

Milford Buzz! - by Bill McGinty

Fifty years ago “Peyton Place”, the story of the happenings in a little American town, hit our television screens. Each week we tuned in to see what Ryan O’Neil and Mia Farrow were up to and what trouble was afoot. Little did I guess that one day I would be able to stand and view similar happenings, intrigue, local politics and trouble afoot swirl around me in a little town called Milford, Pennsylvania!

So gather close and listen up as I tell you the latest, gossip, rumor and buzz that have been gripping the town. It all started with that Library Committee deciding that they wanted to improve the lot of Pike County residents by building a new library. You would think that a library was a fairly neutral and apolitical project for a group of do-gooders to undertake! After all, Republicans and Democrats both read books, don’t they?

Not a bit of it! When the smoke from the first barrage of reaction cleared, they were counting bodies knee high outside Borough Hall. As reluctant as I am to listen to gossip at the checkout, I couldn’t help but overhear the whispered exchanges and again in the Post Office before they ever stamped my letters. The woman next to me said: “I only went in there for some ice-melt and size six brass screws. I said: ‘looks like we’re getting a new library then!’ Well, you would have thought I had raised the Confederate Flag at Gettysburg! I stood rooted to the spot, like a dead corpse on Cemetery Hill.

‘New Library!’ he replied. ‘We don’t need a new library. What we need is for these busy-bodies to leave our town alone instead of trying to change everything with their money. If they had come to us first, we would have told them how to build a library. It will never pass. I’ll see to that. There’s a way to do things around here and we don’t need any outsiders to tell us, with their social-engineering, how to run our town!’

I was so shocked; I forgot to ask for my screws and walked out without them!”

Gossip like this abounded from store to store and even at the Diner where the chat was: “He’s written to the Governor, you know, and the Senators. There will probably be a State investigation. It’ll be as big as Watergate! They’ll be loading them up and taking them away to the State Pen! Library indeed, next thing you know, every young crook will be reading books and breaking into the bank with laser technology he learned on a library computer! Lock them up now, that’s what I say!”

Outside the Dimmick, I overheard the hushed tones of two of our most prominent and senior ladies: “The ARB is getting involved,” she said, raising her eyebrows in a knowing way. If she had said ‘FBI’ or ‘CIA’, she could barely have extracted a more horrified reaction. “Rumor has it that the designer is some guy called Frank Lloyd Wright. He was down here last summer snooping around the ravine and looking at all our buildings. ‘He is up to no good,’ I told myself. Probably looking at what he can demolish for a car park, and he had a beard. It’s like that Joni Mitchell song: ‘Big Yellow Taxi!’ That’s paradise gone, we’ll be looking at miles of blacktop or at least Davis Chant will. The ARB will sort it all out; they have taken care of us in the past.”

“Yes,” said her friend, “just look at Milford Cemetery. You won’t catch them building in there, nor hunting. The ARB won’t let them! Besides, I don’t know if we really need a new library. The old one looks fine to me, although I have to admit, I haven’t been for years. Well, people just don’t read books anymore, do they?”

Outside Borough Hall a Fire Engine was reversing. “Don’t hit that signpost, or there’ll be trouble!” the Fire Chief shouted to the driver. It was hard to hear with the sound of the engine’s bleep, but I could swear one of the group outside the hall was saying:

“They want to do what? They want to postpone the vote on the library application so they can make recommended adjustments to get it to pass? Well that’s not going to happen! Jack, get what’s his name to e-mail everyone that the answer is ‘no’! Do you hear me? ‘No!’ That way it either fails or they have to withdraw it. Who do these people think they are? They raise all this money, come up with an idea for a new Pike County Library and they expect us to be grateful. There are things Milford needs before a library. There’s a new police station for a start, or another Fire House.”

“What if they take their money and build their library somewhere else?” said the little man with the baseball cap. All eyes turned and looked at him as if to say: ‘are you crazy, how could they do that?’ “Well what I mean is, they don’t have to build here, I mean they could build anywhere. Look at Home Depot!”

“Home Depot was different! That’s what you call your commercial sector. It’s all a matter of zoning, isn’t it? I mean you can’t have a dirty big orange building in the middle of residential dwellings, can you? If the ARB allows the library, what comes next, that’s what I’m asking? No, the library isn’t going anywhere! I don’t read myself, but I tell you now, it’s our library and it ain’t going nowhere!”

I wandered home after that, deep in thought. What an interesting and exciting place Milford is, I thought to myself. Maryann met me at the door.” Did you hear the news? She said. They arrested two girls from the Library Committee and put them in Pike County Jail.”

“What’s the charges?” I asked with surprise.

“They have a whole bunch of them,” said my wife. “Sedition, conspiracy, civil disobedience, incitement to overthrow the established local officials and disorderly conduct.”

“You’re kidding me! All for trying to build a New Pike County Library? Do you think I should go and visit them in jail?”

“No you can’t. They’re in solitary, besides they have both gone on hunger strike!”

“What?”

“Sure,” said Maryann. “They saw it in this movie: ‘Iron Jawed Angels’ and decided to try it. They are okay at the moment, but they are both so thin, I’d only give them a couple of weeks, tops! Pity it wasn’t you! You could do with losing some weight and you’d probably last a year.”

So that’s the story from Milford this week. Thanks for listening, but try not to spread it around, as that is how rumors start and things get exaggerated out of all proportion. I wonder what the buzz will be next week.