



WINDSOR
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Wesley Gilbert: Share Your Windsor Story

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Michelle Tom

Great. Can you just start by telling us your name and your relationship to Windsor?

Wesley Gilbert

Hi, I'm Wes Gilbert. I grew up in Windsor and was here most of my life. When I got married, for four years, I was in Broad Brook. And then we went to Pennsylvania for 20 years, and then we came back to Windsor, bought my parents' house and have been fixing it up ever since. And the real good thing about moving away is you learn to appreciate what you either miss or have changed, or have lost, whether it's friends or the area or other stuff. So, we came back in the late summer of 2004, two days before school started so our three children could get in school. And it was neat being back, and I had thought about a lot of things, and we used to come back every couple of months. [00:01:00] You also learn who your friends really are. Some people keep in touch, some people don't at all. Some acquaintances keep in touch and become really great friends. So, coming back, it was really kind of neat because we had friends borrow trailers and borrow trucks and help us move back and we had a U-Haul we brought back probably 10 different times.

Wesley Gilbert

But the other thing that really relates to Windsor is I went to Poquonock School and, of course, it was a nice quaint school. And it kind of seemed like everybody was friends, and then when you grow up, you realize that some of the guys were bullies and some of the people weren't very nice, but you rolled with it. You were still friends with them, and you didn't really, you weren't intimidated, or it just didn't hit you that that guy was kind of a bully. And coming back, my children [00:02:00] were in Catechism, which was held at Poquonock School. And one day I was early at picking them up, so I wandered through the school, and it really hit me. This is the spot where I was in 6th grade, 5th grade, this and that. I remember this. And I rolled down the hall and I said, "This is the corner I was standing in when I heard that President Kennedy was shot." And I remember the two other people that were standing with me, and it just, it kind of hit you. You know, this is where my early times were. And the other things that always happened when I was back is every little spot in Windsor I said, "That's where I rode my bicycle up the hill. That's where I hung around with my cousins. That's where we went down and did that." And Windsor was kind of neat because my cousins lived on the other side of it and we used to have fun when we got together.

Wesley Gilbert

I would suggest things and they would do it. Things that I would never do. [00:03:00] I can remember [everybody] on bicycles and you had so many guys, you had made somebody get on the front. And I was pedaling and riding the bicycle and I didn't realize that you're supposed to go over near the curb so the guy could kick garbage cans over. That wasn't very nice. But I do remember Timmy Porter from Loomis was with us, and at the time, so this was probably early 70s, late 60s. He had long blonde hair. And then I remember the cops came looking for the kid

with the blonde hair, and all the rest of [us said], "I don't know. I don't know." You know, you play stupid, but also different stories like that. That people weren't behaving, but it was a neat place to grow up and, I mean, there's everywhere in Windsor, whether we went to the high school with the kids or the [00:04:00] middle school.

Wesley Gilbert

Of course, the middle school wasn't around, except it was in my neighborhood off of Kennedy Road where I grew up. And you go into high school and it's all changed and you remember OK parking out in that parking lot or going here and it was nice coming back. And then I joined Windsor Marksman, a gun club in Windsor, and one of my old friends of a friend's that I was still in touch with was in it, and he kind of egged me into joining. But I found out there's about seven other people from the Class of '72 that were in this club, people I hadn't seen since Poquonock school, kids I hadn't seen since middle school, so it was kind of neat, and people were grown up and the bullies weren't bullies anymore. And it was— it was very nice.

Michelle Tom

How do you think your kids' experiences growing up [00:05:00] here are different from yours? Are you in the same neighborhood that you grew up in?

Wesley Gilbert

Well, we, yeah, we're not far away. I grew up right on Kennedy Road and now we're on - _____ . And the important thing about that is all the land around me and behind me is land I played on. And years ago, I had permission, and then when we came back to Windsor, I got permission from Joey Thrall to go on his land. It took me a long time to ask him because I was gonna – I was afraid he was going to say no, but he said, "Sure go ahead." And so I'd go on his land and travel through it, whether on my dirt, legal, registered, quiet motorcycle, or my kids go on it. And so the town and the land and the places we played outside and rode motorcycles meant a lot to me, [00:06:00] and I still do some of them. My kids, it was funny, we used to come back and visit from time to time. And they, at one point said, "We're here so often. Why don't we just move back?" We thought they were, you know, developing such close friends in Pennsylvania, you never know. So we did, and we did it before anybody hit high school. And my mom and dad were still alive. My sister came back from Vermont and bought a house in the neighborhood, and they moved in with her, and we bought their house and like I said, I've been fixing it up. And they were close, and so my kids finally got to know my parents and my sister.

Wesley Gilbert

Windsor is different. The racial profile is different and it's just a lot of people that are trying to be middle class and being middle class [00:07:00] and everybody has different judgments and some of my kids bought into the new way that you have to have this phone or these sneakers to be great. And of course, it's not. It's what you do. It's what you accomplish. It's how you behave that matters, and he kind of, it's taken him 10 years to get over it and get to the truth. The girls kind of didn't buy into it that much, but it was different when I was a kid. I don't believe you were

judged that way quite so much. We spent a lot of time with the kids in school activities and different things and sports and things and I learned a lot then. My father and I really weren't into sports, it just wasn't our [00:08:00] thing other than motorcycle racing, but I learned how my daughters— I had a daughter, still have a daughter, that was very meek and very shy, but she was in Windsor Water Rats. And she joined a swim team like before she even got into high school, and all of a sudden, she's in high school. She has friends. She doesn't care if she dresses funny. They dressed up funny on purpose and did weird things and she had no angst at all. It was wonderful. And that was something I learned. Being a part of a team is pretty neat.

Wesley Gilbert

Same way with work. If you have a team you respect, you work for them. So, Windsor was, [in] some ways tough there, in some ways wonderful. But my mother, my dad passed [00:09:00] away in '09. My mother lasted until 2014 and my mother always said, "Are you glad you're back?" And I said, "Oh, yeah. I'm glad we're back." We've gotten to know people better. The old friends are really close now. And the area, Pennsylvania was kind of, everything was big. It took you a long time to get places. Yeah, I used to go shopping at Allentown half an hour away. Windsor, everything was close. We could go to the post office here or there and the shopping centers [are] close or a couple of them. So a lot of neat, convenient things about Windsor. And as always, the teachers are great. They're working, they're working their butts off, trying to make it work in a system that's difficult and I won't bring politics into it, it's just that Democrats haven't learned how to not spend money. We've got a great tax base here. [00:10:00] They shouldn't be spending all the money they get. Anyway, so we'll stop at that. How's that?

Michelle Tom

Thank you so much. I kind of want to ask you about the Marksman's Club if you have like another couple of minutes?

Wesley Gilbert

Sure, sure. On film? I don't care. Sure, sure, sure.

Michelle Tom

Yeah, if you're willing. Could you tell me how you got involved with that and what, where they are, and what they do?

Wesley Gilbert

Well, we're actually a club of about 275 members. At the moment, I'm the secretary. I didn't think I'd ever get involved in doing anything like that, but it's actually, we don't have much land, but we do have a neat range down between the Farmington and Connecticut River. We have different kind of matches you go to and you can, whether it's pistols or rifles and all kinds of things in between where you knock down bowling pins, where you shoot for [00:11:00] scores, or you shoot for your group size. And there's always somebody that can help you. [They] can teach you something. It's pretty neat. I got in from an old friend that was in it. He said, "Oh, you

gotta join!” And I did, and I just started meeting people and ran into all the old people from my class. It was pretty nice. There are matches that you can go to as a complete novice. And whether you have the best, newest, most up-to-date equipment doesn't matter. They help you. You'll get better, you'll get competitive, and it can be a lot of fun. And in the last couple of years, we've had lots of new joining members because a lot of people have gotten their pistol carry permits, and they have a place to shoot now. And I'm affiliated with other clubs and have other friends [00:12:00] that are around. I have friends that you can take your class with to get your pistol permit, so there's just a lot of things to do and it's a pretty good time. And it's, like I said, people help you. They'll teach you, and you learn even more safe handling of firearms at the club forever. Get your finger away from the trigger. Don't do that. And you learn. It just gets repeated.

Michelle Tom

Are most people in it from Windsor?

Wesley Gilbert

Not at all. Probably I'd say under half of them are. They're from all over. Yeah, anything else you want to know?

Michelle Tom

Yeah, but, you know, it's OK. I think we could stop there.

Wesley Gilbert

OK.

Michelle Tom

Thank you so much. I just, at the Historical Society we hear the shooting range. And I realized, I really didn't know – well it took me forever [00:13:00] to figure out what was down there.

Wesley Gilbert

It's right down behind there, yep.

Michelle Tom

But that's what all the banging was.

Wesley Gilbert

Yep, Yep. But the other, the other –

Michelle Tom

Yeah, we don't know about that.

Wesley Gilbert

–the other thing about Windsor is actually right where Box Turtle Lane is, there used to be a dirt road, and there was a fellow that lived there named George Ritchie. He used to come over and cut our hair when I was a little kid, and he used to work on his car at my folk's house. The group my parents were in on Kennedy Road, my parents were the youngest ones there and they called it, I think they called it the Windsor Men's and Ladies' Club. They used to get together every month and play cards and stuff, and I can remember all these old guys and Uncle Joey and Uncle Walt and, you know, all these people that were nice and were part of it. And George Ritchie used to always, he didn't have any children, but he always used to complain about how bad they would be. And [he would say], “They'd be borrowing my cigarettes, and they'd do this and they'd do that.”

Wesley Gilbert

And then we used to go [00:14:00] get together from time to time and go out to Stratton Brook and go swimming, and I can remember probably being four or five years old and whining to my father that I had to go to the bathroom. And they were way, way, way down there for a little kid. And Uncle George picked me up, threw me on his shoulders and said, “Let's go!” The mean old guy. But he was nice. And the other thing is, he always talked about, he was, I think, an eighth Native American, and he always used to tell me stories. And he said right along the Farmington River, half a mile north of Breakneck, is where there's an Indian graveyard. And I've never been there, but I know where it is, and I think the state might have done some excavating there. But there's stuff all around. There's arrowheads everywhere. It's neat.

Michelle Tom

Very cool, thank you so much.

Wesley Gilbert

OK. [00:15:00]

Michelle Tom

I really appreciate you sitting down.

Wesley Gilbert

Yep.