

Dairy Queen Intertwingle

Bill Moore adapted the term “intertwingle” from “karass” which comes from the Kurt Vonnegut’s novel *Cat’s Cradle*. A karass is an element in Bokomonism, which is a fictional religion based on “foma”, or lies. A karass is described as “a team of people that do God's Will without ever discovering what they are doing”. An intertwingle is the same as a karass except for the team part and the part about God’s Will.

These stories are about the Dairy Queen intertwingle. Although I think he went there one afternoon when he and some others from Charlotte visited me when I was writing automotive textbooks out of the front room in Frank’s old house, Bill Moore had nothing to do with the Dairy Queen. He and I are part of the Cardinal Associates professional intertwingle.

The main Dairy Queen intertwingle consists of hundreds of people, most of whom I do not know. The focus, or “wampeter” of this subsuming interwingle is Milton Rachels, the owner of the establishment. A large man, as wide as he is tall, he knows everybody in Shelby and gives his attention fully to whoever is talking at the moment. In 1986, at the Christmas party held at the Dairy Queen (when we taped black plastic bags over the windows and drank spiked Mister Misties), he presented to Brenda and me and to Frank and Margaret plaques that read, in part, “FOR 15 YEARS OF SERVICE EXECUTIVE ‘BORED’ OF DIRECTORS PIGS AND DAIRY QUEEN”.

Within this larger intertwingle were (and still are) a number of secondary intertwingles. There is the ongoing and complex intertwingle of the Rachels family and various connecting families. There is the almost equally complex and ongoing intertwingle of current and former employees (some of whom, such as the girls of the Summer of the Carhops, could comprise their own third-level intertwingle). An intertwingle could be constructed from legitimately crazy people (including the who man went BOOM!, the woman from whom people ran and the boy who ate hot dogs in a single bite). Other intertwingles could be created from girls who played softball (one of whom Lem married) and people from various churches who gathered after Wednesday night services (and occasionally tried to save the BOOM! Man).

I am not sure who or what was the wampeter of our intertwingle within an intertwingle. It could have been the Dairy Queen itself – the physical place where we came together as often as every night and once on Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon. Or, Frank might have been the wampeter.

Our intertwingle began when the Dairy Queen was located off 74 near South LaFayette. This was a classic old style DQ with walk-up windows and a soft-serve ice cream cone silhouette on the top of the little building.

Brenda and I were already in the habit of meeting Frank at night for coffee as a way of getting out of the house. We started at the Little Mint across from the Presbyterian

church. We sat in one car or another, talking about God-knows-what, blowing cigarette smoke out the windows. Sometimes while Frank and Brenda talked I looked across the street and remembered the early 1950's when Shelby Architectural Millwork, the company where my father was superintendent, manufactured the fittings for the church, including I think, the steeple.

By the late 1960's, after Frank had married Margaret to make it a foursome, we were going to the Dairy Queen. I suppose there was more activity in the parking lot, more to see. Sometimes, Bill The Engineer, who later married into the Rachels family intertwinde, sat with us in Frank's Cadillac and tried to trick us into getting involved in Amway. If we parked toward the rear of the building we could watch the rats play.

It was during this period that we met the Rachels family. They had bought the DQ franchise several years earlier from Mr. Aaron whose daughter, Patsy, I had dated a few times back in 1960. She was a small pretty girl with vaguely East European features and a pleasant giggle.

I think Milton first spoke to us. Something had happened to Lem, his younger brother. It might have been when Lem fell off a tractor and was run over by a bush hog (e.g., a large lawn mower). The accident happened in a field not far from Coleman's house. Lem lay on the cold ground for several hours before someone found him. According to the story, the near-freezing temperature prevented him from bleeding to death. Even so, his heart stopped several times once they got him to the operating room.

Milton, by now regarding us as regulars, kept us posted about Lem's progress. That is how we got to know them. They already seemed to know us.

When the Rachels family bought the Twin Pigs, which was located around the corner on Dekalb, we started going there. Frank suggested it, noting that we could go inside in bad weather. Also, on a solo exploratory visit, he had met Griff, who was a friend of the Rachels family and who went to the Pigs every night for supper (usually scrambled eggs, over which he dawdled until they got cold or nearly raw hamburger which he called "steak tartare"). Frank thought Griff was interesting and odd.

So, despite my misgivings at having to talk to new people we joined Frank and Griff, adding two members that if not interesting were at least odd. Ellen, a friend of Griff's and the Rachels', and who was both interesting and odd, came not long after. When the original DQ moved to the Pigs building; more people joined us at the long back table – younger people, old people (we were not the old people then) and eventually children (ours and others).

Our part of the Dairy Queen intertwinde survived the deaths of Griff and Ellen and the move by Brenda, Yancie and me to another town. However, by the winter of 2002, when Frank got lung cancer, it had dwindled down some nights to just him, sitting there alone, an oversize red DQ cap perched high on his head, staring at his own half-smiling reflection in the plate glass window or maybe beyond that at God-knows-what. When he

died in July of 2002, a week before Yancie's daughter, Allie, was born, the intertwingle died with him – which is why I think he might have been our wampeter.

The stories that follow are from the time in between.

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