

A TALE OF TWO SUMMERS

by Fred Hobbs

Filamina Frampton and Danny McNulty experienced vastly different summer vacations. Filamina was dubbed “Filly” (appropriate nickname for a first year teacher of English in a tough inner city school in Brooklyn, New York). Danny was a student in her sixth grade class.

To paraphrase the famous first line in British author Charles Dickens’ “Tale of Two Cities”, the summer of 1963 was both the best of times and the worst of times for Filly and Danny.

To further her prospects for a successful teaching career, Filly spent most of that summer taking graduate courses on the campus of Millard Fillmore College in Summerhill, New York. To pay for that advanced education and refrain from starving on a teacher’s meager pay she worked also waiting tables at Butch’s “Meet and Greet to Eat” Café in town.

Danny was whisked off to summer camp. Camp Granada in the Catskills. (Danny was the only Irish-Catholic kid in the camp that was composed predominately of kids from middle-class Jewish families.)

Filly found herself bored with classes in subjects such as “Inter-disciplinary Methods for Maintaining Order in the Classroom” and “Importance of the Ellipse in Creative Writing.” She longed to be sunbathing on the beach or seeing the exciting sights of Paris. Then, toward the end of the summer, a young tall, handsome customer at Butch’s caught her eye and he caught hers, too.

His name was Jeff, in Summerhill to interview a potential witness in a lawsuit he was handling for a prestigious Manhattan law firm he had recently joined.

Meanwhile, at Camp Granada, Danny was getting to know the other boys. In spite of their contrasting religious backgrounds, they got along very well, sharing their initial gripes about the camp, agreeing it was very entertaining and that they’ll have some fun when it stops raining. Danny wrote his parents a long list of complaints: he went hiking with a boy named Joe Spivy who developed poison ivy. And his friend Leonard Skinner? He got ptomaine poisoning after the first night’s dinner. “All the counselors hate the waiters, and the lake has alligators,” he wrote. “And you remember Jeffrey Hardy? They’re about to form a searching party.”

Then Danny interrupted his correspondence task. “Wait a minute, it stopped hailing, guys are swimming, guys are sailing. Playing baseball, gee that’s better... please regard this letter.”

When the new semester started in the fall, Filly was so happy to leave her advanced studies and cuddle up with Jeff that she didn’t plan her first day back in her classroom and, for a first assignment, pulled out the old chestnut topic:

“Write about your summer vacation.” When Danny was called onto read it out loud he began in his best Brooklynese: “Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah. Here I am at Camp Grenada.”

Impressed at Danny's rhyming ability, Filly's boyfriend Jeff sent the letter to a standup comedian he knew who recorded it, set to the music of classical composer Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours." It became a jukebox and radio hit. The best of times for everyone involved!