

REMEMBERING WILLARD ESPY

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In 1972 Willard Espy published his first book of wordplay, aptly named, *The Game of Words*. Ross and I both read it and sadly shook our heads. It would have been a much better book, we thought, if Espy had known of Word Ways and talked with us.

Ross and I were in our third year of publishing Word Ways, and I was exploring every avenue that I thought would bring us new subscribers. That summer I wrote to Espy and sent him a sample copy of the journal. I didn't hesitate to suggest that he might benefit from subscribing. He did not reply,

About five days before Christmas that year, I got a phone call from Louise Espy. She told me she'd like to give her husband a set of the back issues of Word Ways if we could get them to her before Christmas. With only five days left, we didn't trust the postal service to deliver in time, and so Ross took the journals in to New York and hand delivered them to Louise.

Willard (or Wede as we came to know him) became an instant fan of Word Ways. He wanted to know more and to talk with us. So one summer Sunday afternoon he and Louise rented a car and drove out from Manhattan to our home in Morristown, New Jersey for dinner. Thus began a friendship which lasted from that day until Wede's death in 1999. Several times we went in to New York to have dinner with the two of them in their apartment in the East 60s, and he invited us to the launching party in Greenwich Village for *Another Almanac of Words at Play*.

Wede grew up in Oysterville, a small fishing village on the end of a long, narrow, Oregon peninsula. The Espys maintained the house as a summer home and invited us to visit them if we were ever in Oregon. One summer, around 1980 we planned a trip out West, and arranged to visit Oysterville. Wede showed us the sights of the village. We had dinner, conversed during the evening, and then drove back up the peninsula to our motel.

"The next time you're coming out West," said Wede, "stay with us. We'd love to have you." We did have another trip to the West Coast some years later. We arranged with Wede that we would come to Oysterville on a certain date, and he repeated the invitation to stay with them. We happily accepted.

Once again we spent a very pleasant afternoon with Wede and Louise. As the hour grew later, Louise asked, "Where are you spending the night?" I looked at Ross. Ross looked at me, and both of us looked at Wede. Apparently Wede had completely forgotten his invitation and had neglected to tell Louise that we were coming. It was an embarrassing moment, but one typical of Wede. He liked his bourbon which sometimes

resulted in a memory lapse. Louise recovered quickly, produced a delicious dinner, and made up the bed in the guest bedroom. All was saved.

After Wede died Ross occasionally had dinner with Louise when he went in to New York to see the ballet. Appropriately, Louise gave me Wede's copper jigger to remember him by. I keep it polished and displayed in my bookcase next to his books. I have not forgotten him.