

JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

Quick, Timely Reads On the Waterfront

A Modern 'A.I.' Essay

By Colin Heeneman, University of Illinois
and David Frew, Scholar in Residence
November 2023

How old does a person have to be before he or she can ignore job insecurity? I'm not sure but, apparently, I am not quite there yet.

Recent concerns over artificial intelligence (A.I.) that have invaded the work of screenwriters in Hollywood as well as my academic colleagues have given me pause. I am told by friends who are engaged in university teaching that it is almost impossible to identify term papers and essays that have been created by inexpensive and easily available computer programs and not written by the students who submitted them. These papers are created by feeding basic criterion into a program and pushing a button. Presto! A flawlessly written paper is printed in almost any specified size range, complete with perfectly placed references and footnotes. The new generation of A.I. papers will pass the old plagiarism-test programs that used to be "state of the art" gatekeepers for college professors.

So, what is a writer supposed to do to protect himself from being replaced by a \$79 computer program? I considered organizing a "union" of other Jefferson writers, but quickly realized that I would probably be alone in such a venture. Instead, I decided to attack the problem head-on by commissioning an "A.I." essay and asking for reader opinions. But there was a problem. I had no idea how to create such a work. For help I turned to Colin Heeneman, 2021 Jefferson

Educational Center intern and current graduate student at the University of Illinois School of Public Policy. I knew that Colin would be interested in the project since we have spoken about artificial intelligence on several occasions. More importantly, he has the technical skills to create an “A.I.” essay.

Colin was quite familiar with the ongoing “On the Waterfront” series, having worked on the editing for more than six months, but even more important he had access to artificial intelligence programs at the university. He selected a program and loaded it with several characteristics taken from the essay series. It was a simple matter to find several “parameters” to load into the program and ask for a new essay. He set the story in 1953, made the characters 10 years old, located it in Erie, Pennsylvania, and on the waterfront in general and near the commercial docks and railroad tracks. The “A.I.” program even generated a story title.

Return with us now to 1953 and the Erie waterfront for an adventure brought to you by Colin Heeneman and his artificial intelligence program (names have been changed to protect the guilty):

‘Echoes of Freedom’

In the summer of 1953, in the quaint town of Erie, Pennsylvania, a spirited group of 10-year-old boys found themselves at the center of adventures that would shape their childhood and forge bonds stronger than steel. It was an era of innocence, a time when the air was thick with the scent of industry, and the commercial docks of Erie held both mystery and danger for those daring enough to explore.

Dave, one member of this seemingly leaderless group, with a mop of unruly reddish hair, stood at the forefront of this motley crew of friends. Alongside him were Mickey, the mischievous one with a perpetual twinkle in his eye; Joe, the quiet and thoughtful observer; and Ed, the youngest of the group, determined to prove himself despite his small stature.

The summer sun beat down on the rusting metal of the docks as the boys, clad in worn-out sneakers and tattered jeans, set out on their daily escapades. The commercial docks, a labyrinth of towering ships and echoing warehouses, became their playground. The promise of adventure hung in the air as they navigated the maze of cargo containers and stacks of wooden crates.

Their days were filled with the thrill of exploration, the taste of freedom that only a summer without responsibilities could offer. The ships, massive and imposing, became vessels of imagination as the boys concocted stories of daring sea voyages and hidden treasures. Each dock was a new chapter waiting to be written in the book of their collective imagination.

Wandering the commercial docks, the boys discovered the art of trespassing with an almost poetic finesse. Fences and warning signs were merely invitations to explore the forbidden. Abandoned warehouses, forgotten by time, became secret lairs where their dreams took flight. The air was thick with the scent of rust and adventure as they forged their own path through the industrial landscape.

Their misadventures, however, did not go unnoticed. The dockworkers and security guards, weathered by years of toil, would often catch glimpses of the elusive gang of boys. Laughter and the pitter-patter of hurried footsteps echoed through the metal corridors, leaving behind a trail of bemused adults shaking their heads at the audacity of youth.

Yet, the docks were not the only arena for their exploits. The polluted waters of the bay, a cautionary tale for the adults, became the boys' secret refuge. Ignoring the warnings of concerned parents, they plunged into the murky depths, their laughter drowning out the whispers of contamination. The polluted bay became their oasis, a place where the troubles of the world faded away with each splash and ripple.

Swimming became a rite of passage, a symbol of defiance against the constraints imposed by a world that sought to protect them. The boys, oblivious to the potential dangers lurking beneath the surface, reveled in the freedom that the polluted bay offered. They were a band of brothers, bound by the shared secret of their forbidden playground.

As the summer days stretched lazily into the twilight of evening, the boys discovered a new thrill – hopping freight trains. The rhythmic clatter of wheels against tracks became the soundtrack to their adventures as they hopped aboard, feeling the wind whip through their hair. The world blurred as they clung to the sides of the boxcars, their laughter carried away by the relentless motion of the train.

Yet, with this newfound thrill came a heightened sense of danger. The railroad cops, vigilant guardians of the tracks, and local police became adversaries in the boys' quest for freedom. The once carefree escapades now carried the weight of consequences, transforming the summer into a delicate balance between exhilaration and caution.

One fateful afternoon, as the boys hopped aboard a freight train bound for unknown destinations, the thrill turned to tension. The distant wail of sirens echoed through the railway yards, signaling the approach of authority. Panic set in as the boys realized they were no longer in control of the adventure they had so eagerly embraced.

The train, a mechanical beast hurtling through the landscape, became both ally and adversary. The boys clung to the sides, hearts pounding in their chests, as the pursuit intensified. Railroad cops and local police, determined to put an end to the reckless escapades, chased them through the labyrinth of tracks and tunnels.

It was a race against time, a test of wits and agility that pushed the boys to the limits of their daring spirit. The world became a blur of motion and shadows as they navigated the maze of tracks, their pursuers closing in with every passing second. The once carefree laughter now echoed with the urgency of escape.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows across the railway yards, the boys made a split-second decision. With a collective leap, they disembarked from the moving train, their sneakers hitting the gravel with a thud. The train, a metallic beast robbed of its passengers, rumbled away into the night, leaving the boys breathless and victorious.

Exhausted but exhilarated, the gang found themselves in a part of town unfamiliar to their adventures. The distant glow of city lights beckoned, and the boys, their adrenaline-fueled bravado undeterred, set out on foot. The night became a canvas for their stories, a tapestry woven with the threads of daring exploits and narrow escapes.

As they wandered through the unfamiliar streets, the boys stumbled upon a hidden gem – an old diner with neon lights flickering in the night. The scent of fried food and the hum of conversation welcomed them as they entered, their dusty sneakers and disheveled appearances drawing curious glances from the patrons.

Seated at a worn-out booth, the boys reveled in the victory of the night. Laughter erupted as they recounted the chase, each embellishing the tale with a touch of bravado. The diner, a haven for weary travelers and late-night wanderers, became the backdrop for a celebration of freedom, friendship, and the indomitable spirit of youth.

As the night wore on, the boys realized the magnitude of their adventures. The commercial docks, the polluted bay, the forbidden warehouses, and the freight trains had been more than just the playgrounds of their summer. They were the stages where friendships were forged, boundaries were tested, and the echoes of freedom reverberated through the very fabric of their existence.

As the gang made their way back to familiar territory, the first light of dawn kissed the horizon. The town of Erie, wrapped in the quiet slumber of the early morning, awaited the return of its intrepid explorers. The boys, tired but triumphant, walked the streets with a newfound sense of accomplishment.

The summer of 1953 became a chapter in the collective memory of the gang – a story told and retold as the years passed. The adventures by the commercial docks, the forbidden escapades in the polluted bay, the daring hops aboard freight trains, and the pulse-quickenning chases through the night became the stuff of legend.

In the years that followed, the boys went their separate ways, each embarking on their individual journeys. Yet, the echoes of that summer lingered in their hearts. The lessons learned – about friendship, freedom, and the thrill of pushing boundaries – shaped the men they would become.

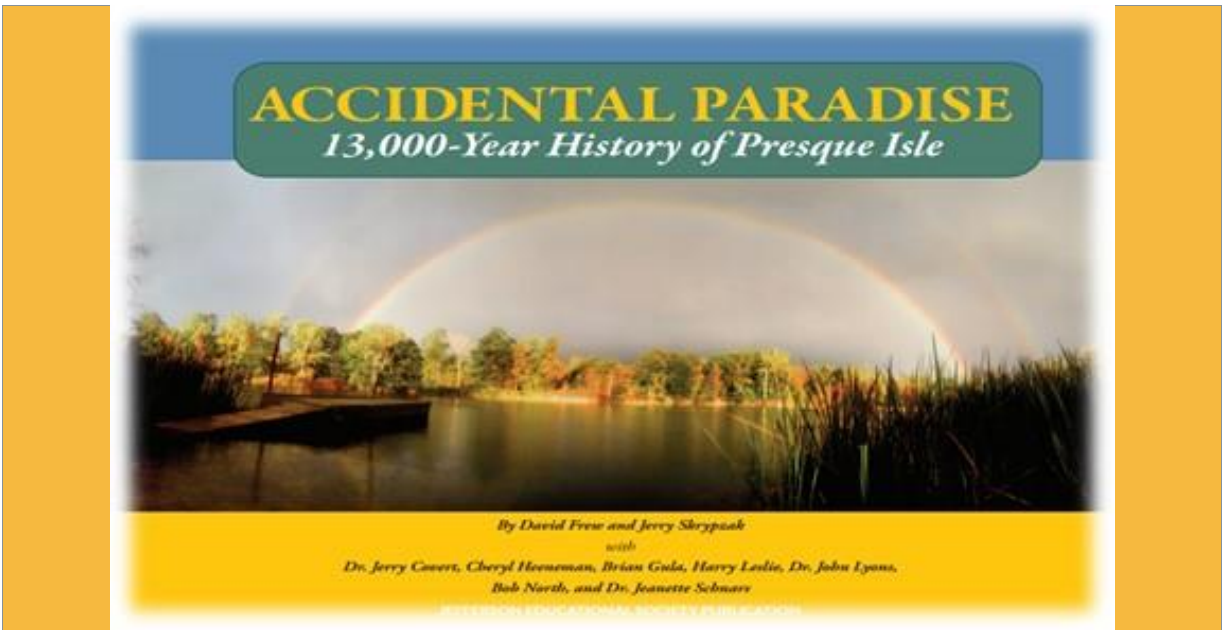
Decades later, as gang members returned to the “scene of old crimes” and enduring friendships, they found themselves watching the astonishing changes in the old commercial docks of Erie, now transformed by the passage of time into yacht clubs, marinas, condominiums, restaurants and tourist havens.

[Subscribe to JES Publications
Mailing List!](#)

[Support JES | Donate](#)

Accidental Paradise Available at TREC!

Accidental Paradise
by Dr. David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak



The beautiful book on Presque Isle published by authors David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak – “**Accidental Paradise: 13,000-Year History of Presque Isle**” – is on sale at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center’s gift shop and through a special website, AccidentalParadise.com.

The book, priced at **\$35 plus tax and shipping**, can be ordered now through the website sponsored by the TREC Foundation, AccidentalParadise.com.

Presque Isle Gallery and Gifts on the main floor of TREC, located at **301 Peninsula Drive, Suite #2, Erie, PA 16505** will also handle sales *daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

For more information, send an email to aperino@TREC.org.

To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.



In Case You Missed It

[The Wider World | Israel's War: Regional Implications for U.S. Military](#) written by President of DC Analytics **Diane Chido**

[Truth in Love | Bolton: Dream Beyond Your Reach!](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Parris J. Baker**

[Be Well | Weathering Cough, Cold, and Crud Season](#) written by health and wellness expert **Debbie DeAngelo**

[Book Notes #164 | Americans & Their Games: Sports and the Immigrant's Tale III](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Andrew Roth**

[On the Waterfront | The Tunnel: A Neighborhood Mystery](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. David Frew**

