

Life Lessons Learned While Working on the 15th Hole at York Golf Club

By MIKE HEALY
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From age 11 through 22, I worked at York Golf Club. York is no more, built over by the Butler National Golf Club in the early 1960s. The hours were long, the pay low by present standards, but sufficient enough so when I entered the University of Michigan as an out-of-state student I already had enough in-the-bank savings to pay my entire way through that institution and later the University of Illinois.

When I was 15 the course offered me my first self-employment, in addition to working at the first tee and in maintenance. I became the official ball hawk for the course, having exclusive rights to find and sell all my "catch" back to the course for either \$0.09 or \$ 0.08 per ball, depending upon quality. The course had five water holes; two were monsters in terms of balls ending up in the drink. I remember mak-

ing the astronomical amount of \$45.00 in a half-hour time when I hit the "mother lode" of balls in one pocket along Salt

vated green, and then a final loop to pass behind the green on its way back to the main part of Salt Creek. To work the Salt

Creek spur properly, you needed waders, which allowed you to kneel in 18 inches of muck while working your hands back and forth in about a foot of water. If you wanted to "feel" those submerged balls, wearing gloves was not an option. The occasional snapping turtle, broken glass bottle, and numerous leeches aside, the golf ball pickings were fantastic!

I can still smell the smoke from the 16- gauge shotgun as I fired both barrels in the general direction of the perpetrator. I had just done the dumbest thing in my

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Creek.

No. 15 was a short par 4, with the main branch of Salt Creek running just in front of the long tee, and from there a spur ran to the side and in front of the shorter tee, then along the right side of the fairway, back around to the front of the ele-

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The 15th Hole-

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life, and it still remains at the top of my "dumbest thing" list more than four decades later. Maybe that's why 18-year olds make the best soldiers; they shoot first and think about the consequences as an afterthought.

I was being robbed, and I knew it. My take of golf balls from #15 and the adjacent #4 holes was down to almost nothing. I could see the back and forth tracks of the thief in the Salt Creek spur in front of #15 green. I tended to my ball hawk duties on Thursdays and Mondays; as Wednesdays and Saturdays/Sundays were the major golfer traffic days. On good weekends, we would have over 700 golfers, some teeing off as early as 4:30 a.m., with the final foursomes making their way back to the clubhouse after 9 p.m.. The thief worked on Wednesday and Sunday nights, leaving me next to nothing in the way of retrieved golf balls.

I had to do something, and as an 18 year old I immediately came up with a plan that wasn't the brightest. So on a

Wednesday night I put my brother's 16-gauge double barrel shotgun in the truck of my car and headed out to York Golf Club. I parked my car behind a stand of Blue Spruce next to the long tee at #15 and walked to the 2nd tee that gave me a clear "shot" at the #4 hole creek immediately in front of the green. About midnight I heard the methodic splash and drag over the gravel bottom of the creek, a sound I most certainly knew as I had heard it every time I had cast my own specially designed rake at that same location.

"You X@%&XX< take this", as I fired both barrels at once in the general direction of where I heard the sound. There was no crying out, but simply a rapid splash, splash, splash as the thief made his way to shore.

Early the next morning the pro (Vince Di Tella) and I found the thief's equipment; his waders, rake, and golf ball bag along Cermak Road. I took those items home with me for safe keeping.

A day or two later the golf course received a telephone call from an unknown person suggesting that the thief's equipment should be returned to where it was found or the golf course

might end up having gasoline spread and ignited on several of its greens. The equipment was immediately returned and no more threats were received.

I ended my career as ball hawk a short time later, as I became a freshman at a university some five hours driving time from home and my after-school and weekend work in the fall and spring came to an end.

So what would have happened to me in today's world? I can't help but think I would have ended up in jail, while the thief successfully brought suit against York Club for "pain and suffering" due to being shot at. I sometimes wonder if I could ever shoot at anyone ever, for any reason. Most likely not, but, perhaps, just maybe, and then I turn to other thoughts!!!

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