

WISHING WELL

NON-FICTION

Ed Ting

Mike and I had the same two problems that many ten-year-old boys faced in 1974. We needed to buy baseball cards, but we didn't have any money.

But Mike had an idea. The Catholic seminary in town had a wishing well filled with change. There were crowds during the day, but the place was deserted at night. We would wake up after midnight, ride our bikes over in the dark, and take the money. The next afternoon we would be flush with baseball cards. I was really glad I had a friend like Mike.

At 1 AM, I woke up to the sound of a tiny stone hitting my window. As we'd arranged, Mike was already on the other side of the garage door. He helped me lift it. We had to go slow; the door rumbled on its tracks, and my parents slept in the room just above. I slid my bike and then myself under the gap and crawled outside, then Mike and I lowered the garage door together.

The Catholic seminary's wishing well stood in the middle of the compound, which is the worst place you could imagine for what we were about to do. Worse, the well was surrounded by a moat, with only one narrow stone walkway as its entry point. And worst of all, the exit point was right next to the dormitories where the priests slept, forming a natural choke point.

Mike assured me none of this would be a problem. He reminded me to park our bikes facing away from the seminary, in case we needed to make a quick getaway. We crept across the parking lot, into the seminary's main square, and to the entry point of the walkway that led to the wishing well.

"Go?" I whispered.

Mike nodded.

I didn't like being out in the open, but it couldn't be helped. We bounded across the walkway and made it to the edge of the wishing well. We could have been any two kids going out for a bike ride. We hadn't done anything wrong yet.

We sat on the lip of the wishing well. Even in the dark, I could see the shiny coins lying under the surface of the water. So many of them! They wouldn't miss a few.

One final check. No sign of movement from the buildings. What the heck - I'd come this far. I dunked my arm into the cold water and came out with a fistful of change.

Looking back, I'm amazed at how fast the lights came on. It was as if someone hit a switch as soon as my hand touched the water.

"RUN!!!!!" shouted Mike.

I ran.

The doors to the dormitories burst open. My first thought was, *Boy, that priest sure can run fast in those robes.* We tried to get past the choke point, but I knew we were never going to make it. The priest blocked the exit.

The lights overhead were so bright it might as well be daytime. The priest opened his hand.

"All right, give it here."

We gave him the wet coins. He pulled a notepad and a pen from his pocket and pointed to me.

"OK, what's your name?"

I told him.

"Where do you live?"

I told him.

He turned to Mike.

"OK, what's your name?"

"Jonas Grundy."

"Where do you live?"

I was incredulous. Jonas Grundy was the skipper on Gilligan's Island, and the address he gave was clear across town.

I couldn't help it. I started laughing.

“Oh, you think it’s funny, do ya? Well let me tell you, Mister Edward Ting, of 21 Brookwood Road, Attleboro, Massachusetts, 02703—we do the Lord’s work around here. You may not care about that but your friend Jonas Grundy here certainly does!”

He told us what would happen next. The following afternoon, after school, he would visit our houses and talk to our parents. All the next day in school I couldn’t function. By the time I got home that afternoon I was so bursting with anxiety I confessed the whole thing to my parents. Their wrath was almost too much to bear, but I felt better after telling them. Maybe that was the lesson the priest wanted me to learn, because he never showed up that day.

Last year during the holidays I went back to the seminary. The place looked much smaller. There are QR Codes to scan, and the lights are LEDs now. I made my way to the wishing well and sat at the lip. I took a fistful of change out of my pocket, looked around to see if anyone was watching, and dropped the coins into the water.

No one caught me.