**Growing up in a small town**

As told by the Late Herbert Walden

To Bob Catlin

**H**erb was born and raised in Waterford and was a sixth generation Waterfordian. He graduated from Fort LeBoeuf High School in 1956.

When I started a quarterly newsletter, *Bisonalities Again*, Herb started writing stories of his memories of his childhood growing up in a small town. These individual stories were all written by him.

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**Waterford's heritage: people and places**

**I** spent the 1940s being a kid. Not just any kid, mind you but a kid growing up in Waterford.

Now that we're all celebrating the 50th anniversary of -- uh -- 1949, I thought it might be fitting to share some of my memories of Waterford's business district

I remember stores that lined High Street in the '40s, and a few others off the main thoroughfare.

For instance, there were five grocery stores along the west side, Laing's, Irwin & Cross, Patten's, Phelps' (which later became Doolittle's), and the Red and White.

My father's brother, Vic Walden, owned the Red & White at the corner of High Street and West South Park Row, and my dad, Bill, worked for him.

Mr. Patten's store at the corner of West 2nd and High Streets wasn't exactly a fully stocked grocery, but in addition to the foods he did have, there were also boots and shoes. Mr. Patten didn't have a cash register; he kept the money in a drawer under the counter.

There were two hardware stores, and my purchases back then were often paints for toys, bikes, bird houses, and such. The brands were "BPS" at Myers' Hardware and "Lucas" at Bowersox Hardware. These were real paints, not the watercolors we have today. Oh, sure, they were probably full of lead, but as long as a kid didn't lick his fingers clean, he was fairly safe.

Sometime in the late '40s, Sam Myers moved his hardware to the building now occupied by the Stancliff Hose Company and expanded his farm supply business. I still half-expect to see Farmall tractors sitting in front of the building whenever I'm in Waterford. Mr. Brown's Variety Store, or 5 & 10s, as those stores were called, had just about everything. There were toys and hats and greeting cards and toothpaste -- sort of a miniature K-Mark with prices that even a kid could afford.

Mr. Brown started his business in a store between 1st Street and the 2nd Alley. About 1944 or so, he moved up to the next block to the former Lindsley Hardware, just two doors from our Red and White. Waha's Restaurant took over Mr. Brown's old store and they were succeeded by Holman's Clothing.

Hewitt's "Park Pharmacy" was between our store and the 5 and 10, and Coon's Drugstore was down in the next block. When Mr. Hewitt retired, Eaton's moved in for a time, followed by Pizzo's and then Parke Phillips took over. Most drug stores had soda fountains back then, and Parke's was the place to get the best marshmallow sundaes with chocolate ice cream!

When Mr. Coon retired, the post office moved from the Masonic Building into his store.

Beyond Coon's was Kingen's Dry Goods, well-stocked with bolts of material and all kinds of sewing needs. The store was operated by Mrs. Stinson and her sister, Mrs. Gates. I liked going in there with my mother or grandmother because of the slippery bent-wood bench and tilting stools, both entertaining things for a little kid.

These were the days of restaurant/dairy bars Merle Heard's "Sugar Bowl" at the corner of High Street and 2nd Alley was a favorite stop. I think single-dip cones were a nickel, and double-dips were a dime.

At Roberts' Dairy Bar, Fred and Eleanor Roberts made their own ice cream. They started in business in the little building next to the Waterford Hotel. (The old Civil War recruiting station). They soon moved into the Masonic Building when the post office moved out. Robert's cold fudge sundaes were the best ever made -- plenty of delicious vanilla ice cream with enough fudge in which to lose your spoon; All that for 20 cents.

Once in a while during the summer, Freddie would make what he called "Frosted Malteds." That was my introduction to soft ice cream, and it was a thousand times better than anything you can find nowadays.

The Gem Restaurant, owned by Mr. Twitchell, was my supplier of Fudgesicles and Choco-Pops (chocolate-covered ice cream bars). Sometimes after finishing off a Fudgesicle, I'd find the word "Free" stamped on the stick. This meant that I could redeem the stick for a free Fudgesicle. And I did!

When Mr. Twitchell went out, Baker's Restaurant moved in. Eventually, Dave Doolittle took over the restaurant and tore out a partition to enlarge his grocery store.

There were four automobile dealerships in town: Delavern's "Central Motors" at West 2nd and High Streets sold Fords along with John Deere farm equipment. Moore's Chevrolet was on the corner of East 1st and High Streets, were the Post Office is now located. Humes DeSota-Plymouth was on East South Park Row, across from the baseball diamond. Humes also sold Case farm equipment. You could buy a Pontiac at Cross' Garage on High Street.

The dealerships did auto repairs, and so did Lawrence Burdick at the "Pioneer Garage" on the northern outskirts of the borough.

Gas stations (or filling stations, as we called them) were not numerous. In the midst of downtown was Lockhart's Kendall, where the bank now stands. Humes' Keystone was just beyond the baseball diamond, and right across High Street was the Mobile Station operated by my uncle, Ronnie Walker. Way up High Street, just beyond 6th Street, was Cap Mauer's Gulf Station, taken over later by Mr. and Mrs. Cook.

My uncle's Mobile Station burned down in 1943 and was replaced by a new Atlantic Station operated by Jim Breon.

The big building across West 1st Street from the Eagle Hotel was Lyn Phelps’s furniture store. Lyn was also the undertaker and had caskets for sale in the back. I didn't care much about going in there.

Mr. Mike's shoe repair shop was a busy place because this was still the era of leather soles and rubber heels, both of which usually wore out before the uppers and cold be repaired or replaced. Remember heel plates?

Dr. Elmer Coop's office was on High Street and Dr. V.K. Worster's office was on West 1st Street, just behind the furniture store.

Doc Worster delivered me and did his best to keep me healthy all the way through my college years. Doc was a big, strapping man with a big, booming personality. The word "robust" may have been coined specifically to describe Doc Worster. When I was sick, I always felt better immediately when Doc came in. I viewed Doc as a celebrity. It seemed like everyone in the world knew him.

When I graduated, I received an envelope in the mail from Dr. Worster. Scrawled on it was the address: "Herbie Walden, City" -- no number, no street, no town, no state. Evidently, Doc was in a hurry that day.

In the envelope was a congratulatory note, hand-written on a prescription blank. He couldn't have sent me a better gift. It is one of my most-treasured mementos.

Dr. Hood, our dentist, moved his office into the "Civil War Building" when Fred and Eleanor Roberts moved out.

Two barber shops were on the main street - Art Babbitt's and Guy Doud's. Haircuts were 50 cents.

The bank was locally owned by Mr. Ensworth, while Mrs. Waltz owned the Waterford Electric Light Company.

Two feed mills served the many farmers of the area: Burger and O'Brien on East 3rd Street, and the G.L.F., located a mile beyond and next to the railroad depot. E.L. Heard's store and coal yard was across the road from the G.L.F.

To serve the alcoholic needs of the locally gentry, there were bars in the Eagle Hotel, the Waterford Hotel, and Curley Ober's Cafe.

Gordon Marsh's Sales and Service was located on Walnut Street at the end of West South Park Row. Gordon dealt in home appliances as well as Surge milking equipment.

Business hours were the about the same for everyone, except bars (ice cream and otherwise, which seemed to be open all the time). Everyone else closed at 6:00 p.m., except on Wednesdays when closing time was noon, and Saturdays when the stores stayed open until 9:00 p.m. At least, that was the plan. In reality, most places didn't get their doors locked until 30 minutes or more after closing. As long as there were customers, the stores stayed open. On Sundays, everything closed except the ice cream/restaurant places -- "Blue Laws," you know.

On Saturday nights, especially in the summer, the downtown was a gathering place for everyone in the area. Some came to shop, but many came just to sit in front of the stores or in their cars and visit with everyone who came by. It was a good social time and welcome break for farm families who worked so hard the rest of the week.

Waterford's "downtown" district has changed a lot over the past 50 years, thanks in large part to the shopping plazas, malls and super-giant stores of Summit and Millcreek Townships.

Oh, I know, there are still many small shops and stores, but as someone once said, "It ain't the way it used to be."

I think it was me.

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**My '37 Chevy**

**T**he summer of 1955 held a couple of big ups and downs for me. On the upside, I had made arrangements to re-start my high school career after a three-year absence, (I had a really bad cold). The downside was my car, which had passed away that spring after a lingering illness. Except for occasional use of my parents' car, I had no wheels! The school was two blocks from where I lived. With no car, how would I ever get there?

Thankfully, my cousin came to my rescue. He had just purchased a sort-of-new car. So, he gave me his old one --- a 1937 Chevrolet!

The Chevy was no stranger. My Dad had owned it first and had given it to my cousin a few years before. It was practically a family heirloom.

The car was dark green when Dad had it. My cousin painted it dark blue. Neither of these colors appealed to my taste. (Actually, I had no taste back then). So, I went down to Bowersox Hardware and bought a couple cans of paint and brushes. I painted the top portion of the car "Tulip Yellow" and the bottom "Sea Turquoise". It was a sight to behold. I'm sure some of you remember beholding it. Even now, I can't get over how good it looks in old pictures, especially if they're in black and white.

To say I was nervous on the opening day of school would be a gross understatement. I didn't know very many people, and being a bit shy, it was hard for me to get acquainted. But the old Chevy proved to be a great icebreaker. Total strangers, kids I had never seen before would come up to me and say, "Why are you driving that thing?"

Conversation would ensue, and before I knew it, I'd have a new acquaintance.

My car was a real stand-out in the school parking lot. Not only was it colorful, it was taller than anyone else's car. Except for Alan Hazen's, which was a 1936 Chevy. But it was black, so there was practically no chance of confusing the two.

The only drawback to the color was that it was nearly impossible to go anywhere "incognito." You would be surprised how few cars there were painted yellow and turquoise. Well, maybe you wouldn't. The Chevy always announced my presence, whether it was in the school parking lot, or down at the restaurant, or up in the cemetery late at ------ never mind.

Everyone kidded me about the old car, but no one ever refused a ride in it. Before the school year was very old, I was running a regular bus service after class to Helen's Ice Cream Bar. By the time I'd get to the car at dismissal time, the backseat was already packed.

Cars of the 1930s were pretty narrow, and not many bodies were required to produce overcrowding. I never allowed more than two others in the front seat with me, and the one in the middle had to be small. As a matter of fact, the middle position became a permanent, assigned seat for Brad Gilmore, who, as you may recall, was smaller than anyone.

Since the Chevy had a floor-shift, Brad took over the job of shifting gears because if I did it, he was subject to a pummeling about the head and face with my elbow. I, of course, did the clutch work. Our timing was phenomenal. We never ground the gears. (In all fairness, I should tell you that, because almost everything about the car was worn out, you could shift gears without using the clutch at all --- if you were careful).

So, with 12 or 13 kids in back and 3 in front, we would make our way to the ice cream bar. You might think with all those bodies piled in the backseat that a little hanky-panky went on. Well, there were so packed in that no one could even move. Heck, there wasn't room for any hanky, much less panky!

You know those little cars in the circus that drive out in the center ring and a million clowns get out? That's what we looked like when I'd pull up in front of the ice cream bar. The car doors would open, and half the high school would tumble out!

My bus service didn't go unnoticed. After a few weeks of up-staging Ringling Bros., Mr. Thomas caught me in the hall. Because he taught driver ed., he seemed to think he had some authority over all student drivers. I thought so, too, so at least we agreed on that point.

He said that he had had several reports of my car being overloaded. I admitted that there were times when a few arms and legs were sticking out the windows, but I also pointed out that there were never more than three in the front seat, (which, by the way, is the only thing the law stipulated at the time).

Mr. Thomas continued to mumble and grumble about overloading and safety and so on. Finally, he said, point-blank, "Don't do that anymore!"

Well, I pulled myself up to my full-height, looked him squarely in the eye, and said, as clearly as possible, "Okay."

I imposed a "10-person-per-backseat" limit. Evidently that was acceptable because no one ever bothered me about it again.

Evenings spent at Helen's Ice Cream Bar often ended with all the guys having cars laying as much rubber as possible as they took off for home. Naturally, there was always a bunch of bystanders who sort of kept score, I guess.

Most of the guys were driving cars two or three years old. My car was almost old enough to vote! When it came to peeling out, I didn't stand a chance. Heck, I couldn't even spin the wheels on slick ice!

So when my turn came, I'd back out onto High Street, rev the engine a few times, shift into 3rd gear, pullout the choke, and pop the clutch!

The old Chevy would cough and wheeze and literally jump a half-dozen times all the way to the Eagle Hotel while spewing a cloud of black smoke similar to Vesuvius!

I'd swing around the block to get the car running smoothly again and re-adjust my cervical vertebrae. Then I'd drive back by the restaurant. The bystanders would be convulsed in laughter, some practically falling on the sidewalk.

I must have done that routine a dozen times, and I got the same reaction every time.

Wintertime was great fun in the Chevy. With chains on, it would go anywhere. Except for color, it was a lot like a John Deere tractor. A couple of times, I was the only one able to drive into the school parking lot in the morning. A good, old Waterford snowstorm was just a bit too much for those fancy, new, log-slung cars that everyone else had.

One night in march, 1956, someone (I've forgotten who) was asking how fast the Chevy would go. I didn't know. I didn't care. Until then. Now I was wondering, too.

So we drove out the "High Road" to Stull's Hill. At the top of the hill, I turned around and headed down. I held the gas pedal to the floor, and we hung on for dear life!

I'm not sure how fast we were going! The speedometer needle was bouncing all over between 40 and what I estimated to be 130! That averages out to 85 mph, which is probably close to our actual speed. At the time, however, 130 seemed more like it!

It was not a comfortable ride. You know those paint-shaking machines in hardware stores? It was kind of like riding one of those.

Now you may not think 85 mph is very fast. Well, it isn't so fast if you're in, say, a Jaguar, or a '59 Cadillac, for that matter. But picture yourself aboard a hay wagon at 85 mph, or the tractor pulling it. Speed seems to be a relative thing, doesn't it?

I slowed down at the bottom of the hill, and we drove back into town at a nice, safe 30 mph. The car rode very smooth then. However, we were still shaking!

The next day, I took the car to have it inspected. It didn't pass. Whatever it is that is supposed to hold the front wheels on ----- wasn't! Only a couple of cotter pins were keeping the wheels from going their separate ways!

After the night before, this was news I didn't need to hear! Of course, my hair turned white instantly, and I developed a nervous facial tick which gave me the appearance of an intermittent snarl. Luckily, it was a weekend, and I was back to normal by Monday morning.

There was no fix for the poor, old car, I retired it and put it out to pasture in a --- uh --- pasture on my uncle's farm. My cousin and I drove it around in the fields and woods for a while, but it was deteriorating rapidly. Its odometer was on its third trip around, and its time had come.

That summer, we hauled it to its final resting place: Roy Green's junkyard down by the depot.

It's been over 40 years, but I still think of the old Chevy every once in a while. I'd like to say that I never had a better car. I'd like to say that, but I can't. I've had lots of better cars. In fact, every car I've had was better than the Chevy. But none of them has ever been as much fun!

**P.S.** Hey! Wanna see a picture of my old car? Grab your 1956 Sentinel yearbook and open to the title pages. There are half dozen pictures of the school. In the lower right is a night shot, and squarely in front of the school entrance is the Chevy! That's Miss Byers' Studebaker in front of it. And those are my tracks in the snow.

**P.P.S.** That picture was taken during one of our yearbook work nights. Mr. Stubbe was also working at something that night, and I told him I wanted to take some night shots of the school. He gave me the master key, and I ran up and down the halls lighting all the lights in the classrooms. I took a bunch of time exposures and then ran around again turning off lights and locking up.

Times have changed. If that were to happen now, I would have to be strip-searched, accompanied by an armed guard, and passed through a metal detector about twenty times. I'm glad we got ourselves born in the 1930s, aren't you?

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**Do You Remember?**

**I**t seems that whenever I get together with old friends, a lot of our sentences begin with, "Do you remember?" Considering that you are at least a potential friend, I wonder . . . . . . . . . . . .

Do you remember when guys who were really hep, (and the word was "hep" back then), wore zoot suits? The coats were very long and had broad, heavily-padded shoulders, and the trousers were full at the hips and tapered to narrow cuffs. I wasn't old enough to have a zoot suit when they were the fad. I probably wouldn't have anyway, because my favorite things to wear were dungarees.

Do you remember dungarees? They're still around, but they've gone with a lot of name changes, like denims, blue jeans, and Levi's, but they're still dungarees to me!

Do you remember when we wore 4-buckle arctics in winter and canvas sneakers in summer? The arctics were a pain to get on and off, and usually the heels of our shoes would rip through the rubber before winter was over. No problem. We'd just take them to the gas station and have them vulcanized. Do you remember "vulcanized"?

Almost every summer spawned a new pair of sneakers. You felt like you could fly when you ran wearing a new pair of sneakers. It was almost as good as going barefoot. Almost.

B. F. Flyers and Keds were popular brands around my neck of the woods. Do you remember how quickly they became odoriferous? It seems they started getting pungent about an hour out of the box.

Do you remember the old Walt Disney comic books of the 1940s? They were among my favorites. Mickey Mouse had two nephews back then. One of them disappeared, mysteriously. A couple other Disney characters have disappeared since then, too. Do you remember Horace Horsecollar and Clarabelle Cow? I wonder whatever happened to them.

My favorite comic book superhero was Captain Marvel. Do you remember how Billy Batson, (boy reported), would utter the word "SHAZAM", and a big bolt of lightning would appear, and he would be magically transformed into Captain Marvel, ready to do battle with some diabolical enemy? Like Mr. Mind, who was a very smart worm.

I used to get caught up in the stories and would sometimes sneak out back where no one was around and quietly say, "SHAZAM". I didn't want to say it in front of anyone because if it didn't work, I'd be embarrassed. And if it did work, I didn't want to scare my mother, what with the lightning bold and all. Maybe I didn't say "SHAZAM" loud enough, because nothing ever happened.

Speaking of comics, I made a list a while back of all the newspaper comics that have disappeared since I was a kid. There are at least fifty.

Do you remember some of the adventure strips like "Buz Sawyer" and "Smiling Jack"? And detective strips like "Kerry Drake" and "Mickey Finn"? The strips I liked best were the funny ones. Do you remember "Smoky Stover" and "Snuffy Smith" and "Gordo"? There was "Our Boarding House" with Major Hoople and "Bringing Up Father" with Maggie and Jiggs. One of the funniest single panels was "Out Our Way".

Do you remember "flip pictures"? They were a series of pictures of maybe nothing more than a guy walking. But when you flipped through them, the character was set in motion. I remember some Big Little Books having these moving pictures in the corners of the pages. In grade school, some of us used to try to draw our own in our school tablets. The effect was close to magic.

I doubt that there are any of these moving cartoons around anymore, but recently I discovered something close. I found that if I stacked all my old photo driver’s licenses in order and "flipped" them, I could actually watch my hairline recede.

Do you remember when Nabisco Shredded Wheat was packed with gray cardboard separators between layers? The separators were printed with pictures of various things. During World War II, there were lots of pictures of airplanes and ships and other military hardware. I seem to have lost my collection. Too bad, I really need some more clutter.

Do you remember LS/MFT? We used to hear it during every commercial on radio's "Hit Parade" each Saturday night. About the same time, "Johnny" used to "call for Philip Morris" while strains of "On the Trail" played in the background. I don't think Philip Morris ever answered; until recently. Now he's answering for quite a lot!

Do you remember running boards on cars? Oh, I know. We have those pretty little add-ons for trucks and vans, but I'm talking about REAL running boards --- the kind wide enough for two or three people to stand on and go for a ride. That was fun, but then I'm pretty easily amused anyway.

Do you remember when you could actually understand song lyrics? Back in the 40s, there was a novelty song called "Rose O'Day" and the chorus was:

Rose O'Day, Rose O'Day

You're my filigadusha

Sdhinamarusha

Balda ralda

Boon toodie ay

No, I don't know what it means either. But the point is I could make out every syllable. As for today's pop singers, well, I haven't understood a word since Bing Crosby died.

You know, I just got to thinking a little more about some of the things I've written. So a few minutes ago, I went out in the backyard and looked around to make sure I was alone. Then in a loud, strong voice, I said, "SHAZAM!"

And what do you know? It still didn't work!

**Waterford Schools - The Middle Years**

**Y**ou often hear folks reminiscing about their elementary school days and even more frequently about high school. But no one seems to wax nostalgic about junior high. There is a reason for this. We all hated it! Well, most of us did. Some of us did. I did, sort of.

In our day, junior high was comprised of 7th and 8th grade. Nowadays, 9th grade is often included. In writing about my junior high experiences, I also include 9th grade, because I want to be up to da.........that is, I'm trying to be mode.........I can't remember which grade was which.

My junior high career began in September, 1949, when I was still a member of the Class of 1955. Junior high was a tremendous change for us in many ways. For one thing, all the former 6th graders from the rural schools were bussed in to join us "town kids". My class size swelled from seven in 6th grade to thirty-six in 7th grade. I had never seen so many kids in one place!

Another change was that we now went from room to room for different classes. In grade school, we were stuck in one room all day. Now there were three or four rooms and a different teacher in each one, too!

In 7th and 8th grade, Mrs. Ada Carter taught English, reading, and spelling. Mrs. Carter was very strict, and I must admit I was a little scared of her, but as I grew up some and entered high school and college, I found her to be one of the nicest people I've known.

Miss Ellen Johnson taught geography and arithmetic, and Miss Dorothy Edwards taught history and science. It was Miss Edwards' class that started me on the road to becoming a science teacher myself, although I didn't know it at the time.

Mr. Glenn McKinney also taught in junior high. Social studies, I think. I never had him for class, and about all remember about him is that he was HUGE!

For physical education, we had to go across the street to the high school gym. 7th grade was my first exposure to gym class. "Exposure" is the right word, too. I was shocked to find myself in a locker room full of my classmates in various stages of undress! Even more shocking was that I was expected to do the same!

We were all required to wear white gym shorts, white T-shirts, white sweat socks, and sneakers, which were mostly all black in those days.

I did not like gym class! In addition to the locker room and the "uniform", there was the gym itself. The temperature was always hovering around 50 degrees or less. At least, it felt like it. I wouldn't have been surprised to have seen frost on the basketball hoops!

The best thing about gym class was Coach Carmel Bonito. Coach Bonito was beginning his teaching/coaching career as we began our careers as almost-high-schoolers."

I have always been a well-established non-athlete, although I'll have to admit to playing a few games of croquet in my younger days. Nevertheless, Coach Bonito always treated me as well as if I were one of his team members. You know, like someone who actually knew the difference between a field goal and whatever you call that other thing.

The only error Coach Bonito ever made in my regard was assigning me to play "center" in the 7th grade gym class football game. I was probably still in the 80-pound weight class, while the kid opposing me on the other team was approximately the size of a Lincoln Towncar, although not nearly as elegant. Fortunately, he was a nice kid and only ran over me five or six times. From then on, he just flicked me aside. It was, however, a very long class.

Hmmmm! Maybe Coach didn't like as much as I thought!

I did learn one very important lesson in gym class. If you strictly adhere to the rule, "tags in clothing always go in the back", you will generate endless hysterical laughter in the locker room!

Some of my memories of those middle years are kind of blurred. It's not because it was so long ago; it was sort of fuzzy at the time. Exactly what we learned is a little out of focus, too.

I do recall art class which was called Industrial Arts. I don't know why. It didn't seem very industrial to me. Miss Esther McFayden taught our 7th grade class, and Miss Lois Byers took over when I was in 8th grade.

I started making a jewelry box in one of those years. Actually, it was already made. All I had to do was carve a design on it. I never quite got it completed. I still have it. I've been meaning to finish it, I will, too, just as soon as I have time.

Somewhere along the line, we studied ancient history. I disliked ancient history, and all I remember from that class are the three Greek columns: Ionic, Doric, and the other one.

It was during those middle years that I studied foreign languages. "Studied" is a rather strong word. Perhaps I should say "exposed to". The languages were Spanish, Latin, and Algebra.

Actually, what Spanish I learned came from music class. Among other things, we often sang La Cucaracha. I'm proud to say I still remember the translation. It means THE cucaracha!

They say Latin is a dead language. I'm not the one who killed it, but I'm reasonably sure I made it pretty sick. It wasn't really my fault. It was Tom's fault. Tom sat next to me. Having an I.Q. of five or six hundred, he really didn't have to study much. My I.Q., probably being in the double-digits, didn't allow me that luxury, especially in Latin. Tom was nuts for airplanes and would regale me with airplane specifications, complete with drawings and diagrams, while I should have been paying some attention to class work. As a result, I don't know any Latin at all.

But I can tell you how the Russian MiG got its name!

I never learned to speak Algebra. Too many X's, too many Y's.

We studies civics in one of those years. I always used to confuse civics with physics. Then I grew up and became a physics teacher. Now I know the difference. Civics is about American government. Physics isn't.

I remember learning about the three branches of government in civics class: executive, legislative, and the other one.

I have always been known for my spelling prowess. Give me a pencil and paper and I'll spell just about any words you can pronounce. Some will be correct, too. However, if I have to stand up in front of a class and spell aloud, my brain shuts down and my tongue moves independently of my residual thought processes. As a result, I end up mumbling, sputtering, sometimes gurgling letters of the alphabet at random. We had spelling bees in junior high. I was always one of the first to sit down.

Another thing I hated was working math problems on the blackboard. There's nothing worse than copying a problem from the textbook onto the blackboard and then standing and staring at it, not knowing any more than a clam about it. Sometimes there was time for a frantic search for an example in the textbook. But to no avail. The examples were never anything like the real problems. All the while, the rest of the class is snickering and whispering because they all know how to do it. This happened to me more than once, although I was ordinarily pretty good in math up to, but not including, square root.

There were lots of tough times in the middle years, but there were good times, too. Enough good times, in fact, that if my time machine were in working order, I'd happily go back and try it again.

On yeah --- the Russian airplane. MiG comes from the designers' names: Mikoyan and Gurevitch. And if you don't believe me, well, you can just ask Tom!

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**Waterford's Fires**

**H**istorically, March has not been a good month for Waterford. Two devastating fires nearly destroyed the town back in the 1800's. On March 5, 1865, (just about six weeks before President Lincoln's assassination, to put it in perspective), fire erupted in one of the stores on the west side of High Street. It consumed almost all the buildings between 1st and 2nd Streets. The cause of the fire has been lost in the depths of antiquity.

Of course, the buildings that were lost were replaced with wooden-frame buildings, the same as their predecessors.

Almost 30 years later in the wee hours of the morning of March 3, 1895, fire broke out again in the same area.

I'm sure quite a few of us remember Frank Phelps and his grocery store, which became Doolittle's when we were kids. Well, Frank Phelps' father, F. L. Phelps, purchased a meat market in January, 1895. It was located approximately where Holman's clothing store was. There is where the fire originated. In preparing a coal stove for the night, someone carelessly discarded some hot ashes. Within a few hours, the ashes ignited the building.

I know a little more about this fire because my grandmother, who was nearly 11 years old at the time, lived upstairs with her sister and parents --- upstairs over the meat market!

When Grandma and her family were awakened, they only had time to get out. There was no chance to save anything except a child's rocking chair which Grandma grabbed in panic on the way out! I still have the little rocker.

The fire spread in both directions and jumped 2nd Alley. In a few hours, all of the buildings between 1st and 2nd Streets were burned to the ground!

The fire was fought largely by bucket-brigade. I remember of Grandma telling about a boy grabbing a bucket of water and throwing it on the fire. Except that it wasn't water; it was coal-oil!

Beginning at 1st Street, the businesses lost were:

Ensworth Hardware

Benson's Bank

Cook's Shoe Store

Phelps' Meat Market (Where the fire started.)

Nickles & McClure Feed Store

Hull's Grocery

(2nd Alley)

Drugstore

Judson Millinery

Phillips' Barber Shop (Where my great grandfather worked.)

Johnson Jewelry

Benson Meat Market

Whitney Grocery

Ward's Millinery

Patten's Grocery

That is a total of 14 stores that were reduced to ashes, and the dollar-loss was placed at $50,000! Miraculously, there was no loss of life or serious injury.

On March 11, the town council passed an ordinance prohibiting wooden buildings in the business district.

The first store rebuilt opened in April, and what seems to me most amazing, the rest of the buildings were up and running by mid-November! They are the stores we see in Waterford today.

*References:*

*Florence (Cole) Walker*

*History of Erie County (1884)*

*Waterford Leader (January 1896)*

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**Always the sticks**

**I** started school in 1943, smack-dab in the middle of World War II. As far as I can tell, the two events were unrelated.

My school was the old Waterford Boro School, which is gone now. It stood on East 4th Street just behind the old Methodist Church, which is gone now, and across from the Old Waterford Academy, which is gone now.

The grade school was a 2-story, 4-room, white-clapboard building with a big front porch. Room contained two grades and one teacher. (One of the upstairs rooms was not used when I was there), I wish I had some pictures of the old building; it's hard to remember all the details.

Downstairs on the east side was the room for first and second grades taught by Miss Elayne Bradley, (who was to become Mrs. Ronald Brooks during my stay). On the west side, Mrs. Luba Lewis taught third and fourth grades. Upstairs were fifth and sixth grades, taught by Mr. William Carroll, who was also the principal.

The building was heated with a big, old coal furnace. The large, round hot-air registers were great gathering places on cold winter days. Sometimes we got some unexpected time off when the furnace would break down. I'm not sure what there was about a hand-fired furnace to break down, but that one did.

The hardwood floors were neither painted nor varnished; they were oiled. In the pre-floor tile era, many floors in schools, stores, and other public buildings were saturated with a thin, black oil. They were slippery as ice for a day or two after the annual oiling, but eventually the oil soaked in and/or evaporated, and it was fairly safe. But the floor was always dirty. Kids couldn't sit or crawl around on it without coming up very black and slightly greasy.

The teachers didn't have much equipment, as I recall. Remember the Hectograph? That was our copier. It was essentially a gelatin coated pad. The “original" was made on plain paper with an indelible pencil. That was placed on the moistened gelatin, pressed down, and when removed, its image had been transferred to the gelatin. Copies were made by smoothing plain paper onto the gelatin and peeling it off. You could probably run 20 copes in 10 or 15 minutes with practice. The Hectograph was slow, but at least it didn't break down!

The start of the new school year meant a new pencil box. Basically, a pencil box was a cardboard case, (sometimes with a drawer!), containing pencils, a pencil sharpener, eraser, a short ruler, a compass, and a protractor. No one knew had any idea what protractors were for, so we just traced around them from time to time.

At the beginning of every 6-week grading period, the teacher gave each of us a new pencil and tablet. The cover of the tablet had a map of Pennsylvania showing all the counties. I always tried to save some of my tablets and pencils to take home. I still have one of the tablets. But I've ran out of pencils.

Our school day started at 9:00 a.m. and ended at 3:30 p.m. The day started with morning exercises which consisted of the teacher's reading of five verses from the Bible followed by our recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. My, my --- things have changed, haven't they?

Do you remember the poems we had to memorize in grade school? I do. Every one of the thousand or so. I suppose it was somewhat less than that, but it seemed like it at the time. Each poem was an agonizing experience --- in two ways: (1) having to stand up in front of the class and recite it, and (2) having to sit and listen to all the other class members recite it. Fortunately, we were a small class!

I didn't care much for all that memorization at the time, but now that I'm an old guy, I appreciate knowing those old poems.

"Blessings on the, little man,

Barefoot boy with cheek of tan."

Now that I think about it, I'm, almost sure there was more to it than that. Oh well, that's not too bad after all these years, is it?

A lot of things went on at our school in addition to the 3 R's. For instance, music classes happened every week or two, I think. Sometimes the music teacher would play the piano while we sang such favorites as "Camptown Racetrack" and "The Erie Canal", (Complete with choreography at the "low bridge" part).

We sang "The Farmer in the Dell" quite frequently, and yet no one ever told us (nor did we every ask), what a "dell" is. Well, I looked it up, and it's just as I suspected. A "dell" is a "vale"!

At other times, the teacher would break out the rhythm instruments with which we would accompany her piano playing. There was a triangle, a couple of tambourines, a few clappers, and just slightly over 12,000 pairs of sticks. Now for those of you not familiar with musical sticks, they are very similar to non-musical sticks. To play them, you whack them together in tempo with the tune being played on the piano, taking care, of course, not to raise a welt on the person next to you!

I speak here with great authority because when the instruments were passed out, I always got the sticks. I always wanted the triangle. But I always got the sticks. I wasn't interested in the clappers which were smacked into your hand to make a sort of clacking sound and were orange. The tambourines looked too complicated to me. The triangle was the most musical sounding thing in the room, including the piano. But I never got to play it. I always got the sticks.

And another thing: All of the 12,000 pairs of sticks were blue, except for two which were red. I never got the red ones. I got blue ones. I really wish I could have had the triangle.

It is said, however, that everything happens for the best, and I'm pleased to say that I can still hit a couple of sticks together in time with almost any slow tune. Still, I wish I could have had the triangle.

There were two recesses each day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Our playground equipment consisted of four swings, four teeter-totters, and the fire escape.

You had to be fast to get a swing, because they were in great demand. And if you did get one, you never gave it up no matter how sick you got. There were always stories about someone going 'over the bar'. No one ever saw this happen; you just heard about it. Some of us would try only to chicken out before we even reached the horizontal. (Actually, it can't be done without a jet engine assist).

The old iron fire escape on the back of the building was our "Jungle Gym". The fact that it was off-limits made it all the more attractive. When the teachers weren't looking, some of the more-daring kids would climb on, around, under, and all over it, which resulted in sprains, scrapes, and broken arms from time to time.

One game we used to play was called "ante-over" or "Anti-over" or maybe "Annie-over" --- I never knew for sure. Anyway, it consisted of two teams, (one in front of the school and one behind it), and a rubber ball. The idea was that someone from one team would throw the ball over the room. If someone on the other team caught it, they would run around the building and --- well, I don't really know. We never got that far. Inasmuch as the building was very tall and we were very short, the entire recess period was spent just trying to throw the ball over the roof.

You know, at the time I didn't care much for school. I was a very busy little kid, and I had a lot of important things to do at home. There were toys to play with, a dog to play with, a cat to play with, adults to bother, etc.

But now I wish I had a time machine so I could go back for a while. I'd like to wander through the old building. I'd like to see my teachers. I'd like to play on the playground with Bud and Ted and Nancy and Billy and all the others.

But mostly, I'd like to get my hands on that triangle!

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**Bluebirds, paste and colored chalk**

**O**nce upon a time, I was a bluebird!

Now before you think some of my wires have come loose, let me explain. I wasn't really a bluebird, but I played one in first grade. I've never told anyone about this, but I've reached an age where nothing much embarrasses me anymore.

Besides, I'll bet a lot of you folks were in some kind of little nature play, too. So before you snicker too much about my acting career, just think back to your own first grade years. Some of you were flowers, weren't you?

I don't remember what the play was about. I'm pretty sure I didn't have any lines. About all I recall is that four or five of us bluebirds flapped around the room a little bit with our blue crepe paper wings pinned to our shirt sleeves.

If you're wondering where this off-Broadway production took place, it was at the Waterford Boro School way back in the 40s.

First and second grades were in one room and were the charge of Mrs. Elayne Brooks. Teaching two grades must have been a bit rough for the teacher, but it was a definite advantage for us kids. As first graders, we got a preview of second grade, and as second graders, we got to review first grade. Third and fourth grades were in the room next door, and fifth and sixth grades were in a room upstairs. Essentially, we went through grade school twice! Those of you lucky enough to attend a one-room school had ever more chance for preview and review. No wonder we're so smart! And we did it all without computers!

Mrs. Brooks was an excellent teacher, as were all my teachers all the way through 12th grade. We walked to school, and in the fall, we always picked up some of the brightly colored leaves to give to Mrs. Brooks. She was always thrilled and was very appreciative. Gee! I wonder what she did with them.

Our school population was small back then. There were about ten of us in first grade and not many more in second grade. Because of our numbers, we got a lot of personal attention from the teachers. And we got to participate in the many activities that went on in addition to the "3 Rs", such as the bluebird play.

At one time, we had a mock grocery store in the back of the room. We all took turns at being storekeepers and customers. It was fun, but I was a little disappointed. My Dad worked in a real grocery store, and ours just wasn't quite the same. The main thing was that we didn't have a cash register. Having always been fascinated by things bristling with levers and buttons, a cash register was always a focal point in any store for me.

I remember planting beans in paper cups in the spring. The beans all sprouted, and we took them home when school was out for the summer. Mine died immediately. Maybe even on the way home. It was alright. I never cared much for beans anyway.

The best part of the project was coloring and decorating the paper cup. I liked anything that had to do with crayons and paste, although I had virtually no artistic talent.

Periodically, Miss Pulling would come to our classroom to teach art. I learned a lot of neat little things from Miss Pulling, not the least of which was how to fold paper to cut out a snowflake. I still remember how to do that. I don't, but I could if I wanted to!

We also did many art projects when Miss Pulling wasn't there. We celebrated every holiday and season with crayons, construction paper, paste, and those blunt-nosed scissors that were never meant to cut anything, except maybe 18-gauge bell wire. In addition, we did art projects on Mondays and Wednesdays, and Fridays and Tuesdays. Oh, and also Thursdays.

The red crayons and black crayons seemed to get used up before any of the others, but in our first grade class, there as an exception: Nicky Waltz. He insisted on coloring the sky purple, and because his pictures always contained a considerable amount of sky, the purple crayons didn't last long either. Just remembering Nicky and his purple crayons had been a bond among us "Boro Schoolers - Class of 55" for over fifty years. Thanks, Nicky.

Our teacher would give us our paste supply by dipping gobs of paste out of a big jar with a ruler and smearing them on little squares of paper. Sometimes we got to help serve the paste. Now there was something to tell Mom when we got home!

The past had a delicious wintergreen odor, and you and I both remember some kids who couldn't resist eating it. Evidently it was non-toxic.

A few of the paste eaters, their appetites not quite satisfied, would crew on a crayon or two. I never tried either, so I don't know which is more nutritious.

Coloring with crayons seemed to be a gender-based technique, or at least the outcome was. The girls always colored neatly, lightly, and inside the lines. We boys, on the other hand, laid the colors on thick enough to chip off it the paper was folded. The lines of the drawings seemed to be too restrictive for some.

The best art projects were those that were cut out of construction paper and pasted together. Pasting was like coloring. The girls always used little dabs of paste in the corners. Not us boys! No sir! We worked on the theory that if a little bit is good, a whole lot is better. We should have been issued putty knives or past application. Our paste-ups were actually heavy when we were finished. They were built to last! And last they did. I still have some of mine.

Then there was the clean-up after the project was completed. Approximately 75% of the paste ended up on the desktop. It usually took two or three hands full of soap and several yards of paper towel to make the desk useable again.

Incidentally, having recently completed 30-plus years of teaching, I'm happy to report that school soap still smells the same. And school paper towels are still made of some sort of non-absorbent stuff that has a texture between cardboard and sandpaper. At least there are some things that never change!

When we were in second grade, we made hand-prints. Mrs. Brooks made plaster-of-Paris "pancakes", and we pressed our hands into them. When they were hard and dry, we painted them with water colors. And, yes, I still have mine.

Mrs. Brooks was big on stars and colored chalk. Nothing beats getting a gold star on a homework paper or a test. Maybe I'd have done better in college if gold starts had been at stake.

Our old school had slate blackboards, and old-fashioned colored chalk worked well on them. We got colored chalk stars for sitting up straight and other behavioral things.

When I started teaching, I was anxious to use colored chalk. In fact, it was one of the major reasons I chose a teaching career. But to my everlasting disappointment, my room had a shiny green chalkboard. And I found the new dustless colored chalk is hard and not vividly colored. It was somewhat like writing on Formica with a rock.

It is difficult to say exactly what we learned from all these little activities, but I'll tell you one reason I think they were important. Whenever I reminisce about grade school, these are the things I think of. And they always bring a smile. What could be of more value than a pleasant memory?

Those were good times, and I wish I could go back and do it all over again. But those days are gone forever. Chances are I'll never get to play a bluebird again.

But if anyone has an opening for an old buzzard, just give me a call.

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**Boys and Dirt**

**W**hen you were a kid, did you like dirt? I mean did you have an affinity for soil? Earth? Mud? Stuff like that?

If your answer is "yes," chances are you're a boy! Boys and dirt have always gone together like ham and eggs, pork and beans, beef and stroganoff, and so on and so on. Boys and dirt are synonymous, analogous, infamous, and notorious.

This is not to say there aren't exceptions. There certainly are. In fact, I once knew a boy who did not like mud! He wanted neither to wade in it nor jump in it. He would never consider throwing it at someone; much less have it thrown at him. I took several pictures of him and got his autograph before he took off to return to his home-galaxy.

Some little girls like dirt, too. I am thinking now of mud pies and such. But they soon outgrow it. We boys never do.

We spend our early years just plain playing in dirt. Walking, crawling, and rolling around in it --- the mode doesn't much matter as long as we're able to get a few bushels of the stuff to adhere to our clothes and persons. A boy who, after a day of play, cannot plug up a bathtub drain just isn't doing his job!

By the time we reach age 10 or so, we still like to get dirty, but the type and source of dirt changed. We're into bicycles now, and that means grease! Heavy, thick, black grease!

Back in the old days, cleaning and lubricating the coaster brake was a satisfying, greasy job. And if we decided to do likewise to the chain, well, we could get greasy clear to our elbows without even trying.

Still later comes the automobile. Those of us fortunate enough to begin our driving careers with an old Junker that had nothing going for them except character, really had it made. Something under the hood usually needed fixing, sometimes on a daily basis. Dirty grease and oil is always in abundance in and around an old engine, and transferring it from the engine to us was fairly simple.

By the time we boys grow up, (and there is doubt among some that this ever really happens), we have to look for new ways to get dirty. Hunting and fishing are among the best excuses I know. Anyone who can do either and remain unsoiled should try harder!

I think fishing affords more opportunities to get dirty than hunting, unless you usually wrestle a deer to the ground with your bare hands. Creek and pond fishing offer a plethora of sources of dirt including, but not limited to, mud, clay, algae, assorted slime and pond scum, and if you're really lucky, fish guts and worm stuff!

As we enter our "golden years," many of us return to the basics. Having experienced and exhausted most exotic dirt sources, we go back to "Mother Earth." Unlike our early childhood when we needed no excuse for crawling and rolling around in the soil, we now feel obligated to have a reason. And we do. It is called "gardening!"

Certainly one can work in a garden without getting very dirty, but where's the fun in that? There was a time when I pulled weeds while bending over. I soon discovered that not only is that really hard, there is practically no chance of getting dirty. So now I get down on hands and knees. Sometimes I sit down. Right in the dirt! You would be surprised at how quickly and thoroughly dirty I can get that way! Especially after a rain!

Way back when I was a teenager, a little boy about five years old lived across the street from us. His parents lived there, too. During one week that summer, we had two or three days of steady rain, and a huge puddle about six inches deep formed along the road where the boy's parents parked their car.

I was sitting on our steps, enjoying the summer sun after the rainy days, when I saw the little boy come out to play. The puddle attracted him like a magnet, and he rode his tricycle in and out of it several times. Then he waded around in it.

For a few minutes, I thought I was going to have to go over and teach him about jumping up and down in it. In fact, I was already removing shoes and socks when he discovered the technique on his own.

Pretty soon, he tired of jumping and started doing something similar to push-ups. He was clad only in white shorts when he started but after a couple push-ups, he and the shorts were a rich, chocolate brown.

He finished off by sitting down in the puddle, (which was more mud that water by now), and then lying back nearly submerging himself.

I applauded him! Here was a little boy who had gotten more thoroughly dirty in less time than I ever had! It usually took me the better part of an afternoon. His accomplishment had taken less than 20 minutes!

I though the show was over when this walking Hershey Bar started for the house. But when he suddenly took notice of his parents' car parked at the edge of the puddle, it was time for Act II.

Obviously inspired, he returned to the puddle and scooped up two handfuls of mud. He slithered up to the car and purposefully applied the mud to the front fender. A natural master of finger-painting, he kept smearing mud on the car (which had been blue), until he had done a professional job of "two-toning." I assume it would have been "one-tone" had he been taller and able to reach the windows and beyond.

Now came ACT III, the Grand Finale! The boy had "painted" about two-thirds of the car when his mother came out to see what was going on. She looked at him in such a way that I thought maybe she wasn't sure that was really her son. Or even a human, for that matter. Then she saw the car! I could almost feel her shock!

To her great credit, she neither screamed nor yelled. I couldn't even hear her scolding the little boy, although I tried desperately. (Actually, I was laughing too hard to hear much of anything).

She simply took him by his mud-caked hand and led him to the house, taking steps easily exceeding a yard in length. I did notice that the boy's little muddy feet never touched the ground even once for the whole distance!

In the decades that have passed, I often wondered what became of this little connoisseur of dirt. He was the epitome of dirt collectors and at such a tender age. One can only imagine and envy the countless times and methods this boy got dirty in the years to follow.

I don't know what ever happened to him. A lot of time has passed. He must be getting along in years. Let's see, it's been ----- geez! I'll bet he has a garden!

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**Mr. Dove and Me**

**I** was glad to see an article by Lew Dove in "*Bisonalities, Again*" awhile back. Mr. Dove was one of my favorite teachers, which may seem odd since I was never in any of his classes.

I got to know Mr. Dove when I was working on the yearbook a lot after school back in '55-'56 ("Working" is used very loosely here). He would stop by the art room often to see how and what we were doing. I always enjoyed his sense of humor.

The fact that I was not in his classroom didn't stop Mr. Dove from teaching me a very important lesson, inadvertently, of course.

One snowy winter evening, I left the warmth and comfort of Helen's Ice Cream Bar with another kid, (I've forgotten who), to ride around Waterford's side streets in the midst of a near-blizzard. I liked doing that, because my old Chevy would go anywhere in the snow whether Hoot Gibson had plowed or not.

We drove down to the end of West 1st Street and I was about to turn right when we noticed a car setting in the middle of the road leading to The Inlet. We could see through the storm that the car was jacked up. Good Samaritans that we were, we stopped, backed up, and went to see if we could help.

Lo and behold, the car was Mr. Dove's, and he was in the process of putting on tire chains. He said that he had found he could go nowhere without them.

We offered to help, but he said he was almost through, and for us to stand out of the way.

The car was jacked up on a bumper jack.

We stepped back, and instead of lowering the car in the standard fashion, Mr. Dove gave the car two or three pushes from the side. The car rocked back and forth and fell off the jack with a "thud" and all sorts of dirt, mud, and slush fell out from underneath it!

He calmly picked up the jack and placed it in the trunk. As I recall, his exact words were: "She goes up, but she won't come down!"

We laughed until I thought we'd suffocate!

A couple of years after that, we were living in Edinboro, and if there is any other place that has "Waterford Winters" besides Waterford, it's Edinboro!

Our driveway, one winter day, consisted of a sheet of ice with about a foot of wet snow on top of it. I backed my car out of the garage and was stuck immediately. I tried the usual rocking back and forth, but the result was that the car slid sideways. That in itself was a problem, but to compound things, a fence with extra-big posts bordered the driveway. It didn't take much rocking until I found myself, (the car, actually), snuggled up tight against the fence. Any further attempt on my part would have either removed the fence or the side of my car. Or both!

Well, I sat there fuming away, not knowing what to do. I had already used all the profanity I knew and was now making up some original stuff. Suddenly, Mr. Dove popped into my mind!

I got out my bumper jack, jacked up the rear end of the car, and pushed it off the jack! I did the same at the front end. I kept alternating front and back until I had moved the car sideways about eight feet from the fence. By that time, I had the snow pretty well tramped down, and of course, a lot if had melted from the heat generated by my temper tantrum. I backed out and went happily on my way.

So thanks, Mr. Dove, for a lesson well taught. And until I take up residence in Florida, I'll continue to carry a bumper jack in my car every winter!!

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**Lunch with Bill**

**I** have known Bill Canfield since he was Billy and I was Herbie. And while most of you who know him may think first of his athletic ability, I tend to think initially of a crazy kid with a bottomless stomach!

One day, I gave Bill a ride home after school. He asked me to "C'mon up and have a sandwich." Now, I'm not a big eater. A candy bar after school was enough to last me until supper. A sandwich was the furthest thing from my mind.

But I couldn't turn down that invitation. In my eyes, Bill had attained the status of one of those few-and-far-between high school celebrities. And he was asking me to come up for a sandwich! Me! Mr. Nobody! Goodnight! He might as well have been someone like John Wayne! And you don't tell John Wayne you're not hungry when he thinks you are!

So, up I went. I sat down in the kitchen while Bill gathered the "fixin's." It was a struggle, but I did manage to get down a baloney sandwich. I don't remember how many Bill put away. Anyway, I was full. I mean Thanksgiving Day full! After all, I had just eaten lunch a couple of hours ago. So had Bill, but that didn't seem to make any difference to him.

I thought I'd done well until Bill poured us each a glass of milk. You know those iced tea glasses? The big ones? The ones that look like they might hold two gallons? Well, the glasses Bill set out were like those. Only Bigger! I had never seen that much milk in one place at one time! And I practically grew up in a grocery store!

Bill drank his milk as though it were in a shot glass. I worked at mine for a half hour or so. I finally got it down, but I really don't know where it went. I'm sure my entire gastro-intestinal tract was filled to capacity before I saw the bottom of the glass, (a sight more thrilling than anything I've seen since).

I thanked Bill and sloshed down the stairs before he offered dessert. Chances are that would have been a couple of pies and another glass of milk!

I was in a state of blot for a while thereafter. I am afraid that it might be permanent, but I started to return to normal after a couple of days. But it was worth the discomfort, because I got to have lunch with a celebrity!

So if you're reading this, Bill, please stop by if you’re ever in the Albion area. We'll have a glass of milk for old time's sake. I personally know a cow that lives nearby!

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**Tar roads and clanking bells in Waterford**

**I** was born in Waterford and spent the best years of my life growing up there in the 1940s and 1950s.

When a person is young, he is so busy being a kid that he takes things for granted. I never dreamed how my town would change. Heck, I never even thought about it. But change it did, and sometimes it's hard to remember how things were back in the good old days.

I do, however, recall a few things of interest.

Until World War II ended, none of Waterford's streets was paved, except for East and West 3rd Streets, which are state roads. In the summer, things got pretty dusty between rains. But before the season was too far along, the streets would be scraped with one of those big Galion road graders. You know the kind - rear engine, tilting front wheels, center-mounted blade, sort of skeletal-looking.

It was a good time for me. I loved big machinery. Still do. One of my fantasies was to drive a road grader. Still is.

Sometimes after the grading was done, oil was sprayed on the streets. At other times, dry calcium chloride was sprinkled on them. The chloride absorbed water from the air and soon became wet. In either case, the dust was kept in check for a while.

The most lasting dust control came from a big tank truck with tar gushing from a row of "faucets" at the rear which would slowly spread a coat of glistening blackness on the road. Lots of folks hurried to close their windows because the tar was rather odoriferous. It didn't bother me. I kind of liked the smell of it. The tar hardened up after a while, and it was almost like a paved street. (CAUTION: If the urge ever seizes you to walk barefoot in fresh tar, don't!)

There was a man who used to walk very rapidly along the sidewalks bordering these streets. He bought rags from anyone who had rags to sell. As he was striding along, he would holler, "Rags, rags, rags!" Actually, it sounded more like, "Regs, regs, regs." His voice had a peculiar duck-like quality and was really loud. I could hear him a block away, and it used to scare the daylights out of me when I was five or six years old.

I don't know who he was, or where he came from, or where he went, or what he did with the "regs."

Waterford's old Town Hall stood on High Street just a little south of East 2nd Street, The bank is there now. The Town Hall was a white, frame building with a belfry complete with a bell. I only heard the bell twice: once in the middle of the night when the Allies invaded France, and another time when the fire siren was being repaired. It probably sounded on V-J Day, too, but so did every other bell, siren, whistle, and horn, so it was hard to tell. The bell was kind of clanky-sounding, not like the pleasant tones of the church bells.

Council meetings were held on the second floor of the Town Hall, and the fire truck was kept on the ground floor. The 1930s vintage fire truck had an open cab and a hand-cranked siren. It looked like a fire truck ought to look.

Floyd Irwin usually drove the fire truck. Floyd had a grocery store and had been friends with my folks forever. Because he drove the fire truck, he was a celebrity in my eyes. I always wanted to ride in it with him, but not to a fire, that was too scary! I just wanted to ride in a parade or something, but it never happened. I had to wait 40 years for a ride in a fire truck. It was great and I thoroughly enjoyed it! But, gee, I wish I could have gone with Floyd.

I don't remember exactly when the Town Hall was torn down, but afterwards, the fire truck was kept in a garage on West South Park Row. After the war, the Stancliff Hose Company purchased two new trucks: a Ford pumper and a Chevy tanker. I remember watching the firemen practice with the new equipment on the baseball diamond.

Around that same time, a new firehouse was built on the southeast corner of the Diamond. Today, that building is the borough building/library.

Of course, these were the days before 9-1-1. If you had a fire, you called Eddie Briggs, and he sounded the siren. Eddie was crippled in an auto accident before my time. I knew him only as the guy on crutches who blew the siren. The strange thing is that when the siren went off, everybody in town called Eddie to find out where the fire was. I assumed that's the way the fireman found out since emergency radios weren't around yet.

Along the south edge of the Diamond, a large concrete grandstand was built in the late 40s to accommodate spectators of the athletic events, which were mostly high school football and baseball. However, Waterford did have an adult baseball team, as did many other small towns back in those days. Dad and I went to those games quite often. Little League was yet to come.

But the most important function of the grandstand (in my view, anyway) came each September when the Waterford Fair set up on the Diamond. It was from the grandstand that we viewed the "free acts" each night of the fair, hosted by the perennial emcee, Sheriff Paul Babbitt. At least two or three times each year, Sheriff Babbitt would introduce an act by saying he or she came from a place, "where the wind blows hard and the ducks fly backwards." We must have heard that line a million times over the years, and yet it was funny each time.

During most of the 40s, we lived on East 2nd Street, so the Diamond was just a short walk down the alley that ran behind our house. We just about took up residence at the fair for those four days in September. So did everyone else in town.

Across High Street from the Diamond is The Park. I don't remember any organized activities being held in The Park except for the Memorial Day services (we called it "Decoration Day" back then). Among other things, Mr. Thomas Shallenberger always recited Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Mr. Shallenberger was a retired high school teacher. I didn't know him well, but I was in awe of him nonetheless. When he gave the Gettysburg Address, I thought he was Abraham Lincoln!

Both my mother and father were in Mr. Shallenberger's classes when they were in school. I was told many times that he could write on the blackboard with either hand! I used to try, but to no avail. One hand is trouble enough for me.

The speeches in The Park were given from the Pavilion. The younger generation doesn't use the word "pavilion" nowadays. They call it a "gazebo." Gazebo is a perfectly legitimate word, but to me, it sounded like some kind of antelope. I do not like the word "gazebo." The structure in The Park will always be the Pavilion as far as I'm concerned!

The old Pavilion was torn down several years ago, and a new one was built in its place. It looks about the same as the old one except that it's only half as tall. But it's nice, and I'm glad the old one wasn't torn down and just forgotten.

During World War II, the American Legion erected a "Roll of Honor" at the edge of The Park facing High Street. It was a billboard-sized sign that listed all the Waterford area men who were in the service. I think most small communities had one. It's gone now, but I do have a photograph of it.

Speaking of photographs, here's some advice for younger readers: No matter where you live, the place is going to change. And chances are that someday, in your old age, you're going to try to remember how things were and you may not be able to. So, get a camera and take a few thousand pictures of your town. You'll be glad you did! I wish I'd have done that, but I couldn't. I didn't have time. I was too busy trying to get the tar off my feet.

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**Ground Observer Corps**

**T**he 1950's were strange times and a little scary, too. I was in the process of being a teenager, which is a little strange in itself no matter what the decade. The scary parts were communism, the cold war, the Korean conflict, and the threat of a nuclear holocaust.

Nuclear war was the biggest worry as far as we kids were concerned. The U.S. and the Soviets were testing atomic bombs all over the place, and we were just beginning to learn the long-term dangers of radioactive fallout.

This, then, was also the era of the fallout shelter. In case of a nuclear attack, folks throughout the country were building or installing shelters and stocking them with water, nonperishable foods, and other necessities --- enough to last a couple of weeks or until it was safe to come out. Other folks said, "Come out to what?", and trusted to luck instead of a shelter.

Radar was not developed to the point that it is today, and low-flying airplanes could sneak under it. The worry in our area was that airplanes carrying atomic bombs might come in low over Lake Erie from Canada to strike major manufacturing centers like Pittsburgh. (I have no idea how these nuclear weapon planes were supposed to get into Canada in the first place, but that didn't concern me at the time).

The U.S. Air Force developed a program using civilian aircraft spotters to fill in the gaps left by radar, (similar to what was done in World War II). The organization was the Ground Observer Corps (G.O.C.).

Erie's G.O.C. post was located on the roof of the old Richford Hotel. Tom Hart belonged to this group, which was fitting --- Tom loved airplanes and, I think, had been spotting them all his life, airborne and on the ground. One night when Tom was on duty, Ted Barton and I drove over to observe the observer. I was enthralled with the whole idea and was absolutely thrilled when an airplane went over and Tom logged it and called it in! It was also great fun to run around on the hotel roof. That, however, is beside the point.

Not long afterward, (in 1954), a G.O.C. post was established in Waterford. A few other kids and I joined right away. Our observation post was an 8-foot-by-8 foot building located in a cornfield on the very crest of Brickyard Hill. One or two of us would man the post for a couple hours at a time.

The actual duty went something like this: When an airplane was spotted, it was entered in a log. The entry included type of plane, (single or multi engine or jet), altitude (high, low, etc.), direction of travel, and time. Then we went to the telephone and dialed the operator, and when she answered, we said the magic words: "AIRCRAFT FLASH!"

The operator connected us to the Pittsburgh Filter Center. We'd read our log entry, and the worker there would locate our aircraft on a huge tabletop map. Our code name for the location of our post was "Lima Metro Zero Five Black." I know that sounds like classified information, but it couldn't have been --- they would never have told me!

If a reported aircraft did not match up with a filed flight plan, the Pittsburgh people would notify the air base at Youngstown, Ohio, and fighter jets would be scrambled to identify the airplane in question.

This happened with one of our reports, or at least, we think it did.

We spotted and called in what, at the time, we thought was a routine report. However, the Pittsburgh center asked us to repeat the report. We did. And again. We did. This was very unusual. Then we were asked to stay on the line. In a couple of minutes, a man came on saying he was General So-and-So or Colonel So-and-So or something important, and asked for our report again. He hung up abruptly.

It wasn't long before two fighter jets, F-86's, (I think), came over our post. Holy Cow! Gee Whiz! And other expletives!

It may have been coincidence, but it certainly made for a stimulating afternoon. We never heard of any enemy planes being shot down over Kearsarge or Union City or anywhere like that, so I guess it turned out alright.

We had a small problem at Brickyard Hill: Our telephone was on a party line. We had been told by the air force Sargent who oversaw our territory that if the line was busy when we needed to call Pittsburgh, we were to interrupt by saying "aircraft flash" and politely ask for the line. This worked well for a while. The other folks on the line were very courteous. But as time went on, and they got tired of being interrupted, they became less courteous. Even when we tried to explain that we could be saving them from the experience of seeing a mushroom cloud forming on their patio thanks to that little Cessna up there, well, they got downright nasty!

We finally quit breaking in on the line, and would wait until it was free, reporting so many minutes delay.

The factor that contributed mostly to this situation was that every airplane flying anywhere east of the Mississippi flew over Waterford. Or so it seemed. Add to that our proximity of the Erie airport, from which came at least a million Piper Cubs every weekend, and, well, we were on the phone a lot! Eventually, the air force told us to ignore all single engine, prop-driven aircraft. I guess they figured the Russians would not be likely to use one of those Piper Cubs to deliver an A-bomb. Made sense to me.

Our problem was solved in a rather unique way. In April 1955, we had a terrific wind storm in and around Waterford. Our little G.O.C. post was blown over and rolled around in the cornfield where it stood. Had stood. Had standed. Used to be.

By this time, I had worked my way up to "Post Supervisor," and somehow I managed to get permission from a whole bunch of people to reallocate the post. So one Saturday, Bud Owens and I disassembled the little building, which was still upside down in the cornfield. We loaded the whole thing into my old Pontiac coupe, which we converted into a truck of sorts by removing the backseat, through the trunk; it was a straight shot all the way to the front seat.

The building was reassembled next to the water tank on Cherry Street. And when our new telephone was installed, it was on a private line!

Our post was manned entirely by teenagers; I guess the adults thought the G.O.C. was a kid organization, like the Boy Scouts or something. Anyway, none ever applied. Our kids did a good job, too. Oh, there were lots of horseplay and fooling around and probably something I never knew about, (or wanted to), but when an airplane came overhead, it was all business. And when we could go on a 24-hour alert, (a practice drill), our post was always one of the top rated.

In the autumn of 1955, I got too busy being a senior at the brand new Fort LeBoeuf High School, and gradually dropped out of the Ground Observer Corps. But I did earn my wings and 500-hours award. A few years later, radar improved, and the G.O.C. was no longer needed.

You know, it sometimes seems like a dream, those turbulent days in the fifties. Thankfully, it's a good dream. It could have been a nightmare!

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**A Change of Plans**

**T**ime has been marching on while I haven't been paying attention. Now, I am suddenly aware of some changes that have taken place in my life; unexpected changes. Things like retirement, Social Security, and Medicare. These alternations in my life have been so subtle that I haven't really thought about them. I certainly haven't felt ready for them. And then I got an automatic senior citizen discount at the store. That did it! It all came to me in a rush!

I am old!

Now I find I have face up to some hard facts about my life and make some equally hard decisions concerning it. The major decision is something I don't like to think about, but I've put it off long enough. Too long, in fact. Much as I hate coming to grips with it, I must. It is even more painful to say than to think about, but I have to say it. I have to admit it. I have to change my plans for my life. I am beginning to comprehend my own mortality, and I must get this out in the open no matter how much it hurts. So here goes:

I am never going to be a cowboy!

There! I've said it! I've admitted it, and it almost breaks my heart. You see, I've been planning a cowboy career since I was five or six years old. Gene Autry was my hero back then. I even had a Gene Autry cowboy outfit, although I never saw him wear anything quite like it. I think it was the yellow hat that just wasn't right.

As I grew older, I became a loyal follower to the Lone Ranger. At least I was on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 7:30 p.m. when the Lone Ranger and the great horse, Silver, came galloping out of my radio.

Later in my early teen years, I switched my allegiance to Randolph Scott. I saw every one of his movies that the Sunset drive-in ran, back in 1950s Waterford. Oh, I watched others that played cowboys, too. I liked a lot of them, like Alan Ladd in "Shane." Remember the end of that movie? Remember the kid, Brandon DeWilde? Remember him calling, "Shane! Shane! Come back, Shane!" Remember that? I was Shane for two weeks after I saw that film!

And then there was "Winchester 73" with James Stewart and "High Noon" with Gary Cooper and "The Magnificent Seven" with everybody. They were all great, but nobody was like Randolph Scott, He was my idol --- until I got acquainted with John Wayne.

John Wayne was the ultimate cowboy. He was at his best in "The Searchers." He was also at his best in "The Cowboys" and "True Grit." Come to think of it, John Wayne was always at his best. I decided when I grew up, I would be John Wayne. However, when I did finish growing, I was only half his size. That was disappointing. I figured I'd just have to modify my plans somewhat.

It wasn't like I'd be entering the cowboy business blindly. When I was 10 or 11 or so, my friends and cousins and I played cowboy all the time --- outdoors in the summer and down in the basement on cold, winter days. That went on for a couple years or more, so you see I was well versed in cowboying at an early age.

Then came the era of the TV westerns. There were more than 50 weekly westerns on the networks back in the fifties, and I watched them all! "Wagon Train," Bonanza," "Bat Masterson," "Wells Fargo," --- the list goes on and on. Nobody knew more about a cowboy career than I did!

I even learned to speak cowboy. I knew the lingo by the time I was twelve --- words like "doggie," "grub," "hoss," Pecos," "cayuse," "yippee," and "ya-hoo." My vocabulary was extensive. I recon I was plumb fluent.

Why the interest in the old west? It's generic, I think. My Dad read every book Zane Grey wrote; five or six times or maybe more. You can't get more cowboyish than that. Obviously then, it's in my blood.

All during the decade of my twenties, I was still preparing myself for life as a cowboy. By then, I had two or three cowboy hats and a pair of ill-fitting boots. I had already learned to play the guitar, and I could sing all the real cowboy songs: "Cool Water," "Streets of Laredo," "Tumbling Tumbleweeds," "Ragtime Cowboy Joe." Yes sir, I knew them all! And then when I bought an honest-to-goodness six-shooter, I felt I was well on the way.

With hours and hours of practice, I got pretty good with the gun. I could quick-draw and do some fancy spins, and all that. I felt good when I walked around with the gun holstered and strapped around my waist. It looked really cool, too. But then it came to actual shooting, I found I couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. From inside the barn! Also, I was scared of the gun when it was loaded, and I didn't like the loud noise it made when I fired it.

I made my first major decision about cowboying at that time: I decided I would not be a gunslinger.

As time wore on, I had another rude awakening. I discovered that I do not like cows. They are big and dumb, and given half a chance, they will step on your feet and even run over you.

So I made up my mind that I would be a drifter. Drifters always seemed okay in the movies. They didn't work much. They didn't get into gunfights. I never saw drifters messing around with cows. They were just sort of in the background. That seemed perfect for me!

While all this was going on, I went to college. I wanted to major in "Cowboy' and minor in "Drifting," but for some reason, neither was a college offering. So I became a teacher.

My plan was to save up all the big money I'd make teaching. Then after a few years, I'd quit and go to cowboy-drifting. I could just drift all over and not have to worry about money. I'd just tap into that big bank account back home whenever I needed to. See, there's not a big call for drifters, so there's not much money in it.

By the time I reached age thirty, I had discovered something else about myself that really threw me for a loop. I found out I was afraid of horses! Talk about devastating!

For a long time, I could hardly eat or sleep. I was so upset; I didn't know what to do. Then one day it came to me: On the old Roy Rogers TV show, Pat Brady didn't ride a horse --- he drove a Jeep! Remember "Nellybelle?" I could do that! I could drift in a Jeep! I'm not afraid of Jeeps!

And so, I was back on track again.

But as the decades flew by, things just naturally went awry. The big bank account never materialized. My gun got rained on a couple times and rusted in its holster. My boots hurt so much that I threw them away. My hats got smashed beyond repair underneath other junk in the closed. John Wayne died. I couldn't afford a Jeep.

Then this senior citizen business came along, and although it hurts me deeply, I'll say it again: I'm never going to be a cowboy.

You know what? It's a relief to get that out in the open. It lifts a great burden from my shoulders. I really feel better. No more cowboy stuff to worry about. That's a good thing! Now I am free!

And now I can spend more time on becoming an astronaut.

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**The Simple Things**

**W**ith computers taking over the world, I often wonder if today's children ever entertain themselves the way we used to. Kids are learning computers at younger and younger ages. In just a few years' most will be on the net before they learn to walk. I suppose there's nothing wrong with that, but I still worry about these young Bill Gates-types. I'm afraid they're missing out on some of the good, old fashioned, simple things.

For instance, can you imagine Bill Gates as a little kid, (he must have looked pretty much as he does now), playing mumbley peg? Lots of boys back in our day carried jackknives, not as weapons, but for entertainment. My cousin and I used to play mumbley peg quite often. You really need a Barlow knife to be good, but I did pretty well with my Lone Ranger jackknife, which I still have.

Some of the boys were good at whittling. I wasn't. The best I could do was make a little stick out of a big one. However, my Dad showed me how to whittle a quill pen from a large feather. I was pretty good at that. I had a pet goose that periodically molted her wing feathers, so I made lots of quill pens. I didn't use them; I just had them in case of an emergency. It's been a long time, but I'll bet I could still "whittle a nib."

Did you ever stomp on a tin can so that it bent around your shoe and stuck there? I doubt if Bill Gates ever did. Tin cans on your feet not only make you taller, they also make a very satisfying noise as you clomp along the sidewalk. You have to have less than 10-year-old feet to do this. Adult feet are too big. Not that I've tried it or anything.

If you wanted to be really tall, stilts were the answer. All that's required are a couple of poles with blocks of wood nailed to them, but I'll bet Bill Gates never had stilts. Dad made my first pair and even demonstrated how to use them. I am a slow learner. I fell immediately and scraped a sizeable quantity of skin off my legs. I was reluctant to try again. But I did. About 25 years later. I did very well.

Do you suppose Bill Gates ever caught bees in a jar? I did. I'm not sure why. Perhaps it was the element of danger. That, and bugs were about the only available wildlife smaller than I was. If there were hollyhocks around (and back then, there always were) I would sometimes catch a bee in a blossom by quickly folding the petals together. I never knew quite what to do next for fear of being stung. Talk about having a tiger by the tail!

I caught a few butterflies, too, but I didn't care much for that. In my 8-year-old mind, butterflies were more of a "girl thing."

I used to catch grasshoppers just to see them spit their "tobacco juice." The big, brown flying grasshoppers were the hardest to catch. Throwing a hat over them was the best way, but even that wasn't too successful.

Did you ever catch cicadas in late summer? Most folks called them "locusts," but this is incorrect. Cicadas are really tough to catch, but I remember Dad catching one for me and tying a long piece of thread around its neck, (or what would be its neck if insects had necks). I could then hang onto the thread and fly my bug like a miniature control-line model airplane. Cicadas do no land so good, though.

I always collected all the cicada shells I could find on tree trunks where they had been shed. They were especially easy to catch. Somehow I got the idea of hooking the shells on the screen door. It never failed to startle people going in and out of the house, especially Mom. What appeared to be a dozen or so thumb-sized insects would capture anyone's attention!

Did you ever make a "telephone" from a couple tin cans and string? My cousin, Donnie, and I tried it a few times, but without much success. The trick is to keep the string tight and don't let it touch anything. We knew all that, but it still didn't work very well.

In desperation, we'd haul out the garden house and talk and listen through that. Of course, neither of us could understand the other, but at least there was sound! And when we would finally give up on communications, we would squirt each other to the point of near-drowning.

Bill Gates couldn't even do that!

Do you remember making grass whistles? You sort of pinched a long blade of grass between the sides of your thumbs and blew on it. I never had much success with grass whistles. Most of my friends did very well, but the best I could do was make a rather disgusting noise once in a while. I'll bet Bill Gates couldn't even do that!

My greatest whistle success came from using the little caps from acorns. You hold the cap under both thumbs and blow through the space above the knuckles. Now that's a whistle! I could drown out any old blade of grass with an acorn cap!

I wonder if Bill Gates ever split a dandelion stem with his tongue. You've done that, haven't you? The taste of dandelion juice is pretty disagreeable and requires a lot of spitting to get rid of it. But it's worth it when you get a big stem to split into four or five nice curls.

So if you have children or grandchildren who are computer wizards, maybe you ought to pry the mouse out of their fingers and show them some of the simple things we used to do. Otherwise, today's computer kid may turn out to be tomorrow's Bill Gates. And be the richest person in the world. And have the biggest house on the planet. And own a million cars. And a couple of continents. And one of the smaller oceans. And . . . . . . .

You know, now that I think about it, maybe you ought to just leave the kids alone.

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**Growing up on 'different world' of Waterford's Lake LeBoeuf**

**A**bout 11,000 years ago, the great glaciers of the last Ice Age were in full retreat as the climate warmed. Huge chunks of ice broke off the glacier and were covered with mud and gravel as meltwaters raged over them. As these giant ice cubes melted, depressions in the earth were left. The depressions, like great amphitheaters, filled with water, partly from streams whose courses were defined by the melting glaciers, and partly from springs. These water-filled depressions are called "kettle lakes." The one at Waterford is Lake LeBoeuf.

Lake LeBoeuf is almost round, in a triangular sort of way. There is a wooded island in the center, very swampy. The lake is fed primarily by LeBoeuf Creek, which has its beginnings north of Waterford and winds its way through Gameland 109 under the covered bridge, past the spot where the French built Fort LeBoeuf, and then into the lake. We always referred to the lower portion of the creek as "The Inlet."

Several smaller streams also empty into the lake, and springs under the lake feed it as well. South of town, "The Outlet," also LeBoeuf Creek carries water from the lake to French Creek near Hughes Corners.

Lake LeBoeuf is known for Muskie fishing. Fishermen really devoted to the sport will spend hours on the lake in hopes of landing the legendary Muskellunge. Many leave empty-handed, but a few are in the right place at the right time.

My uncle, Stanley "Pete" Walden, loved fishing above anything else. He practically lived on the lake.

One summer, Uncle Pete got a small kayak. It was just the thing to paddle around easily catching pan fish. He was doing just that one day, using a light fly rod, when he hooked a large Muskie! That presented a predicament. He couldn't boat the fish because there wasn't room in the kayak. What's more, Muskies are very ill-tempered when irritated by a fishhook. A Muskie has a mouthful of needle-sharp teeth. An angry Muskie is not a fish to cuddle up to!

Uncle Pete did the only sensible thing: He let the Muskie tow him around in the kayak until it finally tired and gave up. Then he towed it to shore. It was more than four feet long!

When I was a little kid in the '40s, Dad went Muskie fishing at night. Mom and I would meet him at "The Inlet" at a predetermined time, quite an adventure for me.

The boat livery and the bait/refreshment stand were at "The Inlet" in the area known as Porter Park and were presided over by Chet Comer. Boat houses and summer cottages were along the creek just before it entered the lake. A string of lights illuminated the footbridge one had to cross to get to the boat livery. In the summer there were always people around in the evenings. Some folks were there to see the fishermen come in, some were summer campers, and still others came just to sit and talk.

Sometimes in the early evening, Dad would take Mom and me for a boat ride. No motor boats were allowed; just rowboats and canoes. Mom was always nervous, but I loved every minute of it. I remember rowing through the lily pads to see the white water lilies up close and the yellow spatterdocks nearer the shore. What a different world!

When I was older, Dad and I went fishing on the lake quite often. The best time was at daybreak. We'd get to the lake when the sky was just graying in the east. Most often there was a thin layer of fog over the water. We'd row silently out to the island, our favorite spot, and anchor just as the sun began to rise. It seemed so quiet, yet there were plenty of sounds around: a squeaky oarlock, water dripping off the oars, a few birds tuning up for the morning, and thousands of frogs calling in an unseen chorus. The glassy smooth water looked almost thick.

As the sun rose higher, birds sang louder and a slight breeze would spring up. We'd have our hooks baited with minnows, and on a good morning would be hauling in crappies as fast as we could.

Around 10 o'clock, the fishing would slacken, and as the temperature increased, the birds would quiet down only to be replaced by buzzing insects. I got drowsy about this time. Usually I'd slip down onto the floor of the boat so I wouldn't doze off and fall overboard.

About noon, we'd pull in our lines and head for shore. Sometimes we had a stringer of fish; sometimes not. It didn't really matter.

Most folks preferred to fish in the evening, and Dad and I did a lot of that, too. It was fun because as we rowed along, it was like walking down a street, running into old friends here and there. We'd pass the Zewes and the Boyers and many others. We'd wave and say hello, and I'd always marvel at the way Mr. Boyer could fly-cast. It was a grand time.

One evening, as Dad and I started out for a couple hours of fishing before dark, Dad decided we'd go clear across the lake instead of the island.

I was rowing, a newly developing skill, and that probably influenced his decision.

It was cloudy, but Dad said it wouldn't rain. And it didn't either - not until we got our lines in the water. Then it started! A deluge. After a short time, Dad thought maybe we ought to go back.

We pulled up the anchor, and I started rowing, even though my shoulders weren't quite back in their sockets from the trip out. When we got to the island, about half way across, Dad dumped the worms and started bailing water out of the boat with the worm can. It was raining so hard we couldn't even see the boat landing. No lightning. No thunder. Just rain!

A little further, Dad spotted a female mallard just ahead of the boat. She was just paddling slowly around as if it were a bright, sunny afternoon. And then, Dad surprised me. He said: "Let's follow her!"

I asked if he thought the duck would lead us home through the storm. He said of course not; he just wanted to see how close we could get to her. With the rain coming down in buckets and roaring on the water, we started following the duck. When we'd get about three feet from her, she'd speed up a little and change direction. We'd do the same. We followed that stupid duck around for twenty minutes or so in a cloudburst. (The duck might not have been the stupid one!)

Eventually we quit playing duck tag and made it safely back to the boat landing. I never had been wetter. I never had more fun. Dad and I laughed all the while as we became water-logged, especially while following the duck. We laughed about it for years after.

Dad and I never caught a great many fish, certainly never anything to brag about. But we always had a good time, and we always laughed.

My only regret: Those mornings I slept in and let Dad go alone. Wish I hadn't.

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**When now-common household appliances seemed miraculous**

**I** was thinking about our home appliances the other day. That's what happens when you're retired and have time to think.

I've thought about almost everything, and am now down to reminiscing about home appliances, specifically our first refrigerator. It was a new 1941 Philco, the last of the pre-war refrigerators. It was wonderful! There was a light inside, and you could actually freeze water and make little blocks of ice! You could even make ice cream! (We did; just once; it was awful.)

Inside the refrigerator were "crisper" drawers for vegetables, and a meat-keeper drawer under the freezing compartment. Below the door was a tilt-out potato bin.

If you're wondering why we were so excited about our new Philco, it's because it was replacing our old ice box. Ice boxes were sort of wooden cupboards with three or four doors. One of the doors opened to hold a block of ice, usually 25 or 50 pounds; the other doors revealed food compartments. A pan underneath caught the meltwater.

Ice used to be cut out of Presque Isle Bay each winter and stored in insulated ice houses for summer use.

Back home in Waterford, there was a time when ice was harvested from Lake LeBoeuf. It was cut by hand with big cross-cut saws (by the Williamson brothers, Bob and Jim) and hauled away on bobsleds pulled by teams of horses. Since the teams and sleds were driven out onto the lake, the ice must have been pretty thick. All this was before my time. I wish I could have seen it. Ice for our ice box was manufactured, probably by the Koehler Brewing Company.

Forrest "Smiles" Moore delivered ice all around Waterford, stopping at homes that had ice cards in the windows (a square card with the word "ICE" in big letters).

Sometimes in the summer we needed ice between deliveries. There were small ice houses at the Mobil and Keystone gas stations. In the late '30s and early '40s, cars had bumpers made of heavy steel that stuck out a foot or so in front of and behind the car. A cake of ice fit nicely between the bumper and front fender if you set it in cornerwise. That's the way everyone hauled ice.

Nowadays, with all the talk about food poisoning and this bacteria and that bacteria, I wonder how all we ice box users ever survived.

My earliest memories of a kitchen stove are of a three-burner Perfection kerosene range. The burners used circular wicks which were lighted with a match and turned up and down with brass knobs. They were connected to a pipe carrying the kerosene from a glass reservoir that sat in a bracket on the end of the stove and held about a gallon of kerosene.

Around 1943, we got a Magic Chef gas range. It used bottled gas since there were no natural gas lines in Waterford then. Like the refrigerator, the gas stove was wondrous! Just turn a knob and on comes the flame!

But even more wondrous was the gas water heater. As long as the bottled gas lines were being installed for the stove, Dad had a water heater put in. Prior to that, our hot water came from a large tea kettle or pan on the kitchen stove. Mom heated water for laundry in a big galvanized tank that sat on another kerosene stove, similar to the kitchen range, in the back shed off the kitchen.

Talk about high tech! After the water heater was connected, we could get hot water right out of the faucet! It almost made a kid want to take a bath. I said "almost."

Mom did the washing in our Montgomery Wards' wringer-washer. A garden hose was connected to the drain valve so that the washer drained out onto the lawn. What a great place to slosh around in bare feet and pick up fishing worms. Worms do not like soap suds in their burrows, so they come to the surface in a hurry. And they are very clean.

The old wringer-washer lasted until 1951. When sparks and fire began to fly out of the motor as it was plugged in, Mom and Dad decided it was time for a new one.

They purchased a new Maytag automatic. This was really state of the art! It filled, it drained, it washed, it rinsed, and it spun! And it did this all by itself! It was the smartest machine I had ever seen!

These were the days before sewage treatment plants and sewer lines. All the houses in Waterford were on septic tanks and cess pools. We were living in our new house by this time, and we had a cess pool for a basement drain. (For the younger generation, technologically a cess pool is a hole in the ground).

The basement drain was adequate for our needs. At least it had been up until now. Unlike the wringer-washer, which drained by gravity in the form of a slow drizzle, the new automatic pumped its water out. The first time we used it, we found our cess pool didn't quite soak up the water fast enough. In fact, after the first ten seconds of draining, we had a fountain of hot, soapy water shooting up out of the drain!

I suppose we could have shut it off, but this was the inaugural load of clothes! We hadn't even had time to read the instructions yet! So while the fountain continued, we scurried around trying to get things up off the floor before they got soaked. Dad finally got things fixed. It turned out the drain tile was partially plugged. The cess pool itself was plenty large enough.

So much for appliances. There were times I've thought my life hasn't been exciting. Imagine that!

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**My Inner Child and Me**

**O**ne day last summer after one of many rain showers, I noticed some sizeable puddles on my lawn and driveway. You know what I did? I jumped in them! Yes sir, I jumped in them! Several times! And got wet way up past my waist which, by the way, is the measure of a good puddle-jump.

You're probably think that this is odd behavior for an old guy. Well, I can't really take full credit for it. My "Inner Child" was the one responsible. My Inner Child is between 5 and 10 years old, and he likes to come out and play once in a while.

Mostly our play times are fun, but sometimes things do go awry. You see, my Inner Child usually acts impulsively while I try to analyze the situation and avoid disaster. Usually.

For instance, a few days ago he wanted to climb the oak tree in my backyard. But I explained that at our age, we'd most likely fall and break a lot of things and maybe dislodge some internal organs. He said okay, but every time we walk under that tree, he looks at it longingly. I know he's going to try again, and I'm not sure I'll be able to talk him out of it. Sometimes it's hard to say "no" to a kid.

Take last winter for example. Early one morning I was about to take some bird seed out to the bird feeder. It had snowed overnight, (the first of the season), and there were about two inches on the ground.

All of a sudden, my Inner Child said, "Let's go barefoot to the feeder!"

I said I didn't think it was a good idea, He said he just wanted to see what it felt like. I told him he said the same thing every winter, but he insisted he couldn't remember the feeling of soft, fluffy snow on our feet. Besides, we were already barefoot, and this would save hunting up boots.

So I relented. The feeder is only a dozen steps from the door. We half-trotted out onto the porch and down the steps. When we hit the ground, both feet went out from under us, and we were airborne!

It was a classic fall! One of those kind often seen in cartoons where you're suspended horizontally in midair about four feet off the ground for what seems to be several minutes!

Then we crashed!

We lay in the snow for a little bit. Cautiously, I tried moving various body parts. Everything still worked. I got up, and we went on to the bird feeder. I was okay, but my Inner Child whimpered all the way.

We don't go barefoot in the snow much anymore.

Then there was the bicycle incident.

A while back, I was cleaning up my old bike, and my Inner Child suggested what we go for a ride. I said, "NO!" He said we'd just go down the road a little ways. I said, "NO!" I told him that our bike, being built in the 1940s, was made mostly of cast iron and concrete. Or so it seems. He said that never bothered him when he was my Outer Child. I explained that there's a lot more gravity now then there was back then.

We argued a bit more and then went for a ride. It took about a week for me to recover! Every direction I rode was uphill! People walking along the road were passing me! Even now, I'm getting leg cramps just thinking about it!

We don't ride my bike much anymore.

And then last summer came along.

We were wandering through the back field, my Inner Child and me, when we came upon a huge ant hill. He has always been fascinated by insects and suggested that we stop and watch the ants for a bit. There was quite a line of them coming and going, hauling little things that I couldn't make out.

Having observed where the ants were and were not, we sat down out of the way to watch the procession. Within a few minutes, a couple more- adventurous ants found us and were harmlessly exploring our shoes. We kept an eye on those ants, too.

All of a sudden, we were aware that some previously unnoticed ants had made an excursion up the leg of our shorts! Somewhere between 2 and 2000, I'd say. It was hard to tell. I suggest it was the former, but it felt like the latter! All I know for sure is they were sinking their fangs into parts of our anatomy not designed for fang-sinking!

Well, we got out of there in somewhat of a hurry. My Inner Child was saying some rather harsh things about ants! I would have cautioned him about his language, but I was busy disrobing and doing something that might have passed as an audition for "Riverdance"!

We don't watch ants much anymore.

Now another situation has arisen. I think this one is safe enough. You see, my Inner Child just said that he would like an extra-large dish of vanilla ice cream with way too much chocolate syrup on it and a glass of root beer to top it off.

As I said before, sometimes it's hard to say "no" to a kid!

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**Old time radio**

**I** feel sorry for folks under 60 years of age. You know why? Because they missed out on radio. Old time radio. Radio like it was, not like it is.

Back in the forties when I was an avid listener, the variety of programs on the air were of the same nature as those on TV today. There were cop shows and quiz shows, soap operas and dramas. Of most interest to me were the comedy shows - - - sit-coms and comedy/variety.

Of all the sit-coms (a term that hadn't been invented yet), "Fibber McGee and Molly" was probably my favorite - - - Tuesday nights at 9 o'clock, as I recall. The comedy came mostly from verbal exchanges with visitors who would drop in on the McGees at 79 Wistful Vista: Wallace Wimple, Mayor LaTrivia, and Doc Gamble, to name a few. A "running gag", (something that happened every week) was Fibber's hall closet. He would absent-mindedly open the door and what sounded like tons of stuff would come crashing out. I have a closet like that. I've kept it that way all these years as sort of a memorial to Fibber McGee. At least, that's my excuse.

The McGee show was sponsored by Johnson's Wax. Yes, there were commercials, but unlike TV, only one sponsor per program. And each program had an announcer who introduced the show and did the commercials. I may be the only person east of the Mississippi who remembers Fibber McGee's announcer's name. You don't, do you?

Other popular sit-coms were "Amos 'n' Andy", (which was always funny), "Burns and Allen", (which was sort of funny), and "Lum and Abner", (which wasn't particularly funny). Of course, I was just a little grade school kid and may not have understood the humor.

My favorite comedy/variety shows were Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, and Red Skelton.

Bob Hope's radio show was much like his later TV shows - - - a monologue followed by comedy sketches with a guest start and his sidekick, Jerry Colonna. About the middle of the show, comedy took a break for a song from Frances Langford.

Jack Benny followed a similar format, except that he had a "boy singer", Dennis Day. Jack's wife, Mary Livingstone, was a part of the comedy ensemble along with "Rochester", (Eddie Anderson), announcer Don Wilson, and orchestra leader Phil Harris.

Fred Allen's comedy was mostly topical humor. Unlike Fibber McGee, who stayed at home while the other comics came to him, Fred went to them, wandering down "Allen's Alley" and visiting with the various inhabitants: Titus Moody, Mrs. Mussbaum, and Senator Claghorn. Portland Hoffa, Fred's wife, traded quips with him, too.

Red Skelton's show was the same on radio as it was on TV, minus the "sight gags". All his characters, (Willie Lump Lump, Clem Kadiddlehopper, and others), were as funny to listen to as they were to watch in later years.

As I think about old time radio in my advancing years, one program stands out as something of a phenomenon. It didn't seem at all odd at the time, though. The show was "The Chase and Sanborn Hour with Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy".

Edgar Bergen was a ventriloquist, (and also Candance Bergen's father). Charlie McCarthy was his dummy. It was one of the most popular shows ever. But when you think about it --- a ventriloquist on radio --- it almost doesn't make sense. It's akin to doing card tricks on the radio! By the way, I always thought Charlie's "country cousin", Mortimer Snerd, was the funniest one on the program.

Talk shows weren't too big on radio. "Arthur Godfrey Time", a daily morning program, was sort of a talk show, as was Don McNeill's "Breakfast Club". But they were nothing like Leno or Letterman.

Radio also featured music shows that are just plain absent from TV. There was the "Fitch Bandwagon", "Phil Spitallany and his All-Girl Orchestra", "Guy Lumbardo and the Royal Canadians", and everyone's favorite, "Your Hit Parade" at 9 o'clock every Saturday night.

Late on Saturday nights, we always tuned to the "WLS National Barn Dance" from Chicago and the "Grand Ole Opry" from Nashville. Sometimes when the weather was right, we could pick up the "Louisiana Hayride" from, uh, well, Louisiana. Saturday night just wasn't Saturday night without country music.

"The Kraft Music Hall" was a "must listen" show. It starred Bing Crosby and featured a guest star each week. Bing's orchestra leader was John Scott Trotter, and his announcer was Ken Carpenter.

There were talent shows, too. "Talent Scouts" was hosted by Arthur Godfrey and sponsored by Lipton, (tea and soup). Orchestra leader Horace Heidt also had a talent show, one of his biggest winners being accordionist Dick Contino. Of course, the grand-daddy of them all was "The Original Amateur Hour", first hosted by Major Bowes and later by Ted Mack.

Of all the quiz shows, the one we listened to regularly was the precursor to TV's "Millionaire". It was called "Take It or Leave It", and if a contestant went all the way, he could win 64 dollars! (Hence the expression, "The 64-Dollar Question"). If that doesn't illustrate inflation, I don't know what does. The quizmaster was Phil Baker.

There was a comedy/quiz show, too: "Truth or Consequences" with Ralph Edwards. The questions were pretty much impossible to answer, and the contestant ended up paying the consequences --- some silly thing he or she had to do.

This was a very popular program in its day. So popular, in fact, that a town in New Mexico changed its name to "Truth or Consequences".

There were kid programs that came on between school dismissal and suppertime; shows like "Sky King", "The Green Hornet", and (my favorite) "The Challenge of the Yukon", among others. "The Lone Ranger" waited until after supper and came on at 7:30.

"The Challenge of the Yukon" featured Sergeant Preston, of the Northwest Mounted Police, and his wonder dog, Yukon King, "in their relentless pursuit of lawbreakers!"

There were news programs: Gabriel Heatter did world news, Jimmy Fiddler did celebrity gossip and Walter Winchell did a little of everything. Winchell always opened with, "Good evening Mr. and Mrs. America and all the ships at sea!" And he always sounded angry!

Most radio programs opened with an introduction from the announcer and a theme song. The theme songs became so familiar that they actually identified the program. For instance:

"Thanks for the Memory" -- Bob Hope

"Love in Bloom" -- Jack Benny

"Love Nest" -- Burns and Allen

"Seems Like Old Times" -- Arthur Godfrey

"When the Blue of the Night" -- Bing Crosby

"William Tell Overture" -- Lone Ranger

Writing about radio is difficult because there is so much to say and so many programs to tell about; such as "People are funny", "The Lux Radio Theatre", "Perry Mason", "Ozzie and Harriet", "Gangbusters", "Henry Aldrich", "Inner Sanctum", and the list goes on and on.

But perhaps the little I've written here stirred some of your own radio memories, and if it has that's good. And for the younger folks, maybe you'll have a little insight into our world of radio.

In radio production, there were no sets, no scenery, and no costumes. The actors huddled around a microphone or two and read their scripts. Nearby, sound effects men gathered around another mike and fired guns, slammed doors, or maybe just walked to provide an "audible illusion". There were no pictures for us to look at, just the ones in our imaginations. And in a way, it was so much better!

Oh! I almost forgot! Fibber McGee's announcer! His name was Harlow Wilcox.

It's that kind of thing that has earned me a reputation as a virtual storehouse of useless information. And I must say, with all humility I can spare, deservedly so!

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**A shocking incident**

**A**h, summertime! The time of year we all look forward to. The season of fun. Good times. And the livin' is easy.

Just the thought of summer conjures up memories of picnics and swimming and fishing and vacation trips and, my favorite, mowing lawn!

Yes, mowing lawn. I really like to mow the lawn. Always have. I started way back with an old fashion push-type reel mower. It was a tough job, to say the least, and it's easy to understand why most normal kids hated it. But I've never been accused of being normal.

When I was about 12 years old, Dad bought a power mower. It was the reel-type, and it weighed darn near as much as I did. Mowing lawn became an adventure; those mowers had no reverse. You just titled them back on their rollers and hauled away backwards. That worked pretty well if you were a full-grown person. As for me, well, Mom's flower beds got thinned out from time to time. And a few of Dad's young trees came up missing. But the lawn sure looked nice.

Although I was a fair-to-middling grounds-keeper, I knew nothing about the engine that powered the mower. Oh, I could start it, stop it, and put gas and oil in it, but that was the extent of my knowledge. As the summer wore on, however, my curiosity about gasoline engines grew.

One day after I finished mowing, I parked the mower under our big cherry tree and sat down in my swing to cool off. While I sat there, looking at the mower, my curiosity got the best of me. My attention became riveted on the spark plug. See, it looked like an electric thing, what with a wire hooked up to it and all. But to shut the engine off, you bushed a metal tab down on top of it. It seemed to me that if there was electricity in the plug, you would certainly get a shock. Hmmm! Maybe there isn't any electricity in a spark plug after all.

Only one way to find out: Cautiously, I touched the plug. Nothing. Wait a minute! What if the engine is running? So I pulled the rope, revved up the engine, and grabbed onto the spark plug.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I am here to tell you in no uncertain terms that THERE IS ELECTRICITY IN A SPARK PLUG!!! A WHOLE LOT OF ELECTRICITY! An abundance of electricity! An excessive amount, I'd say!

In just the split-second that I was connected to the plug, I absorbed enough electrical energy to illuminate the entire city of Boston, including the harbor area and both lanterns in the Old North Church!

You've probably seen comedies or cartoons where a guy gets shocked and he stiffens, vibrates, has little lightning bolts flying off from him, his hair stands on end, and you see a flashing x-ray view of him.

Did you know all that really happens?

**Summer thoughts turn back to childhood**

**I** was a summertime kid.

I loved summer most of all. I still do. But summer days were a lot longer then than they are now, and summer itself went on and on.

By the time it was over, I was almost ready for school to start. Almost. Now it seems the summer season is gone before you know it. I'm sure it has something to do with the theory of relativity or Kepler's Laws of Planetary Motion. It certainly can't be old age!

Now, once again summer is upon us, and as usual, my thoughts are turning back to my childhood summers. My fondest memories are not of big events, but rather those little day-to-day things in my old hometown of Waterford.

I spent the first 10 years of my life in a neighborhood with no other kids nearby. And being an only child meant that I had to depend on myself for entertainment.

There are advantages to that situation. Not only did I develop an imagination, but I also learned independence and self-reliance. And, most importantly, I didn't have to share my toys! When I was very little, I used to spend hours playing in my sandbox in our backyard on East 2nd Street. It was fun to haul sand in my toy dump trucks and cultivate sandy fields with my toy farm machinery.

Then, we got a cat.

While roaming around the backyard one day, the cat made an amazing discovery. She found what she determined to be the biggest litter box in the tristate area. She must have been ecstatic! Soon after, I lost interest in that sandbox.

When Dad's car was home, I spent a lot of time pretend-driving in the driveway. It was safe. The driveway was fairly level and Dad always made sure the key was not in the ignition. The car I liked best was the old Model-A Ford that was used for a delivery car at the Red and White Store where Dad worked. It was known as the "store car" (pronounced as one word: "Storkar).

I'd fold the back of the front seat down and sit on it so I could see through the windshield. Of course, I couldn't reach the pedals, but that didn't matter. All I really needed was the steering wheel. I "drove" for miles and miles in the old Storkar.

Cars of that vintage were also good to climb on if they hadn't been sitting in the sun too long. The front fenders made good slides. However, the door hinges did present somewhat of a hazard to the knees and head.

Another neat thing was my swing in our yellow transparent apple tree. I'd swing sitting down, standing up, sideways, corner-ways - you name it. On hot days, it was a way to generate a little breeze. Sometimes I'd wind myself up and then spin like crazy to see how dizzy I would get. I never got sick, but I did have trouble getting back to the house!

This was during World War II, so most often my swing was a fighter airplane, a Curtiss P-40 to be exact. My middle name is Curtis, so that plane, despite the extra "S", had a particular appeal.

**Kindred spirit**

**I** always loved little toy cars and trucks and spent hours and hours playing with them. In 1948, we moved from 2nd Street to a great place way up on Cherry Street. Here I found a kindred spirit. Bud was just my age and lived next door with only a narrow strip of cornfield separating our houses. Bud liked cars and trucks, too, and we played most of the summer making roads and towns and hills and valleys in what would eventually become our side lawn.

Bud was a pretty good pretender, too. We used to play a lot in the little woods at 6th and Chestnut Streets. Most of the time, we were explorers. At the edge of the woods were the remains of an old gravel pit. We would tie ropes to trees and scale the walls of the pit. Looking at it today, it appears one could easily take a single step from bottom to top. Ever notice how small real estate becomes as we grow older? Down at the corner of 7th and Cherry Streets, a tiny creek ran through a tile under the road. There were always a few minnows in the deeper places, but much more interesting were the crayfish (or crabs, as we called them). Bud and I caught many crayfish there on summer days. We didn't do anything with them -- just let them go. The "catching" was the thing! If you have not spent an afternoon squatting in ankle-deep water trying to catch crayfish that seem smarter and faster than you are, well, you've missed some fun.

Bud and I had bikes that we rode whenever and wherever we could. One of our favorite things to do was half-ride, half-push our bikes through the cornfield to the top of the hill. Then, we would turn and ride pell-mell down the hill between the rows of corn. The cornstalk leaves would slap the living daylights out of us. Why we weren't cut to ribbons by those stiff, sharp-edged leaves I'll never know. I don't even remember bleeding, very much.

Most summer afternoons required some refreshment to make it through the heat of the day. Across the street from Bud's house and mine was an open field. Crossing that field on a well-worn path brought us to Cook's Gulf Station on High Street. Mr. Cook's candy, pop, and ice cream cases were well-stocked. At least they were until we got there!

Our choices were usually Popsicles or Eskimo Pies, although Popsicles often proved to be terribly unreliable.

Walking back home we found that an open field with a hot July sun beating down was a rather harsh environment for Popsicles. That is not their natural habitat. We tried to eat our Popsicles at the same rate as they melted, or faster. But we weren't always successful. Everything would be all right up to the last bite, and very often that last bite would suddenly melt enough to fall off the stick, and with no warning. Sometimes it could be salvaged if there wasn't too much grass or dirt on it.

Eskimo Pies were a lot more dependable because they gave some warning of impending disaster. When the chocolate coating cracked and started sliding off the ice cream onto my fingers, I knew I had to hurry, forehead pain or not! I never lost the last bite of an Eskimo Pie!

**Days and nights**

**U**nlike many kids, I always liked to mow the lawn. When I was around 12, Dad bought a power mower. It was a big reel type that weighed almost as much as I did. It dragged me around the lawn for a good many summers, occasionally nipping off a small tree or something in the flower bed before I could stop it.

Reel-type mowers discharge cut grass from the rear. In other words, onto your feet, which, if bare, turn green in no time. Some folks had grass catchers on their mowers. I didn't. My grass catcher was on me. In those days, most of us kids wore dungarees with pants' legs long enough to roll up into two-inch cuffs. The cuffs were the grass catchers. The amount of grass dungaree cuffs can hold would feed a cow for a week.

Summer nights were great experiences, too. When we lived on 2nd Street, and if there was nothing good on the radio, we would often sit on the front porch in the evening. Some nights we could hear the organ music from the roller skating rink nearly a mile away. Up on Cherry Street, I usually went out in the backyard in the evening after or during a rain to pick up night crawlers. That in itself was fun, but better yet, it meant that Dad and I would probably go fishing the next day.

But I think the most enjoyable nighttime activity was catching lightning bugs. Running around through the cool, dewy grass trying to anticipate where the next blink would be was great fun. The captured insects would be placed into a jar that would sit on my nightstand to keep me company after I was in bed. Trouble was I always went to sleep instantly and never got to enjoy them.

Last summer, I tried catching lightning bugs. I found they fly a lot faster than they used to.

Many years have passed since those summers of long days and soft nights. But you know, some of those things I've written about still sound like fun.

I wouldn't mind swooping around in a swing, if I had a swing. And I might even like to ride a bike through a cornfield, if I had a bike . . . and a cornfield.

There's a little stream down the road a ways. And if some summer day you're driving by and you see an old geezer hunkered down in the shallow water like a 10-year-old making frantic grabs at scurrying crayfish; honk your horn and wave. I'll be sure to wave back.

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**My three 'first' bicycles**

**D**o you remember your first bicycle? I'm afraid I don't -- remember yours, that is. But I do remember mine. In fact, I remember all three of my first bikes.

Mom and Dad got my very first bicycle from a neighbor when I was about eight years old. It was bright red and blue, had 14-inch wheels, and was not equipped with brakes. Looking at old pictures, I see now that it resembled those little circus bikes that clowns and bears ride.

I learned to ride in our driveway -- nice, smooth gravel with a very slight down slope. With my one-track mind, it was hard for me to concentrate on balancing, pedaling, and steering all at the same time. The gradual incline of the driveway relieved me of pedaling, and left me free for balancing and steering.

However, if I steered, I lost my balance. If I kept my balance, I forgot to steer, which invariably caused me to slam into the only tree along the driveway. It was a thorn tree, too. The more I thought about the dumb tree, the more likely I was to hit it. Sometimes I'd start off and get everything together and be going right along. Then I'd glance at the tree and uncontrollably head right for it!

I might have stopped if I'd had brakes, but that would just have been something else to think about. I never got hurt, but I did lose my temper several times a day.

Training wheels weren't around in the early 1940s, but I'm willing to bet that the guy who invented them had a thorn tree near his driveway, too.

At around ten, I got my first real bike.

Slightly used, it had 20-inch wheels and a coaster brake so that I could actually stop when I wanted to. It had a wire basket on the handlebars, as many bikes did back then. The theory was that you could put stuff in the basket and transport it. The reality was that the stuff bounced out when you rode over even the slightest bump, like a leaf or a worm.

One thing this bike didn't have was a chain guard. Lots of bikes were chain-guardless back in those days. "So what?" you say. Well, unless you took the proper precautions, a pants-leg could get caught in the chain and sprocket. That could yank a kid off a bike in a big hurry. The least that could happen was a very greasy pants-leg with a couple of holes punched in it.

One popular remedy was to roll up your right pants-leg, which is what I always did. Another was to wear a clip, like a lady's bracelet, that went around the pants-leg and held it tight. I never had one. They looked too much like bracelets to me.

Along came Christmas 1948 and waiting for me that morning was a brand-new "Roadmaster," my first full-sized bike!

Now let me remind you of what bicycles were like in those days. They were big and heavy, unlike the present skinny, little lightweights. My new bike weighed darn near as much as me. If my bicycle had been a living thing, a bike of today would look like its skeleton.

The seat was large and comfortable, quite different from the thing you find on a modern bike (which, if it were made of wood, would be called a "stick").

I added a sheepskin cover to mine to make it even more comfy. We didn't have gears on our old bikes. None of this 5-speed or 10-speed stuff. No, sir! We didn't need all those fancy levers and -- hmmmm. Well, maybe gears aren't such a bad idea at that.

When I was a kid, there weren't too many of the Roadmaster species around Waterford. My friend Ted had one, but it was a different model. Bud, who lived next door, had a Schwinn, and my cousin Donnie had a Rollfast. Some kids had J.C. Higgins bikes, which was Sears and Roebuck's brand. Montgomery Ward's was Hawthorne. There were Columbias and Western Flyers and even an Iver Johnson, which I knew only from ads in the Boy Scout handbook.

There were as many brands as there were kids to ride them.

My bike had a dandy big headlight, which I didn't use much. Mostly because I rarely rode after dark and the batteries were dead most of the time anyway.

There was a horn enclosed in the decorative tank that fit between the cross bars. It was okay, but it quit working before I really had a chance to annoy anyone with it. Those horns never seemed to work for very long on any bike.

Behind the seat and over the rear fender was the luggage carrier. No one I knew ever carried actual luggage, but you could strap on other things, like school books. You could also sit on it, if you weren't too heavy, and go for a ride as a passenger. But most passengers chose to sit side-saddle on the cross bar.

There was a time when Ted and I thought we were bicycle repairmen. Our repairs consisted of cleaning and greasing the coaster brake. Mostly, we oiled things.

I don't know whether coaster brakes are still around, what with gears and hand-brakes. If you aren't familiar with the device, the coaster brake allowed you to coast without the pedals going around. A bit of a backward push on the pedals applied the brake. Two of the major kinds of coaster brakes were Bendix and New Departure. Our Roadmaster bikes had Bendix brakes, so Ted and I were authorities on taking them apart and re-assembling them.

One day, we made a deal with a neighbor for his old bike. We were going to fix it up, sell it, and become rich.

The old bike was rather dilapidated, but we thought a little paint would hide that. So we started on our lubrication binge. We oiled everything that moved, looked like it had moved, or appeared that it should move.

Then came the coaster brake. It was a New Departure (aptly named, we found). We expected it to be similar to our Bendix brakes, which were composed of about a half-dozen parts. Not so the New Departure. When it came apart, about 8,000 little washer-like things jumped out. (I'm exaggerating. It was probably more like 7,000). Some had little tabs on them, some were plain.

We decided they went together in some definite combination, but we never stumbled upon it. We tried a dozen or more times with the same results: Everything worked all right until we applied the brakes.

It took three or four backward turns of the pedals before the brakes caught, if they caught at all.

I don't remember whatever happened to that old bike. I'm quite sure we didn't sell it, because I don't recall being rich.

I still have my Roadmaster; although I haven't been on it in years. It's kind of rusty and in poor condition, but then, so am I.

It would be fun to get it oiled up and ride it, but it's been so long, I'd probably have to learn all over again. I'd do it too--but there's this thorn tree growing down along the driveway . . .

**Charles Atlas and Me**

**C**hances are I'll never be built like Charles Atlas. Having passed my 60th birthday some years ago leads me to this conclusion. That and I just took a look in the mirror.

It's too bad too, because I planned on it as a kid. It was all due to those comic book ads. Remember the skinny little guy at the beach getting sand kicked in his face by a big bully? Then along comes Charles Atlas and his "Dynamic Tension," and the 98-pound weakling bulks up and beats the living daylights out of the bully!

Unfortunately, I never had enough money to send for the Dynamic Tension stuff, whatever it was. I'd start to save up, and then a Popsicle or candy bar would come along and, well, it was just one thing after another.

As a teenager, I still had bulging muscles in mind. (And in mind only, I might add). So I bought a pair of grip exercisers. You know - - - those things you squeeze that look like nutcrackers. One would have been enough. I could have switched hands from time to time, but the catalog only sold them in pairs.

I used those things for a couple of days and couldn't see any difference, except that I got blisters in the palms of my hands, and my arm muscles got so tired I could hardly hold a bottle of pop.

By the time I reached my early twenties, I was still committed to having a body like Charles Atlas. (Isn't it a happy coincidence that his name just happened to be "Atlas?" I wonder if there was a Mrs. Atlas).

I sent away for a bodybuilding program that involved no equipment. Just exercise. I was faithful to the program, too. I kept at it for three, maybe four days. Not consecutive, of course, but spread out over a two-week period.

Well, I just couldn't see that it was doing any good. All that was happening was that it was making me tired, and since I was born tired, I didn't need that!

Many years have passed since those body building days. I had sort of forgotten about it until, as I mentioned, I glanced in the full-length mirror, (Something I generally avoid if at all possible). I'm afraid it's too late for Charles Atlas to do anything for me. I just have to accept the fact that I am not going to beat up that beach bully with the sand and all.

But over the years, I developed a much simpler solution to the problem.

I quit going to the beach!

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**Tough Guy**

**I** am one tough guy! I may not look tough, but I am! You've never known a tougher guy!

And you talk about being scared --- heck, I ain't a-scairt of nothing (I know that is poor grammar, but that's the way we tough guys talk. We say "heck" and "darn" a lot, too).

Things weren't always that way, though. Way back when I was a little kid, I was actually afraid of a couple of things.

A favorite summertime activity was something called "sleeping out". "Sleeping" is a misleading term since actual sleep was hardly ever involved. In fact, sleeping was not even an option for a lot of us kids. It was too dangerous! If you fell asleep, you might lose your grip on the baseball bat.

Of course, we needed the baseball bat for protection because we were out there surrounded by one of the things we feared the most. Yes, we were afraid of THE DARK!

The Dark itself was bad enough, but we also had to worry about what might be in it. There was always a lot of rustling going on. Nothing ever rustles in the daylight. Only in the Dark. And I never found out what it was, because to do so would have meant leaving the tent. No kid should ever venture outside the tent in The Dark! Unless, of course, he's headed directly for the house! At full speed!

I always imagined the rustling was caused by the furry-thing-that-lives-in-the-bushes, but I don't know for sure. I never saw him. But what I did see occasionally was far scarier!

Of course, I'm referring to the most dreaded of all nighttime creatures! The one that strikes fear into the hearts of little kids all over the world! (Or maybe it was just me in my backyard). If you haven't guessed already, the awful being of which I speak is A MOTH!

You may think that moths are harmless, but that's probably because you've never been attacked by one! Now, I'm not talking about those little one-inch jobs that hang out under the porch light. I'm talking about the great big ones about the size of a crow!

You show me a big, flapping moth and, well, you won't have a chance to show me anything else, because I will have left town!

Big, brown cecropia moths and those extra-ugly sphinx moths are bad enough that I don't care to share the same county with them. But the worst of the lot, the most frightening moth of all is the Tuna moth! And the thing about it that makes it so horrible is that IT IS GREEN!

No life-form that big should be that green, except maybe a cabbage!

It is a well-known fact that Luna moths prey on little boys.

Even now, I can see their gaping jaws drooling with saliva, those razor-sharp teeth, and -- wait a minute! That's not A Moth! That's a pterodactyl! No matter. They're about the same thing.

The combination of The Dark and A Moth is the reason I stopped using a sleeping bag when sleeping out. Ever try running full-tilt in a sleeping bag? It can be done, but it's not easy.

See, the problem is the zipper. You may feel all snug and secure in your zipped-up sleeping bag, and then along comes A Moth! Consumed by terror, you can't find the zipper; Heck, if you're like me, you couldn't remember how to operate it even if you could find it! There's no time to figure it out, so you start running, bag and all! Of course, you can't find the opening in the tent even though the stupid moth found it easy enough!

It's always hard to explain to your parents why you're standing in the kitchen wearing a sleeping bag and wrapped up in the tent with ropes and stakes dragging along. You're reluctant to mention A Moth for fear of ridicule, and breathlessly panting, "I wanted a drink of water", just doesn't make it. So you just say, "G'night", and shuffle off to your bedroom as nonchalantly as possible, hoping the tent stakes won't catch on the stairs.

If you must have a sleeping bag, I strongly recommend against the "mummy type". There is just not enough leg room to develop a stride, so you are pretty much forced to make a series of jumps to the house. But the worst thing about mummy bags is THEY LOOK LIKE GIANT COCOONS!

Unfortunately, a lot of things sound like A Moth in The Dark. Like a gentle breeze, a rabbit hopping by, the neighbor's dog, a railroad train, just to name a few. Any one of them is a source of potential panic. Therefore, while some moths are real, many are imaginary. Be that as it may, one is just as alarming as the other, if not more.

From what I've said, you may think that I'm still afraid of moths. Well, I'm not! No sir! I outgrew that! I'm way too tough to be afraid now. However, I do have a phobia about moths. You can have a phobia and still be tough.

A phobia is almost like a fear when it comes to moths, though. Even now, you put me in a zipped-up sleeping bag inside a tent in The Dark with A Moth and you've got yourself a circus!

No doubt you've seen those novelty acts where motorcycle riders ride at high speed around the sides of a barrel-like container. Big deal! I can do that; too! In a tent! In a sleeping bag! And, heck, I don't need no darn motorcycle!

Happily, my fear of The Dark is gone, too. Mostly. Why, just last summer I was sitting out in the backyard one night right in the middle of The Dark, and it didn't bother me a bit. But when I started into the house, I saw an extra-large Luna moth on the screen door!

"Oh, heck", I said, in somewhat of a falsetto. "There's a darn moth!"

I didn't panic! But I did run around the house to the front door. I did run pretty fast. As fast as I could, actually, but I did that on purpose. It's sometimes fun to see if I can remember where all the bushes are in The Dark. I did, too. Almost.

"Oh, heck", I said. "Darn lilacs."

Had there been A Moth on the front door too, I don't know where I would have ended up. However, I was headed in the general direction of Milwaukee. As I was saying, I am one tough guy. And just because I may over-react a little to A Moth sighting doesn't make me a sissy. I have reason to believe that I am the only person in the world who knows that moths are a clear and present danger.

And, by the way, so are lilac bushes and shrubs.

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**A horse is a horse, of course**

 **I** consider myself quite an authority on horses. It's all first-hand knowledge, too. None of that book stuff. (Oh, I did read a book about a boy and a horse when I was 11, but I don't remember a thing about it, so it doesn't count!)

My first experience with horses occurred when I was about seven --- nearly 30 years ago.

I was in the process of growing up in Waterford, and there were quite a few horses around town then. I never had anything to do with them, until one spring afternoon near the end of the school year. My mother had come up to school at dismissal time to pick me up. I was always happy when she did that because it meant we'd go for a little ride out through the country.

They were short rides, but they were just what I needed to help unwind from a tough day of coloring, pasting, and those Palmer-method handwriting exercises.

On this particular day, Mom paused to visit a bit with my teacher, Mrs. Brooks. All the other kids had disappeared instantly upon dismissal. So while Mom and Mrs. Brooks talked in front of the school, I played on the swings. It was the only time I ever had all four of them all to myself. I was going from one to the other, trying to decide which was best.

The area from behind the school to Fifth Street was an open field. Paul Bartholme, who lived a couple of houses up the alley from us, had a team of horses. Occasionally he would hitch his team to a mowing machine and mow the field. This day was one of those occasions.

So, there I was happily swinging away when all at once I heard a terrible commotion in the back of the school. Someone was yelling! Horses were making horse noises! Suddenly, from behind the school came the horses at full-gallop!

Runaways!

Now for those of you unfamiliar with “runaways,” horses will sometimes spook when they catch a glimpse of something they perceive to be life-threatening --- like a leaf or a butterfly. Then they run! Away! Very fast! And in no particular direction!

On came the horses with the mowing machine and Mr. Bartholme still attached! Mr. Bartholme was yelling at the top of his lungs. He was saying things like, “Whoa!” and “Gee!” and “Haw!” and other things that I, as a second grader, had never heard before.

The horses paid no attention whatsoever. They were on their way somewhere at about 85 miles per hour! How Mr. Bartholme stayed aboard that sulky-like mowing machine is beyond me. It was chattering like a machine gun. It's a wonder they didn't cut down all the trees in the schoolyard!

I had stopped swinging and just sat there in shock and astonishment. The horses turned and came directly toward me! They were very large horses! Elephant-sized I'd say.

Mom came on a run for me.

Still, I sat there, bug-eyed and immobilized! I would have run, but I had momentarily forgotten how!

When the horses got within a few feet of me, they suddenly turned and headed for the street! When they reached the road, they stopped almost as suddenly as they started.

Funny how little incidents like that stuck with you.

Most of all, I remember the crazed look of the horses' eyes --- bulging, rolling, staring, white. Mom had a similar expression as I recall. I can still see her running out there to fight off those two brontosauruses. Talk about family values!

I don't think we went for our ride that day.

My next experience with horses came when I was about 13 --- nearly 30 years ago.

The Anheuser-Busch Clydesdales were visiting and stayed overnight at the old bus terminal. We went to see them. Unfortunately, they were facing north in their stalls, so all I got to see were their southern ends. (I've not seen such a sight since!) The part I was looking at is a substantial portion of a horse's anatomy in any case. But these were enormous! Huge! Just plain big.

Even so, I was somewhat disappointed. But then I realized that I was getting approximately the same view of the Clydesdales as the driver of that fancy Budweiser wagon. That made me feel better.

I finally got some real hands on experience with horses when I was 20-something --- nearly 30 years ago.

We were living just outside Albion then, and our neighbor, Roscoe, had a rather large riding horse that he kept in our barn for a while. He rode the horse quite a bit. Having long been a Gene Autry/Roy Rogers fan, I wanted to ride, too. Roscoe was more than willing and showed me how to mount, dismount, neck-rein, check the oil, test the battery --- no, wait --- that was something else.

He said any time I wanted to ride was okay with him. Go right ahead. Just make sure the horse knows who is boss. This was unnecessary advice. The horse knew who was boss long before I showed up.

One afternoon, I decided it was time for a ride, so Dad and I went up to the barn. Dad knew all about horses, but he wasn't able to do anything because of a heart condition. So with Dad giving directions, I somehow managed to get the blanket and saddle on the old horse, along with the bridle, reins, suspenders, cummerbund --- no, wait --- that was something else.

We led her outside, and I mounted up (just like Gene and Roy). I said something horsy, like “giddy-up.” The horse turned and marched back into the barn. Fortunately, I'm a quick ducker or I probably would have fractured my skull on the beam over the door.

I dismounted (just like Gene and Roy). We led her outside again. I mounted up once more and, like an instant replay, she clomped back inside the barn again with me lying on her neck to miss the barn door.

Dad said for me to stay aboard while he led the horse back out. I did, but when he handed me the reins, we went right back inside again. I was getting very proficient at ducking the door.

We decided that we should get the horse a little further from the barn door, so we led her all the way around the barn. I climbed “back in the saddle again,” clucked at the horse, neck-reined and all that, and the horse ignored me completely. She stomped rather rapidly all the way back into the barn. I ducked the door successfully again.

I said I guessed I'd had enough riding for one day. Besides I'd seen about all the inside of the barn that I needed to see. I think the horse was tired, too. So we said goodbye.

A few weeks later, Roscoe was riding around and stopped in the yard to talk with Dad. The horse was parked nearby, and when I came along Roscoe invited me to take a ride.

Dimwittedly, I said okay and climbed on board. To my overwhelming surprise, the horse responded to my urging and away we went off through the field.

We went a couple hundred yards or so. Then the horse stopped. No amount of pleading would make her go further. So, having always been quick to compromise, I decided this was far enough anyhow. I turned her, and as soon as she caught sight of Roscoe back in the yard, she took off for him at full-gallop.

Well, I was hardly prepared for this. I hung on to everything I could find to hang on to. Horses do not have handles, you know.

Luckily, I managed to see where we were going. The horse was taking a shortcut. Under the apple tree. The one with the big, low limb.

The barn door experience proved immeasurably valuable. I hugged the horse around the neck and skimmed under the limb, missing it by several --- uh --- millimeters.

The horse skidded to a stop in front of Roscoe.

He laughed and said, “See, I knew you could do it!”

I went immediately to the house, took a handful of aspirin and smoked a pack of cigarettes.

I have not been on a horse since.

 My opening sentence may have been misleading. Maybe I'm not exactly an authority on horses as I suggested.

What I meant was I know everything about horses that I ever want to know!

**Sorry -- only the memories get delivered**

**I** have groceries in my blood. Now that I think of it, I guess that's true for all of us. But I'm speaking figuratively about myself.

I wasn't exactly born in a grocery store, but coincidently, I was born in an apartment above one. That, however, is not the reason for my lifelong interest in the grocery business.

From a few years before I came into the world until 1946, my Dad, Bill Walden, worked for his brother, Vic, in the Red and White store in Waterford, PA. Later, in the 1950's, Dad had the store by himself and I worked there part-time.

The building that housed the Red and White stands at the corner of High Street and South Park Row and is known as the I.O.O.F. Block.

The earliest record I can find shows that in 1910 the storefront housed “Phelps and Sherman Furniture and Undertaking.” Apparently, it first became a grocery store in the 1920s and remained that until the late '50s when a restaurant moved in for a short time.

A little later, Merle Heard moved his drugstore from next door into the old Red and White. It remains a pharmacy today.

Back in the 1940s and '50s grocery stores sold -- groceries. Oh yes, there were tobacco products and cleaning agents, but they were nothing like today's supermarket/variety stores.

There were many things in the grocery store that came in bulk when I was a kid. I can still remember the big vinegar barrel with its wooden pump standing in the back. (“Bring your own jug!”)

**No waxy chocolate**

**B**ut more importantly, I remember bulk cookies (Nabisco and Ontario, by brand name). They came in boxes about a foot square that were fitted with a metal frame and a glass door. I think there were about a dozen boxes on display, and customers bought their cookies by the pound.

Each kind of cookie had a name. I do recall that the best kind were chocolate-covered mounds of marshmallow that sat atop a semi-soft cookie with just a tad of jelly inside, Boy, were they good!

Marshmallow then was always soft and gooey and chocolate tasted like chocolate, unlike the brown, waxy stuff we have nowadays. There were similar marshmallow cookies that were covered with coconut instead of chocolate. Some were white and some were pink. They were extra-good, too.

And then there were rectangular cookies with ridges that . . . hmmmmm . . . I'd better quit this cookie stuff. Otherwise I'll have to stop writing and go to the store!

**The real difference**

**M**eat was all in “bulk,” too. This was in the pre-pre-packing era. I am sure there are young people out there who think the deli section in a supermarket is quite an innovation. It's no big deal to us old guys; that's just the way it was in the '40s and '50s.

What is really different are the prices.

Around 1950, one could buy a pound of most kinds of cold cuts for 49 or 59 cents. Hamburger was 59 cents per pound and link wieners and chicken were 39 cents per pound.

Hamburger was scooped into a thin cardboard disk, weighed, covered with a sheet of waxed paper, and then wrapped in brown “butcher” paper. Cold cuts and all other meats were handled the same way, except for the dish.

Neatly wrapping a package of meat isn't too difficult until you come to some ridiculously shaped thing like a chicken. In my early teen years, when I worked for Dad, I got pretty good at it, if I do say so myself. Trouble is there isn't much call for chicken wrappers anymore.

Except for cold cuts, all of our meat was cut by hand on the big maple butcher block. Power saws hadn't made it to Waterford at that time. Some things, like ham, were easy: Just slice down to the bone, cut through the bone with a meat saw, and finish the slice with a knife.

Pork chops were a little different. Starting with a whole loin, you sliced between the ribs with a knife. The bone is then chopped through with a meat cleaver. My Dad was really good at this; one hack with the cleaver for each chop. On the other hand, I required at least three swings of the cleaver, none of which ever quite hit the same place. My pork chops tasted fine, but they weren't pretty.

It's strange how little things change in the grocery store. Oleo margarine was called just “oleo” back then. Now it's just “margarine.” No matter what you call it, it used to come un-colored. It looked pretty much like lard. A little tablet of yellow coloring was included in the package, so if you wanted to pass it off as butter, you could mix in the color at home.

Some law prevented the manufacturer from coloring it beforehand.

In the produce department, bananas came in long, wooden boxes and they were still on the stalk. The stalk was hung on a long ceiling hook, and customers could break off whatever number of bananas they wanted. A bunch of bananas was called a “hand.”

**Forget the oranges!**

**O**ranges came in crates, and the oranges were individually wrapped in tissue paper.

But never mind the oranges, the crate was the thing” The wooden orange crate was one of the great inventions of mankind. It was composed of six slats, about five inches wide and three feet long, and three solid wood boards about 14 inches square (two ends and a middle).

What made the crate so wonderful was that a kid could use it to build just about anything. With a little care, a crate could be taken apart without splitting more than one or two slats. Two or three crates made quite a pile of lumber when they were disassembled. I even saved the nails -- 36 per crate.

At the store, Dad had rows of the crates stacked in the back room for shelves for stock. We even used a few in the attic at home for storage shelves.

Cantaloupes came in crates, too, but they were different and not nearly as good as orange crates. And cabbage crates were totally useless, at least to us kids.

The best part was that the crates were free. Any kid who wanted one had only to ask. We never had a stockpile of crates at the store. They went out about as fast as they came in.

Fruits and vegetables came and went with the seasons. Now you can buy strawberries in January. Back then, you could only get them in June. I suppose being able to buy any kind of produce at any time of the year is a good thing, but it's taken away a certain thrill. I mean, if you can have corn-on-the-cob any time of year, then what's the point of August?

**Clever Donnie**

**A** lot of our produce came from local farms, especially potatoes. Waterford has always been potato country. Dad bought potatoes in 100-pound burlap bags, and I usually got the job of re-bagging then into pecks (15 pounds).

Of all the different jobs I had at the store, bagging potatoes was the worst.

Not only was it boring, but occasionally I'd run into a rotten potato. If you have never plunged your hand into a rotten potato, then you don't know what rotten really is!

My cousin, Donnie, worked at the store, too. A year older than me, Donnie was always clever enough to get out of potato-bagging. When the time came, he was always busy stocking shelves or putting up orders. I have never even been accused of being clever, so I was always available.

Donnie and I started working on Saturdays as stock boys. We soon graduated to putting up orders, waiting on customers, and elementary meat-cutting.

Many customers would come in and tell us what they wanted, or hand us a list, and we would go around and gather the groceries. Others would phone in their orders, either to be picked up later or delivered. Dad delivered groceries all over town, and quite often way out in the country. It was a free service. Imagine that!

My Dad has been gone a long time. So has Donnie. The store even longer. But sometimes in the back of my mind, I can still hear Dad answering the phone to take someone's order on a busy Saturday.

“Red and White!” he'd say. No “hello” or any greeting; just “Red and White!' Occasionally he would forget himself and answer our home phone the same way.

I still remember the store's phone number: 2341.

We don't deliver any more.

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**A Sled-Riding Kid**

**W**hen the winter winds blow and the winter snows snow, I often think of when I was a sled-riding kid back in the 40's.

Those were real sleds we had back then, not the dinky plastic thing you see around nowadays. No sir! Our sleds were build tough --- hardwood bed, steel frame, steel runners, nuts, bolts, rivets --- oh yeah, those were sleds!

My first sled was a 3-footer, and my sledding consisted primarily of Mom and Dad pulling me around. All kids had sleds, and if there was no one to pull you, you just pulled the empty sled around by yourself.

The big kids would go belly-slamming in the road. It was fairly safe, there not being much traffic then. To belly-slam, you carried the sled in front of you, ran like the dickens and slammed yourself and the sled down onto the hard-packed snow. It was surprising how far you could go!

I was too young for this. Heck, I wasn't even allowed to cross the street much less slide on it. After watching the big kids, I thought I ought to be able to do the same thing in the safety of the backyard. I didn't realize that hard packed snow is a must for belly-slamming. So I tried it in the soft, fluffy stuff. I ran as fast as I could and slammed down onto the sled. The sled never moved and inch! Neither did I, having a very good grip for a little kid. Except for my head. It went down, driving my chin onto the steering mechanism. I still have the chipped front tooth, which was brand new at the time, to remind me of that episode.

For really good sledding, three things are required: a sled, a kid, and a hill. In our part of town, there just weren't any hills. Well, there were, but as I said before, I wasn't allowed to cross the street.

My cousin, Neil, (older and bigger than I), came to the rescue. With a little ingenuity and a snow shovel he built a hill by packing snow in the front steps. Starting with a push off the porch, I would go zooming down the steps, down the long sidewalk, and down the bank to the ditch, stopping just short of the road. I couldn't go any further because I wasn't allowed to cross the street.

What a fun day that was! I think I nearly wore out the sled runners. I nearly wore out Neil, too, since he had to re-pack the steps after every couple of runs.

After I had muddled my way through more than ten years of life, we moved way up to the other end of town. What a great place it was! I was practically out in the country with my school chum, Bud, living right next door. And in back of our home, a hill!

There was a narrow cornfield between Bud's house and mine, and when the first snow fell, we walked back through the field and up the hill. At the top of the hill was a small woods, and as you entered the woods, you went downhill again. We slid both directions --- into the woods and out of the woods.

Sliding in the woods was really the most fun because you had to go around trees. And until you got a track made, you didn't always go around the trees. Slow as we went, it was still a bone-jarring experience to impact even a very small tree.

Many times there wasn't very much snow in the woods. After a few trips down the hill, we were sliding mostly on wet, half-frozen leaves. I didn't care. It was a hundred times better than our old place.

Bud was more daring than I. He had a pair of skis, the kind with straps that you just scuffed your feet into. He used to ski down through the cornfield. Maybe I should say he used to try to ski. It seems like the snow was never quite right for skiing, and besides, the hill just wasn't steep enough.

I don't think he ever went more than a few feet at a time. Nevertheless, it looked too dangerous to me, so I never tried it.

My cousin Donnie often came over after school to go sledding. He and I usually slid in the field instead of the woods. We'd slide and slide until the street lights came on, the universal signal for all kids to go home.

One day we were sliding in what had been a couple of inches of wet snow. When the street lights came on, we said, "One more time!", and climbed back up the hill.

"One more time" is a very dangerous thing to say and even more dangerous to participate in.

Donnie went down first. I followed. By now, the snow was worn away to mud at an old dead furrow near the bottom of the hill. I came down faster than any trip of the day! The sled hit the mud and stopped dead. (Hence the name "dead furrow"). This time, I didn't stop! I zipped off the sled face-first through mud, snow, stones, and perhaps a few small rodents who had been hibernating there until I passed through!

Well, I didn't break anything and I didn't bleed too much, but I did have a sore nose and mouth for the next few days. Sometimes I think I could still spit out a little gravel, but I guess it's just my imagination.

A few years later, I got a toboggan for Christmas. Toboggans are neat because they go in almost any kind of snow whether it's deep or not. A regular sled needs special snow and not too much of it.

For the uninitiated, a toboggan is a runner-less sled made entirely of hardwood --- maple or ash or something. The wood is curled into a half-circle at the front which makes it glide easily through the snow and helps make the toboggan look like something other than a plank.

Rather than go into all my tobogganing exploits, let me instead give you of a few basic toboggan rules that I learned:

1. If you are barreling downhill and over a "jump", try to maintain contact with the toboggan. If you and the toboggan become separated, there is no guarantee as to what position either will be in upon landing.

2. If a collision with a tree, house, or large animal is imminent, it is perfectly ethical to leave the toboggan in any convenient manner. You are under no obligation to stay aboard.

3. Do not allow yourself to be towed on a toboggan behind a car. When the car stops, you will not, and will therefore get to see a lot more of the underside of an automobile than is necessary.

4. If, while lying on a toboggan, you see good prospects for a "head-on", do not stick your head under the "curl" for protection. While it may seem like a good idea, independent research has proven otherwise.

Over the last few decades, my sledding days have dwindled to zero, but you know, it still sounds like fun. I have an old sled. And not too far across from our place, there is a dandy-looking hill. I'm often tempted to try it out some winder day. Only three things keep me from it: (1) I get cold sooner than I used to; (2) I get tired sooner than I used to; and (3) I' m still not allowed to cross the street!

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**Those Snowy Waterford Winters**

**F**or the past 40+ years or so, I have made a rather intensive study of weather, climate, and the seasons.

Much of this study has been by book, and even more by observation. I even taught meteorology in high school for several years. I have finally reached a conclusion: Summer is much nicer than winter!

What astounds me is that upon looking through the photo albums, I see there was a time when I apparently enjoyed winter. That time began in the early 1940s in our old hometown of Waterford.

These were the days before "wind-chill factors" and "lake effect snow." Oh, they existed, but not by those names. It wasn't necessary. We knew that when the wind was blowing, you should probably bundle up a little more or stay inside. And snow -- well, as you all know, Waterford was squarely in the middle of the snow-belt (another term we hadn't heard of then).

We Waterfordians know all about snow, and it doesn't much matter whether it's caused by the lake or a Canadian air mass or an angry snow god. Snow is snow, and we always got a lot of it!

All of us in the four-year-old range knew that snow was great stuff to play in, and the more the better! Of course, there were some drawbacks, and getting all bundled up was one of them.

**Dual purpose!**

**I**t seems I was usually wearing corduroys that time of year, and trying to stuff them into flannel-lined snow pants was a real hassle. The outer layer of snow pants was wool, not exactly fuzzy, but sort of hairy. It collected snow like no other substance known to man. I thing it actually attracted snow. At least it looks like it did in some of the old photos.

Boots were the over-the-shoe kind, and hats were thickly lined helmets that strapped under the chin. A heavy coat with big buttons, one or two pairs of woolen mittens, and a scarf completed the outfit.

Tied semi-tightly over mouth and nose, the scarf served a dual purpose: 1) nose/mouth/chin warmer; and 2) handkerchief.

Now I was ready for the great outdoors, the first hurdle being getting down the steps. Stuffed into all that clothing, walking was pretty much a rolling, side-to-side gait. The three steps down off the porch were tough to negotiate.

Once on the ground, everything was all right unless I encountered a snowdrift of a few inches or so. The danger here was that I might fall down and if I landed on my back, it was all over. It was much like being a turtle, except that a turtle has a lot more mobility.

**Hot bumper!**

**S**ooner or later -- usually sooner -- I'd be ready to go back inside because I had to -- well, you know what I had to do. Getting into the house could be a problem, too. For one thing, there were the steps again; and for another; I couldn't get my arms up high enough to reach the doorknob. So, I'd just stand there until someone came looking for me, hoping it wouldn't be too long.

It was always nice to get back inside the warm house after those 10-minute arctic adventures.

There were still many houses without furnaces in those days, and our house was one of them. We had big kerosene heaters in the kitchen and dining room -- "Sunray" and "Duotherm" respectively. These stoves were about two feet square and five feet high. In the coldest part of winter, I think Dad filled their fuel tanks once each day.

In the living room, we had a hard-coal heater. This was a huge, cast iron stove with lots of shiny nickel trim. It sat on a metal-covered asbestos stove board, and we had a sheet of asbestos on the wall behind it. (This was before asbestos was found to be dangerous.)

The stove had isinglass (mica) windows in the front and on both sides so you could see the orange glow of the burning coal.

This particular heater was a "magazine" type, which meant you dumped the coal from the coal scuttle into the top of the stove instead of through the front doors.

No heating unit ever put out hotter heat than that old stove. What a great place to be on a cold winter night, and an even greater place on a cold winter morning. I used to grab my clothes and head for the living room to get dressed for school.

One morning I got careless and inadvertently stuck a bare toe on the nickel "bumper" around the mid-section of the stove. HOT! Hot enough to raise a blister and generate a few tears. I did, however, get to stay home from school that day, so it wasn't a total loss.

When I was in second grade, the winter that began in the tail-end of 1944 and spilled over into 1945 was a super-deluxe winter. I don't remember any specific snow amounts, but I do know we had all the snow anyone could ever want.

**A new furnace!**

**S**chools were closed for a while, and we were all "walkers." We had to go to class on a couple of Saturday mornings to make up some of the time missed.

Our neighbor's roof was so loaded with snow that she hired a man to shovel it off. It was nearly waist-deep, according to old pictures.

Snow removal on the municipal level back then was as good as or better than it is today. The streets were plowed with the one and only borough truck by the one and only borough employee. He used to plow all night to keep the streets open, and he did a great job.

The sidewalks were also kept clear. The borough had a horse that pulled a big, wooden, V-shaped plow. They did all the sidewalks in town, walking behind the horse and plow every time it snowed.

In 1949, my parents bought a house up on Cherry Street, and that house had a furnace! There was heat in every room! Imagine that!

The furnace burned soft coal and was fired by a stoker, "Iron Fireman" by name. The stoker was an automatic coal feeder controlled by the thermostat upstairs. When the thermostat called for heat, a shaft -- which looked like a huge screw -- began turning at the bottom of the stoker's hopper. It forced coal into the furnace along with an air supply for draft.

**Hard like coral!**

**M**y job was to keep the hopper full of coal. Two or three scuttles of coal were required each day, but sometimes I'd really load it up so that I could skip a day.

This furnace didn't produce ashes; it made rock like clinkers, sharp and hard like coral. Each night, the clinkers had to be dug out of the furnace with long clinker tongs and deposited in five-gallon metal buckets. Once a week or so, we'd haul the clinkers out of the basement and dump them in the driveway.

It also became my job to drive the car back and forth to mash down the clinkers. Not bad duty for a 12-year-old. That driveway ended up with a better base than the highway.

Back outdoors, my neighbor Bud and I did a lot of sledding on a small hill behind our houses. I spent some time following animal trails in the little woods at the top of the hill. We built snowmen and made snow angels. I found that if you lie on your stomach when making a snow angel, it will not only have wings, it will have a face, too.

Sometimes I would content myself by snow-balling the garage. The idea was to spell a word or draw a face with the splattered snowballs. It was fun, and the garage couldn't throw back.

Once I went with Bud to check his trap line. It was snowing hard, those big snowflakes the size of silver dollars. There was no wind, and the snowflakes drifted down lazily, but thick enough so that we could see only a few yards ahead. It was the kind of snow everyone wants for Christmas Eve.

I had never been one to stray very far from home. So that, combined with the blinding snow meant that I was completely lost within 10 minutes of leaving the house.

It was great fun, and it seemed to me like we were in the Northwest Territories, or maybe somewhere between Dawson and Selkirk. Twelve-year-old imaginations are great, aren't they! If Yukon King had been along, I'd have felt just like Sergeant Preston. And if you don't know to whom I'm referring, well, you're just way too young!

You know, all this reminiscing has made me think that maybe winter isn't so bad after all.

Maybe I should go outdoors and build a snowman or wade through a big drift or throw snowballs at something.

Of course it is awfully cold out there.

I might slip and fall or catch a cold or get the flu. It would probably take an hour to get all bundled up.

I don't think I even have a scarf. And my arthritis always acts up when it's cold.

No, I was right in the first place. Summer is much nicer than winter!

**Native of historic Waterford traces town's 'four corners'**

**H**aving been born and raised in Waterford, I always think of the old town as being much larger than it actually is. That is, it seems Waterford extends way beyond the business district, the quiet tree-lined streets, and the borough boundaries. Things are different now than in the 1940s and 1950s. Back then, following any of the four major roads out of town brought you various points of interest.

**North** - High Street, the main highway running though Waterford, is U.S. Route 19 and Pennsylvania Route 97. About one mile north of town, the two routes split, forming a "Y" with both branches headed for Erie. Route 19 goes up and over the hills. Everyone always called it the "High Road." Route 97 keeps to the valleys, and therefore (you guessed it), it was known as the "Low Road." When I was a little boy, I thought the old song was about going to Erie, not Scotland. Near the "Y" on the High Road side was the fox farm. It was called "LeBoeuf Silver Foxes" and was owned and operated by Joe Edman. It was quite a large business before man-made furs came on the market. Lawrence Burdick also raised foxes, but his location was on Cherry Street, just beyond the water tank. That area was practically "out in the country" in the 1940s.

**East** - Traveling east on East Third Street, the first place of interest, then and now, is the Waterford Cemetery. Cemeteries are fascinating places to visit - on a bright, sunny afternoon. At night, well, that's a little different. I've always been a little scared of the dark anyway. Nowadays, I know many, many more folks residing in the cemetery than I know living in town. Scores of my relatives are buried there, the oldest being my great-great-great grandparents. The original cemetery was located at the end of West Second Street. But due to construction or erosion, it was moved to the present location many years ago. The oldest part of the cemetery lies along East Street, although there are many very old markers throughout the grounds. The most celebrated gravesite is that of Michael Hare, who died in 1843 at the age of 115! He served during the French and Indian War and survived, the Revolutionary War and survived, and other Indian wars in which he was wounded, but survived. Then he taught school in Waterford before he died. Just shows you what a tough job teaching is! We always called East Third Street the "Depot Road," and for good reason: The Waterford Train Station was located at the railroad tracks about one mile from town. When the railroad came through in the 1800s, Waterford's town fathers would not allow it to pass through the borough. They didn't want the noise disturbing the serenity of the town. So the tracks were laid one mile east. At least, that's the story I was always told. After the railroad was up and running, a fair-sized community called East Waterford grew up around the station. It was mostly gone by the time I was around. Only Heard's Store and Coal Yard, the G.L.F. Feed Mill, and a few houses remained. The depot was there when I was a kid, but it is gone and so is the old Depot School, which was located between the railroad and Hood's Corner. It's too bad they couldn't have been saved.

**South** - Just south of the town bridge and behind the present supermarket is the site of the Washington Sentinel. It was a very old and very large hemlock tree which, legend has it, George Washington climbed to get a view of Fort LeBoeuf. There is no mention of this in Washington's journal, but it makes a good story. Lightning had destroyed the top half of the hemlock by the time I was around. Now the tree is gone altogether. A little farther south brings us to "The Y" where Routes 97 and 19 split, with 97 going to Union City and 19 to Hughes corners and Cambridge Springs and beyond. When anyone spoke of "The Y", it was understood that this southern split was the one being referred to, not the northern one. Right at "The Y," a replica of the Fort LeBoeuf blockhouse served as a gas station. It was moved down Route 97 to its present location many years ago. Before my time, there was a small zoo at "The Y." When I was a little kid, all that was left was a cage with some raccoons in it. Stanley Boarts had his auto repair garage at "The Y" for many years. Just south of "The Y" on Route 19 is Lake LeBoeuf and its outlet, LeBoeuf Creek. The old roller-skating rink, which burned several years ago, and the Showboat, a dance hall/night club, stood along the lake shore.

**West** - About a mile west of town on West Third Street were the pump houses that supplied Waterford with water. I came to know those two pump houses very well. Between grocery stores, Dad worked for the water company in the late 1940s. It might be better to say that Dad was the water company. He was the only full-time employee, and to him fell the jobs of running the pumps, repairing water mains, installing new water lines, reading meters, and collecting water bills. I was only around 12, but I helped as much as I could. There were times when Dad would be busy on some emergency repair, and Mom would take me down to the pump house to take care of the pumps. That meant shutting the pump down, re-filling the chlorine tanks, checking a dozen or so things to make sure they were working properly, and then starting up the pump again. It was quite a job, and I felt very important in doing it. I also helped in typing the monthly water bills, and Mom helped in collecting them at the water company office (next to the old Civil War recruiting station). It was a family affair. I went meter-reading with Dad a couple of times. Therefore, I have the distinction of being one of the few people who has been in almost every basement in pre-1950 Waterford.

So ends the tour of the perimeter of old Waterford. I've had a number of people around here say, "Since you write and talk so much about Waterford, why don't you move back there?" Some have even said it in a kindly way. I would if I could, but I can't. The Waterford I knew isn't there anymore. Many years ago, author Thomas Wolfe wrote, "You can't go home again." You know, he was right!

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**Mowing the Lawn**

Well, spring has sprung,

And winter is gone,

And once again

I'm mowing the lawn.

Grass growing like crazy

Hither, thither, and yon.

Looks like a long summer

Just mowing the lawn.

Oh, I get some rest

From dusk until dawn,

But the rest of the time

I'll be mowing the lawn.

Sometimes I break

To go to the john,

But in a few minutes,

I'm back mowing the lawn.

My summer fishing

Is more off than on,

Since, I'm way too busy

Just mowing the lawn.

I'm getting real tired

And starting to yawn,

But I can't take a nap

Cause I'm mowing the lawn.

Lots of jobs

Seem to go on and on,

But they're nothing compared

To mowing the lawn.

By the end of the summer

I'll look old and drawn

Cause I've spent so much time

Mowing the lawn.

In the years that pass

Long after I'm gone,

I'll be remembered

For mowing the lawn.

"Here lies Herb Walden"

 (My tombstone---engraved upon)

 "He didn't do much

 But he sure could mow lawn!"

 Herb Walden - 1998