

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Join John Yamrus on Memory Lane

Mish (Eileen) Murphy · Monday, January 1st, 2018

pointing & laughing

if you look closely
at the cover photo for my book...
notice the iron-on patches
on my knees. i remember
when Mrs. Dula (across the street)
made a big deal of laughing at me,
saying “what’s the matter,
can’t you afford good clothes?”

i can still see it today..
we were in their back yard
where i played with their son Vincent...
she was standing
on their back steps,
pointing and laughing.

—John Yamrus

*


Let’s stroll down Memory Lane. We’ll look at old photos. We’ll revisit our childhood home. We’ll play baseball with Dad, eat Mom’s cookies. Hug Grandma again. We’ll sigh or cry when some of the fresh faces in the photos belong to loved ones now buried in the ground. Do you have the courage to walk with John Yamrus and me?

— John Yamrus, author of *Memory Lane*

John Yamrus’s *Memory Lane* talks about the life changing-experiences of a boy growing up in the 1950s and ‘60s in a blue-collar family. John’s father was a coal miner. His Polish parents were far from wealthy, but were rich in ethnic tradition. I’m not going to give away the juicy details of *Memory Lane*, but the memoir reads like a novel. It’s full of stories that’ll make the reader laugh, sigh, or cry.

Memory Lane is already jumping off the charts in pre-sales; its official publication date was

December 15, 2017. John is the internationally acclaimed author (most recently) of the illustrated poetry collection *AS REAL AS RAIN*. Since 1970, John Yamrus has published 26 books (2 novels and 24 volumes of poetry). He has also had almost 2,000 poems published in print magazines around the world. Selections of his work have been taught in colleges and universities and been translated into several languages, most recently, Albanian. His website is <https://www.johnyamrus.com>.

 **So, John, how come you're writing your memoirs now? Did something happen or not happen to influence you to write this book, to cause you to depart from your poetry? Your book is not lengthy or wordy and you concentrate on only certain people and incidents. What made you choose those particular memories?**

John Yamrus: why now? why these people? why even bother or think about writing a "memoir" (such as it is) which is such an egotistical thing to do?

i mean...i've had a good long career as a writer, but i haven't really known or associated with any real "names" that people would know...maybe enough to be able to bullshit my way through a not so entertaining night of drunken stories...

but, the people in *Memory Lane* were (and are) names and characters in their own right. they deserve to be talked about and remembered, just as much as anybody else. they're always there in the background for me...waiting...looking over my shoulder.

Memory Lane begins with collages of John's old photographs. I asked John to tell me something about some of the photos....

Baseball with Dad



Baseball: John Yamrus with his dad

John Yamrus: that's me and my father and a 30 inch Louisville Slugger i played with for years. you can see how i've choked up 4 or 5 inches on the handle, and by the time i quit using that bat i was a whole lot older, and by then i was holding the bat down at the end, with the knob in the palm of my hand. my father's dead now, and the bat's long gone. all that's left are the memories and a couple of photographs and i thought this was the perfect way for me to start the book

Fishing Contest



Fishing contest—John Yamrus and his dad

John Yamrus: the fish was a bass...27 and ½ inches long. my father was in a fishing contest that day and lost out on winning a prize by half an inch and he swore for years that it was only because he caught it early in the morning and by the time they measured it later on it had shrunk. check out the tie i'm wearing. it was probably a late sunday morning right after church. it almost had to be, because anytime other than that i'd be in my jeans with the patches on the knees and probably if it was summer a short sleeve striped tee shirt that we bought downtown, a short couple block walk

from the house.

Baseball players



John Yamrus's dad in his baseball uniform (far right)

John Yamrus: the short guy is my dad, who i was told (mostly by him) was a pretty good semi-pro ballplayer. to the left of the photo, across the street, was a line of trees and a slag heap coal bank. when i was a kid we used to chase foul balls there and every now and then we'd cover a ball with coal and dirt and pretend we couldn't find it, and come back later on in the day and dig it up. the ball field's still there...with bleachers, a fence and a candy stand. cars still park on the left and maybe some kids still hide balls in the coal.

The coal truck



The coal truck John Yamrus's father used

John Yamrus: that's my father, later in his "career" as a miner. he had worked his way up in the mine from a laborer, to a miner (which was an actual title, that gave him the right to set the dynamite down in the hole, deciding how much or how little of a charge to use...a serious and dangerous task thousands of feet underground, where the slightest mistake could cost him and everyone else their lives). by the time this picture was taken, the mines were already running out of coal and the work was slow.

The "new" bike



John Yamrus and the "new" bike

John Yamrus: not new. it was a second-hand wreck when i got it. but my father fixed it up, painted it, got new tires and even later that summer added a little bell and a horn. there's that same car out front. it was maybe that same summer when the neighbor across the street got a brand new gas lawn mower and i can still see him and my father picking that thing up and using it to try and cut that hedge with my mother and sister screaming and yelling that they were out of their minds and going to kill themselves. i don't think they ever tried to do it again.

Grandmother



John Yamrus's grandmother

John Yamrus: me, my grandmother and my sister. i was kinda shy and maybe the sun was in my eyes. she's wearing those black high-top shoes i talk about in the book. always reminded me of Ma Joad...stern, tough, undemonstrative and cold. i can still hear that screen door, and the sound it made when it would creak open and bang shut. i was short and my grandmother smelled like onions and soap.

One last question

What did you learn as a result of thinking about the people in your old photos and as a consequence of writing *Memory Lane*?

you don't make it easy, do you? you spend your whole life trying to come to terms with your youth...trying to explain things and figure them out. i don't know if i got ANY answers out of it. i look up at that little kid, standing next to his grandmother, and i can still feel the sun warm on my face. down the walkway at the front of the picture, there was a tool shed on one side of the yard. on the other was a great big cherry tree. there was one summer when i used to keep books in the shed and read. i never did get to climb that tree.

Information:

John Yamrus's *Memory Lane* can be purchased at [Amazon](#) and at johnnyamrus.com

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