

## BOOM

From the front stoop of the red brick row house in Philadelphia, Jack Martin pounded on an Indian drum he built from a large empty paint can. He had his eyes closed and thought about wild Indians with war painted faces running after his Uncle Pat through nearby Pennypack Park. Uncle Pat was late for dinner so he pounded on his drum and yelled his name. He wondered if anyone heard him with the cold wind blowing.

His thought was answered when his mother opened the kitchen window and peered out at him, "Are you okay?" She asked

"I'm doing an Indian call for Uncle Pat," He said.

"Come on in to help me," Eileen said.

He walked upstairs to the living room where he found his father, Tom, maintenance worker at the Nabisco cookie factory. He was opening up his tool kit to three pints of whiskey. He was given these bottles as gifts for the holidays. His wife, Eileen, forbade any alcohol in the home so Tom thought he could waylay these gifts to Uncle Pat. All he had to do was transfer them from his work bag to his car toolbox. Tom whispered to his son, "Got to hide the bottles, look out for me."

Jack leaned against the entrance of the kitchen to keep an eye out for his mother. He thought he may use an Indian warning like a bird call to alert his father. He thought about what birds lived in the Indian lands and he wasn't sure. From Mrs. Brady's grade school class, he remembered

the day she brought in her parrot. He believed he could screech like one. His attention was soon taken over to watching his mother basting the turkey, and as she opened the oven, he was hit by a warm wave of heat combined with the smell of turkey and apple pie. He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes thinking about apple pie and ice cream.

As Eileen walked around her son, she patted his head while he was entranced by the image of dessert. He opened his eyes when his mother yelled, "Thomas! I want a nice Thanksgiving!"

Tom was able to hide one bottle in his tool box and as he stood up he flipped the tool box shut with his foot and started to juggle the two bottles in his hands.

"The greatest show on earth here, hey Jacky boy?" Tom said walking about the room just out of reach from his wife's outstretched hands.

Jack watched his mother's long brown hair and yellow dress float by him as she pursued the bottles. Her pale freckled face had a determined look that Jack recognized was the one she wore when he was being scolded.

Eileen caught one of the bottles and Jack clapped and yelled, "Good catch, Mom."

She then stood in the middle of the room and looked at Tom. She was breathing hard, with flushed cheeks and a small bead of sweat on her forehead.

His father, all six feet, six inches of him raised his hands up and gave up. Jack wondered if the cowboys gave up like that. His Dad would probably be one. He kind of looked like the cigarette cowboy in the magazines he saw in the cellar.

Jack watched his father hand over the other bottle and his mother held them out away from her mumbling, “Disgusting, terrible, criminal”. Jack wondered if all disgusting things were held the same way. He had watched his next door neighbor hold a dead rat by the tail the same way.

“Eileen, going to give them to Patty for the holidays, buy him nothing, won’t cost a cent to us,” Tom said picking up his tool box to return it to his car.

“No excuses”, Eileen said turning to go into the kitchen.

Jack followed her into the hot kitchen. He watched her open each small brown bottle on the white counter top and pour one down the drain. He loved hearing the wonderful gurgle sound the drain made. He asked if he could do the other one.

“Jacky, no, no, no, go to the door and look for your Uncle”, she said.

He ran off to the living room and tackled his father who was just placing his surviving gift back in his tool kit.

“I’ll be a scalping you, you big pilgrim you,” Jack said climbing on to his father’s back. Tom grabbed him, picked him up easy and then in his ear he said, “Saved one bottle for your Indian Story Teller.”

“Look out for him, I’m going to speak with your Mom,” Tom said kissing the top of Jack’s head before he watched him run away.

Jack reached the frosted front door and looked out on the wonderful sunny, cold, crispy day. In the background his mother said, “No alcohol in this home, Tom. Especially the way it has been with both of our families through the years. Remember last year’s holiday with all the family except Pat. He was too busy last year, he told us, but now he’s coming. Remember, we decided to do it alone this year to rid ourselves of the curse.”

Jack watched neighbors milling around their homes. Many were dressed like it was Sunday. Some carried pies in and out of their homes. Parking spaces were filled up by cars he didn’t recognize. Big boys were playing football in the street. Some decorations of pilgrims and turkeys had gone up since yesterday. Jack’s house was the only one with an Indian eating a turkey. He had cut it from one of his coloring books and taped it on the front door.

“Now, Eileen, when you think of your Aunt Sara last year. She’s worst than Pat, drinking Irish coffee then falling asleep and snoring right in front of us after the dinner,” Tom said

Jack wondered if Indians snored like Aunt Sara.

“Well, your Uncle Frank, drinking all that beer, does he ever bathe?” Eileen said checking the turkey.

Jack thought Uncle Frank looked big and fat with a gray beard like Santa. He imagined reindeer poop smell all over him.

“Oh, like your Uncle Shawn is such a prize with his drink and reading his race forms while at dinner,” Tom yelled back.

Jack knew Uncle Shawn knew loads about horses, he had asked him last year if he had ever seen an Indian horse and Shawn said he had not but would be on the lookout for one and would let Jack know.

“Don’t wish to fight Thomas; it’s just that it has cursed both families. All of them paid no mind to the sober. None of them was caring one iota how it should be on a holiday. I won’t have it anymore and now Patty is coming, why, why, why, is the question,” Eileen said

“Honey, he’ll be good. The kid wanted him here, and I couldn’t say no?” Thomas said.

Jack looked up the street and remembers his father stopping at the gas station and how his Uncle Pat, who worked at the station, sat him on his big shoulders while walking around with him. He remembered talking in his uncle’s big ear about coming to dinner. He promised he’d come.

Jack was focused on a crow hopping around the yard across the street and practiced a crow call when he saw his Uncle Pat turn the corner.

“Here comes! He’s here!” Jack yelled.

His Uncle waived at neighbors in passing cars and others outside their homes he yelled greetings.

He was wearing a white shirt and a small brown checkered sports coat with dark brown pants and black shiny work boots. He wore a wide green tie. He carried a brown paper bag in one hand as he waved with his other. He was a big man over 250 pounds, six-feet-six-inches with a crew-cut and two scars on his right cheek which Jack thought looked like war paint.

As he walked closer Jack opened up the door of his house and yelled, “I’m going to get him!”

Jack ran down the payment toward him and when Pat saw him he put the palm of his free hand to his lips and did his Indian call then danced around in a small circle. Jack fell behind him trying to do the same dance.

Their actions stopped when Pat tripped a bit on the payment then quickly found his footing.

“Well, well, well Jacky boy, look here in the bag. I purchased a pie” he said in his deep gravelly voice. Jack tucked his head in the bag and smelled cinnamon, and pumpkin.

“You think Indians had pies at their Thanksgiving?” Jack said sticking his nose back in the bag for the sweet smell. He then took his Uncle’s hand and walked with him back into the house.

“I’m sure they had some kind of corn bread, meat, maybe a root pie.” Pat said.

“I can ask my Mom for a root pie if you want Uncle Pat”, Jack said thinking it probably tasted like vegetables and if Indians ate it, he would try to like it.

“No, no, no, your Mom doesn’t need to hear anything about food from me. She’ll no doubt do Thanksgiving real good.”

Tom opened the door for his brother and son, “Great! You got a pie, Patty. He has a pie,” Tom said shaking Pat’s big hand then turning to his wife. Eileen rubbed her hands with her green yellow flowered apron. Jack thought she looked as if she was about to instruct him about the proper way to act. “Do as I say and be very polite to all”, she would always tell Jack.

“It’s okay sweetheart, he has a pie,” Tom said one more time as he took the bag from Pat and said, “Patty, you and the boy have a seat at the table, will be dishing out in a few minutes.

Pat's lips turned crooked as he contemplated food, but he obediently sat at the table with his nephew. His stomach was soured from the last night's visit to the bar. He wished he were hungry, he kept whispering to himself taking in the sights and smell of the meal.

In the middle of the table Eileen placed the golden brown turkey. Steam and the aroma of turkey stuffing rose up from it. One breast had been carved and rested against the sky blue turkey plate. There was hot gravy, bowls of carrots, peas, string beans, and homemade cranberry sauce, and a pile of Sweet potatoes looked like they were about to tumble from the bowl. There was a butter tray and a small bowl of honey sat next to the hot wrapped biscuits. The tablecloth was an emerald green and Pat remembered Eileen once saying it was from her old Irish aunt. The glassware and utensils were spotless and shining up from the warmth of the meal. Pat wished he was hungry and even with Eileen's sometimes harsh disapproving eyes on him; he loved her for the meal she prepared for her family.

She sat down, nodded at Thomas to begin. All heads bent low as Thomas said grace. Pat prayed he could eat something or have one drink.

After grace each person picked up the plate of food closest to them, piled the food on their plate and passed it along. There was no common direction the plates circled; they went crisscross, to the right, to the left until everyone had their plate packed with food.



All ate at the start with smiles. There were short words of approval from Jack who loved the gravy and built little valleys and rivers through his mashed potatoes through the forest of string beans and flooding the brown timbers of turkey. “Hummm, yum, yum, mom,” he said

Thomas loved the sweet potato and turkey and would be up for a second helping before anyone. “Wonderful, delicious, so delicious,” He said between bites.

Eileen gave herself small portions and cut her food in small pieces, and chewed her food longer than anyone. She thought all the food was the correct temperature and the turkey was moist, the butter soft, the biscuits hot and the gravy wasn’t too salty. She occasionally reprimanded Jack and Thomas about eating too fast and she had to smile when Thomas complained it was all too delicious and he could not control himself. Jack informed his mother he was using the Indian way to eat which was fast with big mouthfuls then Thomas yelled to his son they were to ride away after buffalo after they ate like Indians.

Pat had to laugh at all three enjoying their time together. It took his mind off of eating and helped him laugh. He tried to show the same enthusiasm as all the others but the feeling of a jumpy stomach was overmatching his desire to eat. One drink would steady him but it would be one too many.

Pat measured his eating with the amount and the time it took for Eileen to eat. He took smaller bites and chewed longer. He still had a lot on his plate when Thomas was done his second helping. Eileen asked him how his work was going at the station and thanked him for repairing

their car. She asked him if he were hungry and he told her he was just slow but enjoying himself. As the others talked and Pat pretended to listen but he was only taking an opportunity not to eat.

While buttering a biscuit, Thomas took a look at Pat's situation.

"How would you like a cold ginger ale?" Thomas asked.

Eileen quickly got up.

"Sweetheart, some more water for me along with Pat's ginger ale" Thomas said.

The men at the table listen to Eileen gathering up the drinks in the kitchen while Tom quickly scooped the turkey and peas from Pat's plate. Jack scooped up Pat's butter and biscuits and stuffed it in his mouth. He had to concentrate to chew without laughing. Pat nodded his head in agreement and said," Thomas, you take me home soon after me and the boy sit out some."

When Eileen came back, Pat's plate appeared like he had eaten a normal portion and this pleased Eileen as she set his ginger ale before him

Eileen poured Jack and Thomas water and placed Pat's ginger ale in front of him. There were no more eating just slow drinks of water and ginger ale.

“I bet you the Indians ate real well that first Thanksgiving, maybe they left the table to hear stories?” Jack asked looking first at his uncle who smiled and nodded his head.

Eileen and Thomas looked at each other and after Eileen nodded her head and smiled, Thomas said. “Okay kid, you take a breather outside with your uncle while your Mom and I clear the table. We’ll, have pie in a while Jacky. Patty, do you want some coffee to bring out?” Eileen said

“Coffee, hot coffee, is fine, and don’t you get up Eileen. I can manage the coffee. Jack, I’ll meet you outside,” Pat said getting up to go to the kitchen to pour his coffee.

In the kitchen Pat was overwhelmed by the sight of food everywhere. There were three big sandwiches wrapped and sitting on the table. They were an apple, pumpkin and mince pies warming in the oven. The cinnamon aroma made Pat feel worst. He spied an aspirin bottle on top of the refrigerator and took four aspirin out and popped them into his mouth and drank it down with the bottle of ginger ale left on the table. He wished his stomach would straighten out with the pain in his head because the food was cooked with care. “Soon, soon, “he said to his hands which shook a bit.

He started to imagine going back with a nice cold highball, sitting there drinking it slowly at the table with the sweet bitter taste of ginger and whiskey quenching his deepest desire. ”Oh, man, man, man, “ He whispered to himself closing his eyes and holding his breath then counted , 1, 2, 3....and when he got to seven, he opened his eyes.

“Not out yet.” He said to himself and before he left, he cut out a piece of apple pie, put it on a napkin and brought it out to Jack. He had forgotten his coffee.

Little Jack thought this was the best part of his day. He had his favorite Eagle Team cap on with his Phillies baseball jacket. His pie was sitting on his one side and, his favorite Uncle was sitting on the other. He had his Indian Drum and looked up to his uncle and said, “Listen!”

“Drink, drink, drink, wish I had a drink,” Pat sang softly to himself while Jack yelled, and beat his Indian drum.

After minutes of yells, drumming and laughter, Jack thought about the pie and started to nibble as both of them sat in the cool autumn air. The sun warmed his face and his warm apple pie tasted wonderful.

Pat thought if he could just get a fifteen minute break, he could make a stop at McBride’s Bar and have one shot then be back. He knew his desire was not practical and it would spoil the day for the kid. He could feel sweat cooling on his chest as the breeze came and went. He looked down at his nephew who was looking at him with the smile Pat thought a kid would have on Christmas.

“One thing, kid, is the Indians on Thanksgiving gave the Pilgrims a break. All of their differences were put aside and the day was about good food and getting along. See here, I got

this book for you, “Pat said going in his inside chest pocket and pulling out a child’s book called, “The First Thanksgiving”.

Jack eyes became saucers as he reached up and took his gift. It had a colorful comic book like cover and held pictures of the Pilgrims in their black clothes and Indians dressed in buckskins and beads. Jack so wanted a buckskin suit.

“Uncle Pat, tell me a story, you tell it to me,” he said sitting next to Pat and picking up Pat’s hand and putting it on his shoulder. “Tell me about the Indians,” Uncle Pat.

Pat understood he would not be let off easy. The kid wanted a story and Pat had more or less promised between his nausea, headache and wishing for a brew.

Pat put his other hand on Jack’s shoulder and sat for a moment feeling the cool breeze take away his sweat. He could still smell the pies from Eileen’s kitchen. The sun hit his forehead and he thought just one more hour and he could leave, or maybe a half hour or less would be enough.

“Well, champ”, he said looking at the top of the boys head; “I imagine they use to walk down this street. Whole gangs of them, little boys with their family going down the Delaware river going after fish, deer, wild turkey. I wish I had a Wild Turkey,” Pat said thinking of a bottle of it and laughing a little.

“Could I feed it, if you get one?” Jack said

“Well I got no room right now for it” Pat said, patting his nephew on the head

In back of them the door opened. Jack mind was envisioning himself dressed in buckskin walking down his street without the houses, streets and cars but with dirt, trees, leaves, deer, horses and mountain lions going down to the river to drink. He and Pat heard the door open behind them. Pat was in the throes of nausea, sweat and a great need of a drink. He was positive it was Thomas. He was coming out to get him ready for a ride home.

“If only she knew how sober I am, Tom.” Pat said

Eileen watched Pat with her son. Jack was smiling and looked at his book while resting against Pat’s hands and she saw Pat’s pale face with his eyes shut. He looked as if he was suffering, she thought.

“Patty, it’s me,” she said making Pat look back at her. He had been startled to hear her voice.

“Oh, oh Eileen, ah, you know just sitting here, going over Indians, the book and all, he said. I just was thinking out loud about a drink, I...me,” he stammered a bit then stood up. He picked the boy up and placed him beside him on the step. Then standing straight showing what some could call a look of concentration. He drew his fingers through his hair and straightened his tie. Then he buttoned his sport coat. He squared his shoulders backed and looked Eileen in the eye. He looked alert.

She held his gaze and for a brief moment Pat matched what she thought a sober man looked like but he was more than that. He looked like a man wanting to make a point. His hands turned into fists and his chest puffed out with the lines in his face taunt.

“Eileen, I’ll not apologize for what I am but I understand with a young boy you want the best around him. For that and because I love all of you, I’ve come on the straight and narrow today and promise any other time I will come clean, sober and responsible because after all, I am his uncle.” He said. His voice was first stern but as he went on it became softer.

“I wish to shake on it,” Pat said stretching out his hand.

Jack looked back at his mother and saw her looking at Pat. Her mouth was open and she looked like she wanted to speak but the words did not come.

“Mom, can you see Pat as an Indian?” Jack said.

Eileen nodded her head as Thomas came out with his car keys.

“Honey, thought you were in the kitchen, things...things going okay here?” Thomas said not understanding Pat standing with his hand out and Eileen looking down at Jack and nodding her head.

“Yes, I can”, Eileen said taking Pat’s hand and gently shaking it. “A deal then,” Pat said.

“Wait, wait, before you go” Eileen said running into the house.

“I’ll start the car, she’ll be right out. She got sandwiches and I have a bottle for you.” Thomas said

Pat sat again on the steps; he loosened his tie and closed his eyes. Jack closed his eyes and buried his head into Pat’s chest as he hugged him. Jack could hear Pat’s heart, “Boom, Boom, Boom,” it went.

THE END



