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Some Names Changed to Protect the Innocent

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Chapter One - Story One: Robert Erskine's Ghost was a Commie

Erskine's Ghost is a Commie" drops right in the issue with racism and the founding principles of America's environmental movement

Ah the joy of internet sleuthing. Saturday July 24, 1965, "FBI Aware of Activities at Ringwood Camp Resort, Communist Youth Training Site" NJ's Herald newspaper. The article goes on, "According to reliable new sources Camp Midvale has been under FBI surveillance for years". Other words jump out of this and other news articles. The camp is a "Red Nest" that allows black youth to mix with white youth, nudism, free love, kids driven out of North Carolina. Mayor of Ringwood, New Jersey meeting with the Police Chief to protect the community from a mixed group of young campers, allegedly involved in mixed race activities, long hair, and sexy clothing. Driven from North Carolina in a riot down in the Appalachians, the police chief is quoted, "We will not stand for any rabble rousing and shenanigans at the camp". The more one reads on, the more one thinks back and thinks "Hey now, I remember hanging out at Camp Midvale as a kid." Wonderful outdoor natural swimming pool carved out of rock, tramping and climbing, hiking, exploring old mines, and fun times. Camp Midvale is about five miles away as the crow flies from growing up in Oak Ridge up in the North Jersey Highlands down across the West Milford Highlands and into the Ramapo Mountains.

Article after article expounds upon so-called hedonistic activities countered by locals burning crosses and anti-communist protests outside the camp. Then a letter to the editor in 1970 calling out naturalists and alerting the public that “radical” topics are being introduced in the public schools including American Negro history, using marijuana to explain art, and that the local schools are allowing student bands playing rock music to appear at school activities. Then the piece de resistance... the head of the local Audubon Society is showing a film to students titled *Ecology* and *Pollution*. Head of the local Audubon Society? Wait a minute, that’s Mom. Her response letter rips into the first letter with passion and sarcasm. Unsheathed binoculars, card carrying members of an organized group of different people, bird and the bees, nature films in color, and well, lions and tigers and bears, oh my.

More articles and there it is a 1972 newspaper article stating ecologists and naturalist are “militant conservationists”. The key claim of those articles is naturalists are out in the woods and letting mixed raced youth interact. Guess Mom is in good company as they also mention the Sierra Club in the same article. Militant conservationists... so being inquisitive, I start asking people who knew my folks and family members is this true in totality? It was like prying teeth from a walrus. Some said yes, others flatly denied it and others said well kind of some things took place.

Forty years back, the FBI and law enforcement were actively engaged in attempting to stop mixed race youth from interacting, playing, learning, and discovery. Forty years back in our lifetime, if you advocated and protested for clean air, clean water, against pollution, and fought for inclusion and a healthy community, one was tagged a militant. Food for thought of all the people involved in the outdoors and the environment, do not forget the past for then we are destined to repeat it. Oh, for sure I had my mouth washed out with soap as a kid once. For sure I encountered racism first-hand and for sure I am suspect of today's generations who claim they know... Do they? I suspect not.

Chapter One – Story Four - Trout Fishing Smoke and Mirrors

They we are, in the late 1960s, four of us neighborhood kids, one fine spring evening fishing for trout along the Pequannock River. Early enough that mosquitoes are out in force, ah but trout are biting. This after a wonderful season of catching and learning to release the mystic of winter brown trout. One of the older kids in the neighborhood of thirteen houses (to this day) who really helped hone one's interest in the outdoors explained the best way to keep bugs down was construct a smudge fire. We would stand in the smoke and fish. Makes sense, so before long a smoke firing is bubbling away laying down a wonderful smoke bank across the low-lying river flowing by its rippled, glade pools. Separated by the others one cast after another follows, nothing biting but it's a fine evening to be out. Glancing up we notice fire trucks and police vehicles up about one-fourth of a mile away at different area along the Pequannock. Well, no need to worry they are not anywhere close to us. Wandering back up to the others, we discuss the

lights. Forgetting recent local wildfires and risks of fire we are blissfully minding our fishing lines. Lights have disappeared so back to fishing and tranquility we go. Looking up the hill from the riverbank, it is readily apparent coming down the road is the local fire department and police in their glory of lights but not sirens. Holy smokes, we realize they are coming to snag the people who set off the smoke cloud. Then our collective lightbulb goes off. Oops, we are in some serious trouble. As we start to flee the big ole brown trout that was laying among the gravel ripple latches onto the worm I am using for bait. Voices from the others yell out, "Skip the fish, let's beat feet out of here." Through the darkness we run up behind the local houses and through backyards getting to where the majority of the neighborhood residents are standing around watching the excitement unfold. The entire Pequannock River Valley in that area is one huge blanket of smoke. Dang, we made good smoke fire. Panting to catch our breath, adults look at us and say "Lose the waders, the fishing poles, and the tackle boxes." Hurriedly discarded behind bushes, we hide behind adults as they claim they have no knowledge of what is taking place to local police officers. Everyone leaves and a semblance of peace returns to the neighborhood. But not so quick. Not only did we get lectures on fire safety, but also on arson, making smoke fires, and much more. We had to go back and tag the fish later in the summer and for sure that trout gained my trust.

Chapter Seven, “Rancocas Doolittle” opens with a visit from the NJ State Police, the proper way of treating mouth fungus in boa constrictors, feeding a caiman in one’s bedroom, and cooking stew with meat gleaned from flesh eating dermestid beetles, and other gems of growing up inside a nature center inside a NJ State Park and inside New Jersey Audubon Society

Story Three

Going to and basically being raised at New Jersey Audubon Society’s Lorimar Wildlife Sanctuary where my father was a naturalist in the early and mid 1970’s one was allowed to dive deep into its library of old books and manuscripts, losing one self in the extensive egg collection, learning by being and doing. Ah, I see that a square knot is used to affix the ole bat banding box

End of excerpts