

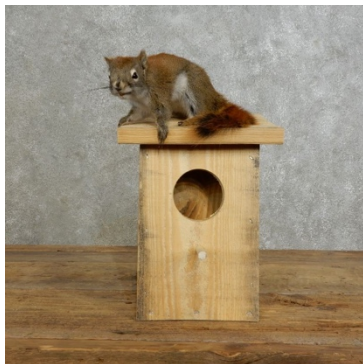
Chapter II: Herman's Childhood

Herman spent his early years living at 13 Chestnut Street in Natick, Mass.

During this time, boys were expected to be tough, strong, and intelligent. Society felt that boys had to show their masculinity in everything that they did. The interests of boys at the time reflected this societal



pressure. One common leisure activities for young middle class boys was taxidermy, the practice of searching for dead animals, cleaning them out, then stuffing their carcasses in order to



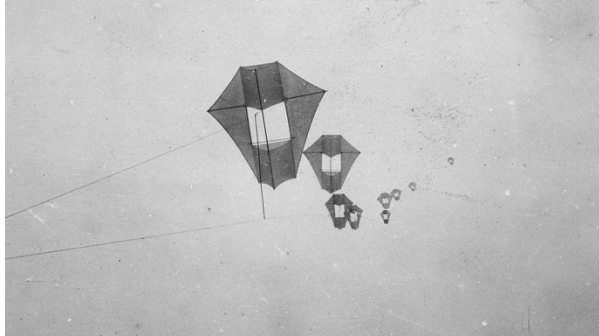
preserve the original shape of the animal. It is from taxidermy that the term for the toy “stuffed animal” was derived. Museums often used taxidermy to create mounts, which were seen as beautiful forms of decoration. Boys like Herman used taxidermy simply to create toys to play with, and to boast their abilities in the art form.

Boys at the time were also expected to be resourceful, which the practice of taxidermy demonstrates.¹ Though gruesome to many today, it was not costly and was something that middle class boys could bond over. The fact that boys were encouraged to make toys for themselves based on what they were able to find in the world around them as opposed to buying toys shows that society expected boys to be resourceful.

War kites were another common toy for boys during the late 1890s and early 1900s. War kites are as lethal as they sound. These toys functioned to similarly to present day kites, but the

¹ Courtesy of Maggie Fiske Research.

boys who owned them made slight alterations. The young boys would add knives or other sharp objects around the edges of their kites in order to “prepare them for battle”. Once their kite was



designed to their liking, they would fight other kite owners. The first flier to use their kite to cut the string of the other kite, bringing it to the ground, would win. The game of war kites demonstrates the violent, competitive attitude

boys at the time were expected to have. They were expected to be strong and indifferent to death and violence. They were encouraged to fight against each other and to be competitive. Such activities represented the cultural phenomena of this era. Herman grew up in a time where everyone around him was participating in taxidermy, war kites, or similar games, so these activities undoubtedly shaped him and his childhood.

Aside from games, boys were expected to be intelligent and to attend school.² Herman completed sixth grade, at which point he dropped out and began working as a salesman at a grocery store, sales being the profession that he would continue to engage in until his late fifties.³ Herman’s occupation gives insight into who he was. Salesmen do not have to be highly educated, and Herman most certainly was not. However, to be successful, salesmen have to be very personable and have a lot of connections in different cities. We know that Herman was a successful salesman, and from this we can guess that he was a very likeable man with many friends and acquaintances. His charisma is reflected in his letters. It seems that in each letter, Herman either runs into another friend from Boston, or goes off to the city with a new friend

² Ibid.

³ "1920 Census." Ancestry Login. Ancestry, n.d. Web. 13 June 2017.

from his battalion. Herman's charm was one of his most important characteristics, and one that manifested itself from his earliest days.

Herman was not only loved by his friends, but was also part of a tight family unit. The tone of the letters he would later write home demonstrate the love he had for his mother. Even during tough battles along the front, Herman always tells her not to worry, that he loves her, and that he will see her soon. He wanted to ensure that his mother would not worry about him, and that she was shielded from the horrors of the war that he was living through. Herman's need to protect his mother comes from a place of love for her, an instinct surely developed as a result of all of the care she provided for him during his childhood. Herman also often mentions his younger sister Estelle in his letters home. Estelle was seven years younger than Herman, and until he married in 1918, Estelle was the most important female in his life, after his mother. He constantly wrote home to her, and often mentioned how much he loved her letters to him when he was in Europe. As her older brother, Herman probably looked out for Estelle when they were growing up, and continued to try to do this while he was away. In each letter, he told his sister that he was living "a regular vacation" in Europe.⁴ He chose to focus his attention on her life and well-being back home, as opposed to his experiences as a soldier. Herman's love for his mother and sister as expressed in his letters reinforces the importance of his family to him.

Herman appeared to have a very different relationship with his father, though he cared for his father just as much as he did his sister and mother. James was Herman's earliest role model, a musician at the local theater, and Herman quickly took an interest in music. From a young age he learned to play a variety of instruments. While overseas, he proudly informs his father that he is learning to play "bass drum, snare drum, baritone and bugle".⁵ Herman appears inspired by his

⁴ Herman Allen letter from May 28, 1918.

⁵ Herman Allen letter from June 1, 1918.

father, and wants his father to be proud as he follows in his musical footsteps. Herman also tried to connect with his father over sports. He often wrote to his father about going to watch ball games in the cities he visited. He also references playing ball games with his fellow soldiers. Baseball is mentioned in almost all of the letters to his father, but is rarely mentioned to his mother. This seems to indicate that baseball was a theme connecting son with the father he so much admired.

Holding one's father as a role model was not uncommon for boys in the early 1900s, but other more well-known role models existed in their society. One particularly prominent figure in American politics that boys looked up to was Theodore Roosevelt. Theodore Roosevelt was a



man who accomplished in one lifetime what many of us couldn't accomplish given a thousand lifetimes. He represented everything that men were expected to be during the 1900s. He was athletic, intelligent and knowledgeable in a wide variety of fields. He was charismatic and brave. One of the central pieces of Theodore Roosevelt as a politician was his position on war. Roosevelt loved his nation, and supported any war that promoted the greatness of the United States.

He encouraged young men to go out and volunteer to be soldiers when the United States entered World War I. Herman, who was in his mid twenties at the time, heard Roosevelt's message loud and clear. Like any good patriot, Herman volunteered to go to war to protect the country he loved so dearly. In the spring 1917, Herman Allen volunteered for the United States Army.
