

**Note for the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion of the Lawrenceville class of 1964**  
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**May 2013**

I have been a teacher and writer; have practiced law and been a consulting economist; and have served two tours in government, working on welfare and environmental policy in the Nixon Administration and on regulatory policy in the Reagan Administration. For twenty-two years (1986–2008) I was president of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. I am now a fellow at Hudson Institute, doing my own research and writing and occasional teaching. My writings are posted at [www.ccdemuth.com](http://www.ccdemuth.com).

My wife, Susan, is a pediatrician. She has practiced in various academic and private-practice settings but mainly has attended to children and families facing special challenges. During the past fifteen years, she founded and led a pediatric center for low-income families in South Arlington, Virginia; served with the U.S. Army at Fort Meade, Maryland, seeing children of active-duty military families, usually with one parent deployed; and, for the past three years, was medical director of Jill's House, a respite home in Vienna, Virginia, for children with intellectual disabilities and their families.

My enthusiasms have included sailing, soaring, skiing, scuba, and, most recently, sculling—rowing my hot carbon-fiber racing scull on the Potomac River at daybreak. Susan and I work out regularly together with a professional trainer—a demanding precisionist like Mr. Pratt. We have three children and five grandchildren, with two more imminent (grandchildren that is).

But now to the serious purpose of this note, which is finally to resolve a vexing mystery that engulfed the Lawrenceville campus fifty-three years ago, generating political controversy, media speculation, and fevered conspiracy theories. I refer, of course, to that phantasmagoric mustelidaen, the Lone Weasel. Although I have not kept up with my Second Form buddy Rod Swenson, the statute of limitations has now run on our clandestine compact and oath of omertà, conceived and sworn late one night in early 1961 in a secret hideaway beneath the Edith Memorial Chapel. The time has come to dispense with weasel words and fess up.

The New Jersey winter of 1961 was gray and drear. By February, the spirit of Lawrence was less than triumphant and tending toward grouchy. Some diversion was necessary, some astounding occurrence, some collective endeavor to rouse the community, bristle the brainwaves, and hasten on the lagging tread in the direction of spring. A one-off prank—a Volkswagen planted atop the flagpole in the middle of the night—would be insufficient to the moment. And so it was that we conceived of the surprise appearance on campus of a vaguely unsettling oracle, a ubiquitous stamped pronouncement: “The Lone Weasel Knows.” All we needed was a pair of rubber stamps and inkpads, and a plan of action.

The initial appearance of this strange declaration was in the circle houses and classroom buildings—so as to disguise the wretched Rhinie Lower School provenance of the scheme. Public placements, as on bulletin-board announcements, were the easiest. Others—inside course books atop the first page of tomorrow’s reading assignments, on table napkins in the Upper dining room, on playing cards in the Griswold common room—took planning and stealth. Placements on documents students could not possibly have access to—inside “Songs for Coffee,” on laundry slips, and on the backside of homework assignments—were high-risk operations. Those of you who were startled by “The Lone Weasel Knows” halfway through toilet paper rolls in Pop Hall restrooms or Lavino Field House locker rooms can now appreciate the lengths of our efforts to achieve the element of surprise. And then, to our amazement, the slogan began to appear spontaneously, as if the Weasel himself had taken charge: When it materialized, shockingly, inside a few chapel hymnals, Rod and I swore to each other that we were not responsible—like two players at a Ouija board.

To a pair of Cromwellians, the initial puzzlement and then growing consternation and tumult throughout the school community was more fun than a soggy war. At first, the debates focused on exigent issues: Where did the Weasel come from? Why he was acting alone? What did he know? But then, as weeks became months and the now-familiar epithet kept recurring with no resolution or revelation, the phantom ferret acquired a life of his own in independently conceived jokes, stories, apostrophes, and even a lesson from the morning pulpit.

Vague suspicions and insidious rumors concerning my association with the Lone Weasel dogged me through my Lawrenceville years and even into later life. But I believe that only one man—a master of ratiocination—accurately identified the perpetrators in real time. In

class one day, when I was least expecting trouble, Mr. Wyman propelled a graded quiz back at me across the table with his rubber-tipped stick, and gruffed, "Young DeMuth, you should spend more time studying mathematics and less time being the Lone Weasel." I was horrified, and struggled to keep my poker face. But then, a day or two later, came the dramatic denouement and crowning success of our subterfuge: Phil DeGuere, literary lion of the Fourth Form, made a public confession in his closely watched *Lawrentian* column that he had indeed been the Lone Weasel all along!

Which leaves us with one unresolved question: just what was it that the Lone Weasel knew—and wanted all of Lawrenceville to puzzle over?

He never told me exactly, but time and reflection have led me to the answer. In the Weasel's months of scurrying and sniffing about, poking through our papers, and surreptitiously observing dorm life, classes, studies, athletics, extracurriculars, chapel, coffee hours, and everyday interactions among students, masters, and masters' wives, always looking for opportunities to leave his mark, our diminutive interloper noticed something that we did not see ourselves but that was stunningly obvious to the clever and curious outsider.

What he came to know was that we Lawrenceville boys were a singularly privileged lot, as blessed and favored as any boys could be, in ways that went far beyond our often-privileged family circumstances. For it fell to us to spend our adolescent years—that difficult and occasionally terrifying passage from boyhood to young manhood—sequestered from the even larger confusions and agitations of the outside world. We were garrisoned in a loyal community that had grown—organically, through a century and a half of experience—to be a place where boys could discover themselves in safety. Although school authorities and student culture emphasized achievement, honor, and leadership, my strongest recollection of those years is that my classmates and I were making one fool mistake after another, but seldom the same one twice, and fewer and fewer over time. Our teachers and housemasters did not excuse, much less indulge, our unsteady behavior, but they were wise to our betwixt circumstances and intent on helping us find our way toward adulthood—by example and, for all of the fun we had together, by treating us as proto-adults.

Lawrenceville was also a place where an adolescent boy could begin to fathom what it meant to be an educated man and to lead an examined life. We were surrounded by stupendous erudition, and absorbed more

of it than we realized (I still turn over in my mind specific teachings of Messrs. Down, Woods, Candler, and Harmon). And our school possessed an institutional self-confidence that is almost impossible to conceive of today. Did you know that Mr. Keller had been teaching Lawrenceville boys for forty years, and Mr. Wyman for thirty-five years, before they got to us? Our school was where teachers wrote *The Bridge Over San Luis Rey* and the leading biography of Emily Dickinson; where Fidel Castro and Barry Goldwater, and the poet John Ciardi and *The New Yorker's* Brendan Gill, stopped by to give talks; and where Alexander Kerensky spent a long weekend in our Fifth Form year—ramrod straight in his eighties with a full head of white hair, and still exasperated with those double-crossing Bolsheviks. Lawrenceville knew itself; devoted itself to knowledge, excellence, and high aspiration; and summoned its young students to join in the quest.

That is what the Lone Weasel knew and hoped we would one day understand. What he did not know was that much of it was about to come to an end. The cultural and political revolutions of the late 1960s and 1970s would destroy the self-confidence of many old elites. New technologies and enthusiasms would make it ever more difficult to sustain special communities to protect and direct the passage of adolescence. The age to come—egalitarian, non-judgmental, populist, interconnected, global—would sweep away many of the serious defects of the world we grew up in, and many good and admirable things as well. That we can never go back should not be a source of regret. But neither should it stand in the way of profound gratitude for our inexplicable good fortune to have come of age when we did and where we did.