

Famous People

I have never been one to swoon over famous people. As a young Ohio farm boy, I never had a chance to meet anyone famous, but things sure changed after I left the farm. To be more accurate, things changed after I left college. The only famous person I had met by the time I graduated from college was my NROTC Instructor, a Marine Corps Major, who was the first winner of the \$64,000 Dollar Question quiz show, answering questions about gourmet cooking. It always sounded a little fishy to me that a U.S. Marine Corps officer would be the world's greatest expert on the gourmet meals of Kings and Queens. When the scandal hit about quiz show fraud, he was never mentioned much to my relief, because I always held him in such high regard.

Well, things have sure changed! I have met, and talked to, all of the following famous people since 1957: Muhammad Ali, the Beatles, Nadia Comaneci, Princes Di, Bob Feller, Jack Fender, Lou Gehrig, John Glenn, Matt Hoffman (BMX star), Tony Hawk (Skateboarding star) (Note: I have identified these last two famous people for some of my older friends), Allen Iverson, Rev. and Mrs. Martin Luther King, Stan Musial, Rosa Parks, Jackson Pollack, Kara Lipinski, Stan Musial, Eleanor Roosevelt, Dion Sanders, Ted Williams, Serena Williams and Venus Williams.

My most memorial meeting was with Stan Musial. He looked at my name tag and said, "Kent, Ohio...do you know Ron Roskins?" I said, "yes," and he proceeded to tell me about Ron and him serving on the President's Youth Fitness Council together. When I returned to Kent, I called Ron, who had moved to Nebraska some years before, and related the story of my meeting with Mr. Musial. Ron laughed and told me a story about "Stan the Man." Ron was taking a church youth group to a St. Louis baseball game and called Stan to see if he might drop by during the game to say hello to them. About the fifth inning, Stan dropped by their seats and

introduced himself to each member of Ron's group. Ron said he couldn't wait until Stan left to see how impressed each young person would be. After Stan departed, Ron said, "What did you think of Mr. Musial?" They all said he seemed very nice, but didn't have a clue who he was!

Unlike members of Ron's youth group, I knew all of the above personalities when I met them. There was one thing very different however. I met nearly everyone on the above list at Miller South Elementary School's Biography Day! Students had to read a book on a favorite personality, dress like they might have dressed and be prepared to answer questions **as if** they were that person. Students were seated at tables around the cafeteria, and parents and grandparents interviewed them to let them demonstrate what they knew about their selected personality. One of my favorite interviews was with a young girl named Molly, who was portraying Nadia Comaneci. She had practiced Nadia's accent and sounded just like Nadia herself. At one point I said, "How have you been doing as you have grown older, Nadia?" She quickly dropped her accent and said, "Mr. Saltzman, the biography I read only covers Nadia until three years after the Olympics, so I can't answer that question." Without missing a beat, she continued to answer the questions of others, using her accent. I teamed up with an African-American man, a few years older than me, to interview students. This man had marched with Martin Luther King and knew Rosa Parks and other civil rights leaders. Some of the interviews of students turned into interviews of this man because he had so much first-hand information about the person who they were portraying. It was a wonderful experience and a wonderful day.

Our grandson, Connor, portrayed Tony Hawk, a famous skateboarder. None of us older folks could guess who he was, but all of the kids knew him right away. I particularly liked Tony...you might say he was my favorite person there that day!

Of all of the people on my “famous people” list, the truth is that I have only met three of the “real” people. Stan Musial (Who talked about someone else), John Glenn (On that day in New Concord when he declared for the presidency...and, he just shook my hand and didn't say a word to me) and John Fender, our Mayor. John has been my friend for over 35 years, and although he is our mayor, most of you reading this story who live outside of Kent probably don't know him. I have talked to John many times and he means more to me than any famous person I have ever met. He knows me, he understands me. Personal relationships are more important than fame ... mothers and fathers and kids and brothers and sisters are more important than rock stars and baseball players in our everyday lives... we should never forget that. Being famous doesn't mean you will be a good friend...or that you will be there when someone needs you.

I have spoken at large convention general sessions ahead of President Bush, President Ford and Secretary of State Powell to name a few, but none of them were ever in the room when I spoke and I never got to meet any of them. I guess I'll have to own up...the fact is that I have only ever met **two** famous people...and neither of them had anything to say to me! I guess I'll just stick with my family and friends.

The End

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