

Reconnecting with a friend is an unexpected gift

A free hour appeared magically at the end of my day, and I was more than a little giddy about how I could fill it. I finally decided to be both practical and indulgent and go to Wegman's.



After picking up two sunflower plants—those were on the list, right?—I found myself strolling, footloose and child-free, through the bakery.

Suddenly I heard a voice say, “That can’t be Rita Beyer.”

Beyer hasn’t been my name for almost 11 years. Standing behind the bakery counter was John, a former coworker I hadn’t seen since before my wedding day.

I was so happy to see him.



“I was just talking about you!” I said. Earlier that day while enjoying lunch with my coworkers, I had started talking about the workload John and I had shared all those years ago. I couldn’t believe my colleague from 13 years ago was standing in front of me.

From about 1999 to 2002, John and I were the entire Hanover/Adams County Bureau for the *York (Pa.) Dispatch and Sunday News*.



A boy I interviewed for a story made that balloon duck for me.

We had a tiny office with two desks, a kind elderly landlord, high expectations from our editors who managed us from afar, a vast geographic area to cover, and a bathroom with wallpaper so wonderful I photographed it—back at a time when people didn't take pictures of everything.



I can't believe I can find this photo and not the one of us standing outside the building.

I was in my early 20s, so thrilled to be a real newspaper reporter that I hardly cared whether I was paid, and I was working alongside a reporter who was more than twice my age.

John was hoping to buy a Harley and I was covering my apartment walls with my flyswatter collection—but we shared a space, a sense of humor, and a passion for reporting and storytelling.



See how beautiful my flyswatters were hanging on the walls of my apartment way back then?

John and I hadn't talked in more than a decade, and many times I have wondered how he was doing—and even looked for him on social media. It took a trip to the grocery store to find him. Here we were swapping updates on our families, our homes, our jobs, and our lives.

We reminisced about the Ice Cream Museum—a storefront full of empty ice cream containers—and our landlord, Mr. Murphy, who has since passed on. Then we talked about our newspaper work, which was rewarding and fun but also grueling and challenging.

"I'll always remember what you said," he said—and I was completely puzzled, wondering what insight I could ever have had that he would recall 13 years later. "You said, 'This job is hard enough without them making it even harder.'"

Huh. I have no memory of saying that about our editors, but it was true. Isn't it surprising how well your words and actions can be remembered by those you encounter?



My old press pass

As I drove home, I thought of how easily we connect and reconnect with former and new friends on social media. Yet, there was something so truly remarkable about meeting a friend again, after so many years, in person.

Even though John has been working at Wegman's for years, and I shop there every six weeks or so, our paths have never crossed. And they shouldn't have crossed that day.

John wasn't supposed to be working that shift, and I never shop there at that time of day. Yet there we were, standing among the baked goods laughing and exchanging memories, as customers shopping for bread smiled and paused to chat.



It was just like old times. Still, as I was sharing pictures of our boys and we were talking about all that has happened in the past 13 years, I realized no, no, it's not. It's actually better.