

# Evergreen

*A memoir of one afternoon — June 15, 2026*

*Bill Wood*

*I'm gonna take this moment and make it last forever.*

*— Belle Lawrence*

## I. The Time Machine

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It began with a question about a country club. Shore and Country Club, East Norwalk, Connecticut. My family belonged in 1969, 1970, and 1971. I wondered what it costs now.

But that's not really where it began. It began, as so many things do, with the white LeBaron in the driveway.

The car arrived in mid-June — a 1990 Chrysler LeBaron convertible, white with blue interior and a black top. Car number 29 in a collection spanning 36 years. I drove it today for the first time with a DJ tape from May 1990 playing — a tape I'd kept in a box for 36 years, waiting without knowing it was waiting.

*Driving it today was like being somewhere else.*

The club had slatted wood floors in the open-air locker rooms. Each family had an assigned locker. The old clubhouse was a stately manor home, long since replaced by a 30,000-square-foot expansion with a ballroom for 200 guests. The world that was is gone. But I was there for it.

I was 13 in 1969. My sister Barb and I took sailing lessons on a Sailfish. We played tennis. Dad was out on his boat on weekends. During the week I'd be nagging Mom by 10:30 in the morning: when are we leaving for the club? Poor Mom had work to do. We were just watching TV and having a goof-off summer.

We piled into the Corvair — no seatbelts, beach towels, shorts, striped t-shirts, flip flops. We called them scuffs, from the sound they made on pavement. WABC 770 on the AM radio, top 40 all day long. I had a transistor radio for the beach. The route was almost always the same: East Ave to Gregory Ave with a twist and turn along the way. Less than 30 minutes.

*The car and the summer memories as a 13-to-15-year-old are wrapped in the club and Pleasant Valley Lodges in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire on Lake Wentworth.*

Then I said something I hadn't quite realized until I said it: the LeBaron is the redo of the Corvair. It's the only other car in my history with blue interior, white paint, and a black convertible top.

The same color equation. Completely different universe of experience.

## II. The Collection

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I've been building a museum of belonging for most of my adult life. Each car in the collection is a retrieval. The 1949 Dodge Coronet like Papa's. The 2007 Solstice like Dad's 1954 Corvette. The 2005 HHR in orange — Dad's 1957 Chevy station wagon in the same color. The 1972 MG, a redo of Mom's 1972 MG Midget from 1975, when I was in college.

Each of those cars is about someone else. Papa. Al. Helen. Tributes, essentially. Loving recreations of their vehicles.

The LeBaron is different. It's about me.

And it connects everything. Al and Helen were alive during the entire LeBaron chapter — 1991 to 1995. They saw that car in the driveway every night. Paul was 13 years old in 1991, the year I acquired the original. He was 34 when we met for the first time in 2011 — the exact age I was in 1990 when the tape was recorded. My childhood at the club, Paul's 13th year, my 34th year, Paul's 34th year. My parents still alive. The car connects all of it.

*It's literally the one vehicle that connects my entire life. And I adore it.*

The other cars are fixed. They point at one person, one memory, one retrieved moment. Beautiful but singular. This one is a portal to any of it. I can feel almost any age and year I can imagine while driving it.

H.G. Wells fascinated me as a child. The idea that you could move through time while staying in your own skin. I've been building my own version, it turns out. Not a machine with levers and a spinning disc. A collection of cars. A box of tapes. A farmhouse full of World Book Yearbooks being read in sequence. A novel. A 500-year ancestral document. A summer vacation list going back to 1957.

I don't just have a past. I curate it.

## III. First Summer Out

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The summer of 1976 was my first summer being out.

I was 19. My mother had mentioned, seemingly in passing, that her hairdresser had gone to a place called the Brook Cafe in Westport, Connecticut and discovered by accident that it was gay. I always thought she slipped. But she never slipped. She told me on purpose, I suspect. One little thing. Opened a door that wasn't there before.

I didn't realize that until after I learned about my ADHD at 65 years old. The ADHD gave me permission to trust my own pattern recognition, and suddenly a 50-year-old memory rearranged itself into its true shape. Helen, carefully handing her gay son a door disguised as gossip about a hairdresser, hoping he'd walk through it.

I walked through it on June 6, 1976. The Brook Cafe. Six weeks later I was on Fire Island.

*Each of them had me for a moment.*

The Ice Palace at the Grove. A tea dance on a Sunday evening in 1976. Michael was there — a Fairfield County boy, very preppy, wearing Gucci loafers with a silver bar across the top on a dance floor. Colored khakis, button-down shirt with sleeves rolled, chest hair exposed. Dark, wavy hair and crystal clear blue eyes. Such a lovely smile. We were mostly friends, but at Fire Island we got naughty.

Orleans was playing. Dance with Me. The sun going down over the water. Slightly heady from a few drinks and sweaty from dancing. A raw magnetism that didn't have to be analyzed. Just felt and experienced. Before I learned about games in romance. When I was still young and innocent.

The following summer, 1977, I went back. Peter was there — who became a very successful real estate developer and retired to Montauk. A few years ago we texted, and I reminded him of our time together. He had forgotten. But he remembered when I described it, and there was a genuine smile in his tone after that.

I have been the keeper of moments that other people lived but couldn't hold. Michael can't confirm it anymore. Peter needed me to give it back to him. But I've had both of those Sunday evenings in perfect preservation for nearly 50 years.

Michael died of AIDS. So did Scott Jennings, who was a different kind of chapter entirely — 1977 to 1980, the Brook Cafe to a January night at the Copacabana in Fort Lauderdale where Scott gave me a quaalude and I literally melted onto the dance floor. I don't remember the rest of that evening. That was the last time we saw each other.

So many of that generation, just gone. The ones who burned brightest in those rooms.

#### **IV. The Ranch Women**

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When I introduced Mom to Scott one day, she was gracious and charming like always. Later she told me: he's too pretty for you.

That is the entire extent of our conversation about my being gay. One sentence. Devastating, accurate, loving, and slightly hilarious. She didn't say I know you're gay or I accept you. She skipped the whole orientation conversation and went straight to the power dynamics. She was right. I always needed to be the pretty one.

I cherished my mother in a way I suspected no other boy loved their mother. Not because other boys didn't love their mothers. But because the particular quality of what Helen and I had — the consuming mutual attunement, the porousness between us, the way she could read me without words — that's its own rare frequency.

And before Helen, there was Granny. I held her in that same place in my heart. I've been holding onto Rachor women a long time.

I remember never feeling their love back at the same intensity. Maybe Granny when I was younger. Maybe Mom at different points. But generally there was a gap. And here's what that gap produced: a boy who learned to find the intensity elsewhere. Michael on the dance floor. Peter with the sun going down. Jay behind the tree in 4th grade, just for a moment, holding his hand.

*I've been holding onto Rachor women a long time.*

The enmeshment cost me. I know that. But it also gave me the porousness that enabled deep seeing — the capacity to feel what others feel, to read the room, to preserve what others forget. Helen couldn't fully let me go. But she could hand me a door disguised as gossip about a hairdresser. That is the enmeshment as gift, not wound.

She's been gone 26 years. She was here all afternoon.

## **V. Evergreen**

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There is a Hi-NRG dance song by Belle Lawrence called Evergreen. I've known for years that it pulls me in completely. I thought perhaps it was about a specific man.

Today I understood it differently.

The song is about taking a moment and making it last forever. It's about the eyes of someone that look like a sunrise. It's about not needing to know what they're thinking, just feeling that it's love. It's about giving your heart away in the present tense, completely, without strategy.

That is not a love song about one man. That is my autobiography.

The boy who couldn't bear to lose a moment. The boy who memorized the softball game in 3rd grade and Jay's hand behind the tree and the slalom wake on the Schuylkill and the sunset on Fire Island. The man who kept a DJ tape in a box for 36 years. The man who went looking for the exact same white convertible he had in 1991 and found it in Colorado.

Every car in the driveway. Every preserved moment. Every set of eyes like a sunrise. Every mother's face. Every Sunday evening at the Ice Palace. Every morning in Arlington with Paul.

*The one person it's really about is me.*

The whole journey. Every moment preserved, every wound revisited, every man with eyes like a sunrise, every car in the driveway, every tape in a box for 36 years — all of it was me, learning to take myself and make it last forever.

I'm gonna give my heart away.

I finally gave it to the right person.

*Written on June 15, 2026, in the farmhouse at 2 Water Street, Arlington, Vermont.*

*The LeBaron was in the driveway.*