



The Illinois Billiard Club

"The Country Club of Pool and Carom Billiards"

8446 Archer Avenue - Willow Springs, IL 60480 - 708-839-1331 - www.IllinoisBilliardClub.com

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1975 - 29th Anniversary - 2004

"A Child's Christmas that Inspired a Man's Dream"

By Jim Parker

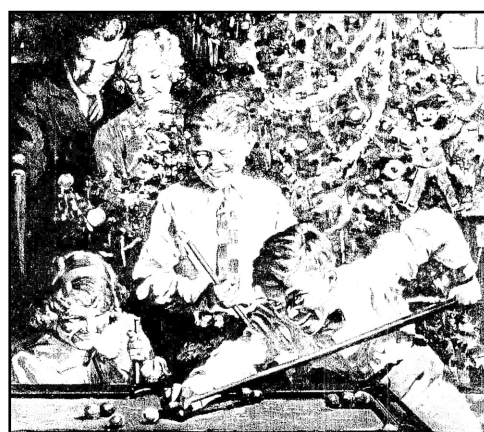
Motivated by his fondness for both his friends and the game of billiards, some thirty-five years ago to preserve and protect a more prominent side of American billiards from its declining and public downtrodden existence, a young man installed a carom billiard table in the basement of his home. To promote both the game and a sense of higher social standards he then invited his friends to use his little billiard room and tell others of integrity they also were welcome.

One by one others came, each bringing honor, integrity and enhancement to the publicly exploited and its own industries mismanaged game. With the responsibilities of operating his electrical contracting business and providing for his family, the man later gave his friends keys to his basement billiard room that they might enjoy and care for the table during his absence.

What evolved over the following thirty-five years has brought wholesome change to the world and has now been recorded within scads of Chicago's history books, newspapers and magazines. All of which has truly been the result of one woman by the name of Bonnie Marie Parker. A woman whose love of her husband and sensitivity to his determination to create for society something of ineffable magnificence, beauty and inspiration led to the success of today's oldest, most distinguished, self owned and operated private billiards club and public banquet facility in the United States. ... The Illinois Billiard Club and Bonnie's Dining & Banquets. A multi-million dollar country located facility where people of all ages, nationalities and places, annually pilgrimage to host each of their precious celebrations of life through the facilities unique marriage of banquets and billiards.

The following is a true Christmas story that begins with an ending and ends with a beginning. It bridges a time from the middle 1940s up to and including today's telling of the story itself. When combining what you've just learned with the story's message expresses one of the greatest principles of celebration. That is, learning to move toward our goals one step at a time ... often just one baby step at a time ... and learning to love the doing, learning to use the accumulation of time. When we multiply tiny pieces of time by small increments of daily effort, we find we can all accomplish magnificent things. We, each and every one of us, for betterment, can change the world.

The year was 1947. World War II that was said to end all wars had just ended two years earlier and our nation was still putting itself back together. I was seven years old and the second son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank and Margaret Parker who lived on Chicago's southwest side in a community known as Marquette Park. My brother Bill and I were blessed with two older sisters. I was too young at the time to appreciate just how beautiful, both spiritually and physically, my sisters actually were. But I'm certain their boyfriends did. Later in life I concluded that actress Elizabeth Taylor's career was in all probability launched simply the result of my sister Margaret Mary, with her long black satin hair and heartwarming smile, was simply too busy to attend Hollywood's audition for Taylor's first motion picture, "National Velvet." My sister Harriet Ann, with her saddle shoes and quick-witted personality could have easily doubled for Judy



Garland when the actress first starred with Mickey Rooney and later in the 1946 hit movie, "The Harvey Girls." But I don't think mom and dad saw Tinsel Town as the place for their pretty and young Harriet Ann. ...A convent perhaps, but not Hollywood.

Christmas in our home was celebrated somewhat in its own style. Our Christmas tree was our family's Christmas centerpiece and primary gift from Santa himself. An enormous Canadian Balsam that always looked as if it were bursting through the living room ceiling as it towered over Santa's village and Lionel's railroad directly beneath it. How exciting it was in knowing Santa would bring our tree all the way from the North Pole on the very night he and his reindeer soared through the heavens with all of his toys and gifts for a world in waiting. We never saw nor smelled that revered evergreen until Christmas morning. I believe mom and dad had begun this family tradition as the result of the great depression. To wake up on Christmas morning and find such a gift within itself in our own living room left little cause to look for more presents.

As a nation during the 1940s you'd be hard pressed in finding much money or signs of financial prosperity. Our nation's wealth at that time were human virtues; like trust, love and dedication to family values. These were the gifts that were bountiful and exchanged within every home, neighborhood, village and city throughout the land. It was a time in America when the only drugs were aspirin. Never, ever, did you hear of young Americans giving their souls to the devil through cocaine, alcohol or whatever other mix of self-indulgence and lack of self-discipline. To make ends meet, parents often worked two jobs yet saw to it that seldom either mom or dad wouldn't be on hand to look after their children. People set and met long-term goals; paid their bills by dedicated work ethics. ...Not laziness and phony claims of entitlement that exploited their nations well-intended welfare and public-aid programs. It clearly was focused dedication to strong family values that led the American family to becoming the supreme driving force that powered the economic and social engines that eventually built the greatest nation in the world.



Christmas Day ...1947

My father, Mr. Frank Rodney Parker was an incredibly talented man that forever shunned public recognition of his unlimited talents. Dad had three loves throughout his entire life: His family, any person, place or thing that brought pleasure and education to others ... and his camera ... that he used to forever immortalize the other two.

of his nephew. Mike died suddenly of an aneurysm shortly before my eleventh birthday.

I don't recall if it snowed on Christmas day, December 25, 1947. What I do recall is my brother Bill and I for hours lying on the living room floor playing with our Lionel

My mom, a pretty Irish girl, born and raised on Chicago's West Side had four sisters and one brother. Her father, Michael S. Kerwin, seemingly like most all West Side Irishmen, was a fireman. In fact, before retirement grandpa Kerwin was promoted to Fire Marshall for the third largest city in the nation. Uncle Mike, the husband of mom's sister Francis was also a Chicago fireman. Heck, I was some ten years old before realizing not every Irishman was a billiard playing Chicago fireman! And speaking of firemen I suspect if anyone has to either be praised or faulted for what I've done with so very much of my life it would have to be poor Uncle Mike. And the irony in what I'm about to tell you is that uncle Mike never lived long enough to see or feel the inferno blaze that he as a fireman, not only didn't extinguish, but on the contrary, a fire he himself started within the heart

trains and thinking of new ways of rebuilding its little village setting beneath the Christmas tree. Lincoln logs and that amazing erector set were the two gifts I couldn't stop playing with for five minutes, not even later in the day after all of our aunts and uncles began arriving for Christmas dinner.

My dad worked some 46 years with one company. He was drafting supervisor for the Kellogg Switchboard and Supply Company. As builders of telephone switchboard equipment that at the time was most often enclosed in elaborate hardwood cabinets, Kellogg's had an enormous wood shop. To remodel a portion of our basement we later used as our holiday dining and recreation room, dad carried home scraps of used and discarded crating lumber, often with sections still nailed together. After breaking the sections apart, the broken pieces of wood went into the coal furnace to help heat the house, while the used nails went into a wooden box for future projects. Dad later used any spare lumber to later build various projects around our home. When building or repairing something one of my jobs was to sit with a hammer on the basement floor and vigorously pound and straighten, what seemed like hundreds of bent nails. The ones found too rusty went into the garbage. And as odd as it might sound I was some twelve years old before learning you could actually buy clean and perfectly straight nails!

It was within this basement dining room that mom and dad would host all of our holiday dinners and family parties. From the old crating lumber and not wasting one scrap, dad cleverly designed and built with the precision of a fine cabinet-maker, some 30-foot long banquet table with removable wooden legs. Shortly after whatever the holiday we'd remove the legs and move the table to its storage place against the outside wall. Then resting on its side upon carefully placed wooden cleats; dad held the table to the wall with a series of screen hook and eyes. When later assembling the table for a holiday dinner, dad first covered the top with newspaper that mom later covered with some three or four of her finest Irish linen tablecloths.

It was nothing short of a homespun miracle the way Mom and Pop were able to transform a cold, dark basement, complete with its webs of round coal-furnace ducts, into a warm and festive holiday dining room. A room that after our aunts and uncles arrived for Christmas dinner glowed with holiday charm and family love. If a sign was ever built and hung outside of our little Chicago bungalow I'm certain it would have read, "Frank and Margaret Parker's Palmer House."

Working together from early morning Mom and Dad cooked and served a traditional Christmas dinner so eye appealing, delicious and filling, it could best be described only in the thousand words of a Norman Rockwell painting. After dinner it was time to go back upstairs for the opening of everyone's afternoon presents. My brother Billy and I had already seen to it that the ones we earlier received from Santa were long since opened at dawn's first light. It had become a custom that as a family we all gathered in the living and dining rooms, and as close to the Christmas tree as possible. After Pop turned on the record player and invited Bing Crosby and his forever-heartfelt version of "White Christmas" into our home, someone was chosen to pass out the gifts. On this day there were some eighteen of us, yet in later years after those pretty sisters of mine married that figure soared to an excess of



My sisters Margaret Mary and Harriet Anne on the left and right with our ever encouraging and devoted Mother, Mrs. Margaret Kerwin Parker.



My brother Billy smiling on the left while I must have been trying to move the stagecoach?

HOLY COW, when trying to fit those little balls into pockets that seemed even smaller than the balls themselves. As a child, this was one of the most memorable Christmas day's I can ever remember. In fact, over the following seven or eight years, whenever friends stopped in to visit and we began to look for something to do, out came that little toy billiard table. The box became so worn it found itself in the garbage within the first year or two. Yet that little table itself, offering everything from challenge and laughter, to the simple amusement of its visible ball return that let you watch a billiard ball roll to its storage tray always managed to turn a simple visit into an exiting fun filled experience.

Today, more than a half-century later, by introducing billiards as the social centerpiece to man's celebrations of life I've lived to fulfill a dream that publicly services our nations greatest wealth, the American family. ...The greatest division of our society that publicly billiards has been of shameful disservice since its recognized 19th century public appearance in America. A game whose self-proclaimed industrial leaders, have, to avoid their further embarrassment of incompetence when failing this division of society, boosted their claims of unfinished symphonies for over a century.

The future of all cultures, is, as always, been found within their children and time honored values of their families and educators. If to the American family this game of billiards is one day to become publicly excepted, it must first become respected. And respect is not easily taught through words of promise, but rather wholesome activity and time proven example.

While uncertain as to what others might feel or do to expand the social and competitive borders of society, I am rock-hard certain of what this one man shall forever continue to pursue, because it's something of value we've all come to see. Simply give me the children, a billiard table ... and a Christmas tree.



Today, some fifty-six years later, it's still the American family that gets top billing at The Illinois Billiard Club/ and Bonnie's Dining & Banquets/ of Willow Springs IllinoisWhen on November 9, 2003, the Jeffery and Maureen Panella family of Oak Lawn Illinois celebrated Mom's and their children's Grandmother's 70th birthday.