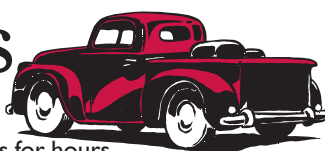


**"Joy cometh in the morning. Like the sunrise, the morning paper and toast with marmalade."**  
~Psalm 30:5

# Finders Keepers

By Bob Ingram



This happened one bad, cold, rainy evening in early January, the holiday spirit already faded like the Ghost of Christmas Past and most New Year's resolutions as broke as the economy.

It had rained on and off all day, but about four o'clock it had cleared enough that I figured I could get in my daily stroll on the Wildwood Boardwalk. So off I went, all bundled up in a down jacket and the ultra-warm knit cap my cousin Eileen had given me for Christmas. The sky was slate gray and a stiff southern breeze made it even chillier; the feel of rain was still in the air.

I walk from Second Street in North Wildwood to the Ferris wheel and back, and the only people I came across on my hike that day were two guys who regularly run the boards. They're in early middle age and go at a pretty good clip and we always wave or nod. One guy has a classic stride and the other sort of drags along a step or two off his shoulder, but they get it done and they have my respect and admiration as a runner of twenty-five years brought to a walk by really bum knees, the final price paid by so many runners.

When I reached the turnaround point, the last of the sun poked out just long enough to put on a sunset light show, the horizon streaked with a brilliant magenta glow that spread faintly across the whole sky before darkness finally settled in with the finality of a closed coffin. I paused at one point and looked back and the Boardwalk stretched into the night like a deserted *film noir* set.

Just as I got back to my car, the sky opened up in a lashing rain. This has happened to me a lot, and I always attribute it to the gods of walking holding back the rain as a small, whimsical favor to one of their disciples. Or maybe I'm just lucky that way.

Anyhow, I headed for the Wawa on New Jersey Avenue in Wildwood to reward myself with a hot chocolate mixed with cappuccino, my winter after-walk drink of choice. From there I'd go over to the Wildwood Boxing Club on Park Boulevard to hang out with Al Mussachio, Richie Bennett, and Andrew Halbruner, the trainers there, and watch the young fighters work out. The boxing club is one of my favorite places on the island, a converted transmission shop that is as bare-bones and funky as some of the legendary Philadelphia boxing gyms like Champs or the Passyunk Gym, complete with old fight posters on the walls, five creaky heavy bags, and a bust-out old ring that has to be covered with a tarp when it rains because of the leaky roof. The Wildwood Boxing Club is a real throwback, which is the main reason I like it so much.

Al Mussachio is another reason. Co-founder and head trainer at the gym, he's an ex-Philly detective, a former amateur boxer, and martial arts champion. He also trains and manages his son, unbeaten Wildwood pro light heavyweight Chuck "The Professor" Mussachio. On top of all that, Al is a true raconteur; I could listen to him spin cop and

gangster stories for hours.

But there would be no stories on this dark and rainy night. Just as I got to the door of the boxing club, Al came busting out with a blond-haired, ruddy-cheeked, chunky boy of about fifteen in tow.

"They stole his bike! First night here and they stole his bike!" Al bellowed. "A five-hundred dollar bike!"

Evidently, the kid had left the bike, unlocked, outside the club. Bad move. Now he and Al were going to cruise around in Al's red truck to see if they could find the purloined bicycle.

"Let me come with you," I said.

"Sure. Hop in," said Al. "Another pair of eyes."

The kid was so quiet in the back seat that I almost forgot he was there as we criss-crossed the Wildwood streets, the wipers swiping hypnotically back and forth and the rain beating ceaselessly on the truck's hood and roof. It was a nasty night for what I saw as a futile mission. I figured the bike was long gone by now, stashed somewhere safe until the heat was off. I glanced at the back seat, and the silent kid looked like he felt the same way.

As we passed the Wawa, Al said, "Let's go by the rec center. I got a feeling."

The new recreation center by the football field on Young Avenue has some exterior doo-wop touches but is mainly a traditional American building in the basic shed shape of much of our architecture. This dismal night, it sent its interior neon glow into the rain like a welcome beacon of shelter and community.

And there, the only one in the rack, an orphan of the storm, was the bike!

The kid climbed out of the truck, reclaimed the bike, and pedaled off into the rain. He might have even thanked Al.

"C'mon," Al said, and I followed him into the rec center where he told the no-nonsense lady in charge what had happened. She nodded in understanding and went into the gym and came out in a few minutes with a sheepish girl in her early teens, her black hair pulled back in a severe pony tail and a faint sheen of sweat on her face.

Al told her the bike had been stolen and asked where she had gotten it. She said a boy had given it to her to ride to the center.

"Who was it?" the rec supervisor pressed her. "You know I'm not playing here."

The girl fumbled and mumbled and finally came up in an almost inaudible voice with a name.

"Who? Who?" the lady kept on. "Speak up, girl."

Al and the lady both nodded at the name and Al said, "You tell him that I used to be a cop and he could get locked up for that if we went to the police. You tell him. Hear?"

The girl nodded.

"All right," the lady said, and the girl went back into the gym.

When we were back in the truck, I told Al how impressed I was at how he'd found the bike.

He put the truck in gear and shrugged. "Once a cop, always a cop."

# SUN SONGS

Bob Ingram, whose writing has appeared in every issue of The SUN, has published a volume of 18 short stories, "Sun Songs: Wildwood Stories."

All but two of the stories first appeared in the SUN, and the collection is under the iUniverse imprint and is available through Amazon.com, at the Wildwood Historic Museum, and at the Hereford Inlet Light-house Museum. See ad with order form for "Sun Songs" below.

Ingram also co-wrote, narrated, and co-produced the documentary film "Boardwalk: Greetings From Wildwood By-the-Sea," which has been shown frequently on PBS.

"The Wildwoods are an endless source of material," he says. "A simple walk on the Boardwalk or breakfast at McDonald's can

turn into a story that imbues itself with a kind of magical realism. The mystery and majesty of the ocean seems to wash onto Five Mile Island. I don't think there's anywhere else I'd rather be and write about."

Bob Ingram has been a writer, editor, and journalist for more than 45 years and his work has appeared in Philadelphia Magazine, Atlantic City Magazine, South Jersey Magazine, the Philadelphia Daily News, PhillySport Magazine, Philadelphia Weekly, Atlantic City Weekly, Philly Arts, the South Philadelphia Review, the Cape May County Herald, The Drummer, The Plain Dealer, The Philadelphia Free Press, The South Street Star (which he co-founded), The Fishtown Star, Food Trade News, Supermarket Business Magazine, and Progressive Grocer Magazine.

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