



BRIDGET BESAW GORMAN (2)

The Mr. Wulp Effect

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Nearly two years ago my two teenage sons, and thus, our family, became involved with an enigmatic man by the name of John Wulp. He, at that time, had a long list of adjectives, and a few expletives, trailing along with his name. He is an eccentric, demanding, omnipotent, retired New York City director who stages jaw-dropping performances by kids on North Haven island. We heard rumors about him on both sides of the spectrum: he broke kids' spirits, he asked too much, he was impatient; mostly, he was intolerant of anything less than perfection. On the other side, lo and behold, he was extracting "perfection" out of junior high and high school students.

Our family also had a few oddities and adjectives of our own, such as the fact that we homeschooled

our four kids on a small outer island — Green’s Island, half a mile or so off Vinalhaven. I remember that we met Mr. Wulp (as all of the children call him) at a poetry reading at his home, Stone Farm, a sanctuary of art and literature. I also remember that in the kitchen was a table laden with the most mouth-watering, knee-buckling, ambrosia-of-the-gods desserts, created by this same quirky fellow. Sitting on his couch making small talk, I recall the woman next to me taking down a trophy from the mantelpiece and whispering to me, “Who the heck is Tony?” We were later to learn that, along with his “Tony,” he had received an Obie and actually a long string of Broadway-related awards that impressed me, though I was fairly ignorant of their true significance at the time. Soon it came about that my two sons would work with him on his next production, *An Evening of Shakespeare: Sonnets and Soliloquies*....

I’m fairly certain that anyone who has had a relationship with Mr. Wulp would consider it unique. He extracts, demands, conjures a unique response, emotion, involvement with each person he meets. For better or for worse, he draws forth a full response from you, “casts” you, demands from you that which you might not have offered otherwise. I watched him draw forth a devotion and concern from my sons that I would not have thought them capable of in that phase of their youth. He could get them to cut, or not cut, their hair in the fashion *he* prescribed. He would get my

rebel sockless and shoeless son to wear shoes and *white* socks by calling him up at 6:30 a.m. to remind him. He could get the boys to take out their earrings and the girls to vamp about convincingly with feather boas, circa 1920. He could demand that they give up not only their Saturday night carousing, but their Sunday afternoon as well. In some mysterious way he brought a discipline to their lives that a mother would die for.

Mostly, he expected it of them, and they came through for him....

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