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## A Hockey Memoir

Growing up in Princeton, NJ during the sixties, and attending all-boys Princeton Country Day School, I gravitated, as did most of my friends, to hockey. We played other sports, including soccer, football, baseball, and eventually lacrosse, but for many, our participation in these activities simply was intended to keep us busy until the winter season. PCD began in grade 4, and all students chose between hockey and basketball as their winter sport. Needless to say, a significant portion of the student body piled into yellow school buses each day to participate in the daily skate at Princeton University's Baker Rink. Beginning in grade 7, we competed against other schools. PCD ended in grade 9, and the expectation for many was that we would continue our education and hockey at a New England boarding school.

Winter weekends were devoted to playing in the Princeton Pee-Wee Hockey League, consisting of six house teams playing in a round-robin format every Saturday morning. Games began as early as 7 am, which represented a major commitment for players and an even larger one for parents. Since my father was the coach of my team, the Blackhawks, we occasionally picked up players who needed a ride to the rink. One was Chris Reeve, the future actor and a classmate at PCD, who played goalie and was assigned each week to a League team. On more than a few occasions, we strapped our equipment on over pajamas while being driven to Baker Rink.

Entering 8th grade, our world changed considerably as PCD combined with all-girls Miss Fine's School. The merged institution, Princeton Day School, extended through grade 12 and was located on a new campus. A new on-site hockey rink was built, which provided an option for those who were considering boarding school. Some, including Chris, remained at PDS for the Upper School experience. However, I was not among them. After some deliberation by my parents, perhaps brought on by my discovery of the opposite sex, I enrolled as a 9th grader at Berkshire School in Sheffield, MA in 1967.

Living in an all-boys community 24/7 provided predictable benefits...and challenges. However, the fact that the hockey team played a challenging schedule in a beautiful facility was important for me. In my 10th grade year the varsity won the conference title, and we moved up to the powerful Housatonic League for the 1969-70 season, which included the top schools in western New England. As our hockey profile increased, Berkshire attracted a group of strong newcomers, including several post-graduates.

A highlight in my junior year was an invitation to play in the Milton-Noble & Greenough 1969 Christmas Tournament (today's Flood-Marr Tournament), the most competitive in New England at the time. Other invitees included Kent School, a long-time rival and member of the Housatonic League, and, ironically, PDS, which replaced a last-minute withdrawal.

We won our first two games in the eight-team field, which put us in the Sunday afternoon finals. After winning the second, the Berkshire team watched the other semi-final match, which pitted Kent vs. PDS. We knew Kent well; the team was strong and deep, with an outstanding new defenseman, Larry Piatelli, who had transferred from a Boston-area high school. Larry's defensive mate was Basil Stetson, another product of PCD and Princeton Pee Wee Hockey. PDS was the clear underdog; the team had outstanding goaltending, with Chris Reeve alternating with Tom O'Connor, and six very good skaters, all of whom had to play extended minutes. However, Coach Harry Rulon-Miller had them playing at a high level. PDS's best player was Fred Schluter, a powerful center who had recently transferred from Taft, a New England power. Fred was my cousin as well.

Berkshire's co-captain, Fred King, was also from Princeton and PCD, so he and I had more than a passing interest in the game that we were watching. Predictably, Kent dominated, putting shot after shot on the PDS goal. However, Chris Reeve was having a special game, and the score remained tied 1-1 through a tense

third period. His greatest save was with about five minutes left after a scramble in front of the PDS net. Chris made several difficult stops, but he was unable to get control of the puck, losing both his stick and catching glove in the process. Eventually, it slid back to the point where Larry Piatelli was able to line up one of his patented slap shots. As the puck headed for the “top shelf,” Chris, lying on his back, managed to free his leg and tip the puck with the toe of his skate over the crossbar, preserving the tie. Early in overtime my cousin scored a backhand goal, which gave PDS an improbable victory and a spot in the finals.

The tournament finals on the following day remain a blur, perhaps because Berkshire was on the losing end (I believe the score was 3-2). My cousin scored the winning goal, and Tom O’Connor turned aside just about everything that we could throw at him. Both the semis and finals proved, at least for this weekend, that a small group of well-coached and conditioned athletes could defeat a favored opponent.

In the ensuing years, much changed in our lives. In that regular season and the next, Kent defeated Berkshire in four Housatonic League games. Larry Piatelli was a dominant force in those matches. He then went on to star at Harvard for four years. Ironically, Basil Stetson and I played together on the same backline for a club team at the University of Denver. After college, Fred King, Fred Schluter and I were reunited as teammates on the Princeton Hockey Club, an adult team of ex-collegiate players that played in the competitive New York Commuter League (it had been founded by my father and Harry Rulon-Miller, among others). Chris Reeve attended Cornell, where he majored in Theater. Soon after college, he was chosen to play the lead in the film, *Superman*.

Despite the fact that I no longer was in close contact with Chris, I kept up with his acting career. After his horse jumping accident in 1995, I was touched by his passionate advocacy for spinal cord research. In 1997 at a fundraiser for the Christopher Reeve Foundation at McCarter Theater in Princeton, Fred King, Fred Schluter, and I were lucky enough to meet back stage with Chris. He genuinely enjoyed talking hockey, specifically the details of the 1969 Christmas Tournament. Chris beamed as I regaled everyone with an account of his incredible save in the final minutes of the Kent game. Indeed, he remembered watching Larry star for Harvard against Cornell, never realizing that they previously had met on the ice.

In 2003, I was able to revisit these events in an unexpected way. Early in that year, I received a Berkshire alumni notice announcing that Larry would be the next Headmaster for the school. I vaguely had heard that he had gravitated to teaching history and coaching after Harvard, but I had lost track of his career. In reading Larry’s biography, I became excited for my school and the type of leadership that he would provide. It seemed like a perfect match.

In late May of that year, I, along with several family members, attended the graduation of my nephew from Berkshire. It was a glorious day and picturesque setting for an outdoor ceremony. My father, who had coached me and later attended many games at Berkshire, was sitting next to me. A short distance behind the seated audience, a number of people in the overflow crowd were standing and watching. One middle-aged man stood out in his demeanor and stance. After studying him for a minute, my dad pronounced that it was Larry. Arms folded, this gentleman rocked back and forth on the balls of his feet watching the proceedings. He was in shirt-sleeves and a tie, and he was wearing a Hamilton College lacrosse hat. When I asked my father how he could be sure, he confidently stated that athletes always move in the same manner. I logically pointed out that there presumably is a difference between skating as a teenager and standing in street clothes at a graduation ceremony twenty-five years later!

To break the impasse, a friendly wager was offered between father and son. I approached this individual a bit hesitantly, introduced myself, and despite losing the bet, was thrilled to connect immediately with my old rival. Larry and I reminisced about past hockey games, our careers in independent school education, and Berkshire’s future. At one point, I asked about his memory of the Kent-PDS game and the spectacular save on his shot in the final minutes. Larry immediately recalled this game in detail, including that particular play. He said that the save against him was one of the very few from his career that he distinctly remembered, and it still bothered him. Larry was speechless when I told him that Superman was responsible for his years of angst!

Larry and I promised to stay in touch as he moved Berkshire forward into a new era. So, several months later I was profoundly saddened when I heard of his sudden passing from a heart attack while playing an adult hockey game in Albany, NY. In the following year Chris died from a lingering staph infection. One of his passions in his final years was watching his son, Will, learn to play hockey in his hometown of Mount Kisco, NY.

Larry and Chris both lived life to the fullest, and, they left us too soon. Undoubtedly, hockey was important to them, and it contributed to their future successes. For a moment in a rink in suburban Boston in December 1969, their lives intersected playing a game they loved.