

The history of the Jacobson/Carlock families

By Mel Jacobson/2020-21

“as a novel”

## **Book 1**

The year was 1900, the new Century had begun and many people were on the move from all over Europe. Folks were flooding America. The Jacobson's from Norway, the Campbell's from Scotland, through Northern Ireland, and the Egger's from Germany and the Carlock's from Illinois. It became Carlock, Illinois. Babies were being born. It was a new Century in the United States.

Baby Otto in Windom, MN, Baby Annis in Charleston, W.VA. The Eggers had Althea, and Mrs. Carlock gave birth to Jesse Foot.

This book is being compiled by Mel Jacobson, son of Otto and Annis Jacobson. It will be full of half truths, stories, family lore and many real life accounts. There is no yard stick of measurement as to accuracy. It is old memories of stories told over dinner and or holidays. Old pictures will appear and they are not always easy to date or validate. But, we try, we move forward to tell the tale.

I will make a pdf file, and the family members and friends will receive it on a “flash, or thumb drive”. Mary Lou Jacobson Decker is my “go to gal” for information. She is a young 92+

and has a keen mind. We two, are the last ones left of the original mob.

It is the year 2020-1. Much has happened, many have died. We use modern technology to record the story as we know that paper and pen does not last, and maybe the electronics will fade too. All we can do is hope that a few from the future will read these stories and have a clue as to where it all started.



Baby Melvin 1935, Adorable

My entire life started when these two people, pictured below were married. This is Odin and Tilly Jacobson. They are my Grandpa and Grandma. Grandpa died of the Asian flu 1918, and Grandma died a year or so later when her dress got fuel oil soaked near the kitchen stove when oil she was ignited, and she died a flaming torch running down the street. My father was 15 years old or so, and was an immediate orphan. He had an older brother and sister, both living elsewhere and he was shuffled around.



My Dad was named Otto Melvin Jacobson. His parents were dead, the town of Windom had been full of death and flu. He had no options, He jumped a train with a neighbor kid and got a job in the Black Hills of South Dakota, working in the kitchen of a Lumber camp. He was alone in the world.

The story goes that a lumberman took pity on him and they got on a train and was taken to St. Paul and was enlisted in the Marine Corps. He was tall, blond and blue eyed with no papers. He became a Marine and had an identity.

At the same time, in Huntington West Virginia, the William Campbell family had started. William and his wife Julia had seven children. My Mother was one of the last children born to that family. She was named Annis Lee Campbell. She was destined to elope and run away from home with Otto Jacobson. That was the start of our family.



Two of the pictures from my dad's early life.  
A bunch of his buddies in a marine truck.  
We think about 1922/Cuba, and  
in Minneapolis about 1928. "Dapper"

Dates and times of Dad's life including the Marines are hard to pin down. A fire destroyed all the records of my Dad and thousands of other 1<sup>st</sup> Marines. We know that he served for several years at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The unit thus became the first division in Marine Corps history, another story is about him marching in a parade for a President, and the

first marines were on training in West Virginia...Again, we think mountain training. He met my mother at the home of "Ma Johnson" a do gooder that put young women from Huntington, with nice young men. Somehow Dad got invited. One look at Annis Campbell and he was hooked.

The first Marines were slated to go to China about 1924. His enlistment was up and he had to make a choice to re-up, or elope with Annis. He chose Annis.

He actually put a ladder up to her room, she climbed down with her Sister Connie and off they went. They were married the next day by a Justice of the Peace. And with just his muster out pay, they fled to Minneapolis on a train.

**The Campbell clan.** Grandpa William Campbell was a crusty old crab. He loved his four sons, had no time for the girls (he would not pay for a wedding, therefore, elope.) It was rumored that he gained and lost four fortunes. We think he gambled.

During WW2 he invented a `Chinese puzzle` that snapped over wires in mines. He made them himself in the garage. Again, he made a lot of money. And, he was a clever inventor.

Our Campbell clan is part of the wicked clan that slew the MacDonald's and ultimately fled to the North of Ireland. They were a huge and powerful clan that were part of that group that founded Northern Ireland. And history notes how that turned out. The term Scots-Irish was born with that migration to Ireland.

Mother had four brothers and three sisters. Fritz the oldest went to school, we assume Marshall College and owned his own Drug Store. One boy died and Sam and Bill were total hellions. Sam died in the Ohio State pen, He got life for Murder. Bill died in a fiery car crash down a mountain road.

The three sisters where Connie, Ruth and Mom. Connie married Dusty a rural character, Ruth married up and Her Husband was a Federal Judge. They lived in New Port News, Va.

Ruth became a Mac Alexander. There were three children. Annis, Boots and Joe Jr. We lost contact with them all about 1948.



Julia and William Campbell  
The only pix we have.

About the time that Otto and Annis arrived in Minneapolis the Ford Motor Company was building a new assembly plant in St. Paul, Highland Park area on the River. When the call went out

for men to work at the plant, Dad was one of the first men to show up. In those days Nordic guys ran the hiring. So, you guessed it...if you were Norwegian you got picked. Dad of course was a Norwegian and former Marine. The Boss looked at him, 6'3" tall and blond and blue eyed and he said..."Stand over by that door, what is your name" "Jacobson". He yelled at other men to line up on "Jacobson". Dad was the first employee hired that day. He worked at Ford for near 40 years, missing two days of work over that span. Work ethic was our DNA. It was my birthright.

Otto was very loyal to the Ford Motor Company. It gave him a good job with a steady income during very hard times. We all know how hard the depression was, and when you lived it, it was daunting. Nickels and dimes were saved. But, that check each two weeks was golden. We had `food, and soap`. A family motto, and it meant no matter what, we were clean, dressed and had a meal.

Dad always had better food than us. He had to have protein to be able to work long hours. We ate wieners, cheese as he ate pork steak, beef and chicken. It was just the way it was.

The early years at Ford were very frightening. One could lose your job over anything. If you got sick, you lost your job. If you sassed a boss, you lost your job. Your mouth was shut, your head was down and you worked all day. A toilet break was marvelous.

Otto went through the "Unionization" of Ford. It was hell. They had to fight those mobsters hired by Ford. It finally ended, and



he got a raise. Then WW2 hit and Ford went full time building “M-8 scout cars” for the army. Dad was made a welder, and that meant 10 hour days, 6 days a week. Overtime was golden too. Our family had a tiny bit of extra money for the first time ever. The war took us out of abject poverty.

Otto may have left the Marines, but the Marines never left him. He went to the Marine offices the day after December 7<sup>th</sup>. He wanted back in. Sure, four kids and a wife. All he could think about were all his buddies that were in the Corps for life. They were at the front lines, leading the fight. The Marines told him to “go home, keep working at Ford. That is your job now”.

We knew that Dad was a “sharp shooter”. We had his medals. If he would have stayed in the Marines he would have become a “Gunny” Sergeant. He had no formal education...school ended at 8<sup>th</sup> grade. He could read, write and do math. So, he was fine and smart. He would have never have been an officer. But, many of his friends died in the Pacific. Most of them in fact, it broke his heart.

But it motivated him to work hard and make the “tools of war”.

We all grew up with the attitude that America was great. We loved the flag, we loved our church. We were “red, white and blue to the core”. And we knew that our Dad was tough and would protect us.

When Otto got two weeks of vacation, he spent the time fixing the house, painting and cleaning up things. No trip to the lake for our family.

A sister of Dads lived in Chicago. She was Helen Theabold. Her husband was estranged. Never did meet him. She was a diabetic, and was crippled. Her twin boys we know had one the largest car dealerships in the Chicago area. We only met them when we were kids.

I remember the eight-plex apartment place they lived in on Leland Av, South Chicago. It was a dump then, so it must be gone. Helen died in her 50's of diabetes.

We never heard from any of them again. There was a Sister/Aunt Minnie, but she died young with an appendix problem, she was the oldest child so we never knew about her.

“Uncle Al” was the only relative we saw. He and his wife Bertha lived in those big brick apartments near Loring Park. He was a house painter, his wife did salon work. No kids, and they drank a great deal.

When I was in high school I had a car. Dad did not drive. He car pooled and we took the streetcar. We got a call from the apartment owner that papers where piling up. I drove over, and found Uncle Al, dead in bed. He had been dead for four days. Bertha was totally drunk. Dad and I spent time trying to organize Bertha, but to no avail. I found her dead too, same story repeated. The sin of having the only car.

As one can see, we went to zero relatives.

Side bar story: Aunt Helen had a baby when she was in high school in Windom. The father was the neighbor next door. That man and his wife kept the baby and Helen moved to Chicago. Our family did not know that story. It was a family secret. A few years back we discovered that we had a real cousin, still in Windom. She looked just like us. Lovely woman named Margie. But, we found her near the end of her life, so we only had a few visits with her. (she painted water colors...hmmm.) Back to zero relatives.

Our family never went to someone's house for Thanksgiving. No sharing Christmas with relatives. It was just us. And that is the way it was.



Uncle Al and Aunt Helen, the only pix we have of them.

**Annis Lee Campbell** was my Mom. She was the best Mom a kid could have. She was kind, funny, and never was “upset”. She loved her husband, children and her Church. Salem English Lutheran Church. 28<sup>th</sup> and Garfield, Minneapolis.



Salem Church. It was the center of our social and religious life.

Annis Campbell Jacobson left her life and family to marry Otto Jacobson. She would only return to West Virginia a few times.

She went with my brother Jim and I. The Greyhound bus was the only way to go. It was the cheapest.

She returned several times during the early 50's. Her Mom came to Minneapolis in about 1953. She thought there were Indians and Bears on the streets. Her Sister Ruth and family came by car during the war. I so remember it was a "Lincoln".

We lived a basic middle class life. Mom was the complete "housewife, homemaker". Our house was clean, we had decent food, our clothes were used up, with holes in shoes mended with a piece of cardboard. Not a lot of new clothes. I got hand-me-downs from my brothers.

Simple decoration was always going on. Mom would go to junk stores and buy crockery of basic color. She changed all the colors in the house to match the season. A small crack, or a blemish would face the wall.

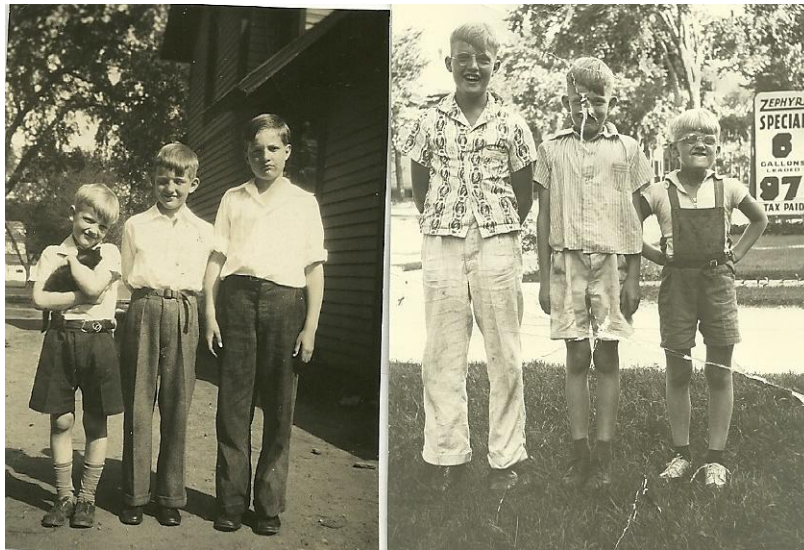


Mom, 1930 and Mom with her Aunt Grace and Sister Ruth



You know the drill, red for Christmas, Green for Spring, blue for winter. It cost nothing but it made her happy.

We did not have house guests. Not many people ever came for dinner. Our life was very simple. We lived by the “golden rule”, and the kids did not cause trouble or embarrass the family.



Three boys, about 1942. As usual I was clowning.  
Note gas prices at Zephyr, 5 gallons, .97cents

Mary Lou was the first born, then John David, that drowned, James Campbell was third and Melvin Lee as in me, was fourth. All about two years apart

It seemed that all of Annis' friends were ladies from the Church. She went to “circle meetings” every month and on occasion went to nice ladies homes for luncheon. As I said, we did not entertain. We were so basic.

Just dealing with four kids, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and making clothes for us to wear was enough for any person to keep up with. She was busy all the time. The kids helped. We did dishes and helped with our small yard. I had to go to the garage and `get out the garbage`, and we had a “coal bin” in the basement and the kids hauled up buckets of coal. Being the smallest I hated that job. It was very heavy.

She went grocery shopping once a week. I often went with her as she needed help hauling it home. I pulled a wagon. We shopped down on Nicollet Av, and Lake Street. A big A&P was there. She always got bargains. Never first line food. And we had the cheap breakfast cereal or oatmeal.

Mother had pre-natal rickets when I was born. Poor diet, no vitamin D. So I was a big baby, over nine pounds+. I was an early walker and jumped a great deal in my crib. I too had rickets, unknown. My bones were soft and I got very bow/legged. I was actually crippled.

The doctors were very worried, and wanted to correct the condition. So, Mom took me to “General Hospital” and on the dole, I had my leg bones sawed in 6 places, sewn back up and went into casts for a year. I was very active and wore out my casts in no time. Mary Lou said I slide down the steps on my casts for fun. The operation was a success but, I hated the scars down my leg from knee to ankle. The pictures above have me in shorts. As soon as I could, I got into long pants and really never wore shorts again. Even at 86, I still prefer pants.



A family picture, maybe the only one like this. taken in the 40's.

Dad got up very early and Mom made a nice breakfast for him and fixed his lunch box with sandwiches, lettuce separate, carrot sticks and some cookies.



The thermos was full of coffee. It was a very nice lunch he had every day. But, the work at Ford was hard, he came home tired. He had rich meat, we had macaroni and cheese. The kids did not get seconds. You ate what was on your plate.

She was not a good cook. It too was very basic. Every piece of meat was cooked to the limit...Dad would say..."Annis cook down that pork, we don't want that pig sickness." (trichinosis) The word rare as to the cooking of meat did not get used in our house.

Actually, Dad was a good cook, learned some at the Lumber Camp. He made Sunday sit down dinner for the family. He made pork roast, beef roast, chicken baked, and the best ever was his "pot roast". We always had white potatoes with every meal. Mashed on Sunday. It was the day we all got good meat.

Our family laughed a great deal. Mom was very funny, and loved to tease us a bit. Often Mom and Dad did the polka through the house. Whoopie John on the radio. Cedric Adams for the News. WCCO/radio. Gopher games on the radio on Saturday. It was all "Minnesota".

We never knew what Mom's heritage was. We posed as Norwegians. Mom told us we were "Yankees". That meant that during the civil war the Campbells were for the north. We did not know what that meant. So we just went with Norski.

It was years later that I discovered that I was half Scots-Irish. But, by this time I had become used to being Norski so never really admitted to it.

It is time to talk about **John David**. It was the worst of times and it defined my Mom.

John and the neighbor Arnie Rong, found a duck boat that had been thrown away in an alley. They gathered it up and brought it home. They sort of fixed it with old paint and glue. It was May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1944 and they loaded it up on a wagon and pulled it to Lake of the Isles. Jim tagged along, but they made me stay home.

They launched it and paddled to the middle of the lagoon. About 24<sup>th</sup> St. They were moving about and someone's leg went through the bottom of the boat, it flooded. Arnie jumped in the water and headed to shore, it was cold. John made it to shoulder depth and reached to help Arnie, but, Arnie pulled back and they both went down. They did not come up.. It was classic panic and rescue. Double drowning. Some people stopped, but nothing to be done. A local minister was on the scene and called the police, rescue. It is unclear, but Jim must have given an address, but he ran and got the wagon and bikes and went home alone. Got under his covers, never said a word. The Police came to the house and told Mom, Dad did not come home til his time. It was panic for sure. Jim never talked about the accident his entire life.

My Mom was slated to be the Mistress of Ceremony at the Mother's and daughter's Supper at Church, three days later. She did it..and told the jokes and led the prayers. The audience was almost always in tears...She did it.

But a few days later, she fell apart. She lost it totally. She sat in a pink robe, drinking coffee and looking at the floor. It was days that way. We kids were in shock most of the time...being the small kid, I just kept quiet. Mary Lou was totally in pain. Jim was as usual, just silent. There was no such thing as grief counseling. Dad went right back to work. He did not take a day off. He always said..."when things get bad, don't wallow in it." He grew up with a lot of bad times. Now his first born son is dead.

The deep grief went on for about a month. Then one day our good old Pastor Wetzler had an idea. He went to Lutheran Welfare and asked for a live baby to give to Mrs. Jacobson to help eliminate her grief. Can you imagine, and they did it. It was a baby named Joyce, waiting for adoption papers to clear the court.

He got Similac in a green can, diapers and clothes and some bottles. He rushed in the house, handed the baby to Mom and said, "this baby needs immediate care, you have to help us". Out the door he went. When I came home from school Mom was singing. She was holding that "miracle". She came back to life. It was all over. Now we had a baby. But, 10 days later a social worker came to the house to take Joyce to her new family. I was half crazed, I yelled, "you cannot take our baby". "There, there now", and I could see Mom's eyes...she was not ready to have it taken.

So, the social worker sat us down and explained that there are lots of babies that need homes while waiting for adoption. Mom

and Dad could sign up to be a short term foster home, “how about that?”

They signed the papers, Mom got a dollar a day, and that was a lot of money each month...\$30.00. So, that event turned into 185 babies over the rest of her life. She always had one. It was like bad luck not to have a baby in our house. Mom’s standing in the community, neighborhood and especially at Church was like she had been “sainted”.

**Tillie’s Grave** This is a perfect place to stop and tell the story of how we found Grandma Tillie’s grave. My Sister Mary Lou and her Husband George went to Windom to visit our new cousin “Margie”. For some reason they stopped at the local cemetery to see the family graves. To their surprise, they found no grave at all for Grandma Tilly. George was a keen scholar of history and wanted to find out where she was. They inquired at the local “keeper of the records” and she had no record of Tillie’s death. But, she said to go up the hill and see Grace Hanson who is 94 and keeps the old records.

They found Grace and explained the story to her. She said. “1918, flu time, lots of dead. Let me get the old book”. She paged through it and found the answer. Grandpa had been newly buried, and so they just opened his grave and threw her on top of him. She was probably wrapped in a blanket as there was no money for a second burial. There were more dead than they had room or money to bury Her.

A few years ago, the discussion started about a head stone for Tilly. My take was she has been dead since 1918, why spend a

lot of money for a headstone? The chat went on for some time. I wanted to make a clay headstone, but that was too informal. So, I said, “let me take care of it, and I will pay the cost of a headstone”.

I had found a grave stone maker in Hammond, Wisconsin while driving through that small town often on the way to my farm. I stopped and talked to the fellow and gave him my story. He loved the story, a sort of new twist on his profession.

He looked in his big book of cemetery rules and found that Windom had an open cemetery. “Do whatever you want, it is up to you.” So, I said to him, “if you can find an old piece of fine stone, could you engrave “Tilly” on it?” Whoa, he liked the idea. and said he would do it at some point when he found a scrap of stone.

He told me to stop later and see what he came up with. I stopped, but he had not found what he wanted. So, he said, “when you come through town look on my back porch, and if there is a stone with Tilly on it, take it”.

About two months later I stopped at 6 a.m. and there was a wonderful square of black granite with Tilly in script written on the face of the stone. Was I happy.

I called my sister and brother and made a plan to head to Windom and plant the stone. We placed it right next to Grandpa’s stone. It was just the word Tilly. Now people passing would say..”who is Tilly?”

We said a prayer, sang a song and I gave a quick sermon. “There Grandma, now you have a Headstone.” So, as we were getting ready to leave I said to the group,” Jim, why don’t we do another day and we will go to Lake of the Isles and you can tell the story of John’s death in detail”. We did that about 2 months later. He showed us the exact spot, told the tale in detail and got it off his chest. We then went to John’s grave at Lakewood Cemetery and had a small private ceremony. It was very nice, brought tears and made the story end. The story from 1918, and the story from 1944 finished.

## **Mary Lou Jacobson, Decker**



Mary Lou was the first child born to Otto and Annis. She was born in 1926 and was a very pretty baby. She was healthy and a good child. She was loved from the first day.

We moved several times in the early years, I am sure they first lived on Clinton Avenue, South, always a rental. Mary Lou's early life is almost unknown. She was ok, and did what little kids do, they grow up.

For the boys, a big sister was a mystery. The early years of Mary Lou are not recorded. In fact, I am sure they did not have a camera.

We had moved to 2738 Pleasant when Mary Lou was a teenager, so she went to Jefferson Jr. High and on to West High on 28<sup>th</sup> and Hennepin Av. She liked school and had wonderful friends. I remember that Diane Davies was her best pal. Mary Lou was popular, in fact she was voted "cutest girl at West" when she was a Senior. (year book photo)

None of us kids had college in our future. It was just not part of our family tradition. So, Mary Lou went to work at Witt's grocery store on Hennepin.

Mary Lou was friends with George Decker (He too worked at Witt's.). He went into the Marine Corps after his Jr. year in high school. That was 1944/early. He trained to be in the first division to attack the home land of Japan. We all knew he would not survive that early battle. So Mary Lou was worried about him, we had buried John and the stress was great. Letters flew

back and forth from George. We boys did not really understand what was going on, we just knew he was a Marine.

Mary Lou's story will continue on, blending with other stories of our life.



Mary Lou

## **28<sup>th</sup> Street and Pleasant Avenue**

Our rental home at 2738 was surrounded by a few busy streets, lots of stores and movies houses.



To the East was Nicollet Avenue, to the South was Lake Street and to the West was Lyndale. Street cars ran on those Avenues. We could go most anywhere in the City.

All four of us went to Whittier grade school, Jefferson Jr. High and West High School. We walked every day, both ways. It was easy. Everyone walked to school. There were neighborhood bullies, but we did not get bothered. It was mostly folk lore. We had four movie houses, the LaSalle, Lyndale, the American, and the Vouge and for a few pennies more you got fancy and went to the Uptown. And if you went to a Frankenstein movie at night you had to walk home in the dark, cross the railroad bridge (Milwaukee line.) and scoot alone as fast as you could go.

Up on Lake Street there was Western Auto, Gambles and a very nice burger place...Ray and Arnie's. White Castle was across Lake St.. Of course there was a Kreske's five and dime store.

We had several parks near us. Bryant Square, Fair Oaks and some other school play grounds with baseball, skating etc. The Minneapolis Millers played at Nicollet field. If you retrieved a baseball foul ball, you got in free if you returned it.

As a kid, I never had skates or a baseball mitt. On occasion someone would leave balls, mitts and other stuff around the parks. We often claimed them.

Salem Church was just a few blocks away.

We did Conformation Classes, ate at church. Sunday School, Luther League and made friends with dozens of kids. We were the Salem gang. I did Boy Scouts out of Salem. Bill Beals and Les Thompson were the adult leaders. We camped out at Lotus Lake. Bill Moulton, the 8<sup>th</sup> ward Alderman and his wife owned 20 acres on the lake. He allowed us to use it, care for it and enjoy the outdoors. Mrs. Moulton was a “babe” with moccasins, wool cloths and was like an outdoor nymph. I sure remember her.

You could take the street car all the way to Excelsior and little did I know I would buy some of that railroad land for my house in Minnetonka. We could not afford to go to the Amusement park, it cost too much.

We swam at Lake Calhoun, biked over to Cedar Lake. The Art Institute was close.

## **George Decker and Mary Lou Jacobson**

When the Atomic Bomb dropped, the war ended for George. He was safe. He spent some months in Japan with the occupation troops. But, the big story for all of us “The war was over.”

George came home. We were all thrilled, but none as thrilled as Mary Lou. They dated, but soon were engaged. All was happiness. George enrolled at the U of Minnesota on the G.I. bill and started college. He was very smart and a great student. He scored very high on standard tests. He went into English Education, and became a public school teacher.

I remember that his first teaching job was at Kenyon, MN high school. Moving to that tiny town was a shock to both of them. A very funny side story. “George was a German and a beer drinker, but the town was dry, no liquor store. His case of beer ordered from the town down the road came in a flat bed pick up truck. The guy would park and walk the case up to the front door. I wonder if anyone knew he was a “beer guy”.

Mary Lou and George lived in Kenyon for one year. George soon got a job in the Minneapolis Public Schools and was assigned to a North side Junior High, It was Franklin Jr. The school had a high proportion of “Black students”. He liked that job. He was then transferred to North High School and spent most his working years at North.

A new baby was on the way, and now it really got exciting. “We were, for the first time, going to have our own baby. we get to keep her forever. And Baby Susan was really a wonderful, pretty baby.

The happy couple purchased a house on Yates Av. North. All was golden and perfect. Then another new baby was coming along. And that was John Decker, and soon after that another baby came along and that was James Decker.

A word about George’s family would now fit nicely into the narrative. George’s parents were quiet, simple folks living on Fremont Avenue and 24<sup>th</sup>. There was Mary Lou Decker, his sister and Sally Decker his young sister. They all became friends of our Family. Very nice people indeed.

After a few babies Mary Lou became rather heavy. It did not suit this Beautiful lady, so at one of the holidays we gave her a free subscription to join “Weight Watchers”. And did it ever work well. She trimmed down to her wedding weight and became so involved that she was offered a job with the company. She became a weigh in counselor. She held that job for many years. It served her so well. But, as she says, “if the A bomb is on the way to Minnesota, give her an hour in a Bakery”. Mary Lou is the best sister anyone could have. George was the perfect brother in law.

George had a big impact on the reading program in the Minneapolis Schools. He was innovative and had good luck with having Black Children learning to read. He was a fine teacher.

Because of the children arriving and a new house, George had to find secondary work. (looking back he should have gone to school, he would have been a great lawyer.) He, however joined the Sears Roebuck company and sold electric supplies for years. He worked Weekends and a few evenings to round it out.

George met an Insurance agent and got involved with investigation work. He was really good at it. He was a gentle, quiet fellow, sort of the “tweed look”. People would trust him and soon he had them telling the entire tale of an insurance settlement. Often they said far too much, to their own detriment. Mike, his boss often commented that George was the best ever in getting evidence. George switched from Sears to Insurance investigator.

We laughed, George could read standing up. He was an avid reader, and he was fast. I am sure he read two books a week. And that would be for his entire life. Book after Book. It was not a hobby, it was his avocation. It did affect me, because of George I did start to read for fun.

George passed away from complications of the flu and a heart condition in 2013. He is missed and loved. George was a star. I was blessed to have him in my life.



A classic picture of The Deckers, coming up the steps at Grandma Jake's house for Christmas.

We have no idea how it started, but my Mother became "Mother Jake and my Dad was Daddy Jake". After the babies it was changed to "Grandma Jake and Grandpa Jake".

### **Susan Decker Priebe**

Susan grew up on the North side and went to school in the traditional manner. She was very pretty, popular and a kind and loving girl. Like her Mother, she was the eldest and had two younger brothers. Life was good. They had enough money to live a standard suburban life style.

Susan dated Bill Priebe and then married him. They had a very content and happy marriage. They raised two very handsome and delightful boys. The eldest is Andrew Priebe, and Daniel Preibe. They are married and very happy boys.

Bill Priebe was very successful and came from a family of some means. He worked in the concrete business, and provided well for his family.

Parkinson's disease struck Susan, and it was a very difficult time. She struggled, and tried hard to live a normal life. It was daunting. But, She died in 2017, and her suffering ended.

**John Decker** was the second child born to Mary Lou and George. He was a very quiet boy, in fact he was a quiet person his entire life. Like his family he was kind, helpful and a quality person.

He went into the Air Corps and became a jet mechanic. He did a four year hitch and came back to live in North Minneapolis. He met a woman named Sue and married her. (she was an odd duck). They had two children, the first was Aaron, and the girl was Hayley. The marriage suffered and was ended.

John became involved in the “Home health care business.” His job was a dispatcher for a company in St. Cloud. He was well liked, did a great job, and lived a private life. John died of a massive heart attack in 2014.

Both Aaron and Hayley married and live their lives in the Lake country of Minnesota. There are more grand children and they live a good life. They continued to have Army attachments.

### **James Decker**

I always laughed when Jim was small they said that he was “just like Uncle Mel”. Well, they laughed at that. I did not. Jim, like his Uncle Mel was born with very high energy. He was smart, open and loving and knew how to get the job done. He was loyal to his family. And now that the family has died around him, he takes great care of his Mother. He carries on a great conversation.

Jim too went into the Air Corps and became a jet mechanic. After his service life he was hired by Northwest Airlines (now delta) to be a jet mechanic.

He married Paulette and had two terrific children. Mathew and Sarah. Mathew is a graduate Mechanical Engineer and Sarah

has her bachelors degree in communications, and is out in the work force. She is single, and loves her life. Mathew is married.

Paulette died in 2016 of “Lou Gehrig’s” disease. It was a devastating loss.

Jim became very disappointed with Northwest Airlines, the Mechanics Union and the United States government. He feels they all let down jet mechanics so he left the profession. The stress was just too great. The fear of one of those planes going down with hundreds of people made for sleepless nights for Jim.

It was almost poetic, but he found a job two blocks from his house. `Walk to work `was in is future. An Elementary school hired him to be a full time night janitor. Now he could provide service and help to kids and teachers and get paid to do it. He loved his job, and no stress. He also had a four \* clearance and that was helpful as he was working with kids in a school.

As a professional mechanic, he could repair most things around the school. He often heard ”Jim, can you fix this???, Jim can you help me?, Jim this, Jim that”. He loved having things to keep him busy.

I am proud to be just like him.

**James Campbell Jacobson** was my brother, two years my senior. He was a redhead, and he could run like the wind, ride his bike twice as fast as I could, and was good looking. He had wonderful hand/eye skill. And, he was a touch “mean”. He did bully me. I was slow, overweight and big.



When Jim was in the ninth grade at Jefferson Jr. High, there was a competition and records were kept to climb the rope in gym class. Jim set the record. He actually climbed like a monkey, no legs. I could not climb the rope at all. So, as you see, there where issues.

Jim played football, and it was so strange that he was the fastest kid on the team and he played center. I guess we all picked our position. Jim was the first kid to run the 440 under 50 seconds. But he got boxed out in the finals of the city meet and finished 3<sup>rd</sup>. He never told us he was running, we never knew. Friends told us a week later. That was Jim. If there would have been quality coaching, he would have been state champ in record time.

Of course Jim was popular, and ran with a bunch of the sorta elite boys at West High. He was a senior, I was a sophomore.



Jim at 14 or so.

When I was about, 15 I got very big, and then strong. He taunted me one day and a smacked him with a baseball bat. He was really surprised and realized he had a “big brother”. I made the varsity football team as a sophomore and things got much easier.

I could never be “Jake”, my brother had that name. I was “Melvin” and it was not easy. Our football coach re/named me “Mel”, that was wonderful. Jim respected that. And the entire team started to call me Mel.

The most important activity for boys in our house was making model airplanes. We made both solid wood and stick and paper models. We knew every airplane in WW2. We followed the war, not as news, but what planes were flying, what tanks were doing. Jim was a master at careful construction. His models were perfect. Mine had a lot of issues. We talked about being pilots all the time. He wanted to be a fighter pilot.

After graduation in 1951 Jim went to the U and took courses. He just wanted to get a year done so he could get in the Air Force and pilot training. He made that happen. He had great eyes, was quick and had a good mind.

He was accepted into Pre Flight school and went to Texas and got started. He did very well. Jim was one of 5 top students in his class. One day a Coronel came into the class and picked the 5 top students and called them to his office. He told them that they would not be pilots. Jim was stunned. Then the officer said that they would all become Navigators. And, they had no options. That was that. So, Jim went off to navigator school. He was really unhappy. But, like the military does, they get you

to work, make you take orders and make the best of it. Jim did that.

It was not long before he realized that he was in an elite group of Air Force Officers. The officer that got you to the target, and got you back home. It was the most demanding job in a bomber.

Jim became an Air Force Officer. A dream came true. And he loved his job.

SAC (strategic air command) was just forming. And one of the new parts of SAC was airplanes re-fueled in mid-air. Jim was sent to Boise, Idaho to start training in big air planes that hauled gas. That became his job for his entire 20+ years in the Air Corps. Navigation was the key, they had to find a plane running out of gas in the middle of nowhere. He never lost a plane, always got home just fine, and was respected in his squadron. He went up in rank and ended his career as a Captain.

He traveled the globe from Alaska to North Africa. Always on the go, and had a serious job to do. Over those years of war and strife, he never had to serve in wartime action.

In the early years at Boise a girl took a shine to him, and she finally got him. Margarite Stenick was her name. And, she became a Jacobson. Soon after their marriage they had a wonderful girl baby. Her name is Judi . The next three kids had J in their first name. Jim was born, then Jeffery, and Jennifer.

When Jim's service time ran out, the family moved back to Minneapolis and moved into a house in Golden Valley. The kids went to the Robbinsdale Schools and did well.

All the time Jim was living at the base in Boise, he took classes in Industrial Education. He loved the program as they had saws, and wood making tools that he wanted to use. He made model airplanes. He actually over the years got enough credits to graduate as a "Shop Teacher".

Jim was medically discharged from the Air Corps. He had a congenital back issue and sitting for long hours in an aircraft made it worse. He left with a good pension and moved home to Minneapolis. He applied in the Minneapolis Public Schools and got a job and the old Central High. That job barely lasted a year. Can you imagine, an Air Force Captain, working with idiot high school boys? He bolted from that job and went to work at Park Center Junior high. He really liked that challenge. Kids wanting to learn to make stuff made him happy.

He continued to make planes. Then he got into radio controlled big airplanes. He did not fly them, he had former fighter pilots that knew radio control fly them. They were amazing planes. Near the end of his life he entered his "Wake Island Wildcat Model" in the National Contest and won first prize for almost a perfect aircraft. He was first Minnesotan to win the nationals.

Family problems started, and soon he left Margarite, followed by divorce. He lived in a small apartment and made stuff at school.

He found a new lady, “Marie” and they lived together until his untimely death from Prostate Cancer. They found a house to share and Jim fixed it up very well. It had a large lot and with the help of a bunch of fellows a new studio/workshop was built. He did love his “Studio”.

He found a 1952 “Silver Arrow Chris/Craft” boat for sale at an auction. It was a wreck, but all the parts were there. He got it for next to nothing.

He totally rebuilt that boat to “brand new”. That boat went to the “National Wood Boat show” in New York, and he won first prize, `Best in Show`. At the time, one of the best rebuilt boats in America. He was offered \$60,000 for it. He turned them down. His daughter and husband have it out in Ohio, and it still draws a crowd whenever it goes in the water. The boat has the word “Jake” on the rear transom.



**The silver arrow.** Pete driving, Judi riding. An identical picture ran in Look Magazine in 1952. This picture is the center fold of the Chris Craft History Book, and it was posed to duplicate that ad.

**Judi Jacobson Crusse** went to Stout in Wisconsin and found Pete there, and she married him. Great fellow, busy and nose to the ground sort of guy. They wound up in Columbus, Ohio as he became building manager for a construction company. It went big time including building the National Monument for WW2 in Washington D. C. Pete was the building supervisor.

Judi was a great Mom. She had the family skills and made clothes, great food and was the “perfect mom”. She also ran a small business making wedding dresses and other perfect female clothes to order. She is a whizz.  
And of course she is a “beautiful woman”.

As was the history, Judi and Pete lost their eldest son to drowning. Nick died on high school graduation day. Pals were goofing around in a pond. It was beyond tragic. Son Zac is a great young man. He supports the family with good humor and is the total son.

As we will see, Jennifer was “retarded at birth”. Judi loves having Jennifer come to Columbus and stay for months at a time.

**Jim Jacobson** is the second child of my brother. He rather changed the family dynamic and became a very successful

banker. He too went to Stout, had good academic skills and went on to a successful career.

The family “funny story” is that he married Pam Decker, his second cousin, not a blood relative. That union was set up by my Sister, Mary Lou. Of course you can imagine the jokes that fly. It is a perfect union. Pam is serious, loved by all, and a great wife. They did not have children, and love their home, their relationship and their families. We won the jackpot when Jim and Pam got married.

Years back when Jim and Jeff were growing up, it seemed that it was fun to tease “Uncle Mel” about being a “dirt potter, and mess’n with clay”. I was not interested in skilled repair and making old things new. But, I was a serious potter and painter. The joke got old.

The most interesting family change was both boys are now serious painters and craftsmen. In fact, Jim retired from banking early to pursue his passion of painting. He is very skilled and creative, and he has shown in many fine exhibits. His DNA is Jacobson “art and skill”. I cannot express how proud I am of him.

**Jeffery Jacobson** was to be the last of the clan. He loved growing up and made stuff, and acquired his father’s skills at building and making things. He liked to collect stuff. He loved looking for stuff. He became a professional collector.

In the mean time, he too went to Stout and majored in Industrial Design. He was very good at his craft and really was a fine

designer. He began to work for the “Wood Workers Store” in their magazine division. He, for years has been the technical director of the magazine...in short, he puts the magazine together every month. He has never missed a deadline.

At some point in his life he found several swords and knives that were from the Nazi era of Germany, WW2. His passion grew and he made collecting those types of objects his life's hobby and avocation. He is recognized as one of the great collectors.

Quality collectors do not brag or show off their work. The danger of fraud and theft are common, so to be prudent he does not talk about his collection. As we will not in this book. Just take it from “Uncle Mel”. He knows what he is doing.



Jeff with painting that Mel/Jeff are working on



Jeff also has the finest collection of his “Uncle Mel’s Pots”. Over the years I have allowed him to pick the best, and save and collect for the entire family to have samples of my work into the future. Like his Brother, I cannot be more proud and love them enough. I am lucky to have them.

## **Melvin Lee Jacobson**

Yes, the author of this book. And, for sure my story will too be coming out in the following pages. It will join the real life stories as they come forward. I will include a number of friends and neighbors in this saga, as they too make the life of all of us better and the story richer.

## **The Carlock, Eggers clans: Sharlene Carlock Jacobson**

Jesse Foote Carlock came to Minnesota from Carlock, Illinois. Yes, the town was named after his Grandfather, but no money or riches followed. We know little about the Carlock line. Jess left early in life and did not return. Like so many he was a product of the Depression. He should have gone to college and been a CPA, but no money was available. Most of his life he worked as a “time keeper”, basically a numbers job. His final job was working for “Rainville Carlson” sheet metal and roofing company on Lyndale Av. Minneapolis. He was a better than average “perfectionist” and every job was figured to the penny. He did not make mistakes.

Jess was the lowest paid employee at Rainville. He was without doubt one of the best employees. But, roofers and sheet metal guys had a union, and double the salary of an office guy. And, Jess was just an office guy.

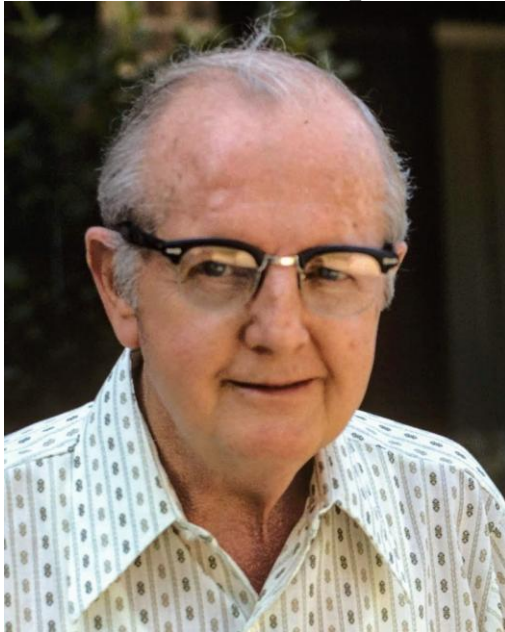
Jess was plagued with Arthritis all of his life. He was in pain almost every day. He just grinned and got on with it. His health, without doubt was poor. He had his first heart attack at about 55 years of age. Between heart trouble and arthritis, he was a mess. He trudged on. He was an amazing man.

During the WW2 he worked at Northern Pump making cannon shells. For the first time in his life he worked with tools. Most of his work was on a metal lathe. Finishing shell casings was the job. He took the street car to work every day.

### **The pool shark**

Jess was a natural pool player, and 8 ball was his game. He knew angles and bounce. If you put money on the table it was his in no time. If he had first shot, he cleared the table often.

Buzz Arlette's bar was the pool table center of Lyndale and



Lake St.  
Jess Carlock

Jess worked just a half a block away. He would often stop after work for one beer, play the football jackpot, and hope a sucker was around. Jess was small, sort of anonymous. He could hide in plain sight. His hands were in terrible shape from Arthritis.

When there was a sucker, the fellows in the bar would say, "hey pal, try to beat that old guy with the bad hands". And Jess would amble over and say, "5 bucks ok?" "hell yes." Twenty minutes later and Jess would have the 5 and the guy would stomp out. But finally no one would play him for money. He gave lessons.

One Saturday the bar got raided by the police for gambling, pool sharking and other nasty problems of 1960. They lined up all the people and Jess just went to the door and walked out. The legend was, the cops did not see him. I believe it. He had just

“sharked” two guys, and had four numbers in his pocket for the Gopher football game. He vanished in thin air.

Jess also played poker, it was a blood sport for him. He was an amazing man, without doubt.

## **The Oldsmobile**

Jess saved money like crazy. He had a fund that he added change, a dollar at a time, and any pool winnings. He had never had a car, but he was saving for the day. It happened in 1953, spring. He rolled home with a brand new, bright green Olds 88 Rocket, four door. It was gorgeous. Paid Cash! It was the love of his life. It was babied, in the garage every night, trickle charger on the battery. It was never dirty. It rarely went over 55 mph. After six years it was still new from the show room. No one dared eat food in that car. Pristine was the name of the car.

## **The sad story**

Jess had a heart attack, got over it really well, but Jess always did what authority said. Doctors were authority. Lawyers were to be feared. Government auditors raised the hairs on his neck. Fear was the word.

The doctor told Jess that with his arthritis, and heart condition, he should “curtail driving”. He thought it meant “give up driving”. He sold the olds to some kid. It was show room new. I said, “Jess, you don’t have to stop altogether. Just slow down, get a small car with all automatic shift, brakes and power steering. You can still drive.” Nope, he never drove again. And that was a real hardship. Take the bus, are you kidding?

So, life for the family was based on being perfect. That is a huge burden to carry, and fear seemed to control things. That was not “my” style, so at times things got a bit tense. But, we all got through it, and maintained a loving family life together.

We do not have a lot of detail about Jess and Althea dating, courting, engagement or wedding plans. It was not a part of the family history being told. All we do know is that they got together, got married and started their life together. Times were hard, and they moved about, and even lived in the Egger’s home for some time. But their story was typical for the times.

## **Althea Eggers Carlock**

Althea grew up in a house full of bakers. Her Dad and Uncle were both master bakers at “Zinsmaster’s”. It was a large commercial baking company near the railroad tracks and about 3<sup>rd</sup> Av in South Minneapolis. Of course the time clock in that house was upside down. Bakers worked into the morning hours. So, 7 in the morning was supper time.

The house they lived in was a classic two and a half story, with rented rooms upstairs. It was built half way down Lyndale on the East side of the street south of 26<sup>th</sup> st. It was nice big house. Aunt Chrissie lived with them too.



Egger's Lyndale House

At one point, in the early 1900's this was the last house on Lyndale av. Open prairie went south and west. It was finally torn down about 2018.

The old uncle said that when building the house "the look out from the top of the third floor rafters one could see "lake

Minnetonka”. It was flat and no trees, all the way out highway 7. It was open farm land as far as the eye could see.” Side story. All the land bordering the Mississippi river was also bare land. Trees did not get planted until houses were built. What people called old growth Oaks was a myth. The Elm trees that filled the boulevards and front yards all around Minneapolis got planted after the houses went in.

Minnesota was a part of a huge prairie until you got to Hinckley, North of Minneapolis. Then the pine trees began. Most of those pines were cut down and milled into 2x4’s that built all the houses in Chicago. Those straight tall pine trees were golden.

A fellow by the name of Archie Walker was the lumber baron. He was not in the “in crowd” of Minneapolis. He spent millions of dollars in Europe buying paintings. The Art Institute crowd would have nothing to do with him. He was “poor hobo” to them...So, he built his own art center. They call it “Walker Art Center”.

Minneapolis was run by the grain crowd. It was milling of flour that made Minneapolis famous. It was the “Washburns and the Crosbys and Pillsburys” They built the Art Institute. Snobs all. The Washburn/Crosby company was the source of their radio station call letters. WCCO. It became “General Mills”.

Althea had a big sister and a brother. Sister was Charlotte, brother was Harry. Harry as a name dominated their lives. Uncle Harry was a constant part of their family, and Charlotte married a fellow named Harry Rowelson.

Althea fought weight problems as a young girl. It bothered her and she was the brunt of some jokes, even by a teacher at West High. She actually stopped eating for a time, got skinny as a rail. She never got heavy again, and in later years she was averaging 90 lbs.

At the time, the family did not encourage advanced learning or college for the girls. They all went to work, right out of high school. At some point she met Jess Carlock. We know little about that time of her life. It was not shared, it was sort of private. However, he gave her a ring, and they got married. As always, times were hard. They lived with Grandma Eggers for a long time. That was a strain on the marriage, for sure. It was a full house all the time. Aunt Chrissie lived there too. And uncle Harry was always on the scene.



The Eggers, Rowelson, Carlock Mob



This is a birthday party for someone? Left to right, Cheryl,  
Susan Rowelson  
Grandma Eggers, Sharon Rowelson (behind) Patty Rowelson,  
Althea Carlock  
And Sharlene, (back) Harry Rowelson, Aunt Chrissie, and Jess  
Carlock

When Sharlene was born, Althea went back to work rather soon,  
and Aunt Chrissie and Grandma raised her. Grandpa Eggers the  
legend had it, adored Sharlene and called her “skipper”. I think  
she got her way a great deal of the time and was pampered.

For many years Althea worked for Charlotte in a mailing  
business. It was located on Nicollet Av. about halfway down  
from 26<sup>th</sup> st. It was hard work. They made steel labels on a  
“Addressograph” machine. Althea did a great deal of that  
typing. One had to push the keys down very hard, and Althea  
suffered from severe pain in her hands and wrists. But, no she

just kept doing it. She got paid a buck an hour



Althea Eggers Carlock

So, she worked, and many wives did not. She cleaned, did all the cooking, laundry, grocery shopping, cleaned the house on Saturday and did all the domestic chores any woman of the 40's and 50's would do. She was a very dedicated and busy woman. I cared for her a great deal.

When I first got involved with Sharlene and the Carlock family, they lived at 2633 Pillsbury Av. S., it was fourplex, and is still there with apartments full. The Carlocks' never purchased a home. They rented their entire life. In 1953 after they got the Oldsmobile, they moved to 3126 Emerson S. It was a larger, more open second floor duplex. It was a nice move for them.

Ten years after Sharlene was born (1935), Althea became pregnant for the second time. So that was at the end of WW2 about 1945. Again, Althea could not stop working, so the neighbor in the next apartment was day care for Cheryl. But as always happens, there was a huge gap in the two sister's lives. Ten years is a huge span.

**Cheryl** lived a happy childhood with family around her. There were many family occasions, with cousins, aunts and uncles.



## **Cheryl Lee Carlock**

She too went through the Jefferson, West High school system, so she was the third generation to do so. It was good for her; she seemed to enjoy school and had nice friends. She was quiet, and a well behaved young lady with good morals and a good sense of family.

After graduating from West High, Cheryl worked at a pizza shop near the Uptown shopping area. She met a young man and dated for some time. They decided to get married. It was not a marriage made in heaven. Robin Nelson was trained in the air corps to be a traffic controller/tower guy. He was very temperamental and had a stress filled job. They were stationed in a small town in Wisconsin. But, luck would have it, he was transferred to a military base just outside of Chicago. About the time they moved Cheryl became pregnant, and had a hard time with it. She lost the baby at birth and Robin was half crazed. He blamed her, went on a rant. The marriage was over.

I went to Chicago, got a truck and moved her back to Minnetonka to live with us and become “recovered”. We found her a job at First bank Hopkins and she became content and happy again. We helped her get a new car and her life started over.

She met a very nice man at Mount Olivet Church couples club. He was Allen Brunsvold. A guy from Willmar, and was a great athlete.

Allen was a vet from the Vietnam War, and was an MP at an air base. He too had a very poor, short term marriage and was looking for a stable, quiet family life. He found that in Cheryl.





Cheryl and Allen dated for a year or more, seem to get along fine and we found him to be a stable, well adjusted man. He worked at Sears as an outside salesman and did well in his work. They rented a house in St. Paul and lo and behold she was pregnant again, and all went just fine, perfect, and they had a beautiful baby girl. **Leigh Brunsvold** was a total joy. Althea and Jess were happy, our family was happy and things were just fine.

They then found a nice, new home in Apple Valley, Rosemount and moved and Cheryl became pregnant again and along came **John Brunsvold**.

Leigh was a very vivacious and beautiful girl. She was popular in school and did very well with her academics. She loved sports and dabbled in varsity basketball, but mostly sat on the bench. It mattered not as she had such a positive attitude and enjoyed school. She went on with her schooling at Mankato State College. Again, her academic record was outstanding. She graduated Suma cum Laud.

As so often happens, Leigh met a fellow named **Joel Lehman**. They started a serious relationship. After she graduated she went to work for Joel's Mom, as she owned big warehouses that stored furniture and appliances before being sold and needed organizational help. Again, she was very good at her work.

Not long after they became engaged and followed with a very lovely wedding. Joel and his family were a tad wealthy. Joel's

Mom and Dad were divorced and each had made a great deal of money.

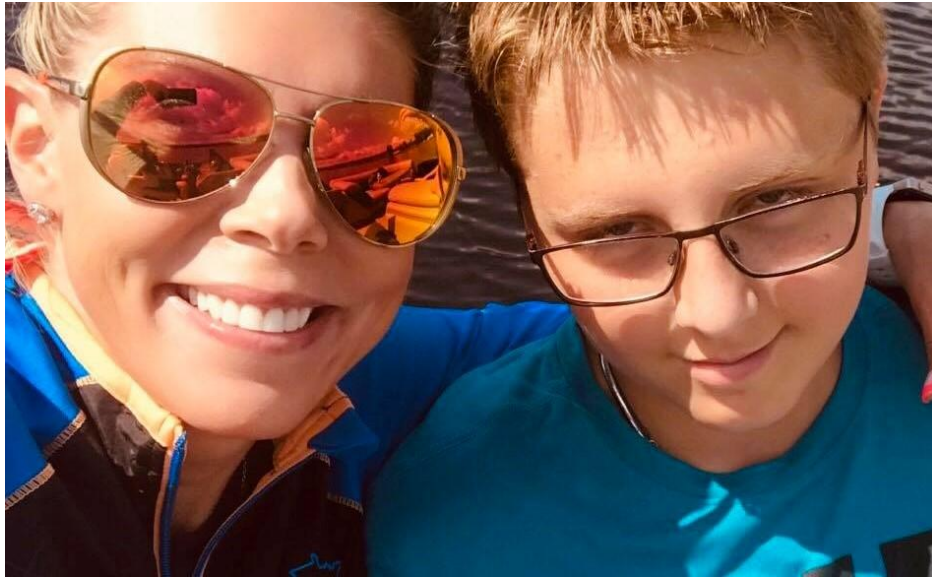
Joel's Mother had always wanted a high class Italian Restaurant. So, it was a wonderful job for Joel to start a restaurant. It was a fantastic success. He did very well in running the place and gained a fine reputation as a restaurateur.

One of his Mother's properties was a very high class sports bar in Eagen, The owners bankrupted it and it was chained closed. What to do? Joel had the idea of taking the property over and remake the Bar/Restaurant into a successful operation. They owned the building and all he had to do is bring back a customer base. He did that very well. It became a gold mine. He did a great job.

They then built a brand new restaurant, with all the bell's and whistles and sold the sports bar at a great profit. The new place is going "great guns".

In the mean time, Leigh became pregnant and gave birth to a fine baby boy.

His name is **Andrew Lehman**. He has developed as an only child with good support from the family. He loves sports, does well and now is just going into high school. The future looks very good for the Lehman's.



Leigh and Andrew

## **John Brunsvold**

John was born with a baseball in his hand. From the time he was a small child Allen had him throwing and batting, and running after a football. Sports dominated his life.

He had a normal quality schooling in the Rosemount system. He was well liked and very popular. He had a wonderful set of pals to play with. There was a big junior high playground a block away. He had an ideal life growing up, as did Leigh.

It was evident at an early age that John had a “gifted” throwing arm. He was a pitcher. Again, he was lucky to have a quality baseball coach at Rosemount high school. He was a former “Twin”, and knew his stuff. They groomed John from 9<sup>th</sup> grade on. He was a star.



He took the team to the State Tournament, with his fine pitching. They did very well all the years John was a part of the team.

After high school he went to the University of South Dakota. He was their best pitcher for 4 years. He set many records. But, the big leagues were not in his future. 100 mile fast balls set the standard. John was a smart, talented pitcher, but....no big fast ball to impress the scouts.

As so often happens in sports, John blew out his right arm. Tommy John surgery was next. Baseball went on the back burner.

He married his high school sweetheart, Riena Dee. She had it all, lovely, smart, talented and loved her family. Riena went into the banking business and rose steadily in the profession. She too was a “star”.

John found a good job with “Sportsmans Guide” and worked as an assistant “buyer”. He was well liked, did a great job, and had a happy job.

He did change professions on the fly, one of his pals family owned a very large insulation company. He was asked to join them as office manager. He did that and increased his wages a great deal. A good move for the family.

Two great kids followed. **Will** was first, followed by **Molly**. Two great kids and very much loved by family.



## **Molly and Will**

Althea became ill a short time after Jess died. She was alone in the apartment, started to drink a bit, had health issues and was rushed to the hospital with a stroke. Things looked very bad. The Doc was not optimistic. He finally told me that she only had a month or so to live.

I quickly made a decision to discharge her and bring her home with us. She could die with loved ones around her...

The doctor was totally wrong. She recovered, loved living with us, we put her on a good food diet, and she was controlled in her alcohol intake. She lived with us for 17, yes **17 years**. We finally needed a break now and then, so Cheryl and Al took her in with a rotation schedule. Both families loved her. It worked out very well. (She often called me into Her room, and had me close the door. Secret time for sure.) She whispered to me that she had called the U of M School of Medicine and donated her body for “science”. “Melvin, don’t tell a soul” it is a secret. I explained to her that it might seem strange that if she dies, there will not be a body. “oh, yes, oh my, what to do?” I told her that it was” very clever and exciting...as she had always wanted to go to college and now she was going to Med School. It all worked out just fine. And she dies peacefully in 2001. She was 93 years old. She fooled them all.

## **Mel and Sharlene Jacobson**

Herein lay the story:

I will try to weave in the story of our families along with the stories of our life, good and bad, happy and sad. I will tell the story of Mel and include the wonderful friends that were a part of our life. The journey was never alone, it was always sparkled with incredible good luck, trusted friends and good relatives to aid and find joy in our success’.

Very often, Mel had an” idea”. Yes I did. Life and how it is lived, is based on good luck, personal decision making and finding daily adventure to improve, excite and live life with a bang. In so many ways, our life as the “Mel Jacobson” family surly did that.

As it seemed to be a way of life, Sharlene had painfor her entire life. Her Dad, Mom and Sister had the same life style. She fought hard, tried to make the best of it...but, it was always there. It ruled her life, Pain.

She was an expert in hiding, and not letting people know about her pain. But, we think most knew. It was a curse. Add to that, the family history of perfection and fear of failure made her life sad in many ways. She had huge amounts of talent and ability. Often unfulfilled.

Our life together started in Kindergarten. I have always known Sharlene since we were small children. We are standing next to each other in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade picture.

Whittier grade school on Blaisdell and 26<sup>th</sup> st south was the home of Whittier. It is now a condo.

I was a big, clumsy kid, Sharlene was pretty, nice and loved by everyone.

School was hard for me, Sharlene did her sums and lessons well.

The trauma of first grade was huge in my life. We had a nasty, big, fat woman named Miss Brown. She was not nice.

One day I was sitting at the red table in the back of the room. I was using clay/oil based. (hmm any thought there?) I made a crown with jewels and put it on my head to see if it fit. She saw me, and charged at me, pulled back her hand and hit me on the shoulder, I fell to the floor. She yelled in a loud voice..”you nasty boy, clay in your hair. Go back to kindergarten and be with the babies.” ( I think she hated men, and boys.)

I ran down the hall towards the kindergarten rooms, took a fast turn to the basement and ran in the boys bathroom. Pushed the window open, crawled out and ran home. It was cold, no coat. Mom said...”what are you doing home?” “mumble”. The phone rang at Locust 3551, it was school. She took me back and I sat for three days in kindergarten. Mad as hell. I made a pledge, I would not do any assignment at all. I played dumb.

And the school folks thought I was retarded. Not. You know the work sheet with words on one side pix of things on the other...so, dog, draw a line to the dog. I went to the cow. Two plus two is 6. Every time.

**Ruth Meske**, the love of my life, married, pretty and wore nice dresses with great shoes. She had a really nice figure. I was smitten. And, she wrote on the board with either hand. And, she liked me. She had me help her, and she said I was artistic. She had me do big scenes on a blank blackboard with chalk. “The Pilgrims, Santa, Easter Bunny”. And, they were not that bad.

Then she had me clap the erasers, run errands, and then the crème de la crème. I was made official travel boy to downtown

on the street car to Broadway Av and the District offices. Every Friday. Just me, and I got one token, and one nickel. Did my delivery and used a transfer to get back to school, with a Milky Way in my pocket. I did that for two years, 6<sup>th</sup> grade too. **Trilby Taylor** to this day complains that I got to be travel boy, and she wanted that job. “Teachers Pet.”

At the end of my 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and I was going to lose Ruth Meske in favor of **Mae Cleveland**, the honored 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher She said to me...”Melvin, I have a friend that works at the University and he is going to come to school next week and meet with you. Is that OK?” My god, I would have killed that dumb Duane Hulke for her if she asked.

Well the day of the interview happened and She said to me...”Melvin, he is going to ask you many questions...will you get them right, just for Me?”  
“Of course”...

Well the guy was a psychologist and he gave me a verbal IQ test. I got caught, as he told Mrs. Meske I was extremely bright. “Very smart.” Geez, now what? Expectations/

I was really far behind in math, I did read well, and social studies etc was very easy for me, and I could draw.

(About Thirty five years ago, I saw an obit for “Ruth Meske”, died at 102. Funeral on 24<sup>th</sup> and Nicollet. I drove down; the casket was alone and closed, in one of the rooms. No one was there. I whispered into the casket..”I love you Ruth”. (Now, that is raw emotion.)

Sharlene breezed right through it all. Pretty, nice, dutiful, and perfect. And she had the best girl friends. **Marlene Stene** was the best. My best pal in grade school was **Harvey Berquist**. He was an only child, spoiled and got all the toys he could play with. A Crazy Mom. But, we made all sorts of model airplanes, trucks and trains. The kits came from Billets' hobby shop. Nicollet and 26<sup>th</sup> st.

**Bob and Dick Hobert** enter my life.

Twins, great big boys, and smart as hell. They moved to Minneapolis from Iowa. Their Dad was huge, 300lbs. And best of all, they bought a house a half a block away from me. We became lifelong friends. We were together all the time. Three big boys. No one ever bothered us. Bullies ran away.

Next stop, Jefferson Junior High, 26<sup>th</sup> and Emerson. Huge building, red brick and you changed classes every hour. Wow, big time.

The very first day we had to start in the Auditorium. **Shirley Bean** was near us and sobbing like mad. We went over and helped her. Nice boys. She was scared out of her wits. She was the "fat girl", we all liked her from the neighborhood. Bob Hobert said that we would take care of her. We did.

All of us got split up. I had home room 321 Ohmar V. Schomer, the music teacher. Bob and Dick were down the hall.

Junior High is a blurr. We had home room teams for touch football, soft ball etc. 321 was full of wimps, and we go beat all



the time. The cool boys like Donnie Ross, wore real “blue jeans”. Who could afford that? And, those flat top hair cuts , wow. Mine was soft and fell forward. I could not get it to stand up. Darn.

Sharlene waltzed through junior high. Pretty, smart and did her homework. Very popular girl. I did not know where I was, or what I was doing. We just got through it.

**Nancy McMahon** came over from the Catholic School. Very pretty and she had real Boobs. She loved boys and teased us all. She chummed **with Sharlene and Marlene and Darlene and Delores.**



Nancy

One day in art class with the crab, crazy art teacher Miss Saxby, Nancy was teasing me, it got noisy and I had to sit in the hall, she locked Nancy in the Art supply room. And, believe it, the

hag went home, and left Nancy in the supply room. The janitor found her at 5 p.m. She had destroyed all the art supplies..ripped the paper, dumped out the paint and made a mess. Nancy had a temper. Of course the next day she was kicked out of Jefferson and had to go to “Holy Angels”. We lost her, and of course no one mentioned that Miss Saxby the ugly hag had left her in the closet. Nancy returned into our lives during high school time. Again, we became lifelong friends.

The fall of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the West high football coach asked some of us big boys to come up to West and play football with the B squad. Bob, Dick and Mel all started on that team. Bob was way the best football player. So, when we were sophomores, Bob, Dick and Mel got to try out for the Varsity. Bob wound up being a starter on the Varsity at right tackle. I was second string center, my brother Jim was the starter. We had a great team and Bob was honorable mention “All City”. Dick was always with us, but he did not have the natural football mentality. He liked to watch. Bob went on to become an All-American tackle for the UofM, and then played pro ball with Winnipeg.

Along with being a great football player, Bob was an A+ student. He graduated from the U with a 4.0 average. He majored in Psychology with his minor in French. He spoke French very well. We were always best friends.

Dick moved on to California and became a very successful banker. He got out of Bob’s shadow and found he was very talented too. A large community park is named after Dick.

My life at Jefferson had some great moments in Wood Shop, Metals, Electricity and Print shop. Gereke, Thompson and Bly. It is so ironic that Art class was the biggest headache. Failure. Old Saxby was a piece of work. I sat in the hall several times. I wanted to make art stuff, we made folders to spec and “nut cups for the boys” at the Vets Hospital, who cared? It was like being in a marching band and no one could play music. That, in itself, caused me to not take any art in high school. Again I fell behind, just like the “clay crown”. At the mercy of others craziness.

In many ways, those shop courses solidified in my brain, that I could make stuff. Even cooking class was fun. I knew that Algebra and English was a drag. It was at this time that I met and became pals with **Donnie Brooks, and Keith Gunderson**. They were outside the sports world, and we hit it off as we were all three, entertainers. We loved the stage, get out front, listen to them laugh. We started to sing together, be goofy together. And those two guys had Ukuleles and could sort of read music. That was way out of my league. I had tried the Accordion, and was a disaster. No “flight of the bubblebee” in my Dick Contino world.

I was lucky, I could sing, and sing loud. My Mom had a full soprano voice and could knock the candles off the alter with a high note.

Even in ninth grade the three of us hatched the idea of a trio. But, he had to wait for that. So instead we made up skits for “talent shows”. We did a fake adagio dance, totally screwed up and dumb, but we laughed. Marlys Ferch sang “Indian Love

Call” at a talent show and Donnie yelled, “Melvin loves Marlys”. I chased him for two days. Got him, and stuffed him in a locker. I was really big compared to those two.

In many ways, I crossed lines in High School. I was never in a clique, I did sports, I did song and dance, and had other strange friends. And then all of sudden some gals said...”You have a girl friend”. What? I did not know that. Typical, sophomore, someone else made the decision. And there she was, Gail Elder. Who knew? We had a hang around, smootch around sort of a dating scene. Again, it was a new gang of friends. It was strange. It did not last long, I lost interest, big time. I finally broke it off.

Sharlene, for some reason, that we still do not know, bolted West and went to Central High. To this day, I do not understand that, nor did she. It was about this time that I became interested in her. Went of the A&W root beer stand, and she ignored me. She had no interest in me at all. It took a long time, and many rejections to have her say “yes, I will go to a movie”.

The two high school summers, we worked on the M&ST.L railroad. Pete Hobert knew a guy, that knew a guy at the railroad. We got the job working in Northern Iowa, as track laying crew members. We lived in a “bunk car” in Forest City, Iowa. It was Bob and Dick Hobert, Me, Ronnie Cornwell, Bob Laden and maybe some others. Just called Ronnie and he said Rick Bollum our star running back was there too. (cell phones, don’t you love them?) That was a great experience. We lived off the land, swam/bathed in a creek and fixed our own food. And, best of all, we got along just fine.

Ronnie reminded me that he stayed back for a long weekend, and stayed with an Iowa guy, and went and saw “Buddy Holly” at Clear Lake. Amazing.

At the end of the summer of 1952, it was the start of our senior year at West High. We were looking forward to having a good football team and excited to be seniors.

The first dates with Sharlene had begun. And, she left Central High and came back to West. She had continued to be friends with many West high girls, and of course there was the Salem Church gang. It was like she never left for a year. She was back at West, with all her friends.

By this time, Donnie, Mel and Keith had formed our “trio”. In fact we got on stage a good share of our junior year, and we were now a fixture. We sang old time songs, fast pace, laughed a great deal. Kids and faculty both seemed to like what we did. **Alice Kean** was an English teacher and was in charge of “Auditorium Programs”. She had the three boys of the trio in her pocket. We were always ready to MC, help, or do whatever she wanted. It was a great relationship. And, we loved doing it. Total “hambones”.

The picture below shows a bunch of West girls at Mary’s home. It is a perfect example of “good friends”. There was no feeling ever of people being “different”. They were Lutherans, Catholics and one Jewish girl. It was amazing in so many ways. It was this group I think, that decided Sharlene would be a great “Homecoming” queen” a bit later. Add another twenty other

friends and boys of the group and it was a movement. Of course I was all for it. That brought Donnie and Keith into the mix.



The Go-Fer girls (go-fer boys)

Left to Right, Marion, Phyllis, Carol, Delores, Sharlene, Mary, Marlene and Marilyn. We think, 1951.

Sharlene did not become queen. Lucy Griffith won the honors, (Lucy married Bob Hobert) Sharlene was a princess, second place. But, she was named "Winter Carnival Queen that January. So, I was very proud of her. She did not make enemies, and liked everyone.



A great picture of Bob and Lucy and kids. We all turned into this picture of family life.

## **Mel's jobs**

From the time I was 13 years old, I had summer jobs. My dad thought it would be good for me to have jobs..sure. My brother John worked on a farm of a Swedish couple in Cannon Falls, MN. When he died, I had to step in and take his place. I was big, and they treated me as a much older kid. Drive the tractor, feed the chickens, feed the pigs, help with the milking. I was thirteen and working like an 18 year old. No matter, I just did it. When I was fourteen they had me drive the milk to the dairy in



an old pick up truck. I learned to drive by driving. The first week all the way in first gear, then I caught on. Zip....i was doing 35. Never had a problem,

Then I was picked to be a junior counselor at “Many Point” scout camp. And I had to learn fast. The first job there was the camp store...some things got stolen and I was on the carpet. They were going to send me home. I did nothing wrong and another kid squealed on the thief. I got a reprieve. The director had me work in the admin building and that was great. I really worked hard, had the phone system learned in about ten minutes and I impressed them. I was home free. Even went back my sophomore year and had a better time. The second year we had more free time at night. So, three of us had met some girls across the lake. We rigged a small motor to a canoe, and went over to the cabin often. We were polite and good boys, and the families liked us. So, water skiing, out to dinner, and we each had our own girl friend. That was super. A job with benefits.

After camp, we started the project of working in Iowa for the railroad.

Summers became hard work, earning real money. My brother left me an old 1940 Ford when he went in the Air Corps. The car ran well, and cost me nothing. My work dollars paid for the car, and my kid life dating and living well.

## **The Star/Tribune**

The other thing that Jim gave me was his job at the Star/Tribune in the newsroom as a copy boy. Night work, three or four days a week. It was the most important job I have ever had. It defined

me as a young adult. All the important people in the news and radio world worked there. Cedric Adams, Barbara Flanagan, Don Morrison, Sid Hartman, as a young sports guy. I sure grew up fast. This was important stuff, with important people who made the news. It was serious.

I knew I had to be up to the challenge and worked very hard. Memorized everything and everybody. The first thing that impressed everyone was my ability to scan the room at 4 p.m. and see who was working. I would then go upstairs to the cafeteria, place an order for coffee, hot chocolate, cookies etc. I paid the bill, took a big tray of food to the newsroom and handed out the order. Each person got what they always wanted. Wally Allen, news editor always had coffee, two cream and plain donut. That is what got for him. Lou Greene, the toughest man I have ever met, had a pint of milk, one cookie. Well, I did that every night I worked. Never got it wrong. And of course most left me a dime, or even a quarter..I had a surplus cash banking system for the cafeteria. I ate free. Just my tip money. I got praise, and was paid a bit for it. It was not long after that I learned that I had a very complex mind as no other person I knew could pull that off. Mrs Meskie predicted that.

I soon became “head boy”. I kept that job for almost 8 years. I paid for college, my car, and I actually went to Hamline University, got recruited to play football as a snapper. No scholarships, but I was in College. And since I worked nights, had a car, lived at home with Mom and Dad and my life was just fine. I could always see Sharlene, and we got along just great.

Some of the important things about work at the Trib was meeting famous and well known people, and having to work with them, and interact as a young man. I knew my job did not have the pressure that was felt around a newsroom. Every time I went to work that office was buzzing. There was always a big story, an event, or a death of important people. I was always the observer of chaos. I was not a part of it. I just did my job in a calm and steady way. I was always polite and happy. Often around me, tempers were on edge.

Lou Greene as I said, was tough. He was the final judge on any copy that went to print. He wrote the style book, and it was more than a Bible, it was law. He wrote it.

I would observe Lou throwing a piece of copy back to one of the editors. “get it right”. Necks got red. The copy passes between them 2-3 times. So, finally the young editor would say “what do I do?” Lou would make the correction and say..”learn the style book”.

I was determined to get on his “good side”, I did not want him on my case.

The only way to get on his side, was be perfect, think ahead, and almost know what he would want before he opened his mouth with “copy boy”.

I got to be Wild E Coyote. I would be standing there before he called. Oh, Mel, thank you, please run to the Library and get a half column picture of “Churchill”. Back in three minutes. “Oh, that is a good pix, thank you.

Then came the big evening. He called to me, “Mel, I am having car trouble would it be ok for you to drive me home”. “Yes sir”. A personal lift to old crabby pants. Never again would he scold me, ever again.

### **Elizabeth Taylor**

One afternoon the city editor called to me..”Mel, head down to the lobby and wait for a cab to pull up, escort the lady up to the newsroom.” I did that all the time, but when the cab pulled up, there was Elizabeth Taylor, new star, and only twenty years old. Those violet eyes stunned me. Remember, she was new on the horizon, few knew about her. But I sure found out fast, “my God she was beautiful”. I got her a coke, sat with her for twenty minutes, and she was very nice, polite and not a snot. Nice twenty minutes.

As I have stated, this sort of thing happened every week. It was my job. In fact I never talked about my job with West High kids. They would think I was BS’ing them. So basically I lived with those stories inside of me. Just went to work, made sure the news room got served, what we needed to do, and fast, no mistakes. My law unto myself was “expect trouble and be ready to deal with it.”

### **Hubert Humphrey**

Hubert came to the newsroom all the time. In those days they did not have press conferences. He would have the cab drop him at the Trib on his way home from Washington D.C. He met with a couple of writers, smoothed troubled waters and set the news cycle. Whenever he came, he had to wait for a bit to free up writers. I got to sit with him most times. He got to know me

and chatted about stuff. He assigned me books to read, then test me later. I had to read all of Steinbeck's work one summer. He became a friend and I adored the Man. He was a for-real human with "total re-call". Those chats went on for 6 years.

The big story will be told later, when the Japanese friends came to visit.

Oh well, why not now, we are talking about him.

### **Hubert and the parade**

Our dear friend Kuzuko and her kids came to visit us from Japan, 1974. They wanted to go to a "festival" while in town. Now what? Oh, yes, the Aquatennial Parade.

I decided to go the stadium area, get there early, take lawn chairs, be right up front. Well, Hubert Humphrey was vice president of the United States and was the "Grand Marshall". His car was the lead vehicle, as he passed us I stood and waved to him. He stopped the driver, got out and shook my hand and said "I have been following your career, what a job you are doing in swimming, state champs year after year and you had a world champion diver and Olympic champ." He nodded to Kazuko and I said.. 'Hubert, the parade", he ran back to the car, jumped in and took off. It may have been the most bizarre moment in my life. I think Sharlene and Kazuko were shaking...Kazuko said in a shaky voice, "that was the Vice President".

No that was just Hubert.

Summers I worked at Rainville-Carlson. I worked the late shift at the Trib and worked the Trib Saturday and Sunday. Just the struggle of youth. It was only a couple of months. And, when things were quiet at the Newsroom, I could read, hide out and take a nap, easy.

One of the best stories are a combination of the Trib and the Hopkins Schools.

I was the special delivery boy for the Managing Editor, **Paul Swenson**. He asked me early on if I could be trusted with valued notes and communication to people in the office. I said, “of course Mr. Swenson”. At any time, I could have opened them and read the contents. I never did. For six years I was like the bad letter arriving from Western Union. But then, now and then it was about a reporter getting his first own column. No email in those days. Notes delivered by the head copy boy.

One night there was a ‘stag’ party. All the men in the office were there. I bet 35 guys, half drunk. I never got out of sorts at those outings. Too young.

That night the photographers had a special treat. They had been going around the office and taking 16mm movies of all the women. They spliced the film into a porno film. It was rotten. I was really pissed as those ladies were friends of mine and it was a cheap trick. I walked out and sat in the lobby. (I have never liked porno, think it is terrible.) “WELL, look who else walked out of the show??? Mr. Swenson.” He looked at me and said “you too”. “Yes sir, it made me sick.” He came over and patted me on the back and said, “Mel, you are a fine young man, you

should stay on at the paper and not go into teaching.” He was offering me a full time reporter job. I thanked him and said that I had had a revelation that I `might` be an artist.

When Sharlene and I moved to Ely for me to take my first high school job, she was pregnant, sick and hated our tiny house. It was a Finn house and smelled like old fish. I had applied at Edina, Minnetonka, Hopkins and Robbinsdale for art teaching jobs. She was on her knees praying I would get one of them.

One day in April, I was called to the office phone. Important` long distance, and I was worried. It was the superintendent of the Hopkins schools, my first choice. He said “Mel, we are going to offer you a job as an art teacher at Hopkins, will you take it? “Ahshaaa, weellaaaaa yes.” I asked him how he knew me, and he said..”Paul Swenson is our Chairman of the school board and he told me to grab you, and not let go.”

So never peeking at notes, doing my job well, and hating porno got me the best job in the Twin Cities at the time. Sharlene wept. As I have said my entire life. “goodness and being good to others will pay off a hundred times. It sure works for me.”





The Ely House, same size as my garage.

### **Story out of order, back to high school times.**

To tell the truth, and I do, High School was just plain fun, laughing, dating Sharlene, and loving my many friends from West. To study for me, was not in the cards. I sort of winged it. I was a solid C students but teachers liked me, and I tried, so, that C often became a B-. I got through it. Never took hard classes like Chemistry, Physics and Language. I took cooking class with Miss Ford. I think all three years. She was a classic old Home Ed lady, and loved to have boys in her class, and we did make her feel good. She gave me all A+'s. And one of my favorite classes was "Radio Work Shop"

Mrs. Kean again. And she loved her boys. A+ again. She even used me as an errand boy as I had the 40 Ford. "Mel, will you go to Lunds and get me

(a list) and run it to my house???. "sure". A+++++ She lived over on Drew, southwest. I laugh, writing the story. And now and then we could call her "Alice".

I had **Miss Palmer** for home room. She was a great teacher and again she was a favorite. She was talking about the danger of Vietnam in 1953. She was a very smart and well informed World Studies teacher. She could mesmerize a class of kids. She was in her 60's, not good looking and did not dress well, but she was an ACE.

And, as a senior I had to take Geometry. The dreaded **Miss Gude** . She was like 5'1". Tiny piece of terror. She could have

dressed down a Marine Gunny Sergeant. She had those eyes. **Burn** you to death. I was worried. I had to have one math class if I had hope of college. So, there I was. After the first class I talked to her and said..”as you know, I am a senior and I have math issues”. She said “no you don’t, not with me as your teacher.” She sat me right down and gave me the way to freedom. “I will train you like a dog, one step at a time. You have to do your home work, every night. Then go over it again. One step at a time. It is logic. So, I did that. “My god, it was easy. I understood everything she taught. It was a breeze. I aced all the tests. And, I realized it was not all me, it was a series of awful old dopey math teachers, all men and algebra.

Theresa Gude was the best teacher I ever had. I modeled my own teaching after her. She turned 65 our senior year, and retired with us. She lived to be over 100 and did all the finance and books for the nursing home she lived in. Of course I got A+’s from her. But, I earned them. As my life went on I realized that Geometry was visual. It was logical and very visual, and as an artist it was totally logical to me. Algebra was not. (air math)

I never went home after school. Football all fall, swim team all winter, and track and field in the spring. I got home the same time as my dad, about 6.

Often I had to go to the Trib, and get home at 11. Naps have always been a source of heaven.

Several times during my Senior year I was asked by the counselor if I would attend “leadership conferences” I did, but did not know why they chose me. I thought others should go, but

it was just me, representing West. Later, after teaching a few years, it dawned on me. Like Mrs. Meske, teachers found something of value in me. I just did not realize it. It was a huge complement.

May of my senior year Keith and I were talking. “We need a recommendation from a teacher to get into college. “ Who the hell would that be?” Keith said. “Let’s try **Sig Stoylen**, English teacher. –Neither of us had had him for class. But he was full blooded Norski, and even spoke the language. So, we went and saw him. He said Yesus Krist, you two, college, what are you thinking? Mmmblemummmble. He then said. “Vell, you two norki boys might keep a C average, I might as well write a paper for you. Keith was a straight A student at Macalester, went to Oxford for two years and got his PH.D. from Princeton, in Philosophy. I did ok too. I made a clay plague that Keith had in his office when teaching at the UofM.

“Who wishes to predict what a child will do.”

Sig, 1953, Gunderson, you might get C’s if you really try.



## **Keith and wife Sandra**

Graduation came and went, out of high school and on to college, to play football. I knew nothing about higher academic education. It was going to be a big challenge. It was worse. One of my first classes was English, Shakespeare, I love the lectures, and class but we had a blue book final and I botched it. Big F. I had not read the plays, I just loved the class, but one has to do the reading. And then I had to have 60% in the 5 credit biology class for a C, and I got 59, both semesters. DD. My honor points were in the toilet. I was sort of a pre seminary student, looking for the door out. It was holy hell. (see the story of Dale Eldred in the second half of the book. I found art. ( It is in detail, so no repeat now.) But I squeaked by the first year.

Sharlene went to Minnesota School of Business, Legal Secretary. She did great, as usual, did all of her homework +.

After graduation she went to work for one of the best law firms in Minneapolis. Perfectionism pays big dividends working in law. Wright, West and Eastlund. Mr. Wright was commodore of the Aquatennial. And Mr. West had worked for the IRS and was a tax lawyer. He made millions of dollars in corporate law. He won a huge case of Northwest Airlines vs Irs. It was about taxing land at the airport for hangers. He won the case and NW got millions returned. Hmmm think 20% of millions. He had a Frank Lloyd Wright house on lake Minnetonka.

Her first year at the firm they gave her a \$100 leather purse for Christmas,

Her Dad got a cheap turkey after 25 years of service. He was stunned.

Life was moving along, She had a great job, I got college sorted out and we were on happy street. We were a good pair.

I sort of blasted through the second year at Hamline. Football, then the swim coach asked me to help out. He needed a scrub swimmer to beat the other teams second man in a race. I would never be close to first, but I could always beat their scrub swimmer. I just showed up at meets, swam and got a couple of points and went home. I had no time to spend afternoons in a pool. The coach was pool director at a local community center and he let me do work outs on my own. Sad really. But I got speech credits, art credits and did well in ww2 world history. So, it was ok. I took pre minister courses like sociology etc. and got

solid C's. I had to get out of there, it was not a good fit. And I had to get away from sports.

### **Mel sneaks into the U.**

I went to the U, summer course to take a course from a very famous Sociologist. Dr. Martindale. He was a great teacher and speaker. I loved it. One day I had changed seats and here in front of me was my prof from Hamline. "What the hell is this". A lightning bolt hit me. "How can I get into the U of M. without applying.??? So, I went to Dr. Martindale and asked if I could take another sociology course second summer session. Would he sign for me? I had talked to him several times in the hall, and sort of knew me.

He said, "yes, that would be fine." I got the paper work at Admin building and he signed me up as a student. Guess what, we did it again Fall quarter, then Winter, then Spring. I was a full time student at the U and never applied. Dr. Martindale was my adviser.

I went always to the same lady in Johnston Hall. Here name was Helen, and she would always help me. I told her I had credits at Hamline, could I transfer them over, she said..."you get no honor points, they come as T, transfer. "WhaHooo." I was an instant Junior. Ruth Meske would have been proud of my "problem solving".

I was taking all the art course I could get into, they were all A's and I thought I was cheating the system. My honor points went way up. I rather liked the sociology classes and I by now, new at least how to study for a test.

### **Hank Rowan changes Mel's life:**

I really liked Hank, he was a real art teacher. He knew his stuff. So, one Saturday we went to lunch and I told him "thank you for all the A's, you know I am not an art major". He puffed up and said "what is wrong with you, do you think I am an easy grader? You are one of my best painting students, you earn that A. Why the hell don't you move to this side of the campus where you belong?" Drop me over with a feather. I well knew I would never go to Seminary. What would Sharlene think? She was going to be a Minister's wife.

One day I saw potter's wheels going into Jones Hall, and I followed, and there was **Warren MacKenzie**, setting up the first class of pottery. I ran to sign up.

Then I found **Reid Hasty**, art ed prof. Again, I found the best person on campus for me. He talked me into art ed. On the spot. I was ready to graduate with a major in Sociology and minor in Speech. I had to plan on school for my fifth year. Sharlene agreed and was willing to wait for marriage. But, why wait" Plans had been made.

### **Marjie Nelson**

Marjie had become a great friend, and she was always my pal in high school, just pals. In many ways, she was my best friend. We had perfect communication.

**Lloyd Eastlund** the brother of Kenny Eastlund that had married Marjie's sister had put Lloyd in the sites of Marjie.





Marjie, see what I mean?

Now it has to be said, up until high school graduation, Marjie was very plain. Always a friend, but she was not a “babe”. She had a complete change over when she started the U. Her figure blossomed, she wore good make up and had great hair. She was

turning into a Hollywood Star. I then realize why Lloyd and I fallen in love with her. It was a perfect match. We learned to love Lloyd like a brother. It seemed that all of our friends were getting married.

Our dear friend Nancy got married, so did Marlene Stene. It was like falling legos.

So we got married that summer too. I had my trib job, she had her law firm job, and I went to school. I became an Art Teacher.

Our first apartment, was off Theodore Wirth park in North Minneapolis, and was the upper of a home of an elderly dentist and his wife. In many ways, we lived simply, had money to go out and it was a very nice first year of marriage.

I got my degree and started to look for work. There was nothing in the Minneapolis area as about 10 junior highs were under construction. There was almost a freeze on new teachers.

Reid Hasty was looking out for me. When I first met him he had shaky hands and could no pack his pipe. It was very odd. We then found out that he was poisoned by Magic Markers. They were toxic. He did drawings in his car with the engine running, cold weather and he used those early markers.

He came to me in the second quarter of my year in education. He asked me for help. He said to me “you have a car, you know what you are doing and I wonder if you can teach my methods class to elementary ed students. And, can you drive me home each day??? “ I was glad to do that and it gave me my first

“practice teacher credit”. I was thrilled. I also installed a garage door opener for him. His wife was thrilled, as they were going through hell.

Then I got the ok to practice teach in Hopkins with **Verne Anderson and John Engelbart** and they were real artists. More than I could have ever expected. It was all falling into place.

Reid knew the superintendent at Ely. The fellow flew his own plane down to interview me. I knew I had the job as Reid had told him “hire Mel”. He did.

It was a job, when they were hard to find. It was my start. Sharlene was not happy, but what option did I have...none. And then she announced, “I am pregnant”. Wow, how did that happen? I headed to Ely with a pregnant, unhappy wife and a job I knew nothing about. I did not feel I was a professional artist. How could I teach what I did not know. Fake it.

I was a fish out of water. I was a total rookie. And, the second day of school I was pinning art work on a bulletin board in front of the art room. Three very tough looking boys walked up to me and the one said. “What’s that crap all about?” I said “I know, you should find out.” He gave me some more crap and said “whatca going to do about it.” I am left handed, and I smacked him right in the nose. He never saw it coming. He went down and bled all over the floor. His buddies were in total shock. They scooped him up and ran outside and got to their car. There was at least ten kids standing with their mouths open wide. I figured that was my last day to be a teacher. It was a South Minneapolis reaction. I am 21, the kid was 19. I did what I had to do. Protect

my honor. I went into class expecting a call to the office. Not a word. Every kid that walked into my room knew what had happened and they treated me like a “mean dog”, scared out of their wits. “This guy is tough as nails.

I went home and told Sharlene. I said, maybe we should start packing. Oh She was mad.

I never heard a word from anyone. The next day the kid walked into my room and the other side of his nose was bruised. He said. My Dad found out about the altercation and hit me with his right hand. His Dad said. “don’t ever mess with a lefty you stupid kid”. He said he was sorry and it was all over.

I became the hero of Ely high the second day I taught school. Every teacher knew. The men teachers shook my hand, and two said “way to go lefty”.

Then I found out the principal was an ass. The men teachers did all the dirty work. They protected the women teachers like big brothers. I was in the club with very high standing.

That `thirty second confrontation` defined my self worth, in other words, no student can ever intimidate me. Ruth Meske and Theresa Gude became my heroines. They knew something that I had to find out for myself. Are you going to be in charge, or be frightened? I knew the answer.

Over the years, I have mentioned to female teachers that “being a big man” does not mean I have control of a room full of kids.

A strong woman teacher is equal to any man when it comes to discipline. It is the `look` of the eyes, power of voice and your own confidence as a teacher that works best.

The rest of the year went like a dream. I loved every day. Kids really respected me and we got along great. They wanted to hear stories about growing up in the big city. Most had never, ever seen a black person. They were social babies.

I did find out later that my predecessor was a total useless jerk. He had been let go. I did find pizza stuff in the kiln. Things were not ship shape. So the entire event in the hall was predicated on the fact that art teachers are stupid wimps. They picked on the wrong guy, it was a small error.

Sharlene had to find a doctor to do pre-natal stuff. He met her and asked he if she had a job in Mpls. Yes, a legal secretary. He said, "I will make a deal with you. If you make my office ship shape, teach the` Selectric IBM` typewrite to the gals, I will pay for you to have the baby...hospital and all". She had a job, something to do of value and met some nice people. We paid nothing to have Mark delivered. We left for Hopkins the day school was out and Mark sleeping in the cubby hole of our 1957 VW. Sharlene did not look back or shed a tear. She was going home.

She did say on the ride home." I hope we never have to spend another day with the temperature at -54, and the furnace line frozen solid to the oil tank'.

We moved in with my folks. Stored what had in the garage. And went house hunting. The only thing we could afford was basically in New Hope. A long drive for me, but, what do you do?

My Mother loved Mark and Sharlene, so it was easy. We just had to wait for the house to be built. It was a long wait.



5325 Sumpter, New Hope, first month in the new house.

We made a pledge that we would stay in this house for just a few years. I built a garage, did landscaping, décor was good, and three years later we sold the house. We sold it in two hours. The realtor got home and turned around and started the paper work. We moved to “Elmo Park” until our next new house was built.

I found an empty lot, at the end of a sand road off Williston Road. It was three acres, a bit swampy, and bugs. The guy said he would have to have \$1200 for the property `that is twelve hundred`. I made out the check. At today’s prices just the lot would be \$350,000, glad I bought it. My Dad said, “putting money down the rat hole.” 15 years later I said to him ”how is the rat hole looking?” He said, “oh shut up.”

We made a deal for me to work on the house every day the summer we built. The contractor supplied a master carpenter, and I was his helper. It was like going to vo-tec carpenter school. It was built like perfection. No plastic, all oak trim, and hand done miters. I cleaned out the basement of Murphy Plumbing and Murph let me take all the one and four inch copper pipe, no one wanted it. Plastic was born. The entire drain system in the house is copper.

We got a loan at Minnesota Federal, 5 ¼ % interest and we paid off the loan in 14 years. The contractor said my down payment was my summer work. He said I did the work of 2 helpers.

Sharlene fell in love with the house and that made all the work worth it. Christine had been born, and we were a happy family in our new house.

The house was bare bone. We had to paint, build a garage and decks and then I planned a studio. That came later, 1970. Sweat equity was the name of the game, and I loved every bit of it.

Mark and Christine were wonderful children. They lived outside, played with friends in the neighborhood, and loved Winter. Sharlene made wonderful friends with neighbor women, and she was driving in her own car. She found freedom too. She never worked outside the house from then on. The house was hers and she took very good care to make it a beautiful place to live. To think we have lived on Williston for 60 years. Now it is Christine's house.





The Walker Place house, 1961

## **Mel and Sharlene become adults**

Living in New Hope was a three year blur. Christine was getting big and we were looking at school for Mark.

I was teaching, coaching and running night and day. We were so glad to be living in Minnetonka, and I was close to school.

Sharlene was busy making her house into a home and busy taking care of children. We shared all duties. We were very happy.

We had great neighbors and got to be busy with them. There was **Brad and Donna Dyer**, and the **Andersons**. The **Toonen**

family moved in with two young girls. Of course as life goes, people left and new people arrived.

Christine and Mark had a mob of kids to play with, and we got our first Golden dog, and the kids loved her.



Curry killed the woodchuck

The glorious day when Curry saved Mrs. Stanchfield from the dreaded woodchuck. The dog as a hero.

Diane came out of her house and was trapped by a woodchuck next to her fence, Curry streaked over and killed the woodchuck. The kids all said that Curry saved the woman's life. Note that dog had been in the mud/swamp.

Mark collected snakes, Christine loved Salamanders. They both wanted golden animals to match the dog and their red hair. Can you believe gold rabbits, gold Guiney pigs and gerbils? There was always a new animal. Then gold fish and real birds.

But, we had very happy, busy kids that loved to be outdoors..The big hill behind our house and kids playing up there all the time. They went down that hill on bikes, skates, sleds, plastic slides and skis. Mark was on skis before he learned to run. He was a great skiing kid.

I got a potter's wheel for the basement, and then built that first gas kiln. We got the garage built and some decks. I pounded lots of nails.

School was great for me. Junior high, all 9<sup>th</sup> graders that I have for the entire year. 6 classes a day for my entire 30 years teaching. The kids loved it.

I started to coach, teamed with Duane Welch with the 9 grade team. We won all the time and we had a tiny junior high. One year we had 18 kids out for football and won all our games against Edina, Bloomington, Tonka etc. our kids were terrors. The high school team was losing all their games, and we won. No one could figure it out. We were "junior high guys, what did we know?". Yup. The true story of education. The older the people you teach, the bigger the ego. In my opinion, K-4 should be given a large bonus every year.

We used the old West High power T. We ran draw plays, we ran inside reverses and the center yelled "Pass". The other team

backed up, and we could score a touchdown almost every time we ran it. Duane and I were locked in to teaching football. That was our secret.

One day Bob Johnson the legendary, great swim coach of Hopkins High was standing watching one of my teams kick hell out of Robbinsdale. After the game he walked up to me and said “have you ever thought about coaching swimming? I heard on the grapevine you swam at Hamline. I laughed. But, he was serious. He needed help with divers and the young swimmers. I was a total blank with diving, but I said, I would love to join you and Elmer Luke and make a threesome.

## **Mel becomes a swim coach**

As I said, I knew nothing about diving, but I could learn, and did I ever study the sport. We had two fair divers, self taught and worked with them night and day. And they improved rapidly. I just put them on a learning schedule. No horse play, serious stuff. I watched film, went to the U and watched diving meets...and it started to fall into place.

I had a kid move in, and he was actually a fine diver. Then I found Herb Miller in the locker room crying. He had been thrown off the basketball team for loafing. “Good god Herb, you are a great athlete, you are their leading scorer” He said “my style is control, I don’t run around like wild dog. I am not going in there and apologize to that fool”. I said, “I have seen you on the tower at Shady Oak lake in the summer, you can dive and have no fear, do you want to be my first “great “diver”. He said, “do you have a swim suit for divers for me”. “Yup, sure do”. We walked into the pool and I thought Bob

and Elmer were going to drop their teeth. The best junior basketball play at Hopkins was now a diver.

My god we worked hard. We dove Saturday morning, we dove at night, sometimes a couple times a day. He learned so fast it was amazing. He started to beat good divers in meets. Tall and lean, good looking and a superb athlete. The judges loved him.

Herb qualified for the state meet. Bruce Brown from Rochester was a big name kid in national diving. He was signed up for Michigan. Bruce Brown beat Herb by 18 points. Herb was runner up to the State Champ. I really thought that Bob Johnson was crying. Then Herb got really serious. But,. Both Herb and Bruce were juniors. They had to do it all over the next year. Bruce was scared. Herb was a “nobody”. Bruce worked his butt off too. It was a great meet, and Herb was second again. Herb dragged about five kids out the school into the diving program and I had surplus divers. We were on our way.

One of the most courageous stories was Rick Haver, and he was on his way to being good. He placed 8 in the state meet as a sophomore, and he was excited about his junior year. On the first day of official practice he was bouncing the board and he slipped. He fell into the board and had a compound fracture of his right leg. He dropped into the water screaming and Bob Johnson went into the pool with his clothes on, and got him. 911 and off to the hospital. I was not at the high school yet, and walked into that mess. No junior year of diving for Rick, cast for 4 months. But, he came back to diving for his senior year and place 4<sup>th</sup> in the state meet. What a kid.

Elmer was a phy ed teacher, and was always looking for kids for the swim program. You only had the school to look for kids. Families did not transfer schools for athletics. It was a rare thing when you had a move-in.

Elmer saw a seventh grade kid walking around the gym on his hands. He walked upside down like we walk upright. His name was **Craig Lincoln**. He told the kid to see Mel, and go out for diving. Here was this shrimp 7<sup>th</sup> grader bouncing on our board. Talk about a “natural”. I knew I had a golden opportunity.

But at the same time I had two 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys, really good with great potential. I had five good divers. **David Walonick and Rob Gauthier** had the right stuff too. I worked them hard. Encouraged them, dove every Saturday morning, even went to their house and picked them up. Parents were very happy, and very supportive. As time went on, we won a lot of meets, but these kids were hiding in the weeds. The other state coaches did not know them at all. I started to have them dive in varsity meets when they were in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I never let junior high kids dive for the varsity. They earned that right. They always came in 1,2. Then the next year Craig started to dive in the varsity meets.

## **Divers win it all**

So David and Rob were juniors, Craig was a sophomore. All three qualified for the state meet. Our swim program had had six straight second place finishes. We could not win the big one.

People scoffed at us. Something always went wrong. Our defending state champ had an ear infection and could not swim. We lost the state meet by 2 points. The next year our 500 kid stopped swimming a length short. Came in 6<sup>th</sup>. We lost that meet by six points.

So, told the divers that if we wanted our team to be state champs, we had to finish 1,2, 3. It had `Never` been done in any sport in the history of Minnesota. But, we had to do it. The team to beat was again Rochester. They had a good diver. The meet started.

Many thought Craig would be state champ. He was magic. But as the meet went on, David was perfection. His score mounted and he was ahead. Rob was also diving out of his mind. It came down the last dive. David and Craig were way ahead at 1,2. Rob and Rochester kid were almost tied. The last dive for the other kid was an inward 1 ½. It was just ok, he got 5's. Rob was like a caged animal. "ok coach, watch this one". He did the same dive and he dropped it like perfect 6 6 6 6 6. Our team beat Rochester by one point for our First Ever State Championship. And my divers pulled off a 1, 2, 3.

Some other coaches said. "That damn Mel Is a diving Coach, and he is an Art Teacher." Another snob put down, but they never beat me.

And the next year we had to do it all over again. But Edina got a transfer student, State Champ of Ohio in diving. He was the big deal. No one could beat him. He was realllly good. Hard dives too.



That year Todd Smith was State Champ in Diving. And, I must say that we did not get good scores, he got 8's for falling off the board.

We took again. 2, 3, 4 and our team kicked Edina by 35 points.

Craig Lincoln was never State Champion of Minnesota. But, the very next year he was diving for the U of M. He was Big Ten champ and beat Todd Smith by 25 points. The next year he was National Champion, and then he was World Champion. He went to the Olympics and had a bad day. The Jews were murdered on the floor above him in Munich. They wrapped Craig in Mattress' and carried him to a military truck and drove him to the pool. All the judges were from Russian countries, he could not buy a score. The Olympic Champ was a Russian that had never placed above sixth in an International Meet. Hmmm, odd.

But, Craig loved the event, he was proud of his diving, his mark was made, and for him the Olympics was just another meet. It all depends on the judges. And a Bronze medal in the Olympics is not a bad thing. No other Minnesota diver had ever been in the Olympics much less be U.S. National winner three years in a row.

After the big three divers graduated, folks said..."pew, Mel's done now". Hmmm, wait a minute. **Craig Rettmer** was waiting his turn. No one saw him coming except me. He was state diving champ the next year. Perfect low difficulty dives. No misses at all. Straight up and down like a dagger in the water. He dove with those three great divers as a buddy. It rubs off you know. He could not do double twisting 2 ½ summies. He did one twist perfectly. The rest of the field was crashing with dives

they could not do. Our philosophy is: “dive with what you have, not what you wish you had, as that leads to flops in the pool.

It was with great honor when I joined Bob and Elmer. We were a great team with each with their own style. Bob was the brilliant organizer, Elmer taught stroke and I was the motivation. That is what was missing before. I added the missing piece. Over 15 years in the program, we won 8 state championships, and were runner up 7 times. Mostly seconds in the early years. The last four years I coached we were state champions. I got tired. Needed a new direction, winning was easy, but it took gobs of time. Bob and Elmer are both gone. I miss them very much. Two of the quality men in my life.



Elmer, Bob and Mel. State Champs again. We were dubbed the “Coaches of the Decade” in Minnesota.

**Craig`s visit this year 2020.** A side story about diving. Craig said I was always his coach. That was true. The coach at Minnesota said to me one day years ago, “Craig came to the U as a polished national diver, how did you do it?.” Who knew? So this last summer Craig showed up at my door with the former coach at the U, now retired. John Walker was his name. Nice

fellow. Anyway, I said “what’s up” and Craid said “John wants the answer, how did you do it”?

Craig as I know was writing a diving book. He is calling it “The Unknown Coach”.....that would be me. Both John and Craig had tape recorders. And we started in. Two hours. “ok, everything has a key. You have to find the key to what you are doing. Mr. Uchida gave me the key to pots. So, in diving I found out early that the board spring that was a human spring and the take off was the most important part of diving. So I studied the physics. Lever action, fulcrum, press on the board and I taught it to my boys. They could all do tricks in the air, of course they could, it was a matter of them getting as high in the air as possible to do those tricks on a low board, in a high school pool, and crazy noise and light.

Other coaches did not teach that. I did. We practiced over and over the press on the board, wait for the energy to push you in the air, wait, “now”.

When Craig went to the Big Ten meet he was on a three meter board, high in the air. Add to that his tremendous lift, he had gobs of time to do his trick, flatten out like a sword and slip in the water. He won the Big Ten meet like by 25 points over Todd Smith at Michigan his freshman year. The Indiana divers were shut out. First time ever. It was really crazy, senior diving coaches knew Craig was different, but why? Everyone judges diving by the entry. What that judge saw was Craig in the ceiling. They did not realize it. Wow.

I retired to become a decent, quality potter. I had found a mentor in Mr. Uchida, but I needed to do it alone.

I was now a full time ceramics teacher. I had six classes a day, 30+ in a class. It was fun and demanding. (see my chapter on teaching at the end of this book.) It is far too complex to do a summary.

Sharlene had launched the demanding world of calligraphy. She was extremely talented, and her perfectionism was needed, big time. Her hand became a Xerox machine. Her confidence was always low, and she fussed far too much, but you cannot undo a lifetime of doubt.



**Sharlene, a very pretty women.**

## **Calligraphy**

She was a charter member of the Minnesota Calligraphy group. People loved her. And, they loved her work. She met **Donald Jackson**, scribe to the queen of England. The world's finest western calligrapher. He became a good friend of our family.

We went to England several times to visit with him and see the great calligraphy of history. He is a wonderful caring, talented, basic all around good guy. He was a great help to Sharlene. It is hard to argue when he gives Sharlene a A++ in her work. It would be hard to tell him he is wrong.

*Only love  
can be divided endlessly  
and still not diminish.*

### **Sharlene, her own Italic style.**

Sharlene had many friends in calligraphy. **Jo with Bob White** became the leaders of the group. Jo was a very energetic, intelligent organizer of what she loved. That was calligraphy. That group of mainly women, traveled all over, including a great deal of Europe, including stops at the Vatican Library. They studied and they had standards of excellence. Jo never stopped in her love and promotion of the "Lettering Arts". I remember Sharlene holding the actual hand written music of Handel's Messiah. She shook with glee.

So many wonderful teachers, friends, **Diane Von Arx, Susan Karrisich Audrey Hennigson and on an on and Chris MacDonald and Charley Hughes and others and others.**

**So many have died, George Yanagita, Bob and Jo, Sheila Watters, Rutherford Aris and a dozen more names. We miss them so much. We both loved them all.**

## **Mark Edmund Jacobson**

Mark lived a perfect life. He had a loving home, Grandma's and Grandpa's that adored him. He was very cute in his early life, became a very handsome adult.

He loved animals far more than people. His dog curry was his constant companion. The area we lived in was like a playground for kids. A huge park in our front yard, hockey rink, open fields, baseball and games. We had a forty acre `green space` behind us. Our property was part of that green space. There was a huge hill, called `fox hill`. It was meant for play, sliding and climbing. All he wanted was to be outside playing.

Winter was even better for him. He loved the cold and wind and snow. When he strapped on skis he glowed.

Mark was not an "academic kid", he was a doer. On the go, high energy. We might call him "spirited". Sharlene lived with a great deal of frustration raising a real boy. He did not want to study, did not want to do sums, he did not want to sit still. His mind was on making things, collecting animals and snakes.

He wanted to build forts, from dirt, grass, into a hill or out of snow.

And he did that, all the time. For instance, he said to me one day when he was 9. “Dad, can I dig a really big hole?” “Where do you want to dig it?” He had found a place on the edge of our property next to the Dyer’s. I said, ”on one condition, it cannot be undercut and dangerous, it has to be slope sides.”

I drew him a picture, the hole was 16 feet across, and about nine feet deep. It was massive. He organized all the neighbor kids to help him. They used wagons with ropes to haul the dirt up and out. They built roads, places for toys to hide. It was safe, fun and they used it all summer. When they grew tired of it, he organized the back fill. That was as much fun as digging it out. I found out a great deal about my son, and his sense of being determined.

He always wanted things to be different, for example, he got a unicycle and drove it all over the neighborhood. He cut down skis into minis, down the hill a spin, summersault. He made ski jumps on the hill. He was never bored, he was an organizer.

He got through school just fine. Average, and that is not bad. Junior high was the same. Do it if he liked it. He just did the same things, only more dangerous. He mogul skied at the local ski hills. He raced, but did not want to be on a team.



The one thing that I insisted on was finding a job. He took his bike to Glen Lake, he called me and said, “I am at the grocery store and they want me to start right now, I will be home at six”.

He got a job at the “Ski Hut” in Wayzata, fitting and adding bindings. It was the family DNA in action, one has to work. And he loved going to work.



Mark loved his skate board

He was totally thrilled that we went to Japan. He made friends the first day, played games. Ran errands for us. He had no fear.

He ate everything that was new. He would have stayed another year.

Both kids got to go to an “International School”. I had made it very clear that we all were taking a year off, they did not have to go to school, they went back and started where they left off. So, the International School of Kyoto was 60 kids from 29 countries. It was a total hodgepodge. They loved it, and they had to take two street cars, change to buses and it took near an hour. They went alone. The only problem was women touched their golden hair. You could not stop them...totally mesmerized by those two kids.



Mark, in our tiny kitchen in Japan. Note, the one gas burner cooking unit. Rice first, while resting, the main dish, then tea.

No doubt, it was the best year of his life. He grew up a thousand times. And when he got home, school was much easier. One day I said, “you are going to be 16 when you finish 9<sup>th</sup> grade, do you want to get a car”? The first kid to drive. Wow, did he.

**Dale Feste** the auto shop teacher helped us. Mark had to make it. No free cake for him. We got a ChevyII sort of a station wagon, bad body, but a great engine and power plant. We found a ChevyII sedan. We put the two cars together. Made one nice car. And, we had lots of parts to store. He helped with every phase of the construction. He sanded for days. And we used the spray gun and painted, it was really nice. From May 19 he drove it to school every day.

That was 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He was very popular, in the car he helped to make.



High school starts for Mark. He had many friends, good friends and they loved to party. You know the expression, “my kid got into a group of bad kids”, we could not say that. Mark was the leader of a group of boys that loved to party. That meant a great deal of danger, dope, booze and trouble. Never trouble to others, it was always “self”. As we found out later, Mark had a very strong addictive personality.

It started at the ski hill. The boys would get “high” while skiing. Add that touch of wild side and it began serious trouble. Add to that the many concerts, heavy metal, wild music and it doubled the problem.

He got along fine in high school. Did what he needed to do, but no extras. After high school he was not interested in College. No more studies for Mark. But, after all the guys left, he was alone. He started to talk about U of W Stout. He applied and got in. So, off he went to Menomonie. And a new problem arose. Girls chased him. He seemed to not want to get tied up. He was always friends, but now they were serious. He started to date seriously a raving beauty. She was gorgeous, nice and a good match. And it became constant intimacy. Add a little drinking, a few puffs and he was off and running to a very dangerous place.

Mark moved into a big loft above the “Spot” bar. It was huge and they had about ten boys living there. They sure were not academics. It was always party time. We now know that his environment, addictive quality started him on the road to alcoholism. It was never cured. It only got worse.

A degree in Industrial Design got accomplished, and he liked the program. It finally hit home,` get the degree`.

After graduation he got involved in security work, installing alarm systems. It was right up his alley, hand-eye, on the job work. He did thrive in the occupation. He also got recruited up, or to better companies, and much more complex installations.

He loved the problem solving and more complex wireless work. He was dating nice women, and had a small house in Glen Lake.

But, living with someone always ended up with the partner knowing about his drinking. Finally “Kathy” came to us with the entire story. Yes, we were shocked out our shoes. We knew he drank, but not at that level. We all made the confrontation and off he went to “rehab”. It did not work. In fact nothing worked. He just wanted to drink. Several years passed, he went to work every day, drank at night. Then his lady friend bolted, it was just Mark and his dog “Chutney”. We were rightly worried sick. And that was real worry, for on Sharlene’s birthday, August 17<sup>th</sup> 2001 we did not get a birthday call. His boss called and said “Mark is not at work”. I knew it was bad. I went to his house and he was dead on the couch. Total heart failure. The end had come, “nature did what we could not do, put him out of his misery”. Nothing compares at all to finding your son dead.

## **Christine Jacobson Sanko**

Christine was born at the “Glenwood Hills Mental Hospital” that had been converted to a small conventional hospital. When we

were in Japan, some of the kids started a rumor at home, that Christine was in a mental hospital. Now, taking those two events at value, I can say without doubt, I have the most sane, well adjusted and happy and loving daughter that anyone could have. She is a gem.

Like her brother Mark, Christine loved the outdoors, loved her animals and loved our family. The story that sets a tone for her life was her rabbits. As we had to have golden animals, she got Palomino Rabbits.

She loved them, and every morning rain or shine, she was down to their cage and feeding them, new water and perfect care. The same thing happened after school, every day. MaMa bunny was cared for like gold.





Chris with her bunnies

She loved her dog “curry” and she followed her brother everywhere.

Christine was blessed with a pile of great girl friends. They were busy all the time, as again, with Mark, the kids made for a great deal of play and busy time. It seemed to never lag, and no “Mom, what can I do?”.

Both kids did ok in school. Nothing special, just kids growing up, going to school, do the work. In so many ways, Christine was content. Her Grandmother “Jake” said many times that Christine had “knowing hands”. And, like her grandmother she

loved dirt. Yes, dirt, Flowers and making things grow. Her Great-grandmother did not have grass in her yard, it was solid flowers. So, the tradition of loving flowers and birds has passed to Christine. She now has acres of flower, and feeds every bird that comes to her property.



Mark, Christine and Curry. Golden hair on all three.

High school for Christine was the usual time of life. She continued to have many friends, She swam for a bit, but finally gave up the pool for other activities. She was happy at home and school, but always had a job for she loved to work. Her first job was a waitress at the “Brothers” deli in Ridgedale. Again, she was respected and trusted.



She went off to the University of Wisconsin/Stout, but never found the rhythm of college life. After two years, she was done. She could not find a major that suited her.

At about the same time I had been helping two young men at Eisenhower high. They were both in my Clay program, and loved it. It seems that both of them wanted to be on the basketball team, but this was the time when Hopkins was bringing in big time players from other schools. There was no room for the local kids. They were brothers and rebelled. They smashed the windows of the coach's home. It all went to hell for them. I was instrumental in helping the boys cope, get back on track and met with the parents to help the entire family through this ordeal.

At about the time Christine was coming home, the father of the boys stopped at my clay room at Ike. He said "is there anything I can do for you, anything? What you did for my family was incredible". I had nothing to say, I don't take reward for doing my job, with my kids at school. He pressed on, "what is your daughter doing now?". I told him about her coming home from college disappointed. We hit the jackpot as he said "I bet she has great hands and control, right?" I said yes. He said "I have just the thing, I own a beauty salon school, and Christine can go to my school free of charge. But, she has to study hard, not miss class and really get into the profession." Well, she did just that. The school was in Edina, close to home, and did she ever "take to" the work and study. She lost weight, started to study make-up and hair design. The first job was to get Christine to believe that she was a beautiful woman. In fact the school prides itself in

making change over's for the young women enrolled. It seemed to happen overnight.

She was a top student. Again, she was respected for her work ethic and her design skill. She had skill and talent and high energy.

The owner had her take the state boards and she passed at 100%. He then said, "Chris, we are going to place you in the best salon in the Twin Cities, Androlie's in Wayzata. You will be doing the hair of some of the wealthiest women in the City. The names of your clients are known to all". And it happened. She was a star.

At the same time, she was dating a young man, Tim Richards and they were getting serious. She got engaged, and then married. Two children followed and then Tim had a total breakdown. He lost most everything. It was the total tragedy.

Christine was a divorced woman with two kids, basically on her own. We did step in and helped her as much as we could. Her lovely house was sold, but at a loss. At various times both of the kids lived with us.

We had built a lovely second home at our farm for Chris and Tim, she retained that property as it was on "our property". Before Tim's breakdown I convinced Tim to pay off the house and pool and debt. He did that so Chris got the farm property "paid in full".

Chris worked hard, kept things together and finally met the man of her “dreams”. Dave Sanko to the rescue. An all American boy, a professional mechanic, house builder etc. And, he is a “good fellow”.

I conducted the wedding for them on our back deck. The kids are growing up to be intelligent, honest and hard working adults. At present, Chris and Dave have taken on the family home in Minnetonka, and we all love the farm. We are doing very well indeed.

Christine has worked for the Minnetonka Schools for 15 years and is now at East Junior High as a “Helper Teacher”. She helps kids get back on track. And, without doubt, she is admired and respected.



Christine with Kyle and Thomas Richards

**Thomas**, our first grand-child. He is a very special young man. He has been through a great deal in his 29 years, but came out the other side a strong, responsible young man.

He was a very strong, active child. His sport was Karate. He did get a teen` black belt`.

School was rather easy for him, but because of home issues he dragged those issue to school. He set a school record for detention. Most of his early teen years was “horse play”. He did love his family and trusted us from an early age. Issues with his Dad played havoc with his mind.

A major event happened when he was ending his Junior year at Minnetonka High and shaped his future a bit. He was in the hall with a friend and four rather, sorta think they were tough guys, started picking on his friend. Thomas said “don’t do that”, and much like his Grandpa experience the first day of teaching the boys went after him. He ended it all in about two minutes.

Karate was his sport, and he had a black belt. Big elbow in the first kids nose, a kick in the stomach to the other one, and a couple of more “strikes” and all four we on the floor, bloody.

The principal actually was in favor of what Thomas had done as the boys were bullies, and no one stopped them. But, you know, school rules, and he drew blood. He was forced to leave Minnetonka. So, grandpa paid for him to go to a private tutor. That gave him his high school diploma, with honors.

Grandpa also gave him one year in a major university. He chose to go to Indiana University and he was accepted in pre-med. He found it very easy except College Chemistry. Grades, 3 A’s, 2 B’s and FAIL. To his credit, he had never had high school chemistry or been in a lab. So his future had a bump in the road.

As is the custom, the kids all worked. When Thomas returned from his year in Indiana to Minnetonka, he found work at the Chipotle Mexican Restaurant, and he liked the work. They even made him the manager. In fact, he did so well that the state manager offered him a “corporate job”.



Thomas

At that time Thomas was dating a young woman from Minnetonka, and they were in a serious relationship. Piling on credits at Normandale for a couple of years, added to his time in Indiana, he was now a year away from a degree. He had been paying cash for Normandale and it was time to get to the U and finish. He spent a year and half and got his degree in Philosophy.

His lady friend became bi-polar so that ended. Another lady entered his life but that too ended. He then met “Ellie” and she became Mrs. Ellie Richards. They are very happy.

After college Thomas was talking “Law School, but began to work out at gym called “Sisu”. He really liked the program in cross/fit. The owner of the gym wanted to expand and Thomas was in his sites to run the Excelsior facility. Thomas was thrilled, and he has now become a full “partner” in Sisu, and they have three gyms, all going well. So, from medicine, to philosophy to cross/fit Thomas has had a great journey, great experiences and started a quality life. He is a great young man. I am glad he is my Grand-son.



Thomas, Christine and Kyle

**Kyle Peres Richards**





Kyle

In many ways Kyle came the farthest, in a short period of time and is on the way to becoming a wonderful, intelligent woman.

Kyle had lots of issues growing up. She was picked on by her Father, all the time...She could be made to cry in an instant. But, that is all in the past. She has faced the possibility of addiction, and a nasty life for one of hope and freedom. She did it alone, by herself, and with tremendous courage.

I never lost faith in Kyle. I could never believe that I would lose two of my kids.

She did not do well in high school, sort of made it a scapegoat. But, she announced several years ago that she had “joined AA



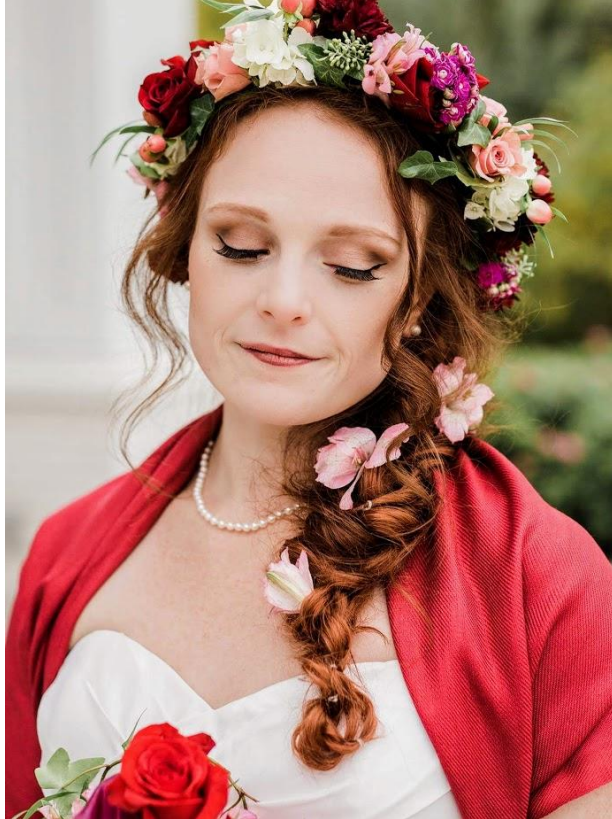
and has not had any nasty stuff in her for a year”. It is on the way to becoming permanent. She also announced that she was going to “nursing school” As we often did, Grandpa and Kyle had a long talk. I told her “if you are going into nursing to `save the world` I would not support that. I told her` if you are going into medicine to be a competent professional, I would support it to the full`. She has chosen the professional way. And of course we were not surprised to find she was the top in her class. The family knew that she was good in math, but she did not exert herself in high school. “She did not feel like doing it”.

When in nursing school, she tested out of all the math courses and scored almost perfect in the tests. She scored very high in all of her classes. She would take on school as an adult.

The staff liked her, and she gravitated to the best students. She aced the state boards.

She is now a full time registered nurse at Fairview Southdale Hospital, and why would we be surprised that she volunteered for the Covid 19 ward. She works 12 hour shifts, works all the holidays so family nurses get the time off, and she likes the `overtime`. She became ill with Covid 19, went home, fought it off and was back to work in 5 days. They needed her. That alone shows her dedication to her work. She is going through what a nurse in WW 2 went through. She has lost many of her patients while fighting to save them.

So, she is standing tall, facing the world as a competent, dedicated professional nurse. I know one person that is extremely proud of her and that is her Grand-pa.

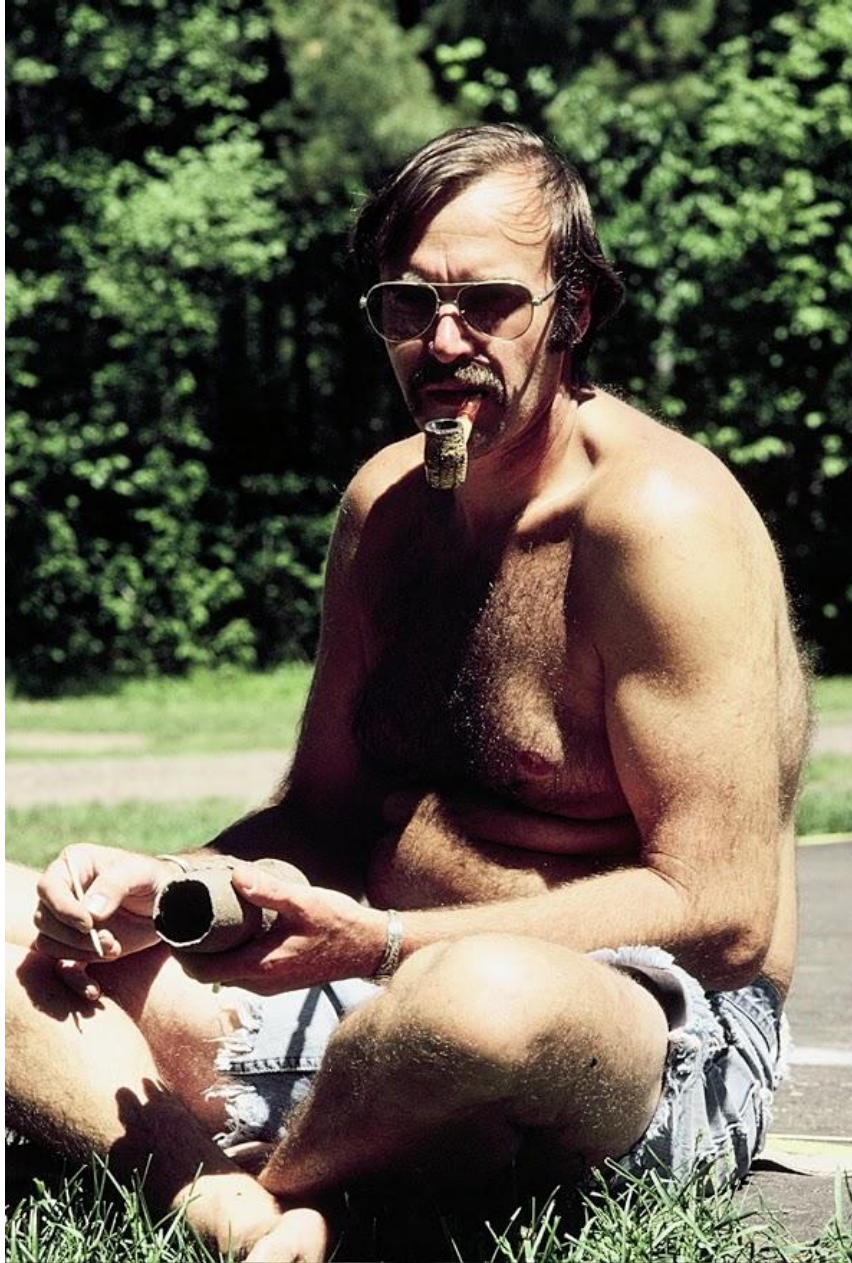


Kyle

## Stories from the past worth telling

**Hay Creek, the Farm, the how and why?**

**Bob Holman**, an old West High classmate had become friends as we both were art teachers and we both coached swimming. He was a fine jeweler, a craftsman. We had a great deal in common.



Bob Holman at Pigeon Lake, 1980.

We had also gotten to know **Kurt Wild**, the potter at U-River Falls. He was a high energy, good to know guy, and not at all a snob college teacher. It was the old thing, “high school art teachers do not have the right stuff”. Bob Holman and I did not believe that blather. If you were a good artist, know what you are doing, your choice of teaching is meaningless. (my salary

was larger, and our retirement plan way better. Many of the U of M Profs could not afford to retire. I did at 55, with money to spare.)

Kurt was planning a summer pottery workshop at the “Field Station at Pigeon Lake”, near Drummond, Wisconsin. And that is near Lake Superior. (It was basically a summer camp for the study of biology, lakes, fish that sort of thing. ) Kurt was interested in primitive firing techniques and wondered if we could join the class. He needed bodies to keep things going.

Both of our schools would pay the cost, and we got 3 credits, so why not? It sounded like a good time, and some new things to learn. That was in the late 70’s, and I was back from Japan, and back in the groove at Hopkins.

Bob had sort of turned into a hippy, bib overhauls, long hair and beard. So we turned up at Pigeon two big guys, in a black van with “Grateful Dead” stickers on the back. It was a very vanilla crowd of art teachers, they did not know what to make of us, and me a “Japanese Master Potter.” But, we met Bob Anderson and Andy Kazukewicz from Antigo, Wisconsin, Bob was the head basketball coach and Andy was a lightweight wrestler. We hit it off. Became fast friends. And of course being in close quarters with other art teachers made things easy for all.

We all had a great time, learned a great deal about outdoor firing and made some new permanent friends. Bob Holman and I attended every year, and it became a ritual. Bob had married a much younger woman, and the year 1981 we came back to the farm that **Bob and Joanne** had just purchased and she was gone,

just vanished. He did not know what to do as he was just diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, and she had the money with her. Of course he was in a panic. After a week he learned that he had a balloon payment due of \$10,000 and he asked me to loan him the money. "Bad Idea" his disease, wife gone, and he smoked a bit too much happy weed. I had the money, but what to do. So, he said, "I will trade you land for the money". That did intrigue me as it was totally beautiful land. It was worth more than 10G's.

So, I went to Rice Lake in suit and tie, dressed as a lawyer, and talked to the banker. See what we could do, as Bob had only owned the land for a year...no equity. So, I suggested to the banker that open a fund of \$10,000, a sort of escrow account that we could use to fix the place up. The bank could oversee the improvements. He bought the idea, I gave him the check for 10"G's. and I owned 25 acres of prime land. (and we used the money to fix up the place, it needed work like a barn roof. He was happy and I was delighted, Sharlene was cool to the idea. But it was a done deal. It was the bargain of a lifetime.

At that time the pottery program at Ike high was closed down as the high school became one school," at the other high school". I had been transferred to a junior high, and was devastated. The land and the farm perked me up, so I decided to build a house, from the ground up, just me. It saved my mental health, and I bided my time and drove the Junior High principal nuts and he did not have a chance. Soon I was back full time in the new High School. The clay program `launched` even better than before.





The first cut with the cat on my hill.

I started to build my house. It was in this hill, and was going to be at the bottom of four Chinese terraces. The house was built from Oak, the entire house.

And, guess what? JoAnne came home with her tail between her legs. “Forgive me, I ran away with a glass blower”. Nice, and of course we got the “what in the hell is Mel doing here? And building a house? NO NO.

‘Sorry lady, you made the choice, and I paid your bills. I am staying’. My land now.

It is a good time to tell the story of what the banker did for me. He said, “You had better have easements on that land, water, woods and you must own the road in, I will call an attorney in the area and have him draw up a contract for deed with those easements included”. That fellow saved my butt over and over. I got the deed, Bob signed it, and to hell with his wife.

Actually things smoothed over, and I got my house built, It was many pitfalls, but that is how one learns. I did everything myself except the 186 foot well, of pure water through stone. And my

new friend **Lyle Weeks** that was doing some cat work for me said “whatch doing for septic?, I know how to build them and my brother boot legs the tanks, and builds them at his farm. If we stay out of site we can do most of it a couple of Sundays at 5 a.m. We did it. I got the inside plumbing pipes built and ran them outside, he had the back hoe and dug stuff in, and I laid 11 lateral pipes 18 feet long. It was an industrial sized septic. I think it was like \$600 or so, 15 grand now. The power company ran an ungrounded line, and I was in business. The house was totally built with raw oak beams and boards. A sawmill down the road milled all the oak I could give them. Instead of 2x4’s, we used 4x4 oak, and 4x 12 beams in the ceiling. I had a ball and it was all mine.

At the same time, Kurt had been over drinking and was nearing addiction. Pigeon Lake needed more people or they were going to drop the art program. I was taking care of Kurt and doing my best to hold art week in place. The director told me, “if we do not get some more classes we have to shut down. Mel, do what you can.” The high school teacher to the rescue.

I asked some of Sharlene’s calligrapher friends if they wanted to come to Pigeon? They did and we had a new class in the Library. I found a glass blower, a fellow that taught jewelry at Stout and he wanted to do “Hot steel”, two more classes, and then I found a textile prof and she came with us. Within two years we had 125 students and were overbooked for space in the cabins. It just turned into a great place to study, the camp was safe, we got Kurt in rehab, and it worked. But, oh the jealous profs. “Why is that high school guy running Pigeon Lake, that is

unfair”. Of course they could not get anyone into camp, but now it thrived. So, of course they wanted me out.

By this time we had fixed up the farm, had things running with a good kiln, and both Kurt and I were going to retire from teaching at 55. In many ways, our tools, facility, kilns and cooking kitchen was superior to Pigeon Lake

Then another break came our way. I was driving out of the farm and I saw a guy putting up a “for sale” sign next door. I screeched to a halt. Jumped out of my car and said..”How much,for the place”?, house , barn, well and septic. He said “it has about 30 acres of land that butts up against yours, make an offer”. I said, “ten grand cash” and he said “you just bought a farm”. I wrote the check on the hood of the car, he handed me a blank deed, signed. (old Engebretson died in the house and was born in the house, and he was 96 when he died the year before..His kids were 77 and 75 and in nursing homes. I paid the back taxes.





And, we had a WOMAN’S DORM. We could do Pigeon Lake camp at our own farm. And we did. I told the silly pros to run the camp themselves and of course they ruined it in no time. The entire camp went up for sale to the public last year.

By having a woman’s dorm, a place that was private and only for women, it was perfect to start our own “Pigeon Lake”. We had all the resources in place, had a great kitchen in the barn, I had my house sorta done, and Bob’s house would take care of 6 more men. By adding that next door property it was a perfect gift.

I had to fix the place up a bit, make it fit for about 12 women, so I got a commercial spray system and got re/cycled paint and did the entire interior pure white, walls, ceiling and cupboards. The bedrooms were white as was the hallway and stairs. I then upgraded the toilet, the shower and the kitchen. We had decent

water and the toilet flushed, even the old hot water heater worked.

We covered the second floor with mattresses and the adventure began. 10 women took over that house and it was a delight. We used the living room and the dining room as studio space, calligraphy and painting. It was native, but it worked. And, of course the entire group of women were hand picked and loved the place.

I added a big circuit breaker box with surface wiring. I also put green treat beams in the basement above the kitchen. I made things solid. The rest of the house sort of balanced on the earth.

Several years later we had a party and dance in the old house, it was raucous, and fun, but the living room floor started to sink, and folks headed for the doors, butts and elbows is all you could see. The floor dropped about 8 inches, into the dirt. But, that was the end of that house, we needed a much better facility, and folks agreed. Down came the house, Lyle had his caterpillar over there and did the job.



Good bye Engie house

Lyle and I planned a new place. We asked the many campers if they would help pay for the new building. They came through like troopers and we leveled the property, and planned the house around the well and septic. We were able to leave it all in place. Lyle came up with a great plan and with some thousands from me, we built it.



Women's dorm and class room

At almost the same time Tim and Christine decided to build a house, and I suggested they use our own land. They did, and Lyle and I sort of planned it on the site of the old barn. It was solid land, it would be near us, and I gave them ten acres. I was in hopes to be able to keep it close as Tim was starting to have bad breakdowns, and was spending huge amounts of money in Las Vegas. The danger signs were in place. And I finally got Tim to drive up to Rice Lake and pay off the property in full. He had gotten a huge amount of money, and so we used it to cash out the house. And, when things went totally bad, we got the entire property back in the divorce.





The new classroom and Christine's house above.

As time went on, and our group of **Hay Creekers** grew we expanded into Christine's house. As her life changed, and she married Dave, he too became a part of the modern Hay Creek

Camp. Sharlene and her older girl friends slept in the bunk beds and others slept in the basement. It was always an older group of women, but the Engie gals often stopped for breakfast and a long chat. It was common for them all to be in their “jammies”.

Dave started to cook, and took the evening meal from Mel’s hands.

In the start of things, for a couple of years we had a local woman joining us as Dinner cook. And that was done in the barn, but we did tire of bird droppings, squirrels in the cupboards and other critters and insects to bother the cook. As soon as the new bunk house was built, we added a full commercial kitchen



The entire farm facility was getting better and better, as we added two new kilns, built outdoor covers for glazing and kiln

shelters. The huge wood fired kiln came into being directed by **Donovan Palmquist**. It worked great, but folks got tired of cutting and stacking wood. (the old story, retold)

In the past few years we have added shelters on Mel's house, a new bunk house for men, and a garage studio at Christine's and one at Mel's. A shelter was added to the back of Mel's garage and we built another set of kiln's, including a Salt Kiln.

This project has been going on for 42 years straight. We think that Bob Anderson and Mel go all the way back to Pigeon Lake first years.

We first lost Kurt, his heart just gave out, and Bob Holman's parkinson's really took a toll. Bob had a new partner in "Dorothy" from the deep south, but Bob's daughters hated her and that started a general dislike for all of us. They blamed us for "taking over Bob's property" and shutting him out of the gobs of money they thought we were making. Think of it, ten days with room and board, use of the kilns, fabulous meals and the cost at the time was \$300. A couple of years we barely broke even. But, the daughters came from California, had not taken care of Bob, hated Dorothy and went on a rampage.

Bob was sick as can be, had a bad fall living alone and had to be hospitalized. Dorothy's family dragged her to California and would not let her return. (the girls had smacked Dorothy around and she had to go to the Emergency/ Bob told the hospital that she fell down. No support for poor Dorothy.) Bob was put in a nursing home, and the girls moved in. They blocked my road, screamed obscene things at guests, ran a fence around our kilns

and did not allow us to step on their land. They wanted to sell and make a huge amount of money. That did not happen. The more they had trouble, the more they went nuts. Bob was dying. He lasted the year and never was aware of the rancor.

We had to have the sheriff in, and he did get our road opened as we had all the easements`. They countered us by having a total land assessment done. They thought the survey would show that my road and property was not legal. Bob Hobert and Mel had done the Survey when we bought the land, and the county Surveyor was very impressed that we could do our own, so he accepted the survey as stated by us. Now comes the crux of the story. He was so impressed with our home made survey he took it upon himself to help us a bit. He had judged in 1982 that we should never have used our road in, as a part of the survey; he moved my official lot lines 15 yards north. This meant that the Holman lot line was beyond the cliff to the water. Now, I was in charge of them. They could not cross my land to even show a buyer their own property. When I bought Engebretson's land it ran right into Bob's back yard. And that line was never established. But, now I owned their back yard too.

Now the tables were turned. They had no options, I blocked their entire upper property and I threatened to fence it in as they had done with me. A new for sale sign went in the next day for a much lower price. **Rod and Margaret Hyde** snatched it up, and are now the best neighbors we could find.

**Byron Bird** the owner of the back property, purchased Bob's fallow land, and in an instant we became friends and co partners in making the back land into a 400 acre park that will happen at



Byron's death. He purchased my fallow land for more money than I had paid for all the land and buildings I own.

The hill acres behind us are now the most lovely piece of land in the four counties. Roads have been built, grass cut, trees trimmed and new ones planted. He has planted about a thousand pine trees. And, I have a land easement on that land too, forever. The tiny gift of the banker in Rice Lake became a monster gift.

So from the ashes of hate and nastiness has risen a glorious place for my family, for me, and for friends to use and glory in.

### **Mel's sabbatical leave to Japan**

When we got word that Mr. Uchida was going to accept me as his apprentice for the entire next year I had to work fast to get the school to let me go. It was daunting. The superintendant said no, the school board said no, and there was a small article in the local paper stating "Art teacher wants to go to Japan to make mud pies", I was furious. There had to be a way. Keith told me to embarrass them. He was a great debater, but that was all he said, he sure did not know what the school board was about. They had said a flat no.

I mulled it for a week then went to the super and said, "I want a public hearing about my sabbatical". That was my right to do. He said "ok ,but it will not help". I made a plan.

In suit and tie, attaché case I stood before the Board and looked at Dan Ventres, father of one of my swimmers and a sorta

famous lawyer. I said, “Mr. Ventres, if a Supreme Court Justice asked you to come and study with him for a year, would you go? He looked a bit shocked at the question but then said “of course, it would be the greatest year of my life”, “hmmm, that is what has happened to me, one of the most famous potters in the world has asked me to come to Japan and be his apprentice, does that make sense to you”? He drew a blank.

The next board member was a very local famous Orthodontist. I was ready for him, for sure, I had found the most famous Teacher of Orthodontic medicine in Germany. The World’s most famous Doc of teeth. I had his name. so I said “Doctor Swenson, if Doctor Hermit Shwinderkockin From Stuttgart, German asked you to come to Germany and be his assistant for a year, would you go” He said “ I think I know where you are going with this discussion, but yes, that would make my career. “So, but you don’t care if I make my life as a potter/artist fulfilled.” ?? “Mel, I had no idea”. The superintendant was fuming.

The third board member cut me off. She did not want to be included in this discussion. She said, “I think we should re-think your getting a sabbatical leave. What do you think board?”

A rather chaotic discussion started. I stood like a rock. They re-voted and came up with 8 to accept, 0 decline. I had my Sabbatical. We went to Japan. The super said to me “God you are tough to deal with.” Yup.

That was the first sabbatical leave granted a teacher in the Lake Conference. Many administrators were granted leaves, but I

broke the glass ceiling for teachers, but the sad news was, no other teacher to my knowledge ever had the courage to ask.

I came back to the board in 1981 and asked for a leave to go to Dubai. “Where the hell is Dubai?”.

### **Mel goes to Dubai.**

**Ann Rooney** knocked on my studio door. Summer of 81, She was lovely, tan, tall shoes, cut low dress. She said, Gerry Coquet (yes home ec teacher named cook it.) said you were the only person that would know where I live and can help me start a community pottery.”? She got the guy right. I did know where Dubai is, and had flown over it. Northern coast of Saudi Arabia, the Truncial states. Can you spell lots of OIL?.

She said they needed all the tools to start an expatriate art center. “hmmmmmm, that is easy”. So I took out a big sheet of paper and started to write. Wheels, pug mill, kilns, tools, clay, etc. It totaled about \$16,000. She said “good, but I don’t have a check with me, I said, “give me your necklace and we will call it square”.

For the first time, but not the last she said “you smarty asshole”. She had on a pure gold squash blossom neck piece. Pure gold. She wore it as a way to have quick money living in the middle east. You never know what may happen. Pure gold is not really polish or pretty.

Then she burst out laughing and said “my husband is the first vice president of Dubai Petroleum, he can pay the bill”. So I

called Em at Continental, and said. “Em, got a big order to go on my account, here is the list, and call Tony Glass at Brent Wheels and have four wheels, model c’s re wired for British standard electrics. Then call yellow trucking and have the load sent to Houston, (Ann. what dock does Conoco have?, she said 25. and how in the hell do you know where to ship it”.???)

Conoco owns Dubai Petroleum So logic, ship out of Houston. She was again stunned. I got the “asshole” treatment with a smile. We got it all done. The Ships huge steel shipping Container arrived before she got home. An entire pottery in a box.

Two weeks later she called me. “Mel, something is missing from the big box”. What ?? She said “you”. Come to Dubai and teach us to use the pottery. I just asked Gulf air to bring you over , first class, MSP, London, Dubai.” I said to her,” how in the hell am I going to get away from Hopkins Schools.” She said, “be alert tomorrow morning, you are coming to Dubai”.

Next morning, about 9 a.m. the super’s office called, “Mel, get down here fast, you won’t believe it Henry Kissinger is talking to the super.” I ran down, walked into his office and said, “Oh, did Henry Call?????. He was shaking. “God Damn, it was him. he wants you in Dubai.”. He did not argue. The state department and Dubai petroleum paid for the sub, I got my full check while gone. In some ways, I was now an employee of the U.S. State Department, but not really. The super thought I was a spy, really. The super’s secretary had very wide eyes. (sidebar. The state department uses the boss to call for favors every morning. It still goes on. And with Kissinger, people granted

anything he wanted. He did not know me, what I was going to be doing..and did not care. Favor granted. His ambassador in Dubai got his potter.)

The hostages where in Iran, very near Dubai, people thought I was crazy to got to the Middle East with that crisis. I said “that is like saying don’t be in South Dakota, Mount St Helen’s blew up.” I was totally safe.

Off I went. It was beyond description. All the money in the world is located in the Emirates.

I had my own beach house, 4 bedrooms with a servant. Yes, they gave me a man servant..”Abduhl”.



Our servant, Abduhl.

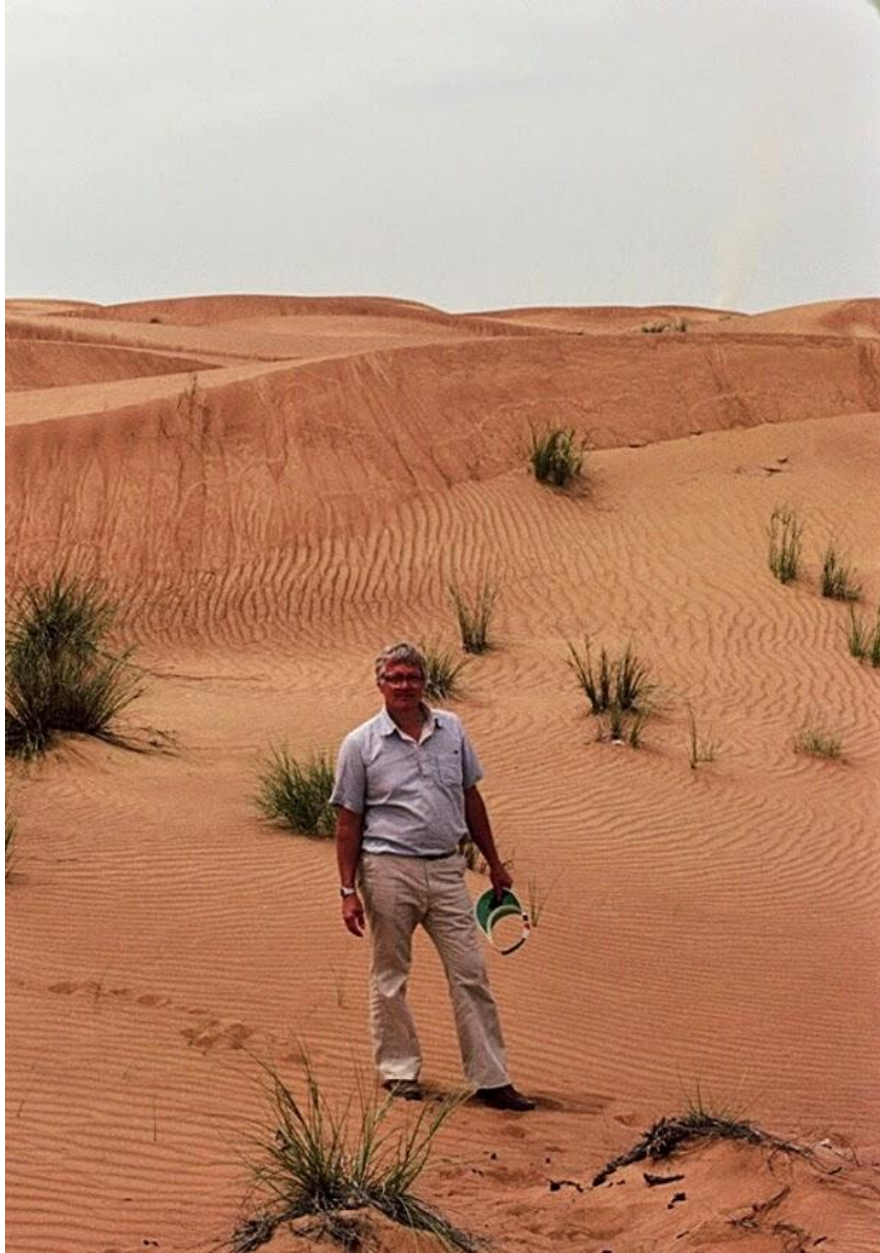
I set up the studio, got the kilns hooked up, Ann had 9 gorgeous wives of oil people. MMMMmmm, what a class to teach. It went just great. The big plus, they were really good pottery students. Loved it and worked hard. One of them went on and got her MFA in pottery in Australia. I was her first teacher.

And at that time Kurt was doing black smoked pots in primitive firings. He said. “do some of that in Dubai.” And we had local clay dug and they brought it in a Michigan Loader and dumped

it in the driveway with a load of camel dung for fuel. Nothing is done in small doses. I primitive fired that clay and then found out that Sheik Rashid's grandfather was a potter. We send the pots to his office and he sent a note back. "they look just like my grandfather made them". I had a friend, the "Ruler of Dubai".

I was there for 16 weeks. It was fabulous. People were nice, happy that I was there, treated me well.





Ann put together a big one man show of my work that I had stuck in the container as gifts. And of course I made tons of pots in Dubai. The opening night of the show was crowded with Ex-Pats from all over the world. It was a gala. They live for this sort of thing as it never happens. Ann squaked at me..."look at that Arab, white and gold dish dash, rolex the works. He was the special assistant to the Sheik, he was told to buy all the pots in

the show for the Ruler. My pal bought the entire show. That sure was a first. Some of the pots went into the case of historic pots at the Dubai Museum. Old and new together.

I went home with my pockets full. I was a happy man. No one at Hopkins ever asked me a single question about my trip. They were stunned. Teachers do not do that sort of thing, especially art teachers. And, coach a World and an Olympic champion, can't happen. And, a solo show in Tokyo? Insane, oh and then there was the show in Shanghai, China. Never mind. ( I hate to talk like a baby, but that attitude prevailed. I just kicked their universal asses.)

In 1983 Sharlene and I went back together. She taught calligraphy, we brought in a famous Brit painter, a glass designer and a textile worker and did an "All Gulf art Event. We lived in a 6 star hotel for three weeks, three meals a day. It was way over Sharlene's head, but she did a great job, and people as always adored her. We spent another 16 weeks in Dubai. The stories are far too many to tell.

In 1985 we went back for a third trip. Ann had a bi-polar attack and they asked me to conduct a second all Gulf art Event. It did go well, but what a responsibility. Another sixteen weeks and Sharlene and I stopped in Italy and went to Florence on the way home, her favorite city. Then stopped in London and visited our dear friend "Donald Jackson, the scribe to the Queen." The airline did not care what and where we went, just get on the next flight as we were special guests of the airline. What a story, and it was all true, it would take a hundred pages to tell all.

The sad part was that our dear friend, Ann Rooney died very early in life, 42 years old. Victim of severe Bi Polar Illness. We adore you Ann.

## **Bits and pieces**

About two weeks in Dubai, Ann's husband Pat came home for lunch and said, "there is a stoning to death today, do you want to watch, I think you should." So, we went to a stoning. A Pakistani servant was hiding out in a cleaned up dumpster and having sex with a maid. She too was a "Paki", but he got greedy and had another girl in now and then...East Indian. The Paki got jealous and had police come when he was in the dumpster with the other girl. The punishment for public fornication is death. So, they pinned the guilty parties to the desert out by the airport. A big dump truck backed up full of stone. No ceremony, he just dumped the load on them. Then a man from the ruler's office put up a sign. "Public fornication is punishable by death." No three times and you are out. The Ruler rules. The next day.

## **Shot in the head**

Ann and I were going down to Sharja to see if we could find natural metal ore in a place they were mining. You know, copper and iron ore and such. We got there and a big piece of machinery was across the road, a dead body with a puddle of blood about six gallons was on the road. Hole in his head.

It seems the German engineer had dynamited near a Bedouin's goats, and killed several of them. He was mad, and wanted money for his prize breeders. He had an old Lee Enfield, 303 on

his shoulder. The German told the guy to F-off. The Bedouin Shot him in the forehead, dead. The Ruler of Sharja fined the German company a pile of money, and the local herder got all new Goats. Don't screw with the locals. And, don't chat with women dressed all in black on the street. Look the other way.

There is no crime. Brand new boxes of TV's sat out on the street overnight. The jewelry shops had packages delivered and they sat out all day. What was in the package?, Gold. And, if you are on the desert, and you see a fig tree, don't pick one, there might be a shot coming at you. If it is not yours, don't take it. It is just a rule. But, the other cultural truth is, if you are out of water, the man you meet will give you half of his. Just a rule.

### **Mel goes to China**

The Hare's fur glaze study with Jo Koons is written about other places in this book. It was an amazing event. We did a huge show of the work in Los Angeles. That show was requested in Shanghai.

I went to China with my friend Po, I had helped Po get some early exposure for his work between China and American potters. He and his wife had escaped China and had come to America. He studied at Duluth, his girl friend was at U of Texas at El Paso. North to South, the max.

He was in the China ceramic trade business. His wife was the third vice president of a small computer company called "Intel" yes, the very one. He wanted to go to my show, I had to go, so

he actually took me to China. We traveled for 5 weeks and ended up in Shanghai. And Po is such a good friend.

The best part of that story was the opening night of the show. I knew nothing of this type of thing in China, but the crowd was huge. Very lovely ladies, Men in Armani suits. Buying it all up.

Then Caroline Chen, the gallery owner said to me..”God Mel, look who just walked in:”. What did I know, they were all Chinese. It was the Director of the National Museum of China. The Big One. He was thrilled with my work and had a lovely hare’s fur bowl with a emerald center in his hand. He said to Po in Chinese, “there are only four of the Emerald pots in the world. In Tokyo, they are priceless.” I said, “there are eleven, I have made 7. He was stunned, and I told him that pot he held was his, a gift from Joe and Mel.” He said, “I cannot accept gifts, I am the Director of the National.” I said, “Please give it back to me”, he said “No,I want this pot”. The best compliment I have ever received any place, any time. That was from the most knowledgeable expert in pottery any place on the planet. The Hare’s fur glaze was a national treasure, and I had helped solve the mystery.

The next day I was ushered to the “National Academy of Science of China.” They asked if I would explain what Joe and I had done. Give us the secret. I did that. They could not believe a person from Minnesota, could solve the problem dozens of Ph. D. scientists could not solve. Nice for me.



**Mel, on the Great Wall of China**



### **The Blue Crystal Pot.**

## **Stories from School**

In 1973 and just home from Japan, the graduation ceremony went to hell. Big protest, the kids threw their gowns and walked out. It was awful.

The next morning I walked past the Principals office as all the phones were down. He had his head on his desk. I said “how can I help Don?” “What do you mean?” ( he was a good guy)I said, “I would be willing to do “Graduation” if you leave me alone to do it my way”. He said, “we just pull out a mimeo of what we did last year.” I said, “that is the problem, the society changes.”



He said “Do It.”

I met with a group of graduated students at my house, and asked questions of them about what is it they hate? I got a list.

1. The English teachers correct their speeches. Meaning Re-Write.

2. The Minister goes on and on. We don’t need that.

3. The music is not current, and the administration picks the speakers.

4. Kids get drunk and high after the rehearsal.

That was enough for me. I knew what to do.

So, it was turning into May, and nothing had been planned for Graduation. And questions arose, like “what’s going on”?. And I just said. “I’ve got it.”.

Two weeks before graduation I called for a Senior Meeting in the theater. Just me and the seniors. I said, “All has changed in Graduation. There will be no rehearsal, You will show up at the athletic field with your parents. We will have ice cream and cake and you visit with friends and parents. I will tell you to line up and you stand in rows from A-Z. If you do not know how to line up in order, we have failed all of you. You have been doing it since 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The Anderson’s are together, get it???”

Then I said “ok, who wants to give a speech? “...mumble.

Then one girl said “We should have Gary do it.” OK Gary it is.

“Who else”. “Sarah”, Ok I said “Now speakers, no one on the faculty can see your speech. It is all on you. Say what you feel and understand you speak for all the Seniors, Got it”

Ok. “who wants to sing or play music”. Three girls had a nice trio, they got to sing.

No religious ceremony. Just a simple benediction.

Then the big one, “What music shall you play during the ceremony?” Cat Stevens. Ok. Then I said” we will all have breakfast together, in the lunchroom the day before graduation.” We did.

They all showed up, nervous, what if they screw up, just a bit of fright makes them serious. I said to the group “you will be fine, I will be there to help if you need it.” Of course they dared not drink or use drugs as they had to come to graduation with the family. No buses, no lag time. No drunken brawl a few hours before the ceremony.

I had microphones out in the audience and told them if they had any bad feelings, or things they wanted to say, do it now. Take the mic and clear your mind.” But, the best thing happened, a girl went to the mic and said “thank you seniors for being so kind to me when I came here from Iowa. You are the best ever.” And ten more kids gave very loving tributes to coaches and friends. It was a lovely morning. I gave clay cookies to about six kids. “Those that gave the most to the senior class.” They cried. We did not do...cutest couple, smartest kids, best figure.

Graduation night was the best the school had ever had. Not a kid out of order. And the only person that helped me was Dale Feste, I asked him to supervise the line up. But all he did was stand there and watch. The speeches were marvelous and from the heart.

Don Coppins the Principal said when it was all done. “My God, you know how to do things well” Yup. Ask the kids, they will tell you everything. NO one listens to the kids. I do. Does one wonder why the swim team always won?. And the football team lost most of their games.? The hockey team was a shambles. If you lose all the time, you get used to it. Just take the mimeo out of the drawer and do it again.

So, I have had a major show in Los Angeles, Tokyo, Kyoto, Dubai and Shanghai. Not bad for a kid from Pleasant Avenue in South Minneapolis, with bowed legs, thick glasses and was left handed. But coming from a loving family sure helps.

**`FROM THE GROUND UP`  
A SHORT HISTORY OF THOSE THAT  
HELPED SHAPE MEL JACOBSON  
“85 YEARS OF LOVING TO WORK”**

**Book 2**

In the early sixties, my pal Dale Eldred had an audio tape of Boss Kettering giving a speech. Boss was the genius engineer at GM and had 186 inventions/patents, including car ignition, battery, the new 2 stroke diesel engine, hydraulic brakes, auto paint sprayer and on and on. He did not go to college, was not an engineer. He said "he did not know how to use a slide rule.  $2+2$  was 4..not 3.9954."

During the speech he mentioned that he invented spraying cars a color. The huge problem with the spray was it took far too long to dry, in fact it was overnight, and bugs etc. stuck to the paint. While on a trip to San Francisco, he watched a Japanese man spraying lacquer on bamboo to make a colorful bowl. He asked the man, "what is the big problem with that sort of spraying." The man answered, "It dry too fast". Bingo, the invention of enamel/lacquer.

One afternoon Boss called up to the CEO of General Motors from an open window. "What is your favorite color?" The reply, "Red". Boss had a new car hauled into a garage and they sprayed the car red, used heat to speed drying and there was the first red car.

Having heros like Boss was perhaps the most important factor in my life. Asking questions like..."what is the biggest problem that faces your work?" People often give you the clue to solving problems.

Boss solved problems from the ground up. It was his imagination that sparked the great ideas and solutions

Dale Eldred was my very first inspirational friend that wanted to be an artist. We played football against each other, and were not friends. However, I went to Hamline University to play football, as a snapper, and therefore was a specialist. When I first got my uniform and went to my locker, there was Dale Eldred at the next locker. We both laughed/ the nemesis. We shook hands and Dale said..."I think we are going to raise a lot of Hell". I agreed. And we did, and became the best of friends.

Dale said to me at the end of the first semester, "hey, would you like to take an art course with me?" Wow, that came from the blue...and I said "I think I do". So, we signed up for painting/drawing. Drew Art Center. But, now we both were confronted with the aspect of two football players taking art class. So, we trooped up the back stairs and slide into class. Bob Turner was the instructor and was thrilled to have two fellows from the other side of campus. He was a great teacher and helped us both...But from the beginning we could sure see that Dale had something special.

That spring at the all college awards convocation, both Dale and I got awards for outstanding art accomplishment. We did not go on stage to get them. Can you imagine? Embarrassed?

Dale's brother was the private pilot for Henry Ford (Ken was a ww2 ace) and he really wanted Dale to move to Ann Arbor and continue school at Michigan. The brother talked him into it and off he went. He walked into the head football coach's office and told them he was ready to start for Michigan at guard. He did. He threw the shot and disc for the track team and placed in the Big Ten meet.

Dale's dream came true, he majored in art. His life became a total joy. He was a star from the first day and literally took over the program. He liked JT Abernathy, but had little time for clay. He just did everything...paint, draw, all sorts of 3d. He won all the big shows, made all the profs jealous. I do recall when he won the all Michigan Art Annual. It was a 5K prize. One of his teachers gave him a D for embarrassing the prof. He thought he should have won the prize. What a jerk.

I too had left Hamline and enrolled at the University of Minnesota. I began taking art courses. To be totally honest, I got A's and did that help my honor point numbers. I actually thought I was cheating, and getting good grades in art without knowing why. One of my painting teachers took me out for lunch and explained that he did not give easy grades. I was actually one of his favorite students. (That was Hank Rowan, a fine painter.) He said I had the wrong major. That is when I left academia and switched my major to Art Education.

Dale wanted to come home and do an MFA and I asked Warren MacKenzie if he would take Dale as a 3D MFA student. He agreed, and Dale made hundreds of sculptures out of clay. No pots as such, just clay "pieces" And to the great surprise of the entire art faculty, the Walker Art Center asked Dale if he could do his MFA show in their main Gallery. It was a smash hit. Dale got a great deal of National Attention. What followed was a teaching job at the Kansas City Art Institute. The rest of his career was a sky rocket.

Dale died in the fall of 1993 while moving tools from his fourth floor studio with a crane. The city was experiencing a major

flood. He tripped, and fell through a hole in the floor. He died instantly. He was 59 years old. It took me years to recover from that loss.

Dale hired the wonderful potter Ken Ferguson. On my many trips to KC Ken became a friend. He was a really odd and funny guy. But he had power in his work.

We all went several times to his home for dinner. Ken was totally henpecked by his wife Gert. That was one of those times you see the inside/out. I sent several fine Hopkins students to study with Ken. He always said “some of the best kids I ever had were from Mel”.

Ken was totally shaken by Dale’s death. It was as if his alter/ego died. Ken used Dale as a sounding board for his dynamic work. Dale pushed Ken very hard to be the best he could be. Ken retired soon after Dale died, and he was seen many days just sitting in the parking lot of the school. It was sad as Ken died early too.

One of my favorite “hellion” students was sent by me to study with Dale. **Ned Mansfield** turned out to be a star at KC. He traveled on the work crew building sculptures with Dale. After graduation Ned came to me with a need to go to “Yale”. Robbie, Dale’s wife wrote letters and we called the dean and Ned graduated with his MFA (terminal degree in studio art) from Yale.

When I retired from Hopkins, I was asked to say a few words the last day at breakfast. Hmmm, so, I started the speech with



“last night, one of the most disliked students from Hopkins High School graduated from Yale University with a Ph.D. degree in sculpture. Who among you is the predictor of what a child will become?” I went on to say that the great general of China Sun Wu (Sun Tzu) the author of “The Art of War” was quoted as saying (loose translation) “A great leader leads and marches his troops to battle, all arrows are taken in the chest.” I finished by saying that “I had spent 35 years taking arrows in the chest, leading my students”.

A number of teachers did not understand what I had just said. Of course they did not get it.



**Dale Eldred**

## **Joe Koons**

Just a few years back Joe Koons a glaze tech for Laguna Clay Company asked me to help him with a project. He had asked a dozen potters to help him and the results were awful.

Joe was totally obsessed with the Chinese Historic Glaze, Hare's Fur. The glaze was found on early Sung pots. Maybe a thousand years old. No one seemed to know how to fire it.



Joe Koons

Joe asked me to help him, he was desperate. He had worked on this glaze for over 40 years. I told him I would be happy to help him, but what was the problem? He said “no one gets it right, just ugly brown pots.” I told him “I would give it a shot, but I would have to make several hundred pots, all fired together, they could not be fired with other pots...it would not work,”

I said “I will need a special clay, and he would have to make all the glaze in powder form, I would add the water and fire the pots. I felt seeing the old pots that I would need a really dark, iron filled clay. So, he had a thousand pounds of clay made, and 40 pound bags of the glaze..10 of them. I got to work.

For some unknown reason a solution had come into my head. I really thought I knew what was wrong. It was an idea born of seeing old Japanese Kiln sites from that same period. The kilns were fired with wood, and the kilns were huge, like 3000 pots fired at one time. Those kilns fired hot. Like cone 12.

Without doubt the most critical thing was that each pot was fired in a sagger, or clay box. There were no kiln shelves a thousand years ago. Those boxes were stacked in the kiln, hundreds of stacks per chamber.

My theory was, the boxes were sealed against smoke, ashes and direct flame. In other words, oxidized atmosphere. That is what everyone missed.

The conclusion was I was able to make Hare's Fur glaze. I nailed it on the first firing of my kiln. I fired in a clear, oxidized atmosphere to cone 12. Joe had made perfect glazes, and I fired them just right.

There has been a great deal written about this project. It is a bit more complex than I make it out to be here in this small book, So, the reader can do simple research into my writing and see the results. A major show was held in Shanghai, China with a great deal of applause. I also presented a lecture to the National Academy of Science of China. The scientific consensus was that "I had made Hare's Fur glazed pots". Joe was thrilled, his quest was over and all of his work had paid off. But, Joe too died early, just two years after our triumph. I put the project away, it was not worth doing any more work without him.



Hare's Fur pot from Mel's Kiln

Being a potter is full of many problems. Clay is very fickle, it often does whatever it wants. It is a natural substance; it is difficult to fence in.

The other huge problem with clay is faulty education. People taught information that had no basis of truth. It was bad science, and then you combine artistic people with severe technical issues and it became a disaster. What was needed was the combined effort of engineer and artist. Learning from industry, thermo/dynamics in firing and destroying the old myths. By being partners with very well educated and eager engineers/chemists, we as potters and users of clay and fire, our

work became much better. We learned to rope in the disasters that clay could produce.

At 84 years of age my entire life with clay and fire changed...in a big way. I purchased a new small kiln. It was designed to fire small porcelain doll heads to a very high temperature. It fired very speedy. It was a problem. The potter's song was...slow, slow, slow. Heat your kiln overnight, go slow or the pots will break. As i worked with this kiln I realized that my pots were not breaking. I had worked out a new clay formula that seemed to be very tolerant to abuse. There again, the technique of working with clay was based on `that old clay`.

The vendors of clay had been stuffing their mid range clay body with talc. Talc is not clay; it is basically a filler to drop the heat range needed to fire the clay (flux). The talc made the clay hard to work with (short), it did not throw well, and it cracked and was basically junk. I took the challenge and took out the talc and replaced it with "Redart" earthenware ware clay from Ohio. It is a natural clay, mined for years to be fired at a low temperature. So like Boss, i had a kiln that fired too fast and a clay that loved to be fired fast. So, I combined them, and changed my entire life as a potter.

Years back, when i first started, i had to make my own clay body. There was no company called Minnesota Clay, no Continental Clay, we had to make what we wanted and our knowledge of clay and glaze was very limited. We shared a lot of ideas that had little basis for a complete, well designed clay body. At best, it was hit and miss.

I was now confronted with the prospect of firing my pots to a lower temperature, in a tiny electric kiln as fast as the kiln would fire. And the clay body was as good to work with as any I had ever used. It seemed that all the old songs were wrong. Now I had to find a glaze that would complement the new clay and fast firing. Enter my pal Ron Roy. He had sent me a glaze recipe a few years back that fired to cone 6-7. **Bill Burgert** had used it the first year he made pots. I had told him to use the recipe as it was easy to compound. Equal parts of four ingredients, you could not go wrong. He used only black and white.

I found the recipe in the back of my book of recipes, on a piece of paper. It looked interesting, and I had forgotten I had given it to Bill.

The irony is that I also made only black and white, and in the tests it turned into a black and white speckle. The old potters called it oil spot, I called it speckled trout. It was a very nice and unusual glaze.

So, now i had a new kiln, new clay and a new glaze. So being a tester, I realized that I would have to kick this entire project in the butt and fire as fast as I could, use the new glaze, and see if it would hold water, and not crack. I had to find out the outside parameters

I turned to Jonas Saulk's theory. The inventor of the cure for Polio. I heard him give a speech while I attended the UofM. He said, "if you want to find the cure for something, you should not get on a bus that has all the other people on it that want to find the same cure. You are going down the highway with people



that do not have the answer. So I got off the bus, and found the cure in a small town in Nebraska, behind a hardware store in a garbage can." That quote changed my life. You have to find the answers yourself. Do your own research, and don't always turn to someone that thinks they have all the answers. My line, "arrogance is a direct line to stupidity". But, having the courage to try new ideas, your ideas, may lead to something brand new. And for sure, a great part of self confidence is "question everything". One of the comments I have gotten my entire life..."oh Mel, why are you questioning everything, things are fine the way they are". Sorry, they are wrong, and should be changed or corrected. Or at least modified.

A side story. Years back I saw a pile of taconite at a testing station on the campus at the U of Mn. Taconite is pure iron ore. I loved the speckles of iron that just once in awhile came to the surface of my pots. I wondered, if I ground the pellets into tiny chunks and added it to my clay, would they spot? (I took a lunch bag full of pellets home with me.) Yes, they did. And, I had a new look for my pots. It then happened again. I was at a friend's cabin on Lake Superior, his beach was black. The sand was black, and i assumed it was the tailings of making taconite. Again, I was correct. I hauled a pail back to my studio and added it to clay. It was more attractive then the taconite. It created a larger variety of spots. Now, what to do with the taconite....I know, I will grind it finer and add it to glaze. That worked very well in certain glazes. So, what I did was observe, wonder, then try. No authority helped me out. I did not read it in a book, and I mastered a new technique. I discovered that you cannot add a new voice to your work unless you "sing". If you

use just old ideas, that makes your song/voice "you are my sunshine".

Now I have a new kiln, new clay, new glaze, new speed and all sorts of problems to solve/prove. The first and foremost issue is absorbency. Does and clay and glaze vitrify totally? So, back to Ron Roy, my go to guy with all things important. The testing has to be accurate. No fudging at all. The standard procedure is based on accurate weight of a glazed piece. I used a digital postal scale. The bisque piece glazed weighs what? 96.8 grams. I fired the same piece to cone 7 and took it from the kiln hot, weight it. 95.2 grams. I placed the sample in a pot of boiling water and boiled it for four hours. It was removed, wiped off and weigh again. 95 grams. Literally no water was pulled into the glazed fired sample. It is vitrified. That was great news. The new clay body fired perfectly and vitrified without any flux from talc or other sources. The Redart did the trick. (Redart clay has natural glass makers so it did not need additional silica or feldspar.)

The next step in testing was how fast can I fire this kiln? I really did not have a clue. So, it was up to me to fire from cold kiln to cone 7 in what time? The only way to do that is have totally dried clay and glaze and warm the kiln for a short half hour and hit the power button to high. No pre-heat, just fire on high...see what happens. The first firing with that method fired in 4 hours and 18 minutes to a full cone 7. It cooled in about 6 hours. I opened the kiln to totally well fired pots with no blemish, or cracks and the sound of the pots was like a bell ringing. I was thrilled. I filled the mugs with water to the top and placed them on paper. I kept them on the paper for ten days, refilling the

water that evaporated. There was no dampness on the paper or the wooden surface under the paper. Perfect.

With my total satisfaction of the clay body and glaze I turned to the color of the clay body. It was a touch flat, not nearly dark enough. I wanted that rich brown that comes from well reduced clay, in a gas kiln. The answer for that was using a combination of ochre, red iron and black iron. My pug mill was busy. The second firing had a much richer brown, but i was not totally satisfied. So, more iron. Finally i had the color i wanted. I did not think any senior potter would be able to tell these pots were fired in an electric kiln in under 5 hours.

As I proceeded with glaze tests, I continued to change the clay color and even got a darker and a more rich clay color.

I was getting very excited about the glaze. By using the black glaze as a base, i could layer it with white, green, aqua and a new yellow, with marvelous spots and small runs. I tried a series of pots fired to cone 8, and it was ok, but the glaze ran and became streaks rather than spots and speckles. I have settled with cone 7.



## Mel6

This entire new project was so remindful of the history of making a home studio, being a part time potter and solving the problems that occur while learning.

The basic clay companies of MN Clay, Continental clay did not exist in 1965 when i began. We had to scrounge around to find any materials at all. Paint companies had some of the materials like whiting, calcium carb, silica etc. (I did not know that silica, quartz and flint were the same thing.) There was a gal in Bloomington that was shipping materials in for her plaster cast doll business...kissing fish etc. She had the old Custer feldspar, some bags of silica and EPK. We had to order oxides from Jack Wolf in New York. All the potters talked and shared ideas as to what was available. We kept it simple, and did what we had to do. It was the way it was.

Clay was the other problem. No one made commercial, ready made clay. In fact the plastic bag was not common, and we did not see plastic buckets with tight lids until the late 60's. A fellow by the name of Nick Brantz had a doe mixer and was making a simple stoneware recipe that you could pick up at his house in South Mpls. I am sure that recipe followed along and it became MN Clay. In fact, i used the old Mackenzie recipe as the starting point for Mel6, my new clay body. Just add 30 percent Redart.

I was teaching school in Hopkins and we got an earthenware clay body from Amaco in Indianapolis. It was basically an 06 clay. I had tons of it available as the elementary teachers threw it

away all the time. No one knew to re/cycle. I could not stand to see all the clay going to the trash so I came up with the idea of adding it to a Missouri fire clay that was available. I just guessed and thought that i could make half and half and have a cone 9 clay. It worked. i packed the clay in old steel buckets that held wax for school floors. All of that clay was air dried and hand wedged. I had an old head stone that was made from sandstone and it sucked water fast. i put that clay on that headstone and let it dry. I still have the stone, and use it for wet clay drying. All the potters were thrilled when heavy duty plastic bags became available. We could store a lot of clay in those bags, and it aged.

I met **David Shaner**, years back at an early NCECA meeting. It turned out that we were both born in December of 1934, and we both had a degree in Education. We had taught Junior High and saved Amaco earthenware clay and mixed it with Fire clay. He went on to Alfred and then taught college clay...I planned on going to Japan, and did. We both built fine careers in clay. But the starting point was the same...learn everything from scratch, no books, and little information. But, was that bad? I think not. We learned from the ground up. In fact David created the Rhodes 32 glaze that appeared in one of the first real books about clay and glaze...the first Rhodes book. David was getting his MFA at Alfred in New York and worked for Dan doing glaze testing for the book.

That glaze recipe was my first really successful glaze. and, that was because if was, like David, using a very high iron, home made, clay body. It fit Rhodes 32 like a silk glove. It is amazing to me that when I started thinking of the mel6 clay problem i was reminded that we mixed earthenware with fire

clay to make a cone 9 clay years back, and then i realized that I could make a cone 6 clay by adding earthenware. It was the same theory, just opposite. And there is the most important part of the "ground up" learning curve that I had. Make do, figure it out, and depend on self.

At this same time, Dale Eldred was home from Michigan, I met Nils Lou who had studied with J.T.Abernathy at Michigan, and we became fast friends. Nils was smart, taught ceramics at Hamline and had built his own kiln. He had gathered information from JT that none of us realized was vital in kiln construction and clay formulation. JT was a genius. Nils was a mirror of JT.

At about the same time i met Gene Johnson from Bethel and Ken Olson a business man turned potter. Both of these fellows were looking into soft brick kilns. We did talk together and exchanged some ideas...I think i was the first to dive in.

At this time the thought of building my own kiln was hatched. I had never seen a soft brick (IFB). I was totally ignorant. But, i had a need. I needed a kiln. So, in my fashion i went about finding out how to build one in my garage. Yes, a gas kiln, in my garage.

**Jim Mackinnel** had been experimenting with ifb brick and building a small stoneware kiln at Iowa State. He had drawings made up and they became "blueprints" I have no idea where they came from, but someone gave me those blueprints. I had to have a gas line to my garage. The gas company said it would not work, so i dug the line in with a shovel. Cut the 1 1/4"

pipe running from the meter in my basement, and put in a T. Ran that line to the garage, through the basement wall, underground to the garage corner then piped to the kiln site. I had no idea if there would be enough pressure and crossed my fingers, as some had said the line was too far from the meter. That pipe system is still in place and works great. I was committed and ready. I ordered all new ifb bricks.

I first mapped the size and placement, and built a concrete block pad and was sure to build it to my height for loading. Jim had designed a flat top system using steel rod run through a hole drilled in the brick. that was threaded and washers and nuts held each beam together. This was all new to me, but i followed the plan. So, what i created was a series of lid beams. they were stacked on the wall of the kiln as a flat roof. I wrapped aircraft cable around the kiln and secured it with turnbuckles.

\*I had cut a hole in the roof and had a metal support fitting and ran a metal-bestos chimney to the flue. It was very make shift, but it worked, that was replaced with brick a year later. So, what i had was a free stacked brick box with holes for the burners and a very small flue as i did not have oversized brick to bridge the flue...I had a 45 sq inch flue, others had 81 square inch flues. Mine worked the best. I remember that Nils was amazed that my kiln fired so well with that small flue. I just shrugged. What did I know? Many years later Nils wrote a book about his new Minnesota Flat Top Kiln. I was surprised that he touted a 45 square inch flue as a venturi system. He called the small flue the "state of the art". He forgot to mention where he first saw it...and that I had used that system for 50 years. It was considered a laughing joke. No one was hurt.



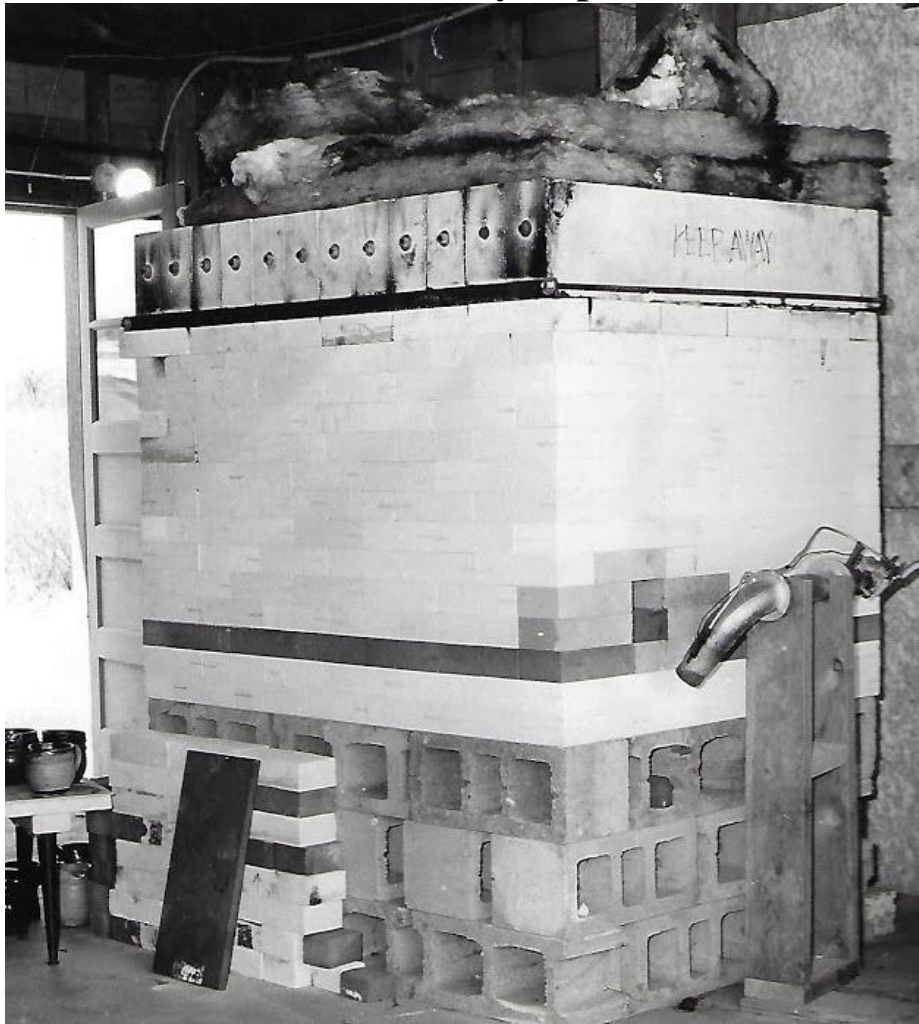
Several others built the same sort of kiln. All seemed thrilled with the results.

My kiln fired to cone 10 on the first try. It seemed to go into reduction with little effort. I used the old Leach 1234 and Mackenzie 446 glazes. My clay body turned a rich deep brown because of all the iron in the body and the glazes melted. It took just under 8 hours for that first firing. I was totally stunned.

A friend, Pete O'Heron, who owned a used tool company traded a really good drill press for a painting. I had to have an accurate drill press and jig to drill the holes in the brick to accept the threaded rod to hold the bricks into a solid block of upright K-23 Bricks. He also gave me some really good business advice about selling art work and pots. "Make sure you always report all of your income to the IRS. Always show a profit in what you make and sell, then deduct the "bejesus" for your taxes. You can always debate the tax folks about deductions, but not reporting gets you in a heap of trouble." That was amazing advice, and served me well over the years.

I had purchased two Denver Fire Clay gas burners. At a plumbing shop I purchased two Honeywell 3/4 inch Baso Valves. I ran high pressure auto water hose from the black pipe to the burners. I had put a ball valve on/off in the basement, the garage and at each burner. I fired with the garage doors open. Lots of air around the kiln. Using that high pressure hose made the burners flexible and quiet. I could move the burners a few inches each way while firing and it taught me to move the heat in the kiln. It was a small thing then, but after years of firing i know that where the flame points that is where the heat goes.

I really learned an amazing amount of information firing that first kiln. Because I had not had any experience with gas kilns it was important to me to experiment with different shelf arrangements, using high gas pressure and low pressure, watching the weather, and learning how to use the damper. That information came from my experience, not a book.



Mel's first kiln in the garage

I had not put the cable on the outside of the kiln until i had fired it a few times. Note the angle iron and threaded rod holding the base of the roof together. The door bricks are stacked on the

floor. The silica carbide shelves came from "Smith-Sharpe", and at the first year of so, I had the burners at opposite corners, (note the wooden burner holder. I still use them. All of the design, structure and building of the kiln I did alone. I sort of kept the kiln a secret from others. I suspect i was nervous that it was not done well enough. It turned out to be one of the best ones built...remember, I was a Junior High teacher. The wisdom at the time is that only college teachers and such could build there own kiln. Totally arrogant BS.

I was able to make a lot of pots, and fired them well. Everything was basic cone ten, medium reduction. When I found Rhodes 32 everything changed again. I made three variations of that glaze, the first one whitan, then a brown/ochre and a rich blue green. Layers became to standard for me. I found wax resist, and it was a one chance system. So, i did a base coat, added wax with a home made brush from my dog's hair. Added the blue green, iron oxide wash and a top coat of white. It was wonderful.

That McKinnell designed kiln got me through the early years of experimentation and basic learning about gas kilns. The kiln had longevity problems. The roof bricks tended to crack just below the hole for the rod. The heating and cooling also made for expansion and contraction and soon after the brick would split off and fall into the kiln. There was no way to repair the bricks, so i had to just fire with the quarter brick. It became a huge safety issue for me. It was time to build a new kiln.

Most of the kilns being built had arches. I was not sure of how to make an arch kiln, but asked Nils, and some others and sort of had an idea what to do.

The first order of business was taking the top off the present kiln. I thought I could carefully remove the bricks. Wrong, the entire top fell in when I loosened the cables and nuts. It all went in the trash. The hole drilled bricks had no value. I built a steel frame for the top of the kiln leaving all else in place. By this time I had brought both burners to the back. I kept all specs the same and the 45 inch flue was still the backbone of the kiln. I had some help with the welding, and rather made the entire kiln stronger. I decided to use a system that was unique. I bent a piece of masonite the width of one brick and snapped it into the steel bracing. I had worked out the math so I knew how many brick it would take to fill the space. But, they went in, one row at a time. No one else had ever done it that way to my knowledge. It worked great and I did not have to make a complex form. I just did one row at a time and made sure they were tight. When all the bricks were in place I used a welding torch and burned the masonite away. I had to use a rubber hammer, with a plywood protector to make sure everything was tight.

The first row of bricks was hard brick, the second course was a mix of K-23 and K-26. By this time, many of us had Kaowool and I used it fill all the cracks and made a blanket for the top. It was tight, well welded and safe. Same kiln, same bricks with a new top. Again, I did it my way, invented as I went and it was a great system.

The kiln fired almost the same, and in most respects I did not even know the top was new. It worked very well, and served me for many years.



Mel's second kiln, built with an Arch Roof

The studio was built. It became very obvious that making pots in the basement of the house and hauling them upstairs and out to the kiln was not going to work. And, living in Minnesota with snow and rain and very cold weather made moving pots impossible. At the same time was working with a friend to make pre/made panels to build cabins. They were four feet by eight feet and slid together to form a wall or roof panel. Foam plastic was built into the panel. I decided to build a studio with

the panels and learn how to use them at the same time. We had to have a permit from the city that was granted and had to have footings with a concrete floor. I ordered the building to spec with window openings and two doors. It came in a truck and we assembled it in two days. It has served me since 1970.

The building has a very good gas furnace and is air conditioned. The floor slopes to a drain that exits the building into a rough area. I use a garden hose to clean the floors. It all drains to the center and spills outside, out of the way.

It was logical to build a new attached building that would house the kiln with a great air flow, and power venting. So, when I returned from Japan after finishing my apprenticeship, I built the kiln room. The arch formed kiln was taken down and rebuilt in the kiln room. That kiln had some wear and tear and I knew at some point a new kiln had to be built.

## **NILS LOU**

I had made a friendship with Nils Lou, Professor at Hamline University. He was very interested in Kiln building and had become very committed to a flat top design. We both had discarded the lid beam with steel rod as not safe enough.

At some point he came up with an idea for corner brackets that would support two all thread rods on each side. He built a wooden platform to reach the actual top of the side walls. He filled that space with soldiered soft brick and wrapped the all rod system around the roof and torque it tight. He then jacked the roof up about two inches in the middle poured a clay slurry in the cracks and totally tightened the roof. He had dipped each brick into a slurry of clay and heavy grog. That system made it possible for the bricks to attach themselves to the partner brick.



It was like putting sandpaper between each brick. The Minnesota Flat Top Kiln was born.

I was very lucky to be able to help Nils a couple of the early models. His basic plan was to build a car kiln, with that flat roof. That plan created a rather big kiln of near 60 cubic feet. It was definitely designed for the professional potter.

Nils wrote a digital book from his Apple computer. It was theory and instructions to build the car kiln. The book was widely read. Some scoffed and thought it was silly..."Arches" are the only way. Most thought it would cave in under cone 11 exposure. I helped build a stand alone kiln using a flat top. He used old bed frame and 1/4"

All thread to hold the top together. It worked, but the kiln was too large for the women that paid for it and it was a sloppy build. I had argued against the size. 'Just too big.'



Nils Lou

Lucky for me, as she did not want the kiln (fear), and decided to move to Arizona and retire. She called me and asked me to



remove the kiln, and I got a free kiln with everything included, propane tanks, base block....the works.

Nils died in 2014. He lived a marvelous full life with some real big ups and a few down times. His wife died early of cancer, and he did carry on teaching and making pots and writing.



The famous corner brackets for the MN flat top kiln

## **Kurt Wild**

About this time I had made friends with Kurt Wild, professor of ceramics at River Falls, Wisconsin (UW RIVER FALLS). He too had become interested in building a kiln at his home. Kurt was a very well organized, technically smart potter that had an undergraduate degree in Industrial Arts. “Not at all the Arty guy”. He knew clay, glaze and fire.

I had far too many brick so donated a batch to him. He built a catenary kiln that did not work, then it fell in. He was very frustrated. I told him about the flat top design and he got interested. Nils had moved on to Oregon and became a full time potter. (he got involved in a legal wrangle with students making drugs and had to go to a Federal Prison for two years.) I was left

without my kiln building pal and turned to Kurt for support. We made a good team. When I first met Kurt he was organizing a summer program in primitive clay. It was based on making in ground, open pit sort of firing. It was based on South American styles of pottery. He ask me to join them, and I could get school credit for a college course. I asked my pal Bob Holman if he wanted to go, and of course he was happy to do so.

The camp was held at a facility the college owned just off Lake Superior. It was called Pidgeon Lake Field Station. The class was about 15, with mostly teachers taking the course for credit. Kurt was serious and things were well organized. We had a very good time and met some very nice people. We attended the camp every summer.

Kurt started to drink heavily and he was more and more depending on me for support to run things. We got a notice that if the classes were not increased in size they would have to shut down the “art camp”. I swung into action and asked a group of calligraphers if they would like to join, then contacted a friend at Stout who taught metals, and a glass blower and a painter...they all filled classes and we had 150 people in camp. I sort of ran things.

About 1992 we started to hear rumbles that the faculty at several colleges did not like that an adjunct that taught high school was running that great camp. And that made me smile. Most of them could not run a two girl race. I knew they were going to force me out. Kurt had quit drinking, but was not about to step into the fray. So, I waited to be kicked. And that entire saga helped to

reinforce my theory that the bias in art was as stupid as the rest of academia.

I decided to retire from teaching and had bought some land from Bob Holman on his farm. Kurt was in the same place....we wanted out of teaching. So when the University axed me, I took all the best students, invited them to our farm and set up a better workshop than we had at Pidgeon Lake. As you might guess, the Pidgeon Lake numbers tumbled, the camp was a mess and was closed down. We all smiled.

We began to fix up the farm, built some kilns, had a nice kitchen in the barn and housed all of our friends. Each person paid a few hundred bucks and we formed a basic co-op. It was "Adult Shared Learning". And best of all, no college rules and BS. Kurt had gotten more excited about building a flat top kiln, and I wanted to expand Nils' basic concept but reduce the size of the kiln, make it a fast fire and have a kiln that could be fired with propane on our farm. Nils had sent all of his plans and notes. I

took those notes and created our first tiny flat top kiln. And was



it ever a dandy.

Hay Creek Flat Top Kiln

Still working well, Spring, 2020

You can easily see the threaded rod, with the corner brackets holding the top together. I welded a very safe cage system around the kiln. It has a 45 sq. in flue into a brick stack, topped with a spiral pipe lined stack.

That kiln fires in well under 5 hours to cone 11. It reduced almost without help and could be fired every day for 12 days during camp time.

Kurt went forward with building the same kiln at his home studio, and Bob Fritz another camper and potter built one at his home.

For years, Kurt was the go to guy for answers to any glaze, clay or firing question. He was generous with his time and helped anyone with technical questions.

Kurt led us often to look at old or odd kilns and see how they worked. At one time at the farm I built a kiln into a hillside. I used an old kiln shelf for the roof and used sod as the top cover. We feed wood into the kiln from the front and had a piece of clay sewer tile coming out of the kiln through the earth to form a chimney. If I remember, that kiln hit about cone 6. It did melt glaze.

For many years Kurt's passion was SW Indian Black ware. Maria was his idol and he created many examples of pure Black Ware pottery.

Folks at Hay Creek got to experience the thrill of firing with Kurt as he made black pots and figures. It was always a joy to see people sitting around a fire polishing pots with a smooth stone to give them a perfect burnish.

We were all thrilled to see Kurt figure out all the secrets of those wonderful SW Indian potters. I accompanied Kurt on a trip to Mata Ortiz, Mexico to visit and spend time with those fantastic potters.

I think one of the most important aspects of one's life is "how did you question things, and how did you solve complex

problems in your craft, in other words were you curious?” Kurt was very curious. Take into account he had surrounded himself with very like friends who were willing to experiment, question and without doubt be willing to step out and challenge the wisdom of the day. That is what was happening at Hay Creek. Also, we were never of the opinion that our work was precious. We were always willing to put our pots and art on the line and never worry about “outcomes”. It was always about solving problems and learning new ways...and that is what “adult shared learning” was about. We refused to deal with gender issues. Each person was respected for who and what they were. Women were treated as equals. All firing was a done by those that needed the experience the most. Kurt died in 2011, our constant phone calls back and forth ended for good. He called it “black cord fever.” We could not have had a better friendship. The most important aspect to our friendship was Kurt was careful, a planner, loved carefully designed pots. He called me “JapoSlapo” as I was much more “loose” then Kurt. But respect was the system of our friendship; we loved the work we could not do. And loved each other for our strength of character.





Kurt Wild

Kurt Wild was sort of the heart and soul of Hay Creek. He loved the place, helped us and supported building a new facility with a huge money donation.

For a number of years, going back to Pidgeon Lake, a group of us built almost every kiln ever designed. Starting with a simple hole in the ground and fired with sticks to a very complex wood



fired kiln designed by and built with Hay Creek hands by Donovan Palmquist. That kiln too fired to perfection.



Kevin Caufield opens the door of the Hay Creek Wood Kiln

When the salt firing craze hit Minnesota, Kerry Brooks decided to build a hard brick salt kiln at the farm. With the amount of salt vapor and smoke emitted by a salt kiln it became essential that kilns like the wood fired kiln, salt kiln and pit firings be a part of our research in our rural setting. We had lots of propane tanks, room to make roof covers for the kilns and plenty of potters to make the pots to fill the kilns. And without doubt, you must have good pots to fill quality kilns to run the vital experiments.

Kerry started the project with soda injection. Adding a huge amount of soda to hot water and using a garden sprayer to inject

the salt solution. It was ok, just fine, but we did morph back to rock salt in ample amounts. That was better.

In the early years we did make, with the help of Feriz Delkic, an entire kiln with Kaowool panels. And all the brick were covered and sprayed with ITC. It was a great project with a great deal of hope....but, in the end, salt ate things to pieces. Kerry's hard brick kiln is without doubt the answer.

In the end, Hay Creek Farm has better kilns, better facilities and better instruction than any college in America.

Pidgeon Lake camp really opened many of us to new learning styles by gathering a group of artists, potters and those with energy to tackle issues and was life changing. When we first arrived at Pidgeon we met two art teachers from Antigo,

Wisconsin. **Bob Anderson and Andy Kazukewicz.** They were small town teachers and were not sure of how they fit in. Bob was a head basketball coach and really was not committed to art as a professional. It was what he taught. I had just returned from my apprenticeship in Japan. I had credentials and this we know intimidated Bob and Andy. As time went on, that pressure went away and we discovered two very vital and intelligent artists/potters. Now the pressure was turned around...we had to convince those two that they had amazing talent.

With the advent of the death of both Kurt and Nils, Bob Anderson had to step up and become the "go to" guy at Hay Creek. He has built a nice permanent raku kiln that is all brick with a Kaowool top. It is of ample size so bigger pots can be handled.

Andy has had some health issues and has dropped out of the total Hay Creek experience. He does keep in touch but his work load in pots has diminished.

Bob retired from teaching and has built a full time studio in his back yard..his flat top kiln is a dandy, and he has built a shelter over it, and has drop down side curtains. His gas guys installed a natural gas piping system over to his kiln from the studio.

There is no question that Bob has become a quality professional craftsman. In my opinion one of the best craftsman I have met in years. He has spun off into knife making, leather work and with his son, they have been making pipes from the “ground up”.

They attend both knife shows and pipe shows.

Over the past 15 years Bob and I have been firing kilns in very experimental ways. We have pushed the envelope with speed, and much higher cone temps. One of the big issues for us the amount of reduction needed, when to reduce and how much back pressure to apply. For sure we have doubted the old adages about reduction. All that black smoke pouring from the stack and spy holes. Our biggest and most important research is based on firing to your cone needed, but, oxidation all the way. No reduction at all in the firing and then reduce on the way down using small sticks of wood. In every case, the firing was a perfect cone 10 reduction firing. We were surprised in every case. Some of the most important factors was clean burning gas and firing in half the time, with amazing results. Think of the fuel saving, the time saving and the amount of carbon in the air. There is no need for heavy reduction unless the potter/artist is looking for extreme color or bloating. For general everyday reduction, modest amounts of carbon in the firing is just fine. The colors are much purer. Even for copper red, the lite reduction with a double down fire will give perfect red. Bob has done some wonderful work with iron red. He follows a basic set of facts based on the work of Dannon Rhudy. She is adamant that very low reduction or even neutral firings give the

best iron red. And very slow cooling in the late stage...like from 1600f on down. Several times, Bob showed us iron red glazes turning color and showing crystals as it sat on a table going from 500F to the ambient temperature of the day. It was amazing. But as usual the world at large scoffs a bit. It is not in the old books, therefore it cannot be right.

We have spent hundreds of hours trying to re/work some old myth. The only way it can be done is fire a new way, try a new way, speculate, then prove it. If we lose a pot or firing, no big deal. Move on, try again. The pots are not precious. Bob has committed his work to try new things. Load the kiln a new way, control the gas pressure a new way.

At Hay Creek, Bob is the kiln supervisor. He advises, helps and shows people different ways to fire. He is a fine natural teacher and never intimidates. We have been blessed to have him as a friend.

What all of us do at Hay Creek is bring strong energy, faithful use of questions and seek answers to age old myth. That was what drew us to Dale, Nils and Kurt. three men that challenged the system. Boss Kettering would be smiling and so would Dr. Saulk. Bob and I, for sure, will always respect those people that make change, look for answers and seek some level of truth. We want to do it with respect for others, happiness and love for the craft. We love learning from the “ground up”.





Bob Anderson

His raku kiln, now there is a new brick kiln.

Over the past few years Bob has launched a new adventure into raku, alternative glazes, horse hair and naked raku. He has teamed with Dave Lyons, one of our new Hay Creek members to push the limits a bit farther.

### New Firing Technique

As has been said before, we have explored many kinds of kiln and firing techniques. It just seems to never end. And it almost seems “just” that I am now doing firing in an electric kiln. What is more amazing is that I have taken the small kiln apart. I took off the electronic controller and purchased a new control box with a single relay switch, and an old style kiln sitter. I can run

that kiln with full power whenever I want. As we say..."no one at Orton tells me how a kiln is to be fired". It is just on/off. No pre/programmed system for firing. Fast firing is very controversial. It is always the same old dance...fire slow. As was said early in the book. Slow is the rule. But, I have ignored that rule. I want every kiln to fire as fast as the kiln can go. The other problem as I see it, is if everyone in America is using the same clay body from a vendor, buys ready made glaze and fires with a program made at Skutt Ceramics, I might think that all the pots are the same....and I would be correct. It more than amazes me that what I see in the magazines is like new houses, they are painted white, gray, and black. Same for inside the house. Pots are now covered in grids and roses. It seems that Nordic rosemaling is making a come back. I have spent a lifetime learning to make a decent brush stroke. Sorry no need for that sort of thing. Get a compass and ruler. And since this is my book, I am an old man, I can be a critic. My right. And, boy did I earn that right.

A few years back I sensed that everyone in my group was building new kilns and I thought it was time for me too.

I added some more space to my studio and started to build a much larger Minnesota Flat Top kiln in my studio. It was three stacks of shelves, still with the 45 sq inch flue with a second opening at the end of the brick stack..I added a twelve foot 10 inch round piece of spiral pipe with a Kaowool liner system. Then sprayed the inside with itc 100.

The new kiln room has a natural air vent in the ceiling, a large attic type electric fan on the back wall and 4 other fans to keep air moving.

The wall near the kiln door has shelves floor to ceiling to hold posts and kiln shelves. I was able to inherit all of Kurt's Advancer shelves when he died and also purchased another 12 when another friend died. It is a perfect kiln, fires well and I have all the shelves I will ever need. The room can be heated when I load the kiln. All of my chemicals and oxides are in huge tubs in the kiln room and I added a large paragon electric kiln in that room for primarily bisque firing. That kiln has a digital programmer. It is set for bisque firing very slow. That works well. It has a purpose. But, best of all, no kiln fumes enter my working studio.

I now fire two glaze kilns. And of course a variety at the farm. In my opinion taking care of pots, the drying aspect, how they are handled is the key to good firing. I stack drying pots on top of my electrics while they are firing. They heat all the way through. I have big ceiling fans in my studio and a box fan on the floor. Warm air flows freely through the studio.

**The pug mill.** Of all the tools I have purchased or made in my life as a potter, the pug mill is always no1. I love it. I bought a new Walker Jamar pug mill about 1969. Big, heavy, big hopper, made clay by the ton. Great for re/claim too. Even then, I was making my own clay body. A lot of materials were now available at Minnesota Clay.

There were recipes floating around...but. I loved what I made.

A.P. Greene fire clay with left over school earthenware.

Taconite added. Always a grog or sand body. I am a thrower, so the body had to be 'long' ...never short. Mine was made to match my work.



The new Mel6 clay body is the same. Throws like a dream, dries fast, no cracking. And it all comes from my pug mill. Colored to taste.

I never throw away clay. My rule is, at the end of the day, take all the scrap and odd clay, throw it in the pug mill, turn on. Take that ball of clay, and throw one big bowl. Sell that bowl and you have paid for all the lights, gas, firing and other items you need. It means you just got in profit mode.

I just replaced my Walker pug mill at the farm. It was a reclaimed mill from a school. We got it free. Did some work on it and it was ok. The trannie died. So, we found a used one in Ohio. The owner of MN clay had it picked up and dropped it at my house. Nice. Can't make pots without a pug mill.

I do not like de/aired clay. It is just too tight for my taste..and I do not like clay from a box. I am sure it is an emotional thing. When teaching I felt that boxed clay was for the student. When I made pots, I used old re/claim and did it myself. We had a Walker at the school, so I just went to work, and bagged up what I needed. Of course the secret was this was old, stinky clay. Kids hated it as I had vinegar etc in the buckets. "Mel, why do you use that stinky clay?" "Oh I want you kids to have a good clay, new boxes"....But, they did not understand that old stinky clay was golden. It was the best throwing clay in the World. And it is/ was mine...Every now and then some senior would get into my bags of clay and yell..."This is great clay...how come?" Mel looks at the wall and says...Who knew? You had to stay ahead of those buggers. At any rate, a pug mill is not a studio frill. It is the life blood of the studio. Your own clay, made by you, for you, for your work.

For example, if I wanted to make a porcelain clay body...It would be made on top of the stoneware clay. The early mix would be a combination body. Not white. It would be gray with speckles of black. I would use that up as a stand alone set of pots. People loved them. Then the white clay would come out. Not a traditional porcelain, but a hybrid. I was never bothered by "it is not true porcelain." I did not care, it was white clay. Who knew other than me what was in the recipe? And, I never made clay or glaze to impress other potters. I wanted to impress customers. If folks do not lay down money, you do not sell, if you do not sell is it the customers fault? I think not. My Japanese teacher would say. "Let the customer decide what they want to spend money on, who cares what you like?" Over the years about 95 percent of my work was in high temperature stoneware. Cone 11+ was standard for me. I love the kiln to make heat work, very hot, good melt, vitrified. Speedy firing schedule, then a long downfire.

(Down fire and Japan) I have written a book about down fire that is in a pdf form. I will not bore old readers with that information. My other book "Pottery a life a Lifetime" is available on Amazon.com. It is my story of being and working in Japan with Kunio Uchida, Master potter, Kyoto, Japan. My book 21<sup>st</sup> Century Kilns is now free and a pdf download. (Melpots.com)

The studio without doubt, having a home studio in my back yard is a total joy. Often people ask, or say...."that is really nice, how did you get that?"

It is called commitment to a cause. I was spending a great deal of time as a teacher working summers. It was not noble, we

could not make it without working summers. As I began making more and more pots I was wondering why not make a studio. A studio would be a lifetime investment. The other thought that always went through my head was “why not invest in me first?” So money spent on a studio would pay me back for the rest of my life.

I also had that sort of dream of getting out of education at 55. If I got the studio built now, my retirement would be perfect. I had heard guys saying..”when I retire I am going to do woodworking “,or some such hobby. I wondered, if they like woodworking why not do it now. Why wait?

The answer to that question is....they were just talking, not really wanting to do the due diligence to make it happen.

I loved making pots, I love the research and the kilns and fire. So I have a wheel in the basement, a gas kiln in the garage...so, why not a building to make pots for the rest of my life.

I remember when my neighbor drove into the drive with a new Corvette sports car. At the time that car was 5K. Wow, new car. And I actually remember my quote at the time when he said..”What you building, a place for your hobby?” He asked about cost, teachers salary, doing my own work kind of chatter...and then he said “how can you afford to do that?” I said, “I am doing all of it for about 5K. The same as you spent on your new car. In 2020 when I am 85 and still making pots in this studio your car will be long gone”, and so was he. He crashed that car a year later. I think he purchased several of those cars. All gone.

Why put money in the stock market that you may get a return on in twenty years? May get. My investment in me paid a great deal of money to our family. And I got to stay at home to do it. And

our family is totally debt free. We paid cash for the farm and I built all the buildings...cash. No loans. The pottery was my part time job. It paid for us to have things we could not afford otherwise.

And, best of all, my Wife did not have to work outside the home, and Mom and Dad where always home for the family.

And to consider what it costs to have two earners? Clothes, transport, meals out and then add child care....no profit there.

And too, every child in the neighborhood came to my shop, studio and garage for help. "Mel, can you weld my handle bars on my bike." And, those grown kids stop and tell me what a joy it was to have me around to teach them things.

And the other thing...what is it like to move to Florida and sit in a chair at 70? Save your money and sit in a chair. Not for me.



Studio under construction, my dad and father in law.

There are many tips in building a home studio, for example, a solid floor with drain to the outside in the middle. A marble should roll to the drain from any spot on the floor. Quality electric system, minimum 150 amps, I have 200amp system wired to the pole in the yard. The meter is on the outside of the studio. I do not rob power from my home. At some point you

will want a big electric kiln and other tools. Have the power to run them safely.

Remember, you will age with the studio. A ramp is a good idea into the studio, make sure you limit stairs. Boxes of clay, and other materials will always be coming through the door. Make a way to bring a two wheeler into your studio and of course you will haul out pots too.

Insurance is a must. Folks will be stopping to buy pots, and for sure, do not teach in your studio without consultation with your agent. I always keep a million dollars in liability. It is more than cost effective. Make sure you are honest with your agent. Most home owners insurance can be had with riders. Extra liability, fire insurance for sure. I am careful that I do not use signage and seem to be a commercial business...The city will not tolerate that in a neighborhood. I always appear as a researcher, book writer and have sales as do others with garage sales. It works. The city of Minnetonka has passed a decree that I am an asset to the community.

The fire marshall can be your friend or enemy. I have befriended the fire marshall and have given him my book on kilns. I also make myself available to the city to inspect electric kilns. They leave me alone.





Mel, on his deck during an outdoor sale

### Sales, Galleries and Street Fairs

Ok, pull the curtains, lock the doors, we are going to be talking about money. Yes, money. The dreaded topic of artists. Most are very stupid about money. Don't be.

So, you have your studio built, you have a gas kiln, you have lovely decks around your studio, the pots are not too bad. Now What?

The first thing to do is take out a map. Put a dot where your studio is, then take a compass and figure a 50 mile circle around your studio. That means most folks can get to your studio in under 30 minutes. How many people live in that circle? In my circle, about 2 million. How do you get 50 people to come to your studio and buy pots?



Most of you have already said, “we cannot do that, they are not coming here, they can go to a gallery or something...man, don’t come here...the yard is not very nice.” Typical comments.

I did art fairs, galleries, street shows...disasters for me. I hated that sort of thing. You feel like a gypsy hawker. I really wanted the status of a professional.

Now, here is another piece of education. “Mel, I sold a painting in New York at my gallery for \$10,000.” “How much did you lose?” “No, ten grand made!”

Here is the sad truth, the math. Ten thousand, gallery gets 60%, that is four thousand, oh, then there is State and Federal Tax and FICA, now you have one thousand dollars, no wait, we had to use linen on the canvas, and the best paint money buys, oh....you have almost \$500 . No, wait, you had to fly to New York, meet the client and stay two nights. Opppps, now you have minus \$300. And then you did not consider you spent 5 months on that painting. Lots of hours, who pays you? And this story goes on every day. Santa Fe, Los Angeles, New York. But the artists ego hits the clouds. They tell everyone they know that they sold a painting for 10K. The gallery raises prices on your paintings, now 20K. You still lose money. (The professor got to add that sale to his advancement book. Then the sale was worth it.)

Now here is a real story. At my studio a lady came in and said...”how much are those mugs?” “Twenty bucks each.” “Twenty bucks each, why so cheap?” “I am just being fair.” “Wow, I will take ten of them.” She hands me two one hundred dollar bills. She goes out of my studio singing and dancing. Bargains galore. The money goes into my pocket. She will be back to buy wedding gifts and other pots she needs. She alone

will spend \$300 bucks a year in my studio. And I have 600 of those people in my data base. And I have a mob of people that are on my facebook page. That is how I paid for my studio years back. Mugs. And, she is just another person in my 50 mile circle. That sale took ten minutes. And we had time to sit on my deck, chat a bit and she saw baby ducks. Of course she will be back, we ain'ta Macy's.

Years back I had pots in gallery, like 50 of them. Went past the gallery one day and it was gone. Yes, gone. Never seen again. I then went to the Uptown art fair, packed all the pots, tables, bags, change and it rained all day. Not one pot sold, anyone help me? Not a soul. I did that three times and said, "ENOUGH not doing that any longer. I have to have a better way to make money.

There are some potters that have worked art fairs all over the country. They send notes to buyers, keep touch..."see you next year" sort of thing. It is reputation building. It works for them. But, I hate the packing, the travel in a van, sleeping in the back. (and the weather risk) And then you reach a point in your life that driving six miles is a big deal. It is like the metaphor..."I love the wood fire, the logs, the trees, gather wood ,new pick- up truck, chain saws, WONDERFUL TIME. Then you turn 55 and splitting one log means you have to take a nap. But, you have 50 grand invested in your kiln and property. Do you just walk away? I tell wood firers, " I love sitting in a pink lawn chair to watch my gas kiln fire." And, without doubt I love walking ten steps into my kiln room with a board full of pots. -25 degrees, still nice, have a space heater going.

I soon realized that I could sell pots from my deck. Invite friends and neighbors over to buy some pots. The first thing that had to happen is making a guest list. My wife typed it up, but then realized she could type the list on labels with carbon paper between the sheets. One typing gave us labels for four shows, it was work, but it made sense. We took the 60% commission. (40 percent at the time.) All we needed to do is make post cards, add show info, have them printed at instyprints, and buy stamps. The cost of doing business was very low, and it was tax deductible. We even deducted the cost of plants and flowers to decorate the deck. We used them all summer. In fact we started to deduct all pottery expenses. Even the gas bill and the electric bill were included...and I was really happy I had an independent electric meter on the studio. As my friend Pete O'Heron said, deductions are debatable with the IRS, you may just win them all. That has proven to be true. Keeping decent records, and not being shy about gathering names has served me well. When chatting with new friends I always mention home sales. In most cases they want to be included, and always tell people it is a `private list`. I do not post signs in the neighborhood. One thing you do not want at home sales is rif/raf looking for bargains. Keep the list clean and updated, and keep signage to a minimum. I do have a large flag with my logo on it. I hang that from the front of the house so that people know my house. Strangers do not know what it means, customers do. And that keeps the city happy, it does not look commercial, it is decorative.

Always been a good neighbor, give away seconds to neighbors and then on holidays drop off some nice mugs. Make them a part of your sale and then a few cars in the street will not bother them. Encourage them to invite friends to the sale. And do not

block mail boxes or their driveways. I put a small sign on my mail box...NO PARKING IN FRONT OF MAIL BOX. That is not a small deal, it is important not to ever disrupt the neighbors or trucking vendors.

### Computers

I became excited about computers from the start. It was thought that when the school started to pass out computers that math and science teachers would have the edge...art would be last to get them. WRONG. My first Apple IIe was working overtime in my department before the math teachers figured out where the on/off switch was. I was learning back doors to programs and created a data base for my home list long before any others teachers had the machine out of the box.

I know I was the first teacher to take the cover off the computer and started to pull cords out of the mother board. The gal in charge of computers had a fit. "you can't take that apart, it is complex." BS. I learned very quickly that a cord with 12 pins was inserted in the mother board with a box with 12 holes. Not big time science. I know I was the first teacher to build my own pc. And I was thrilled and waited in line for Win95. I even knew DOS. (dirty old software)

The two machines that changed my life, was a simple Texas Instruments calculator. I was math challenged and that little box opened up a new world for me. The second was Windows Word. It was magic for me. I became a writer because of winword. All fear left me, and I knew that my brain goes faster than the machine, so I could type, but never fast enough. Now I write a chain of thoughts as fast as I can type, then correct and edit. The entire office package was next. Again, it was all magic. By the

time I was 75 I was way ahead of the normal curve of computer knowledge. I just can't seem to go to the dark side. APPLE. My newest computer is all home built. Big case on the floor, great intel processor, and 3 ssd drives. Win 10 64 bit Professional sits on its own ssd drive, migrated over by me. It is the fastest computer I have ever used. But then again...I learned from the "ground up". And, in some ways I feel I invented "Home Sales".

I built my own web page from scratch. It was built on an experimental program from Adobe, called "pagemill". They stopped production, but after 20 some years I still use it. Simple, not complex and easy to control. I just added Filezilla and have been in charge of my own website ever since. melpots.com .

I set a pattern of behavior years back. Do it yourself. That was a cliché years back, but I believe in it like a religion. When my wife years back said I should "call Warren and get some good glaze recipes from him" I freaked and said, "if I cannot make my own glazes and figure it all out, I will just be another hanger on with the Minnesotamingai mob". I had no interest in them. My pottery was mine, me and only me. If I could not make it, we did not have it. And if I had to hire someone to help me, I sat and learned from that paid person. I most often did not have to hire them again.

I met **Stephen Kolcinski** at the company ODI. They sell used computers and many parts and systems. The prices were very low. Steve was a very interesting man, he had all sorts of skills, and he had Faith, a military background and loved guns. And he was a real smart computer guy. Right up my alley. I asked Steve to help when I got stuck.

I did not want him to fix or touch any of my computers. Just nudge me over the fence. He was thrilled to be mentoring an older man. He did not cotton to people that wanted free advice or him to repair for them. We have been friends for many years. He was instrumental in my qualifying for a permit to carry a pistol. It was all based on self reliance. Steve was the one that got me “off the ground with computers”, but having a private/safe gun range at my farm gave him the thought of helping me to learn to be safe and thoughtful about guns.

In the modern times we live, often it is someone that steps forward and helps you keep in step with those younger, and around you. Steve did that for me. I never had to be embarrassed around my Grandson, and his buddies. I remember a neighbor kid that was a tech geek, we called him “Wally”, and he told Thomas, “Grandpa really knows his stuff, he is way ahead of me”. And, on several occasions, Wally called me at home with complex computer questions. He often said is Grandparents did not even know how to turn on the TV with the remote. That story says a great deal about the concept “ground up”. It was up to me to stay within the society that was around me. I did not regress. Most of my friends did.

Having command of computer knowledge made my life as a potter much better. I controlled my website, I would take digital images of my work for my writing career. It set me apart with those that controlled magazines and books. I was never the “old guy trying to step up.” And especially important was my ability to control and run a listserv for thousands of potters. Clayart is totally in my control and I make it possible to send out information every day that has value for all levels of potters.

Square peg in a round hole

Artists and craftspeople are by en large visual learners. We see anything happening and we can remember it. Utube is great for us, we see a trick, got it. Bob Anderson learned how to make knives on Utube. If you see the cover of CM magazine and it is a potter's studio in the background, you look, and you know all about that potter in about 12 seconds. You actually never look at the potter.

When I first got my Apple IIe, the tech gal went nuts when I took the cover off and pulled a cord out. (previous story) But she also said, "how will you know which way it goes in the holes?" "You see, the shape of the box, it has a dent on this side, and the plug has a tab on this side. The tab, slides in the dent." "How did you know that, did you read up on these machines?" You know, slap your forehead and weep. "No, I observed it." Total blank. But, she was in charge of computers and I bet she never took one apart. She passed them out.

Kids do not get rewarded for being observant in school. If you read well, do math and test well you are considered "brilliant". Kids that observe are considered to be rather dumb. I remember those old stories of my childhood. I am left handed, and it was not easy in the olden days. A teacher hit me because I could not cut well with a scissor. It was a right handed scissor. I also wore thick glasses and I was big. Really big for my age. I often got picked on because I was big with glasses. But, I was very observant. I realized that if I faked my head right, the kid across from me, the bully would move his head right. My big left hand smacked right into his nose. He never saw it coming.



I had to go to a farm to work when I was about 12. Big kid, you can do it. One day the farmer dropped me off in front of a 4 acre flax field. The flax was cut with horses and a bundle maker. He said, “put those bundles together three at a time and one on top, like this”. It was hot, the field looked like twenty miles across. He left, I cried. Then I realized the story of my life. “No one but me is going to do those bundles, get up, get going and see how fast you can do it. GET GOING. When he came back with the truck to get me, I had finished the job. He actually was impressed. So, he said “tomorrow you can take the truck to the dairy and deliver the milk cans.” I was 12. I did take the truck and deliver the cans of milk, in first gear. In three days I was up to third gear. That is how I learned to drive. I figured it out. ( I realize it was a mile and a half, down a gravel road.)

Arnold Howard



Arnold entered my life just as several others left my life. He is not a mentor, he is a great friend and partner in crime. We have

a great deal in common. His family values are impeccable. He has a very powerful love of country and its history. He is writing a book on the history of Iwo Jima, and has interviewed hundreds of vets of that encounter.

He has worked for Paragon Kilns for a number of years. To replace Arnold at Paragon it would take four people. He is self trained in many fields and has a strong feeling for “learning from the ground up”. His best trait is his love for his fellow man, and he only wants to help.

Years back when Clayart was being abandoned, Arnold was my first call. I said, “Arnold would you help me save clayart?” “Yes”, and that was it. In just a few days he found an ISP in Australia. Thank god I had a cd with all the email address’ of Clayart past and present. That was due to a gut feeling that we could get the axe.

I took it upon myself to write to everyone on that list. Over 5,000 names..I had to ask everyone if they wanted to stay. Most did. Arnold transferred that list to our Australian friends and they started a new program for us because Listserv is a very expensive software system. We got an extreme bargain. They more than understood what we were about and that we have given great service. Twice I have received notification that Clayart was one of the finest discussion sites on the Internet. I have always felt that was due to very tight moderating. We have always had control of the program, and we don’t let hate rule us. Dozens of chat groups have bit the dust, we just trudge along.

Arnold wrote the entire section on electric kilns for the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Kilns” book. (he did have a shared author.)

Arnold is off on his own now. He retired from Paragon a few months ago. He is very busy setting up a private company to help folks with problem kilns, and he does onsite repair. He is in the process of moving to San Antonio, Texas to start a new life with his family. Amazingly they have bought houses next door to each other. His son is a professional writer, his daughter in law a professional nurse. Arnold’s wife is a Whole Foods natural pharmacy expert.

Arnold stepped into my life, just as I was in need of a new friend. He is a gift. And of course, when that gift is a guy that knows everything about electric kilns , that is pretty good stuff to know. I am sure his new company will do well. He is all about service, and when that is your goal, people flock to your business. The other tech guy that really has been a “godsend” is

**Jim Woelm.** Jim was a Whittier kid that came from “behind the tracks”. He lived above the CC Tap tavern, on 26<sup>th</sup> and Lyndale S. When your home is above a bar, you know you live in hard times. For me, living in a duplex, surrounded by a loving family was like being a millionaire. I had that life.

Jim was small, he was surrounded by `big boys`, yet he was always accepted and was a good kid. But, like me, when you come from that “outer,outer Kenwood” we did not have big expectations for ourselves.

Jim went into the Marines right out of high school. He learned some stuff, and it was valued. He could tape record, I am sure it was wire then. It served him his entire life. He was on the “g.i. bill” and went to the U. He got a job, working at a radio station. It seemed that he was not so dumb after all. Teachers remarked how well he wrote, the station had him writing copy and scripts. Amazing.

He got really involved with taping things. And then a big break happened, he taped some important lectures at the U, and he copied the tape and sold it to visitors. On his own, not a part of the U of M. Soon departments were calling him to tape `Visitors Lectures`. Then cassettes happened, and more money came in. Anyway, the poor kid from the dregs bought the “Flame Bar, and then the entire block”, 14<sup>th</sup> and Nicollet. It became the company “Greatapes”. He was/is the owner. Jim has become a great friend and advisor. We cooperated on my book “21<sup>st</sup> Century Kilns”. He was the publisher and had a great employee edit the book for professional sales. We split the profit.

At least several dozen books based on police, fire and civic learning are being authored and sold by Jim. He has just completed a book based on the life and history of his wife Diane. (She died of cancer last year.)

For many years I was able to turn to Jim for help, advice and counsel for any of my writing projects. Now his son runs the company and the entire format for the company has turned to

“flash drives.” He will help us get this book out into the hands of folks that want it. “flash drives”.

Colleen Baillie

Colleen’s dad Bill called me and said his daughter quit college and is having a really bad time. She wants to be an artist, potter, can you help us? What could I say? The entire Baillie, Merritt mob was all close friends. Bring her over.

She came over with her Dad, sat with her head down and would not look up. I said ”Colleen, what do you want?” in a firm voice. She looked at me and said “I want to make pots really well.” I said, “I can do that and it is easy.” I did that, she was the best student I have ever taught. She knows tools, has great hand eye sense, industrious, and careful.

She started as a learner, now she is my studio mate.

I sent her to the U of M, and the program is far more “modern, gag” than UMD. She was armed for it. She was confident, and took no crap from anyone. We laughed at the dumb projects. She was straight A.

Her senior show was marvelous.

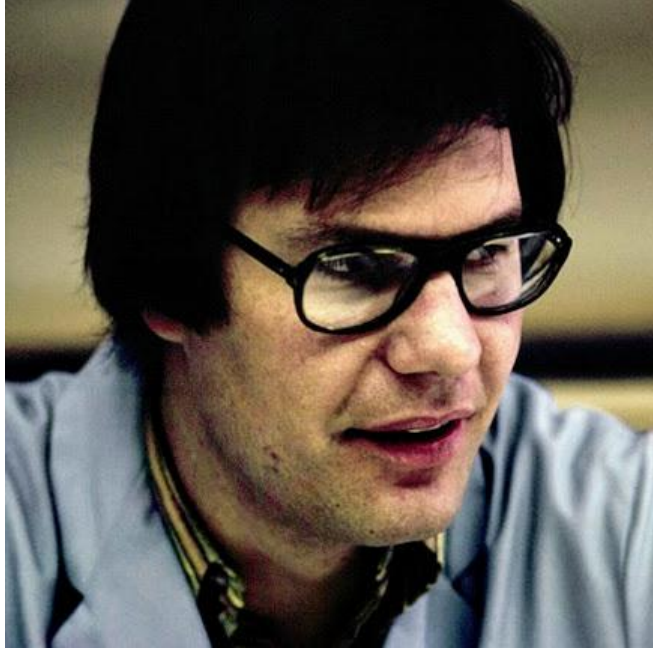
A few years later she went to `Dunwoody` and has a two year degree in `computer digital art`. In the old days it was `commercial art`. Now, Graphic Artist.

We sell pots together in home sales. She sells many of her pots at her work place and does commission work. And, I could not

have a better person to share a studio with. And, the word is “respect” for each other, and that makes everything perfect.



Colleen with wood fired pots



Dale Feste

Dale was a shop teacher at Ike High. He was a strong, intelligent guy that was all “Teacher”. The kids loved his class as he made the class “student centered”. Kids worked on their cars, not other people’s cars that are dragged in for free work.

It was ironic that Dale had two sisters with Ph.D’s and had fine college teaching jobs, he was a motor head. Well I soon found out that the family was brilliant, and so was Dale. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin/Stout. He knew cars from the “ground up”. He was a “brilliant” automotive teacher.

He had a background in gymnastics, and that drew me too him because of my diving coaching background. We hit off from the first day. He knew what it took to make a diver.



Early on, I asked Dale if I could ever sit in on one of his classes as I wanted to learn as much as I could about auto mechanics. I loved working on my own cars. It was very often we would be having coffee with me and say “Mel, I am going to do hydraulic brake repair next week, stop and sit in”. I did that, all the time. He then let me work on my own car, in the school auto shop. I did it myself, he would guide and suggest things but he did not do it for me. Our mutual respect grew by leaps and bounds. Often he would have me help a student, as teaching solidifies learning. We both knew how to make students motivated. In fact, we often said, “we two had the best and smartest kids at Ike” as kids wanted to be a part of that great learning that was going on.

Both of us disliked teachers that would “drop their keys” and give

Dale a cheap bottle of wine to have the kids do a tune up on their car.

He often handed the keys back and say “my kids are too busy with their own work, come back and make an appointment.” In many ways we hated cheap teachers that would steal toilet paper, masking tape and ask me for colored card board. I bought my own toilet paper.

Dale married one of our best pal English teachers. Kathy was a wonderful intelligent teacher that did not always fit in the English Department. She was a mile ahead of most of them.

Kathy is a “brittle Diabetic” from 14 years of age. She has written books on the subject, taught it and is a marvelous

motivational speaker and teacher of “great health with diabetes.”  
(`real` English teachers do not write books, Kathy did.)

I got to know Dale’s father. Chris Feste was born in Norway,  
was a Immigrant to America, and loved it here.

**Chris Feste** As Chris was totally “from the ground up”, for his  
entire life. He was always one of my hero’s. He died, along with  
his wife Ruth at 99 years of age.

The Hopkins schools started the drop Industrial Arts programs  
and one day Dale stopped in my room with his “pink slip”. We  
talked and he said “what do I do now?”. I cheerfully replied,  
“you will open your own repair shop in Hopkins, you will do  
well for sure.” Hmmm. He thought about it for about three  
minutes and we started to look for property in down town  
Hopkins. He found it the first day, a semi unsuccessful gas  
station. Right on main street. And for sale for a bargain. I was  
the first to organize an investment scheme, and I said to Dale, “I  
will give you 10K, no interest loan, and I am sure Bob Hobert  
will do the same”. Cash. His dad pitched in, the bank was happy  
to help and away he went. It was easy sailing after that. He  
opened with two car lifts, got rid of the gas and the bell ringing  
and concentrated of American Cars, no German. It was a huge  
success, He is now retired and sold the entire expanded to 8 lift  
building for several Million dollars.

Every senior citizen in Hopkins brought in their car. He was the  
most honest mechanic ever to grace the twin cities. Strange,  
“honest” It was expected. The news flashed, a great fellow has  
opened a shop. The word spread fast. In two years there was

now a waiting time to get your car in. You made appointments weeks in advance. And it was worth waiting for.

For years, he still advised me on the “what to do for my own repairs and was always quick to say..bring your car in, that job is too complex for you. “ My life improved a great deal when I met Dale Feste.

The irony of life. Dale ran for “School Board” and won, two years later he was named “Chairman”. He could not teach there, but he now had charge of the entire district. Can you spell the word “smile?”.



Kathy and Dale

## **Mark Baillie**

At Eisenhower high, I had the best tech kid I have ever met, and he taught me from the ground up. Mark Baillie had a magic touch, and he is Colleen's uncle. Family ties make sense. He could set up speakers and a mike anyplace and it worked great, no whaaawhaaa, when I had the mike. Pep fests were great, I had control of the sound. It made all the difference.

Mark even went with me to the first calligraphy conference at St. John's University. He did wireless mike's before it was popular. It worked great. He was respected.

Whenever I have to give a major speech, big crowd and even up to a thousand people at a NCECA potters conference I know how to get the house ready. I go a day ahead, make sure the slides or disc is ready, nothing upside down. I then have the tech meet me in the auditorium and I ask him/her to walk me through the houselights. They usually say why? I tell them, "if I have the main mike and things go bad I must control the crowd, control the house lights, be ready for anything". They do it, and a walk through and test of the sound system, what mic will I use? Control of pictures are essential, usually a mac computer. I have even asked for their "good mic". They know what I want and get it for me. They use junk for people that are stupid and spit in the mic.

Techs are wily, if you speak their language, they will love you.

And the best news of all, the talk goes perfectly. I have been at many conferences filled with college professors, pix upside down, heads turning away from the mic and you lose the person. Stupid and un-professional. I always get heaps of praise from tech folks. “Mel, that was great, no glitches. As it should be. Thanks Mark Baillie.

And many times I have to wake up a dead crowd. Big Microphone, deep and strong voice, the heads snap up. And they stay with me. Dramatic impact, it works every time. And never do I talk to the crowd with a question like: “hi folks, are you having a good time, how are you”.???? They all start answering you, total stupid. Control the audience, it works, they are like children, guide them.

## **Harry Hauck**

Harry was a commercial artist. He did all the General Mills boxes. He did the Wheaties box, Hamburger Helper and he was one of my best pals. He designed my Logo, he helped with show art. He was the total `from the ground up guy`. He did things the right way because he knew how to do it right. He just died; I miss him so damn much.



Mel's Logo, Harry Hauck directed.

## **Les Averil, Arnie Johnson and Lyle Weeks**

I have been blessed often in my life by running into very talented and exciting men that knew how to build and make things. Perhaps it was my own curiosity, and need to know that forced me to look for these sorts of people.

Years in college and working in schools puts you around a great many academics. They can read books, give lectures, but often they cannot “make stuff”. My entire life was about making stuff.

Years back I got a hydraulic pump transmission from a B-29 bomber. It made the gun turret spin. Nils had been making potters wheels from this powerful system. Of course, I had to have one too.

I was having trouble finding all the parts like splined shafts and rubber connections. Someone at school said he had an old neighbor who had tools and such, and maybe he could help me. What a find. Les Averil had a milling machine, metal cutting lathe, and just about everything one would want to build a potters wheel. He was a character. He got very excited about making a wheel. He had all the extra parts, or he made them.

The other part of Les was he was a “Master Welder”. Not only did he weld up a nice angle iron frame, but he taught me as he worked. The shaft for the wheel was placed with the hydraulic system with its electric motor, and it all slid into a perfect position to place a v-belt to a pulley, and that made the wheel go round. It was a dandy potters wheel. It is still around, works great, but has been pushed to the back row.

More importantly, what I learned from Les, was amazing. He was a master teacher and he had information that I could never find elsewhere. Again, an older man, with no education except his own “ground up” learning. In the old days, he was called a handy man. That hardly described that brilliant man. I only got to know him for a few years. A bad heart took him down.

Arnie was the first person to install an air conditioner into a truck, and delivered strawberries from California to New York. His dad had a` jack of all trades` shop in Hallock,MN. He had dabbled with refrigerators and had been helping his dad make some units for a Drug Store, and a Butcher Shop, so, they knew the ropes.

Arnie was still in high school when a black man stepped off the train, and realized he was in the wrong town. It may have been the first black man to be seen on the streets of Hallock, about 20 miles from the Canadian border.

When asking what town this was, who lived here and how did he get on the wrong train, he asked if there was anyone in town that could do refrigeration? They pointed to the Johnson’s shop. It seems this fellow was some sort of genius, and wanted help with his invention. Refrigerated trucks. Arnie’s dad and this fellow named Numero got along just great, and Arnie did the welding and installation and was learning the trade too. So they built the truck with the unit behind the cab. It worked.

The rest was history. The time of this story was 1940 and within the year Arnie was drafted for the war and because of his own genius, was placed in Iceland to build hundreds of Freezer units



for meat for feeding the troops in Europe. Arnie spent the entire war in Iceland, helping to keep the units working. And, talk about learning and working from the ground up. When he got back the company had started, the units were slowly built, and Arnie was full time for the new company called “Thermo-King”. That became White Westinghouse and Arnie spent his entire life working there in his own lab doing research. Not one day in college.

When he retired, he moved about a mile from us at our farm. He had built a shop from an entire ships container, and used it for his best tools. The barn had a big shop too.

He loved making things, and he was actually excited about our kilns and wheels and pottery making expertise. As a maker of things he loved others that knew their business and any help we ever needed, Arnie was there.

Another tragic ending, He had to have a pacemaker replaced and the doc slipped and punctured his aorta during the procedure and Arnie died on the table. It was actually an accident. No one to blame, but we sure were unhappy.

Lyle Weeks was the all-time champion “jack of all trades”. He was crude, swore all the time, cursed, drank too much and chain smoked “Lucky Strikes” no filter. When he swore, it was usually followed by an F-bomb or something worse.

He had a great D-3 Cat. He had a back hoe, he had a truck, he had tools and he had 23 John Deere Tractors. Most were rebuilt like new.

He could do anything with tools. He built houses and cabins from the foundation up. He did a great job of electrics, he did plumbing, he did perfect furnace work and everything he did was perfection.

When I built my house alone, here at the farm, he did some cat work for me. He said, “what you doin bout a sewer?” I said, “I don’t know, can you help me..i pay cash.” Cash was good for Lyle. I carried hundred dollar bills on me all the time here at the farm. Cash was King.

Lyle said...” Holy Shit, yeah, I build sewers, F yes.” It was just dirt around my cabin and he said we should do it soon. I had roughed in the drains and had a main drain going outside. He went home and got his back hoe. His brother made the concrete tanks behind his barn. We did not have inspectors around here in 1982...you were on your own, and the Uniform Building Code did not arrive for 5 years. And Lyle was the inspector when it did arrive. Vance Creek, Wisconsin. 54005. Tiny Village. Lyle was a legend around here.

He told me “plastic is cheap, buy a lot”. So, I filled my trailer with plastic drain field pipe. He waited til 6 a.m. Sunday morning. Lyle said “did not want some A-hole do gooder looking at our sewer”. My cabin was built on a two tier system. All the plumbing was on the top tier, down two steps into the living space. It was on a really nice down-hill grade. He liked that.

So, he back hoed the concrete tank in place, I ran the pipe into the tank. He opened a huge area and I built the drain field,

eleven lateral, 16 foot pipes, about six times larger than any drain field I had ever seen. They were all hooked together with a nice upward pipe to let in air. We got into the old hay mow in the barn and hauled several big wagon loads of straw and hay. I covered the entire field. Then a guy brought two big truck loads of rock, dumped it and Lyle spread it. The hay kept the drain field pipes holes blocked. It rotted out in about a year. Wide open holes for the life of the system. It was a perfect sewer system. He just sat and drove the back hoe, I did the construction and learned a lot. He said it was an F-ing great sewer. And it was, perfect and never plugs, never needs service and will work for another 30 years. I bought the stuff to make it, he charged me \$700 to drive the back hoe. Today that system would cost about \$12 grand.

Lyle would stop if he saw my truck..go into the closet and get the brandy bottle, lite up and tell me stuff. I don't drink, but he said "that's ok, I should quit". He did a great deal of work for us over time. And, when my daughter got married and they wanted a cabin, I said they could have 5 acres and build it on our land. Lyle built them a two story house, not a cabin, a house. It too was perfect. The house cost them \$70,000 and would have been \$150,000 in Minnetonka.

Lyle stopped one day and said he had "F-ing Cancer, bad Cancer". I was really shocked and heart sick. A few weeks later I told him I was having a big art show in Hopkins about my 50 years of making pots and paintings, and we wanted him to come. He said "never been to an art show".

Well we had the opening on a Friday night, no Lyle, and then a second sort of all day opening on Saturday. I looked up and there was Lyle, cowboy hat, boots, a great shirt all shiny and dressed up. Tears came down my face. He had a nurse with him, sort of helping him. He said to me, “don’t do a lot of this kind of Shit, but did not want to miss this one.” He died three weeks later. I repeat myself, a blessed Character, full of skill and knowledge that could learn anything, from the ground up. Never an excuse, never lied or cheated anyone, a heart of gold, but an exterior that had folks fooled. He was what he was. And that was perfect.

## **New Beginnings**

### **Byron Bird**

Two years ago, Bryon showed up on my deck. He had a proposition for us. After the land and house was sold that was owned by Bob Holman, things had settled down for us all. He wanted for us to join forces, have him buy all the fallow land on top of our hill and make it into a nature sanctuary, and will the entire 400 acres to the state of Wisconsin as a park. That would of course happen at his demise.

Wow, that was totally out of the blue and wonderful. He has become a great friend and wants this land to be for people to use and admire and love, and of course the animals and trees would be saved for future generations. He has planted nearly 1500 trees over the property.

Byron lost his son in a military accident, and has dedicated the land in his name. Of course we too have dedicated the land above to the memory of our son Mark. This event has started a

totally new beginning for our three families. We are thrilled, the land has been dedicated to the future and we can all glory in caring for it.



Byron Bird on a spring day, looking for a Turkey for dinner.

## **The Hyde's show up**

A year and a half ago, Rod Hyde showed up at my door. White hair, big guy talked with an Oakie accent. His truck had a sign.

“Woodworker, Furniture Repair”. I did not know what he wanted. He said, “I just bought this place below”. He just bought it????

A new neighbor and he is a woodworker. We are now done with five years of bad ugly behavior from the neighbors. They are gone, finished, good bye forever. No need for details, it is too ugly to remember. Hate has been replaced with love and goodness.

We sat and talked, and I said, “are you retired, what did you do?” He said he was a doctor with the Vets. Doctor, Vets, as in Hospital. Well, he went on to say he was a PA. He went to med school, then got a degree in Public Health and then got involved with triage. Sort of a broad range doctor. Now called a P.A.

His Dad was a professor , Chairman of Medicine, University of Oklahoma. His Brother is a doctor too. I asked him about woodworking. Well it seems that he likes to build things, make things and rebuild things, like old cars, like a 53 Hudson Hornet. He likes ww2 books and history, same as me. He likes to go to Church and do good deeds; he is kind, and very, very funny. Right up my alley, as I like those things too.

Many men had left my life. Quality men that were my mentors, friends, helpers and companions. And here, standing at my door was many of them, rolled into one.

This event was like a miracle. And he just shows up, and with him is a Scottish lass **Margaret**, born and raised in Scotland. And, of course, and why not, a Ph.D. Pharmacist that makes and

designs jewelry, reads good books, and is beautiful inside and out. Two for the price of one. A grand day for all.

### **Dave Sanko**

Over the past few years I was getting to know my new “Son in Law”. Dave had entered my life too. He is a builder of things, he is a “Master Mechanic”, and is a carpenter, and a damn fine plumber and electrician. He loves to be kind and help people. He is very quiet, and thoughtful. When he starts something he gets it done. He is a Gem.

Now I have two new men in my life. “Quality Men.”

What is so nice, we often meet here at the farm. Dave, Rod and Mel. We are sort of a team. We help each other, and work on big projects together. Quiet planner Dave, raucous, fun loving and talented Rod, and I watching. It is a total joy.

The other thing that is interesting, but Rod and Dave have more in common than a bus load of “Academic Doctors”. Dave and Rod equally have no time for snobs; know it alls, or ego driven fools. All three of us get the “heeebie, jeebies” when a lumber truck rolls into our yard. A great visual site, Dave and Rod with their heads under the hood of Dave’s 63’ Ford.

A typical Rod event. We had a broken pipe in the bunk house kitchen. All totally ruined, drawers full of water, Things warped. Water ran full “on” for a week.

Heartbreaking event for sure. When we had gone home, Rod removed all the kitchen cabinets, hauled them to his shop, took them apart and cleaned them, and re/assembled them with new glue, and straight. He put them back on the walls. “No big deal,



I needed a project to keep me busy, thought you needed a hand.” That single event was all the evidence we needed to know we were blessed with a new and wonderful friend.



Rod and Dave, busy building

## **Book 3**

### **Teaching Clay by Mel Jacobson**

If you have a plan to be a high school ceramics teacher, give up all you have

learned in college. You are alone. Realize that those college professors of

education will not stop by your fourth hour hell rais'n class and lend a hand.

They are gone forever from your life. Theory is gone, reality is with you

forever in your career...it is you, and you alone. But, that may be your

greatest gift. You can start a program from the front end, no expectations

or rules. You are free. But, it is up to you to create it, it will never be done

for you, nor will you get —support. If you want it, do it.

Remember, kids are starving to death for something of value to make or

build and call their own; they want a sense of belonging and ownership. You

can provide something that no one else in the school can give them. You will

be a hero. Our society has built into young people's minds that they can be

talked into having personal status. No, you cannot do that, people have to

achieve something of value that they respect in themselves to  
gain personal

status. Hard work, discipline and passion for a task will give  
people self

worth. It cannot be verbal, it must be accomplished.

You will be a complete stranger, an anomaly in the process of  
education. No

one will understand what you are doing...well, except the kids.  
They will

catch on the first few days.

There is only one truth in education, one only, TRUTH/TRUST.  
It is the key

to your future. It will make all other things equal. All the  
delivery systems

made for learning in the universe have no meaning without  
TRUTH/TRUST.

When the kids believe, totally believe in you, you have them  
forever.

The first step in building any high school full time clay program  
is "building

your own skill set with clay". You can do that many ways. Take  
courses,

hang around full time potters, and maybe you can apprentice  
yourself for a

summer. Or, learn with your kids. Yes, I said "learn with your  
kids". A

great teacher makes pots and sculpture with the kids...every  
day...yes,

every day. Make something with them. In fact, fail with them,  
then have

success with them. Share your own struggle. It helps them understand it is

not easy. Your life will become skill, skill, skill, skill. Make pots, make glaze,

make clay, fire kilns, and many kinds of kilns. Read everything you can

about clay, glaze and firing. Visit potters, and don't worry about seeing

shows. Visit and find out how they make clay objects and what tools do

they use? Anyone can view finished work; you have to know how it was

done, so you can teach it. To hell with art ideas, metaphor, and BIG A art.

Learn how to make clay stuff. Kids want to make things, and what in the

hell do they know about life, self or big ideas? They are ignorant kids,

Facebook rats. What do they know? NOTHING. But, we know they want to

learn how to make something, anything. They crave purpose and challenge.

You can give them that purpose, and watch them grow. Set them onto the

path of building and making things with purpose and the knowledge of how

things can be sequentially produced with skill.

Our society is breeding a culture of lies. It seeps into every corner of our

life, such as the church scandals, government, even our political leaders. It

is one of the greatest challenges we have as teachers. You cannot let it

invade the clay studio. Your space should have the reputation as the safest,

most passionate, honest place in the school. You stress it every time you

lecture, tell stories, and when you give the students information. Be the

most trusted faculty member on your staff. Of course you have to live by the

rules yourself, every day. Abuse trust with students and you may as well

resign and leave teaching.

Very few on your faculty or administration will have any clue about what I

just wrote. Complete ignorance as to the importance of art and craft, of

—hands on, brain on. Lip service is always given, but the reality of how it

2 really works is never understood. They are into delivery systems validation,

grades and test results. It is always —educational theory. Making things

with clay is not educational theory, it is real world craft, and the oldest craft

on this earth in the hands of children has importance. It is what made us

human. Clay, water, fire...life. You are at the front end of learning. REVEL



IN IT. YOU HAVE THE KEY TO LEARNING.

How can a group of people determine that clay is —dangerous? Clay is the

natural material that has been in constant use by humans since the dawn of

history. It is the chemical element that has led us into every phase of

modern technology. From the earliest fire and bowl to the brick and then

the birth of the silica chip and the first nose cones for rockets to —super

conductivity, clay/silica has always been society's highest and most

important technology. And some want to take it out of the schools? If

anything, the study of the properties clay should be inserted into science

and mathematics and always in art. And, without question, the study of

simple fire and heat technology should be a major part of any school's

curriculum. How can this be missed?

Fire and the use of it is the essence of life on this planet. It was fire and

clay that made us into the modern human that we are. And to ignore it is a

sin. Without clay and the study of silica we would not even have the

computer that I am using to write this essay.

The cause and effect of the world's most important technology should be

honored, not thrown out. How can there even be adults that want to take

this time honored material out of the schools? It is total ignorance and a

complete lack of understanding what education is. How can we, at this time

in history, add another set of learning systems that includes lecture and

memorization of facts? How can we add more time to the computer screen?

Put something into the hands of our children. Start with clay and that leads

children to creative and abstract thinking. Social networking is interesting,

but not creative, it is like television, static thought.

Teaching Ceramics

Here is a story: my dear friend Bill Burgert had to give a guest demo of

throwing at an alternative school. And, you know what I mean. No one

gives eye contact, jackets still on. Heads on desks, eyes closed. He started

his demo and no one looked up. Bill took a digital camera from his pocket and

walked around the room and leaned down and FLASH, took a few pix.

"Hey man, why the f\*%\* did you take my picture?" He said "I am doing a

documentary story for a major magazine on "unmotivated, boring kids, and

you will be on the cover of the magazine, sleeping". Two minutes later they

were all around his wheel, talking and asking questions..."hey cool man, do

that again." You see, he used dramatic impact, got their attention and

moved them from negative to positive. He then answered their question

with a big smile. "No article, just wanted to wake you up", they all laughed.

He had truth and trust. If bill showed up every day in that classroom he

would have them all making pots in a week.

It takes a great deal of courage to be a quality teacher. You have to find any

way you can to get their attention. The following essay will give you some

clues as to how I did it.

When you begin each day meeting kids, touch every child. Just shake hands,

touch the shoulder or arm, "good morning, nice to have you here with us

today. Meet every child at the door. Soon, they will expect it...and will be

ready for you...with a warm greeting. Don't let a kid slouch past you, stop

them, make them look at you in the eyes and shake hands.

Non- threatening touch is the key to trust/truth. When you teach clay/craft

you often have to touch the students, lean into them, they must learn that

touching is part of the craft, it is natural feeling. Your senses must be alive

to be a potter. It is important, very important. DO IT WITHOUT FEAR. It is

never, never sexual, only caring and friendly. Kids really do know the

difference; they feel it and they are always correct. Most girls in a school

know the people that stare at them, look through them. Trust is almost felt.

It is mostly eyes that spook kids. Their filters are pretty good.

Post your resume`

Go to any doctor or lawyer's office and see the wall of their office. A dozen

framed pieces of evidence that they are certified, degreed, and important.

Why do teachers not post their degree? I do, and have a long list of my

achievements stuck on the wall with duct tape. I have the kids read it and

understand that I have value, and worked hard to get there. Nothing fancy,

sort of funny really, but they get the point. `Hey mel, I didn't know you

where art teacher of the decade for America, wow, New York

University...wow.` They did not know I coached 8 state championship swim

4teams, and 7 runner-ups. Fifteen years in a row, 1 or 2. Wow.  
`Hey mel,

did you coach an Olympic diver? Wow. `Hey mel, you had a  
show in Tokyo,

wow.`

All of that was nice, they like to ask questions about my past,  
but here is the

best of all. For years I did pots that would be used on the  
General Mills

boxes, like Total Cereal, Hamburger Helper and such. I had a  
Total Cereal

box on the shelf in the studio. On occasion I would take it down  
and show it

to the class as it had three of my pots on the cover and back of  
the box.

`wow whooo, my teacher has pots on a cereal box, gotta call my  
mom and

tell her.` Now, that impressed them. Little did they know how  
much work



that was, no recognition, just pay. General Mills used the pots for photo

shoots, and it was basic —commercial art, as I could measure clay and make

pots to perfect specification, just a trick of skill. Do it, get a check and be

done. They could care less about my shows in Dubai, Tokyo or Shanghai.

The kids did not know the difference; they just knew I was famous because

my pots were on a cereal box. They are totally naïve to the real world of

art. So, often it is the small things you do that make the difference. It has

to be things that a child can relate to. It is ok to let them know. They

become a part of you.

When you start class, never, never do it the same way, same words every

day. You know: "simmer down, simmer down, open your folder to page 2",

the teacher that does that, day after day, every class, becomes a mental

moron. Kids turn it off like an old dead cell phone.

I start class like this: `Bob, what color boxer shorts do you have on? Tell

the class why you selected them. ` Or, `Sandy, why did you pick that great

green sweater? It is perfect for your eyes.` I make a kid say something

about them self. Often very funny and loose stories and it must be

non/threatening. But, the sense of class starting is getting people to think

of why we do things that we do every day. Selection starts every day for all

humans. Hair, smell, clothes. An artist always knows why we start

something. And every day has a new beginning. I may ask a question about

the world, where is Shri Lanka? How does a battery work?  
Clay, where

does it come from????? Anything, make it up as you go. I have  
been

known in good weather to march the entire class out to the  
parking lot of

the school and talk about car tires, and how to change a flat tire.  
Discuss

5 any topic that is not clay to start them thinking and being  
involved. I teach

everything, there is no limit.

Dressing as a potter

I came to school ready to make pots, I wore Red Wing boots,  
clean jeans

and a work shirt. I had a cool apron that I wore most days in the  
studio. It

was a working space that needed and demanded work clothes. It  
became

for me, almost a uniform. The advanced student potters would  
often dress

just like me. That is when I knew I had them totally. It became a status

symbol in the school to look like a —varsity|| potter. They stood out and had

a real place to identify with. Every now and then I would show up at school

with a coat and tie, or a full dress suit. I would change everything with my

appearance, I became a new person in the room. It was based on the

theory that you never do the same thing, every day, day in and day out.

Always change your image, let them see a different and new person now and

then. A woman teacher should come into the room about once a month

wearing a knock-out dress, great shoes and full makeup. Give them

something to talk about. A child's new view of you, as a real person. As a

teacher it is imperative that you be a real person every day, with a real life,

and your real life becomes a window that the kids can peer into and want to

emulate.

When you are gone for a day

I found a very lovely woman in our area that was a full time potter that did

mostly hand building. She had a degree in teaching but did not have a job. I

negotiated with her to be my only sub. In fact kids would say to me, `mel,

take a day off and have Karen come in and be with us and hand build for a

day. ` They loved Karen, and the program just slid into another gear when

she was in the studio. She carried out all the steps to make a great studio

work with kids. Karen was a part of our program. You see, even the sub was

planned and negotiated. We never left things to chance. Karen had total

trust, and she let the varsity kids take over the wheel work when I was

gone.

This is my week:

6 MONDAY every kid sits around my potter's wheel and I make pots, talk, tell

stories. Every Monday, a new kind of pot was constructed by me. I made

about 6 pots per class. At the end of the day I might have between 30-50

pots done. I line them up on a wall. Every Monday. The kids asked me

questions, they may tell stories back at me. It is an open interchange of

ideas. But, I am in charge, I set the pace. Seniors will ask me to tell

famous `mel` stories. `Hey mel, tell them about the time Mr. Uchida kicked

your butt for dropping pots. ` The seniors know the stories, love the stories.

But, they all watch me make dozens of pots, thousands of pots by the time

they graduate.

It is about process. The stories break the time up, set up ideas. My rule:

Never a lecture, always a story.

Kids will say: `hey mel, isn't it boring making pots? I say. `No, I love to

make pots; it is what I choose to do, it is my profession...and watch. I take

five balls of clay, throw a fast five bowls and say...\$25, \$25, etc. `How long

does it take you to make a \$125 working at Wendy's?` Wow. Point taken,

nothing is boring...only boring kids are boring. We all know that idea.

I teach kids about passports `get a passport on your 18th birthday. Who

knows, someone may ask you to go to Tibet, and you won't have a

passport`. I encourage them to think as an open, interested person. There

is no place we cannot travel. We must always be prepared. I NEVER SPEAK

OF POLITICS, NEVER, EVER.

During the Monday demo days I give them the philosophy of the class. How

we think, what we believe, what they have to do to be successful in my

class. I would always point out: `there is one rule, and one rule only to

succeed in mel's ceramics course. You must treat everyone in this class with

respect, no exceptions; you must help every student in this class and be



prepared to be the teacher, every day.`

I begin teaching clay with the wheel. I know the standard wisdom says that

it must be coils, slabs. That is not for me; to make really great coil pots you

need far more skill than it takes to make pots on the wheel. Kids love the

machines as they are all in the starting phase of driving a car. The first year

the kids learn to throw, skill, skill, skill. They learn to handle clay, know the

simple properties of the material. No art, just craft and skill. They graduate

to hand building and sculpture. Seniors do some art. It is advanced work

7 that takes time and patience. The wheel is quick success and fun in most

cases. I teach the wheel, I have every kid throwing pretty well the first

week. It is a step by step process, 1 2 3. The seniors all help the new

students learn the basics of throwing. It is part of the program that

everyone teaches. It is the culture of sharing knowledge. When we all

teach, we all get better very fast. The intellect of teaching transfers to the

self. We all grow fast when we teach a skill.

Whenever you find a person that says —I tried to learn to throw, but I could

not do it.‖ I would reply —you had a bad teacher, I can teach you to throw a

pot in 15 minutes.‖ And I can. It is a simple system that works every time.

College kids that cannot throw a pot come from a program where the

teacher does not know anything. The teachers cannot throw either, so like a

racial slur, they minimize the craft. —Throwing is just silly craft, I am into

serious art, and I make huge statements.‖ —Yah, right, I can see that, I saw

your last show.‖

I tell the students that the `tools, clay, and kilns belong to the students of

this class...they are yours, you own this studio. It is not mine; I have my

own studio at home.` We care for the studio here at school, we love this

studio. We have extreme respect and love for clay and the tools that we use

to make things. We never dis/respect the clay, it is never poop or dirt, or

objects to be flung at the walls. It is golden. It is our most precious

possession when we are in this class. It would be like killing bunnies to ruin

clay. The seniors all nod, and say..`mel has that right`.

I tell the students about un-conditional love. I give it to all of them...every

student. And then they know that the most vicious of all punishment is `the

withdrawal of that love`. It is the mother of all discipline. I did not need

any other form of discipline. A student abuses our rule of respect and that

student does not belong to our group any longer. They are dismissed from

our class and banned forever. No exceptions. Do it once in ten years and

every kid in the community knows about it. It is like the great line from

Shakespeare, bring a cannon on stage, and make sure you blow it off. Never

timid, never pretend, never lie. Making 50 rules and posting them is stupid.

It takes them two minutes for respect to take hold in their minds. If they

respect the class, the teacher, themselves, all else falls into place.

8 TUESDAY most Tuesdays are student days. They take the pot of the week

and try to make it, or they continue their own projects.

Music:

We had a very nice stereo system in the room. It had a lock and key, and I

had the key. I controlled all music but had some simple concepts. Tuesday

is female day, and they got to pick a girl for that day, and she selected the

cd for that Tuesday. Only female music on Tuesday could be played. I set

the sound level. If a boy tried to influence the music, the stereo got shut off

for the week. No exceptions.

Wednesday

Again, work day for students. Pretty much they select what they want to do.

Music: classical music day. I put on the cd. Every Wednesday is classical

day.

Thursday. Get pots ready for bisque to the back room. Get things trimmed

and finished. Work on projects. Music. Boys day, same as Tuesday, only a

boy gets to select the cd.

Friday.

Ok, this is important: This is the key, clean up day.

Students must have their projects ready for the kiln room, get all pots

trimmed and finished, or tightly covered with plastic. Music. Loud

Ok, here it is. This is so important it should be in bold type. I split the

room into a grid. Sort of one square yard grids. Every student has one

square of the grid. That is their grid and it has to be cleaned on Friday. In

fact it is more than clean, it is sanitary. For example: Jean has sink number

three, that is all she ever cleans, just that sink. It has to sparkle every

Friday. She may keep it all three years if she wishes.

So, 190 kids in one day, they each have one square yard of the room,

everything shines at 3:30 p.m. Friday. If one grid has not been cleaned and

the kid was not absent, I call their dad at work if I can. `Jean did not clean

her art space, I will wait here at school until she comes back and takes care

of it.` Dad says, `my god, sorry mel, we will get her, call her and she can

run back...sorry to hold you at school on a Friday.` That is how I do it.

Every kid in my class knows I will sit and wait on Friday for a kid to come

back to school and finish their cleanup. It is their responsibility to the studio

and fellow students.

When they understand this concept no one ever misses their one square

yard of cleanup. Again, we blow off the cannon. No fear, but be ready to sit

at school maybe once a year on a Friday. Never threaten without being

willing to hold up your end of the bargain.

And, every teacher of clay has really important things to do Friday

afternoon. Like: phantom pot smasher.

On Friday/4:30pm I would walk around the room pushing a 50 gallon drum

on wheels, half full of water. Pots left around, not trimmed, no name, odd



pots just sink into the plastic drum. Gone forever. I also had a bottle of red

food coloring and a brush. Any bisque ware that is getting dusty I marked

with red. The next week it goes to the trash if it is not glazed. Nothing sits

around the room. No exceptions. Do they ever figure it out fast. No

discussion. When a kid says: `hey mel, someone stole my pot!`, I would

say, `must be international art thieves. I am sure your pot is on its way for

exhibition and sale in Tokyo, kid says` I will look for it some more. opps,

here it is.`

So, that is the week. Lots of time for students to work, they get a rhythm.

Interesting fact, they love classical music day, but no one ever says it, but

they get mellow and happy and will ask for Mozart or some other great

historic piece of music.

I often ask them on story day...`if you had to go to an island for a year,

what cd would you bring with you?` It becomes a cacophony of discussion.

They talk about that all year long. It changes constantly.  
Remember, each

kid is an authority on what they like, and almost have religious zeal about

telling you what good music is. All BS.

Another example of respect: Pat loaded the kilns. A 55 year old motherly

type. A wonderful bright woman. Pat was in charge of the back room, The

kilns and loading them for the next firing, I unloaded them in the early

morning. No one told Pat what to fire or what to do. Every student respected

Pat with an almost fanatic respect. If you pushed your pots forward, or

wanted them fired fast, they went back to the outer room for a week. No

exceptions. It is simple logic, wait your turn. Seniors had a kiln of their

10  
own. They loaded their own pots with teams of two. That was negotiated

with the seniors. They were in charge and it got done very well in most

cases. Many seniors just waited for their pots with the general population.

We fired three Skutt 10-27 kilns every day.

Seniors

Just imagine a sophomore kid throwing clay in my school studio, and the

clay sticks to the one square yard clean up space of a senior. I would just

walk away. The kids eyes would get as big as a stop sign. That senior would

be in that kids face like an NFL linebacker. See the benefits?  
Seniors did the

teaching, hands on, and they controlled the behavior of the new  
kids. The

seniors had status, the seniors knew what to do and showed  
others how we

did things. Seniors were golden, and they knew it, and respected  
that

status. I was the one that set up that status situation. I did it  
because it

worked so well, and taught people about leadership.

We broke the studio up like a football team. Seniors with two  
years

experience were considered `varsity potters`. We also had a  
starting team

of about 15. All star boys and girls. Juniors with one year  
experience were

considered `jv`. One year, or first year students were just  
rookies. They

had to earn the right to be on the team. And, they all made it.  
The funny

thing is, the varsity first team may be a smoking door kid, a girl  
going to

Dartmouth, the all conference running back on the real football  
team, two

kids from special ed. and a couple of plain, no name girls that  
were the heart

and soul of our program. And those top varsity potters were all  
best friends.

They were a team. We never knew where the `golden hands`  
kids would

come from, but their dna was clay. The varsity potters ran the  
program, I

was the facilitator. As you read this, can you feel respect?  
Would you have

loved to have been a varsity potter at our school? You betcha.  
In so many

ways, it was one of the highest standards of our school. And, all  
the kids

knew it.

## Mixing up kids

We did not have clay classes in series. It was just called "ceramics". The

seniors, juniors and new kids were all mixed together, and you could take

11

"ceramics" all three years. Some kids even had it two hours a day. If a kid

stood in the door watching, and he came back two days in a row, looking, I

would say `hey kid, come on in, you want to learn to throw a pot?` then I

would call a senior over, `bill help this kid throw his first pot.` the kid would

come back every day...we called them `walk-ons`. We had many that never

signed up for "ceramics" and they came every day, for three years. No

credit, just passion for the studio. Often they became my best varsity kids.

They would just sign out of study hall and come to ceramics every day, and

many did it for three years. Their names were never on my grade sheets.

So what? Good kids and they became heart of our program. What other

teacher had —walk-ons||?

## Attendance

If you know every student as a human being, you miss them if they are not

in class. There is a big hole in the day if that kid is not with you. About

every month I would do this. Mary would be absent, I would tell the class,

`Mary must be sick, I will call her Dad at work and check on her.` (always

call Dads if you can, and especially at work.) so, I would call and talk to Dad

or Mom and say `Mary is absent, she is such a great girl, she must be sick.`

The parent would probably say..`mel, how nice of you to call and check, yes,

she has the flu. My god, thanks for calling and caring so much.` Every kid in

that class is listening. `Hmmm, he calls your dad at work.` Do you think

they would skip my class? Not on your life. Do the parents think I am a

Saint?, Yes, and two birds, one rock. (If Mary is at the counselor, or on a

trip, the kids will tell me and I don't have to call.) Blow off the cannon, no

fear, (helpful hint: have the kids fill out a card, their name, address and

home phone. Mom and Dad's work number. a space on the bottom for their



given and expected to be called name, like `boomer` or something and if

they are naughty you always use their full name like `Walter J. Swishmore

what in the heck are you doing?`

Girls and emotions

This is a big deal in high school. A great deal of respect is needed by staff. I

kept about twenty dimes in my desk for tampon purchase. Any girl could

leave the room at any time as needed. We never ask why, only support their

12 needs. I kept a big jar of aspirin in my lower desk drawer. They never asked,

they just used them as needed. (In theory they were stolen from me...wink,

wink.) If a girl was crying over anything I would excuse her to go to the

nurse or just go to the hall and sit with a friend. Respect always ruled the

decision. Never ask anything like, `what's wrong?`. Leave it be, they will

talk to you if they need you. It is often boy trouble. But, I sure do not want

them in my room all broken up and crying. When you build your program

on truth/trust, they won't leave for some odd or silly reason. They love the

studio, and don't want to leave. So, if they leave, they have a reason. Not

always your business. And, if they suffer from pms, you sure don't want

that red eyed devil in your space that day. She will be back to being a

princess in a day or two. Reality. Be a real person, never the "teacher". Kid

rules that cannot be broken are made by teachers that do not have trust and

control; they can always look to the —RULE. I made all of my rules general,

maybe, sort of, and kids understood them. Each kid could trust that they

knew how to behave and act. Consistent fairness ruled our studio.

I did not support bad teachers, bad education, and for sure I did not support

radical school policy. Just leave me alone, with my kids and let me do my

thing. Very few cared or knew what was going on in that studio. But the

kids all knew and supported the program and so did their parents. I never

blamed the school or the administration for anything that dealt with the art

department. If things were not going well, it was my fault, and I corrected

whatever was wrong. Never send kids to the office for discipline as you will

be blamed no matter the cause. Take care of it yourself. I never wanted

administrators to be in the clay studio, they may get their cheap suit or

dress dirty. They can just cause trouble. In the thirty five years I was a

teacher not one kid was sent to the office. From the Board of Education to

the door of your room, no one cares. It is all on you. It is your life, live it.

If you have great administrators, you are living a life of good luck.

If you have a serious problem with a student, deal with it `right now`.

Never wait until the next day. As soon as the kid talks to their parent, the

lies begin. It will always be your fault, no matter what has taken place. I

used the phone while the kid stood there. Dad at work was my first call, or

Mom at work, but if there was a Dad, get to him first. Tell your story while

the kids listen. —Mr. Smith, Tom is standing right here next to me, he has

done a very bad thing here in our clay studio, he called a girl a whore, and a

bitch and he laid an F bomb in class.

Take care of it right now, just so you know. After you deal with Tom at

home tonight will you give me a call at home? Yes, thanks a great deal, yes

I know how you feel, same for me.¶ Now, that was Judge Andrew Smith,

called out of court to deal with this. He is not a happy father, and the boy

will not get to lie out of this one. A scene like that did not happen very

often, maybe once in five years, but that is how I dealt with it. I won every

battle. And, those parents are dedicated to our program because it was just

Mel, Dad and Boy. Solve the problem, don't let it linger. And never involve

the Administration. They will turn it back on you every time. They will kiss

the judge's butt and tell him I am not a very stable teacher.  
—And Tommy

really didn't mean to call the girl names. NO harm done.‖ (And no one

cares about the girl.) But, I do, and that is how it gets solved, Me, Tom and

girl, and he will damn well apologize and slobber all over her or else he

becomes a non-clay student forever. You must have courage.

The teacher working in clay

I have a rule, the more I work in clay, the more the kids work in clay. If I

should get lazy, just sit around the studio, the kids get lazy too. So, with

that in mind I always have art work going on in the studio. The old adage

from art teachers that comes out like this, —I am so busy helping kids that I

have no time to do any of my own work, that is total BS. They have fear of

showing their work, or looking bad in front of the kids. And, if the kids are

instructed as to how to work, why do you have to hold their hands? They

want to make their own work; you are the facilitator, not the doer of their

work. (I kept a stamp with my logo on it in my apron pocket, if a student

asked me to let's say, trim their pot, I would take out my stamp and push it

into the bottom of their pot. `hey mel, you just signed my pot` and I would

say, `no it is our pot, I just finished it.`) My students would rebel if I did

anything on their pots. They did everything themselves. That was the point

of the studio. It is the basic idea of being an artist; you control the work, all

of the work. It is the blessing of art, it belongs to you, self. It is not a group

dynamic, it is individual. But many teachers are convinced they only teach

happy groups doing happy thoughts and wondrous things. I teach kids to be

independent, free thinkers that get credit for what they do, what they

achieve, and all the credit all the time. If they fail, it is their failure and

theirs alone. But, they sure know what total and complete success brings

them. Their total success, they get all the good stuff, just like me when I

open my kiln. It is all mine and I own it.



I have painted my entire life. It was fun to make big painting stretchers and

cover with them with canvas in the clay studio. I had an easel in the room

in the far corner and I would start a big painting (six by four feet). I loved to

do big color fields and change them as the week went on. Green to red, then

blue, then change it all around a week later. I would ask the kids, `what

color now?` They all had opinions about my paintings. But, they saw an

artist struggle with color and composition every day. It became real to

them. The teacher struggles with art, they struggle with art, and it is real

life. And then I would see kids going over to the painting studio and work

out some idea they had in mind, then they would come back and show me.

Art, real art, but it was their idea and they did not ask permission to paint.

They just went and did it.

I also kept a small jewelry work bench with wax and a torch, some simple

tools for silver smithing in a back corner. I would repair things for them,

and then watch them melt metal, make a ring, just one at a time. Never a

formal course, just kids messing with silver. Every hour in the day there

was a kid at the jewelry bench, and often they were fixing something for

another kid. Craftsmanship was stressed, just like clay. Learn what the

materials can do, then do it. If they got stuck, I would walk over and lend a

hand with technique. Just like when they were on the wheel or making a

hand built pot. `Hey mel, what do I do now?` They sure did not get a video,

I knew what to tell them because I am a potter/artist/craftsman.  
I honed

my skills over years of dedicated work of my own. I spent my  
entire life to

train myself to know the answer; I did not train myself to be a  
teacher,

which was natural. If you want to be a full time teacher of  
ceramics, learn to

be your own self as an artist/potter/craftsperson. Then your  
room will be

full of kids wanting to be just like you.

## The Studio

There has never been a studio in a school that is large enough.  
If kids

follow your program, and you fill your room with kids you have  
to be

organized, really organized. It does not mean you have to do  
more work;

your kids have to do more work and are trained to care for clay, pots and

firing schedules. It is the training that must be stressed. It has to be logical

and benefit the program. It is not about making the janitor or the administrators happy; it is making the studio into a functioning space for

15

kids to work. It can be done. And when kids understand what you're doing,

they tend to work into the system. It is the illogical, snarky, whining about

cleanup that drives them nuts. The more you organize and train, the less

you will have to do yourself.

The first thing you can do is make sure you have some husky kids that want

to get out of class a few minutes ahead of the other kids. They are garbage

haulers. A couple of times a day I would have all of the trash collected and

taken to the dumpster outside. Old bisque ware, paper etc went in the cans.

The kids that hauled garbage got to be first in line at lunch, or were the first

kids out of the parking lot at the end of the day. We would do a quick sweep

of floors just before the kids took off with the garbage cans. Every day I

would put down one ice cream pail full of sawdust on our studio floor. This

kept the dust way down. We did a great deal of water cleanup, but

remember, the kids are in the room a couple of hours, you are there all day.

Year after year, protect your health. Getting rid of garbage and old pots

becomes routine, and if the kids hauling get a bonus, they are ready to roll a

few minutes before class ends. That becomes their one square yard of

cleanup. And, this system helps your janitor, and he knows it and will

appreciate it. The more everyday cleanup that you can do will keep the

sharks off your back. Get the kids to understand we do not want our studio

sloppy and crappy, it is part of being a craftsperson, it is part of the system

and it helps you a great deal.

The wheels

We had about 30 wheels, we collected them, bought used, got gifts, used

Craig's list, and sometimes we got donations of older wheels. They all

worked and we kept them all maintained. If a wheel would break down

during class, the kid that was on it had to pull it out, drag it to a work table

and turn it upside down. Boys, girls the same, it was never an issue. They

would get the big red tool box and start the repair. I would guide them, and

make sure we had the extra parts. I kept belts galore, and a few Brent

parts. Of course the Brent's never failed. Loved those babies. But, the odd

wheels had to be fixed now and then. It was mechanical teaching, and we

could not afford to take a wheel out of the room for repair. We needed them,

just like a car race, you had to keep them running. Of course the kids loved

the fact that they were in charge of the repair. Nothing better than seeing

the `homecoming queen of the school` with a socket set in her hand

working with a goofy special ed kid. But, he knew how to fix it, and she

liked that kid. She knew he had value. TRUST AND TRUTH.

Wheel location

This is a very critical part of the essay on building a studio for clay. The

most common position for wheels in most schools is: in the middle of the

room with rows facing each other. TOTALLY WRONG without question, you

might as well serve popcorn and soda, pass out the pizza, it creates a party

atmosphere. You never want kids facing each other on a potter's wheel.

ISOLATE THE WHEELS. Kids need privacy when learning. It goes back to the

old classroom with the first art lessons. The kids draw with their arm over

the art work as they are worried that others are watching. Memorize this



theory: Art and PhyEd are visible, and kids are frightened. It is like a

spelling bee, you are standing alone and can make grave error, and you can

be embarrassed. `Sit down mel, you missed the word dog.`  
`crap, I thought

she said log.` Kids laughing all over the room, you smack them at recess. I

faced every wheel into a wall or corner. I built four foot walls about 10 feet

long coming into the room from side walls. Four wheels on each side. We

had two of them. On free spaces against the main room walls I had other

wheels. All facing a wall. There was a big window, floor to ceiling and that

had three wheels looking out. Of course those we reserved for Senior/Varsity

potters. A primo spot, looking out at the world for the best kids. My own

wheel, yes, I had my own wheel, was at the front of the room  
sitting in the

open, chairs all around. I had the audience. (kids would often  
believe that

my wheel made much better pots, and they would sneak onto it  
when I was

not around, as if I cared. Just a wheel.)

We built wooden shelves just above the wheels for their tools,  
and had flat

boards that they could put their pots on. Each wheel had a five  
gallon

plastic pail next to it for scrap. There was a water bucket on  
each wheel.

Kids furnished their own tools, and they all had a kit, homemade  
that they

brought to the wheel.

No one cleaned up a wheel when they were done throwing; they  
just picked

up their own tools, moved their pots and left the room. The next  
student to

use that wheel, the next period, would set the wheel up as they wanted. If

they were clean freaks, they cleaned the wheel, sloppies never touched it,

just started to throw. Most kids knew who used what wheel and they

followed the same kid each day, then they got the wheel the way they liked

17

it. With this method, you made pots right to the end of class.  
The kids

figured it out just fine and no one whined about anything. You  
get to set the

wheel up as you like to work and work all period. And, why  
wash a wheel

that was going to be used ten minutes later, which would be a  
typical anal

teacher trick (twenty minutes of cleaning, four minutes of  
throwing

time.) These were tools to be used, all day long. They got  
washed at the end

of the year. On Friday, the wheels were cleaned of all scrap clay,  
the clay

was re/cycled. The wheels almost never stopped running. And  
just think of

the thousands of pots made on those wheels. Kid pots, they had  
privacy,

and no fear, they could smash all the bad ones, and then run over  
to me

with the good ones. `mel, look at this great pot I just threw, great huh`. No

one saw the mistakes, the flops or the stupid ones. Just like a real potter,

throw away the bad ones; keep the great ones, your public never knew. The

public assumes that everything you make is a perfect one every time. Art

and craft is a private enterprise, it always has been, always will be. You are

alone with your work most of the time. We live for the isolation and clear

thinking that being alone will give us. Why would it be good to be public and

open for new students? That would be silly beyond belief. And then

teachers wonder why boys are throwing balls of clay down the shirt of the

girl across from them? Get a brain, as the kids say.

One of the on-going fights we have in our society is respect and

understanding of tools. As a teacher of clay you have to instill every day the

value of clay, tools, kilns and the products that we buy to produce what we

make. We teach an almost religious respect for the tools and materials that

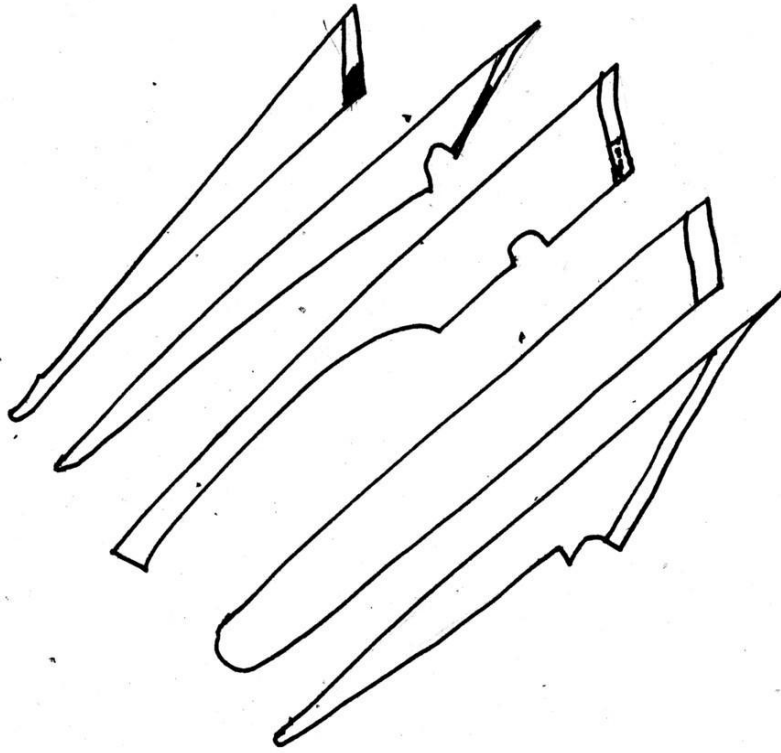
we need to make great clay objects. It starts with the teacher and how you

love your tools. I would stop class and hold up a really great rib some kid

had made, `hey, look and feel this great rib, way to go Wally`. The best

way to teach respect for tools is have the kids make them. In fact, we made

most all of the hand tools that we would need in the studio.



Metal, steel and other hard object ruin pug mills. We had an old Walker Pug

Mill at our school. If anything got into that pug mill we were out of business

until it was fixed. Thousands of pounds a day would go through that mill. It

was our life-line. Kids had all the clay they wanted or needed. So, in saying

that, we needed tools that the pug mill could eat and digest. Wooden tools,

cutoff wires and trimming tools all could go into the pug mill without

damage. We made everything. Seniors actually made most of the tools as

they had training in the simple machines we used. A small band saw, a

powerful disc sander and a one inch belt sander did the trick. We cut

hundreds of strips of wood, like maple, oak etc. that came from wood

working shops, mountains of scrap. We even had rosewood. I also ordered

a bunch of bamboo stakes and fishing poles. We cut them into all sorts of

shapes. Forty five degree angle tools came first, then long dowels with

pieces of sponge taped to the end was next. A needle tool was easy; we got

all the used needles from the sewing machines in home economics. Drill a



tiny hole into the end of a stick and epoxy them in. We made hundreds of

them. Kids would bring into class an entire foam mattress, and then cut it

up into sponges. We would add the cut up sponge to a bucket of water

loaded with vinegar and let them soak over-night, next day, clean as can be.

19

Kids would rip those sponges into any shape they liked and we made big

sponges for clean up and huge pieces for spills. All free. I taught simple

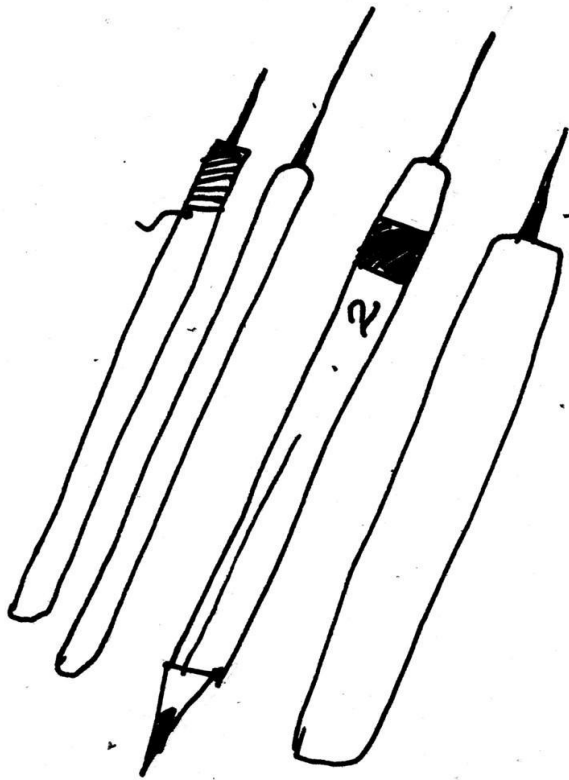
Japanese brush making, just hair and epoxy into the end of a piece of scrap

bamboo. Or, just wrap them onto a stick with electricians tape. All sponge

on a stick tools were just a piece of sponge, wrapped with colored

electricians' tape.





All cut-off wires were made from stainless steel fishing line, doubled over

and added to a small wad of bisque fired clay with a hole in it. They spun the

wire to make a spiral pattern. The kids would decorate the bisque knobs, or

add a letter figure so they could tell their own. It was easy to carve a

symbol in the end of the bisque knob and use it to sign pots. There were

animal carvings, symbols and letter forms in their bisque knobs.

We would collect banding metal and thin strips of stainless metal to make

trimming tools. Use the belt sander to sharpen...just add a wooden handle,

either with tape or epoxy and they became custom made. There is no limit

20

as to what kids will make for clay tools if you turn them loose. And then

every kid in the program has his or her own set of unique tools, they never

get lost or stolen. Many kids would keep their tool kit in their hall locker and

bring it to class every day. Talk about respect for tools, it was built in. And it

was a joy to see how creative they were with tool boxes, every shape and

size from plastic, to old metal lunch boxes and fabric bags. Many of my

students carried those boxes to college with them, and people would ask,

—hey, how did you get those great tools, smile.



Our wedging tables were built-in all over the room; I screwed a piece of hd

scrap plywood with contact glue on to old formica counters (old drawing

boards work great.) I would then add a screw eye into the wall and one into

the wedging board. Add piano wire to a spring and a turnbuckle and wrap it

in place. It will never break. The spring and turnbuckle keep it tight, but

makes for give and play and it springs back in place. We did the cut and

slam method of wedging as it is far superior to rolling clay around. Do the

math, twelve cuts and slams will give you hundreds of layers. The clay is

totally ready for the wheel or sculpture making. Only seniors would master

21

the perfect Japanese cone wedging technique. That method takes time and

patience to master. Cut and slam is learned the first day and works every

time. Clay that is manufactured, in the box, in the bag is ready to make

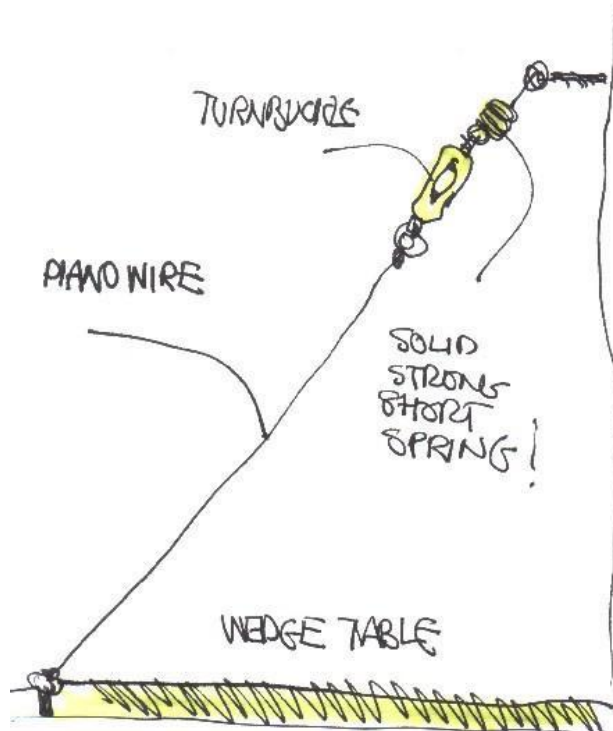
pots. It needs no wedging. In fact most kids will ruin the clay by wedging.

Just have them use the clay/as is. Pug mill clay has to be carefully hand

mixed with the cut and slam method. Again, they learn it fast, as bad clay

will not throw well.





Taking care of scrap clay is the key to sanity for any ceramics teacher. It

must be an ongoing system. If you fall behind, everything gets piled up and

the room is a disaster. This is how I did it.

I made twenty bushel basket sized plaster buckets. They each held about a

five gallon pail of slop. As the wheel buckets of scrap started to fill, we

would transfer the clay into the plaster buckets. It would take about 4 days

for the clay to become throwing clay again. The kids would touch each

plaster bucket filled with clay with their finger to test it. It would feel like

ready clay, and then they would tip out the clay and add it to the pug mill.

It all went back through the pug mill.

Really wet clay would be added to the pug mill and then mixed with dry mix

clay or grog/sand. We would often set out long snakes of clay from the pug

22

mill to dry on tables overnight. For great fun we would take all the scrap

clay in the studio and run it through the pug mill with kids catching it as it

came out to make an unbroken snake of clay many, many feet long, in fact

we tried to take it all the way to and down the hallway. Many kids from the

hall would run to the studio to help. You had to have a kid about every two

feet to hold and support the clay. They would shuffle along very slowly.

Some would bring chairs and stools to hold the clay. This activity would go

on for hours, or, an entire day. Kids at the front end would be sculpting the

head of a giant snake as the clay moved along. Class after class would

change positions as they had to run to another class. You did not have to

teach cooperative learning. It was natural. And when the word went out

hundreds of students would show up to help and watch. It was a real event.

The next day we would bag up all that great clay and store it away. And

guess where it went? It just disappeared. The varsity kids would take it to

their lockers, into the trunks of their cars, take it home and store it in their

garage. We would even find clay stacked behind the bleachers in the gym.

There were mountains of scrap clay, aging in hidden places in the school. It

was their clay, they hid it, aged it, stored it away, then it all came back to be

made into pots. I did nothing; it was not my place to mess with varsity

potters clay. (Often teachers would report to me that kids were stealing

clay, yah, right, stealing clay. Don't be a snitch, kids hate that.) And, if the

teachers would find bits of clay in the hall, they would put it in my mailbox,

but I would end that by picking up themes that were thrown in the hall and

stuff them all in the English department mailboxes. Turnabout is fair play.

They got the point, but hated that they got stuffed. They are perfect you

know, and teach really important stuff. BS.

When the clay delivery truck arrived from Continental Clay Company the

kids would line up behind the truck and grab the boxes as they came off.

Away it went to hiding places just like the scrap. You would see some tiny

little girl hiking down the hall with a 50lb box of clay on her shoulder. How

they knew the truck was coming is still a mystery to me. High school

tom/tom communication systems in action. All I knew was I did not have to

carry it, or handle it, or store it.

I never, ever use boxed/ new clay for demos. I used the scrap from the pug

mill, in fact I stored and hid my old stinky clay too, in a locked store room

just off the studio (locked up the cobalt too). I had the only key as those

23

buggers would snatch my clay in a heartbeat. And, since I always kept the

pots I made at school, I had to fashion much higher temperature clay for my

own use. I purchased bags of Fire Clay and added it to my batches for the

pug mill. I would use the kilns over the weekend to bisque fire my pots and

then take them home and fire them in my big gas kiln. Those pots would

have my school stamp on them, so those were always used for research and

glaze experiments.

I would have dozens of pots around the studio. Any student could pick

them up, carry them around and use them for examples of how to do things.

That was the point. They knew I was a professional, and did not use my

pots as perfect examples for them to make. Mine were far too good. And

that is an important point. You do not want the kids to compare their work

with yours. But, they sure chase after the best varsity potters and try to

emulate them. Again, that was the point. And, if any of my work got broken

or chipped, no big deal, just throw them away. I can always make another

dozen. For example: a girl might drop a teapot of mine and absolutely go

into hysterics. I would just pat her on the back and tell her it made no

difference; I would just make another one tomorrow.

The kids all knew that I kept my pots and did not use the school clay, which

was theirs, for my own use. It teaches an integrity lesson to all of them.

Honesty rules and theft is not acceptable. I had to make my own, and sweat

to get my clay. It was never free for the taking. Remember there are

always a few staff members that steal school toilet paper, pencils and pens.

They were always asking me for masking tape and good colored tag board.

I refused them as I would know that they were using it to paint their own

homes. I hate petty theft. Anyway, it was the kids tape, not theirs.

One clay body



If as a teacher, you keep several clay bodies for kids to pick from you have

set yourself up to go mad. I always had just one clay, one only. It was a

mid-range cone 4-6 iron bearing stoneware. It was perfect for a school

situation. We only had one clay to re/cycle.

White/high talc bodies are nice, but often throw like baby pooh. I

concentrated on having a decent body that would throw well, yet by adding

sand and grog, we could hand build or make big sculptures. The students

learned to add sand or grog in the cut and slap method of wedging. White

24

clay left a trail down the hall on the carpet of the school. It took me about

one day to get rid of it. Don't ever leave a trail to your room, only bad

people will follow a trail of clay. And, they will punish you when they arrive

at your door. Find a clay body, learn its properties, and stick with it. You will

have to match a glaze to that body, and keep that simple too.

Glaze

I had one glaze, one glaze only. It was a 60/40 mix of Volcanic ash and

Gertsley Borate. It fired to cone 4-6. I made the glaze in a 50 gallon plastic

garbage drum on wheels. If you mix that glaze to 90/10 you have a great

cone 10-11 glaze. Mix it 20/80 and you have a great raku glaze. Two items

to mix, add water and a canoe paddle and you have blended glaze. A boy

will always be thinking he is in a canoe, and will paddle for an hour. The

glaze will never settle. `hey, wally, get away from the glaze bucket.` Tom

Sawyer times ten.

I made four colors of glaze, white with zircopax, tan with iron, blue/green

with copper and cobalt, and a black. That was that. But, with layers the

kids could have hundreds of combinations. Add the thousands of glaze

tricks that appear in Ceramic Monthly/Clay Times and PMI every month,

year after year, and the combinations are endless. With kids, limit the

choices. Keep it simple.

I encouraged kids to dip out an ice cream pail of base glaze and then add

any colorants they pleased. Some great glazes came from that bucket. And

the secrets were always kept. —Hey Sally, how did you get that great deep

blue green glaze?|| She had her bucket locked up in her hall locker and she

would not tell a soul. Smart Sally.

Nothing was as exciting as watching a non/reader kid, special ed kid, doing

simple math and making glaze. Learning ready for sure. Can you imagine

the excitement of a kid opening a kiln with his own super secret glaze recipe

and it was his? He cannot read, but he could figure it out. And then, help

him do the simple record keeping. I kept teaspoons in the room to use as

measuring devices for kids that did not do math.

It is easy to teach glaze calculation using cups and spoons. If the recipe

calls for 6 parts and 4 parts, it is very simple. They just use any standard

container, measure 6 and 4. Then they use a spoon measuring set. Keep a

simple record and they have a glaze. They see the melt, they see the color

25

and they know the glass structure of the glaze. No big time math. In fact it

was the way people did glaze 400 years ago. What digital scale?

Contests

Rule number 2, never enter kid pots in contests. My kids were so well

prepared that they would win everything. I would tell them: —we don't do

contests, we make stuff, and do you want to win a prize against a kid that

makes pots out of macaroni? And it would be like playing football against

2nd graders.¶ Enough said. It is all ego crap anyways. Good kids should

make and sell their own work. Many had sales in their living rooms and

made a few hundred bucks. Mom's loved the home shows, and then

everyone wins.

And I did not have to haul those damn pots to some community center, set

them up and go haul them back to school with three things broken. Plus you

would have to talk to the show director and she would talk about the

—modernity of time and space in the universe of children's art. Crap on

that. I don't even show my own pots in contests, crap on that too.

Little girls and big pots

When teaching ceramics, boys get very macho. They want to make giant

pots, you know, 80 pounds of clay. It becomes a wrestling match with clay

water all over. And, of course, they never get a decent pot. My take is

always, —big and ugly is really ugly. So, I take a small girl  
aside, best if she

is Asian and tiny. I teach her to stack/and center 3 pound balls  
of clay on

the wheel head, maybe 8 of them, and that makes a 24 pound  
centered

mass of clay. Then she just pulls the clay out and up and has a  
great big

bowl, all leverage and no grunt. So, the next day I say to Twin  
Twee, why

don't you make us a big bowl? All the boys sit in shocked  
horror as she

makes a big bowl, not sweating, using leverage and skill and  
makes them

look like big dopey fools. The lesson is learned. Skill, leverage  
and a steady

use of the wheel, and then slow it all down.

A sick day all day in the studio

It was common for kids to be working on an entire set of dishes.  
They

would get frustrated for time and space in the room. They really needed an

entire day to get things done. So, I would have their Mom call the school,

give an excuse for a day out of school. No lies, just the kid would not be in

26

class that day. Mom would bring the kid to the clay room, with his lunch

and a soda, and he could stay in the room all day. He had to stay away

from the halls and lunch room, and he used the bathroom right next to our

clay studio. We did not want him spotted by that crappy math teacher, so he

would just hang out, work all day. Now that is commitment to the craft.

Lessons learned big time. And the mom is thrilled because mel is a real

person and understands her great kid. We all win.



## Grandma gift pots

I insisted that a few pots each semester be pulled out and sent to all the

Grandmothers of my students. At first the kids did not get it, but after a few

pots are given as gifts to Grandmother, and the praise and gifts are returned

and the kid looks like the re/birth of Ghandi, the smiles appear. `Holy cow

mel, my grandma thinks I am a god or something because I made her a few

pots.` I would get calls and letters from Grandma's. Then we all win.

## Field trips

I have never taken a group of kids on a field trip. Ick, awful, I hate taking

gangs of kids into public places, and god forbid they are in a museum as a

gang. But, they all learned about the museums of Minneapolis. They had to

go to them, on their own. They had to learn the way, by themselves. It

meant they could go for the rest of their lives, because they knew how to

get there, and any other museum or art gallery in the world. We broke the

mystery of art galleries and museums.

This is how I did it. I assigned them the task of going to both the Institute

of Art and the Walker Art center of Minneapolis. They would squak and

squeal, and tell me they could not go alone. I just ignored them, and said,

`find a way, if you can go see a rock concert in St. Paul, or shop at

downtown Macy's you can go to an art gallery'. End of story. It got to the

point that my wife and I hated to go the galleries on Saturday's as we

always were bumping into my students. —Hi mel, Hi Mrs. Jacobson, nice

show huh?||

Lots of kids drive and they would share rides, Mom's would take them and

they all seemed to get there. Of course this led to one of my most famous

projects. It was called —Quality dating||. I would give an extra A to any

student that went to any quality event, play, symphony or art experience

with a date. It could even be a date with a Mom, Dad, or a Grandparent. It

27

was based on a quality event in your life. An adult attitude would be

required. I would often set up students that did not ever date with another

student. It went like this: —Jim, would you please take Jeannie to the Art

Institute this Saturday? She just moved here from Des Moines and does not

know her way around. You can consider it a quality date. You may want to

go to lunch at the Institute as the restaurant is very nice and inexpensive.

It will give you time to talk about the art, and get to know each other. This

often worked like magic. No threat and the kid was being a good person,

and his art teacher assigned it. He really had no choice and she was really,

really cute and a nice girl. Then five years later they got married. (True

story/the names are accurate.) I assigned hundreds of quality dates over the

years. Not one came back to haunt me. Have courage when doing the right

thing. Jim's Mom claims it was the best thing that I ever did. She adores

Jeannie.

Pit firing

I encouraged kids to take a batch of bisque fired pots home and dig a hole

and pit fire them. This became a wonderful adventure for many kids. They

would gather a few friends, do a bon-fire and have their pots at the bottom.

Often kids would take pots to their cabin or the woods. Do a camp fire,

make dogs and hamburgers, and bury the pots in the ashes, often keep the

fire going all day. They loved it. Primitive firing, and a total understanding

of what the fire did to the clay. But, it is about independence, they did it

alone, took charge and learned from doing, that became a permanent

memory in their life.

I also encouraged kids to drop pots in lakes and rivers, or bury them in a

wooded area. Pots for the future. It was my time to remind them that their

pots would last for thousands of years. `Don't make crappy pots, with your

name on them for the future. ` They caught on. It is also fun to make tiles

with stories or history written on them and then drop them in a lake for the

future. It is a great New Year's eve tradition with friends. Have them write

on a tile, fire them and hide them in nature, they may be found 50,000

years from now.

Easy grading.

28

This is really important, memorize this: You remember the one square yard

of the room each kid owns. Well, that is going to be the space for a solo

exhibition at the end of the semester. Each child will set up a display of his

or her work that I will grade. They may ask Mother and Dad, or Grandma to

help them with the display. Black drapes, boxes and lights, whatever they

want to do. Fuss like mad, but make it your own solo show. It is up to the

kid to make sure it is done. No pots to show, and the grade is either F or

incomplete.

When the show is set up we send out invitations to the public, school and

parents that the pots can be viewed in the ceramics room. All welcome. We

serve coffee, punch and cookies. My darling ladies in the lunch room make

homemade, wonderful cookies, `it is for mel and his kids you know.` They

do fuss. No one can believe the numbers of folks that would come opening

night. It is like the homecoming football game. The school parking lot was

full. I just sat in a big chair in my coat and tie and get all puffed up. I do

love those kids, and the proud families that —got itll. Very few faculty or

administrators ever understood what was going on. It was just beyond their

scope of what education is/was.

The students were so proud, and they understand fully that their work, their

skill and understanding of clay has given them something special. Now that

is positive reinforcement. Their own, and they own it.

Among those in modern education the clay studio would be considered a

radical system. It was reality, skill, self direction, and self fulfillment without



group effort. And the best of all, done with a disciplined effort.  
That is how

a great art/clay studio can be built. They will flock to the  
program. And for

gifted and talented students that we know are going to live the  
life of art, we

just had to give them tools and get out of their way. No mystery,  
just skill

and work.

The A+

If a student is seeking an A+ that in itself would disqualify them.  
The A+ in

my class was reserved for those students that gave of themselves  
to the

studio and the students that used that space. Very few students  
ever knew

they were going to get an A+. I would announce the A+  
students the last

day of class. The kids loved it, as they seemed to have an idea  
who would

get the reward. I often made a clay cookie, just a simple emblem for them

29

to take home. We would thank them for their effort and the kids would clap.

I do not think there was ever an issue of jealousy. It was honest and fair.

It was warm and tender and the kids that were given the honor would blush.

As it should be.

I was very blessed in my early years of teaching to be partnered with some

very strong, skilled and dedicated teachers of art. We shared a common

philosophy of skill based education with an extreme effort placed on teaching

those elements of art and craft that would allow students to be independent

with their own work. We wanted them to be life-long lovers of art and craft.

And if they should carry on in the field, they would be more than equipped

to move on to any institution of higher learning and feel that they were

prepared with the knowledge and skill necessary to accomplish their goals.

They would never feel that they were behind in learning, but the opposite,

they would feel they were way ahead of other young students.

I can point to many students that would come back and see me. Stories of

being so well prepared that they embarrassed their new teachers. Most of

my kids could do simple Japanese hump throwing, measure clay, tap center,

make and mix glaze and know the basics of the standard kiln. Most of my

students could make in excess of 25 pots in a day. And they understood

basic tools of the trade and could trim and turn any basic foot ring. And,

without question they were not just wheel throwers, they were —CLAY

SMART. They could face any challenge and get it done. I know, radical

teaching. It is about loving students, and making them be honest and

disciplined. But my greatest pride was knowing that they were prepared and

ready to face a real world of challenge.

P.S. When I retired from Public School teaching I looked at the red tool box

that I had in the school studio for most of my career. Amazingly, the socket

set I bought at Sears in 1966 was still there, along with about 10 other fine

tools, all the pieces in place and hundreds of kids had used those sockets,

fixed their own cars and bikes, and had taken that box home with them,

time and again, and the tools were like new. Why do you suppose that

could be? Other teachers lost things every day. Could it have been Trust

and Truth? I sure think so.

Mel Jacobson/Minnetonka, MN  
[www.melpots.com](http://www.melpots.com)