

The History of Golf in America in 1986

by Todd Sentell

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WHY WE LIKE IT: ‘

The non-committal voice of the ‘raconteur’ is the perfect foil to the bawdy shenanigans going on in this uproariously hilarious flash. There’s lots of good writing here but we especially love: ‘All of a sudden the woman started going at it as if her hand were covered with killer bees.’ Read it and weep (with laughter). Then laugh some more.

Little Jeremy Robideaux, twelve years old, an enthusiastic junior golfer who lives in Biloxi, Mississippi, was given an assignment by his social studies teacher to write about the history of something he loved and understood.

Jeremy loved golf a lot. His mother didn’t really play golf ... she just took a lot of private golf lessons. The one-on-one kind. Just her and the club pro. She also enjoyed getting massages at their country club quite a bit. Jeremy’s uncles played golf and even one of his sisters played golf until she broke both of her arms a couple of weeks ago. Jeremy’s dad used to play golf but he quit because he travels a lot now.

For reference material, Jeremy had only the “G” volume of his very own set of World Books. Through his research, Jeremy discovered there was a “colonial” period of golf in America but the encyclopedia didn’t say a whole lot else about it. This really intrigued Jeremy, and wanting his report to be thorough, of course, Jeremy dialed up the head pro of the club where he played and where his parents were members, Pelican Landing Country Club. Jeremy’s mother knew the pro’s home phone number by heart and she recited it to Jeremy in sort of a sultry, sing-songy voice.

The head pro’s name was Vern Johnson and he was twenty-nine years old and a really nice guy who had won an event a few years ago in Pensacola. Amazingly, for a club professional, Vern was also fairly well known as having a good historical knowledge of the game. Jeremy’s mother had urged him to see if Mr. Johnson knew anything about this colonial period as this would be a good opportunity to impress his

teacher, Mrs. Nix, by interviewing an “authority figure.” Jeremy’s mother said that Mr. Johnson knew quite a bit about a lot of stuff. As a couple, Jeremy’s parents were hugely involved in their son’s academic and golf growth, although they would have been nonetheless pleased if he excelled at badminton.

The phone rang a bunch of times before Vern finally picked up. He sounded a little out of breath, so Jeremy asked him right away about the colonial thing. Vern said, “Oh, yeah. There was some course near Charleston, South Carolina. Okay?”

Jeremy had his fresh legal pad all ready and his pencil was sharp. “When, exactly?”

“Late seventeen hundreds. Oh, Jesus.”

“Good ... goood,” Jeremy said as he scribbled like the dickens. “Thank you Mr. Johnson.”

Jeremy continued, “Mr. Johnson, can you tell me anything more? I really do appreciate your time, sir.”

“Uh, well, actually, in seventeen-ninety-six there were a couple of clubs down there and one near Savannah and then they just disappeared.” The woman squeezed it tightly and put her nose in Vern’s left ear and let out just a little breeze. She dug her long red fingernails in the thing ever so slightly. Vern liked that very much. “Well that’s about all I know about the history of golf in America,” Vern said quickly. “Okay, Jeremy? Good God I’ll call you back la—”

“What? Fire? Hurricane?” Jeremy was ready to write again. He thought this was what a reporter must feel like.

“Nuh uh, just disbanded. Social climate. Bad gnats. Goddamn fucking shit like that. O-kay? Is that goddamn fucking ... you know ... *enough?* Jee-zus.”

The woman mouthed, “I’m leaving.” She stopped her hand, but held her grip.

Jeremy ignored Mr. Johnson’s profanity as he was used to him cursing like that at kids during junior clinics. “That’s exactly what I need, Mr. Johnson,” Jeremy said brightly. “Tell me some more. Really, I appreciate it.”

But there was a long pause while Vern forced her hand back in action. She wouldn’t do it at first. Vern helped her. Then Vern breathed heavily, “No, Jere-mee. I got a wo-man over here. We’re doing something ... very important.”

Jeremy pressed the phone to his ear to see if he could determine what Mr. Johnson and the woman were doing that was so important.

All of a sudden the woman started going at it as if her hand were covered with killer bees.

“OH ... SWEET JEEEE-SUS!”

“Mr. Johnson!” Jeremy shouted. “Are you oh-*kay?*?”

“I’m sitting here,” Vern said slowly, “getting ... oh, Jesus ... my chicken spanked.”

Jeremy literally looked at the phone in his hand. Chicken spanked? What? Mr. Johnson’s got a pet chicken? Jeremy was extremely confused.

Jeremy's mother was in the kitchen cooking dinner. And right before she chopped the head off of a fish she called out, "How's it going in there, little golf scholar?"

The moment Jeremy put the phone back to his ear he heard Vern drop his phone, but Vern didn't turn his phone off before he did.

And just an instant later, and for a good five minutes or so, Jeremy had the distinct pleasure of listening to the sounds of Vern's chicken get spanked and was also privileged enough to hear the type of conversation extremely particular to when a woman spanks a guy like Vern's chicken. And as intellectual and generally informed of modern times as Jeremy was, even at twelve years old, he truly felt at that moment in his existence on the earth that there was so very much left to do and so very much left to learn.

The End

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

For fifteen years in the private golf business, I've been surrounded by club members and club staff who are truly ootsie-tootsie and a whole lot of them who aren't ootsie-tootsie at all but act ootsie-tootsie. I'm plum worn out. So one day I recently thought I'd write a golf-related story that exposed some of the truth about: some folks who work at nice private clubs are human, too. Anyhow, I'm not 'Vern Johnson' but the ol' golf pro is real and a friend of mine. And what's real and revered to me, as a writer, are the deep literary influences of people I've met, and they are Cormac McCarthy, J. D. Salinger, John Updike, Charles Bukowski and Flannery O'Connor. Who says golf is boring with those folks on your writing shoulder?

BIO:

Atlanta native and former schoolteacher, Todd Sentell, is the author of the lunatic adventure *Toonamint of Champions* (2007/Kunati Books) nominated for the 2008 Thurber Award for American Humor. He's the first Georgia native in the salacious history of world literature to publish a sports-related novel, unless *Deliverance* is really about canoeing. He's also the author of the hilarious teaching memoir *Can't Wait to Get There. Can't Wait to Leave.* (2014/Stairway Press). Todd is also a two time award winner for magazine feature writing from the Magazine Association of the Southeast.