

Biography of Robert E. Sprehn
The “Bestest” Dad one could have!



October 1, 1924 – April 13, 1998

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Robert E. Sprehn:

aka

“Red”

“Bob”

“Dad”

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In memory of
Roberta Ellen Sprehn
(1957 – 2020)

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Introduction

This book “**Biography of Robert E. Sprehn**” is divided into four main parts.

Part 1

This part was written solely by dad himself. It is an **autobiography** beginning when he was circa 4 years old and ending in his high school years.

Part 2

This part was my attempt at a **biography** of dad which itself is divided into the following three sections:

- The “War Years” (1941-1945).
- The post war years while mom and dad still lived in California before moving to the great state of Washington.
- The years that the Sprehn family lived in Washington.

Part 3

This part contains a sampling of the many writings by dad. Two of these writings are philosophical in nature, one is a short fictional story and two of the writings were meant for humor and poking fun at mom.

Part 4

This part contains a sampling of some of Dad’s carvings that he whittled over the years.

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Dad's autobiography was titled "*An Anthology of Yesteryears*" and came about mostly as a lark. My Aunt Ginny (dad's sister) was over at mom and dad's home years back and they found themselves reminiscing for many hours throughout the night (and morning) about those growing up years. Ginny, being older than dad, in many cases was able to provide information for dad that he probably could not have remembered given his young age at given times. But, fortunately for all of us, those nostalgic hours that night resulted in the creation of his autobiography which is now published in this book.

The Part 2 biography section that covers the post war years in California was aided by information provided to me by my mom (Lilan R. Sprehn) and my uncle (Al Wilson). This information was gratefully appreciated.

I must say that if I could have purchased a time machine, I would have used that machine to produce this book many years ago. Several attempts were begun at earlier times but each effort always fell short of reaching the goal. My bad.

PART I- Autobiography

Years 1928 – 1941

Introduction

Haven't any idea what precisely instigated this pilgrimage into yesteryear, but Ginny and I inexplicably stumbled and fumbled our way, innocently I believe, into that often flawed "remember when" nostalgia trap. This impromptu incredulous endeavor took place during her recent visit to the great Northwest. Twas mostly about fragmented memories of the late twenties and into the thirties. This memory exercise was devoted exclusively to recall about the fun stuff. The melancholy nostalgic filled "other" moments, having faded to convoluted fuzzy memory anyway, we casually shucked aside, and little effort was expended to dredge them back. However, Ginny expressly claims the right "to allude to these convoluted fuzzy memories where applicable."

We talked primarily about being poor. Not the starving scrawny kind of poor. Though `seconds' at the dinner table were not something one could count on, there was always an abundance of those god-awful `greens' from Dad's gardens: a soggy steamed mixture of kale, collard, chard, turnip and beet tops, and maybe, ugh, even some whatevers!

We never endured any real hardship, or of course at that time, understand that "poorness" was an intangible doctrine of comparative values. Never had much, and therefore didn't miss what we didn't have; we were too busy just being kids. Besides, everyone in the whole world, as far we knew, were paddling along in the same canoe. Friends, relatives, neighbors, lived just about like we did, and probably had to eat `greens' too.

First consistent recollections were of the place on Ivar street. This was in a small town known as Wilmar, maybe 25 miles a shade Southwest from downtown Los Angeles. The "place" was a couple of acres--farm--ranch, we didn't know what it really was, but after we moved away, it was always referred to as "the place on Ivar street."

Grew some alfalfa...for the rabbits and pigeons that Grandpa Brown raised for sale. Probably sold some of the alfalfa too. We remember Dad's vegetable garden; the first of many. It's virtually

impossible to remember living any place where Dad didn't have a vegetable garden.

Pencils

Our drawing tools were pencils; I guess we didn't have crayons. Wendell and I were about three or four, Ginny two years and a month older. The pencils all had little sticks tied or glued to them when finally worn down to a nubbin, and beyond the faculty for even little fingers to hang on to them. The pencil's life was thus extended to its last miniscule fraction of use. We pestered Grandpa Brown, who lived with us on the "place on Ivar street," to sharpen our "stick pencils", and he would pull us up on his lap to perform this valuable service.

Eggs, Rabbits, and pigeons

My memory wanted to insist that Uncle Will and Aunt Kate also lived here. Not so, Ginny said. Although they owned the property, they finagled a deal that allowed us to move in while they moved to a smaller house on Gage street; a move graciously designed to help us out for awhile.

Both of us agree that Uncle Will had a model "T" car and an egg route. We can recall sitting mesmerized watching the mysterious and fascinating process of "candling" the eggs in a darkened room, as he examined each egg for freshness and fertility. He sold and delivered other things too, maybe rabbits; but I only remember the eggs. If we were there at the end of his working day, he would give us the job of stacking and counting the coins from his day's receipts. From our perspective, he was rich, maybe a millionaire. We never saw him dressed in anything but a dark suit, and a white shirt with a black bow tie.

The rabbits and pigeons were killed and dressed only on a customer order, and somehow the dastardly deed was always done when we weren't there. The next day we would see fresh rabbit pelts

stretched on a frame and hanging on a wall in the shed--and then we knew. Nonetheless, I don't recall feeling any remorse when having a rabbit dinner. Maybe they didn't tell us what we were eating. Occasionally we were allowed to take a box of young bunnies out back to the alfalfa fields to play with them and let them run around. I don't remember ever losing any.

The laundry and big grinding wheel and nails

The folks took in laundry. Dad made the pickups and deliveries every day in what might have been an old converted milk truck. I remember a large copper boiler with an open flame, that huffed and puffed and made terrible menacing sounds. Ginny remembers an electric mangle, but the rest of the laundry equipment is lost in the dimness of time. I can easily still picture the long clothes lines of shirts, towels, sheets, etc, snapping in the breeze from early morning to dusk, and Grandpa Brown watering down the driveway to keep the dust down.

Ginny remembers the laundry was in an outbuilding next to the house. Wendell and I weren't permitted in the laundry when they were working. Looking through the open laundry door, we could barely make out the ghostly figures of Mother and Dad fading in and out thru clouds of steam and smoke. It was just as well the laundry was out of bounds, because the strong smells, billowing steam, and our fertile imagination made it seem very much like a fire breathing dragon's cave. Indeed a very forbidden scary place. Wendell and I knew monsters certainly lived in there, and the folks were in there bravely fighting them every day.

The big grinding wheel was fitted with a rusty tractor seat and a treadle that one pumped like an old pump organ to turn the wheel. We watched as Grandpa Brown sharpened axes, farm implements and whatever was brought to him. I doubt if he charged for his services.

Our legs weren't long enough when sitting on the tractor seat to reach the treadle, but one of us could stand in front of the grinding

wheel and turn it by hand, while the other sat on the tractor seat to sharpen beautiful wooden swords. Wendell and I slaughtered many ferocious laundry dragon monsters with those swords.

One of our extremely important jobs was straightening old nails--buckets of them. Bent nails were never thrown away. Grandpa Brown desperately needed our help in the arduous task of straightening the nails. He provided solemn instruction in this fine art and gave us stools to stand on, and hammers to pound the nails. He let us know how much he valued our work, bragging to everyone that they always used the twin's nails when building anything on the place. Probably also got compensated by Mom for keeping us busy.

Grandpa Brown positively did "saucer and blow" his coffee. He poured coffee from his cup into his saucer, cooled it down by blowing on it, tilted the saucer, and neat as you please, down went the coffee. Fascinating to watch, but the mystery was when he pulled in his upper lip, why his mustache and upper lip kind of disappeared, and he made it sound as if he was sucking the coffee out of his mustache. If he saw us watching him, which we probably always did, he'd give us a wink, stick out and pat his stomach, smack his lips and say "aah". We realized later he must not have had upper teeth.

Ginny remembers him always "humming" and can still see his distinct hop-a-long gait, a kind of one, two, and a hitch. He would put a spoonful of peanut butter and a like amount of honey on his coffee warmed saucer, stir together, spoon it on his bread, then add more coffee to his saucer.

Uncle Will wouldn't tolerate a mixed salad; the veggies weren't allowed to touch each other. His salad ingredients were put on separate plates: tomatoes, cucumbers, celery, lettuce, etc. I could easily sympathize with the cucumber bit. When Ginny was given the salad maker job, years later in Hermosa Beach, she added the vile cucumbers to the salad bowl only after she dished out my portion. Yeh! Let's hear it for Ginny!

Uncle Will and Grandpa Brown chewed tobacco. A brass spittoon was strategically placed on newspapers, so that these

venerable gentlemen could lean over the arm of their chairs, pucker up, and aim their shot. Kerplunk! The newspapers served a necessary utilitarian purpose, for their aim, yuck, was sometimes off the mark.

Colored water and snakes

Mom let Wendell and I use her canning quart jars to make colored water. She had a box of old crinkled crepe paper of every color in the rainbow. She showed us how to tear strips of the paper and stuff them into water filled jars to create wonderful artistic masterpieces of vibrant liquid colors. Leaving the crepe paper in the jars overnight would leach the color out. We lined them up on the ground against the house in the back yard, and created many exciting new colors by mixing them together. The novelty would have probably worn off pretty quickly if we hadn't discovered this part of the yard was also favored by small garter (gopher) snakes. Did we put snakes in our jars of arty colored water? Do birds fly?

I'm a little hazy on the details, probably because other family members later had their own versions. Everyone agrees however, that a jar with a snake in it, (the lid was removed of course) found its way into Ginny's murky dishwater. Ginny, age six, had volunteered to wash dishes for Mother and Aunt Kate, and had slid a chair up to the sink. She hopped down to use the bathroom, and in her absence two small four year old boys slipped the snake in her dishwater. Minutes after her return, she bellowed out a mighty scream when her hands discovered the slippery slimy soapy snake in her dishwater. She threw it out of the sink--in the direction of Mother and Aunt Kate. More shrieking and more hollering. The men came a running, certain of a bloody scene of murder, while Wendell and I tried to slyly, hastily, but unsuccessfully, disappear into the woodwork. Usually, according to Ginny, she always got blamed for the trouble the twins got into, "cause she was the oldest and supposed to be watching over us." Not this time.

Ginny recalled chasing a ball that rolled under the folk's bed and discovered a box of broken and used toys. This was apparently the ongoing collection that formed the "cache" that supplied Santa with his bag of future Christmas presents. By Christmas time, of course, they would be all newly painted and repaired. I don't remember any of them, but I'm sure we didn't know nor care if they were used or not.

Ginny remembers a Christmas morning when we were shown the empty plate that held cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve, and a trail of white powder from the tree to the front door. We were told this was snow from Santa's boots, and there's no doubt we bought it, though the snow certainly resembled soap powder. (was twelve before remembering seeing real snow)

In 1929 or 30 we had to move...the "place on Ivar street" was sold--for delinquent taxes or whatever, I never really knew.

Encinitas/Bald headed Monkey Man & broken arm

Dad rented a three room house in Encinitas, a small beach town north of Del Mar and approximately 35 miles north of San Diego. It had a wood stove, an inside chemical toilet and an outhouse. The house must have been small for the five of us, but Ginny and I don't remember giving that a thought.

Next door lived the bald headed Monkey Man. We couldn't come up with his real name, but, no offense intended here, it describes him well, and I'm sure we never called him that. Our small house was surrounded by avocado groves, of which he was the caretaker and overseer, as well as for the owner's large home not quite visible through the trees. The only building we could see from our house was a small garage. On the garage's flat roof the monkey man had built a wood skeletal frame and covered it with canvas, like a second story tent. That was his domicile. I don't remember any stairs, which seemed fitting, considering his acrobatic prowess. To get "home" he climbed a knotted rope hanging down from a cantilevered platform

that jutted out from the roof, and could be up that rope in the blink of an eye. He taught us all to climb up that rope, and when finally we all succeeded, he showed us his meager possessions, including a wonderful old wind-up phonograph. His only record, Ginny said, was "Over the Waves." and we all thought it was, in her words, "divine."

He had a swinging trapeze bar next to the garage on which he performed amazing acrobatic stunts, always finishing up with flying somersaults. We thought he was an absolute whiz-bang wonder, and I think he enjoyed putting on a show for us.

The trapeze bar had a rope attached which held the bar high off the ground and tied to a tree, probably, Ginny says, to prevent us kids from playing with it when he wasn't around. A neighbor girl and Ginny stood on a box to release the bar, and Wendell and I swung the girls back and forth with the attached rope. We were all laughing and having a great time, but Wendell and I figured we could have even more fun by swinging the girls higher and higher. Of course the girls pleaded with us to stop, but as Ginny said, "the devil kicked in," and we just ignored their screaming, until, inevitably, of course, they fell off.

Fortunately Dad was outside working in his vegetable garden, heard all the yelling and commotion, and came running over. It was later discovered Ginny had a broken arm and her friend had a sprained arm.

Now this wasn't snakes in the dishwasher stuff, this was one real BIG SERIOUS UH-OH. So serious that Wendell and I decided that Ginny must be a REAL PERSON after all, and not deserving of the mistreatment and torment fostered on her by her younger brothers. Sincere as we were at that particular moment, I'm afraid our solicitous concern only covered an abbreviated period of penitence. The Grandma of Ginny's friend absolutely refused to allow her ever again to play with any of us rough "Sprehn kids".

Ginny says growing up with her twin brothers in their early years was, to put it charitably, "challenging."

The monkey man was a vegetarian and he ate most everything raw; we can't recall seeing a stove in his tent house. Ginny remembers one of the dishes Mother gave him was cooked green beans with bits of bacon, which he seemed to especially enjoy.

Wendell and I were told some of the plants behind our house were peanut plants. Oh glory, peanut heaven! But where were the peanuts? The peanuts are the roots of the plants, somebody explained, like potatoes, and they would be digging them up soon. Well, 'soon' being tantamount to several eternities, Wendell and I dug up a plant, broke off a section of root that bore several peanuts, then carefully replaced the plant. One bite and we spit it out, yeech! Terrible, nobody told us they had to be roasted.

The three of us barefoot kids followed a worn path through the boonies to school. The path took us through the avocado groves, up and over sand dunes, dotted with rock and scrub brush, and delivered us faithfully to the border of the school playground. Brother Dick, leaving to get a ride back to the CCC camp after his first and only visit to Encinitas, walked part way with us. He yelled at Ginny, "stop, don't take another step. Don't move."

A coiled rattlesnake sunning on a flat rock dead ahead, was in perfect position to sample Ginny's big toe. Moving slowly, Dick picked up a large rock, slammed it down on Mr. Snake, and sent him along to snake heaven. Wow, much too close! Dick achieved instant hero status, and we found a safer way to walk to school. .

I couldn't say for sure how long we lived in Encinitas, probably a little less than a year.

Del Mar

It was with grand anticipation that we moved into the huge house in Del Mar, about ten miles south of Encinitas. Way back when, in the horse and buggy days, it had been the "way station" for horse drawn

stage coaches traveling the "El Camino Real" road, the principle route of travel reaching from San Diego to Los Angeles and beyond. Out in back stood an open front long shed type building that once had housed stage coaches, equipment and feed. There were remnants of old harness equipment hanging on the walls. I'm forever surprised there is so little memory of excitement and fascination about the stage coaches and horses. Perhaps it was because the iron horse Southern Pacific railroad tracks were but a block away, separating the house from the beach, and the rumble of the trains was insistently intrusive.

The "El Camino Real", known also as the "Kings Highway," was for centuries a well-traveled Indian trail. It became the established route of travel for Spanish Missionaries as they sanctioned a chain of Missions starting circa 1770 along the Pacific Coast. Most of them still stand, and with reconstruction, many are still in service. The historic significance of the El Camino Real highway was unfortunately of little interest to us kids in this year of 1931.

The house was in terrible condition--a classical example of a very low end fixer-upper. Most all of the windows were broken, the kitchen floor had holes in it, many of the doors were broken, etc, etc. The folks were given two years free rent to make the repairs, replace the window glass and paint the whole house inside in and out. We think the owner must have supplied the materials.

Five minutes to the beach, another five to the fishing pier, a delightful recipe for tons of kid fun. We were just two blocks from the two room school house--grades one to four in one room and five to eight in the other. It was the only school in Del Mar. The high schoolers were bussed to San Diego.

Vegetable merchants

Dad had already started a vegetable garden in Del Mar while we were living in Encinitas, and he immediately set about enlarging it. We think he planted more crops so as to have a continual rotating

harvest of those crops that grew well right on through the winters in this mild Pacific Coast climate.

We are pretty hazy just when us three kids started the wagon vegetable route. Wendell and I thoroughly hated being mobile vegetable merchants, but I don't think Ginny minded. Mom would load the big wagon with cucumbers, greens, radishes, turnips, eggplant, tomatoes, carrots, beets, lettuce, and beans from Dad's garden surplus--cover them with soaking wet gunny sacks, admonish us to stop often to wet down the sacks, and send us on our way. We pulled the wagon a couple of miles straight down the back street of the well-to-do's beach homes that fronted directly on the beach. We traipsed door to door selling fresh veggies just harvested that morning. Ginny was cashier, knew about the prices, and I suppose was allowed to bargain if necessary. Wendell and I were the wagon mules. Ginny said we were an irresistible trio: a barefooted ten year old girl and her younger barefooted red-headed twin brothers. Apparently business was good. Ginny said hardly anyone refused to buy something, and is positive we always came home with an empty wagon.

Mother gave fresh veggies to a Mexican family and they reciprocated with homemade tamales that we all loved. One family had a back yard with an overabundance of berries--raspberries, I believe. Wendell and I were the berry pickers. We would take them a sack of veggies, and return with the sack and our stomachs full of berries. Cucumbers for berries was a wise choice.

Fish dinners

Del Mar was a young kid's heaven. Beach bums. After our morning chores were done, it was off to the beach not to return until time to refuel the belly.

The tide pools held a special hypnotic fascination for Ginny. She would get so engrossed in the marine life, she lost track of time, and

Mother would have to send one of us boys to the top of the cliff to yell dinner time.

Dad regularly came down to the beach in the late afternoon with his long surf fishing pole and tackle. We were almost guaranteed a fish dinner that night. He made us a wire screen "soft sand crab catcher." The screen was shaped around a "V" shaped frame, with about an 8 inch width at the opening of the "V", about 18 inches wide, and had a long handle. He taught us how to hold it against the receding tidal wave action to catch soft shelled crabs--the perfect natural bait for the Bass, Perch, croakers, and Corbina he typically caught surf fishing.

Dad smoked "Bull Durham" and always carried the "makings" in his shirt pocket. He could expertly shake out the right amount of tobacco on the cigarette paper with one hand, close the drawstring of the sack with his teeth, lick the paper to seal it, twist the end, then strike a match on the seat of his pants to light it, exactly like we saw the cowboys do it in the movies a few years later.

He saved every tobacco sack and made them into fishing sinkers by filling them with sand and rocks. Lead sinkers were an unnecessary extravagance. Using the drawstrings on the Bull Durham sack, he would tie two or three to the end of his fishing line for sinkers, wade out into the surf, and with his long pole could whip that line out what looked like it would go clean across the Pacific Ocean to China. If his line snagged some kelp or got hung up on rocks, the Bull Durham tobacco sack strings broke first, so he always got his hooks and leaders back. The hooks and leaders cost money. It was a special treat if his catch included some "roe". If we had any soft shelled crabs left, Dad would let us walk to the pier and sell them to the pier fisherman.

The vacation Sprehn beach house

We always had bundles of company, especially in the summer and on weekends. Everybody wanted to come down to stay with the Sprehns at the beach. They would start drifting in late Friday night, many times hours after we were in bed. It was a fair bet we would wake up Saturday morning on the floor, adults in our bed, and the house filled with Cousins, Aunts, Uncles, and friends. Most brought their own bedding; some brought collapsible cots, and I'm sure they must have brought their share of food. They slept everywhere: on the floor, the couch, in tents they put up in the yard, the bathtub, outside on the veranda deck. As far as we knew, they must have enjoyed every minute of it because they always seemed to come back.

One of Ginny's bittersweet memories of Del Mar was the approximate six month period cousin Margaret stayed with us. She was brought to mother and dad as a small baby, and the folks were delighted to have her. Margaret's mother, Hazel, had somehow contacted T.B., and Aunt Kate, Hazel's mother, had to care for six year old Barbara, Hazel's other daughter, as well as Hazel. Ginny said, "I immediately assumed much of the responsibility for Margaret. I rushed home from school every day, hoping she would be awake. I remember a dimpled, chubby, blue-eyed, curly-haired blonde baby, and was completely devastated when she returned home."

Pancakes

Pancake manufacturing on those house filled Saturday and Sunday mornings was a job Wendell and I sometimes volunteered for. The gigantic kitchen wood stove had two large separate griddles, which gave us our own well defined area of responsibility. Dad mixed the batter, and when the griddles were hot enough to make drops of water do what Mother called an "ouch-ouch dance," we poured identical sized gobs of batter to fashion a dozen pancakes at a time on each griddle. Turning them when the "holes" were just right was where the real important technical work came in.

Mother made pancake syrup by boiling down brown sugar and adding maple flavoring. She also fried the early morning surf fishermen's catch. The fish were rolled in cornmeal with other ingredients whose identity is now beyond recall. I would hazard a realistic guess that it wasn't unusual to have twenty or more people for breakfast on most summer weekends.

The folks had a regular system for baking bread. Dad would haul in a 100 pound sack of flour. Mother started mixing, kneading, and soon there were many pans of cloth covered dough sitting in various places doing what bread dough does so mysteriously before it is allowed to bake. Dad's job was to maintain the wood stoves proper temperature for the four ovens. The smell and taste of that fresh baked bread was...deeelectably deeelicious.

The cliff

As we were the kid resident beach experts, it was our responsibility to exploit our beach experience superiority to our kid cousins and friends about the beach: low and high tides, crabs, seashells, delicate sea anemones, how to make a whip out of sea weed, how to create sand castles, etc, but especially the "cliff short-cut" down to the beach.

We had a couple of paths staked out to climb down the very steep cliff to the beach, which we had climbed hundreds of times. To get to the cliff short-cut, we had to walk across a foot bridge high over the train tracks, where, if one timed it right, one could look down on a black smoke belching monster as it roared by below. If you were brave enough to stay on the bridge, which we dared each other to do, and be entirely enveloped in the stinking black smoke, well boy, you were really something. But if the train engineer saw you on the bridge, and blew the whistle at that exact same instant the train passed below, you were considered a gen-u-ine hero. Boy, did that smoke stink!

When Aunt Kathleen saw the steep cliff and realized her only son, Raymond, had climbed down the "dangerous cliff" to the beach with us, she churned up an excitable solid case of hysterical apoplexy. She spread the alarm to some of the other Mothers, with the end result that our Mother had to outlaw the cliff. It was twenty minutes further to walk around the other way, but...it was back to the cliff after they all left.

One two three

On a foggy morning at the beach, one of our same age girl neighbors persuaded Wendell and I to join her in a "one- two-three-go-game". She explained the object of the game was to drop your bathing trunks for a "boy-girl quicke look-see". We formed a little circle behind some rocks or something on the beach, and at the count of one-two-three-go we were supposed to all drop our trunks. Well, we all counted one-two-three-go together all right, but nobody dropped their trunks. We accused each other of being chicken, and danced around with our thumbs in our armpits, flapping our arms, making squawking chicken sounds, pointing at each other and laughing. She pleaded with us never to tell about our aborted anatomy lesson--said she'd deny it anyway, and it has remained a secret--til now. However, when we would pass her on the school playground, we tried to get close enough to whisper, "one-two-three-go." Wonder if she remembers?

Cactus pears and milk man and apples

Dad had a job for a short time as a milk man and sometimes Ginny went along as his helper. We think his wages were realized in milk and other dairy products. (We drank only "raw" milk as Dad didn't believe in pasteurized milk) The town of Del Mar was so small that Dad and Ginny were back home well before noon.

Many of us kids collected milk bottle cardboard caps. We played a game of taking turns slapping a cap to the ground bending over from the waist--couldn't bend your knees. If your cap landed on or touched the other guy's cap, it was yours. The older worn softer caps were the best; they didn't bounce. Had some fierce arguments about cheating knee benders.

The family made an excursion to a desert like area east of Del Mar where cactus pears could be harvested by the sackful. Mother packed a lunch and we spent most of the day picking cactus pears. Actually Dad and Mom cut them free and us kids gingerly loaded them into gunny sacks. I remember being warned to keep a sharp eye out for rattlesnakes. Most were made into jelly, but I know some of the juices were added as a flavoring to pancake syrup, and we also had it on fried cornmeal mush, which was often our breakfast.

Another trip was to the town of Julien. This time our treasure was apples. An apple rancher had given us permission to "glean" his apple orchid. We gathered all the apples left on the trees and on the ground, no matter what condition they were in. On the way home the car must have looked like a huge runaway apple box on wheels. The apples were everywhere: in the trunk, boxes tied on the running boards, sacks of apples on the backseat, which we sat on, and sacks tied between the front fenders and the hood.

Most of the apples were turned into apple butter, some of which Mother used for barter. (one jar of apple butter for so many haircuts from a neighbor who owned clippers) I think there were some apple pies made and probably applesauce as well. Everybody worked--seemed like for days. Mother had a talent for making us feel our help was essential and extremely valuable, which effectively preempted any notion of pleas to go down to the beach. Dad dug the apple residue into his vegetable garden, where all organic waste materials found their final resting place.

Christmas

Other than shirts and other clothes that Mother made, there is one particular Christmas present that remains in my memory bank. It was one half of a red toy fire truck.

Our two room school put on an annual Christmas program for the parents and community. The wall dividing the two classrooms had been built in portable sections and therefore removable for community functions, such as Christmas. I'm sure us kids must have put on holiday skits and plays, sang Christmas carols, and helped provide the usual Christmas entertainment. With everybody singing Jingle Bells, Santa Claus made his dramatic entrance.

Each kid received a small red fishnet Christmas stocking with an orange, apple, candy cane and other hard candy--and a present. Wendell and I, since we were twins, got a toy red fire truck to share, and we had to walk up to the front of the room to get it from Santa. Well, gee-whiz, (we might have said) we were eight plus years old, and pretty well past the age of toy fire trucks by then. By facial expression and whispered code words, (forerunner of "body language") Mother told us plainly to shut up, grin, and be sure to say "thank you." I do remember when walking home that night, Wendell and I argued about who would have to carry it. Sister Fern's son, Howard, (nephew and five years our junior) played with it whenever they came down to the beach.

We were unmercifully teased at school about having fun playing with our "lil ole red fire truck".

A trip to Los Angeles and the W.P.A.

Dad took Wendell and I on the 90 mile trip to Los Angeles. The car, an Essex, I believe, broke down out in the middle of nowhere land. Dad fussed with the motor, finally declaring he needed a new part. I don't know what he needed, but he radiated confidence he

could repair the car with the new part. It was early morning, raining, foggy, cold, and no civilization in sight. Dad stuck two fingers thru his key ring and showed us how he would twirl the keys at the first car that came along, promising that car would stop and offer assistance, or even a ride to the next town.

As promised, the next car did stop, and so did the next four, all willing to help.

When we saw the first car coming we got out and stood behind our car. Dad stretched out his arm, twirled his keys, and magically, as if by witchcraft, the car stopped. It was a coupe with people crammed in it door to door, and they certainly had no room for us. The next vehicle also responded to Dad's twirling keys. It was a truck, but without space for passengers. However the truck driver did check our motor problem and did verify Dad's prognosis. The next two cars also stopped. They were traveling together and filled to capacity with school band members and their instruments.

A solitary man was in the fifth car and gave us a ride to the next big town, which I think was Oceanside. The driver waited at the auto parts shop for Dad to get the part, drove us back to our car, and waited again to make sure our car was working okay before he went on his way. Have never forgotten. Magnifico!!

On another trip to Los Angeles, Ginny and I accompanied dad to pick up Mother and Wendell. They had traveled to L.A. several days prior to have Wendell undergo medical testing and evaluations. I was seated in the center of the front seat and Ginny next to the door, when suddenly the door opened and Ginny was sucked half-way out of the car. She instinctively grabbed my right arm, and Dad's quick reaction of grabbing my left arm while slowing down saved the day. A very close call. The doors on the cars of that day were notoriously dangerous, being hinged from the center post, but Ginny got the usual parent lecture for playing with the door handle anyway.

Dad got some part time work through the "Works Projects Administration", known as the "W.P.A." Wendell and I were about nine at the time and the poignancy and significance of the work

escaped us. We were allowed to ride along with Mother and a friend, whose husband was also working on the same W.P.A. project as Dad. We were bringing the men their lunch.

We approached the worksite by cresting a small hill that looked down on the work in progress. In the eyes of a nine year old, it was an incredible surreal scene: hundreds of shirt-sleeved men sitting in the drainage ditches on both sides of the road. They were lining the ditches with uniform sized rocks brought to them by more men pushing wheelbarrows filled with rocks, while trucks dumped loads of more rocks. The section of road already completed receded in the distance around a curve in the road, neat and majestic, a picture of geometric symmetry.

Long lines of other men moved patiently toward a table where several men sat writing in large ledgers. Mother said these men were signing up to begin work, and then waiting their turn to be called. It was evident what some other lines were for: portable outhouses on wheels with the familiar signature crescents cut into the doors. One man standing in an outhouse line was playing a harmonica and stomping his foot in tune to the music, but Wendell and I suspected he probably had a more urgent problem. I don't remember seeing Dad, but Mother and the other lady were able to deliver the lunches.

Bombs & brother Dick & cuss words & rattlesnakes

For only the third time in our young lives we saw our older brother Dick. He was in the "CCC", (Civilian Conservation Corps) which he had been "invited" to join after leaving the "school for boys". He was on leave for the weekend and visited us with one of his older CCC friends. We were enraptured by our nearly 6 foot tall 16 year old grown-up brother. His friend smoked cigarettes, could blow beautiful smoke rings, and then stick a finger through the center of the hole. Wow!

Wendell and I were allowed to go with Dick and his friend to watch the Navy drop bombs. The site was east of the El Camino Real and a little north from home; I'd guess about a mile plus. The Navy had outlined a flat area about the size of four football fields with white chalk, and made chalked circles inside this area for targets. (twenty years later this area became and still is, the site of the Del Mar racetrack) The Navy flew two seater bi-planes from the San Diego Naval air station to practice dropping sand bag bombs on the circled targets. We sat on a high point and watched. Really exciting for five minutes or so, but then they were gone, and it seemed like forever before the next group of planes came. Dick and his friend became bored and decided to go rattlesnake hunting--for the rattles. We took the long way home, walking up and over desolate sand dunes and down into ravines, but never saw a rattlesnake.

Told the folks about our adventure when we got home and Dad angrily read Dick the riot act for hunting rattlers with us boys along. He said, "greats gobs of goose shit boy. What did ja ever do a thing like that for? Don't cha remember Encinitas?" Closest thing to a cuss word I ever remember him saying.

Wendell and I had these identical words directed at us once or twice. One in particular was the day Dad transplanted some new tender vegetable starts. Our job was to carry buckets of water to the garden and give the new tender plants a small drink. Off in some dream world, we carelessly poured the water on the plants and promptly washed them out. When Dad saw the results of our watering technique, he started out with, "great gobs of goose shit boys, what did ja ever do a thing...." He was interrupted suddenly by a neighbor friend who had just walked into the garden and started laughing, "goose shit? Did you say GOOSE shit Emil?" Dad replied he himself must surely be the goose and was probably full of the other, and they both started laughing like it was the funniest thing on earth. I suppose we laughed too, but didn't know why, unless it was because we were off the hook. But don't get the wrong impression here, I don't recall Dad ever laying a hand on any of us.

The CCC did a tremendous amount of fabulous work in the National and State Parks: trail and road building, campsites, camp

tables and fireplaces, maintenance work, removing dangerous dead trees next to the roads, and generally making themselves indispensable to the National and State parks system. They built mile after mile of mammoth engineering marvels: retaining walls dug into nearly vertical mountainsides that allowed the construction of roads through otherwise impossible areas.

Dinner time

Neighborhood pot-lucks happened without any warning. Not too often, but occasionally when we came tromping home about dinner time, there would be nobody home. A note on the table would have the name of a neighborhood family that was to be the host of that night's dinner. Each neighbor brought one or more dishes. Some were exceedingly mysterious, and Mother told us never to ask what might be in them. Nothing was said if there was more diners than contributors. We spread out all over the host's yard: on the front lawn, porch steps, saw horses, and whatever. Everyone seemed to enjoy the food as well as each other's company, and I have thought of those community sharing meals often.

For some unexplainable reason, after moving from Del Mar, I couldn't remember which town, Monrovia or Santa Monica, became our next residential location. But I do know our time in both places was relatively short.

Monrovia

The man living next to us in Monrovia had a large portion of his property devoted to growing concord grapes. Some of his vines grew on a wire fence adjacent to our yard. We could easily reach over the low wire fence and pick a handful, and had his permission to do so. Having heard that raisins were nothing more than sun dried grapes,

(said so--right on the box--sun dried) Wendell and I helped ourselves to a boxful and spread them out to sun dry on an old unused wire screen door, promising ourselves we would share the fruits of our labor with our neighbor. We didn't try to hide our hard work, and were surprised our neighbor considered this scientific experimentation as pilfering and snitched to Mother. Official adult logic proclaimed a boxful of grapes was considerably more than a handful, so we spent the next day pulling weeds in our neighbor's vineyard. The grapes didn't dry anyway or make raisins either, they just rotted, attracting zillions of flies.

The folks were involved with a local struggling co-op store, where members could buy groceries, fruits and vegetables (much of it donated) cheaply. The store also received donations of second-time-around clothes and shoes. We ran around barefooted most of the summer, but since school was about to start, Mother brought home some second hand shoes from the co-op. Fancy good looking two-tone brown or black and white. Trouble was, the first day of school the kids let us know we were wearing girl's shoes. Girl's shoes? Oh cripes and a million gee-whizzes, (more than likely Dad's favorite cuss word as well) an embarrassing horrible catastrophe! Luckily, we lived close enough to walk home for lunch, for we couldn't wait to change into our old ankle high beat-up tennis shoes. Dad said to pay the kids at school no mind, but Mother thankfully exchanged them for Keds at the co-op.

We had avocado, cherry, kumquat, persimmon, and quince trees, and, of course, the proverbial vegetable garden. Mother warned us not to eat the kumquat or quince fruit right off the trees, or they would pucker up your mouth for a week. A warning being nothing more than a dare, a challenge, we found out for ourselves just how right she was. But they did make excellent jellies.

Dick came home for one of his rare weekend visits, and told Mother he had a girlfriend. I can still picture him high up in the avocado tree with a saltshaker, peeling and eating avocados and exclaiming, "I could live on avocados and love."

The soft over ripe persimmons made better weapons than rotten tomatoes. Great missiles. When you aim was good enough to hit your target square on the nose, they made this oh so nice satisfying "splaot" sound, giving your victim an awesome drippy persimmon-goo face from ear to ear, something like the results of a gooey cream pie. Ah, great old persimmon wars--wonderfully effective if you could sit up in the tree with all that ammunition and wait for your victims to pass by. We had many memorable and very intense messy persimmon fights.

Ginny, Wendell and I, in the midst of a horrible heat wave, dug our own private swimming pool. We must have nearly worked ourselves to death, in that heat, to make it big enough for all three of us. It took a long time to fill, and the water was quite naturally very brown, but Ginny said we didn't care and in we went. What's amazing is that Mother let us do this, or perhaps she didn't know. After all, parents didn't know everything their kids did--thank God. Right?

Santa Monica

Memories of Santa Monica, for some unaccountable reason are very few. Remember when the folks made bathtub root beer and the caps all blew off one night--sounded like a war down in the cellar. Remember when a boy cousin, a year younger and who shall remain unnamed, slept overnight with Wendell and I in the double bed we shared. The cousin made two mistakes. One: he wet the bed, forcing Wendell and I to bail out. We took the top blanket with us and spent the rest of the night on the floor. Two: he compounded his first mistake by trying to absolve himself of blame the next morning. I'm afraid he rather later regretted this very stupid episode of indiscretion. (can't explain why stuff like this is still kicking around in my memory bank)

This was the first place we ever lived that we had any pets, so we were really excited when someone gave the folks two beautiful adult collie dogs. Dad built a makeshift enclosed run for them, but the first

night they managed to break out. Dad improved the enclosure, but someone broke it open a few days later and made off with the dogs. Never had another pet until Aunt Ida gave Wendell and I a female black registered cocker spaniel when we were sixteen. She had one litter of wonderful pups, (profitable too) before she was also dognapped. This was a contradiction in the morals of those days; we seldom locked our doors yet the dogs were stolen.

Santa Monica was the only town we ever lived in that was of sufficient size to have its own high school.

Hermosa Beach / and another garden

We lived in Hermosa Beach longer, over four years, than in any other town. Coincidentally enough, the house faced the El Camino Real Highway. The two bedroom house was positioned down a gentle slope approximately 200 feet from the highway and fronted with lawn and iceplant. A moderately sized outbuilding was located in the back on the north side.

As you might guess, the first order of business was getting the garden started, and by now Wendell and I were of sufficient stature to do more than pull weeds. We helped turn the earth over, adding straw compost and fertilizer Dad had somehow bargained for. The stringy compost was very difficult to chop up and turn under. Several days were spent digging a deep channel completely down one side of the garden; I'd guess maybe 250 feet long or more. Dad's gardens were never simply a back yard pea patch. We intersected this "water main" channel with many smaller and shallow "bleeder" ditches that would feed water to individual rows of plants. Thus, the entire garden could be watered by a single hose feeding water to the head of water main channel, and by judiciously relocating the wooden blocking boards Dad had constructed. The placement of the boards in the water main determined how much water he wanted in any given area. The natural gentle slope of the site greatly accelerated the success of the design.

Later, when the garden was growing and Wendell and I realized how well the system worked, we felt quite proud of our contribution.

Dad had located a man whose yard was being overrun with rapidly growing bamboo. He gladly gave us permission to cut all we wanted, and we carted home several loads tied to the roof of the car. With long lengths of bamboo, we helped Dad construct Indian type "tepees," spacing the poles about a foot apart, while leaving one opening large enough to squeeze inside. The bamboo tepee poles became the climbing surfaces for green beans which could then be harvested from inside the tepees as well as outside. Bamboo constructed frames were fashioned to support the tomatoes. Vertical bamboo poles, with heavy twine tied horizontally about 8 inches apart, supported rows of snow peas. The bamboo was expeditiously put to very good use, removing the necessity of buying materials to make garden stakes and poles.

The "greens?" Well, sad to say, they grew...everywhere, and prolifically! Cucumbers, too.

The tepees of beans and rows of corn were planted in two week intervals. Probably some of the other veggies as well.

The first corn on the cob feed of the year was a highly anticipated event. When the day arrived that enough corn had matured and ripened for the feast, fresh corn was destined to be our appetizer, entree, and desert. Water was put on the stove to boil, and then and only then, were the first ears of corn plucked. It was timed so that the corn was picked, shucked, and in the water the instant the water started to boil. This was corn at the very zenith of its goodness and freshness and with all its sugars locked in, (the believing was in the chomping) and was light years beyond comparison. That was about 60 years ago now, and my kid memory is still convinced I have never eaten its equal. Real bummers were the too many times my lips became so sunburned and swollen from constant exposure at the beach that I couldn't eat it off the cob, and had to cut it off with a knife. The taste was lost in the transition.

Ginny, Wendell and I competed to see who could eat the most corn, zealously guarding our growing pile of naked ears until the winner was determined. I guess the winner got another ear

Hermosa Beach / and the town and baseball

Taking all the short-cuts to the beach, it was maybe a smidgeon under a mile walk. Hermosa was much more sophisticated than Del Mar; of course it was probably 50 times larger. The town supported two elementary schools, a hardware and five and dime store, movie house, library, etc, and about a 12 foot wide cement strand (sidewalk) on both sides of the pier. The strand stretched maybe six or seven blocks in each direction, and ran parallel to the beach a couple of hundred feet or more from "mean" high tide. It was exclusively for pedestrian traffic only; no skating or bicycle riding allowed. The strand was lined with inviting ice cream shops, yummy tantalizing smelling hamburger joints, small restaurants with outdoor umbrella shaded tables, novelty shops, and the first bowling alley we had ever seen.

Hermosa Beach had a municipal park with a recreation building and gymnasium. Best of all, it had a baseball field, complete with bases, bleachers, and even some lighting for night games, woefully inadequate as it was.

Our second year in Hermosa, Wendell and I won jobs with the local Hermosa Beach merchant men's softball team as bat boys. Yeah! During baseball season they played night games once a week, and every second week went on the "road" to a neighboring town, and took us along. After the game the team always stopped at a greasy spoon for chili, crackers, and beer. We got the chili and crackers.

The folks came to some of the night games. (Dad was a real baseball fan) The early fans pulled their cars into parking spaces front first and facing the outfield. They lined up side by side, starting 25 feet or so on the outfield side of first and third base, and outside the

foul lines by perhaps 10 or 15 feet, which didn't leave much room for the players to chase down a foul ball. Each of the outfield facing cars was given a small card with either the number 1 or 2. When a batter came to the plate, the umpire behind the plate flashed a large card with a number 1 or 2. Those car fans with the corresponding number were supposed to turn on their headlights to help illuminate the outfield. Unless the headlights were on when a hitter blasted a ball to the outfield, the fielders were susceptible to receiving lumps where lumps don't normally reside. The umpire alternated the numbers with every batter, and between innings the headlights were all turned off. If the home team won, the automobile horns gave the team a concert. About the sixth inning a man walked around the bleachers with a coffee can accepting donations. He stayed away from the cars, figuring, I guess, the fans running down their batteries were giving enough.

I believe the reason I don't remember anybody complaining about foul balls bouncing off and denting their cars, was because the cars were made of sturdier stuff then. Besides, every car usually had at least one person with a glove sitting on a front fender for protection. .

The Hermosa Beach Surfing Club

Except for duties and work at home, Wendell and I spent most of our spare time at the beach or the ball field. We learned to "body surf", swim out to the breakwater, and were finally admitted to the highly respected "Hermosa Beach Surfing Club, Junior Division." The club was sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, the Hermosa Beach Merchants Association, and the city police.

One requirement for membership was maintaining a good (?) grade average, and another was demonstrating the ability to catch and ride a cresting wave on a surfboard. Those of us "wantabe" Junior Club members who never owned such a highly coveted (read: expensive) board, (which was easily the majority of us), were loaned a club board and allowed to practice. The Juniors were allowed to

qualify from either a kneeling or sitting position, while the Seniors had to come in standing. We were kneelers.

The club's primary duties were raking the beach every weekend, and starting when school was out, every morning... early morning...at dawn. Each member was asked to sign up for two mornings a week. When you showed up for work they gave you a shirt with the logo of the club on the back, but made sure you turned it back in after each morning's work. The rakes were, memory wants to say about 3 or 4 feet wide. They were a uniquely designed steel combing tool with a long "T" handle, and so designed that two were required to pull each rake. We formed an overlapping staggered line from the surf's edge to the strand, and holding that staggered line in place, we moved down the beach raking up the previous days debris. If broken glass was discovered, the location was marked. Other members following behind the rakers carrying small screens would sift the sand and pick up the pieces of glass. Each day started with a meticulously sterile clean beach.

Hermosa Beach enjoyed a very favorable reputation that attracted crowds of beach lovers, undoubtedly bringing dollar shaped smiles to the Chamber of Commerce and town merchants.

Slave labor would have been a close description of the work, but not to us; we would have done most anything to be members of the Hermosa Beach Surfing Club. (probably says something about the effectiveness of brain washing, as well as our sorry mental capacity) Nevertheless, near the end of that first summer of our club membership, they brought in mechanized equipment, and we were emancipated from raker slavery and out of a job.

Hermosa Beach Pier Ave Elementary School

Pier Ave Elementary School sat on the corner of Pier Avenue and the El Camino Real Highway, a half mile from home. It had separate rooms for all eight grades, music room, art room, and more. An

imposing feature was an auditorium large enough to accommodate the entire student body and their parents. There was even a separate building for wood and metal shop, with a corner set aside for "Introduction to Electricity," where the boys were taught the fundamental basics of Mr. Edison.

The most permanent memory imprint from that school was a particular teacher: our first male teacher, and the tallest person we had ever seen. He had to bend over to walk through the door, 6 foot nine, number 16 shoe size, no nonsense, soon to be also our baseball coach. The first hour of that first day he released all his personal statistics: height, weight, neck, belt, shoe and hat size, etc, and answered personal questions. He then declared his size would not be a class subject of discussion for the remainder of the school year.

The giant's favorite answer to many questions was, "glad you asked, let's you and I look it up." That wasn't a suggestion; it was a blunt invitation to meet him at the "reference" table that held sets of encyclopedias and other resource books pertinent to our current field of study. In those "one on one" encounters he taught each of us the values and the "hows" to search for information.

He said words to the effect that the encyclopedias and reference books give us facts and figures, but little of the blood, tears, and joys of the men and women who produced them. Holding up books in each hand, and with an almost reverent tone of voice, he told us of the infinite wonderful stories, people, history, ideas, opinions, beauty, and inspiration to be found in them. Choice and availability of books, would prove to be our most valuable freedom of all. Cherish it with care.

He read Moby Dick, some of Charles Dickens, James Cooper, to name a few, to the class ten or fifteen minutes every day. He would be constantly in motion, walking around the room, towering above us as we swiveled in our seats to follow him. This giant's voice was at times seductively soft, nearly a whisper, but would explode loudly with drama and feeling when Captain Ahab was speaking, and he punctuated that feeling by jabbing his free hand in the air or pounding the desk of a startled student as he walked by. We sat riveted to every

word, and I was hooked. Yeah! Let's hear it for books! Except for math, he rescued school from abject boredom. Baseball and the beach suddenly had competition

Jobs ... flower girls / and the carrot juice factory

Dad had a variety of jobs, sandwiched between and around his patients. Most of the jobs I either can't recall, or knew nothing of them. I know he painted houses, hung wallpaper, and one summer the folks supervised an overnight camping program for out of town city kids at the Municipal Park.

A friend cut out yard decorative wooden figures: ducks, donkeys, pigs, etc. Dad and Mother painted them, inserted long sturdy wooden dowels, and planted dozens of them in our front yard accompanied by a for sale sign facing the street.

One year the folks got hundreds of Christmas trees on consignment, and we sold them from a vacant lot somewhere in Los Angeles. It was not only a financial bust, but that particular Christmas surely was the wettest on record; it rained buckets every day, and every tree touched, however slightly, rewarded us with yet another cold shower. But everybody worked. We made hundreds of crossed shaped wooden tree stands, grouping the trees by size, creating a labyrinth for customers to wander about to make their selection.

Wendell and I were hired by a district magazine salesman for the Saturday Evening Post and Liberty magazine, and promised riches beyond our dreams. He assured us these magazines were a "highly prized commodity," and people were clamoring for each new weekly edition. Assigning us designated sections of town to work in, we began this quest thoroughly pumped up, eager for our share of the Golden Fleece.

But sadly, few eager clamoring buyers issued forth from our persistent hopeful door knocking. Our enthusiasm quickly turned sour

by the resident's automatic rejection of door to door magazine salesman, especially sunburned kid salesmen, and the nasty derisive comments partially heard through hastily closing doors. Only a distressing one or two wanted to part with nickels and dimes for these "highly prized commodities."

Dad had a client (patient) that grew dahlias, gladiolus and chrysanthemums commercially. The two of them cooked up this scheme that theorized since Wendell and I were going door to door selling magazines, why not sell bouquets of flowers also?

We complained to Dad: this was a lousy idea and the lady was definitely and certifiably nuts. We had worked for her hoeing weeds in her flower fields. Each time we worked in her fields, she sat in a chair at the end of each row, moving it to keep pace with our work, and mumbling critical dumb remarks just loud enough for us to hear.

Dad persuaded us to give it a chance. We did. There were two notable results: (1) we didn't sell a single flower, which left batches of useless wilted flowers (2) and much worse, some kids from school saw us hauling around bouquets of flowers and tagged us with the name "the flower twins."

One of these malicious (read: normal) kids spouting this obnoxious "flower twins" label was older, taller, heavier, and meaner. One on one, we were no match for him, but together, having had enough "flower twin" branding, we managed to work him over pretty good.

The big kid showed up at the house that night--with his Dad, who knocked on the back door. It was dinner time. Our Dad got up from the table to talk to him, then came back to politely invite Wendell and I outside.

Both Dads let the big kid (half-heartedly...it being plainly evident he was embarrassed and he certainly didn't want to hurt us) smack Wendell and I around a few times one at a time. This was to prove to the big kid's Dad that his son was capable, one on one, of cleaning our clocks any old time. Something us three kids were

already well aware of. Our Dad said we would each fight our own battles from now on, wouldn't we?

The next day the big kid said his Dad made him do it. We thanked him for going easy on us, and became, let's say, tolerable friends.

Dad's patient numbers were gradually increasing, and demanding more of his time. He had a portable foldout treatment table that he carried for use at his patient's homes. He gave treatments at our home as well, requiring restrictions on our presence in those parts of the house.

Dad was an avid advocate for fundamental vegetarian diets, and that unequivocal fact was the primary motivating factor behind the carrot juice factory. He acquired a commercial sized food grinder, and a very huge press, once used for making apple juice.

From some of the many Japanese family farms, common along the California coastal highlands at that time, he made contracts to buy carrots--many crates of carrots. The price was reasonable I'm sure, chiefly because Dad, Wendell and I did all the tough manual work. We dug and crated them, and lugged them across the fields to the car.

(Years later the Japanese were unjustly, rudely and unceremoniously incarcerated after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and were forced to spend the duration of the war in internment camps. Some of them sold their property and possessions for next to nothing, but many had only enough time to pack a change of clothes before they were forcibly removed to the camps. It was a terrible injustice.)

The outbuilding housed the carrot juice factory. Our inaugural day started about 5 a.m. with Wendell and I sitting next to a large washtub filled with water and carrots. First chore was to brush scrub the carrots and cut off the tops. From there we moved them through two rinsing cycles, and tossed them in Dad's tub where he cut them into proper sized pieces to feed the grinder. (we soon learned that when the grinder was running, all lights in the house had to be turned off or the fuses would blow)

A portion of carrot ground mash was positioned in the center of an approximately 3 foot square heavy canvas. The four sides were folded to overlap the center and slid into place on the press.

Now it's time to turn the wheel and squeeze out the juice. Even with the three of us, this was a lot tougher than Dad had anticipated. We discovered the easiest and most efficient method was for Wendell and I to climb up on the press, sit on the top of the wheel with our backs obliquely in the appropriate position, our hands at our sides grasping the wheel, and thereby turn the wheel by pushing our feet against the press frame. Wonder of wonders, rivers of carrot juice flowed through the sides of the trapped canvas.

We reduced the carrot mash by about a third on the next batch, which made it considerably easier. I found it hard to believe the quantity of juice that flowed so effortlessly out of rock hard carrots. Mother brought out newly sanitized root beer bottles; the juice was bottled, capped and put into ice filled buckets, and the finished product was delivered to the front porches of Dad's patients.

Thereafter we did the preparation work the day before, leaving the grinding, pressing, and bottling for the next morning. The carrot juice was actually very delicious, especially chilled, and what I hadn't expected, extremely sweet. Later on, Dad experimented by mixing in a small amount of celery and other juices, but the taste and the bright orange color was compromised. Several times we ran batches of apple juice. As the word spread, neighbors and others who were not patients, began stopping at the house for the juice, and most brought their own containers.

Wendell and I groaned and moaned one day about getting up early every morning to work in the carrot juice factory. Mother thought that was pretty funny, coming from two eager willing boys who last summer walked a mile to rake a beach before sunrise and then walked another mile back home.

I really can't recall how long the carrot juice factory survived, maybe 6 months or so. I have to believe it was a relatively short-lived

project. Looking back, I'm surprised it ever got off the ground, for I doubt if our juice factory would have satisfied any of the bureaucratic health requirements. Things like permits, licenses, inspection of the premises, etc, were probably not given much thought. And perhaps that's what happened; officialdom doomed the project, and the day the grinder and press disappeared, the carrot juice factory was history.

A modern age ringy dingy . an almost fridgerator

We joined the modern age in Hermosa Beach; a Ma Bell one ringy dingy two ringy wall phone was installed. A first for the Sprehn family, and a necessity for Dad's growing business. Ginny, having moved on from Pier Avenue Elementary School, where she graduated from the 8th grade, was in high school by then, circa 1936, and a regular school bus rider to Redondo Beach. Can one imagine going to high school without a telephone?

Mother bought a new gas stove, also a first. She was determined to keep it in mint condition, which mandated that every Saturday Wendell and I take the burner grills, oven racks, and all removable parts outside for a thorough scrubbing. Ginny was responsible for what we couldn't dismantle. The only danger this stove would ever suffer was to be worn out by excessive elbow grease.

Mother was the type of housekeeper that was forever smoothing out the embroidered doilies on the living room chairs, straightening an afghan or picture, moving a knick-knack, or dusting something. It seems to me there has been another one like that in this house with these very same attributes for going on 52 years.

An ice box occupied a kitchen niche in every place we lived. Hermosa Beach was no exception. They all looked alike: drab, oak, old, approximately 4 feet high, smelled musty, and always leaking water from melting ice. A day came when we arrived home to find the ice box niche occupied by a gleaming (nearly 6 foot high) white metal

appliance. We instantly concluded it was an electric Frigidaire. Great! Ready made ice cubes. All refrigerators were known as Frigidaires, even though GE, Westinghouse, and others were also on the market.

Mother proudly opened the door to display the interior. It was very fancy, had very much more storage space, but was still very much an icebox. Ginny says the local utility company, which included a home ice delivery division, loaned these boxes to customers for using their services for a specified time.

Marge Bastien was one of Dad's patients. Her husband, Harold, was soon to be the Postmaster of Manhattan Beach, the town abutting Hermosa Beach to the north. Their son Jack, was one of Ginny's classmates at Redondo Beach high school, a big popular baseball pitcher and football star.

Jack, I always suspected, nourished an undeclared (?) crush on Ginny. His most favorite endearing term for her was "drip." He often showed up at our house, ostensibly to have Wendell and I take turns catching him while he honed his pitching skills. If Ginny wasn't home, he seldom stayed long, unless he could talk Dad into giving him a treatment to relieve his football bumps and bruises.

(Ginny told me she and Jack enjoyed an extensive conversation at their 50th Redondo Beach high school reunion in 1990, discovering, among other things, that he was the author of several travel books.)

For a never clearly understood reason, one particular evening, Jack and one of his friends invited Wendell and I to a corn roast and watermelon feast in Jack's backyard. We must have felt quite mature (what a laugh) to be included with these older world-wise sophisticated high school guys.

Arriving at Jack's house, he decided we would all walk the four blocks down to Lester Woodrow's farm to get the corn and watermelon. Jack said this was perfectly okay, it wasn't stealing or anything, and that Lester was an old family friend. He said his folks,

Marge and Harold were, actually, at this very moment at Lester's house playing pinochle. We got the fire ready to light, grabbed some paper sacks, and started for Lester's cornfield.

Palos Verdes

Palos Verdes, an area adjacent and south of Redondo Beach was a veritable wondrous marine paradise, especially at low tide. Sea life filled tidal pools, secreted in temporary trapped enclosures constantly presented a never ending variety of fascinating marine life. At low tide, it was possible to carefully step and hop across exposed rocks hundreds of feet into the Pacific. The surrounding Universities regularly sent students and marine biologists to search and study in this implicit marine classroom. They were blithely unaware they were infringing on what was our private favorite overnight camping spot.

Dad would sometimes come down to give us a ride home and surf fish at high tide for Perch, especially the delicious and famous Buttermouth Perch.

Sometime after 1950 a prized portion of Palos Verdes, situated high on the buttes overlooking the tidal pools, was converted into California's first "Marine Land" theme park. During a California visit to see the Heasleys, about 1965, I took home movies (Sprehn kids have copies) that showed our family's visit to Marine Land.

Years later we heard unverified reports the tidal pool area was bought by the California Parks Department. To prevent the area from "overflowing," they were forced to implement a reservations system.

Redondo Beach was famous for it's horseshoe shaped pier, and held bragging rights to the "Largest Heated Saltwater Public Swimming Pool in the Universe." The pool occupied most of the center of the horseshoe. It was divided into three sections: by depth and by temperature. The deep end, with its spring diving board and

three level high dive platforms, was not heated, but the center medium depth section, (about 4 feet deep) and shallow section (graduated from ankle depth to about 2 feet deep) had large fountains gently circulating heated saltwater into the center of their respective sections. After swimming in the colder deep end, we would sit on these fountains, allowing the warm water to soothe our bones. The top of the section dividers was about a foot below the surface, which allowed the swimmers to glide easily over the dividers, giving easy access from one section to the other. The buoyancy provided by the saltwater was wonderful.

We became familiar with the pool because Dad managed, for a short time, a steam cabinet and massage parlor at the pool. It was located maybe 15 feet back and parallel from the pool's center section. Two white steam cabinets were arranged so that the "steamers" could watch the pool's action while slowly "cooking" in their individual cabinets. Of course, all that was visible of them was their heads, wrapped turban style in a red towel, and resembling for all the world a forlorn ribboned red bow adorning a huge white birthday gift box. Dad divided his time between the cooking steamers and a private massage room where he had set up his folding treatment table. Not all his clients had to be cooked first. He gave us a shot at the steam cabinets for about 10 minutes or so one day. I remember being very unimpressed, but we were impressed enough anyway; we got free use of the Largest Heated Saltwater Swimming Pool in the Universe.

Ginny and the United States Navy

Shortly before Ginny's 17th (?) year, she and our younger cousin Barbara, were waiting at a bus stop for a ride home from a late night movie in Redondo Beach. (It was questionable who was the chaperone(r) and who was the chaperon(ess) They were approached by two sailors in a small coupe, and after, I suppose, the normal dither, and babble, palaver and small talk, allowed these self same sailors to give them a ride home.

But there was a problem. There are now 4 people to sit in a seat designed only, at best, for three. Now Ginny was the consummate innocent, naive, reserved, etc. Although she probably harbored an oblivious and unrealistic view of safety in a world mixed with sailors and young girls, she was fiercely aware she would perch on nobody's lap. Barbara solved the problem by sitting on the passenger sailor's lap, leaving room for Ginny in the middle. The sailor driver promised to take the girls directly home. He did exactly that. Whew!!

In the year of 1940, her eighteenth year, Ginny became the happy bride of Mr. James Springer, wife of the sailor driver.

Ginny corrected this partially flawed version of these events. She said two young men in their early twenties, and wearing civilian clothes, gave them a ride home from Redondo Beach. The young men never once revealed themselves as members of the U.S. Navy. Furthermore, she never saw Jimmy in uniform until well over a year later, after they were married.

(But shucks, I think I like my version best.)

Jimmy's ship was sent to Pearl Harbor mid-year of 1941. He was in the process of getting Ginny moved to Honolulu before their redheaded son Dennis was born. But the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941, and Ginny was then thrust among the first of a growing multitude of servicemen's wives forced to work, be a mother, and survive on a meager Navy allotment. (Dennis was born November 1941)

One could see puzzlement in some people's eyes when Ginny, her redheaded baby, and I were seen together. They breathed somewhat easier when we explained.

Hermosa Beach Random recall

Wendell being elected Valedictorian for our 8th grade class graduation exercises, and doing a great job giving a speech. (These 8th grade graduations were a big deal then)

Walking with Ginny to the Hermosa Beach library after dinner to work on homework.

Curling cousin Margaret in a tire and rolling her down the hill out behind the garden. Not very bright stuff.

Mother helping plan pot-luck dinners for the Knights of Pythias Lodge in Redondo Beach, singing as a member of the lodge chorale group, and trying to entice Wendell and me to sing a duet.

Aunt Lena's Hollywood boyfriend, who paid Wendell and I handsomely to wash his car when they came to visit. He was a stage hand on the movie sets in Hollywood, spun tales of hob-nobbing with the stars, and was, therefore, a celebrity. They always brought some awful Norwegian fancy pickled fish, (fin`n haddee?) which smelled as bad as it tasted. It was a criminal way to treat perfectly delectable cod. He brought us a monopoly game and showed us how to play. The boyfriend, Aunt Lena, and us three kids, started a game, and that first game went on all day, all that night, before finally producing a wealthy land baron in the wee morning hours.

Ginny's memory said Wendell was the mischievous one and it was my job to keep him in check. (and here I thought it was the other way around) She says, "Wendell used his famous imitation of Donald Duck whenever Mother tried to read him her softer version of Dad's riot act, and generally it would crack her up, resulting in a temporary reprieve for Wendell."

Rare Grunion runs. Thousand of these small silvery fish rode the waves right up on the beach. The females flopped around on the

beach, laid their eggs, and caught the receding tidal action back into the ocean. The next wave brought in the males to fertilize the eggs, and they also returned to the sea. The marine biologists gave advance notice of this phenomenon, (tide, moon, time of year, etc.) but they were unable to be absolutely precise in their predictions. That uncertainty didn't stop hundreds of people from standing side by side on the beach, bucket in hand, waiting for hours to grab this bonanza of delicate grunion before they escaped back into the sea. I once watched a grunion run from the advantage of standing on the pier. It was truly a spectacular sight--and hilarious. Hundreds of people falling all over themselves--and each other, trying to gather enough of these slippery flopping fish to make a meal in the few seconds available before they were all swept back into the sea.

Cut-rate gasoline was 8 gallons for a buck. Motor oil could be had for 5 cents a quart. Haircut was 25 cents.

Dad singing "Ah Sweet Mystery of Life", (and he could positively NOT sing) while standing under our neighbor's bedroom window after midnight, and Mother pulling on his arm to guide him home. Absolutely the only time I ever saw him under the influence. If either one drank, I certainly never saw it happen.

A job on a sport fishing boat for a couple of months. (I believe it was my last summer in Hermosa Beach) The boat left for Catalina Island from the Horseshoe pier in Redondo Beach every morning at 2 A.M., about a 3 hour trip. My job was to sit on top of a live bait tank, bait the paying customer's hooks with a live sardine, pepper the water with nets of live bait to "chum" up the fish, and lure the coveted albacore, tuna, and barracuda to a lovely sardine dinner.

The skipper was often unsteady on his feet when he came aboard in the early morning, and smelled like a brewery. He would pilot the boat well past the breakwater, and if the weather and sea were flat, he'd give me the wheel and a compass bearing, with instructions to wake him in an hour.

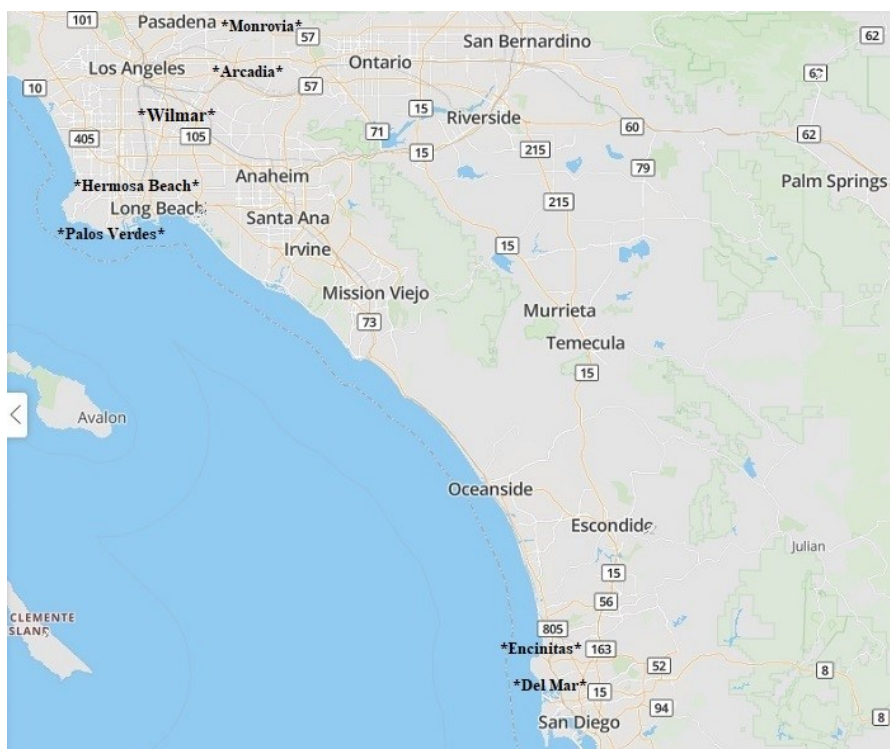
My monetary reward was whatever the fisherman would pay to have their fish cleaned on the afternoon trip back to Redondo. No payee, no cleanee de feshy.

Salt water, ocean breezes, warm sun and reflecting burning rays off the ocean, played a dual role in my early years in beach towns. Without these elements, of course, life at the beaches could maintain little appeal.

But the other side of the coin was that for half a year, seldom was I free from cracked, swollen, and painful lips, crisply burnt nose and ears, and constantly peeling forehead and cheeks. I looked and felt like I was molting. In short--a mess. I used zinc oxide and other sun safeguards on my lips, ears and nose, truckloads of it, but nothing really worked. Strangely, and fortunately for Wendell, he didn't have this problem as severe. When we moved inland to Arcadia, mid-way through our first year of high school, I was more than ready to try something else.

Folks mentioned	Relationship
I, me, myself	Robert Emil Sprehn
Dad, father	Emil Herman F. Sprehn
Mom, mother	Jessie (Brown) Sprehn
Wendell	My twin
Ginny	My sister
Aunt Kate and Aunt Lena	Mother's sisters
Grandpa Brown	Mother's father
Uncle Will	Everyone's revered Uncle
Aunt Ida	Dad's sister
Hazel	Aunt Kate's daughter
Barbara and Margaret	Hazel's daughters
Uncle Henry	Mother's brother
Aunt Kathleen	Uncle Henry's wife
Raymond	Kathleen and Henry's son

Towns/Cities where Dad lived between 1924 and 1945:



Monrovia: Attended Monrovia Arcadia Duarte Union High School

Arcadia: Lived with Al's parents as a senior in High School

Santa Monica: First place dad lived in which pets were allowed. Dad and Wendell were given two collies but later were dognapped!

Palos Verdes: Veritable wondrous marine paradise, especially at low tide

Hermosa Beach: Lived here longer than in any other location (4 years)

Encinitas: Three room house. Lived here for about a year

Del Mar: Huge house that was in terrible condition.

Wilmar: The place always referred to as the "House on Ivar Street"

PART II- Biography

Years 1941 - 1998

“The War Years”

Years 1941 – 1945

“The War Years”

For the purposes of this book, “**The War Years**” is herein meant to include the years 1941-1945 (even though World War II officially spanned the years 1939 – 1945). (Editorial comment: Ask the Chinese of Nanking when they believe this war began, and the year 1937 will be the response – given that their citizens were massacred by the Japanese)

Let’s start with a little background information. Dad’s parents were Emil H. Sprehn and Jessie E. Brown. Jessie died when Dad was 15 years old. Dad had a fraternal twin Wendell, and a brother Dick (born in 1917), and two sisters Fern and Virginia (“Ginny”). Fern was born in 1911, and Ginny was born in 1922. Therefore, the twins were the youngest of the lot. After Jessie passed away, Emil mostly relied on Fern (who was 13 years older than the twins) to do the parenting and act as the mother of the twins and Ginny. When Dad was a junior in high school, he spent most of his time (including eating and sleeping) at the home of his best friend Al Wilson (later to become my uncle Al). In fact, when Dad became a senior in high school, Emil pretty much turned the twin boys out on their own. Dad lived mostly with the Wilsons from that point on until he enlisted in the Marines. Also, during this time Fern, his aunt Kathleen and uncle Henry helped out and saw to it that the needs of the twins were met.

Dad attended high school at **Monrovia Arcadia Duarte Union High School** (which everyone simply called **MAD.**). It was during his junior year that he met his future brother-in-law Al Wilson. This began a friendship that lasted for more than 57 years. As Al said, *“Bob was almost a straight “A” student, and since my GPA was far below his, he was a great help in getting my grades up. We actually*

spent so much time together that we soon felt like foster brothers rather than just friends”.

In one incident, Al went to his bandmaster’s home to take trombone lessons and met the bandmaster’s blonde daughter and later asked her to the Junior Prom. As it turned out, she had already been asked to the prom by Dad and she had not yet said yes. She then suggested that Al and Dad should decide who should take her to the prom and she would abide by that decision. Dad and Al discussed the matter and decided to use a coin flip and Al won. In Al’s words, *“I thought I had won, but she was a dancing dud with two left feet and had no sense of rhythm”*. Dad asked a girl named Lois Beardslee to the dance. Since he had access to a car, he suggested that they could double date. Dad went steady with Lois for the balance of his schooling at MAD.

Dad’s twin brother, Wendell, had epilepsy. During his junior and senior years in high school he was raised (or looked after) mostly by Fern and Ginny. After high school, Dad got a job and an apartment and looked after Wendell.

Ginny lived and worked in nearby Pasadena. Ginny was married to Jimmy Springer who was stationed in Pearl Harbor at the time of the December 7th attack by the Japanese. Jimmy’s ship, the USS Shaw, was damaged by bomb hits while it was in dry dock, but fortunately Jimmy escaped injury. As we know, gas rationing was in place during these times, but Ginny was working in a service station and was able to give Dad some unused and “about-to-expire” gas ration stamps that her customers didn’t need. Dad and Al were able to use these stamps for Emil’s car. These stamps were only good for a few days after their expiration date, so they had to be used promptly.

Ginny owned a 1936 Ford convertible. Ginny’s husband Jimmy was quite concerned for Ginny’s safety fearing that the west coast of the U.S. might be attacked by the Japanese. He convinced Ginny to quit her job, and move herself and their son (Dennis) to Texas. Jimmy felt that she could live with his parents in Texas more safely than living on the west coast. Ginny agreed, quit her job, and she boarded a train for Texas with little Dennis in tow. Before Ginny left for

Texas though, Dad and Al volunteered to help in the storing of the Ford convertible. Dad and Al put her car on blocks, wrapped the tires in heavy paper tape, drained the gas tank and fuel line, inserted new motor oil and treated and covered the canvas convertible top. The car was placed in Fern's garage and readied for long term storage. However, ten days after Ginny left for Texas, Dad convinced Fern that he really needed a car to drive himself and Wendell to school. Fern being the oldest of the siblings practically raised Ginny, Dad and Wendell after their mother passed away in 1939. As Uncle Al said, "*Fern did not think too much of her father and his parental neglect of the twins and I suspect that she conspired to help her younger brother Bob have that transportation*". Shortly thereafter, Dad had that car off of the blocks and on the road. When Dad later left for the Marine Corps in late 1942, he put the car back onto the blocks and storage all polished and cleaned up like it was before. According to Al, Ginny never knew that the car had been borrowed.

Once the car was in hand, Dad and Al's schoolwork became somewhat of a lower priority ☺ These two 17 year olds had that "**I am going to war soon**" attitude which helped rationalize their truancy. Dad and Al both worked evenings at local restaurants in the area for spending money. In those days, it didn't require a lot of money to have a good time on a date. According to Al, a typical Friday night high school date usually involved taking a girl to a movie. The movie would cost 25 cents each, and a hamburger and a malt would cost 50 cents each, and then splitting a large french fry order would cost another quarter. Total expenditure: \$1.75 for both! After the movie, they would just hang out at the local drive in and dance in the parking lot while the music was playing in their car radios until it was time to head home. Once in a while, if a big band like Harry James or the Dorsey's, Stan Kenton or Bob Crosby (Bing's brother) was in town, they would pack six of them in the Ford and head to the Pasadena Civic Auditorium Ballroom to dance. The attendance at the Auditorium for those events was a whopping 50 cents each.

In 1942, Dad would be turning 18 so he would be subject to the US Army draft. However, he wanted to join the Navy. At that time,

young men were very eager to go out and fight for their country. According to Al Wilson, he received permission from Emil to enlist in the service in September of 1942 while being a month short of his 18th birthday. According to an interview of dad by Rebecca Wilcox, dad attempted to join up in September of 1942 but was unsuccessful because Emil would not give dad the needed permission. In either case, dad wanted to join the Navy but the Navy recruiter was not at his desk the day that dad arrived to enlist. So, dad walked over to the US Marines recruitment officer desk instead and enlisted. This is how he ended up joining the Marines. When his friend Al Wilson attempted to enlist, he was turned down because he was told that he had a heart murmur. As it turned out, he tried a few months later, and Al was told that he did not have a heart murmur and was given the choice of enlisting in the Army or the Navy. (He chose the Navy).

Not long thereafter, Dad got the call for the Marine Corps boot camp at Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, CA. After boot camp was over, he was able to gain a short leave. He and some of his buddies visited Al (since Camp Pendleton was only sixty miles away from Al's home in Arcadia).

After returning to Camp Pendleton from leave (early 1943), Dad was temporarily assigned at Pearl Harbor for a short time. He was then assigned to the heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis which was the flagship for Admiral Spruance. Everyone was lined up on the deck of the ship and Admiral Spruance said, **"I'll take those two redheads"** (dad being one of those two) and two others and these four marines ended up being the bodyguards for the Admiral. Since dad was one of the Admiral's bodyguards, where the Admiral went, dad went.

During his time on the USS Indianapolis, Dad served as a gunner on the stern quad 44 mm anti-aircraft guns. Their ship participated in some of the most important naval battles that took place in that theatre. Their naval task force moved in and out of combat frequently. While in combat, Dad witnessed some of the first Japanese suicide planes destroying task force ships.

Dad served in the following theatres:

- Asiatic Pacific Area
- Marianas Islands
- Ryukyus Islands
- Hawaiian Islands
- Marshall Islands
- Guam
- Saipan

Dad served on the following ships:

- USS Indianapolis
- USS New Jersey

Dad participated in the following bombardments:

- Tarawa
- Kwajalein Atoll (Island in Marshall Islands)
- Truk Atoll
- Marianas Islands
- Okinawa

Dad was transferred off the USS Indianapolis because Admiral Spruance was given another Star, and he moved his flagship to the USS New Mexico (says Wikipedia) or the USS New Jersey (says Al)

Before being sent to Okinawa, Dad was sent back to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina as a quad 40mm anti-aircraft gun instructor. Among other things, Dad taught recruits how to grease the inside of the gun. Eventually, the recruits had to be able to grease the guns while blindfolded.

Dad did not remain at Camp Lejeune long. He was then sent to the Okinawa invasion (assigned to the “Red” beach). Apparently the landing was fairly mild at first but then later the fighting was heavier and he was involved in close combat due to a Japanese counterattack.

After the initial invasion of Okinawa, Dad was assigned to a quad-mount 40mm anti-aircraft gun and continued to be stationed in Okinawa until the end of the war.

In one incident, Dad (and probably a few other friends) “jumped ship” while serving on the USS Indianapolis outside of Saipan and rowed to shore to meet up with a few of his former 2nd Marines buddies. While he was on the island with his buddies, they were jumped by Japanese, and Dad was bayoneted in his left back. Once they returned to the ship, the Admiral “covered” for Dad (since obviously he would have been in trouble for “jumping ship”). The Admiral had his personal Medic tend to Dad’s wound instead of sending him to the ship’s hospital. This prevented the incident from going on Dad’s record.

In another incident, Admiral Spruance caught Dad reading the Monrovia daily newspaper. Dad thought that perhaps he was in trouble for doing so. However, the Admiral was incredulous as to the coincidence that one of his guards was reading a Monrovia newspaper given that Spruance himself was from Monrovia. Dad explained to the Admiral that his Aunt Kathleen from Monrovia had sent the newspaper to him.

As I assume the reader knows, the USS Indianapolis was sunk by a Japanese submarine on its return trip from the island of Tinian after delivering a component of the “Little Boy” atom bomb that was to be dropped on Hiroshima. This sinking happened only two weeks before that bomb was dropped. The ship was en route from Tinian with a destination of the Philippines and was sunk in 12 minutes. Of the 1,195 crewman aboard, approximately 300 went down with the ship, and the remaining 890 faced a terrible ordeal – of which only 316 survived. These crewmen were in the water for four days and faced saltwater poisoning, exposure, dehydration and shark attacks while stranded in the ocean with few lifeboats and almost no food or drinkable water. Because of a SNAFU and the secrecy of this mission, the ship was not on record as being expected in port in the Philippines and therefore was not seen as “missing”. Only by an accidental routine patrol of a PV-1 Ventura were the survivors

spotted in the water. This sinking of the Indianapolis resulted in the greatest single loss of life at sea, from a single ship, in the history of the US Navy. As another unfortunate side note to this story, the captain of the ship Captain McVay was later court-martialed for not “zig zagging” (but this was reversed later by Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz). However, in 1968, McVay committed suicide using a Navy issued revolver.

I mostly recount the sinking of the Indianapolis in this writing because it brings up a very interesting “**What If?**”. As we have seen, Dad spent the majority of his time during the war on the USS Indianapolis as one of the guards for Admiral Spruance. What if Spruance had **not** been given another Star and thus his flagship had remained the Indianapolis? Therefore, it is likely that Dad, too, would have remained on the ship with Spruance and both would be among those unfortunate crewmen. However, in the months before the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, Dad was stationed on Okinawa. He, again, was part of a crew manning a 40 mm anti-aircraft battery. But ... in the middle of August 1945... and in Dad’s own words, *“That night, off in a distance, a few weapons began slowly and sporadically to illuminate the sky with tracers. Eventually this flagrant act of unauthorized firing grew to a crescendo of fireworks, that soon jubilantly included our own 40mm. From our vantage point, it looked as if the sky was crisscrossed with patterns of tracers from every compass point. This deliberate act of island wide celebration (read disobedience) was the clincher. We knew then that we were going home. However, no one on that island knew anything about an atomic bomb at that time.”*

Notes:

- VE Day (Victory in Europe): May 8, 1945
- VJ Day (Victory over Japan): August 14, 1945
- Japan's official surrender: September 2, 1945
- Date Dad is discharged: December 11, 1945
- Dad's monthly pay during this time: \$54/mo.

“California”

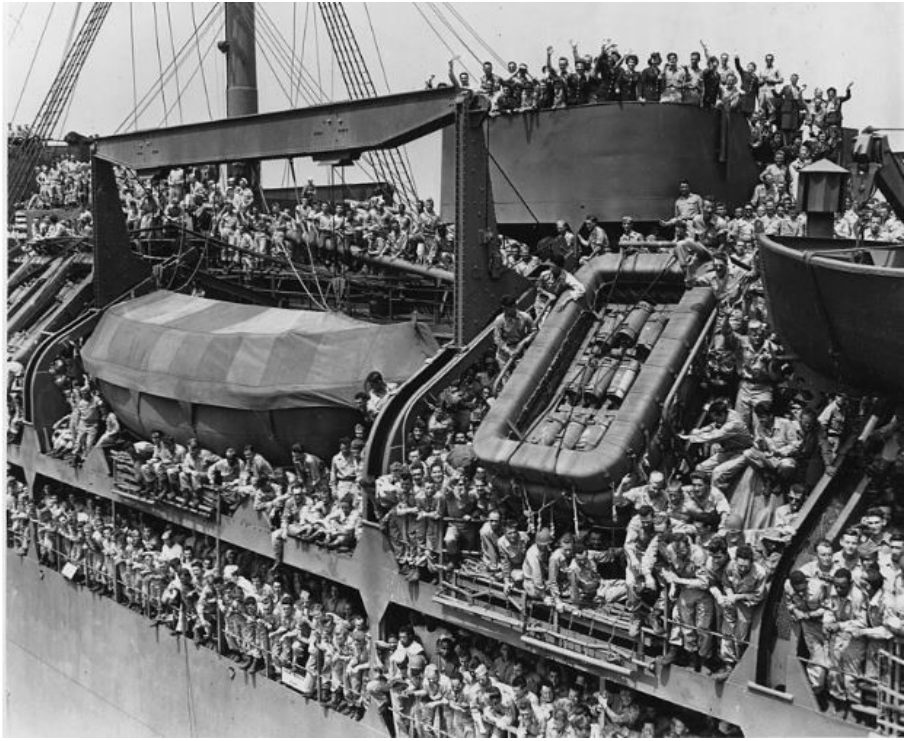
Years 1945 - 1955

California

Dad was discharged on December 11, 1945. As we are all aware, even though VJ day was August 14, 1945 and the formal surrender was in early September, servicemen were discharged based on a never understood mysterious “priority system” that probably seemed more like a “lottery system” than anything else.

As Christmas approached, the Army and Navy launched Operation Santa Claus to expedite Operation Magic Carpet, with the goal of rushing as many eligible men home for the holiday as possible. Possibly Dad was among the beneficiaries of this operation?





Upon returning home, Dad spent most of his time living with Al's parents in West Arcadia. (Al was not discharged until March of 1946). Dad started continuing education at Pasadena City College but could not make ends meet financially. He then got a job at the Union Oil Company pumping gas.

When Al was discharged in March, the two of them moved into an apartment. They both immediately found employment at Alvarado Plumbing in Arcadia as ditch diggers and as potential apprentices. This lowly beginning was the foundation for Dad's career as a plumber and plumbing contractor and Al's career as a plumbing pipe distributor,

Note: As Al has written "*Most of us spoke very little to each other about our war service experiences. In fact, most of us were **more** than happy to forget all about it*"

Enter Lilan Ruth Heasley (my mom)

In April of 1946, Al asked his sister, Dolly, if she had any ideas who he could date. (None of the online dating services existed back then ☺) Dolly worked in a cosmetology salon. One of her friends and co-worker was Phylis Heasley. As you can surmise, Phylis was Mom's younger sister. Dolly then got to work acting as a matchmaker and arranged for a date for Phylis and Al. This plan was soon updated to a double-date to also include our mom and dad. The four of them went to a movie the day before Easter.

Apparently, Grandma Heasley had previously met Dad a few days before that first date and knew Dad was a redhead. Just before he came to the door to take Mom out on their first date (the double date with Phylis & Al), Mom asked Grandma about Dad and Grandma said, *"All I know is that he is a redhead"*. Then, Mom told Grandma *"I am not going on this date"* (because Mom had it in her mind that she didn't like redheads). Grandma told Mom, *"Yes, you are. You are going on this date and you are joining Bob, Al and Phylis"*. However, when Dad came to the door, mom changed her mind immediately and knew that she wanted to go out with him.

On Mom and Dad's second date, Dad invited Mom to an Easter sunrise service, and he ended up oversleeping (As I have been told, the long days of ditch digging were taking their toll!). Mom waited until he showed up, and they went to breakfast and then to a nursery in Monrovia to see the Easter Lilies.

They dated pretty much every night after this but Mom had to be in by 10:00pm as that was grandma's rules (as Mom was living with her parents at this time)

On Mom's birthday (July 6, 1946), she was home with a cold and Dad came over and surprised her and presented her with an engagement ring. (Dad had first asked Grandpa Heasley for "her hand".)

Emil (Grandpa Sprehn) invited Mom and Dad for dinner and served "seaweed meat loaf". Emil considered himself a Naturopath and had many theories about what foods were healthy. At this time, Mom also met Emil's second wife Thea. (Note: I remember meeting Thea only once in Hemet, CA. She was very nice to Lylan and me and was heavy into music, in fact she was a music teacher). Dad and Wendell took singing lessons from Thea. The twins actually sang a song on the radio "back in the day".

On October 1, 1946, Mom and Dad were married. Phylis and Al stood up for them. One week earlier, Mom and Dad had stood up for Phylis and Al when they were married on September 26, 1946. They were married in the Monrovia Presbyterian Church by Reverend Haven Davis. Emil never attended the wedding. However, he did place a metal coffee pot on Grandma Heasley's doorstep for the newlyweds. On their wedding night, they went to Pasadena to listen and dance to Tommy Dorsey. Afterward, they went to a motel in Alhambra.

Very soon afterward, the couple rented an 18ft. camping trailer on Garvey Boulevard in Alhambra. Also, Phylis and Al rented a small place about a mile away. They stayed in this trailer while their new house was being built in Temple City and financed by a VA loan. Mom and Dad did a lot of this work themselves. Obviously Dad did the plumbing. They also did all of the painting, and they dug the entire septic system by hand.

They moved into the Temple City home approximately six months later. During those first two weeks in the house, Ginny and her husband Jimmy lived with them. Ginny was pregnant with Cathy at this time. After those two weeks were over, Jimmy was discharged from the Navy, and they moved to Long Beach.

When Cathy Springer was born, Mom and Dad went to the Navy Hospital to visit them, and Mom passed out. That is when Mom discovered that she was pregnant with me. I was born on August 1, 1948 in the hospital in Altadena, and the Temple City home became my first residence.

Circa 1951, Mom and Dad moved from the small house in Temple City to a rental in Arcadia near Dad's work at Alvarado Plumbing. Lylan was on the way and there wasn't enough room for another addition to this family. Alvarado Plumbing was basically across the street from the Santa Anita Race Track.

Mom and Dad's first purchased home in California was in Temple City. Their second purchased home was in La Crescenta. Lylan was born on July 3, 1951 at the hospital in Altadena and her first residence was at the home in La Crescenta.

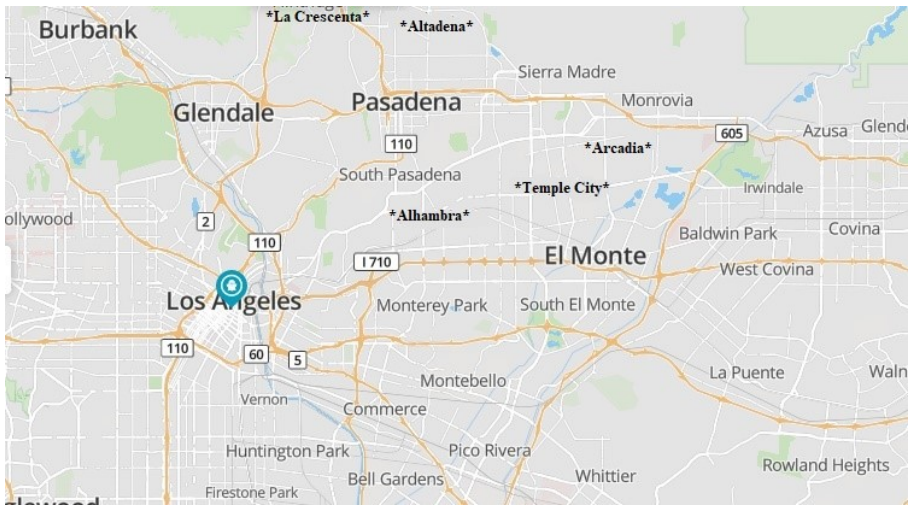
Apparently, the land around the home in La Crescenta was nothing but rocks, rocks, rocks and more rocks. Dad spent many an hour building a rock wall fence and a wishing well using those rocks!

Below is a photo of Dad at the home in La Crescenta:



After four years living in this home in La Crescenta, they decided to move to Washington in 1955. They arrived in Seattle on May 1, 1955.

Towns/Cities where Mom and Dad lived while married and living in the Los Angeles area between 1946 and 1955:



Temple City: First home Mom and Dad purchased (Baby Jeff's first home)

La Crescenta: Second home Mom and Dad purchased (Baby Lylan's first home)

Altadena: Jeff and Lylan born in hospital in Altadena

Arcadia: Dad worked at Alvarado Plumbing which was in Arcadia. This plumbing shop was located across the street from the Santa Anita Race Track

Alhambra: After Mom and Dad were married, they first moved into an 18ft camping trailer on Garvey Blvd in Alhambra while the home in Temple City was being built.

“Washington”

Years 1955 – 1998

Washington

On “May Day” (May 1, 1955), Dad, Mom, Lylan and I arrived in Seattle from California. There was snow on the ground on May 1st! Legend has it that in Seattle, it has never snowed again on this day of the year. Phylis and Al had already moved to Seattle. They strongly encouraged Dad to move up to Seattle where the air was cleaner. I suspect that there was also a mutual desire for all of them to be reunited again in the same area. Al had already contacted the owner of South End Plumbing and was able to convince the owner to hire Dad based on Al’s knowledge of Dad’s plumbing prowess.

The family of four (at that time) stayed with Phylis and Al at their rental in Rainier Valley for a week. After the week was over, Mom and Dad moved to a rental in Prichard Beach which was nearby.

During their stay with Phylis and Al, one night the four of them hopped in Al’s car and went to the movies. However, when they returned home, they discovered that Mom and Dad’s car was stolen. Welcome to Seattle! As it turned out, the police found the car one block away. Lost to history is any further information related to this caper.

This biography of Dad is not going to be presented in a chronological year by year manner. Instead, it is going to be broken into “topics of interest”. I am hoping that this will make the read more enjoyable and informative.

- Dad's years at South Side Plumbing -

When Dad began working for South End Plumbing in 1955, it was owned by Ross Wilcox. However, Ross retired a short time after that, and his brother Roland bought the business. Dad thought the world of Roland. Dad would say that Roland was the most charitable person that he had ever met. He recalled a time when the two of them were in their plumbing truck on the way to a job when Roland was driving and spotted a motorist who was broken down on the side of the road. Roland pulled over to the shoulder, and the two of them spent a couple of hours helping the motorist. Of course, all during this time, Dad was “on the clock”, and they hadn’t yet even made it to the job. Years later Roland painted my 1952 Chevrolet in his shop and refused any kind of payment from me.

In 1963, Roland was offered a position with the city (or county?) as a plumbing inspector. He decided to trade the stress of owning the business, doing the bidding (more on this later), billing, headaches, etc. for an 8am-5pm job inspecting the plumbing work being done by other plumbing establishments like his own.

So, in 1963 Dad bought the shop from Roland and renamed it South Side Plumbing. He owned and operated this business until the shop was closed in 1988 when Dad retired.

South Side Plumbing did mostly commercial work. Occasionally, Dad’s business would do plumbing for a residential home, but mostly he bid jobs for restaurants, apartments, commercial buildings, etc. His business seldom did “house calls” or “Roto-Rooter” type work.

Maybe because of what I had observed from Dad’s experiences regarding the pitfalls of owning a business, I have personally never desired to own and operate my own business. Dad did well financially from owning the business, but it sure presented a fair number of headaches and required a lot of time outside of the normal 8am- 5pm.

The two biggest issues were (1) “The Bidding process” and (2) “Getting paid for services rendered”.

Larger sub-contractors usually have a person who remains in the plumbing office doing nothing but bidding for jobs. This is a very time-consuming job and important job – especially if your business desires to make any money! Dad had all of the duties associated with owning the shop (doing the billing, keeping the plumbing vans/trucks “online”, hiring employees, etc.) as well as doing some of the plumbing himself and all of the bidding for new jobs.

It is not surprising that there never was much time during the day to work on the time consuming bidding process. Therefore, this was often done at home at night and on weekends. There are many negative sayings involving “coming in second”. Dad would spend *many* hours itemizing all of the plumbing related items needed for a particular job and calculating their total cost and estimating the labor hours needed in order to perform that job. Then, often (read: most of the time) the bid to the general contractor (or the owner of the restaurant) would end up being the *second lowest bid* and this would get you You guessed it Nothing. (Of course, in reality one would never know how close your bid was to the “winning bid”). Sometimes the “winning sub-contractor” actually bid the job knowing that he would lose a little money, but it kept his workers employed so it was worth it to him.

I don’t remember all of the details, but I remember hearing about a frustrating experience Dad had when he worked many many hours on a bid for a fairly large sized job. The bid was a sealed bid that had to be manually dropped and signed-in at a County office in downtown Seattle by a certain date and time. Dad left with plenty of time to get there but ran out of gas on I-5 as he was just about to enter Seattle. This is where my details get “sketchy”. Given that there were no cell phones at this time, Dad either walked to a gas station to get gas in order to return to his car, or he called a cab so that he could submit his bid (leaving the car on I-5 temporarily). In any case, by the time he arrived at the office building, he was 5 minutes late!

Even 5 seconds late would have been too late. Many hours of work “down the tubes”.

As I mentioned earlier, the other of the two issues relating to owning a plumbing business (or any other business I presume) was getting paid. Numerous times, for whatever reason, the General Contractor failed to pay his sub-contractors. In other words, the sheet rockers, the electricians, the carpenters, the plumbers, etc. wouldn't get paid. (Hmmm ... this sounds kind of familiar. Did I hear you say, “Donald Trump?”). Sometimes this would lead to a potential court-ordered “ten cents on the dollar” arrangement where the sub-contractors would each get 10% of what they were owed. However, this could only occur if **all** of them concurred with this arrangement. Invariably one (or more) would say, “***No deal. I want all of the money owned to me or nothing at all***”. So ... the end result would be that nobody would get anything.

Dad had an “experience” with an owner of an Italian restaurant in Federal Way. Dad did plumbing work for the owner but the owner failed to pay Dad after all of the work that he had done. Dad's “solution” was for Mom and Dad to eat dinner at this establishment once per week. When they were presented with the check, Dad would simply say, “***Put my bill on the owner's tab***”.

While owning South Side Plumbing, Mom and Dad bought a “Mini Winnie” (and later an Itasca) motor home and went on weekend excursions at various nearby state parks. They did this for a secondary reason. It was their escape from contractors who would bug them with phone calls over the week-end. This allowed Dad to work on bids and billing in a peaceful and enjoyable environment.

Four “interesting” events that happened during the years of Dad’s plumbing experiences:

1. Once Dad and Roland got into a “play” paint fight while in the shop.
2. More than once (during the time that Dad was doing “house calls”), a woman answered the door in the nude
3. One time Dad responded to a woman’s emergency plumbing issue where she had flushed a cloth diaper down the toilet. When he arrived, she began berating him and using lots of “choice language” because she felt that he should have arrived sooner than he did. Ignoring her insults, Dad informed her that he was going to go under the house in the crawl space and disconnect some pipes and she was NOT to use or especially use the toilet while he was down there. Well, as you might have guessed, she flushed the toilet! Dad grabbed the diaper that he had just “fished out”, reconnected the pipes, left the crawl space, and went back up to the bathroom. “So, what did Dad do next?”, you ask. He flushed the cloth diaper back down the toilet and left!
4. Another time Dad was plumbing at a housing development and he was under one of the houses hooking up the drain to the bathtub. He was lying right underneath the unconnected drain. A drywall worker decided that since there was no toilet and was too lazy to go out to the porta-potty, he would relieve himself right into the bathtub! Dad was so mad that he chased the guy through five houses. Imagine a plumber running into one side of a house and a drywall worker coming out of the other side of that house.

Possibly I made it sound like owning South Side Plumbing was all “gloom and doom”? If so, that wasn’t my intention. I am sure that there was plenty more good than bad. I am quite sure that if Dad was asked what his thoughts were regarding those years at South Side Plumbing, he would say that he had no regrets, and would happily do it all over again.

- Dad – Scoutmaster Troop 993 -

For many years, Dad was a Boy Scout Scoutmaster. Our troop number was 993. It is difficult to “put to paper” how many hundreds of hours of his time was spent in these efforts. Our troop went on many hikes and outings over the years. Once, we went on an 80-mile week-long hiking and camping trip on the Cascade Crest Trail (part of the Pacific Crest Trail). It is not a trivial endeavor to plan and provide all of the requisite logistics involved in doing so. Dad had to consider items such as the safety for a large group of boys of various ages, how far to hike each day, where to setup camps, meals, schedules, and much more. Besides long hikes, there were many weekend excursions to plan and coordinate.

There were also yearly jamborees that required many hours of planning and coordination with the scouts themselves and parents. Weekly scout meetings were held in a school gymnasium, the name of which has now escaped me. Of course, there were also the infamous “fund raising” events. Our most profitable was the selling of Christmas Trees.

It is amazing to me that I can remember word-for-word the song and lyrics that Dad wrote sixty years ago that all of the boys would sing in unison when a member arrived late at one of the weekly scout meetings in the gymnasium. The lyrics were as follows:

You're late, You're late, You're late
You should've started earlier
You spent too much time
Combing back your fur
You really didn't need
That other piece of pie
Or all the time you spent
To kiss the girls goodbye
You're late!

While it is true that I was in scouting for a long time, and Dad was my Scoutmaster, there was never any preferential treatment headed my way. Dad made sure I never took any shortcuts towards the next rank or merit badge.

Mom told me of an incident (that I don't remember) involving a particular camping trip. Apparently, Dad saw me and another boy picking berries on one side of a bush, and we were unaware that on the other side of said bush was a bear. Dad was able to silently get my attention, and the other scout and I were able to "high tail" it out of there. (Note: normally I wouldn't "win any awards" when it came to being observant, so I am surprised that I was actually able to acknowledge Dad's silent motions headed my way :-))

Another incident of note occurred when Dad was driving a number of boy scouts (destination: unknown), and one of the boys in the back seat threw litter out the back side window of the car. Dad, seeing this occur, proceeded to drive another ½ mile down the road and then stopped on the shoulder. He then instructed the boy to walk back that ½ mile and pick up all of the litter that he had thrown out of the window. Love it!

In summary, Dad could have spent a lot of these years doing other things, but, instead, he chose to put his heart and soul into scouting. My life has been very much enriched because of those years in scouting. I learned much from them, and without question I am quite certain that all of the other boy scouts in that troop would feel the same today, if asked.

Potpourri and hodgepodge of unrelated items

- I have been told of the story where Lylan had done something “bad” (transgression unknown) and Dad put Lylan on his knee and pretended to spank her. He made Lylan promise to yell like it was hurting so Mom (who was in another room) would think that Dad was actually spanking her. ☺
- When I got into trouble, Dad would be tasked to perform the discipline in my room. Nine times out of ten, this would lead to a “philosophical discussion”. Dad might say something like, “*Well, what do YOU think that you did wrong?*”. My cousin Larry would always tell me that he wished that my Dad was his Dad because his Dad, (my Uncle Al), was more of a “spank first” (or ground him first) kind of guy and then later ask questions about the transgression. (But, hold it, maybe I shouldn’t be putting this in this book in case a Wilson reads it!) ☺
- Shortly after moving into the Burien home, Mom and Dad were returning home and a car was chasing them (never knew why). Dad pulled over on the shoulder of the road and rolled down his window in an effort to determine why he was being chased. The driver of the other car simply walked up to Dad’s window and sucker-punched Dad right in his face. Mom grabbed the steering wheel and somehow put her foot on the gas pedal and drove away (Dad was knocked out). They then hunted for a gas station for a telephone and called the police.
- We moved from California to Washington when I was 7 years old. So, for about 7 years straight after that, over Christmas our family would drive from Washington to our grandparent’s home in Pasadena, CA. I am sure that every single year we could be heard singing the song, “*California, here we come, right back where we started from*”. Just sayin

- There was really only one time that I can remember when I saw my Dad get mad at anyone. (Or anything, really). One school year while living in Des Moines (or Burien?), I had a science project to do and needed some parts in order to complete it. Dad called a hardware store in downtown Seattle and the owner says matter-of-factly that, “*Yes. We do. We do have those parts*”. So off we drove for an hour to that store in downtown Seattle to buy those parts. When we get there, the person that talked to my Dad on the phone casually says “*We don’t have those parts. We never would carry something like that:*”. Suffice it to say that Dad was not happy! The owner of the hardware shop was only interested in saying **anything** that he could in order for us to go there and buy something.
- This memory is really just for me but I am including it in this book anyway. “Why?”, you ask. Because I can. ☺ After my classes at the University of Washington, I would leave at noon and drive south because I had a job as a residential electrician. I had wired hundreds of homes in the cities of Burien, Kent, Auburn, Federal Way, etc. I remember once when I drove the EdCo company van to a house to begin wiring it, and lo and behold there was my Dad just finishing up doing the rough plumbing. What a coincidence (and a one-in-a-kind event). A fond memory that was for me.
- Dad liked to use the good old Kodak 8 mm movie camera to make “trick photography”. My favorite two “stunts” he pulled are as follows. For one stunt, he would ask me to round up as many of the neighborhood kids that I could find. He would have one kid at a time climb into this large barrel and at the sound of “Go”, he would film the neighborhood kid coming **out** of the barrel and just then STOP recording. He would do this repeatedly for each kid involved in this chicanery. When you viewed the finished product, it looked like a dozen kids came out of the same barrel! His other “scheme” was to record one kid at the **front** of a long 12 ft. 2x4 just walking for a few paces. Then he would stop the recording and have the two kids reverse places and then he would record the same kid holding up the **back** of the 2x4. When you

viewed the finished product, it would appear as if the **same kid** was at the **front** and the **back** of the 2x4.

- I have faint memories of my Dad and Uncle Al building a boat. This occurred when we were living near Prichard Beach. As Mom tells it, Dad built the boat and Al supplied the outboard engine. They kept the boat until my sister Bobbi was born in 1957.
- In 1986, my uncle Jimmy Springer and my cousin Cathy Springer were building a home for Cathy and the kids on Uncle Jimmy's property. My parents drove their RV down and Dad lent a hand installing kitchen cabinets, a water heater and other appliances. As Cathy tells it, Dad was such a giver. Also, earlier Mom and Dad had given Cathy's Mom (Ginny) money so that she could purchase her own mobile home in Reno.
- Cathy also relates the time that Ginny won some airline tickets from a radio station in Reno. Cathy was given those tickets to visit Mom and Dad in Federal Way in 1993 or 1994. Cathy relates how our Dad was so awesome playing "tour guide" to Mt. St. Helens, ferry ride, the fish market, Snoqualmie Falls, etc. She also remembers Dad's blackened Salmon and considered him quite the Chef!
- Mom relates the story of a retirement party for Dad hosted by Coast Construction, for which Dad did a lot of plumbing work. As it so happened, Mom was sick that night, but Aunt Tine was visiting at the time, and Dad ended up taking her instead. At the party, Dad introduced Aunt Tine as his "girlfriend". Definitely sounds like something Dad would do! ☺

Places where Mom and Dad lived in Washington -

1955 – 1956: Prichard Beach (Seattle)

This was the rental that the family moved to after first moving up from California (with the exception that the very first week was spent at Phylis and Al's rental nearby in Rainer Valley)

1956 – 1961: Burien (Home on 143rd street)

Bobbi was born on November 9, 1957 at Virginia Mason Hospital. The address above was her first home of residence. Daryl was born on September 12, 1959 at Virginia Mason Hospital and this address was his first home of residence.

In the back yard, Dad built a full length cement (blacktop?) basketball court and often half the neighborhood kids could be seen playing basketball or riding bicycles on this court.

1961 – 1962: Rental (South Park)

For a year Mom and Dad rented an older home in South Park (South Seattle area) that belonged to Roland Wilcox. I personally have fond memories living in this house. Not that I remember “such a thing”, but Lylan has pointed out that it was at this rental that I locked her in a closet for some period of time. I am going to take her word for it! LOL. Another memory of this house was the old 5 ft. high wind-up gramophone that Roland left behind that played 78's.

1962 – 1970 Des Moines area (1627 So. 204th Place)

Mom and Dad moved into this home shortly after the SeaTac runway was extended from 188th to 200th. Since this home was on 204th, the landing gear on airplanes would fly over our roof by just a matter of a few feet. Dad was fond of saying, “*The airplanes were close enough that you could shake hands with the passengers*”. I do recall some kind of lawsuit that the neighbors were involved in due to the de-valuation of their property once the runway was extended. However, Mom and Dad did not join in with this lawsuit because in all good conscience, they bought this home after the runway was extended and they were fully aware of the situation.

I moved out of this house (early 1968) before Mom and Dad moved to the rental near Des Moines in 1970.

1970 – 1971: Rental near Des Moines

I don’t know the address of this rental and can only conceptually picture where it was located. Mom, Dad, Bobbi and Daryl lived in this rental only a short time before they moved to the home in Federal Way at 2155 SW 316th.

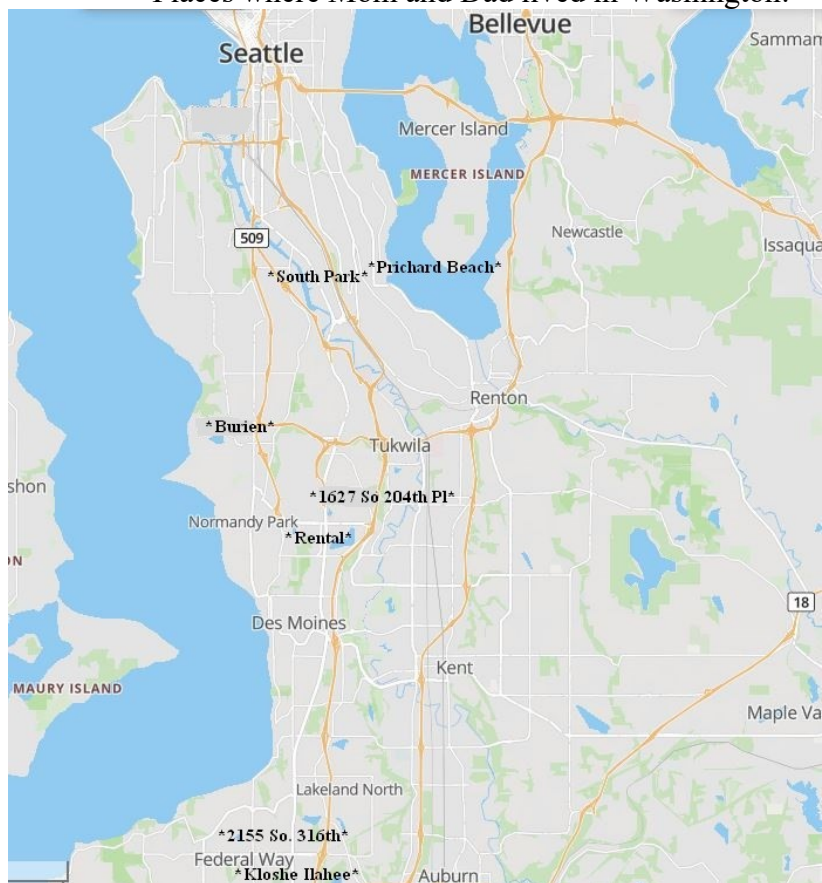
1971 – 1979: Federal Way (2155 SW 316th)

This was a nice home with quite the landscaping all around and the family (except Lylan and myself) lived here for a number of years. Lylan and Jim Wilcox were married in this home.

1979 – Present: Federal Way (Kloshe Ilahee Mobile Park)

This is where Dad lived from 1979 until his death in 1998. Mom still lives here now.

Places where Mom and Dad lived in Washington:



Prichard Beach: A rental in the Seattle area before moving to home in Burien

Burien: Home south of Seattle (143rd Street). Lived here 1956-1961

South Park: Home belonging to Roland Wilcox that was rented from him for 1 yr.

1627 So 204th Pl: Home just on outskirts of SeaTac runway. Lived here 1962-1970

Rental: A rental outside of Des Moines before moving to Federal Way (316th)

2155 SW 316th: Home in Federal Way. Lived here 1971 – 1979

Kloshe Ilahee: Mobile home park in Federal Way where Mom is living today

Interview with Dad

The following is a verbatim copy of an assignment given to Rebecca Wilcox when she was 15 years old in High School. Her "mission" was to document her interview of a person that she thought would have important and/or interesting things to say about life experiences. She chose to interview my dad.

Rebecca Wilcox

4-23-96

LA H P.6

G-dunks and Bell Hops

by Rebecca Wilcox

Robert Sprehn is my grandfather, and as I recently discovered, one of the most interesting people I know. He was drafted into World War Two in 1942. Later, he came to own a plumbing business. These were the main reasons I decided to interview him, to find out about his war experiences and his experiences as a plumber. As it turned out, I got much more than which battles were fought where and "what that was like." I heard fascinating and funny stories, discovered the meanings of some military slang, and even learned a little geography too.

RW: How old were you when you joined the service?

RS: Well, I tried to join the Navy when I was 17, but my father wouldn't sign for me. You had to get a signature from your parent if you were under 18. At that time, young men were very eager to go out and fight for their country. I worked at Douglas Aircraft as a die-caster until I was drafted. Then I went down to sign up with the Navy but whoever was supposed to be at the desk wasn't there just then so I went across the hall to the Marine Corps office and signed up.

RW: Where did you go first?

RS: The first place I went was San Diego for basic training, boot tramp.

RW: boot tramp?

RS: We used to call boot camp boot tramp because they had us tramp all over the place.

RW: Where did you go next?

RS: Next I went to Pearl Harbor and eventually ended up on the Indianapolis, which was a heavy cruiser and the flagship of the 5th fleet.

RW: What did you do on board?

RS: Well, we were all lined up on deck and Admiral Spruance looked us over and said "I'll take those two redheads" (my grandfather is a redhead) and we and two others ended up being sort of like his bodyguards. Wherever he went, we went. He walked four miles a day around the ship, two in the morning and two in the afternoon. So, we walked four miles a day. We were called "sea-going bell hops." As it turned out, Spruance and I were both from Monrovia, California. He saw me reading a Monrovia paper and thought I'd stolen it. We ended up being pretty good friends. He used to invite me in for G- dunks.

RW: What are G-dunks?

RS: G-dunks is what we used to call ice cream.

RW: Why were they called G-dunks?

RS: I really don't know.

RW: Where's the first place you went with the ship?

RS: The first time I went ashore was in the Kwajalein Islands, which are part of the Marshal Islands. We went ashore the day after D-day, but I never had to fire a shot at that battle.

RW: Where did you go next?

RS: Next we went with the Admiral on to the New Jersey, which was a battleship and the sister ship of the Missouri. We went to Truk Island first, and were attacked by kamikazes. Then we went to Guam and then to Saipan and got there on D-day.

RW: I thought you were somewhere else on D-day.

RS: Well, D-day is the first day of any invasion. So, you can have D-day on Normandy or on Saipan or whatever.

RW: What happened at Saipan?

RS: Well, we almost got into a lot of trouble there. A few of us went off where we weren't supposed to and ran into a bunch of Japanese soldiers and I ended up getting stabbed in the side. We got someone to "fix" the report about us going to where we weren't supposed to but I had to be treated for the stab wound in secret so that Spruance wouldn't find out.

RW: Where did you go next?

RS: We went to a couple other islands, and then back to Pearl Harbor, and then I was sent to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, that was in November, 1944.

RW: What did you do there?

RS: I was a 40mm gun instructor. I taught them how to grease the insides of the gun. Eventually, they had to be able to do it blindfolded.

RW: You mean literally, like so they could do it in the dark?

RS: Yep

RW: How long did you stay there?

RS: Not long, I was sent back to fight in the invasion on Okinawa. I was assigned to the "red" beach. They had color charts for the beach and everyone was assigned to a section of beach. The landing was fairly mild but later on there was more fighting. After that I went home.

RW: Why did you become a plumber?

RS: (laughing) Well it wasn't a lifelong ambition! After I quit college Al (his brother-in-law) and I took jobs as plumbers' helpers. I eventually bought the business.

RW: Why did you quit college?

RS: Well, it was very hard to support a family when I was going to school.

RW: Do you regret not staying in school?

RS: Yes, if I could do it again I would stay in college.

RW: Any interesting plumbing stories you could share?

RS: Yes, well, one lady answered the door naked. She was obviously drunk and was about 5 feet and 200 pounds.

RW: Whoa!

RS: Another time, we were plumbing at a housing development and I was under one of the houses hooking up the drain to the bathtub. I was sitting right under the unconnected drain and a plasterer inside the house decided that since there was no toilet and he was too lazy to go out to the portable one, he was going to go right in the bathtub.

Well, I was so mad I chased that guy through five houses. You'd see a plumber run in one side of a house and a plasterer come running out the other.

RW: If you could change anything, what would it be?

RS: I would have stayed in college.

Although this interview did not turn out as I thought it would, I was very happy about the way it did turn out. It showed that there is more to war than battles. There are times in between when people make friendships and have ice cream. This interview also demonstrates the importance of listening to people who have experienced things that you haven't, if not for the knowledge, for the fun of it.



Top Row Left to Right
Adolph, Carolina, Johanne, Henry

Bottom Row Left to Right
August, Kristin, Ida, **Emil**, Carl

Carl and Kristin had eight children who immigrated to America from Germany. Carl Heinrich Friederich Sprehn was born in Oldenburg, Germany circa 1850 and Kristin Henriette Brandovitz was born in 1858. My grandfather (Dad's father) was Emil Herman Friederich Sprehn and he is the little boy standing by Carl in the photo above.

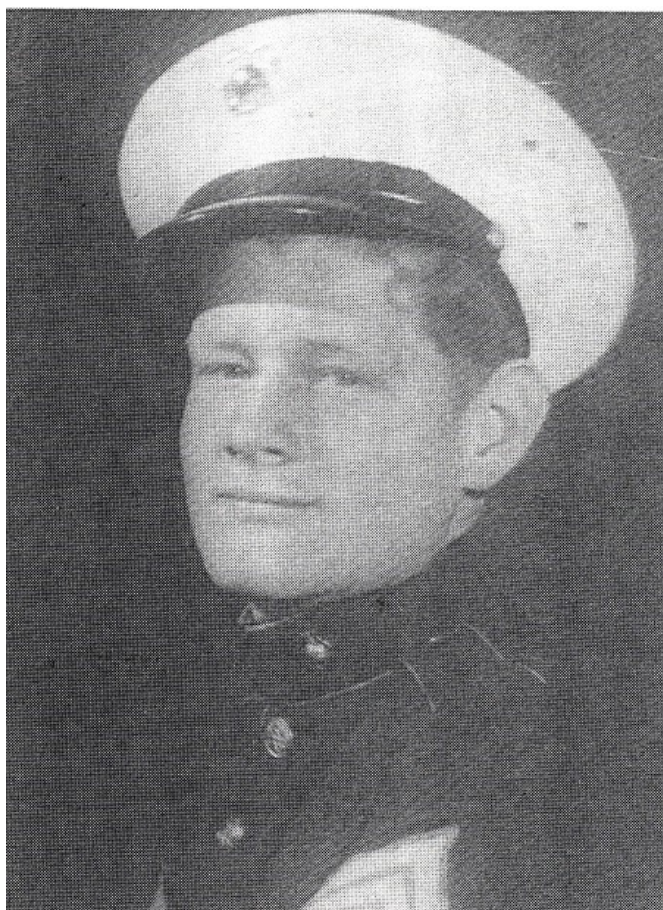
I have not been able to discover who the parents were for either Carl or Kristin. Carl and Kristin's oldest daughter was Anna and it appears that she and her husband (Nels Petersen) immigrated to America circa 1897. And, it also appears that the rest of the family immigrated to America circa 1905.



Jessie and Emil with children Fern and Dick



Grandpa Emil and Shadrack



Wendell Brookie Sprehn (Dad's twin brother)



Virginia and Jimmy Springer with Dennis



Fern and Jack Gentle (Fern being Dad's oldest sister)



Dad's brother Richard "Dick" Sprehn



“The Twins”

Wendell Brookie Sprehn (left) and Robert Emil Sprehn (right)



“The Twins”



Jessie Sprehn with Fern Dick and Ginny



Back row: Jessie, Emil and Fern
Front row: Ginny and "The Twins"



Dad at Marine Corps Camp Lejeune (before going overseas)



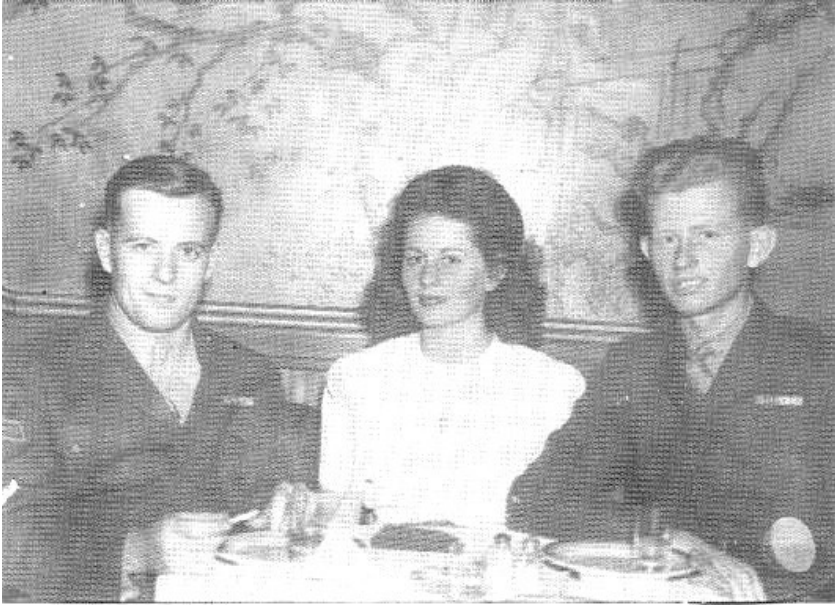
Dad in Okinawa (1945)



Dad in Okinawa (1945)



Dad in Okinawa (1945)



Left to Right: Sargeant Duffy, Virginia Sprehn, Robert Sprehn



Mom and Dad – married Oct 1, 1946



Mom and Dad (Circa 1946) Location: unknown



Taken at Grandma's & Grandpa's in Pasadena, CA (Circa 1964)



Dad with Jeff and Lylan (1951)



Back row: Jeff Sprehn and Dennis Springer
Front row: Lylan Sprehn, Cathy Springer and unknown



Left to Right

Dad, Al Wilson, Phylis Wilson, Aunt Tine, Viola Heasley
Paul Heasley and Mom



Back row: Jeff who appears bored

Middle row: Dad and Mom

Front row: Lylan, Bobbi and Daryl



Back row: Jeff (again appearing bored)

Middle row: Lylan and Mom

Front row: Bobbi and Daryl



Jimmy and Ginny Springer and Dad
(No. Jimmy is ***not*** wearing a funny hat! 😊)



Dad (1968?)



The whole Clan

Top row: Jeff (smiling this time)

Middle row: Bobbi, Mom, Dad and Lylan

Front row: Daryl



“Bob, Carol, Ted and Alice”
(**Not true.** This was the name of a movie in the 60’s)

Al Wilson, Phylis Wilson, Mom and Dad



On the way to their Alaska Cruise in 1995



Taken during a dinner cruise in Seattle (Year unknown)
Mom helping Dad talk faster



Dad and Bobbi at Bobbi's wedding in Redondo Beach
August 1, 1993



Mom and Dad at Bobbi's wedding in Redondo Beach
August 1, 1993



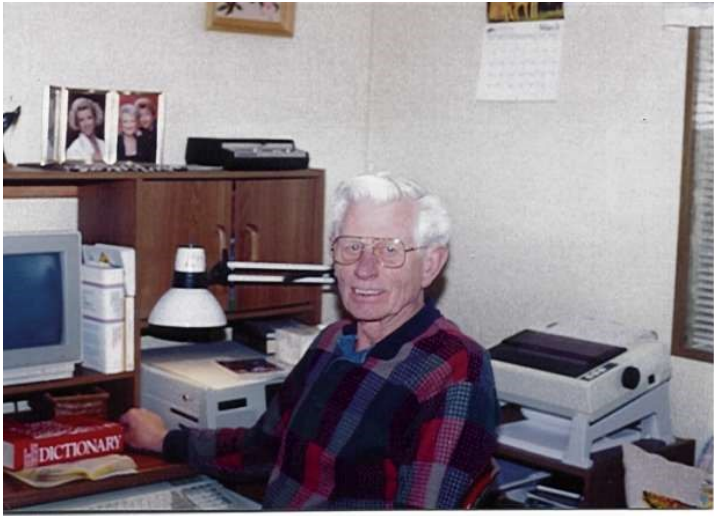
Dad and Mom at Bobbi's wedding in Redondo Beach
August 1, 1993



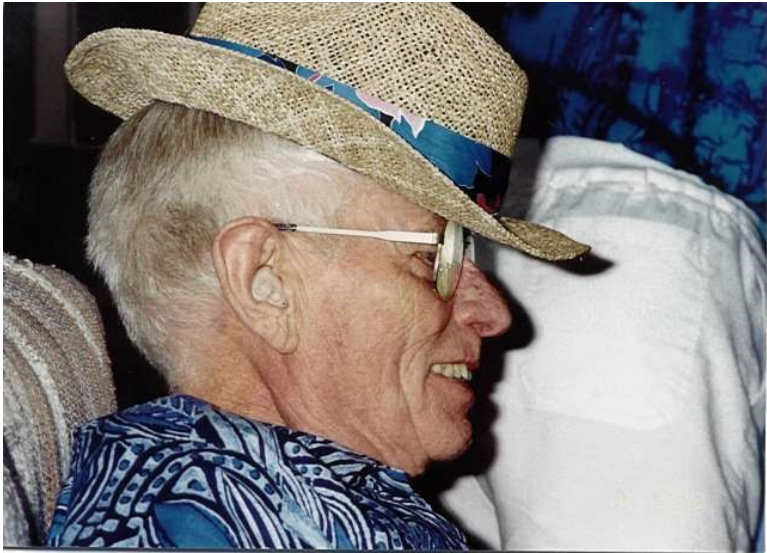
Back row: Daryl and Ginny
Front row: Bobbi, Bryan, Dad, Mom, Rebecca, Lylan, Logon



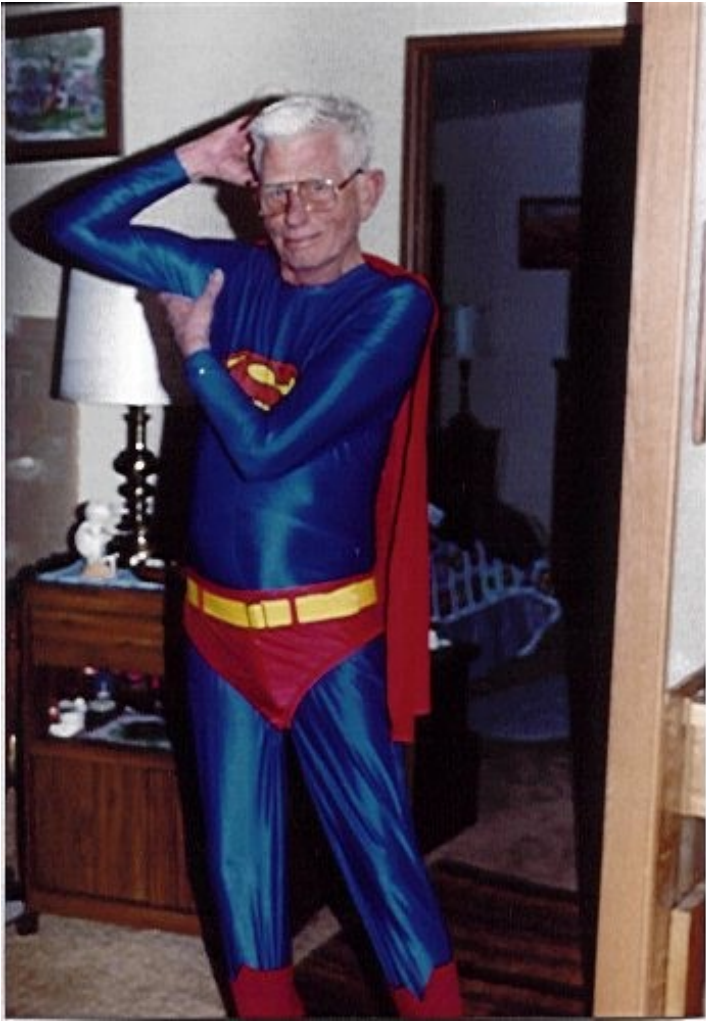
Mom & Dad at Daryl and Julie's Wedding
June 11, 1988 at SeaTac, WA



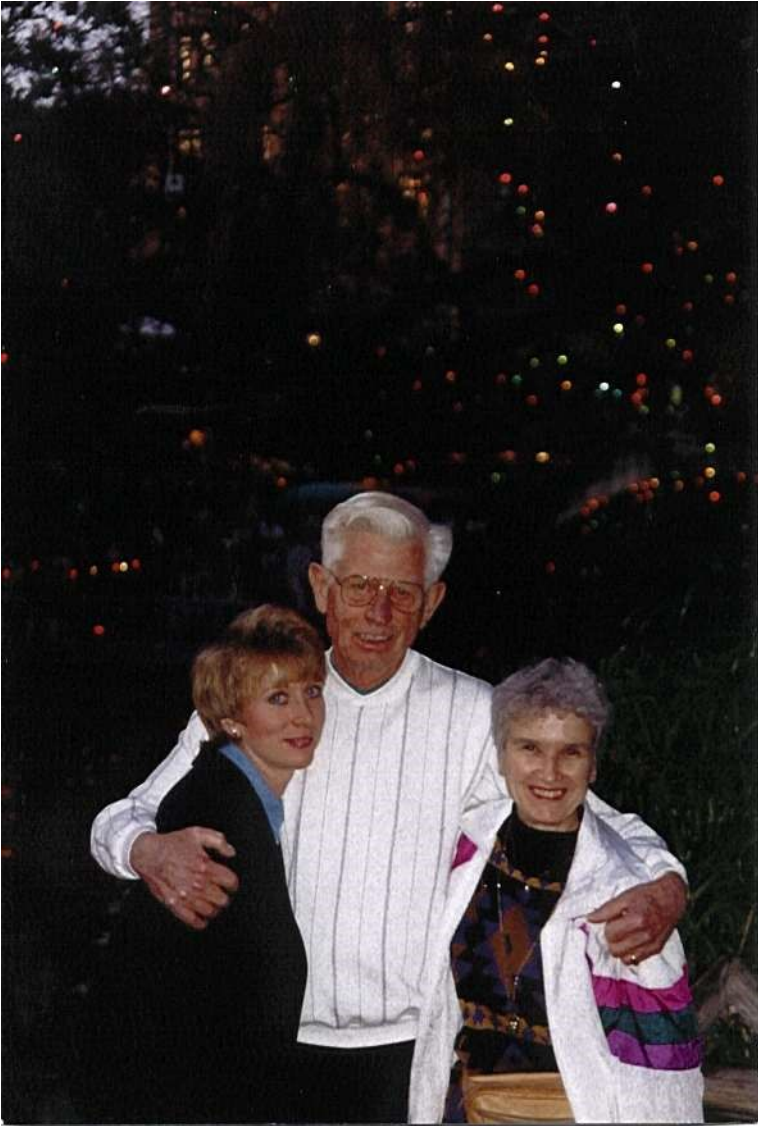
Dad did all of his writings on an old IBM XT Computer and
Dot Matrix printer that I had given them



Dad wearing his Paniolo hat (taken during their trip to Hawaii)
(Paniolo being the Hawaiian word for "Cowboy")



Dad in his famous Superman Outfit before his operation to remove one of his kidneys



Good times in San Antonio
Bobbi, Dad and Mom (Circa 1994)



More good times in San Antonio
Dad , Mom, Bobbi and Brian (Circa 1994)



Sprehns and Browns

Back row: Dick Sprehn, Jack Gentle, Robert Sprehn

Middle Row: Fern Gentle, Aunt Kathleen Brown,
Ginny Springer, Lilan Sprehn

Front row: Aunt Kate



“The Explorers”

Mom and Dad - 1994 - They surely did enjoy RV'ing
all those years!



30th Wedding Anniversary Photo



Ginny, Dad and Mom



Mom & Dad sharing cake at their 50th Wedding Anniversary party

PART III- Dad's writings

“Lucky Nickel”

"At the old baaall game" warbled from the throats of twenty-two thousand baseball fans, as the bottom half stretch of the seventh inning and the old familiar refrain wafted away. "And now", the public address system blared, "ladies and gentlemen, get out your lucky ticket stubs. You all know, this is the season ending drawing for a fabulous all-expense, glorious two week vacation for two in Hawaii. The lucky numbers must be verified at the ticket office in thirty minutes. And now, here comes the winning numbers ... and the first number is".

Nick knew he would win. He always did. But he had confidence in his proficiency of deception, and no one but he would know he had the winning ticket. He joined with his friends in spontaneous moans of disappointment, as they showered each other with tiny pieces of their losing tickets. Besides, they will call new numbers soon, and somebody would win, maybe even one of his friends.

His memories. wandering back through the years, dimly focused on his freshman year's resolution to try out for the University's baseball team. Nick had deliberated long and hard about his baseball participation and was satisfied that luck couldn't present any appreciable problem. It was with great anticipation that Nick excitedly turned out for the team, remembering his high school coach's encouragement to "Go for it, Nick!". Success was practically immediate. The thrill of competition on the college level, and total acceptance by even the older seasoned players provided an exhilarating reality of barely hoped-for dreams.

A sharp elbow in his ribs from his friend next to him abruptly brought him back to the game, to see the hitter crack a sharp single through the hole, eluding the shortstop's glove by a fraction of an inch. Involuntarily Nick smiled, and unbidden again, his own short two season Collegiate baseball career paraded through his memory. He hadn't possessed great long ball power, but his phenomenal .622

NCAA batting average would never be challenged, and he knew this would always trouble him. "Lucky Nickel", they had tagged him. His average was built on singles down the lines, through the holes, and bloopers chopping in at the outfielder's feet. Perfectly placed bunts were a "Luck Nickel" specialty. When he was "defensed" by bringing in the outfield to cut-off the bloopers, he had just enough power to drop the ball barely over their heads.

The "Lucky Nickel" critics who loudly proclaimed he had more luck than talent and skills, were scoffed at by his team and the professional scouts who relentlessly pursued his career. They wanted this "Lucky Nickel" on a contract and weren't concerned about the luck vs. talent controversy.

But Nick knew his critics were right and his baseball glory days were over. He no longer could deny the agonizing truth he had fought to ignore, and resignedly recognized the familiar pain of his oppressive luck. Luck really was his greatest asset as a ballplayer. How he had loved the game!

At the close of his second year, and amid much publicity and thousands of probing questions, he offered few satisfactory answers- he simply walked away from baseball. Now fifteen years later, his brief sojourn in the glaring spotlight of national publicity had faded to obscurity. He was enjoying, after some earlier apprehension, his first baseball game since then, even if it was only as a fan. His friends, fellow engineering employees at P. I., knew nothing of his "Lucky Nickel" past, nor, he hoped, would they.

The inning was over, he suddenly realized, and he glanced quickly at the scoreboard to confirm that the score hadn't changed. Memories seemed to be nudging and flooding aside the realities of the game. No one had called him "Lucky Nickel" for fifteen years, and with a degree of sarcasm, he thought the nickname should have started seven days after his birth. At that time, it was discovered he was the only baby to escape a devastating virus that swept through the hospital nursery. Those who hadn't died, suffered debilitating long term problems.

He fell out of his crib at age two on pillows accidentally kicked there moments before by his mother, who was cleaning his room. Childhood diseases touched him just enough to provide lifelong immunity. He never got colds, teeth came in straight and strong without any fuss, and after the first week, he slept twelve hours straight every night. The pediatrician told his parents at age four that he had never seen a child so perfect and healthy, and they were certainly lucky. When he was five and on an excursion to the zoo with his aunt and her two children, their car was demolished by another car crossing over the double center line. He escaped without a scratch, but the others were seriously injured, and one child was killed.

All these and many other similar incidents were slowly leading his parents to believe that their son was firmly ensconced within the benevolent arms of an angel.

But it was more than just a charmed life. The state lottery weekly drawing on TV provided their first real clue. The balls were shot out of a Keno machine and each number appeared on the screen. Nick, lying on his stomach with his head in his hands, called out each number a split second before that number was revealed to the vast TV audience. Nick was six. Although his parents were greatly amused and startled by the coincidence, they were genuinely astonished and somewhat disturbed when Nick repeated this performance week after week.

Nick's parents numbered individual slips of paper from one to ten and put the folded slips in a basket. Nick would unfailingly identify the number as it was withdrawn from the basket. They asked him to pick out a particular number, and he repeatedly did so without a miss. Nick was asked to pick a prearranged number from one to one hundred, and then one to one thousand. Never once was he wrong, not once. They spread a handful of toothpicks on a table. He gave them a quick glance and then they covered them with a cloth. His total count was always correct.

They taught him many games of chance, keeping the games a time of family fun and emphasizing good sportsmanship. His phenomenal luck made him a constant winner in all the newly taught

card games. They strove to teach him that winning was great, but not nearly as wonderful as just having a good time with his friends and family. Anxiety and worry, which they hid from Nick, created an atmosphere of speculation of what course of action they could possibly pursue. Was there some clairvoyance?

At age 8, Nick would no longer play any games requiring the spin of a wheel, the throw of a dice, or the turn of a card with the other kids. He never lost, and the other kids said he was too lucky anyway. Knowing he always would win destroyed the thrill of competition, and he complained that the games were too boring.

His school teachers realized Nick was somehow different. They quickly learned that true-false and multiple choice tests were much too easy for him. After consultation with Nick's parents, who didn't confide Nick's "gift", they developed new challenges where Nick needed to employ reasoning, logic, and problem solving that didn't involve luck or chance. At this Nick was well above average, but not brilliant, and he was noticeably happier when confronted with these challenges.

By age nine, Nick's parents reached some conclusions which they hoped would provide the character building blocks necessary to help Nick live with his gift - luck, or whatever it was. The responses from the professionals when tentatively questioned by Nick's parents was disbelief and derision, and they now were convinced not to seek outside help. They would have to do it themselves.

They calmly, but persistently, taught Nick that using his luck fairly, honestly, and with honor was his responsibility and privilege. To use his luck for personal gain, financial or otherwise, was surely morally wrong and was to be steadfastly avoided. They admitted he would probably be sorely tempted many times to use his luck, and they knew it wouldn't be easy. They instructed Nick that he must strive to excel and work hard with his own developing talents, and only in this way would he know integrity and the satisfaction of self generated achievements without the advantages of luck.

Nick's parents privately acknowledged that by utilizing Nick's luck, they could be millionaires many times over. They recognized the dangerous implications of using Nick's unique and sensational luck and correctly assessed that his luck could destroy them all. They began to monitor his friends and activities with feverish devotion, hovering about him in constant surveillance to protect him from those predators who might tempt Nick into unethical opportunities to capitalize on his luck. They tried to stay in the background and guide instead of direct.

Very seldom would Nick play any games of chance with his friends, which gave him no pleasure anyway, and increasingly he was found outside, intensely involved in every kind of sport. By age eleven, he was playing in all the little leagues of football, baseball and basketball, and his parents were enthusiastic supporters.

At age fifteen, Nick's parents gradually recognized the fruits of their labors, for Nick was now firmly endowed with the principles of shunting aside his luck. He was vigilantly pursuing his future with his own better-than-average intellect and character enriching tools so thoroughly instilled by his parents. He had found luck too often intruded on his own hard work, and like the golfer whose tee shot careened off trees, rocks and the flag to drop in the hole, he wanted to just do it all by himself.

His high school graduation brought him academic honors of a 3.4 grade average. He was a 3 letterman in three sports, but baseball was his true love. The diversity of his skills was exemplified by being captain of the debating team, chess champion, and student body president.

As a freshman in college, he felt duty bound to explain his unique ability to get perfect scores on tests based on choice or chance. They soon learned that this was indeed true, and were challenged to provide new, innovative methods to measure his academic progress. This required a dedication to problem solving and study not needed by most students, but for Nick this accelerated his accumulation of academic skills greatly.

After his disappointments in his baseball career, he decided to concentrate his energies to studies in engineering and prayed that math, physics and the sciences were learned skills, not dependent on the subjective elements of luck. He graduated "cum laude" with a two year scholarship and a choice of several graduate schools.

He had been attracted to prosthesis because one of his friends had lost a leg in a hang gliding accident while he was receiving instructions for his first flight. He was very impressed by the workmanship, materials, and skills that produced his friend's new leg, but could also easily determine where improvements could be made.

He eagerly suggested that between them they could reshape the leg here and there and alter the knee joint slightly to increase mobility and lessen the "sea-going swagger" so common to most artificial limbs. His friend was delighted with the results and eventually brought Nick to the training and rehabilitation center for people learning to live with the restrictions of artificial limbs. It was there he met Jack Sayre who helped mold his newly acquired interest in prosthesis.

Jack Sayre was frequently at the center, as his company sponsored the clinic. As president of Prosthesis International, he spent several days a week working with the amputees and their new limbs. This day, the first to see him were Nick and his friend, and after carefully examining the newly remodeled leg, he reluctantly had to point out the potential dangers of the changes they had made. However, he was adamant in his praise of their workmanship and fresh ideas and invited Nick to join him in making his rounds.

Nick became a regular visitor to the clinic and, encouraged by Jack Sayre, sought a graduate school that would most help him in the future of prosthesis, his now chosen career. He was promised a position at P. I. after his masters degree and Jack also promised that with the skills and talents Nick possessed, he and the company would prosper.

Now, many years later and holding a position of excellence and leadership among his prosthesis engineering peers, he had watched

this baseball game in the spirit of one finding a lost love. Luck hadn't adversely affected his career at P. I., but he had become very adept at avoiding any situation where chance might play a part.

Nick was abruptly brought to reality again by a rather insistent voice urging that they should leave right away to avoid the ever present traffic jam just beginning to gather momentum. Even though the game was in the tenth inning, he quickly nodded his assent and they rapidly moved out to the parking lot. No sooner had they reached the car and turned on the radio, when an enormous roar erupted from the stadium, signaling a win for their home team.

Their chagrin at just missing the final run of the game was at once tempered by the necessity of a two-hour drive home and more, unless they left immediately.

After the welcome respite at the ball game, the next day found Nick again facing the two dilemmas that had been plaguing him for several months. Jack Sayre had confided to Nick that he wished for him to succeed him as president of P. I., and soon. But Nick was questioning his own capabilities as an administrative executive and asked himself if he would really like leaving the creative work for a desk.

However, there was a much larger problem that belabored him incessantly. P. I., as the leading manufacturer of prosthesis in the world, received many thousands of requests to help provide equipment and prosthesis for the victims, especially children, of the constant wars. These requests for prosthesis for arms and legs blown off during these wars were rapidly reaching the limits of their benevolence. From South Africa, South America, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine and other torn countries, the innocents were being maimed daily. Even a wooden cane was more than they could afford. Some aid was provided by governments, the U. N., worldwide charitable organizations, and of course, a disproportionate amount from P. I., but it wasn't nearly enough, not nearly.

As the official spokesman for this cause, Nick was greatly disturbed and frustrated by the indifference demonstrated by most of

the world, and in desperation, considered the feasibility of the advantages his old nemesis "luck" might bring to help build a financial structure for a prosthesis foundation.

After all, he never once used the gift of his luck for personal gain, and the thought of doing so was thoroughly repugnant. But wasn't this a justifiable opportunity to use it? And it wasn't for himself. This question surfaced again and again, begging for an affirmative answer. Why not use it? This thought seemed to be forever present and threatened to possess him. But where would he start? He knew nothing of gambling. But what was there to know? He always won anyway.

Deciding on a precautionary course of action, he would play the stock market for a month with an imaginary \$100,000, watching the papers and moving the stock around according to what his "luck" advised. He would buy a state lottery ticket for this Saturday's drawing reported to be 14 million. He arranged his imaginary \$100,000 into volatile stocks, noting the prices and quantities on Thursday. On Friday, he bought his state lottery ticket, and on an impulse, flew to Las Vegas with \$5,000 dollars of his own money. He would increase that to \$100,000 by the weekend. Just how he would legally and formerly start the Foundation with his bonanza, he would worry about later.

But "Lucky Nickel" disappeared completely in Las Vegas. He lost \$2,000 at roulette in twenty minutes. Dazed, he stumbled over to a carrousel of dollar machines and lost another \$2,000 without ever winning a single dollar. The last \$1,000 flew away on the hoofs of race horses who failed to win, place or show. He flew back home Saturday, spending the flight time contemplating the disbelief of losing and searching for answers. Saturday night found him glued to the TV screen, waiting for his numbers of 9-14-27-31-32-39 to be displayed and prove him a winner of 14 million. There was additional horror as his ticket had not even one correct number. In total shock, he sat staring at the screen, enveloped in a black vacuum of space.

Hours later, with stiffness and cramps from sitting with every muscle tensed, and every nerve stretched taut, he was forced to get up

and move around. He walked into the kitchen and made a pot of coffee, dumping the old coffee grounds and his torn-up lotto ticket in the garbage grinder, wondering if his life was going down the drain also. He wandered aimlessly from room to room, refilling his cup on trips through the kitchen. By the third pot of coffee, as dawn was breaking, he was watching the street for the paper boy and was out the front door waiting when he first saw the bicycle down the street.

He was sweating profusely as he ripped the paper open to the financial section. His already growing fears were immensely magnified when he realized that his imaginary \$100,000 had already lost a sizable amount since Friday morning.

There no longer was any question. Luck was an illusion of his youth - or was it? Suddenly he realized he was talking out loud and gesturing wildly, but he didn't care. "In all the years I had all this luck, I never really used it. I never tested it. I never tried to make any money from it. I took it for granted that I could make lots of money, but it wasn't right. Not right at all! They were just games I played with my parents. I knew I could win any time, didn't I? Maybe I could have stayed with baseball after all, and maybe luck hadn't played any part of my fantastic batting average. But no more "Lucky Nickel". I know now it's gone forever. Did I ever really have it?"

"I gotta call Mom right now." Dialing her number, he struggled to compose himself to talk normally. After exchanging greetings and other small talk, he suddenly chuckled and said, "Mom, think of a number from one to ten."

After a momentary silence, she said, "All right, but ..." "Just do it, Mom," he interrupted, laughing. "Well, OK I've got it." she said. "It's eight, isn't it? The number is eight." he almost yelled. "Well, no Nick it was four. What's this all about anyway?" she answered. "Oh, it's nothing Mom, really. Nothing. Just fooling around. I've got to go Mom. I'll talk to you later and explain. OK?" Hurriedly, he hung up.

This was the clincher, and the truth was glaringly self-evident. He couldn't even pick a number from one to ten, and he remembered when he could pick one out of a thousand. "I've really never used it

since I was a kid; will I miss not having luck?" he questioned. Intuitively, but surprisingly, he knew the answer was no. "No, not at all; I won't miss any of it!"

Quietly, a purifying exorcism of "Lucky Nickel" gradually lifted him to exotic heights of tranquility he had seldom before experienced. He was able to breathe deeply for the first time since betting that first dollar in Las Vegas, and his euphoric feeling of peace and grace, although strangely foreign, would fortify his resolution of irrevocable change. He instinctively knew he had been living with a terrible abomination, and the release had at least set him free. "Lucky Nickel" died at this moment, but "Nick" was resurrected.

This same sense of well being was reassuring him that the legitimate methods to finance the Prosthesis Foundation would surface, and he felt new strength to redouble his efforts toward this goal. He felt a confidence and determination that promised unqualified and complete success.

He felt exhilarated by these new revelations and although deeply engrossed in thought, the intense strain and sleeplessness since Friday night insisted he get some much needed sleep. Stretching out on the couch, he was instantly and peaceably asleep.

The TV was still broadcasting this Sunday morning news, and the screen created patterns of dancing lights around his eyes, but sleep had completely captured every ounce of his being. "The State apologizes for this freak computer error", the announcer was saying, "but the persons, if any, who had the numbers that were announced at the drawing last night will be given a \$10,000 consolation prize. The real 14 million dollar winning numbers are 9-14-27-31-32-39. The lottery commission has already reported that one ticket with those numbers was issued last Friday. Congratulations to the winner!"

“Retraining”

The stated goal of this mission is to retrain Lilan to desist, refrain, quit and stop walking, running or otherwise moving behind Bob during those few minutes he is engaged in brushing his teeth. This hygienic cleansing activity consumes 5 minutes daily, 2 ½ minutes in the morning and 2 ½ minutes, approximately, before retiring.

Since there are 1440 minutes in a 24 hour period, it is reasonable to assume that left 1335 minutes when Bob was not brushing his teeth. She could then, of course, utilize any portion of these 1335 remaining minutes to visit this same bathroom in any fashion and for whatever purpose she chooses.

Apparently, the triggering mechanism is unaccountably the squeezing of toothpaste onto a toothbrush. This action is either heard or sensed by Lilan, even if she is at the furthest reaches of the house, and this inexplicably provokes this bizarre compulsion to visit the bathroom - immediately. She seldom, if ever, uses the toi-toi, but simply straightens a towel or two, or perhaps moves a bottle of shampoo from one place to another. Thus, this retraining mission.

The training program is really a direct result of Bob’s vehement insistence that he not be forced to ingest any more toothbrushes. He has eaten 7 to this date, one crosswise, and he rationally considers this number to be adequate for the remainder of his life. This is very disconcerting and uncomfortable indeed, and is not highly recommended. Toothbrushes are neither tasty or easily digestible and their nutritional value is somewhat questionable at best.

The following is a fairly accurate description of the typical action during a 2 ½ minute tooth cleaning period:

1. Toothbrusher Bob squeezes toothpaste on toothbrush.

2. Lilan immediately rushes to bathroom

3. Toothbrusher Bob leans over the basin, brushing his teeth, and a portion of his anatomy protrudes obliquely and somewhat horizontally from his waist, blocking access to those parts of the bathroom that lie beyond. (It is this bathroom area that Lilan unexplainably wishes immediately to visit.)

4. To get by Toothbrusher Bob, she quite naturally must move his posterior to a position that allows her passage and in a few seconds repeats this action again to exit.

5. It is this unexpected movement of that portion of his anatomy that causes Bob's toothbrush to suddenly take a dive, and often toothbrush, hand and arm, all the way to his elbow, momentarily disappear down the gullet.

Her record for these trips behind Toothbrusher Bob is 79 times during the 5 minutes of toothbrushing in one day. Admittedly, this is well above the average of 27 times.

It is recognized by the professionals and guru's of psychiatry, that this fetishism or compulsive behavior seldom is dangerous, nor should the affected be forcibly restrained or incarcerated. Complete recovery, happily, is guaranteed by this compassionate retraining program emphasizing the 1335 minutes she may utilize for any various purposes at her discretion. Some researchers have suggested this problem possibly may be of genetic origin, but complete scientific results are as yet unavailable.

Our hopes are to reduce Lilan's bathroom incursions by 50% the first month and tapering off to total abstinence in 6 months.

Tough, I know! When one is dedicated as she is, we are very optimistic that this serious malady may be finally brushed away!

“My God”

My God is in a neutral corner, motor idling and ready to mobile. He the master of ubiquity, and instantaneous response. Even when He's out on a call somewhere, He is still available. I have absolute confidence He will be there-always-like a rock. He waits patiently until an impending disaster, or conversely, a joyous celebration, perceived or otherwise, elicits my urgent plea for help.

Trouble is, sometimes He's a little fussy about helping out. Like getting dressed this morning, one of my socks came up missing. (I had inadvertently kicked it under a towel) "Good God", I said, "now where in hell is my other sock." True to form, He offered not a hint of assistance, leaving me little choice but to search out the missing sock on my own. And that's okay, I'm used to it.

A phone call from doctor Mc Clure later that morning delivered absolutely wonderful great news: I needn't be a candidate for radiation. Immensely grateful, I breathed, "thank God for that. Thanks God, ole buddy!" I'd blurted out the words before even thinking about it.

Now actually, I can't say for sure if He even had the slightest clue about my bladder fiasco or the subsequent possible need for radiation. I'm sure He did, but I couldn't prove it. But without hesitation I gave him the benefit of the doubt and all the credit too. Glad to. It's not a hundred per-cent given, but I think He and I go back a long way. As Lilan was driving home from Seattle Monday night, a car with two careless yackity-yak women on her left, swerved suddenly over to our lane. Lilan alertly was able to find space between two cars in the lane on our right and moved over just in time. "Oh my God oh no," was my instant first reaction. Seconds later, exhaling gratefully, "well thank God Lilan, you found room to move over," was my automatic second. References to Him were spontaneous and without conscious

thought. I don't know if He provided that space for her to move over, or if it was simply the luck of the draw. But He was there in our corner, saw it happen, so why not give Him the credit? I would have liked to shake His hand and buy Him a beer.

It seems reasonable that talking to God, (Allah, Buddha, WhoWhat, Someone, etc) in times of stress, emergencies, etc, is a probable universal conditioned societal reflex. Perhaps akin to having an alter-ego perpetually available in our hip pocket. A Someone who listens to our asinine complaints, as well as share in most glorious, conceivably even spiritual, moments.

Substitution of the word "He" for God provides a commonality that we are familiar with. However "He" could be a She, an It, the Boss, or possibly even a Who-What. Doesn't seem important to me one way or the other.

I cannot presume to define Him, and any ragged attempts to do so, are probably deceitful efforts to manufacture Him to my own narrow specifications. I considered such an exercise would have been laughingly ludicrous. Nevertheless, if pressed, words such as unconquerable, ubiquitous, comforting, love, forgiving, compassionate, healer, and an omniscient presence of spirituality, might be an acceptable way to start.

With the exception of several years in the distant past, when I struggled to wear the coveted (?) mantle of Christianity, I rarely spent any time or effort thinking about God.

Christianity was an ill fitting garment. I fought to remodel it and persuade it to hang a bit more comfortable. It seemed so stiff and pretentious. A few times I felt success was within grasp, but invariably this faint glimpse of success quickly evaporated into myth and hypocrisy. I became robotic in mouthing Christian platitudes and doctrines, struggling to locate a foothold to anchor my beliefs in the fundamental tenets of their faith.

I regularly caught myself with head unbowed, eyes open, and mind wondering what was for lunch during congregation prayers and morning worship services. Inevitably the dishonesty of this constant posturing and charades in order to wear this desirable cloak of Christianity became an impossible burden. I could never locate a Christian suit my size. What was unsettling, was the realization I had known it was an impossible fit from the beginning, but stubbornly determined to try it on anyway.

There were varying degrees of regret, one of which was diminishing opportunities to rub elbows with a few truly wonderful human beings. They are missed yet today. I believe they were, and undoubtedly still are, true sincere dedicated ambassadors for Christianity. They quietly demonstrated their devotion to their unshakable Christian beliefs, not by preaching, but by the example of their lives. To those I may have hurt or who feel betrayed by my zealous bigotry, I can only offer my profound apologies. If anyone could understand, it certainly would be them.

It was impossible to deny the powerful injections of benevolent fresh air, offering unlimited horizons—labeled freedom and honesty--that ultimately transcended all other concerns. Shedding the Christian designation was for me a liberating experience; the weight of pretense vanished. I felt like I had just got out of Jail and would collect two hundred bucks when I passed go.

There was a time when we felt our children should be exposed to a variety of organized religions. Enough so they could be masters of their own decisions, pick and choose, or throw them all out, and most importantly, without parental prejudices. Perhaps the bright side of our failure to achieve this goal, is that we failed. More than likely, the kids were simply smarter.

The number of hate organizations that bastardize the concepts of Christianity and promote their debauched brand of "love thy neighbor" is astounding, and terribly frightening. Groups such as the KKK, Nazis, right wing conservatives, born againers, and white separatists, to name but a few, live among us everywhere. These

extremists loudly espouse their destructive murderous agendas, swearing they are sanctified by God, and that Christ leads them by the hand. Shouting, "it is God's will," they beat a black man nearly to death, while

waving high the banner of Christianity. It shouldn't be surprising that many Christians would feel a deep antipathy to any group that so horribly abuse the name of their faith. The world's religions all share this horrific problem from splinter extremist groups, and as far as I know, it has been forever thus.

My God doesn't ask that I kneel, bow down, desecrate my physical body, or crawl into a closet and spill my darkest secrets to some guy I can't even see. He never tells me what drum beat to follow. In fact, He doesn't say one word, but I I know He listens attentively to all my petty stupid bitches, moans, and pleas for assistance, whether justified or otherwise. I can tell Him anything, the majority of which, He probably wished I would keep to myself. I've told Him I would gladly give Him a willing friendly ear to some of His problems. However, He hasn't once asked me for one solitary thing, not even a Big Mac.

He never flaunts His will. Most all of life's choices are piled high, and the decisions to grab one or more and run with them are mine. If my choices are stupid or harmful He may disapprove, but He never imposes His will. He never says, "thou shalt not!" After all, I'm the guy who will take it on the chin. If He is charting a course for my life through His will He certainly conceals it well. I don't feel like a puppet on a string whose every move is pre-ordained by some vague mystical plan.

He is not a shouting demanding fist pounding vengeful God, never boils over with wrath and punishment. He never threatens me with Hell, although He knows I've said "God damn it all", and worse, countless times. He knows I've said many despicable things and have participated in despicable shameful acts. He knows all my secrets--everything. It doesn't bother me that I don't know or care what He looks like.

Guess He's never given up on me, even though there is plenty of evidence to do so. I'm certainly not ready to give up on Him.

God only knows why He still puts up with me.

You'll have to excuse me now, there's a couple of things I have to take up with Him.

“Letter to Barbara Kingsolver”

October 18, 1997

To: Barbara Kingsolver,
c/o HarpersCollins Publishers, Inc.
10 East 53rd Street
New York, NY 10022

Re: High Tide in Tucson

Thanks to you and my thoughtful daughters for sending me your books, I followed the trail from bean trees to heavenly pigs to animal dreams, and consider myself extremely fortunate to have made the journey. Having recently read "High Tide in Tucson"—twice, and many of the essays three times or more, I now have a decided amity for crabby hermits; take good care of Buster.

Please accept my sincere appreciation and slack-jawed awe for your work. Your arsenal of linguistic nimbleness cuts right to the mark, with color, clarity, compassion, insight and humor. I could waste a sizable chunk of tree in describing parts of your essays that provoked mutterings of ‘whoa there, I gotta look at this again,’ as well as ‘right on, yeah, exactly!’. No boring disconnected rhetoric’s here, nary a smidgen.

But the essay, "In the Belly of the Beast", ripped the high tide into a tidal wave. Although I’ve read accounts from other visitors to the memorials at Hiroshima, your poignant details of the terrible simplicity depicted in the midst of all that horror, gave vent to deeply rooted troubled and probably nearly incurable ambiguous feelings.

Under the umbrella of privacy—having my head buried between the book covers—this seventy-three year old, not so surprisingly, had tears in his eyes. How could I not?

In midyear 1945, I was one of six Marines manning an isolated 40mm anti-aircraft gun position on Okinawa. Communication with our Command consisted of weekly visits from a Company Headquarters Jeep driver with a weeks supply of "C" rations, mail if any, and by far, most importantly, the latest scuttlebutt.

Scuttlebutt was—probably still is—the folklore of the service. Its information, enigmatically accurate, regularly proved more reliable than the "official" word. Before that horrifying morning of August 6, the scuttlebutt, whether it was banded about in feigned bravado, or more commonly, in pragmatic resignation, never varied from its content: that we, the Marines presently on Okinawa, would certainly be among the first invasion forces to set foot on Japanese soil. It was an uncompromising absolute given.

Invariably, during late night and early morning duty watches, the talk would focus on the coming invasion. At this stage of the war, scuttlebutt consistently proved detailed information of the terrible suffering and cruelty the Americans, British, and Australian prisoners had received at the hands of the Japanese in the Philippines, Singapore, China, Burma, Shanghai, etc. Some of us had witnessed the fanaticism of the Japanese Kamikaze suicide planes. Others had seen the gruesome evidence of Japanese throwing themselves and their women and children off high cliffs rather than surrender. The horrendous fighting at Tarawa, Guadalcanal, Iwo, here on Okinawa, etc., just added further proof that the Japanese would fight to the death for their Emperor. Harboring few illusions, this was simply accepted as fact, and only rarely was a central topic of conversation.

Expecting orders to stand down for deployment, and begin training for the assault, the word the war was over initially bred utter disbelief; the concept was nearly impossible to buy. There had to be a kicker in here somewhere. We joked at the absurdity, and cursed at some unknown's stupid sense of bizarre humor. Not until that night did we really buy it.

That night, off in a distance, a few weapons began slowly and sporadically to illuminate the sky with tracers. Eventually this flagrant

act of unauthorized firing grew to a crescendo of fireworks, that soon jubilantly included our own 40mm. From our vantage point, it looked as if the sky was criss-crossed with patterns of tracers from every compass point. This deliberate act of island wide celebration (read disobedience) was the clincher. We knew then; we were going home. No one knew a thing about an atomic bomb.

Months bled into years, before the real Hiroshima horror began a painful personal invasion, demanding recognition. I was desperate to somehow comprehend the contrast of my joyful celebration that August night on Okinawa, and the horrible terror of that same night in Hiroshima—incompatible, yet inseparable, and inexorably close to the surface.

Fifty-one years ago I married my dreamboat. We have four wonderful beautiful children. My family is alive, healthy and happy. If there had been an invasion, my children would quite likely not be here. "Ochita-chan" is not here, and my sorrow is profound. "How much grief," you ask, "can one bear?" I don't know, but I ask, how much guilt can one carry?

You say, "we did it, so the story goes, to hasten the end of the war and send our soldiers home." The phrase, "so the story goes" has a cold glibness, seemingly suggesting an off-hand fable from a ghostly gnome. "Operation Downfall" (allied invasion) estimated a million American killed and wounded. The Japanese War Council estimated 100 million Japanese would die defending their country. Both estimates, even if inflated, promised the death of countless future fathers and mothers of "Ochita-chans," as well as American fathers of "Janes." I fear, as the final history of Hiroshima is written, and especially as us older guys give way to father time, the "political correct" historians will ignore the invasion that almost was.

The world could not survive the abomination of another Hiroshima, and you've got the skills and tools to keep the pressure on. As you say in Jabberwocky: "Love it and never shut up." This is one family who will be listening—and ready to add a carrot to your stone soup. Please don't shut up.

Additional thoughts by our Dad (Robert E. Sprehn) concerning the given subject:

It was difficult to hold my comments to just two pages, perhaps due in part, to the nearly universal accepted shroud of spiritual sensitivity that seems to surround Hiroshima. This is coupled with a feeling that a heretic might encounter in denouncing ancient sacred dogma.

In war no nation is completely innocent. The unbending attitude of victimhood chronicled in the Hiroshima memorials, and the complete denial of any of Japan's culpability, dilutes the greater part of its power.

The memorials display pictures of victorious Japanese soldiers marching through vanquished countries. Not seen is the world renown photograph of a burned crying Chinese babysitting among the ruins during the infamous "Rape of Nanking", the story of untold numbers of women cruelly raped and murdered, and the killing of thousands.

Where is the mention of the sneak attack and slaughter of 2,383 Americans killed, 1,842 wounded, many of whom later dies, and 950 missing at Pearl Harbor?

Where is the story of the terrible cruelty inflicted on American prisoners on a forced march to Corregidor, where if they couldn't keep up, they were bayoneted?; the brutal death of thousands of prisoners forced to build rail facilities in Burma?; the gruesome murders and torture by Japanese doctors experimenting on live patients in Manchuria? (just this year additional Japanese doctors have come forth and admitted their guilt to 'unburden themselves of their war crimes').

After Manila was declared an ‘open city’ to protect the civilian population, mostly women and children, the Japanese bombed the city relentlessly on Christmas day 1941. The world was shocked by the savage treatment of prisoners revealed when Manila was liberated in 1944. This was a nation that openly scorned the world wide accepted provisions of the Geneva convention for the humane treatment of prisoners.

Where is the mention of captive slave ‘comfort’ women from Korea for the pleasure of the Japanese soldiers?

The list goes on and on. The accounts of these events are not found in Japanese history books, nor taught to their children. It is said that 70% of the Japanese population wants the U.S. to apologize for Hiroshima.

Japan’s fanatical war ambitions were buried deep in the muck of hideous aggressive cruelty. Having said that, yes, I can’t help but still mourn—with punishing shredded emotions, for the many thousands who died so horribly that August morning in Hiroshima—my God, it’s impossible to do otherwise.

I realize the failure in adequately expressing the conflicts of this emotion; words are hopelessly weak—leave out so much. To say there must never be another Hiroshima with all the searchings of our very soul is—just words.

The memorials of Hiroshima reach me from a different perspective than those of the people of Japan; the alternative would probably have been.....

“Clean out the Refrigerator”

Periodically, Lilan will issue this frightening, spine chilling and ominous proclamation: "It's time to clean out the refrigerator."

This statement has implications that might produce immediate sweats and terror unto even the bravest and strongest of persons anywhere or, conversely, delightful anticipation of a gourmet mystery meal.

This experience is not only character building but awe inspiring in its artistry and qualifies as a requirement for sainthood.

Hidden deeply in the dark recesses of every shelf in our refrigerator are small Tupperware containers, rolled up balls of aluminum foil, many of those zippered plastic bags, small glass jars covered with plastic wrap and lumps wrapped in wax paper. These varying containers all hold leftovers of unknown content or ages and many defy description.

The moment of truth is the unveiling. Aluminum balls are unrolled, plastic bags are unzipped, Tupperware lids are popped off, glass jars are opened and the contents of wax paper lumps are revealed. Lilan stands back to survey her treasures, realizing her imagination and culinary skills are about to be severely challenged.

There are 7 lima beans, 8 green string beans, 14 peas, 4 spoonfuls of cooked carrots, corn cut off from a partial ear, $\frac{1}{4}$ of a green pepper, 1 clove of garlic and about $\frac{1}{2}$ of a small white onion. All this will compliment her entree of a $\frac{3}{4}$ slice of turkey meat load, one chicken leg, one hot dog (turkey dog) and three little pig sausages (link). Then there is the remnant of a carrot and raisin salad, four tablespoons of coleslaw and a moderate amount of lemon jello. And the last lump proved to be three radish halves, four green onions, a sprig of parsley and one small slice of red bell pepper.

Quite naturally, there is an unwritten rule that if any leftover moves by itself, it is swiftly, but regretfully, discarded.

The gleam now clearly visible in her eyes is an unfathomable expression of culinary delight, although some observers have reported that gleam more recognizable as temporary insanity.

Majestic masterpieces are often somehow a combination of these typical leftovers and occasionally contain other ingredients whose identification I couldn't and wouldn't dare venture to guess.

With heady and confident culinary expertise, Lilan proceeds to construct this gourmet mystery dinner. The entree (individually prepared) is a 2 inch slice of turkey meat loaf, topped with finely sliced chicken. This is covered with a chicken gravy spiced with small diced hot dog. The garlic has been added to the gravy and the whole entree garnished with slivers of red pepper and chopped parsley for color.

One vegetable dish is a succotash-type combination of lima beans, peas and corn with a sprinkling of chopped raw green onions on top. (The carrots were discarded after the discovery of a whitish green fuzz.) The other vegetable dish has french style cut green beans, sliced green bell peppers, onions and diced pig sausages. This dish was steamed and then garnished lightly with paprika. The radishes were cut thinly and placed artistically around the perimeter of each plate. The carrot and raisin salad have mysteriously absorbed the four tablespoons of coleslaw and crushed pineapple has been added. The lemon jello was served as dessert with a generous helping of Cool Whip.

This is irrefutable proof that frugality can ward off starvation. The only time there is cause for serious alarm is when there are leftovers from these leftovers.

"Cleaning out the refrigerator" is not to be confused with her renowned "one-dish meal" casseroles. She has rightfully gained considerable notoriety for her one-dish meals as all the kids can

enthusiastically endorse, since these dishes were their primary subsistence in their "at-home years," and I guess there is not too much wrong with them.....is there? It is without exaggeration to say most are marvelous and superb works of mouth-watering succulence without comparison. Well, I do live here, you know.

However, when her one-dish meal casserole is combined with cleaning out the refrigerator, why, prudence is often the better part of valor and a certain gamble is perhaps probable if ever you are invited to share one of these.....

er....ah.....interesting dinners.

PART IV – Carvings

“Cowboy Sheriff”



“Native American Thunderbird”



“Ozark man w/canoe over his head”



“Dog with owner”



“Ozark Old Man Hiker”



“Ozark Lady”



“Carousel Horse”



“Cowboy w/lasso, pistol & hat”



“Lotus Flower”

(with secret compartments)



“No Nets – Save the dolphins”

