

A Rocket Falls Out of Orbit

John Sheehan b.7/19/68 d.7/3/19

A Memory, A Reflection

When the reports came in last Wednesday afternoon that a 50 year old man had drowned in Learned Pond I learned Johnny Rocket's birth name.

I'd seen him the previous morning. Entering the outside door to the Café from the side parking lot I looked right and spotted the Rocket about the same time he saw me. He made a beeline toward me. My greeting, a constant across more than a decade and a half, "Hey Johnny Rocket, how ya' doin?"

Johnny's attached to his ever present bicycle. He looks the same. Compact, wiry, sporting a buzz cut and, since it's 8:30 a.m., clear eyes. While he's long been indiscriminate about his DOC, unlike many of his fellow travelers entering the sixth decade of their life, Johnny seems none the worse for wear.

David D. brings me an old photo. The first HR orientation for RWA, circa 2006. The Rocket's there, with two other new workers, mugging for the camera in his inimitable style.

We crop the photo to focus on John, blow it up and frame it. The plan is to hang it in the Café where the 7 a.m. meeting is held daily.

After some friendly chop-busting focused on the lime green inner rims of his latest bike last Tuesday, I watched John Sheehan peddle away from me. This is the tune that played in my head.

**"Long may you run
Long may you run
Although the changes
Have come
With your chrome heart shining
In the sun
Long may you run."**

I wonder if when the Rocket was a toddler, strapping jets to his legs to launch himself into adolescence, if his mom and dad, perhaps with a favorite uncle hummed this melody to him.

The perigee and apogee of the Rocket's orbit consisted of the morning meeting at 7 Bishop and his room at 58R Clinton with the Drop In serving as a worthy way point.

I grapple to find meaning and relevance with what's happened. I find solace in two lines from Chapter 11 of the Tao Te Ching.

**"Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub.
It is the center hole that makes it useful."**

As helpers, we have the responsibility to help guide the folks we work with to find usefulness in their everyday lives. In other words, to help others find meaning. Sometimes at SMOC we strive to help others find usefulness by searching for the possibility that usefulness can be found in helping others. I wonder whether Johnny Rocket, in a quiet moment, perhaps when he was making coffee for the morning meeting or making a momentary stop from his perpetual travels, thought about whether he had the capacity to use his natural skills of engagement and wit and charity to become a helper.

Long may you run John Sheehan.

Post Script:

Yesterday we had a Celebration of Life for Johnny in our café. One of the staff had contacted his family and his mom and two brothers participated in the service. They were able to meet almost of the 75 or so folks who attended. Most importantly, they got the opportunity to listen to many folks share how Johnny impacted their lives. Johnny had left Lowell at the turn of this century and made a home for himself in Framingham. In doing so, it seems that he had left almost everything about his previous life behind. As I watched his family listen intently

to Johnny's community, it was easy to see that this Celebration of Life brought Johnny back to them.

NOTES:

- DOC - Drug of Choice
- RWA - Ready, Willing and Able
- Long May You Run - Neil Young, Stephen Stills
- Tao Te Ching Chapter 11 - The full chapter reads:
 - "Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub.
 - It is the center hole that makes it useful.
 - Shape clay into a vessel.
 - It is a space within that makes it useful.
 - Cut doors and windows for a room.
 - It is the holes that make it useful.
 - Therefore, profit comes from what is there.
 - Usefulness from what is not there."
- Lao Tzu