



Class of 1972 - Class of 1972 Memories

Class of '72,

As you may recall, it is my goal to publish a classmate's memoir concerning an experience he or she had at Penn during our four undergraduate years on every month between now and our 45th reunion. To that end, I am pleased to attach the memoir of James Morris, entitled "Lord of the Stacks."

One of the things I most enjoy as an active alumnus is reconnecting with old friends. While Jim and I have known each other since freshman year, I had not seen him since graduation. Through my efforts to encourage all of you to attend our 40th reunion, I found out that Jim had relocated to New Jersey. We now have lunch together at least once a month.

Jim is a native of North Merrick, New York but now resides in Gladstone, NJ. As an undergraduate, he was an honors English major and wrote his thesis on F. Scott Fitzgerald. Upon graduation, he went to Penn law and thereafter embarked upon a career in environmental law. He was based in Philadelphia for most of his practice and retired in 2010. Jim has two daughters -- Elizabeth Ann (25) and Emily Jane (22).

In retirement, Jim is an avid student of labor history, Catalan history, Catalan language, and history of the Spanish Civil War. He finds the time to do pro bono work for environmental causes.

I hope you enjoy his piece as much as I did. If you wish to contribute a memoir of your own, please let me know by emailing me at Friar72@gmail.com.

Best,

Jeff Rothbard
President, Class of 1972



LORD OF THE STACKS

Shortly after I arrived at Penn for my freshman year in 1968, I was cast adrift by my high school girlfriend under circumstances I found particularly trying. At length, I concluded to seek a new girlfriend. The women in whom I found myself most interested ran to a type: bellbottom jeans, long hair, peasant blouses or work shirts, sandals and a copy of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. They weren't talking to me, so I decided to pick up a copy of *The Hobbit* to see if that might change my luck. It did not.

Gesturing feebly and unintelligibly at these women with my new acquisition did nothing to break the ice. Some of them even preferred to speak on College Hall Green with a man I learned was Ira Einhorn. Since he didn't even go to Penn and smelled quite awfully, I was doubly affronted. I repaired to Van Pelt's upper floor carrels to regroup, study and brainstorm new tactics. I preferred the loophole windows overlooking College Hall Green, where I could marinate in self pity as I watched the crepuscular advance across the green. It was there, one Friday evening, that I had my second encounter with the works of J.R.R Tolkien. I had just finished reading *Beowulf* in Dr. Judith Fetterley's English 103 class and had enjoyed it thoroughly.

I thought to investigate some recommended "Additional Reading" and had gathered volumes containing several scholarly articles relating to the poem. I found many to be pretty much unhelpful and at length, grabbed the oldest volume - possibly an old hard bound PMLA? -and looked up the article I wanted. There before me, on a dusty, yellowed page, in tiny agate type, was the article I sought. In even tinier type was the author's name: "J.R.R. Tolkien." There, while seated in my carrel, a white hot flash of rage raced across my vision. I felt as though all the gods of a malignant universe were making mock of me and of my situation, epitomized at the moment by the name "Tolkien."

Needless to say, I brooded about this over the remainder of the weekend. On the following Monday morning after class, I asked Dr. Fetterley if this Tolkien of the obscure critical article and the Tolkien who wrote the popular novels were one and the same man. She said. "Why, yes. Aren't those books delightful?" I walked away thinking Judith Fetterly completely mad.

Years later, my two daughters were in the first wave of Harry Potter readers. As we waited out the stretch between books, my younger daughter read *The Hobbit*, pronounced it excellent and recommended it to me. I had just finished the last of *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a Potter stop gap, and followed her recommendation. *The Hobbit* was at least 10,000 times better than the reworked Jeebus stories of C. S. Lewis.

My older daughter in the meantime had finished the Tolkien trilogy, was enthused and recommended these Tolkien works highly. It was then I commenced the first of my three readings of all four books. These many years later, I believe that Judith Fetterley, far from being mad, was one of my best teachers and with the publication of *The Resisting Reader*, an epochal thinker on literature. Both my daughters have read that book, too, and find it excellent. Over time, I have found that Tolkien is a ready conversation starter with any woman with whom I actually wish to speak. I also believe those books are great and enduring contributions to English literature. It is from those books, and from *Beowulf*, that I've also learned that perhaps we should only fight wars if they are provoked by actual dragons or by the incontestably evil. Then again, neither the *Beowulf* poet nor Tolkien ever read the provision of the victorious platform in the 1984 presidential election, which provided that "[t]he personal automobile is the individual American's personal symbol of freedom and mobility."

I attribute these various reflections to Dr. Fetterley, my daughters, J.R.R. Tolkien, the *Beowulf* poet and J.K. Rowling. None of them would have occurred in quite the same way without my time spent in the stirring crucible of Penn from 1968 to 1975, and certainly the less so without Tolkien, although in the moment, he really pissed me off.

James Morris, C'72, L'75