

Speaking Contests

Memories of Boyhood and Graham Weathers (As Best An 83-Year Old Can Remember)

We were in grade school during World War II. While in the fifth grade, our teacher, Mrs. Pichette, was informed by the principal, Mr. Kiser, that her husband, Pierre, had been captured by the Germans.

Each year, the local Woodmen of the World (W.O.W) sponsored speaking contests. We were all urged to participate. The boys competed against other boys of the same grade and the girls competed against other girls. Each of the speakers was given about seven or eight pre-written speeches to choose from. A story about Knute Rockne was particularly popular with the boys. At least half the boys my age gave that speech each year. It was easier to speak about sports.

All speeches were given in the school auditorium which was located on the top floor of the elementary school. You had the stage to yourself and you spoke from memory. Judges were usually prominent members of the community such as Mayor, School Board Chairman, Mill Superintendent, etc. Prizes were awarded for first, second and third places. First place prize was usually a \$25 war bond, second prize was usually \$10 in war stamps and third place prize was \$5 in war stamps. Believe me, that was big money back then and well worth the effort of trying your best to win. Boys my age had a big problem trying to win first prize. That problem was Graham Weathers. He was simply a natural at that sort of thing. We knew we were competing for second place. Ten dollars in war stamps was still a big prize for any of us. Many of the winners took their bond or stamps straight to the post office to turn them in for cash. Many were shocked to find that the bonds and stamps had to be held until maturity to receive face value. The cash value just after purchase was only 50%. That was still big money!

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