic. One of them actually occurred in the courtroom in Lycoming County. The positive side of that coin is that virtually all of the people involved in those incidents have since asked for my forgiveness, which I was all too eager to grant.

Nevertheless, I still am surprised by comments, remarks, and opinions that people hold of those who think differently. The political extremism sometimes voiced in this community is disappointing. Perhaps this goes on all over and I have just lived too long in Williamsport to recollect what goes on in other communities. Perhaps I expect more of a warm, friendly, low-key area such as this. When I read some of the opinions expressed in the newspaper, or just talk with fellow residents of this area, I am often nonplussed by the judgmental views. Sometimes I am even pigeonholed. I have had many people say to me "oh, you're such a liberal, I know who you are going to vote for," without having the slightest idea of my opinions. We could all do well in this community to learn how to listen to others and to stop believing that the Lord has personally imparted to each one of us ultimate truth and wisdom. I have a feeling that as North Central Pennsylvania becomes more cosmopolitan, some of these attitudes may change. In this respect, the gas drilling industry may be good for the area. Some of the people that are coming in from the outside do not necessarily have the negative attitudes and limited experience that typify some of our indigenous residents.

On the other hand, there are people like my in-laws who are the most open, wonderful, and fair-minded people I know. They are basically a farm family, who have been around the area for many generations. Without getting into their personal business, the family has faced many challenges through their established way of life, including doubtless from me. Nonetheless, this beautiful group of people treat others with respect at every opportunity. To categorize local residents in a uniform way would certainly be unfair and hypocritical.

I love North Central Pennsylvania and the Williamsport area because of what it has to offer, but more importantly because of its potential. All people and communities are in the process of "becoming" as noted by the great philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. Our community will not stay the same and should not stay the same. As Williamsport and the surrounding communities grow, I hope to love it even more than I do now.