

Patron Saint

“He’s the patron saint of working men, you know,” said Wendell, as he shifted his large frame and got comfortable in the porch rocking chair. Two old geezers, one of us somewhat sane, were going to have another one of Wendell’s goofy conversations.

“You mean St. Joseph?” I asked
“Oh, sure,” he said. “That’s why he traveled around looking for work all over the place.”

“With Mary on a donkey?” I asked?
“Well, sure,” said Wendell, “on that night, anyway. He probably heard there was work in Jerusalem.”
“You mean Bethlehem.”
“Right. He was a carpenter, don’t cha know. Might have heard the news about a palace or a sindagog going up somewhere. So he pops Mary up on old Donner and off they go again.”

“You mean Blitzen,” I said.
“Right.” says Wendell. “There wasn’t any Union Hall to go to. No bulletin board with job postings back then. You had to keep your ears open and hang around down by the station for the camel drivers to come through and ask if they heard of any construction starting up.”
“And drink beer,” I interjected.
“Don’t be a smart ass,” said Wendell, “they drank wine.”

You could feel sorry for my dopey friend Wendell, but if you had spent any time watching him cross the road without looking or riding his lawn mower to the store when no one is looking, you’d realize he must have the hardest working Guardian Angel this side of the Pearly Gates. They say God protects

drunks and fools. Wendell was neither until one night out drinking in college more than thirty years ago. He lost control of his Chevy convertible as it spun wildly off the road and crashed into a sleepy fleabag hotel in the Catskills. Without a seatbelt, it’s a wonder Wendell stayed in the saddle, so to speak. The Chevy battered and bounced off 6 parked cars and a US Mail truck, before plowing into Units Number 3 and 4. The latter was occupied by a young lady and an older man who would have a lot of explaining to do when he got out of the hospital.

Wendell’s head must have been hit by every two-by-four sent flying through the wreckage of the High Peak Motel. He hasn’t been the same since. He lives up the road with a sister and each day walks down past my house, oblivious to the cars that zoom by him on the busy road as he wanders on and off the pavement. When he gets opposite of my house, Wendell stops and waits for me to come out and invite him up on the porch to sit for a while in one of the wooden rocking chairs. Some days I stay inside and feel like I’m hiding. This goes on all summer and fall, until Wendell flies off to spend the winter with his younger brother in Florida.

“So, “ I asked Wendell, “Saint Joseph traveled all over 48 states looking for work?”
“Don’t be silly,” he said, “there’s 50 states now.”
“Oh, I forgot,” I said, “we bought Mexico.”

“No-o-o! Alaska and Puerto Rica. You don’t know your geology. Hahahaha!”

Wendell loves it when I play the fool, though I’m pretty sure he suspects the ruse. His sister and her family have grown tired of his banter and his needs ... unfortunate, but understandable ... and he seldom has the opportunity to feel important or even superior. So, I often ask his advice on little things.

“It’s clouding up, Wendell. Do you think rain is coming?” I asked that afternoon.

Patron Saint



he'd just thought up, he shuffled up to the macadam, puts his toes on the edge of the grass as if it was the end of a diving board, and then bowed way out over the road's surface. I cringed, thinking he might lose his balance and fall into the path of an oncoming car. Leaning even further out, Wendell put his hand to his forehead to shade his eyes like some long ago Hiawatha. He looked north, then swooped the upper half of his body around and stared off to the south. Then he turned and ambled back to the porch.

"Any rain coming?" I asked as Wendell plopped himself back down in the rocker. I'm a good straight man.

"Huh?" He looked truly confused.

I knew he'd forgotten what he had been about. His eyes screwed up in thought. In a moment he would realize he'd lost a piece of the day again and begin to feel bad.

"Did you see any rain coming up the road?" I reminded him. "Or anyone on a donkey?"

"No," he said, now deflated. "This isn't the way to Jerusalem." He was silent for a few moments, while for the first time I wondered if this might be my Road to Emmaus. If you weren't listening in Sunday School, that's where Christ disguised himself as a mere mortal after his resurrection.

"You want some coffee, Wendell?"
"I've had my two cups today," he said.
I knew he wanted a cup. He always wants a cup. He was afraid to break the rule his sister

made for him, to keep him from getting too jittery, I guess.

"You won't tell anyone I had coffee, will you?" he asked.
"Your caffeine secrets are safe with me," I said with a chuckle. I stood up to go in and get two mugs.

He looked up suddenly and said, "Who is your patron saint?"

"Saint George," I said, without a thought.
"You mean the guy with the dragons and the roundtable and all?" he asked.

"No, the guy with the piano, George Gershwin."

"But he's Jewish," said Wendell.

"So is God," I replied.

Well, you'd think I'd just made the funniest joke this side of the Pearly Gates. Wendell laughed and laughed, and was still giggling when I brought the mugs of coffee out from the kitchen. I always wrap his in a dish towel, because his hands shake a bit.

Quiet for a moment, we sipped on our coffee. While Wendell was thinking about God-knows-what, I sat and thought of all the things inside the house I needed to do. I had a package to wrap, the refrigerator ice maker to fix, the

"I have a patron saint," said Wendell.

"Who's that," I asked.

"You," he replied, without looking at me.

Ah, me. What could I say to that? It's a heavy responsibility to be someone's patron saint, I was thinking. Still, I've never received a nicer compliment.

"But," he continued, "you can't make coffee worth a damn."

copyright 2009, David Griffin

***The Press at
Windswept Farm***

Saugerties, NY

www.windsweptpress.com