

Chris remembers James Christopher Neylon, Sr.

About his lifestyle

Jim was a complex man. On one hand he could party hardy and on the other play an intellectual role. He wasn't like William F. Buckley, Jr., instead unpretentious, alert and aware. He had a diverse vocabulary that he used frequently when speaking. He was not ordinarily an extemporaneous man, but when prodded would willingly expound on any subject at all. Jim had a mysterious repertoire of prayers that he would utter in Latin. Well I suppose it was Latin. He often said prayers at special events such as Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas and bathroom baptisms. A lot of Jim's life centered around his favorite bar, The Chatterbox. It was a local bar on East 185th Street, in Euclid, right at the Cleveland -Euclid boundary, located next-door to the old LaSalle Theater.

The Jim was a big baseball fan. He attended at lot of Indians baseball games at the stadium in downtown Cleveland. You could find Jim glued to the radio during the baseball season.

As kids we met some of his friends, many of whom he met at the Chatterbox. One of his friends, Carl Elhert, gave us a large assortment of board games that his children left behind when they married or went off to college. There were a couple of early antiques like the game of Finance, a precursor to Monopoly, and the game of Anagrams, which was the precursor to Scrabble.



Jim in Euclid about 1972

Throughout the years Jim had a parade of different cars. The first car I remember was Jim's 1948 maroon Plymouth, four-door, stick. In 1954, Jim traded for new blue Mercury, followed in 1957 by a black DeSoto. It had long sweeping fins and a pushbutton transmission. Eric recalls that the car was custom ordered and came personalized with a message written on the engine block from someone at the factory. It was in this car that both Eric and I learned how to drive. After moving from East 194th Street to Zeman Avenue, Jim got a new American Motors Rambler. What a change. The Rambler was low-powered, ugly, light gray and spartan. When the Rambler died, he got a huge old Cadillac. He drove that big bomber for awhile.

One of the principal characteristics you might notice when first meeting Jim, was he could talk the talk and walk to walk. I mean, you could engage Jim in nearly any subject and he would discuss it in detail with some degree of authority. Carla once remarked that "Jim was intelligent. No, too intelligent."

Jim was born in Springfield Massachusetts and graduated from Harvard University summa cum laude in 1934. Having lived all of his young life on the East Coast I would have imagined he would have had a New England accent. Not so. When listening to Jim speak the only clues that you might notice in his speech were phrases like "draw a bah-th" or eat a "toe-mah-toe" or visit your "Ah-nt". We were instructed to neither use the word pop when referring to soda nor to use the term hot chocolate when referring to cocoa since only the mid-west hillbillies used these terms.

When I first started dating Karen, Jim coined her Katrina. Years after we had been married he still continued to call her Katrina and I'm not certain he ever really knew her first name. Another name that Jim got wrong was the name that everyone used for me, Chris. As Chris is a contraction of Christopher and also his own middle name you

would think he'd known how to spell it correctly. He spelled my name Cris, without the h.

Jim had an opinion on Swiss Cheese. He said that Swiss cheese manufacturing in Switzerland was governed by tightly held family secrets. The secret he claimed was that the patriarch of the family would swipe residue from the creases of his nose and stir it into the culture. Now that's getting personal.

Shortly after moving to Zeman Avenue, Jim went on disability and retired. He purchased a large black vinyl covered Lazy Boy and parked it in the center of the living room. Its proportions were ungainly for the room, and obviously clashed with the existing rattan and Scandinavian furniture. Carla had just purchased a 21 inch color Zenith television console and Jim took charge of it. At the side of his chair you could most often find a jug of wine. Jim would spend his days in front of the tube watching or reading, sipping wine.

Growing up from grade school through high school meant frequent trips to Gornik's, the local haberdashery. Jim was keen on proper men's fashion. All the boys wore jackets and ties to important events, holidays and Sundays. We all had clip-on neckties and bowties. One year when Jim was outfitting me for a high school prom, he insisted that I buy a Derby. I did and wore it through my senior year in high school.

One of the reasons Jim retired early, was increased discomfort in his lower back, evidently caused by an old college football injury.

As kids it was a fairly easy to beg small amounts of money from him. At any given moment, the right hand pocket of his suit jacket was bulging with pocket change received when buying drinks at the Chatterbox. So hitting him for a buck or two was easy.

The entrance to the downstairs bathroom had a hallway enclosed by two doors. On one side was a set of shelves with the fiduciary box and lots of small odd and ends. The other side had clothes hangers and more shelves where Jim stored his wardrobe including suits, boxed Arrow shirts, Roblee and Florsheim shoes, wooden shoe trees, hats and garters for his socks.

All in all, Jim seemed to be at peace with himself throughout his life. I never knew him to exhibit worry or frustration. He was always ready with opinions on most any subject, and generally quite tolerant of all people and situations.

His work and chemistry

Jim's first jobs after graduating from Harvard were in the plastic industry, particularly at Monsanto Plastics. In that job he worked as a research chemist and brought into the family terms like thermoplastic, thermosetting, nylon, synthetic resin and rayon.

After moving to Ohio, he had a series of different sales positions, mostly with industrial and chemical products. One of his first jobs in the Cleveland area was with the Allied Paint Company. Later, he worked for White Tool, a distributor of industrial supplies and Miller Falls hand tools. Another position where he was able to draw on his chemical background was selling industrial lubricants. After moving to Zeman Avenue he took a position with the Rochester Chemical Company.

When growing up on 194th Street, we had plastic and chemical products from his employers that he had received as samples. One interesting object that he brought for the children to play with was a set of nine plywood tubes, laminated with a new epoxy-like formulation. The tubes were about eight inches in length with varying diameters that could be concentrically stacked one inside the other. They were beautifully finished with lacquer and when stuck together made musical notes. We also had boxes of plastic swatches that were two inches square by 1/8 thick

of every imaginable opaque and transparent color. We use these throughout the years for a number of different school projects.

Jim was ready at the drop of a hat to explain the chemistry of common household items like vinegar and oil salad dressing, mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce, the importance of egg yolks as an emulsifier and what the newfangled homogenized milk was all about

One of the chemistry stories that Jim would tell was a classroom experience at Harvard. The professor was explaining to a class the importance of physical observation before starting the analysis of chemicals. To illustrate his point the professor brought a beaker of his own urine for the class to see. The professor proceeded to describe physical characteristics of the sample. First the color, then the viscosity, then the aroma and finally the taste. Having said that the professor dipped his finger into the urine, and to the astonishment of the class, licked it. He then turned to the class and addressed one of the flustered students. He asked, "What have you learned from what you have just seen?"

The student remained perplexed for awhile not answering so the professor continued and said: "I'm afraid you haven't learned very much. You see this exercise was about learning how to observe. If you had observed more closely you would have seen that I had dipped my small finger into the urine, but licked my middle one."

Jim had a book called Henley's 10,000 formulas. It described formulations for castile soap, tooth powder, underarm deodorant and other household products. Jim used this book to make deodorant from aluminum chloro hydrate that I would buy from the Standard Drug store on 185th street. The children also found recipes for things that like gunpowder and ginger ale that turned out to be ginger beer.

Art, literature and science

We grew up with a small library consisting of a pair of bookshelves that Jim had assembled when he was much younger. He gave the shelves a stand-alone modern look by wrapping boards around the edges removing all the sharp corners. His collection of books included a number of first additions, old classics and important contemporary works of the first half of the 1900s. Aside from books on the fine arts you could find works by Hemingway, Carroll and Shakespeare. One book in particular was troublesome to me as a child because of its graphic nature. As I recall it was published by Life Magazine with hundreds of photographs depicting the horrors of World War II. This left an indelible impression on me as a youth that still disturbs me today.

Although Jim was interested in classical art throughout his lifetime, he made movie and theater posters to work himself through college. Like Bruce learned later in life, commercial art can also be satisfying and rewarding.

Also while at Harvard, Jim participated in repertory Players and college theater.

Jim first introduced me to the value and operation of a slide rule and gave me his old one that he used in college. This was instrumental in stimulating my interest in the science and mathematics. I also remember as a six-year-old, sitting on his knee and carrying on conversations about magnetism, the significance of the earth's magnetic field and the semantic relationships between the terms magnetism and magnifying glass. We also discussed the gyroscope and the relationship of those principles to the changing of seasons.

The boys and toys

Eric and Bruce hammered on Jim to buy a boat. Jim agreed, but only if they took Coast Guard training classes. The three of them went to classes and eventually received certificates of completion for the proper and safe

operation of small watercraft. Then one day, Jim pulled into the driveway towing a trailer. He had just purchased a 16- ft. wood Lyman lapstrake speedboat with a 25 horsepower Johnson motor, complete with a Tee Nee Easy Load trailer. Jim was very proud of his successful negotiation with the former owner and received, as part of the package, a small two wheeled dolly that could be placed under the tongue of the trailer so you could move the boat around without attaching it to the car. In winter, Jim wrapped the boat with plastic tarpaulins and parked it beneath one of the plum trees in the backyard. This caused a lot stress for our landlord, Mr. Bates.

Another project that Jim participated in with the boys was the setup of a fairly complicated electric train. He purchased 4 by 8-ft. sheet of homosote material and placed it on the picnic table in the first-floor playroom. He bought a classic three-rail Lionel setup with the grandest transformer and many accessories including a log loader, barrel loader, switches and other accessories. The diesel engine was silver colored and from the Burlington line. I already had a two-rail royal blue coal-burner American Flyer setup.

Christmastime was Jim's time, not because he received gifts but because he could give them. He shopped at stores like Newman Stearns in downtown Cleveland for sporting goods and games the boys would be interested in. So we had our toboggans, sleds, ice skates, baseball equipment and the like.

Some of the other gifts the boys received stimulated their interest in the sciences including a crystal radio kit, chemistry set, a seven-watt hi-fi amplifier from Heahkit, a magnetic disk recorder, and an Erector set.

For other Christmas's he got us products from Murray Ohio, that manufactured bicycles and wagons. One Christmas I received a new Murray bicycle complete with a saddle tank that had a built-in electric horn, a luggage rack on the back, front wheel suspension with two coil springs, whitewall tires, extra comfy saddle and a kickstand. All I needed to add was the handgrip streamers and the playing cards in the spokes. What a grand bike. Another Christmas we received a futuristic wagon that had no sharp corners anywhere. It was complete with a license plate on the back and a free form steering handle that was used like a tiller on an old-time automobile. I seem to recall the license plate was a vanity style, IAM4U, or something like that. What an unusual and unique wagon that was. And then there was the Irish Male. If you had enough strength, you could actually make the thing go. No one else on the block had one (or even heard of one).

As a handyman

As a salesman and distributor of Miller Falls hand tools, Jim brought home one of the power-units that included a 3/8 inch drill, a jigsaw attachment and an orbital sander. We used those tools for years in various household projects.

Jim became a master of laying linoleum and congolium. He taught me the art of making and cutting templates, cutting the materials and fitting them around pipes and corners of the irregularly shaped rooms.

The house was old and constructed of lath and plaster. Many parts of the walls were rough from years of cracking and patching., so a lot of the house was painted with water-based whitewash paints. The powdered paints were mixed with water and applied with a stiff brush giving textured surface that covered surface blemishes. Jim used

Carla's electric kitchen mixer to stir the paint. The paint was thick, like plaster of paris, and quickly burned up the motors in the mixers. Needless to say Carla was distressed.

Jim was handy around the house serving as plumber, painter and floor cover installer. One of the first projects after moving in was to assemble a workbench from a kit from the Forest City Lumber Yard. Jim demonstrated his skills

using power tools by making a hobbyhorse for Eric and Bruce out of plywood, dowels, springs and 2 by 2's. In another project we took the ubiquitous picnic table which had three boards spaced a couple inches apart and added two more, increasing the width and removing the spaces. He used the Miller Falls orbital sander to smooth out the surface. That table, made of nice looking redwood, became the main dining room table for years.

Jim had extensive experience with paint formulas, both as a chemist and sales rep for Allied Paint. He expounded on the value of using premium oil-based paints with high lead content for floors and porches. He also thought that shellac, being a more natural product, gave wood a nice warm look. He showed me how to adjust to the viscosity using alcohol. I personally never cared for the smell of shellac nor its color.

One of the repeat maintenance chores was keeping the downstairs toilet functioning correctly. We had frequent stoppages were almost certainly caused by the girls disposing of sanitary napkins. I learned how to remove the toilet, clear the pipe and replace it in a few hours time.

Shortly after moving in, Jim decided the old house needed a modern touch. He installed a series of the bullet shaped spotlights in both the living room and dining room.

One bigger project that Jim and I did was replacing the downstairs bathroom floor. We removed the rotting floorboards and cut and cut plywood sheets. I got to use my new template making skills. Of course we had to remove all of the plumbing fixtures before we could install the new floor.

Jim also taught me the art of applying hot patches to inner tubes. Tubes were an integral part of our life growing up on the lake.

Some family activities

Family vacations away from the house were infrequent. One notable trip was a drive to New York City. On that journey with Eric and Bruce, we visited Greenwich Village, China Town, Staten Island Ferry and many other wonderful sites. It had not been my first visit to New York with Jim. As a toddler I vaguely remember visiting his friend named Arnold, who lived in an apartment on Manhattan. That was obviously my first experience visiting an apartment and it left an impression.

Other family activities centered on Jim and one of the children. An example was Jim's encouragement for Lynn to make a mural on the side of the fireplace. Lynn chose an abstract format using chalks and her mural adorned the side of the fireplace for many years.

Another day trip was visiting a fire station in Columbus Ohio. Jim had to make a sales call there and took me out of to join him. It was a grand experience with seeing all the fire trucks and equipment. It was on that trip that I was first instructed that the hillbillies in Ohio use the term hot chocolate when they really meant cocoa.

Another time, Jim helped me when I got in a scrape with the Brattinal police department. I was a freshman in college and working part-time in downtown Cleveland. One evening while driving home in a blinding snowstorm, I was involved in a huge chain collision on the Shoreway heading toward Euclid. There were about 100 cars involved and we were located just within the boundaries of Brattinal. The police impounded all of the cars and took the drivers to the police station for questioning. After a few hours, Jim fetched me and on the way home we stopped at the garage to pick up my Volkswagen. What an adventure.

James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973) and Carla Wilhelmina Melander (1910-1994)

A major vacation that the children remember is our trek from Connecticut to California.

It was 1946 and I had just turned four and Lynn turned seven on-route. Jim had received an opportunity for employment in California in the chemical industry and was checking it out. Carla recorded the trip in her diary.

Another adventure was an impromptu trip that Karen, Jamie and I made to Florida. Without a plan in hand we drove our new Ford Econoline 300 van to Jim's house and asked him to come with us to Disney Land. He grabbed his toothbrush and left with us. As I recall, it was on the way he to Florida from Cleveland that we passed through Morgantown West Virginia where Bruce was living at the time. That was a fun experience.

Philosophy and random thoughts

On the subject of women, particularly selecting a woman to be a wife, he the following advice:

No. 1: Check their teeth. Just like a horse, if they have bad teeth it's going to cost you lots of money and grief.

No. 2: Take a careful look at their mothers. You can bet your bottom dollar that in 30 years, your prospective wife is going to look like her mother does now.

Sometimes he said that "Cleveland was the world's largest hick-town."

I never knew Jim to be a cursing man but he did have two sayings that slipped out from time to time. They were "Hells Bells", and "Jesus H. Christ."

He would say: "A thousand Swedes ran through the weeds chased by one Norwegian." I never knew exactly what that meant.

And remember: "The man always carves the turkey, roast or ham."

About using crossword dictionaries: "That's mental masturbation."

And paraphrasing Shakespeare: "How sharper than a serpents tooth it is To have a woman scorned."

On the subject of hangovers Jim had a medical-chemical explanation. He explained that hangovers were the direct result of consuming fusel oils. What is a fusel oil anyway? He further explained that a few vendors of whiskey had low fusel oil content and therefore could be drunk in quantity without fear of a hangover. His choice of whiskey was Hiram Walker. He said Scotch whiskey was the worst.

Concerning Jim's family. He rarely spoke of his parents or siblings except for his sister Mary.

About food. Aside from Jim's interest in the blue cheeses and Swiss cheeses his passion was steak and liver. Jim was always in charge of cooking the steaks on his red-hot iron skillet and pan frying the liver onions with bacon. In the pasta department Jim cooked the vermicelli and prepared the sauces.

Eric explained to me later that Jim insisted on using a small sized salad fork rather than a standard one. He felt strongly enough about it that he protested if someone should set his place at the table with the wrong fork.

On politics I would have judged that Jim was predominantly a Republican. I do remember as a very young boy being instructed to not use phrases like "We Don't Like Dewey, Do We." Although Truman was a Democrat Jim

James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973) and Carla Wilhelmina Melander (1910-1994)

admired him for his background as a haberdashery owner in Missouri. But the thing I remember more clearly about Jim and politics was his admiration for Eisenhower. One year when I was in elementary school, Eisenhower passed through Euclid and stopped at the TAPCO plant near Euclid Avenue. His train was called the Freedom Train that had a number of cars with historic artifacts on display. Eisenhower also gave a speech in the parking lot of the TAPCO plant, later known as Thompson Ramo Wooldridge. He took me out of school for that historic event. That pleased me.

I remember Jim preparing his federal income taxes. Sometimes I would help by counting and sorting the Ohio sales tax stamps, which were required to document the deduction for state taxes. Throughout the year we had to be meticulously careful about collecting sales tax stamps for every purchase.

Jim also explained to me the meaning of the term red cent. He had one that he kept with his other small treasures in his top bureau drawer. The very old Indian Head pennies were made of a reddish colored copper-nickle alloy that turned more red as it aged. He also had a small gold coin that he said was illegal to own after the U.S. went off the gold standard. I don't know whatever happened to that coin and I believe it was either a \$5 or \$10 denomination.

James Christopher Neylon, Jr.

June, 2002