

FIRST

03-17-2014 BY HARRY ZIRKELBACH

I am the first of two children born of Harry and Josephine Zirkelbach.

Otherwise it would be a long time before I would be first at anything, with a “Z” name



Harry at Yosemite

Then too, Mom enrolled me in the first grade when I was five. Then, and for years, I would be the youngest, smallest in grade, often seated last. I learned to recognize grade school classmates by the back of their head.

It is amazing how different the back of every head can be, though the female is inclined to be disguised by well-coiffured hair. Still the shape is evident.

There is no posture in life, or time, not revealing of something.

One childhood friend had an especially large knob behind the head. He had two other characteristics known to all; he was the brightest, seemed to glean more than one fact from any sentence declared as truth. Further, his last name began with “A” so most often he was seated front left, as was deservedly, first in class.

Seated last alphabetically had advantages, realized years later. Unlike the arrangements of our Writers Group, where each is the head of Class, where a viewers, like our companion Gene Richer, who does not read, sits along the east wall, observing and listening from that advantage; no one looks at him these 60 minutes; so he has a cat-bird view, unmarred by our reaction.

Thus, much of High School and College CLass years were viewed from behind my friends, but always the same clear view, and ear, of the knowledge transmitter.

First is where everyone begins the race.

It is not important where one finishes when the best effort is continuous.

In one moment as a child, our class went to a summer June picnic. Boys and girls were separated, all obliged to be participants in a foot race involving many grades. I assume the herd gave their all, as did I. I observed that as I rounded the third

bend in the square race course, the winner was already home; I far behind the other last runner. Yet, finished to shouts of encouragement; then out of courtesy, good humor, and plain old summer fun, I was declared the winner of the next race, the only runner.

To this very day, I have been treated fairly in every race entered.
Does first matter?
In this room, do you listen more intently, if you have already read?

Requiem

Out of curiosity, I looked up Johnny A in Erie Obituaries. He is the boy mentioned in paragraph three, large knob back of head, which I imagined, filled with surplus brains. In that obit I learned he died in 1977 at age of 58. He would not be the first classmate to die. – One classmate, Tom McCarthy, Irish, all smiles, a delight, quit Prep as Junior, transferred to St Vincent's High – that year died in his sleep. – Another, James Quinn graduated, and when I returned from an extra year in the Navy, learned Jimmy became a Marine Officer, died in one of the nameless South Pacific Islands.``

Oddly each were really bright, had my friendship, deserved happiness, for they first befriended everyone.



Salute to March 17, and all the Irish.

