

Early Remembrances

As memories fade in the start of my 83rd year, I think back to my first memory. I was four years old and we lived in a tar paper shack which my father had built when he was in an apprenticeship program in the Bremerton naval shipyard.

The shack was on the road from Harper to Port Orchard. It was somewhat ramshackle with an outhouse and banty chickens in the yard. Just west of the shack was the turnoff on Baby Doll road. The origins of the name of this road are obscure and lost to history. My first remembrance, then, was riding in the back of an ancient four door sedan with "suicide" back doors, with my sister, Nancy, a year and fourteen months older than me; taking her to kindergarten at Orchard Heights School. My mom and two year old brother, John, were riding in the front seat. He had been born in Berkeley when we lived there, as my father worked as an electrician building the cyclotron for the Manhattan Project for the atom bombs that were dropped on Japan to end the second world war. I have a letter (certificate) to my father from the secretary of the army thanking him for his work on the project.

We were forced to move back to the tar paper shack in Port Orchard when displaced from our residence in Berkeley by second world war veterans returning to the U.S.

As my sister and I bounced along the road to her kindergarten class, I somehow managed to open the car's back door and fall to the gravel shoulder of the road at about twenty-five miles per hour.

Only slightly scuffed up, I watched as the car continued down the road for at least half a mile. My sister, Nancy, must have said, "Dickie's fallen out." They returned to pick me up, but this probably led to my later abandonment issues.

Some other remembrances of Port Orchard include eating fresh crabs on the dock on Saturday morning and picking a washtub full of oysters at night on low-tide on Hood Canal, where my Dad had hooked a car battery to a headlight on a pole to illuminate the beach to pick oysters, which I still love in my eighty-third year.

We moved to Seattle when I was in Grade 2 at Horace Mann Elementary. We lived in a house across from Garfield Highschool, the alma mater of Jimi Hendrix, famous guitarist. I told my daughters that I helped Jimi with his math at Horace Mann Elementary - a spoof story my wife, Carol, and I had concocted.

My daughter, Genny, was shocked when we revealed that it was just a crazy joke story because she railed, "I told that story to all my friends!"

A couple of years later, after we moved to Seattle, my grandparents sailed the Beverly B, a forty-eight foot motor sailboat, from Ketchikan, Alaska to Seattle and tied up next to my Uncle John Selfridge's houseboat on Lake Union. He was pursuing a graduate degree in mathematics.

As a ten-year old, I had the delightful experience of getting on the boat at Everett and steering it thirty miles on Puget Sound to Seattle and through the government locks.

I remember my grandmother, Nora, baking jam-jam cookies filled with dates in the steamy galley of the sailboat.

In my forties, on a family vacation, I stopped at Baby Doll road to see the still present ramshackle tar paper shack. I had wanted to show my wife, Carol.

In my 60's, we had gone to Iowa City to attend a wood firing conference. There, I met a wood firing potter, Steve Sauer, who said he lived on Baby Doll road in Port Orchard. We agreed to

trade tea bowls and I picked up one from him about two years later when I saw that the tar paper shack had been replaced by a bunch of new tract homes.

Ironically, my sister Nancy, who said, "Dickie's fallen out..", on retirement, moved with her husband to live in Port Orchard near the still existing Orchard Heights school. In chatting with her about my definitive moment....falling out of the car,....she doesn't remember a thing about it. But I sure do!