

Remembrances of Fred Pederson

By Papa Jack Hoeschler



Jake Hoeschler and ← Fred (Frederick) Pederson were close, life-long friends and practical jokers. Fred handled press and public relations matters for Northern Engraving Company and knew well how to write a press release that would likely get published.

One of Fred's signature achievements was to write a phony press release for the American Alligator Wrestling Federation in the late 60's. It breathlessly reported that Jake Hoeschler had just won that year's heavyweight alligator wrestling event in Naples, Florida (where Jake and Janet Hoeschler had a winter home). The letterhead was purpose-printed, the style was classic sports page, complete with appropriate statistics and quotes from spectators.

Gator Is Overmatched

La Crosse businessman **James W. "Jake" Hoeschler**, recently bested an alligator in a championship wrestling match, two rounds out of three.

Alligator wrestling is a popular spectator sport in Everglades City, Fla., where Hoeschler has taken it up as a participant. Hoeschler did so well he became the champion of his group.

Hoeschler competed in the group restricted to men over 40 years old and alligators over 30.

His margin of victory over his opponent, Andy, the alligator champ in the group, came as the result of a foul. Andy hit Hoeschler in the head with his tail, momentarily dazing him. The referee called the foul, awarding the round and the match to Hoeschler.

It was so well done that on March 1, 1976, the La Crosse Tribune ran it without further comment beneath a heading: "Gator is Overmatched." I assume that the Tribune editors knew Jake well enough that they must have suspected a ruse, but they still ran it, probably on a slow news day.

When Fred and Jake were in Central High School, and into their 20's, Jake was the leader of a dance band that played all around the region. Fred would often accompany them and the whole lot was quite capable of drunken pranks of serious scale – like putting their drunken double bass player in a bass drum case and rolling him down a bluff.

Fred personally confirmed another event involving himself, saying repeatedly: "Gus (his nickname for Jake), you should not have done that." It clearly left a mark on Fred.

The King family, heirs to the J.R. Watkins Products fortune, had an estate→, Rockledge, in Homer, Minnesota (on the river south of Winona) which featured a private zoo complete with lions and tigers. The big cats were housed in their own building surrounded by exterior, barred exercise cages that were connected via trap doors to smaller, interior cages. A service alley large enough for a tractor and wagon ran down the center of the building from which the animals were fed and serviced on either side.



Fred was well known to be personally cautious (Jake would say, privately, “He was a big coward.”). One evening after a dance job in Winona, Fred was sleeping, less than sober, in the rear of one of their cars. His ever-thoughtful buddies in the band conceived of a great wake-up prank. They laid him, passed out, in the center of the cat building service alley and then proceeded to excite, irritate, and drive the cats into their interior cages by poking sticks and throwing stones through the exterior cage bars.

Poor Fred woke up in a dimly lit building surrounded by snarling and agitated jungle cats and was barely able to crawl out without swerving too close to one side or the other and coming within reach of their claws through the cage bars.

The prank could easily have ended tragically, but they all seemed to be heedless of such a danger and thought it was great good fun at Fred’s expense. As Fred said, “they should not have done that.” Fred and Gus/Jake remained best of friends.

Diamond's Funeral

By Papa Jack Hoeschler

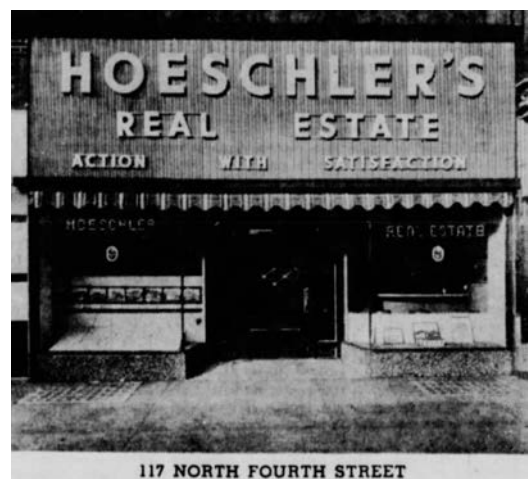
We always had horses while I was growing up in La Crosse. They were mainly American Saddlebred, with the later arrival of hunters and jumpers when those became popular after I went off to college in 1960.



The longest lived of our horses was Diamond, my mother's black saddle-bred gelding. We were not sure of his age when he was acquired, but we thought he was at least 2 or 3 years old. If that is correct, he was at least 30 years old one Fall when my parents were planning their usual winter vacation in Florida.

It was their custom to let the horses stay out for most of the winter as long as they had water, feed, and shelter from the wind. That setup had worked fine in prior years, but my parents were concerned that old Diamond would not make it through the upcoming winter. Moreover, they did not want to have to field calls about a dead horse in their pasture in the coulee while they were away. It seemed that the only option was to put Diamond down, as the phrase goes. But my father, Jake, felt that an ignominious trip to the glue factory was inappropriate for a noble steed like Diamond. He started to think more about what would make a fitting funeral for a horse.

As it happened, my father had a large residential real estate office in La Crosse with about 26 salespeople who were accustomed to a weekly sales meeting on Monday mornings. At those gatherings they would review the houses sold over the weekend as well as new listings. Often a tour of the new listings would follow the meeting.



On the day in question my father told everyone at the meeting that he had something important to show them and that he wanted all to be sure to come on that day's tour. With that, they all went to their cars and he led a parade of vehicles out of downtown La Crosse. As they were leaving downtown, he saw some friends and acquaintances on the street and told them to get into some of the following cars because he wanted to show them something.



The entire caravan then wound its way out of town to what the agents thought was a viewing at his eponymous subdivision, Hoeschler Hills, out in Mormon Coulee. But instead of turning left into the subdivision, he turned right into the Mormon Coulee Memorial Cemetery, an adjoining venture which he had also developed.

The caravan wound its way through the narrow cemetery lanes to the back. No one noticed that they were joined by a last-in-line car that had been waiting outside the gate. When Jake finally stopped his car and got out, all the rest in the train were forced to stop and disembark. As they did so, they looked around in some bewilderment, but failed to note that the driver of the last car was digging in a valise he had opened on the hood of his car. Going up near my father's car, they saw first a large hole in the ground and then a groom leading a horse toward them as my father took out what appeared to be a prayer book or Bible.

Without further explanation, Jake addressed the crowd: "Dearly beloved in Christ, we are gathered here to give testimony to the long and loyal life of service of our dear friend Diamond."



With that, the guests realized that they were attending Diamond's funeral, but that Diamond was standing before them, very much alive. Some snickers but more a sense of unease rippled through the crowd as my father proceeded to read the 23rd Psalm: "He maketh me lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside still watersl. and

other fitting biblical passages. The climax of the service came when my father took out his trumpet (for which he was well known locally) and blew taps.

This was the signal for the vet, the fellow in the last car, to come forward with his large horse syringe and give Diamond a baneful shot in the carotid artery as the coups de grace.

As so often happens, notwithstanding the best-laid plans, Diamond had become quite alert and agitated at the sound of the trumpet call – he not recognizing the tune itself. He was straining at the halter rope to show his mettle.

Suffice it to say that the first and even the third effort at a drowsing injection was unsuccessful. To make a long story and a somewhat tedious repetition of taps, short, Diamond finally succumbed about 20 minutes later and about 100 yards away.

In the meantime, the spectators themselves had become progressively more horrified by the extended nature of the service. Some were heard to reference the notorious film “Mondo Cane” as being exemplary of the situation. Those who were not Jake’s employees were pressing to leave immediately, lest the humane society or some branch of the law appear.

Even though their cars were trapped in a line on a narrow lane bordered by graves, because this was a memorial cemetery with only surface planted brass plaques in lieu of headstones, the pressure was finally too great and one after the other of the cars fled the scene by driving over the graves (as reverently as possible) with the passengers careful to never speak of the experience again.

All of this went down in the annals of Jake Hoeschler experiences as the day Diamond refused to die. Nevertheless, to this very day, Diamond is buried at the Mormon Coulee Memorial Cemetery, but without the notice of a grave marker – a serious oversight.

There are two postscripts to the story, however. The first, fittingly enough, involves Jake’s own 1989 memorial service, held a week after his death at age 75 from colon cancer. Even though he was not a religious man, he was a notable in the La Crosse community and his memorial service was held at the La Crosse Cathedral before a

congregation of over 750 people. During the service and without warning to, or plan by, the family, the priest read the 23rd Psalm. There was a ripple of recognition both in the family pew as well as elsewhere in the church.

Indeed, at the party after the service at the La Crosse Country Club (complete with dancing since his favorite musical buddies had played the hymn tunes at the church service and were available for the remaining time to reprise the dance tunes Jake loved to play), countless former employees came forward to attest that they had been at Diamond's funeral and would forever remember it on any hearing of the 23rd Psalm. It was clearly a signal event in their lives and one that will always be linked with the memory of my father.

The second postscript pertains to the near correction of the un-memorialized burial of Diamond. My mother outlived my father, but late in her life she became displeased with the standard of perpetual care at the Mormon Coulee Memorial Cemetery where Jake himself was buried in a crypt with the name Hoeschler at top center, his name and years at bottom left and a place for his wife's name and years at bottom right. Among the children it was agreed that if Mother insisted on being buried with the Catholics (who were still providing the level of care that she expected at their cemetery), we would solve the problem of Diamond's anonymous grave by adding, next to my father's name and years, the name of "Diamond, his wife's horse," and Diamond's years.

Regrettably, my mother in the end was buried next to her husband and Diamond continues to rest in an unmarked spot known only to a rapidly dwindling group of witnesses.



Jake's Funeral

By Papa Jack Hoeschler

My father died on August 12, 1989, of colon cancer that had spread throughout his body. He only learned of the diagnosis three months before his death but, looking back, we all thought that he was seriously slipping well before that. Nevertheless, periodic visits to Mayo had failed to highlight any problems.

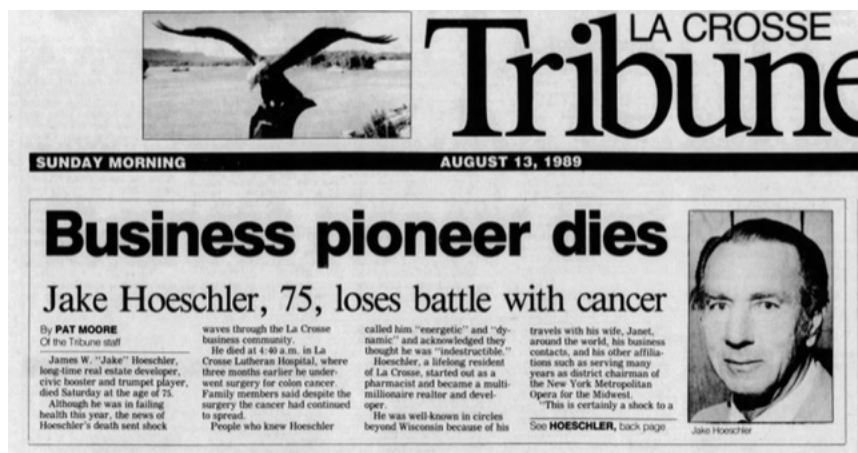
He did the usual chemo defensive measures but after each bout of treatments, evidence of the spread of the cancer returned. As he said, it was as if he were drowning and just as he struggled back to the surface for another gulp of air, a big hand would push him back below the surface. After the third struggle, he was just too exhausted and dispirited to fight more. He was ready for the end.

He spent his last week at Lutheran Hospital in La Crosse where he was still feisty enough to challenge the nurses about a basket of hand cream, face tissues and other personal toiletries that came to his room every day even though he had not used or used up the previous package. He insisted that that stop as a waste of money even if it were covered by Medicare. He and we were convinced each package was likely valued and charged at \$15 but no one seemed to know what the cost or charge was or even how to stop it. The system was simply rigged that way.

Similarly, he attempted to ask several times how much a treatment modality cost but again no one had the answer. It was clear from this that there is no cost governor on the insurance reimbursement system, and this is a big reason American health care costs so much more each year.

During his last week in the hospital he also asked to meet with Dean Dickinson, a classmate of my brother, Jake, who would be his undertaker. The nurses reported to us that they witnessed the undertaker leaving the room and insisting over his shoulder that there was no such thing as a used casket. When we spoke with Dad about last plans he confirmed that he had told the undertaker that he wanted no embalming and just burial in as inexpensive a coffin as possible, promptly after he died.

We also agreed with him that we would not have a fancy funeral but, instead, a musical memorial service sometime after he had died and been buried. He had a space for himself and mother at Mormon Coulee Memorial Cemetery, the cemetery he had developed. The visit with the undertaker came shortly after a priest friend stopped by to ask if Jake wanted the last rites – the priest, who had visited with Jake privately while we waited down the hall, later reported that Jake was “not ready yet” for the sacrament of Extreme Unction. Jake reported that he had told the priest that he did not believe in that “crap.”



As it happened, he finally died at about 4:30 am on a Saturday morning in August. The family was near his bedside – indeed, he seemed to have waited until Janice and favorite grandchild, Heather, could get to La Crosse in the wee hours of the

morning from the Twin Cities. After Jake died, we all went back to the family home in Ebner’s Coulee to get some sleep.

About 11:30 that Saturday morning Dean Dickinson, the undertaker, called and spoke with my mother. He reported that they had the body but no clothes other than his hospital gown. He suggested that it would be nice if she could send down some clothes even though he was to be buried without a service the next day. She agreed and promptly turned to a bag of clothes she was going to send to Goodwill, from which she chose

- A pair of double-knit pants in a brown checkerboard pattern.
- A blue dress shirt that was so old that the collar had turned whitish at the neck; and
- A soup-stained long tie in some sort of purple pattern.

She sent these to the undertaker. When we learned of this later in the afternoon, we were slightly aghast but failed, ourselves, to think of the paisley yellow sport coat Jake often wore as a possible fitting last touch. But since there was to be

nothing special except a trip to the cemetery on Sunday, we did not give it further thought – until, that is, Uncle Bob, his fastidious younger brother, arrived from San Francisco just before dinner.

As we were all gathered around the dinner table in the Ebner's Coulee house talking about Jake, his life and the musical memorial service we were planning for a week hence, Uncle Bob announced that he would like to see Jake one last time because he had something to give him. We all perked up at this because we knew what he was wearing.

My brother, Jake, excused himself to call his friend, Dean Dickinson, to see if something could be arranged. Dean warned my brother that they had done nothing with the body but put it in a cooler since he was to be buried without any viewing. But he said we could come to the funeral home if we gave him 45 minutes to try to arrange things as best as he could.

That was agreed and about an hour later about 8-10 of us joined Uncle Bob to view the body. When we got to the funeral parlor, the heat and humidity were typically August high but nothing else was going on – indeed, the place had been clearly closed all day with no air conditioning because it was very hot and humid inside.

Dean had set up the casket at one end of an assembly room. The casket was covered in blue-grey fabric and looked perfectly nice. The only give away that it was a pauper's casket was the label at the head end that proudly declared it was an Elderlite Casket made of corrugated cardboard, not wood.

In it Jake lay in repose, still with evidence of a scab beneath his nose where the tubes had rubbed the skin raw. The double-knit slacks, shirt and tie made for a comical costume but the final touch came from the beads of condensation that had formed on his face when his cold body was placed in the hot and humid room.

Bob placed the rosary in Jake's hands, but the body did not stir. To his dying day, Bob would always repeat that "it just was not right" that Jake should look like that. Bob himself was always a fashion plate and packed as much personal luggage as his wife and two daughters combined. He was clearly more sensitive to that sort of thing than either Jake or the rest of the La Crosse Hoeschlers.

The next morning the family, along with Jake's longtime secretary and bookkeeper, gathered at the funeral parlor and then formed an auto procession behind the hearse as it drove out to the Mormon Coulee Memorial Cemetery on Bloomer Mill Road.

The cemetery was located across from the Hoeschler Hills residential subdivision. In addition, other land owned by Jake adjacent to the back entry to the cemetery had also been converted to residential lots and, as the hearse and cortege turned into the back entry, it passed a sign heralding "plots guaranteed to percolate" for your future home. By the time our car passed the sign it was too late to have the hearse stop for one last fitting picture. Indeed, we later agreed we should have had the hearse make a tour of all of Jake's subdivisions – as he would typically do with us kids when we returned from school – for one last review of the inventory.

The hearse pulled up to the above ground mausoleum where the two Hoeschler places had already been marked by a front slab with the Hoeschler name centered and Jake's name and years also engraved on the left. Room was clearly left for a second interment on the right.



JAKE HOESCHLER

Born - September 12, 1913
Died - August 12, 1989

*"I smile through a tear
Today makes a year
It was my last goodbye to you."*

*"My Last Goodbye"
The first tune Jake ever
played on the trumpet.*

When we all got out of our respective cars and gathered around the casket that had been removed from the hearse, we each said a few words in memory of Jake. My mother then suggested, as was her custom, that we use this family gathering as a good opportunity to have the family Christmas picture taken – here, for the last time, with Jake. Had the secretary and bookkeeper not been there and had they not been visibly sad about Jake's passing, we would have tilted the coffin and opened it to the camera for a truly memorable farewell photo. As it happened, however, the picture merely shows us circled around the unopened coffin before it was slid into the mausoleum.

A week later we held a memorial service at the La Crosse Cathedral. Since Jake was not really religious – indeed, he was irreligious and had had ongoing

fighters with the Bishop over various real estate issues – the rector at the Cathedral suggested that we did not need a full funeral mass but just a memorial service. Out of respect for the concerns of Uncle Bob, however, we elected to have the full mass.

The music was provided by the musicians who had played with Jake in their annual Oktoberfest polka band. →

The only thing we forgot was to place his horn on an empty chair. Nevertheless, the band played hymn tunes at appropriate times in the service.



(JGH: More to come)

LLH notes that Jack died before he could finish this essay. Jake's funeral was splendid, with the band playing religious tunes (ending with a couple of pop tunes that Jake loved), and the four Hoeschler adult children speaking. (See Diamond's Funeral essay above which recounts the surprise recitation of the 23rd Psalm at Jake's funeral.)

The post-funeral reception at the La Crosse Country Club, featured Jake's band playing (why waste a good gig?!) where Jack danced with his mother and aunt, thus encouraging others to enter the dance floor. T'was a true celebration of a remarkable, multi-faceted life.