

Fechter Stories to Remember

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Grandpa, Mike & the Cement

This past week I had an opportunity to go to lunch with Connie. It was a great lunch and many “stories” were told. When I passed along some of my memories growing up in the Fechter family Connie told me that “we” should capture many of these great stories. The “genealogy” will always be there ... names, dates, births, deaths, military, marriages, etc. But many of the best “memories” we share as a family will be “lost over time” if someone doesn’t try to capture and preserve them now. OK ... I’ll start and ALL OF YOU GET TO CONTRIBUTE. If you’ll like I’ll act as the central “repository” of the stories and put them all into a single document that you can share with your family and children. Send me e-mail or short notes, pictures, sketches, anything you think would be neat to pass along in time.



So, I’ll start off with a few of them that are special in my memory. Some of you probably have heard me tell these stories at some time in the past. They are, of course, my favorites. But all worth retelling and preserving. (Picture to left is grandpa Earnest Fechter on roof of a house – top row left.)

My family (Joseph, Ruth, Larry, and myself) lived with grandma and grandpa for about two years while grandpa and dad built the house on Passolt Street. This was in 1949-51. So I was four to five years old and Lar ... bless his heart ... was only about 1-2 years old. So he probably won’t remember too much of this time. It was a really special time for me ... and many days I spent all day long with just grandpa Fechter ... and rode with him out to the house being built on Passolt. What fun for a young boy! At that time the area was largely just open fields and farm land. The Byer farm was just west of the house being built ... barns and all. Passolt was a dirt road ... promised (and never fulfilled) to become a center tree lined boulevard. There were apple trees all over the place. These made great climbs and grandpa somehow always snuck a salt shaker out of grandma’s kitchen. I’d climb up and eat green apples in the shade of the tree limbs ... sprinkling a little salt on the green apples with each bite. It was at this time I first died. Well ... anyway I thought I was dying. That was the day I fell out of the tree and had the “wind” knocked out of me. There I lay ... flat on my back and couldn’t draw in a breath for what seemed like HOURS. Well ... we all know how this story turns out. I lived and had many great days “working” with grandpa during the summers.

Working may be a “slight” misdemeanor. Let’s explore some of the many ways I helped grandpa during this wonderful time.

Well, let’s start with the day grandpa was pouring the foundation for the fireplace in the living room. I watched him mix the cement, dump it from the “mixer” into a wheelbarrow, and push it up the wood planks and weave his way to where the fireplace was to be erected ... only the cement foundation and part of the outer walls were established when I helped grandpa this particular day. It took several wheelbarrow loads of cement. I watched as grandpa dumbbed the final load, and, pipe in his mouth and his signature hat on his head, he got down on his hands and knees and pulled out his trowel. For what seemed like an hour to a small

boy watching he carefully pushed the surface cement back and forth until it was absolutely flat and smooth. I can still see him stand up slowly, puff on his pipe, and blow out some smoke, and admiringly look down on his completed hard work. I don't recall what he said to me as he picked up his tools and put them all in the wheelbarrow to push it back out to clean them all off with the hose.

Me? ... well ... I stayed behind. BOY ... did that cement look neat. Wonder what it would be like to step on it and walk across it? Now this house has about three foot of concrete under it. It was weaved back and forth with copper pipes to provide radiant heating (by pumping hot water through them). So the cement in the fireplace was a good two feet deep. Man ... was that first step a deep one!!! I almost went in head first, but wound up standing upright with both feet well over my short knees in wet cement. What now. How about hollering as loud as I could "GRANDPA". Grandpa sure seemed to be taking his time to get back to me ...but he slowly walked up behind me and just stood there for several seconds looking at me and what remained of his hard work. Amazingly grandpa wasn't mad at me. But, he didn't laugh either ... at least out loud. He may have been splitting a gut laughing to himself. Looking back on it I'd bet on this later description! Instead, he reached down and grabbed me under each armpit and with some effort pulled and lifted me out of the cement. When he set me down there was wet cement dripping off my entire lower half ... and there was a notable absence of two new shoes missing from my feet.

Without a word grandpa guided me out of the house and I recall being thoroughly "hosed down" from the waist to my one bare and one stocking foot. Still without much talking he picked up his trowel and I followed him back into the house. There, grandpa once again got down on hands and knees and slowly worked the two gaping holes I had left behind from where I was "extracted" from the wet cement. It took some time before it once again looked exactly like it did before I defaced it just minutes before. Only now there were two new shoes and one sock resting forever entombed down deep in that fireplace cement.¹

Grandpa then announced it was probably a good idea if we took off early for lunch and let grandma find me some dry clothes. No spanking, no hollering, no punishment what-so-ever. But, grandpa and I had a very firm SILENT understanding that I wasn't to "help" him in this way in the future. Grandpa was often a very quiet and stoic man. But, I always found him to be warm and loving. I know we certainly had a great bond. What I didn't know is just how "smart" grandpa was and I was to find that out the same afternoon when he took me back to the house to "help" him out some more.

Before I finish his story I should probably tell you a bit about living with grandma and grandpa. Grandpa did pack a lunch in a black lunch pail on some days. And he always had a thermos of coffee that he took with him that had been filled by grandma and handed to him as he walked out the door. But, I recall that on many of the jobs that were close to home he made it a point to come home for lunch. Mom and dad's house on Passolt was close to their house on Johnson St ... so most days ... when work permitted ... he came home for lunch. He would come into the kitchen and take off his hat, fill his pipe, and sit on a kitchen chair that was back against the kitchen wall away from the kitchen table. There was a radio there (on a wood platform up on the wall that grandpa had made himself) and grandpa would turn on the news and sit and puff on his pipe. NOONE was allowed to talk ... this was "hush" time as grandpa listed to the 12pm news while grandma prepared lunch for all of us (mom and dad were both at work). Lunches were simple, but ample and tasty. A lot of sandwiches of different types. And downstairs in the basement was a "root cellar" that had all sorts of good things that grandma had canned and preserved herself. During lunch (when the news was over) grandma would ask us what we did that morning and we always had a nice lunch discussion. I mention this as grandpa saw fit not to bring up the issue of where my shoes might be and why my clothes were dirty and wet. Being a really smart kid I just followed grandpa's lead and kept my mouth shut. Looking back, I'm pretty sure grandpa had to fess up to grandma sometime later that day ... but it was never brought up to me again. **Gosh I love my grandma and grandpa!!!!!!!!!!**

¹ Some day when the house is knocked down someone will find these shoes and my sock and wonder if a kid was buried in the bowels of the cement foundation. It will likely launch a major criminal investigation!! ☺

BUT ... the REAL END OF THE STORY!!!! That afternoon, after a nice lunch, some dry blue jeans and another pair of shoes and socks, grandpa and I headed back to the “worksite”. As soon as we arrived grandpa asked me if I would help him on a “really important job”. “Sure, grandpa ... what can I do?” Grandpa set up two of his custom hand-made wood saw horses and pulled out a board ... I recall now the board was probably a 2x6 (2” thick and 6” wide) that was probably about five or six feet long. He placed that board on the saw horses and got out his big thick carpenter’s pencil and his carpenter’s “Square”. He “marked” with his pencil a line all the way around the entire board about ¼” from the top of the 2x6. Next he got out his hand made wood sanding block and a sheet of real nice **FINE** sandpaper ... not the **COARSE** you understand ... the **FINE** used to just finish a sanding by taking off a tiny, tiny, tiny bit of wood at a time. Grandpa bent down next to me and said **“Now, Mike, you sand on this board until you get the ENTIRE board down to this pencil line for grandpa ... OK?”** “Sure, grandpa” ... me thinking I’d be done in just a few minutes! DAAAA! Well, I didn’t quite finish that board ... **EVER**. But I sanded on it every day for at least a week for several hours each day. Grandpa would check in on me every now and then and “inspect” how the “job” was going & provide **LOTS OF ENCOURAGEMENT** to keep on sanding! On occasion ... rarely ... he would tell me I needed a new piece of sandpaper and pull out a new sheet of **FINE** sandpaper for me.



I have no idea where (if ever) grandpa used that board in my parent’s house. At this late time in my life I have my serious suspicions. **But, let NOONE ever question the wisdom of grandpa Fechter.** He was truly wise beyond his years! I don’t know about all of you, but every time I recall this memory I just have to smile and chuckle to myself. Yes ... I do love my grandma and my grandpa.

Dad, Grampa, & The House

Building the house on Passolt Street has many memories. I think Larry may have been too young to appreciate all of the stuff that I got to experience at that 3-6-year-old time period. Here is a short potpourri of some of my memories.

First up is the “bathroom window” on the north side of our house. Understand that the house on Passolt Street is built with concrete blocks on all of the interior and exterior walls with a 2” insulation air space and brick wall exterior on all exterior walls. There are no wood stud interior walls. All are concrete block plastered over. The “main” bathroom is at the north end near all of the three bedrooms. In that bathroom, behind the bathtub next to the north wall, is a large “block window” These blocks are about six inches square with a “rippled” surface on two sides.



One-day grandpa started laying in these blocks. They are placed very much like bricks with mortar troweled in on top, bottom and both sides, leaving two sides of the block (inside and outside) clear and exposed. Late in that afternoon my dad showed up after he got out of work to help grandpa on the house. This was the typical day and they both worked on it together on Saturdays. Grandpa took Sundays off ... it was his and grandma’s day for church and for grandma to prepare a special Sunday meal.

Dad walked around to where grandpa (and I, of course) were working on the bathroom window. Grandpa had about two thirds of the six-foot by six-foot window mortared in. Dad took one look and told

grandpa that he was making a mistake! Grandpa ... pipe in mouth ... grumbled somewhat like “what do you mean ... looks good!”. A somewhat heated discussion ensued as the two of them discussed the issue. Seems like the blocks were very specific in the “orientation” that they had to be laid. Looked OK to grandpa laying them from inside the house. But, when dad took grandpa outside to look IN to the house grandpa had to concede he MIGHT have made a minor error. You see, from one side you can see through the blocks (a little bit ... not like a clear window) and from the other they appear opaque just letting light penetrate inside. If the blocks had remained as grandpa was originally laying them anyone taking a bath or shower inside the house would be (semi-) visible by anyone looking in from the outside!!!!!! Oh, boy ... did grandpa fuss and grumble. But the two of them dismantled the entire blocks grandpa had laid and began to put them in so that the window was opaque to anyone looking in from the outside! Grandpa (and I) finished the window the next day.



... if nothing else ... a perfectionist. And he was not about to be associated with a brick wall that was not absolutely level. After a (short) discussion dad and grandpa tore the entire wall down to grandpa’s first layer of bricks and dad was tutored in how to lay bricks straight and level.

While dad may have won the day with the bathroom windows, grandpa won the day when laying bricks on the back side of the garage! Typically, grandpa “got dad started” on one job and then went off to work on another. One Saturday when all three of us were at the house grandpa laid the bottom layer of bricks for the back of the garage. He told dad to just keep going up layer by layer. Off went grandpa, and dad kept working. Dad had completed about six-eight layers of brick ... waist high or so ... when grandpa came back to “inspect” the job. “What the @\$!@#\$ are you doing here?” he queried. Grandpa grabbed his level and proceeded show dad that the bricks sort of had a low amplitude Sine wave² across the length of the wall. Now grandpa was

The wall was completed of course. But, dad learned a lot from grandpa. And while grandpa often had ... shall we say ... somewhat “colorful” language, he was a pussy cat at heart and my dad and grandpa actually worked quite well together over the year or more that the house was being build. I know that my dad mentioned often how much he enjoyed building the house with grandpa. Both of my parents had great pride in their house. As it turned out both lived in that house for their entire lives. And it is still in the family.

A couple of other interesting short facts about the house:

- Later, uncle Ernie and aunt Betty also had a house build that grandpa helped build. It was designed off the basic floor plan of the Passolt Street house. It too is concrete block and brick. And it too has the exact opaque block window in the north side of the house in the main bathroom. Uncle Ernie and aunt Betty did build their house just a bit bigger than the Passolt Street with a few modifications in it. The utility room was larger and part of a “breezeway” design. And the bedrooms were expanded out to the west more than the Passolt Street house. I can’t remember, Chris & Gretchen will remember, but I think they had four bedrooms instead of three like the Passolt Street house. But, looking at the two houses from the outside they look amazingly similar. Uncle Ernie & aunt Betty’s house is on the corner of Hemmeter and Weiss.

² Thinking back this is probably where I got my first “lesson” and interest in ultimately studying math and engineering ... you have to know your Sine and Cosine and Tangents you understand!!! ☺ Important if you ever need to build a house with your grandpa!

- When the Passolt Street house was built (1949-1951) there was still a severe shortage of commercial building equipment that resulted from the end of WWII. Things were still getting back on a post-war commercial basis. I remember riding at times with just grandpa and sometimes with dad and grandpa all over the state of Michigan to pick up plumbing, heating, electrical, and other building components for the house. As a result, TO THIS DAY, many of the things in the house are unique ... different plumbing fixtures, different electrical fixtures, etc. differ from one end of the house to the other. Many have been “updated” and replaced over the seventy years of the house’s lifetime, but there are still visible artifacts from the time. One plumbing fixture from Flint, another type from Lansing, yet another from Detroit or Grand Rapids. AMAZING ... the things we forget about over time.



- The house has a built in “milk box” in the garage. We actually moved into the garage and lived in it as the rest of the house was completed. Half of the garage is heated! Nice for parking your car on cold winter days and nights! But, the milk box had a door on the outside and one on the inside. And for the first few years we lived in the Passolt Street house we had fresh dairy delivered to the garage milk door **each and every day**. Put the empty bottles in and they were replaced with full ones. Needed extra cream or cottage cheese ... just leave a note in the box and it showed up the

next day. Much more impressive was the dairy was delivered by a **HORSE DRIVEN CART** down the dirt road that was then Passolt.

- Grandpa was a professional carpenter by trade. But, he had a lot of “hand skills” and was also a

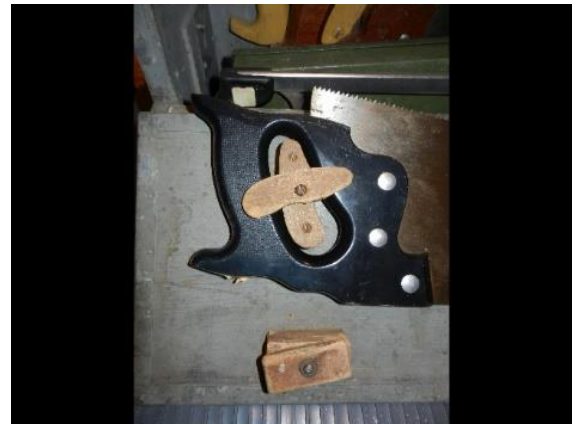


“handyman” capable of doing a large number of jobs (e.g. laying bricks/blocks, plumbing, electrical, etc.). I can still so clearly see the garage at the back of the driveway (back of their lot) on Johnson

Street and the entire west side of the garage was grandpa's "work area". Here he kept all of his tools and worked both summer and winter on many inside projects. The west side wall was lined with all of his tools hanging. Grandpa Earnest (Ernie to his friends) **HAND MADE** all the **CUSTOM WOOD tool handles** for saws, screwdrivers, hammers, etc.³ I don't believe he ever bought a tool from the store. Much of grandpa's work was cash or barter. One of his friends had a forge and made all the metal parts of his hand tools and grandpa fabricated the wood handles attached to them. What many people did not know is that **Earnest made ALL OF THE WOODEN OBJECTS FOR GRACE LUTHERN CHURCH!** This consisted of all the ornate (beautiful) wood pews, the alters, candle holders, etc. When he died the church



still owed grandpa several thousand dollars for part of his work. **But, what I also remember is that grandpa had several handmade toolboxes. Each was "customized" for different tools for different jobs. Grandpa made one of these tool boxes for my father when they built the Passolt house.** Dad kept ... and used that toolbox for not only the house, but for many years after. That toolbox is STILL in the garage at the Passolt Street home and now Larry and I have inherited it. It is a past treasure from a grandpa I deeply loved. I've scattered some pictures of this toolbox throughout this section. But, do take note of all the hand crafted wooden knobs, handmade leather carry straps, and latches on the box. All hand made by grandpa Earnest Fechter.



- In the 1950 era Passolt was a dirt road ... then destined to become a two lane tree divided boulevard. That of course never happened. But the road went about a hundred yards north of our house and dead-ended ... just as it does today. But, surrounding the entire area were vast fields, fruit (mostly apple) orchards, and farm land. The old Byer farmhouse still exists today at the corner of Passolt & State Street. At the time there were barns and orchards behind the house and across from our house. BUT, the real GEM for young boys was the slaughter house just past the end of Passolt to the north. This was a real "working" slaughter house where they processed cattle. There were high wood walls surrounding the cattle "pens" and several structures to the east. As kids we would go down and crawl up on the walls. When the pens were fairly full of cattle we would drop down on the back of a cow and ride it around the pen until we could get "back to a wall" where we could jump off. You **DIDN'T** want to jump off the cow in the middle of the pen as the cow poo was probably as deep as grandpa's cement in front of the fireplace!! So at times we would be "stuck" on the cow for 20-30 minutes before we could

³ I can remember working with grandpa in his garage when he was making these handles. I'd ask a dozen times "is it done grandpa?" He would hold it up for me and say "not yet ... we have to sand this part down a bit more to fit my hand ... and then we have to polish the wood, stain the wood, and the put a nice schlack wood finish over it before it's done!" Every tool had a specific placed traced on the west peg wall of the garage with grandpa's carpenter pencil and neatly labeled name. God help the poor soul who might "misplace" one of these tools. God's wrath was not equal to Grandpa's! Rule NO ONE: Never TOUCH any of grandpa's tools without his SPECIFIC permission!

jump off to the fence. Rarely, but on occasion, someone would come out and chase us off ... but it was a fun activity for young boys!!!

- Also in the “domain” of young boys living in the area was a “chicken farm” that resided very near where uncle Ernie and aunt Betty build their house just east of the intersection of Hemmeter and Weiss roads. It was huge. But while we occasionally would play near the chicken farm I don’t recall as may vivid “adventures” as the slaughter house provided. You have to understand that in these days we “roamed” many miles from our house. Much more so when we were just a bit older and had the mobility of riding our bikes. At times we rode several miles up Mackinaw Street, which was only populated by a few farms at the time, and had many, many little creeks and ponds and lots of deep woods to explore and play in.



- Davenport did not exist until mid-1950” s. And that too was a great experience for young boys. The giant earthmovers dug up the roadbed 4-5 feet deep ... pilling up great ramps of dirt often twenty feet high and dropping down into the depressed roadbed. Riding bikes in this was absolute heaven when the road crews quit in the late summer afternoons.
- Interesting, you might wonder WHY Davenport takes a short bend to the north going westbound just east of Bay Road. As the state highway department was buying up the right-of-way for Davenport there were many residents who did not want to move and have their house bulldozed down. When they got to my parent’s house on Passolt they told my mom and dad to just go look for another property anywhere in the county and the state would “move” our house to the new location as they had been doing for other houses as the road progressed westbound to Passolt. OH... BUT A PROBLEM. Dad told the people responsible for buying and moving the houses that this house COULD NOT BE MOVED. “Oh, we can move any house” was the reply. But, when the state engineers came to inspect the house they were appalled to learn that there was 2 ½ to 3 feet of solid concrete under the house and that the concrete was interwoven with copper pipe to provide “radiant heat” to the house by circulating hot water through those copper pipes. So, now you know why Davenport had to be moved one whole house north to avoid this house. Mom and dad owned three lots and had built in the middle lot. So they sold the northern lot to the state for Davenport. They had to go back and purchase all the lots east of the Passolt Street house up to where the roadbed was already started coming off the Saginaw River.



- Perhaps one of THE MOST memorable incidents that occurred while growing up in the Passolt Street house was prior to Davenport's existence. As I mentioned previously, the area around the house was sparsely populated with only a few new houses and neighborhoods. Most of the area was open field and orchard trees⁴. Growing up there were perhaps seven or eight young boys close in age and even fewer young girls. What did young boys like to play at that time? Why ARMY of course (don't forget WWII had only shortly ended and we were involved in the Korean war in the early 50's). So, one day the two "generals" (one of which was myself of course!!!!) ordered all the privates and NCO's (Larry et al) to strip off their shirts and "sneak" up on the enemy through the grass and weeds. It was summer time and there were LOTS of things growing in the weeds at this time ... just one of which happened to be poison ivy! The generals didn't crawl ... but were only down on hands and knees (everyone was wearing shorts). The "grunts" slithered along on their belly and back. Needless to say the entire neighborhood was COVERED in calamine lotion for the next week or so! That thick pink cream that dried like a crust. Bedding and clothes had to be changed and washed at least once a day and clothes sometimes two or three times a day. Mothers throughout the neighborhood were NOT HAPPY CAMPERS to say the least! Aaaaahhhh ... YES ... the generals who "led" had only mild cases of poison ivy ... but most of the kids in the neighborhood had pretty severe cases. My only excuse to this date is that we won the war!!!!!! 😊
- In retrospect I now wish they had sold the house and moved. Davenport is a nuisance in many ways. BUT, I do understand their emotional attachment to a house that was built by dad and grandpa and with all the love of labor and toil that they put into this house. It certainly provided me many great memories of my youth while growing up there.

The Fechter House on Johnson Street

It may be helpful to remind all of you the basic layout of Grandma's & Grandpa's house on Johnson Street. Verbal rumor is that they built this house, but we have nothing to confirm this (yet). There were three basic layers;

- A main floor raised about four feet above ground level.
- A second story which did NOT cover the entire area of the main floor due to the roof pitch (slant). So it is smaller than the other two floors.
- A basement that covered the same area as the main floor. This basement had a FEW windows on both the East (driveway side) and West (Aunt Doe's house) sides of the house. While I am very familiar (vivid memory) of the main and upper floors, I'm only about 95% knowledgeable of the basement. Two areas of the basement (the front of the house and an area near grandma's root cellar) did NOT have any windows and were always very dark. There were few lights in the basement ... and those were just a single dim light bulb hanging from a wire. What I do remember is that these "unknown areas" were unlighted, always dark, had TONS of cobwebs, and at least a few spiders that I

⁴ Another frequent "play" task was to walk to the near-by Kroger store ... where out back they threw out all the used "orange crates". You can't imagine how many forts, tanks, cars, airplanes and other objects you can build using them!

did see and probably a ton more I didn't see. I can't imagine, that as a young boy exploring, I didn't "venture" into this unknown space. But whatever I may have "discovered" (or not) must not have left a very strong impression and I have no specific memories of what may have "resided" in these two areas. Maybe some of you will have more specific information and we can correct my drawing below.

From my memory ... and from many of the stories from above and below ... I've tried my best to **recreate sketches of each of the floors**. These drawings are presented below to give the reader a richer reading of the included stories in this document.

Let's start with the main floor and some memories. (This also includes the outside yard, drive, gardens, & grandpa garage, etc.

The kitchen at the back of the house was grandma's domain and rule! Even grandpa yielded to grandma when it came to the final word in the kitchen. There were back steps coming up to a small (covered) porch and then a screen door and regular door entering the kitchen. During the summer time the regular door was always open to just the screen door. There was no air conditioning in the house and the kitchen was heavily used for grandma's cooking and baking ... so the kitchen was warm summer and winter.

To the left as you came in was a sink under the window overlooking the driveway and key to all the wonders that came out of grandma's kitchen. She frequently stood there peeling or washing or cleaning while she could look out that window "looking for 'pa' to drive in"⁵. There were cabinets below and above the kitchen counters on both sides of the sink. This is where grandma set her projects, hot pots and pans, cookie & cake dough, etc. There is some disagreement on memory as to the location of grandma's stove and oven. I recall it to the left of the sink. For strong reasons this seems to be correct, at least for a large part of the time, but it may also have been located on the opposite wall next to what I have labeled as grandpa's chair. More on this later.

The refrigerator sat in the corner of the kitchen to the right of the sink (close to where I label the "coal chute". There was a long kitchen table that ran parallel to the kitchen counters/cabinets. And this was where you could almost always find grandma when she was not standing during the daytime.

⁵ Grandma frequently referred to and used "pa" when talking about or to grandpa. And, in like manner, grandpa frequently referred to and used "ma" when talking about or to grandma. Both terms were loaded with endearment and love when used.

FIGURE: Earnest & Clara Fechter House on Johnson St - MAIN Floor LAYOUT

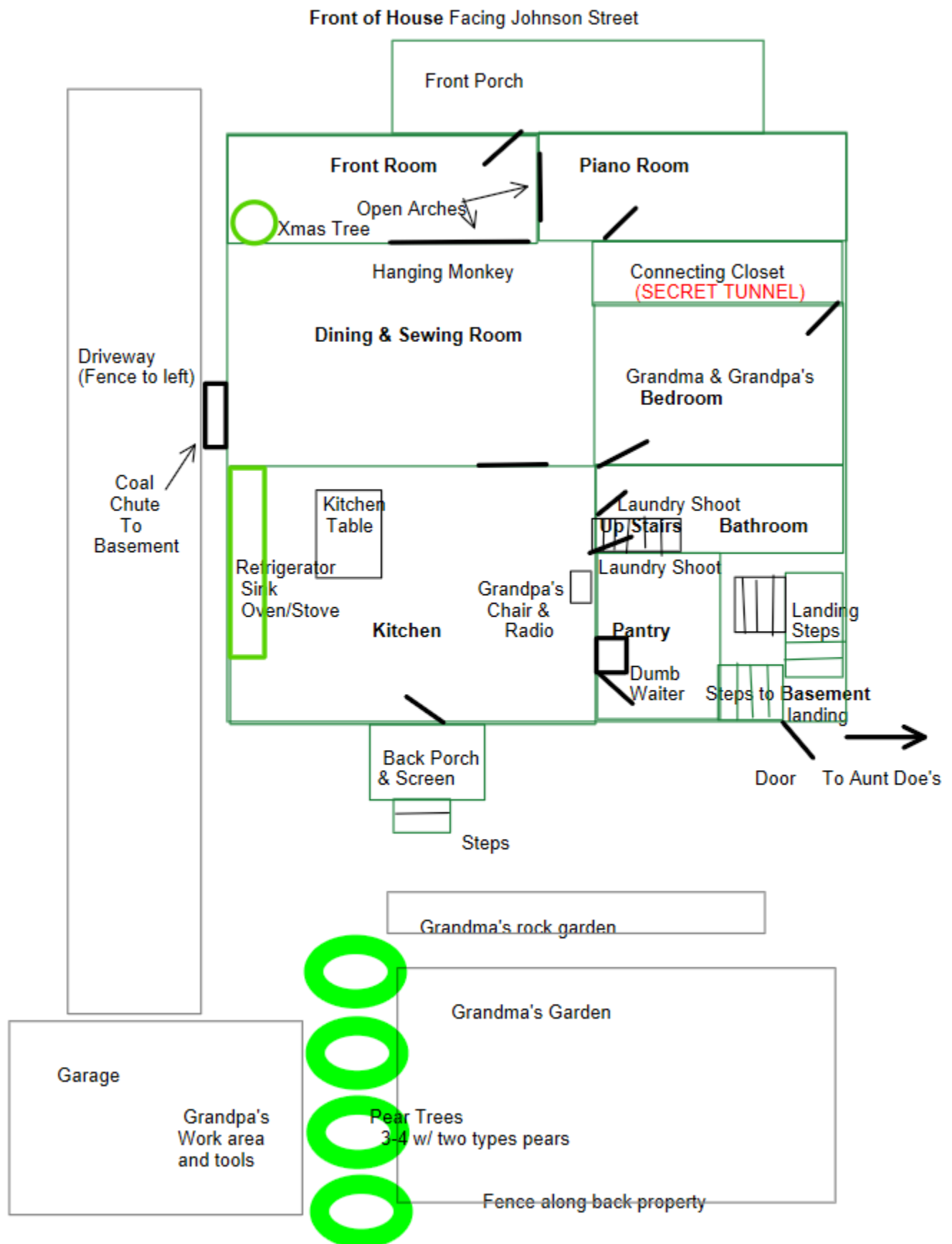


FIGURE: Earnest & Clara Fechter House on Johnson St - **UPSTAIRS LAYOUT**

Front of house facing Johnson Street

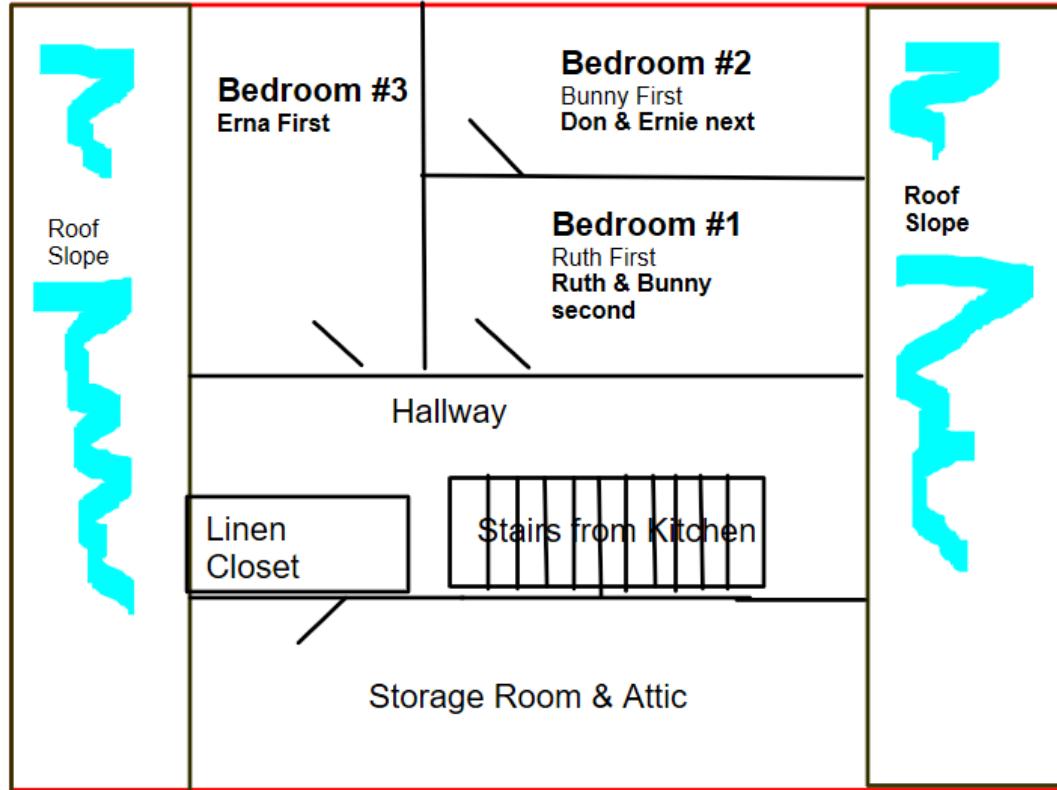
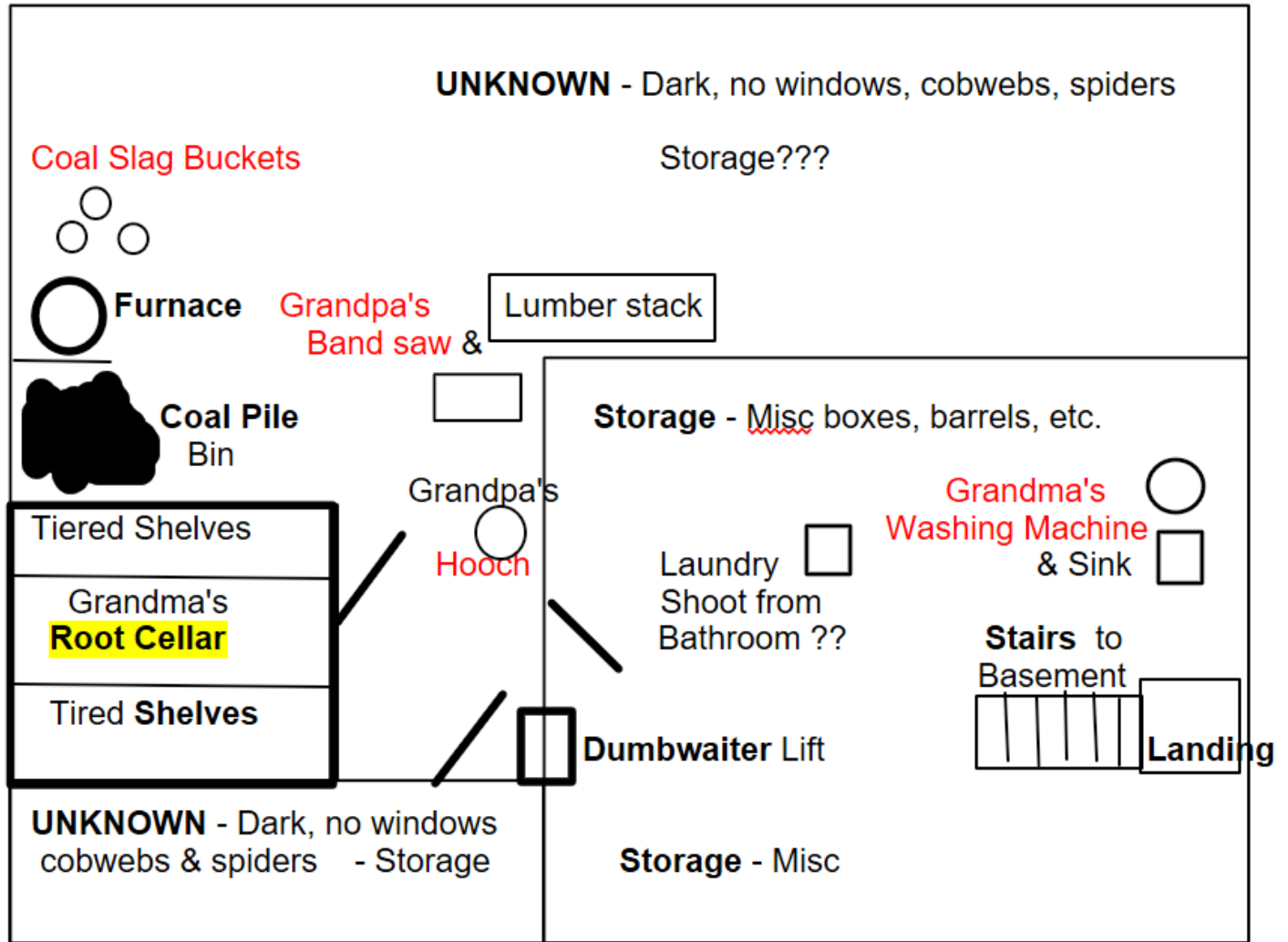


FIGURE: Earnest & Clara Fechter House on Johnson St - **BASEMENT LAYOUT**

Front of House - Facing Johnson St



All sorts of work were accomplished at the kitchen table ... rolling dough, frosting cookies & cakes, etc. And those rare times when grandma wasn't busy she would sit and "rest" at the table. Sometimes these "rests" included knitting, sorting, repairing, and a host of other tasks that always seemed to keep her fingers busy.⁶

One thing several of us recall vividly was that grandma seemed to have only two-three dresses that she wore frequently. One was a "gray" "housedress" ... pretty plain and simple ... that was her day to day work dress. This is the one I remember and picture grandma mostly wearing. And over this simple dress was the ubiquitous kitchen apron. She had several of these. They had a loop over her neck and covered her from just above the breast all the way down to her knees. It had a tie in the middle that went around her waist and tied in the back. How MANY times I saw grandma working on something in her kitchen and then "scoop up" with both hands and wash and/or wipe her hands on the bottom portion of her apron. I think she put it on early in the morning and didn't take it off until after she had finished cleaning up and completed her evening chores.

⁶ It was also at the kitchen table where Grandma would sit us down and serve us warm bread (with her own jarred strawberry or raspberry jam), warm cookies, and other goodies ... right out of the oven. Ummmmm ... I can still smell them and taste them! They were WONDERFUL.

The other dress grandma had that is so well remembered is her “formal” dress. This one too was quite simple, but was blue. This she wore for church, Easter dinner, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Only once or twice can I recall her wearing another dress and this one was also dark, but was covered with large poka-dots. I think this fell in between every day and formal events as I can picture her wearing it at some of the family picnics. Both grandma and grandpa were frugal ... something they tried hard to pass on to their children and the grandchildren. I know my mom was much the same frugal person and she certainly passed that on to me. It is important to distinguish the difference between frugal and parsimonious. Grandma and grandpa were the former and not the latter. Much of how they lived was by cash and barter. When grandpa had his heart attack, and later died, it was discovered that he had never paid U.S. Income Tax and neither had ever paid Social Security. I mentioned above how Grace Lutheran Church still owed grandpa a considerable (for the time) sum for much of the ornate woodwork and lumber he provided for the church⁷. And, there were other things that were bartered ... such as work skills, canned fruit and other foods, etc. In some of the stories below you will read about how many of the things they gave to others were all handmade and not purchased.

But, certainly, the kitchen was the heart and soul of the Fechter house. It was where most of their time was spent throughout the day and the “hub” of the social meeting place when visitors and family were there. The kitchen table was the “anchor” for this and you frequently found aunt Doe (Dorothy ... grandma Clara’s sister), their children and their grandchildren and other friends. Grandma was an exquisite baker ... and she ALWAYS had home-made cookies, cakes, pies, cinnamon rolls, fresh bread and anything else you can imagine coming out of her oven. The kitchen had a near-permanent smell of fresh baked goods ... and as boy the things that came out of grandma’s oven seemed endless and always available. Visitors were always served treats at grandma’s table any time of the day or night.

On the opposite wall from the sink was “grandpa’s chair”. There was an old (vacuum tube) radio sitting on a mounted wall shelf just about above the chair. This was the radio grandpa turned on every day he was home for lunch. When the 12pm news came on all talk and noise had to come to a cessation. EVEN grandma bowed to this rule. Grandpa would sit in this chair with his lit pipe listening to the news. When the news ended he would put up his pipe and move to the main table for lunch. Lunch discussion was always friendly with grandma asking “Dad” how his current project(s) were going and about any “relevant” news grandma may have heard from morning visitors. The same routine was repeated for the evening meal. I don’t think I can recall of a single incident when I overheard the two of them argue. If there were the typical husband-wife disagreements, they saved them from the ears of their grandson. But, regardless, I would definitely say grandma and grandpa were deeply in love with each other ... and they had a strong working relationship to make the 50+ years of their marriage work. An occasional outsider might make the mistake of interrupting the often “quiet” and “stoic” and measured words incorrectly, but for those of us who knew them their love was very evident to see and recognize. This is also true to a young grandson that lived amidst their home for well over a year. It was truly an “enjoyable” time and experience for me and always a place I greatly anticipated visiting.⁸

Off the kitchen were four interior doors. As you entered from the back porch to your right was a door that went into the pantry. In the pantry was a dumbwaiter that went down to the basement. The dumbwaiter was about 3x3x2 feet and just large enough for small grandchildren to crawl in, and play in, when you dared to dodge grandma’s watchful eye. But, I can tell you I rode that dumbwaiter up and down on more than one occasion until I got too big to squeeze in comfortably. From the pantry there was a short set of stairs leading down to a landing. On the landing was another outside door that was at ground level,

⁷ To be clear, Grandpa also did wood work for a large number of “other” churches in the Saginaw areas.

⁸ One other thing we recalled about Grandpa ... in the winter time he would come in from the cold outside and often had a small ice cycle ... completely frozen ... just below his nose where his nose dripped. With the “twinkle in his eye he could almost pass for Santa Claus!!!!!! His hat & coat off and hung he would head straight for his chair & the radio!

and lead out to the rock garden and to aunt Doe's house. Opposite the outside door was another short step down to a second landing and forming a "U" turn of the stairs down to the basement.

Back off the kitchen, adjacent to grandpa's chair, was a door to the stairway leading up to the second floor. (This door was almost always shut!) And juxtaposition to this door was the door leading into the only bathroom in the house. There was a laundry chute in the bathroom that dropped clothes directly down into a hamper on wheels in the basement. Ann Cherry and I were "speculating" on exactly where this laundry shoot was, when suddenly it came to me clearly that it was located just to the right as you entered the bathroom and cut into the wall just under the stairway leading up to the second floor.

The fourth and last doorway led into the main dining room. As you entered this room from the kitchen there was a doorway into the single main (downstairs) bedroom which was grandma's and grandpa's bedroom. The dining room was only used rarely for eating and the dining room table was left without the expansion leafs most of the year ... and only employed for large family gatherings that required indoor eating ... such as Christmas dinner, etc. Most of the year the dining room was more of a sitting room, where grandma and grandpa sat in the evening. It also acted as grandma's sewing room, knitting, and various other projects room. It had some nice handmade (by grandpa) rocking chairs and end tables. THERE WAS NO TV in their house that I can recall ... perhaps later after I left for the Air Force ... so evenings were the radio sometimes, but mostly "ma" & "pa" engaged in social conversation (sadly, now largely a lost art!). There was, I believe, also a radio in the dining room ... or perhaps it was a record player ... that was employed in the evening.

There was a large (wide) archway door from the dining room leading into the front of the house ... where there was a more formal (albeit small) living room. The living room had doorways leading out to the front porch and also another archway door into the "piano" room. Both of these rooms had chairs and tables made by grandpa. When I was living with grandma and grandpa ... and even later years ... these last two rooms (living room and piano room) were RARELY used. But, I am certain they played a much more important role when grandma and grandpa were living with, and raising, five children. Our parents were certainly looking for all of this space in their parent's house to be used with seven people living in the house.

I won't "spoil" the upcoming story, but there is one more significant part of the main floor that you need to know about and remember. There was a long closet that ran along the adjoining main bedroom and the piano room. There were doors on opposite ends of this closet that came from the bedroom on one end and the piano room on the other end. Keep this in mind for later!!!! ☺

Grandma, Grandpa, Presents & Christmas

Christmas was always a very special time at the Fechter's house. This was especially true when all of us cousins were very young! For many years ... probably from around 1945 to maybe about 1955-58 ... it was tradition for all of Grandma & Grandpa's children, and the grandchildren, to come to the Fechter house on Johnson Street for Christmas Eve celebration. There was a LOT of food. And of course cookies and treats were on trays from one end of the house to the other. This was a time when adults didn't concern themselves about "sugar highs"⁹ and kids eating "junk food". Christmas was a time for dozens and dozens and dozens of Christmas cookies and treats of all kinds. In fact, Grandma would make several dozen cookies of perhaps each of a dozen or more different types of Christmas cookies. By Christmas Eve I would estimate Grandma

⁹ Now many of you will want to disagree with me here. But, there have been almost 100+ credible medical research studies that conclusively agree that sugar does NOT give children a "sugar high". This is a long standing myth that persists to this day! What they do seem to agree upon is that the "concept" of a "sugar high" is more one of parent's "expectation" based on the excitement level and joy of children when they receive a treat e.g. it is mental misinterpretation of behavior falsely linked to digesting sugar. If you disagree do your own research ... but the general consensus of the respected medical research says no such link exists, and there is no chemical explanation for a "sugar high". All mental!

had well over 300+ cookies in circular tin cans about 12" in diameter and 3-4" high ... and she was always ready to extend an open can to any of her grandchildren every time they passed by! Got to LOVE Grandma!!!!

Of course cookies were not the only treats available. She baked all kinds of cakes, strudel, cinnamon rolls, pies and stuff I still don't know how to describe to this day. All of our parents would also bring food, and it was very much a potluck dinner. Adults would sit in the dining room and all of us kids would sit in the kitchen at the kitchen table. Dennis, being the oldest grandchild, would be allowed to sit with the adults.

Of course, in these early years, there were not as many grandchildren as in the later years. It is with great regret that I must reveal to all of you "youngest" grandchildren that us first born were privileged to ALL receive Christmas presents from ALL of our aunts and uncles at Grandma's house on Christmas Eve! As the grandchild head count increased the adults decided that as a matter of curtailing runaway Christmas present costs that each grandchild would only receive one present. As I recall I think they drew our names and each of us would get one present from one of our aunts/uncles (probably labeled "From Santa"). But, oooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhh BOY ... those early days were pretty sweet ... as we all got five or six presents on Christmas Eve at Grandma's & Grandpa's.

This is probably also a good time to talk about some of the other stuff we got from our grandparents. Grandma probably got up in the morning and started directly in on breakfast for grandpa (and the Michaels when we lived with them during the house construction). When everyone left (for work) Grandma ALWAYS seemed busy. If she wasn't baking bread, or pies, or cakes, she was busy canning, or cooking, or cleaning, or washing! I rarely saw Grandma sit down during the day except for eating with the family for meals (and she was up and down a lot even then). At times, during the spring/summer days, she would spend an hour or two outside planting vegetables, pulling weeds, or tending to her rock garden in the back yard.

It wasn't until after the evening supper was completed, and the kitchen was all cleaned up, that Grandma would move into the dining room. Often she picked up her knitting or sewing or other projects and would sit with Grandpa to finally "relax". But how many of you remember receiving a "Sock Monkey" from Grandma at one time or another. Christmas was generally a time when she would give one or more of us grandchildren a hand-made "toy" or something she had sewn (sweaters, etc.).



Grandpa too made many of us all kinds of wooden toys. How many of you "older" grandchildren remember the wooden monkey that hung from the arch way between the living room and dining room. You would pull on two strings and the monkey would slide ("crawl") all the way up to the top near the arch. When you let go of the weighted strings the little wooden monkey would "climb" his way down moving from one side to the other one "hand" at a time until it made its way all the way down to the end of the two strings ... usually taking a full minute or two in time. Those monkey toys that he made for many of us kept us entertained and enthralled for hours and hours. The little wooden arms would "click", "click", "click" as the wood arms moved one by one when the monkey was climbing down. I don't know about the rest of you that still remember this, but it was one of the coolest toys I remember. And, it was made by our Grandpa out of wood and cut on his band saw in the basement ... and a bit of string with a few metal washers attached. Very ingenious ... very simple ... and only a few pennies of material.



Clearly, this was a different time and place. Not the same as all the sophisticated toys and electronics in a Christmas of today. Don't get me wrong here. I'm a digital geek and I LOVE all the cool new technology. But, at the same time I have to tell you that these simpler times now hold a lot of fond memories ... and I look upon them as good times. It didn't take much for most of us kids to expand our time and space using our imagination. A simple toy and a strong imagination can rival today's battery operated toys in many respects. I

do like today's "educational" toys ... and I wish we could have had them too. But, I don't feel like I really missed anything significant. Christmas at Grandma's and Grandpa's house were a very special time.

Secret Tunnel

I promised you I'd share a secret that most of us "older" grandchildren knew about and kept secret from many of the "younger" grandchildren. You might wish to look back up above at the ground floor sketch of Grandma's house after you read below. It may make more sense to you.

When all of us grandchildren were at the house on Christmas Eve we had a lot of time "waiting" to open Christmas presents. Everyone had to arrive, we had to wait until after everyone ate, and then wait for all of the adults to adjourn from their talk in the dining room before moving to the living room to disperse Christmas presents. Well naturally, no healthy young grandchild is going to sit patiently!!! Daaaaaaa!!!! So we kids would often play games together. Some were at the kitchen table. But, one of the more "fun" games we played was "hide & seek" in Grandma's house.

This is where the "conspiracy" came into play. We older kids would take our time hiding while the younger ones were to "count" before looking for us. In fact, this was an ingenious intentional plot to deceive the "seekers"! One or more of us would "strategically" place ourselves in a place where when the younger kid "seekers" finished counting they would "catch" a glimpse of us making a last minute dash into either grandma's and grandpa's bedroom, or around the corner into the piano room.

This was very intentional and intended to draw the seekers in a mad dash chase to "catch" us. What they did not know is the "secret" of the "tunnel" that ran between the two ends of the closet connecting the piano room to the bedroom! In fact, even if they did open and look inside the door (on either end of the closet) ... after not finding us anywhere in the room we intentionally "drew" them to ... all they would see is a "wall" of hanging coats, clothes, and other hanging stuff from up high to nearly all the way down to the ground ... AND ... piles of shoes and shoe boxes and other miscellaneous stuff piled on the floor of the closet.

For all intent and purpose this certainly appeared (to the uninformed) as a "dead-end" ... and after just a brief time pushing aside the hanging clothes all there was to find is just the back wall of the closet. WE were nowhere to be found in the room in which we had drawn them. Confusion and frustration reigned!! (Sort of exactly what we intended ... us cruel and deceiving older grandchildren!!!! ☺)

Well, of course, as you might well expect by this time we had entered the closet, got down on hands and knees, and had pushed aside the boxes and shoes on the floor and crawled to the other end of the closet ... carefully pushing everything behind us back into what appeared to be an impenetrable wall. Clever young devils that we were the insidious plot did not end there!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The "hide and seek" game inevitably started in Gram's kitchen ... and it was here that the game started and younger kids had to count before looking for us. With them now ... unsuccessfully ... looking about in either the piano room or inside Gram's bedroom we would sneak and dash around them BACK INTO THE KITCHEN and then into the pantry (and sometimes down the stairs to the dark basement where the little kids would NEVER venture to look for us!

Of course, the adults would see us doing this. And after a sufficient time of utter confusion and frustration on the part of the "seekers" one of the adults would ask them "Did you look again in the kitchen?" Well, they would go look ... without positive results. And, again the adults would tell them "You need to look harder to find them in the kitchen.

Sometimes we could not hold our laughter and excitement ... and with great joy we would "let" them discover us. And, then again, there were times when we were just "stinkers" and hiding down at the bottom of the stairs in the basement be splitting our guts trying not to laugh out loud or make noise. It was during these times that one of the adults ... usually Uncle Don or Uncle Ernie ... and sometimes it was the boss herself (Grandma!!!) that would take them by the hand and say "Let's go look ... I'll help you"). The jig was up at this

point ... as the adults knew the secret and just exactly where we HAD to be (as we had to sneak past the little kids in front of the adults!).

What makes this story so much fun to recall is that it was played out over and over again. Many times. And the little kids would burst into squeals of excitement and laughter when we were ultimately “discovered”. And we older kids could no more easily restrain our laughter about the entire process. Looking back on this I now strongly suspect that the little kids ... my younger cousins ... probably had this figured out more than we older kids thought. And the fun they had “pretending” not to find us was really part of THEIR strategy and held just as much fun and excitement as that of our use of the “secret tunnel”. Again, some really fond memories of times we spent at grandma’s & grandpa’s house and the family times growing up.

The Deep, Dark, Mystery Basement

What remains? Well, certainly the deep and dark (and dreary) appearance of the basement yields yet a major misconception! It certainly meets the dark adjective. Deep? Grey zone ... as there were (and remain to this day) many parts of the basement that will forever provide us a mystery. Dreary? No! Not really. Not if you look at the synonyms for the word dreary (dull, boring, monotonous, tedious, lackluster, lifeless, etc.). Now why, you ask, would I then even use the word in describing the Fechter basement? Well, I think it comes down to imagination. And the imagination of an adult is most often different than that of young grandchildren!

The Laundry Room

At one’s first look at the basement ... as you step on the upper landing just before progressing down the steps to the basement floor ... it certainly would look dreary!

As you turned from the pantry and first turned to the basement you would look down and would see a fairly large room. It would be DARK as there was only one (possibly two) small windows up high on the wall to your right. If you could see out these windows (which we kids could not as they were up high on the basement wall) you would be looking at the driveway of aunt Doe’s house. These small windows allowed only a trace of faint light during the day and were dark as the dungeon pits at night (There were no lights coming from aunt Doe’s house that reached these basement windows. (Later, we will discover that there were a matching pair of windows on the opposite side of the basement looking up to the Fechter driveway ... and there were NO WINDOWS at either the front or the back of the house’s basement.

Even when you could finally reach the light switch partly down the stairs you would only have been able to turn on a very low wattage light bulb that hung near the center of the room, from a single electrical wire, emerging from the rafters of the ceiling. The walls were unpainted and unfinished cinder blocks that did little to reflect light and brighten the room.



As you stood on the landing and looked down along that wall to your right you would see (if there was sufficient light from the windows) first an old fashioned wash sink. And, just beyond that you would see one of those old fashioned washing machines with the hand rollers to ring out the washed clothes.



Somewhere near the center of this room of the basement you would also see a dirty clothes hamper made of wood frame and thick white linen cloth. This was on rollers and was strategically placed directly under the chute from the clothes laundry chute that was located in the main floor bathroom, just under the stairs ascending to the top floor. Getting dirty laundry down was an easy task.

The rafters of the basement in this room were also criss-crossed in several parallel lines with clothes-line rope. In the winter and on inclement summer days this is where grandma hung the wet clothes from the washer to dry. Normally, she used the clothes-line that was outside and located just behind the rock garden whenever the weather permitted.

I had mentioned earlier the dumbwaiter that went from basement to pantry (and perhaps to the upstairs as well ... I just can't remember it going upstairs ... as it was always closed off later after we lived with grandma and grandpa (their kids were all grown up and left the nest). It was rare for us to be allowed upstairs ... and also it was easy for us kids to ride the dumbwaiter DOWN and difficult if not impossible to ride it UP from the cramped inside!! The dumbwaiter was built into a cabinet and looked "similar" to the picture of the dumbwaiter to the right (only not nearly as tall & no shelves). I saw grandma often fold dry clothes or a basket of wet clothes and place them in the dumbwaiter and "beam them up" to the pantry. (This before Star Trek and the infamous "beam me up, Scotty" of Captain Kirk!! ☺) Grandma was clearly a woman before her time ... another reason I probably loved math and science.



I have several times said "mystery" of the basement. Try as I may (and Ann Colpean as well) there is no real memory of what resided under the stairs and behind the stairs to the back wall of the basement in this main room with the wash. I do recall some stacked boxes at various points around the room ... but nothing left much (if any) impression. So, I have labeled several parts of the basement as "unknown". All of these areas were deep dark with no overhead lights and no basement windows. Probably a lot of cobwebs as well.

The Fruit ("Root") Cellar



A doorway from the large washroom led into the other half and parts of the basement. As one went directly through this door there was a fairly large room (& door) directly across the hallway that had three or four cement tiers of shelves on both sides (left and right as you entered). This was grandma's fruit cellar. The left side was larger than the right. Unlike the images I've shown (left & right) grandma's shelves were tiered with larger (deeper) shelves on the bottom and progressively smaller as they went up. And the shelves were (I believe) made of concrete, or perhaps cinder block with heavy wood shelves. You could stand on the lower shelves to reach jars on the top shelves.



Stacked in neat row after row on these shelves were the hundreds of glass jars of canned food that grandma had so diligently worked on throughout the year. Often one would see a paper note, secured to a single jar with a rubberband, that would define the contents of that section of a shelf. Pears, peaches, tomatoes, pickles, ... you name it and you could probably find it down there.



On the lower shelves and on the floor were the larger round “wicker” baskets that held apples, pears, corn, and other larger non-canned fruits. Each fall the entire family would gather at grandma’s and grandpa’s house to pick the pear trees. There were at least two, and possibly 3-4, pear trees that were just to the west of the garage and between the garage and grandma’s garden. Also here, just alongside of the sidewalk that ran from the back porch along the side of the driveway to the garage, and nestled under the first pear tree was a really neat wood swing (built by grandpa) that would easily sit 3-4 people. What I remember, is the laughter of all the adults as dad, Uncle Don, Uncle Ernie, and Uncle Dan would take long bamboo poles ... perhaps twenty feet long or more ... and swing at the pears in the upper regions of the trees ... much like children thrashing away at a piñata trying to knock the candy down. Of course, the women would be jibing and laughing at their husbands as at times they seemed unable to knock down a single pear ... and at other times would run from a bombardment of a dozen or so pears all at once to the ground. Us kids? Oh, yes. We had a part too. Almost before the pears hit the ground there was a scramble of feet as we all raced to pick up the pears from the ground and throw them into the many wicker baskets that lined the sidewalk and the driveway. Through all of this activity and frolic the ever stoic and unflappable Grandpa Earnest stood in the driveway ... avoiding falling pears, thrashing bamboo poles, running grandchildren, and giggling females ... and puffed steadily on his pipe. But, if you looked at him when he didn’t know you were watching you could see the upturned smile on his face and the twinkle of his eyes. He loved it as much as his grandkids. Grandma sat with the rest of the women ... laughing just as hard as the rest ... only occasionally to rise and give “directions” as to the handling of the accumulating pile of pears and baskets. It was a time of the year that was repeated annually ... and there was NEVER a time when I did not find it absolutely fun and entertaining as a grandchild allowed to participate.

Many of these pears, and other canned goods, found their way to Aunt Doe and other family, and friends. Most would be “bartered” with others in exchange for something else. Each of their kids would take some home as well. Like most things in that era just about everything was fully used and not discarded. Oh, the dumbwaiter was frequently used to lift all kinds of stuff up/down to the root cellar ... including baskets of pears.

The Furnace and The Coal Chute



If you turned to the right after entering from the laundry room door you headed down into a long “L” shaped part of the basement. Juxtaposition to the root cellar wall was the “coal pile”. The furnace sat to the right of the coal pile and was separated from it by a short low block wall (which acted to keep the coal neatly in place and not all over that part of the basement). Coal was purchased ... and a truck would bring it backing into the driveway and then “dropping” it down a coal chute that deposited the coal into the basement coal pile.

Yes! Someone (and you guessed correctly ... it was grandpa) had to periodically go down to the basement and shovel a couple of scoops of coal into the furnace when it was needed. Typically, this would have to be done about every couple of hours. I can never recall grandma every stoking the coal furnace. I do recall grandpa stoking it just before he left for work in the morning, again at noon, and then once or twice in the evening when it was winter and cold conditions. What about poor grandma when grandpa was gone? No worry ... that oven stove was in full swing and with the doors to the kitchen closed



grandma had a nice toasty warm place to work until grandpa came home! Her domain was never cold or chilly ... as were some of the other rooms in the house in the winter. Remember I said FRUGAL describing our grandparents ... and in this case they almost certainly did not have the funds to burn coal extensively to heat the entire house. Grandma's shawl and a lap blanket was a common site when they sat in the dining room on winter evenings. I think Grandpa's pipe kept him warm!! ☺



Interestingly, the coal that was available was for heating Michigan homes at the time was a low-medium grade coal in terms of energy per pound. I do vividly recall that when the furnace burned down low and needed stoking it produced large amounts of sulfur that permeated the entire first floor of the house. Pheww! It smelled terrible. My guess is that they used a low grade coal consisting largely (or at least partially) of Lignite (brown coal) which typically has a much higher sulfur content. See ... now you are getting your daily geology lesson!

You might also recall that the furnace had to be periodically "cleaned out". This consisted of letting the coal fire burn out and then shoveling out all the coal "slag" accumulated inside the furnace from the burned coal. This got shoveled into large buckets and had to be eventually carried outside. Grandpa did use some of this to dump on the driveway which helped fill in potholes and hold the gravel drive together. (Remember ... EVERYTHING was used!!)

The Band Saw & Grandpa's HOOCH

Opposite the furnace and near the inside basement wall Grandpa had a large band saw. And around the "L" shaped corner he had a substantial lumber pile. The floor was deep with sawdust around the saw. There was a light hanging from the ubiquitous electrical wire over the saw. (There was also one ... dimmer ... near the coal pile and doorway to the root cellar, and a similar one inside the root cellar room.)

It was here that Grandpa did a lot of his more "artistic" work on the band saw. I can remember him cutting out a flat wooden rifle and pistol gun for myself and Larry (and probably several of the other grandchildren) to play "army" or "cowboys & Indians" with outside. Grandma didn't want us running around inside the house with these toys. It was also here that he cut out the



climbing monkey toys. He also cut out a lot of custom Christmas decorations from wood on this saw as well. Funny how I can remember all the "fun" stuff ... but not any of the "real work" Grandpa performed for his customers.

Further back around the "L" corner of the basement was yet another of those "mystery areas" of the basement. No one seems to remember much about what might have been back there along the front of the house basement. I do know it was pitch black! And, I can't recall going back there.

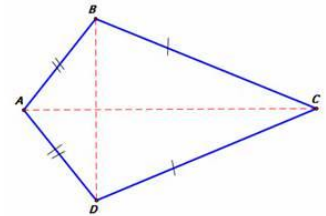
In a similar manner memory fails me on what resided between the root cellar and the back wall of the basement. I think it was a separate area with a door entry. But, it was also dark and I just don't ever remember being in that area in spite of the hundreds of times I was in the basement. If anyone remembers I'd love to know. Mysteries prevail! ☺

Perhaps the most "unusual" thing that resided in the basement was a small wooden platform with a small wooden barrel sitting on it. Actually, I had completely forgotten about this until my brother Larry and I were talking about our memories of the basement one day. Following the discussion, I can see why it was a stronger memory for Larry than for me. Larry tells the story about how one day when he was a bit older he was "poking" around and exploring the basement. He said he lifted the lid of the barrel and was revolted by the pungent odor emanating from within. He took a closer look and remembers seeing corn and potatoes floating in

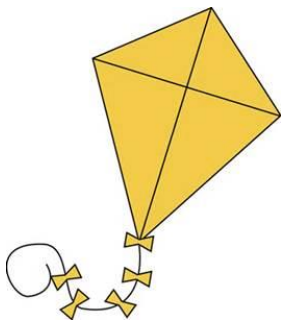
a fermented liquid. Hummmmm ... **Grandpa's Hooch!!!** Now, I don't recall Grandpa drinking anything but bottled beer. That said, in those days the adults kept their secrets about hooch. So maybe he was making beer and not liquor ... and maybe he was re-filling some of those beer bottles with something a bit stronger! If so it was a well-kept secret. Then again, maybe he was "brewing" some hooch to sell/trade with, or for someone else. What I can verify is that I too definitely remember the presence of that wooden platform and barrel. I just don't think I ever looked in it ... or maybe I did and it was empty at the time. One thing for sure ... I believe my brother, Larry, after hearing him tell the story of his discovery!!!! And a grand old laugh it was listening to the telling. You should ask him to tell it to you some time. Very colorful!! ☺

The Pear Trees & Uncle Don's Kite

There was one very memorable year when we picked the pear trees that I recall as being particularly unforgettable. That was the year that after we had picked pears Uncle Don, surrounded by all the grandchildren, made a huge kite to fly. It seemed to take forever ... as all of us were so anxious to see it fly. It was a huge kite compared to many at the time ... something on the order of 4-5 feet tall and 3+ feet across.



We started with a trip to the basement with Grandpa, and rummaged around the wood pile. Grampa fired up the band saw and cut two long thin strips of wood to provide cross supports. Grandpa and Uncle Don went back upstairs with all the kids excitably trudging along behind with great expectations and excitement. Uncle Don went to the back porch steps and sat down surrounded by all of us kids. Grandma came out of the house with a spool of string she had somehow produced or found inside, along with an old rag cloth that eventually was ripped into strips, tied together, and became the "tail" of the kite. The first step was to firmly tie the cross bars with some of string. Next, Grandma again came out of the kitchen and had a large folding of old newspaper and some tape. Uncle Don got down on hands and knees on the sidewalk and "smoothed" out the newspaper. He was particular about which pages seemed to be acceptable ... picking some and rejecting others. There was a howl of questions "Why can't we use this one?" and handing him another page "Uncle Don, will this one work?", etc. I'd like to tell you it was truly a "group project", but Uncle Don did all the work ... and he gets A++ for his patience in answering all of our questions. (Many of the answers were "Just wait a minute and you'll see why!")



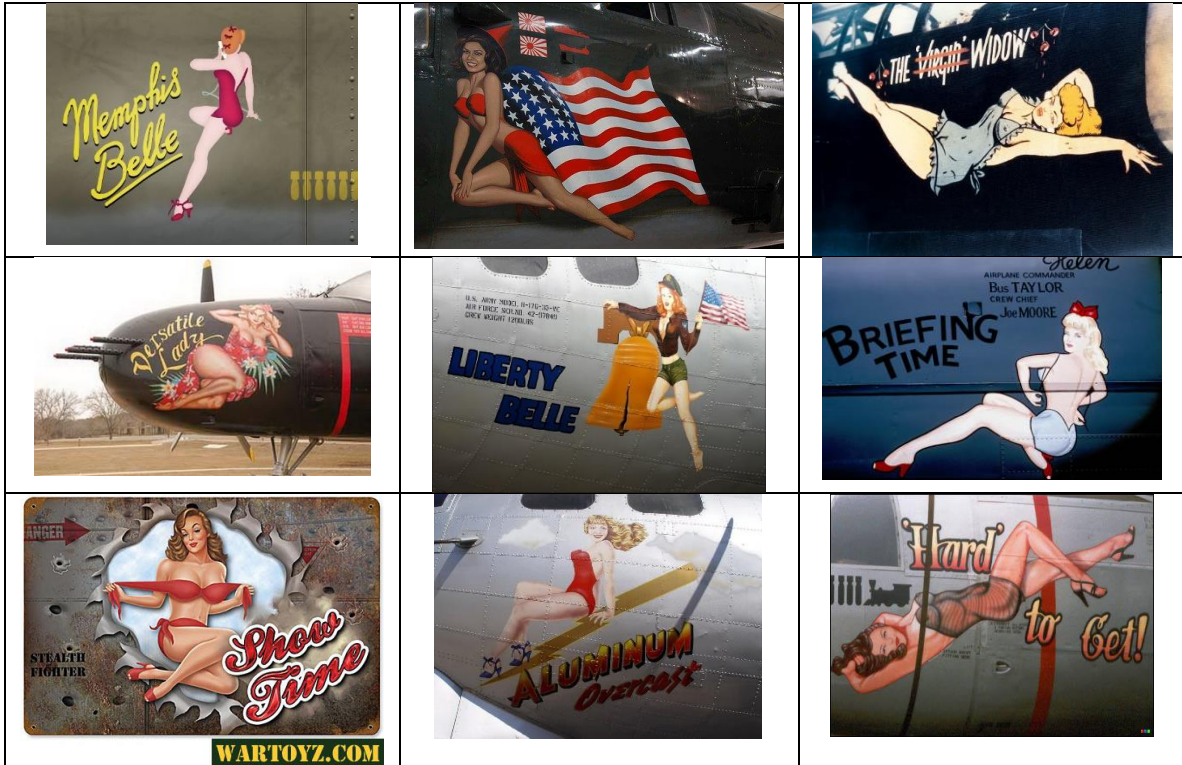
Uncle Don was meticulous in building the kite. I remember him taking great care in making sure the cross bars were tight and straight and that all the pages were taped nice and tight and smooth edges. He folded the large single sheet of taped newspapers over along the edges and taped them to the crossbars. He took great care to make sure the edges were tight with a bit of "flex" in the center part of the kite to better "catch" the wind. He explained to all of us what he is doing and why as he worked. We all looked on fascinated, but urged him to "Hurry up, Uncle Don"!

Just when we thought the kite was done Uncle Don produced a box of colored chalk. I can see them today ... they were much like the large diameter sidewalk chalk that kids use to draw on sidewalks and driveways. Red, blue, yellow, purple, orange & green were probably the only basic colors he had in the box to work with. "Now what, Uncle Don?" was the cry of his audience. For the next several minutes we watched as Uncle Don began to draw on the newspaper of the kite.

When I told some of Uncle Don's kids this short story of this kite they were amazed that their father was so artistic. But, it is true! And, not just a mediocre one, but a pretty darn good one at that!

At this point in the story I have to digress and explain about a couple of facts. World War II had only shortly ended a few years back. My dad, Uncle Don, Uncle Bud, and several others in the family had "served" in the U.S. Army during that time. We have both pictures of them in uniform and actual army "official" papers

for many of them in the current genealogy. The other thing you need to recall is that in the Army Air Core (the precursor of the current United States Air Force) the men serving had a tradition of painting “nose art” on various parts of the aircraft they served (the most prominent place was on the nose of the airplane ... hence the name). For those of you that have never this type of art I did some “research” and present a few examples in the table below. It is important because of what I’m about to tell you regarding Uncle Don’s “nose art” !!!!!
 ☺



As you can see from these examples the men ... stationed overseas and far from their loved ones ... wife’s and sweethearts ... it is not difficult to understand their ... aaaaahhhh ... PREOCCUPATION (?) ... thinking about the women they had left behind and were anxious to return to. So, the overwhelming volume of “nose art” had images of “sexy” women painted on them. Not nudes, you understand, but scantily clad for sure.

Back to Uncle Don’s kite art. If I close my eyes I can see the BEAUTIFUL young woman ... sketched in chalk ... on the newspaper of that kite. Further, it looked very much like the woman shown above in the top left most image and the bottom center image. WOW! Was that a surprise ... and now we knew why Uncle Don was so meticulous in selecting certain pages of the newspaper. He didn’t want any with pictures on the paper to interfere with his art work ... just pages with a bit of black ink words on the mostly white paper!!!

Well ... I can tell you this made quite an impression on the women when the kids were all hollering “Come see Uncle Don’s picture!” There were a lot of “oooohhhs” and “aaaaahhhhs” ... and I’m sure a lot of teasing of Uncle Don that went way over the head of 3-6 year old kids at the time!! ☺

The kite was quickly finished. Uncle Don added a cloth “tail” to the kite and made a string “bridle” to attach to the long string line from kite to the person flying the kite. Grandpa, meanwhile, had gone back to the basement and had cut out a really neat wooden “spool” to wind the string around with a handle cut in to more easily hold. We all walked over to the Houghton School playground just across the street from the Johnston

Street house. The kite was launched and boy did it fly well! There was lots of laughter and great fun as Uncle Don let each of us take control of the kite as he helped us fly it.

It was truly a wonderful memory ... one that will stick with me forever. Thanks, Uncle Don!!

Grandma & Mike – The Screen Door

The next two stories are truly my favorite ... and I've shared them with several of my close friends over the years. Each telling brings a smile to my face and brings back fond memories of grandma and grandpa.

First, I should tell you about grandpa! Grandpa was great with us grandkids. He was typically very patient ... at least as long as you obeyed the few inviolate rules he laid down. You've heard a few already ... like "You never touch Grandpa's tools unless I'm there and tell you it's OK." Or "QUIET ... time for the news!" etc. His rules were few ... but you did know when he meant business and you did know when Grandpa was giving you a hard rule.

But, Grandpa was also a tease with the grandkids. And, the one classic time is when he would grab one of us as we were running by him ... or otherwise being "unruly" ... typically inside the house. He'd grab you and pull you in close to him with an arm. Then he'd raise his right hand and ask "Do you want **4 ½** ... and close his hand into a fist. Then raise his left hand and continue with "or **5**" and then make a fist out of that hand. Well ... all of us knew full what this meant. You see, as a carpenter, Grandpa was largely "old school". A true tradesman who worked his wood by hand to perfection. This meant that almost all of Grandpa's tools were HAND TOOLS. I think he may have had an electric drill or two ... but he also had a large number of hand drills. I have told you about the band saw in the basement. But, Grandpa was MUCH more comfortable and competent with a variety of hand saws ... a specific hand saw for every unique task.

When Grandpa purchased a **Skill saw** (an electric hand saw) a lot of people were a bit worried, because in those days there was no OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). Grandpa didn't wear safety glasses ... and he was a bit careless with where he put his hands when working ... being so accustomed to the much safer hand saws he was so familiar with. Sure enough ... one day on the job Grandpa was using the new electric Skill saw and it buzzed right through the wood and kept on going. Right across Grandpa's right hand where it cut the right index finger off at the inside knuckle!

Now it was not uncommon to hear a ... aaaaahh ... **occasional** ... utterance of "God Dammit" uttered from Grandpa. Well, maybe it was a bit more common than occasional! I'm sure there was some good old German "blue" language expressed while he calmly wrapped up his hand and drove home. There Grandma (and I think someone else, maybe my mom who was a nurse) put him right back in the car and drove him to the emergency room. They could not repair the finger. All they could do is clean it up, disinfect it, and stitch it up nicely. From that day on Grandpa had only **4 ½ fingers** on one hand and a **full five** on the other ... hence the expression so fondly used with his grandchildren ... "**4 ½ or 5**"!!!

When you heard Grandpa use this expression there was a bit of a good natured tease in the threat ... but, also a firm warning that you better dial it down a bit and be better behaved. Most of the time I'd smile at Grandpa's expression of 4 ½ or 5 when it was being delivered ... and then follow it with a hug with both arms around his neck with an "OK, Grandpa". Funny how something as simple as this can be both a warning to behave and a tender act of love. As far as I know Grandpa NEVER used either 4 ½ OR 5 on anyone. If you were really bad there were other repercussions that were much more immediate ... and effective.

Now that is a perfect lead in to my favorite story of Grandma.

Picture a nice warm summer day outside ... sun shining blue sky. And a **VERY BORED** young man who decided that instead of playing outside it would be MORE FUN to go into the kitchen and “**play**” with **Grandma**. Into the kitchen this young man went ... only to find Grandma VERY BUSY working over by the sink and the stove ... probably getting something ready for lunch or dinner. This was one of the days that I did not go to “work” with Grandpa. This was not uncommon as he typically had more than one job going at any time. Some of these jobs were not appropriate for a 4-5 year old boy. That meant that I got to spend almost equal time during the days my parents were working with both grandma and grandpa. That day was just a “Grandma Day”.

Understand, there were times when Grandma was doing tasks like working in the garden or folding or hanging wash when she was content to have a grandson follow her around and have a running conversation. These “talks” mostly consisting of “Grandma, why do you ...”, or “Grandma do you always ...”, or “Grandma, how does that work ...”, or “Grandma, what is that thing ...”, or “Grandma, do you always have to ...”, etc. You know ... those important things in life for a 4-5 year old! ☺

And, then there were those days when Grandma was very busy ... or perhaps had run out of explanations for “How”, “Why”, “Does”, etc. ... and wanted or needed to concentrate on her work. At these times she would typically say “Mike, why don’t you go out and play while Grandma finishes her work?” It was not so much a question as an **Imperative** sentence ... “Mike, GO OUTSIDE and leave Grandma alone”. This was typically “softened” with a follow up “I’ll come call for you when I have lunch/snack ready for us”. Grandma ... like Grandpa ... was firm at times ... but a softie inside.

On this particular day ... for some reason ... I decided it was more fun to stay inside and tease Grandma! And, like many (most?) young boys it was easy to see that I was being “effective” in agitating Grandma and that kind of egged me on to push a little bit more.

There were a couple of “escalating” warnings by Grandma letting me know in no uncertain terms that she was busy and didn’t need me distracting her. The Imperative sentences became SHORTER and MORE DIRECT in wording. And, I ignored them!!!!!! ☹

Well ... to my own demise ... I was successful in getting Grandma to reach the end of her rope. That was clearly obvious when she set aside her work, washed her hands in the sink, reached down and dried her hands on her apron, and then slowly turned and looked at me with both hands on her hips!!!!

What happened next goes down in the all-time annals of Greatest Every Grandmothers.

As I pushed the envelope just a bit too far and kept on teasing her, Grandma reached out to grab my arm. I quickly jumped back making her miss ... erroneously thinking this was just part of the neat game we were playing. She took a few step towards me and again I moved back and began chanting “NA, NA ... GRANDMA CAN’T CATCH ME!” Another step by Grandma and with another “NA, NA” chant I spun and dashed for the screen door, ducked through it to the back porch and slammed the screen door shut.

I’m not sure exactly where I went wrong ... but CLEARLY when I stood with my nose to the screen door and chanted several times again “NA, NA ... GRANDMA CAN’T CATCH ME! ... NA, NA ... GRANDMA CAN’T CATCH ME!” that may have been the cross over point.

Grandma slowly moved across the kitchen floor to the other side of the screen door. What happened next was SO FAST and QUICK that I was literally frozen in time and place. **WHAM** ... Grandma slammed her fist right through the screen door and had a death grip on my arm. Slow and methodical she opened the screen door with her other hand, stepped around the door and grabbed me with her free hand before letting go with the other and retrieving her hand back through the hole in the screen door.



It was an interesting (and VERY SILENT) trip across the kitchen over to Grandpa's chair by the radio ... helped along by a few firm swats to my behind by Grandma. (Now none of these hits on the butt were anywhere near enough to hurt me physically ... but man-o-man did they damage my pride and leave me in disbelief that my **Grandma COULD CATCH ME** ... and realize that when I sat down in that chair and looked at the 4" hole in the screen door that **she was a lot smarter than I was**. There was a stern "Young Man ... you just sit RIGHT THERE and don't you MOVE until I tell you so. And, while you sit there you just be quiet as a church mouse ... NOT ONE WORD! Understand?"



The story doesn't end here. I had to sit until Grandpa came home about an hour (or less) later ... although it seemed more like a week, or even a month, later at the time! As Grandpa came into the kitchen he had his hat on, pipe in his mouth, and thermos in hand. He took many 4-5 steps into the kitchen and slowly turned around and looked at the screen door. "What happened to the screen door?" ... in calm spoken questioning. Grandma: "Ask your grandson!" Grandpa turned to me and repeated the same question. "Wellllll ... I was misbehaving and Grandma grabbed me right through the screen door with her hand" I replied.

Grandpa said nothing. He set his lunch pail down on the table and with hat still on and pipe still in his mouth he turned and walked back out the door and down the walk to his garage. Moments later he reappeared on the back porch with some screen patching and small wire and a pair of large scissors. He cut some of the damaged screen out with the scissors. He measured and cut a large square patch from the screen patching piece and proceeded to use the fine wire to "stitch" the patch over the part of the screen door that required repair. It took him a good fifteen minutes or so and the patch looked very nice. Only the patching material was much newer and shiner than the old screen material on the door. The patch was incredibly obvious and glaring.

Grandpa never said a word to me about the incident ... convinced that Grandma had everything in tow ... and the incident and the punishment was defined and over. A short time later she told me I could get up out of the chair and "go help Grandpa out in the garage until dinner" (Grandma always referred to "lunch" as "dinner" and the evening meal as "supper").

Numerous times after that I heard Grandma chide other grandchildren "**You better listen to Grandma and behave. Do you see that patch over there on the screen door? Just go and ask your cousin Mike what happens when you disobey Grandma!!!**"

Grandma still loved me ... and by dinner the event was over and done. But, everyone ... mostly me ... understood that Grandma had very effectively made her point! ☺ I think Grandpa just quietly smiled when I wasn't looking!!!

Grandma & Mike – The Egg Story

Yet another of my favorite stories about Grandma and the misbehaving young grandchild is the one about the egg.

Honestly, I don't really know which of these two stories came first in time ... the egg story or the screen door story. But, none the less, you'll see several parallels in the two stories.

Once again, the story takes place in Grandma's kitchen and over by the sink and stove. Not sure if it was summer or winter ... but it was another day that I was spending with my Grandma inside. On this day she was baking (something ... something GOOD) ... and those were ALWAYS good days to stick close to Grandma and know you'd get something warm and good right out of the oven when it was done. Sometimes



you'd get to lick the bowls clean with a spatula (both before for cake mix and then after when she used frosting to finish a cake or strudel or cinnamon rolls, etc.). Another "treat" was to stick close to Grandma and be first to ask to "lick" the egg beater clean. This was such a day and such a time.

Whatever it was she was baking that day it started in a large bowl and Grandma was cracking eggs with her hand on the side of the bowl and dropping the egg shells in the sink. I have absolutely NO IDEA what it was that I was doing to annoy Grandma that day. I was standing right at her right side peeking up over the counter to watch what she was doing and what I might be getting as a treat from her efforts. Maybe I was too close and in her way. Or, maybe I was just being a general nuisance in asking too many questions AND being too close and Infuriating. Whatever it was I was definitely irritating to Grams.

Once again there were two of three escalating verbal warning to back off a little bit ... which I somehow didn't catch ... or more likely just ignored.



Next thing I knew Grandma took an egg in her right hand and just smashed it down right on the top of my head! Speechless and frozen ... unable to move ... I just stood there in disbelief as raw egg rolled down my face and the back of my neck. "PLOP" as a large piece of yellow egg yolk slid off my shirt and hit the kitchen floor.

Grandma ... calm as can be ... reached around me and turned on the water in the sink, washed off her hands, picked up her kitchen sink cloth, soaked it in the water, squeezed it out, and handed it to me and said "Now wipe up the egg on you and then clean up the kitchen floor while I finish my baking". Calm ... collected ... no anger ... no belligerence ... just a simple command and a dismissal to do your task and please be a better listener!!!!!!!!!!

When I finished cleaning myself and the floor she told me to go and put on some clean clothes. Again, not a word was spoken of the egg on the head again ... and if she told Grandpa or my parents about it I never knew. I'd like to think it was just one of those private things between the two of us ... one that helped shape me into a better person. Nothing else needed to be said.

And that was Grandma! Full of love ... and more patience than anyone I know ... but also someone to be taken seriously.

New Year's Eve with Uncle Don & Aunt Donna

Another periodic family gathering that took place for several years was to meet at Uncle Don's and Aunt Donna's house in Carrollton, Michigan (a suburb of Saginaw) on New Year's Eve. Like all of the family events it was a potluck type of arrangement and there was an abundance of good food. The evening always started early in the evening. It was a large house ... to accommodate their large family. This translates into a lot of rooms for the kids to run through playing. The grandkids collected in one group and the adults in another.

One item that persists in my memory is the "discovery" of peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwiches at their house! It was the first time I had experienced them ... but, were apparently a favorite of Uncle Don's & Aunt Donna's kids. Over the years I've had hundreds of such sandwiches ... and with each and every one I think back to the New Year's Eve parties and my aunt & uncle and their kids that introduced me to them. Haven't tried this ... you should ... they're good!

Another thing I can vividly recall is waiting for Midnight ... when we would all venture out into the frigid early morning January weather ... and having Uncle Don shoot off his shotgun several times into the air. You could hear many other people around the neighborhood doing the same thing.

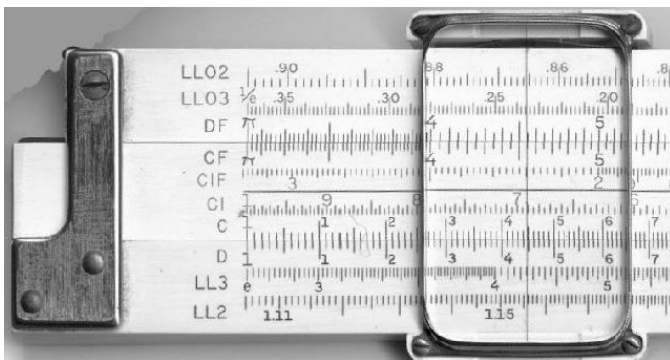
Lastly, one of the neat memories of these events is that it occurred just days after Christmas. And, ALL of us kids had a plethora of new toys from Christmas. Having played with our own toys for several days ... and “wearing out the newness of them” ... it was always fun to visit cousins and see and play with all of THEIR new toys from Christmas. This meant that ... for the large part ... there were abundant activities for us kids to engage in, and I think we were all generally well behaved. Well ... except when running around through the house. But, I recall board games, card games, and other activities that kept the anxiety level largely in check until after the midnight fireworks and finally ... exhausted ... falling asleep in the car on the way home after a wonderful evening.

Mike and Woody and Algebra

The Hayes family also played a prominent part in my memories of growing up in the Fechter family. My cousin Forrest ... known only by the nickname Woody ... was almost exactly three years older than me. He certainly would fit the definition of child progeny! Woody was (and is) extremely bright. He excelled in school. And, before eventually migrating to his love for veterinary medicine he studied engineering. So, Woody was an older role model for me, and was an outstanding mentor as well. At a fairly early age I thought I'd be an oceanographer. So math and science were subjects of great interest to me (they also came easily to me in school).

I can't remember exactly which grade I was in ... but it was one of the last three years of elementary school ... probably 4th or 5th grade ... when Woody sat down one day and began to explain the basic concepts of Algebra to me. This was of course not something taught at my grade level. But, Woody had done a wonderful job of explaining to me the concept of using “X” in a mathematical equation (e.g. $23 - X = 16$). Now this is Algebra 101, but not something taught to elementary students. That “blew” the mind of my elementary teacher when one day I explained that the math problem she was working on the blackboard (yes ... BLACK and with chalk ... not a whiteboard and colored markers) would be much easier if she would express it using Algebra.

If that shook up my teacher I think she was way in over her head with me when I went on to explain to her after class that my cousin had taught me that ... AND that he also had taught me how to graph algebra equations. To this day I can see the open mouth of my teacher when I sketched on the blackboard the simple equation for a “linear” line in Algebra ... $y = mX + b$... and told her that “m” determined the “slope” of the line. Probably a disbelieving moment for a young elementary teacher. Woody was just in Intermediate school ... probably 7th or maybe 8th grade. But, I'd bet he too surprised a few of his teachers with his advanced knowledge of math. I remember several warm summer afternoons sitting at a table or desk with Woody as he pulled out one of his math books and proceeded to explain to me one math concept or another. To say I had a HUGE head start on my classmates is a gross understatement. I'm not sure who got more out of these sessions ... me learning new and neat math stuff ... or Woody having a chance to show off and teach someone else what he was learning. Regardless, they remain special times in my life growing up and left lasting knowledge that would later shape my education and my ultimate profession.

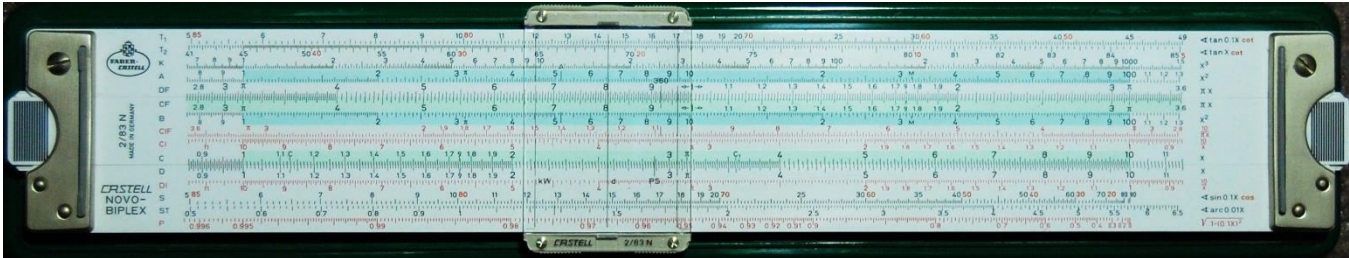


What Woody probably would recall more than the Algebra is how he introduced me to the slide rule! This was the day before any of the electronic digital calculators or personal computers.

So now Woody had to explain logarithms to me ... and he started me off on the simple C and D scales to learn multiplication and division. I was FACINATED with these lessons ... and it set a personal goal to save up and buy a slide rule of my own. Woody said you can buy cheap ones, but the more expensive

ones were much more accurate and had many more complex functions that I would probably want to have later in college. And a better made slide rule would last longer. So from that first lesson I began to save my

allowance. It took quite some time before I had the money to finally order one ... a good Pickett slide rule like the ones I've shown here. And, I DID keep ... and USE ... that slide rule. There were many long late nights sitting at a desk working out complex engineering and math problems using that very slide rule. Yes ... I still have the slide rule, and the leather case it came in, to this day. It is a personal treasure. Along the way I also acquired some circular slide rules, my first "four banger" electronic calculator¹⁰ (in 1971 from Texas Instruments) and from there to HP engineering calculators and now to very high end PC's. A long journey in life ... but that first slide rule and Woody's tutorage was the birth of that journey. Thanks to a great cousin for all the help and the head start!!!!



As a side bar story related to the slide rule that I'm certain Woody would appreciate has to do with one of the ways in which I employed that tool shortly after I had acquired my own. Larry and I spent the entire summer living up north at our parent's cottage on Island Lake. There, we grew up with some other very special people in our lives ... several young girls our own age. As a group we spent every summer day and every summer night together ... swimming, playing cards, and everything imaginable that young kids do living for the summer on a lake. Welllllllllll ... one day ... shortly after I had bought my new Pickett slide rule ... we kids were sitting on the cabin porch finishing lunch. I pulled out my slide rule and told the girls I was going to "calculate" how many frogs were in the lake ... this based on how many I'd seen just over by the island where we frequently swam. There were the expected giggles and teasing from the girls of course. And, I don't recall the number of frogs that I had calculated in this simple Fermium calculation. But, the event has persisted over time and the girls STILL laugh and tease me about this. Oh, well ... once a geek ... !!!!! No wonder the girls thought me socially inept! ☹

Fechter Summers at the Hayes Farm – The Great MILK Fight

Something else the cousins will remember. The summer picnics that occurred on many occasion on the Hayes farm just east of Saginaw. That old Hayes farmhouse is now gone. It was purchased by the government in order to build I75 and the I675 by-pass. In fact, the old farm was located almost exactly in the center of the circular off-ramp. I think this is correct when I say that right next door to Uncle Dan's and Aunt Erna's farm house was another farm that belonged to a relative of Uncle Dan. During this time the farms would be considered out in the country ... and were surrounded mostly by farm fields and were a quiet location.

What I recall ... besides the ubiquitous pot-luck food ... were the entire family softball games we played on the grass of the Hayes farm between the driveway and the house. Men, women, and kids all split up into two friendly competitive teams. The games were played in a manner where all the kids (and often the women) had a chance to actually "hit" the ball and run the bases. Number of strikes were rarely counted.

Grandma and Grandpa attended these picnics ... and they were the only two I can recall that did not actually play. They sat on the picnic table benches (under the large beautiful Willow trees) and rooted their kids and grandkids on (both teams!). Grandpa ... with the always present lit pipe in mouth, hat on head, and a smile and a twinkle in his eye. Grandma with one of her "intermediate" poka-dot dresses on. I think back of

¹⁰ A "four banger" calculator is one that ONLY does multiplication, division, addition, & subtraction! Later models ... as the computer chips become more and more powerful, added the logarithmic, exponential, and many other complex math functions.

them watching and have this strong impression that it was one of their happier times in life ... having the whole family there and watching all the fun activity and laughter that presided over the day.



Two other things I remember about the Hayes farm. One is that Aunt Erna had this “huge” (to me anyway) semi-circular pipe organ in her living room. What I can’t recall is whether the room floor was sunken or the pipe organ was raised up in the north-west corner of the room. Regardless ... it was ... to a small boy ... massive. I still can recall the beautiful musical notes that emanated from the pipe organ. And, the pipe organ still can give me chills and goose bumps when I listen to one today. I remember a huge one in a church in Denver when I was in the Air Force ... and the Saginaw Temple Theatre has one that I get to listen to frequently. Ann Arbor ... a place I spent two years at U of M ... has many, many pipe organs ... some of them very large ... that I’ve had the good fortune to hear played.

The last thing I’ll share about the Hayes farm is something few may have known or even heard about. One warm fall day several of us cousins (Woody, Larry, myself, and ???) were over in the barn west and adjacent to the Hayes house (relative?). Memory fails me as to who exactly was there ... but approximately half a dozen of us kids. Someone (Woody?) was showing us how to “milk” the cows in the barn. Cool! But, shortly after the initial lesson the person showing us how to milk turned the cow’s tit towards us kids all in a line looking at what was happening. We were “squirted” with warm cow milk. There were two or three more cows nearby in the barn and a race ensued to find “return fire” to the perpetrator of this unprovoked attack. Milk flew in long arching streams back and forth across the barn for the next few minutes before we all got calm heads and figured out we would be in a heck of a lot of trouble if we emptied the cow’s milk all over the barn and but scant drops in the milk buckets. I’m amazed that the cows didn’t revolt and trample us kids.



I’ll close this memory by telling you I had on a thick wool jacket (or shirt) that fall day. And, mom was not real happy when she smelled me walking up to her from some distance away. Wet wool soaked with cow milk is probably not a good thing to take home to mom!!!!!! I believe the jacket and some of Larry’s clothes all went into the trunk of the car on the way home. Strangely, I don’t recall what the punishment was for this adventure. Anyway, I can now say I’ve “milked” a cow at least once in my life experiences. ☺ Grandma? Well, I do believe I saw her snickering and holding in her laughter as mom fussed over the event.

Mike and the Hospital

I’m going to end adding a bit about myself here. Part of it is relevant to the Fechter family, and a bit of it is to “fill in the history” for the family record.

This part of the Fechter history could start no other place than the very day I was born.

My mom gave birth to me in the early morning hours of 22 Oct 1946 at Saginaw General Hospital. Later that morning ... at the first hospital morning visiting hours ... most of the Fechter family gathered in mom’s hospital room. My dad, Grandpa, Grandma, Uncle Don, Uncle Ernie, were all there for sure. I’m not sure how many of her other siblings or their spouses were present (probably Aunt Erna, Aunt Betty, Aunt Donna, and Aunt Bunny ... but ??? ... hopefully you’ll understand I was a “bit” too young to remember clearly).

Picture them surrounding my mom’s hospital bed. Mom ... lying in bed and holding me in her arms ... proud of her firstborn son!

You also have to understand that her two brothers, Uncle Don and Uncle Ernie, were GREAT TEASES to their sisters (and others as well). They loved nothing better than to find an excuse to tease someone like my mom, in a situation just like the one made perfect for the two of them described above.

The story goes that one of the two brothers asked my mom “What’s his name? Have you got a name picked out for him?” My mom (almost certainly looking down so fondly at myself you understand ☺) said that she and Joe did have some names picked out ... but had not decided on which one to pick yet. Can you imagine a better lead-in for the two brothers? One of the two (unknown) said “Well ... he looks like a ‘Mike’ to me!” The other brother almost immediately chimed in “Yup ... I like ‘Mike’ too”!!!!

As described to many often through the years by those who were present, my mom looked at the two brothers and with stern eyes and firm voice claimed with authority: “I’m NOT having a **MICHAEL MICHAELS** in this family!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

That was all it took! Uncle Don looked at Uncle Ernie and vice versa. The two of them in unison PROCLAIMED that mom could call me anything she wanted ... BUT that from now on he was a **“MIKE”**. The name ... from within just hours of birth ... stuck for a lifetime. While I still use Wayne for official documents no one that knows me would call me Wayne ... only Mike. Even in school I was known as Mike. (This often confused my teachers until they understood I would only answer to “Mike” and not “Wayne”! They quickly learned to use “Mike”.)

All I can say is **THANK YOU Uncle Ernie and Uncle Don!** I actually like Mike much more than Wayne. Mom’s two brothers gave me a gift for a lifetime! ☺

Mike and the United States Airforce

I will end my list of stories with some information about my own early life. Many people ask me about this and for many years I was not allowed to discuss or disclose it. But, it is interesting and perhaps capturing it here is an appropriate end to Mike's list of stories growing up.

Even prior to graduating from Arthur Hill High School in 1964 I was taking limited classes at Delta College my senior year on a special program. In 1963 my dad and I traveled to University of Michigan to meet with the Dean of Engineering school. My "passion" then was to go into Oceanography. The Dean assured my father that taking a list of classes at Delta would allow me to transfer to U of M in my Junior year without any problems. Interestingly, it turned out to be totally irrelevant, as during a SECOND visit to the Dean's office in 1965 we discovered that many of my classes taken at Delta were now not required my U of M ... and that I was "missing" a number of other classes that the "new" U of M Meteorology & Oceanography (**M&O**) degree curriculum required. **Grrrrrrrr!** I'm not sure who was madder ... me or my dad. We both fumed on the home.

But, as I say, it proved to be irrelevant. For a very short period in late 1965, during the most rapid buildup of forces in the Viet Nam war, the military's need for drafted males exceed supply. This resulted in a short-term window of time when all "2S" (Student Deferment) classifications were suspended, and all unmarried males in college were required to take the military physical and the battery of military classification tests. So off I went to Detroit ... and being healthy I passed the physical with flying colors. For a while it looked like I was on my way to Viet Nam. However, I had a visit here in Saginaw by two officers in the United States Air Force. They sat with me and my parents and explained that I had excelled in the military tests (maxing ALL of them out with perfect scores). Well ... not only was I physically fit I had a cousin who helped me be exceptionally intelligent as well. THANK YOU WOODY!!!! Bet you never knew this did you?

What I was offered was to enlist into the USAF under a "special program". I could not be told exactly what I would be doing, but we were told that given my two years of existing college I would be sent to Colorado Springs and would complete my education at the US Air Force Academy. I would then have three years of service in the USAF in a "special organization". It was a pretty good bet that the USAF was **not** going to let someone they deemed exceptional, and was investing two years of free education at the Air Force Academy, be allowed to crawl around on hands, knees, and belly in the 110 degree jungles and swamps of Viet Nam cradling an M16!!!!!!!!!! But, all the rest was an unknown "pig in a poke" risk.

That was the carrot. The "stick" was that if I declined the offer it was likely I'd be drafted into the Army within the next few months ... as all of the military branches had access to my physical and test scores. The irony of this is that the 2S suspension was only a short temporary window before the government went to the "lottery" draft by your birthdate. I do vaguely recall that my birthday in October was a way down the line towards the "safe" side from being drafted. But, I didn't know that at the time. And the offer of the military college (FREE ??) education was clearly something worth risking. So, a week later when they returned with all the papers I signed on the dotted line(s). And a few weeks later I was off to OCS for "temporary" parking until my initial security background check could be accomplished. I was told that this brief training was necessary for two reasons. First, I needed to know something about military protocol and behavior ... and second, I had to pass this first security check before I could enter my academy studies. A "later" more detailed security clearance would be done while I was studying and would be required before I could even be told what I was to be doing in my USAF job.

The eighteen+ months at the USAFA was no picnic. We ... about eight of us ... were on an accelerated academic schedule, and there was virtually no free time between class, study, and the endless homework! No women ... no wild parties ... no drinking ... just nose to the grindstone. Story of my life!!!!

In late 1967 I was “graduated” (without ceremony & in secrecy) with a BS degree in **nuclear radiochemistry** ... a far cry from my M&O trajectory at Delta & U of M. Our small group was moved to Lowery Air Force Base in Aurora, CO just next door to Denver. Here we sat again for six weeks while we were required to take an extensive course in **electronics**. Humm ... speculation ran rampant ... there are all sorts of high tech units in the air force that require electronic training. But, none of us could disclose to the others about our major and education at the USAFA ... so I had a slight advantage knowing that NONE of these electronic occupations would require a nuclear radiochemist. We sat ... in class & studying ... awaiting to hear just what we had opted into almost two years prior.

At the time we were constantly warned about two things. First, you **MUST** be on **ABSOLUTE GOOD BEHAVIOR**. We had one of our group that went to a party in Aurora, CO with some “outside” people (outside meaning not part of our small group). Apparently there was marijuana at the party and the police busted everyone ... including the one of our small group¹¹. The next morning his room was cleaned out and he was GONE. Rumor was he was off somewhere to the DEWS line in the Arctic Circle or some other far place that the USAF could send people. Again, we were warned (as previously) that drugs, DUI, ... even SPEEDING ... would result in our being thrown out. Remember, at this time we still did not know where we were to be assigned!

The day finally came. We were assigned to a **TOP SECRET** organization that most people did not even know existed at the time. The organization was very small ... less than 1000 people at the time. Its name was **Air Force Technical Applications Command** ... or **AFTAC** as it was known. No one was allowed to even breath a word of our mission, or of the capabilities we used, to accomplish that mission.

AFTAC still exists today. Its mission has evolved over time as has its name ... currently known as Air Force Technical Applications CENTER. Current AFTAC information (limited non classified basis) can be found in numerous places on the web today. Here is a short history of the organization I copied from their official web site:

History

Soon after the end of World War II, **Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower** recognized the **need to monitor nuclear programs**; in 1947 he directed the Army Air **Forces to be able to "detect atomic explosions anywhere in the world."** In 1949 a sampler aboard an Air Force Office of Atomic Testing **B-29** flying between Alaska and Japan **detected debris from the first Russian atomic test** -- an event the experts had predicted couldn't happen until the mid-1950s. When AFTAC was activated in 1963, it assumed responsibility for the Long-Range Detection Program. **This program has evolved into a unique resource that monitors compliance with nuclear treaties, supports our nation's space programs, and helps protect everyone during emergencies involving nuclear materials. AFTAC systems detected and confirmed nuclear weapon tests by India and Pakistan in 1998.** In October 2006 AFTAC's USAEDS detected an event associated with North Korea's claim of a nuclear test and later provided verification to national authorities that the event was nuclear in nature.



¹¹ “Rumor” had it he DID NOT use any drugs ... he was just at the “wrong place” at the “wrong time”. None the less!!

When I joined the organization AFTAC had three specific mission objectives:

1. Ability to **detect nuclear detonations** whether **surface donation, sub-surface, oceanic, atmospheric, or deep space**. To accomplish this mission, we had systems that measured telluric magnetic earth currents, seismic stations, atmospheric electro-fluoresce, Radar, U.S. Navy SOSUS system access, and several other worldwide monitoring stations & technical systems.
2. Measure and report to U.S. Intelligence Community (tightly restricted basis) the **exact size (kilo or mega tons) and the estimated EFFICIENCY** of all such **detonations**. This requirement gives a highly accurate intelligence view of the stage and progress of other nation's nuclear programs.
3. An “estimate” of the amount of **fissile** (highly enriched material used in nuclear weapons) Pu^{299} & U^{235} **being produced and stored by other countries** ... both USSR (our main concern during the cold war) as well as “friends” such as France, Britain, and other countries such as India, Pakistan, Israel, etc.

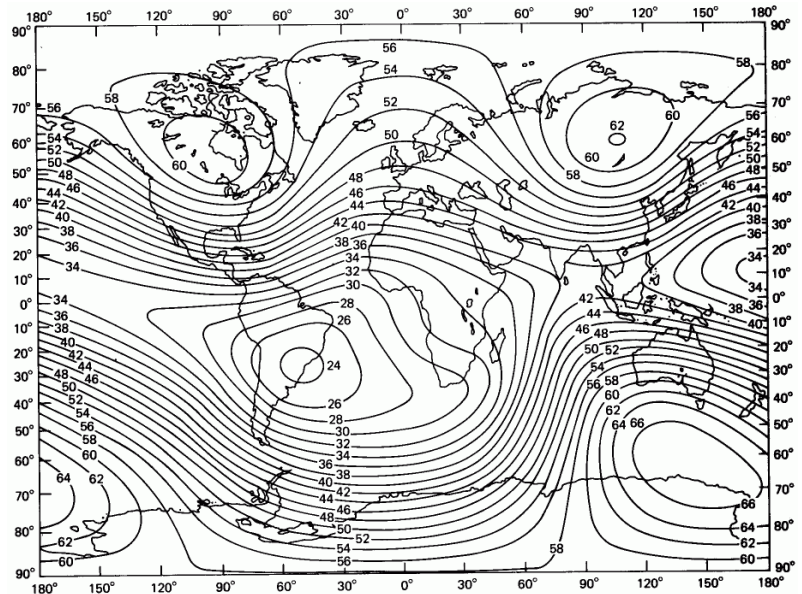


Figure 1-18 Present-day magnetic field of the earth. (a) Magnitude, μT .

In accomplishing this mission, we (at the time) reported **DIRECTLY** to the **Joint Chiefs of Staff** in the pentagon and in parallel to the **U.S. State Department**. Since that time the new AFTAC has been relocated to be a **DRU** based out of Patrick Air Force Base in Florida. A **Direct Reporting Unit (DRU)** is an agency of the United States Air Force that is outside the bounds of the standard organizational hierarchy by being exclusively and uniquely under the control of Air Force headquarters alone, rather than reporting through a Major Command. The term "Direct Reporting Unit" comes from the fact that the unit reports directly to the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force or to a designated representative on the Air Staff.¹²

My first deployment in AFTAC took me from cold dry winter (exceptional) skiing in Colorado's mountains to warm and balmy Pago Pago, American Samoa (pronounced PONG-GO PONG-GO as Samoan language only has sixteen characters.) I am sad to report that for nearly fourteen months I was forced to live and to eat in the Samoan Intercontinental Hotel. I shared a two bedroom “falle” on the beach with a fellow airman. During that time period I was fortunate enough to travel around the world to AFTAC “detachments” twice ... each trip about a month or more in duration. I have many stories to tell about these trips. It was a wonderful experience and opportunity.¹³

¹² While DRU's did not “officially” exist in the 1960's we were effectively a DRU prior to the official designation.

¹³ We “lived” almost exclusively in “civilian clothes” ... not uniform, and we traveled on “red book” (diplomatic) passports.



Perhaps my greatest adventure while on Samoa (besides almost getting stranded for several weeks on a Japanese fishing vessel ... but that is another story) was the opportunity to fly one mission as a passenger in the back seat of a USAF RB57F. The RB57 was a spy plane exactly like the more commonly known U2. It had two large engines for



takeoff to high altitude and two smaller engines that were almost invisible to the eye¹⁴ that allowed the RB57 to "loiter" at extremely high altitudes for many hours. I can tell you my mission flew at well over 80,000 feet where you can see the blackness of outer space and the extreme curvature of the earth. And, yes ... I

had to wear a bright orange high altitude pressure suit with attached helmet almost exactly like the old time astronauts wore into space. Each summer AFTAC flew missions out of Samoa to monitor the French nuclear tests in nearby French Polynesia just east of Samoa. From 1960 to 1996, France carried out 210 nuclear tests, 17 in the Algerian Sahara and 193 in French Polynesia in the South Pacific ... symbolized by the images of a mushroom cloud over the Mururoa atoll. AFTAC monitored and reported on every one of the tests. US spy planes (both RB57's and U2's flew out of American Samoa each summer and sucked minute particles out of the atmosphere onto special "filter papers" that rotated in out of an air scoop device. These filter papers were returned to AFTAC and at three labs (main lab at McClellan AFB in CA, and two satellite labs in Japan and Alaska) they were dissolved, chemically separated into elemental groups, and processed with highly sensitive radioactive counting detectors for subsequent analysis to fulfil our second and third mission objectives. That is where I came in to play with my nuclear radiochemistry education.

Significant Historic Events of AFTAC

There is interesting history about AFTAC that many of you may not remember. In 1960, just a few years before I became part of AFTAC **Francis Gary Powers** was shot down over the old USSR while flying a **U2** spy plane from Turkey to Greenland transiting USSR airspace. His mission was twofold ... imaging photo intelligence **AND** high altitude particle scooping for AFTAC for our laboratory analysis.

Then on June 8th, 1967 just as I joined AFTAC the **USS Liberty** ship was attacked by Israel (there is dispute if this was intentional or accidental) in the mist of the "Six Day War". The ship suffered both air attack and sea attack before the action was broken off. The combined air and sea attack killed 34 crew members (naval officers, seamen, two marines, and one civilian), wounded 171 crew members, and severely damaged the ship. AFTAC had four members on that ship and three were wounded! The Liberty was a navy spy ship working the **Mediterranean Sea** at the time.

On January 23, 1968, while I was on active duty in AFTAC, the **USS Pueblo (AGER-2)**, a U.S. Navy Intelligence ship similar to the USS Liberty, was attack and captured by the North Koreans while in International waters off the coast of N. Korea. AFTAC had a secured (locked) compartment on the ship loaded with our detection equipment along with two AFTAC members aboard. One navy sailor was killed and all the

¹⁴ If you look closely at the image of the RB57F you can see the "outboard" engines nestled in under the wing just outside the larger main engine(s).

rest captured and interned in N. Korea for eleven months ... while being tortured ... before finally being released. BTW ... N. Korea still holds the USS Pueblo ship and refuses to release it to us. Fortunately, our AFTAC airman destroyed all the sensitive equipment and material before the ship was captured.

It was an interesting time for sure. And, as it turned out I was never allowed anywhere near Viet Nam and never had an M16 rifle. To the contrary. We (AFTAC) were pretty much forbidden to be within 500 miles of any communist controlled boarder without significant USAF Air Police escort and often Marine or Army supplement. Only once did I have to worry about this ... during a trip to Afghanistan not far from the USSR boarder. That again is another story for another time. (Interesting too!!!)

American Samoa

My stay in American Samoa was a wonderful time and experience. We worked three eight hour shifts with eight hours of rest between them, and then had the next 48 hours off ... work two days and two days off. This allowed us time to lay on the warm white beach sand, lounge around the hotel pool, hike and explore the island, visit with the native Samoans etc.¹⁵ It also allowed us time to take short trips to New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, and French Polynesia. There were only about twelve of us stationed at this "detachment" at any one time with the exception of regular air force personnel who flooded the island during the summer French testing periods.

The island was heavily isolated at the time. There were only three flights into the Pago Pago airport by Pan Am each week. And two flights by Australia's Qantas airlines. The airport was about twelve miles from the main downtown deep water harbor of Pago Pago ... and along the ONLY paved road on the island at this time. There were a few dirt roads off this and another longer dirt road going opposite the airport from the downtown. The flights usually arrived in the early to late evening ... often around 10:30-11pm ... and it was the MAJOR social event of the island. Hundreds would migrate out to the airport to greet arrivals and to "party" into the late hours. This was also a "layover" for the Pan Am crews ... so there was always a flight crew staying in the hotel with us. We struck up friendships with many of them and enticed them to bring us small containers of fresh milk ... as there was none on the island normally. Standard drink was ice tea during the day, wine with dinner, and rum & coke in the evening¹⁶. Beer was the drink of choice for the Samoans ... who consumed vast quantities of it daily! A favorite pastime was flirting with the stewardess who adorned the pool in skimpy bikini. Aaaahhh yes ... then there was Monica and Annellaca ... two Dutch stewardesses who were regulars on the flight run ... but, I digress and that too is another story! As is the story of the black-tie and limo attendance to the Island's Governor's mansion ... and introduced by a former NFL football star to the governor and his wife as then senator Mike McCormick's son ... also named Mike!!! Great hi-brow party!!!! Even got invited back!!! (But, the jig was up ... I had to confess my true identify. The Governor (U.S. appointed) roared with laughter and told us he had completely "bought" the story. He retold this story to other visitors many times at future events.)

Spies

I guess it is important to at least address some false perceptions here. Well ... maybe hopes, dreams, and expectations might better apply. AFTAC was a TOP SECRET CODE WORD limited access national intelligence organization. Few people were allowed to know about it and fewer had access to our work

¹⁵ Samoa has an interesting history. It is the deepest natural island harbor in the south pacific! During WWII the island was garrisoned by the U.S. Army and there were many "pill boxes" in crumbling decay scattered around the island's hills to explore. There was only a SINGLE battle (of sorts) that occurred at Samoa during the entire war. That happened when a Japanese submarine surfaced off the island on the opposite side of the harbor ... and lobbed three shells from their deck gun over the mountain chain down the middle of the island at Pango Pango's harbor. Two shells fell harmlessly into the ocean and harbor. The third shell did land in the village shopping center and blew up a small store that was owned and operated by a Japanese civilian!!! ☺ Honestly ... you can't make these things up!!

¹⁶ I'd like to thank all you U.S. taxpayers for the outstanding accommodations!

products. It is more than fair to say that during the cold war in the 1960's AFTAC was certainly one of, if not **THE**, most prestigious and valuable national strategic intelligence asset. It worked with, but fell outside the control (and largely knowledge) of the National Intelligence Community (which consists of the NSA, all the military intelligence agencies, NRO, FBI, Dept. of Energy, etc.) (Surprisingly, to this day the CIA remains outside this organization as well!)

This was the time of the **James Bond 007** books and movies! Being highly intelligent and handsome young men ... part of a super-secret spy (intelligence) organization ... it should not surprise you that many of us probably saw ourselves as partly a James Bond female magnet! We didn't kill anyone, but we flirted with beautiful women in an intercontinental hotel ... and traveled the world ... all in a world of secrecy! Naturally, you would think we might ... aaaahhhh ... fantasize about having beautiful women just fall into our arms. Perhaps think about scenarios of a beautiful Russian spy attempting to seduce us to extract information from us! DAM ... SOMEHOW THAT NEVER HAPPENED!! ☹ To this day I wonder what I did wrong!

McClellan AFB

All good things come to an end. After my year+ based on Samoa I finally boarded that Pan Am plane (and drank several quarts of milk on the way to Hawaii) to be stationed at the main AFTAC laboratory on McClellan AFB just outside of Sacramento, CA. I co-commanded the Rare Earths department, running large rotating tables that dripped radiochemical rare earth elements into individual test tubes through large resin chromatography columns. These rotating tables of four rows of test tubes and four resin columns per table were over six feet in diameter and held several hundred test tubes in the four rows around the circumference of the rotating table. The chromatography tubes were 5-6 feet tall and nearly 1 1/2" in diameter. Samples would come in and we would chemically isolate the rare earth component and then separate them with the chromatography before sending them to be analyzed by the NaI (Sodium-Iodide) detectors. It was rush, rush, rush, then wait for many hours for the chromatography columns to drip, drip, drip into the rotating tables of test tubes. When the columns were done doing their work ... middle of the day or (more often) middle of the night ... we headed back into the lab to '**precipitate**' the liquid to a solid, dry it and mount it on Teflon 1" disks for the counting room. The time lines were always dictated by the chemistry ... and they could not be rushed. Many a night I sat around the house of my co-commander's house until 2, 3, 4 in the morning waiting on the chemistry before heading back to the lab to continue the processing. Maybe this is the time in my life that makes me a nighthawk. To this day I rarely go to bed before 1am



But, it too had its advantages. Here I met Rod Anton who would become one of my best friends. We dove the north coast of California for abalones, did extensive underwater photography, and were both certified SCUBA instructors who co-taught classes at the Sacramento YMCA. In spite of its current problems, California had its many advantages during the late 1960's. And the weather was generally nice much of the year.

Project "**Azorian**" (erroneously called "**Jennifer**" by the press)

Of all the things I experienced while working for AFTAC the most secret of them all involved something that I only had a small part in ...but which later would be one of the most specular secrets of the entire "cold war" between the U.S. and the then USSR. The event actually "started" while I was in the USAF with AFTAC and progressed over the next several years ... **not to be revealed to the public UNTIL February 2010.**

As I mentioned above AFTAC had the most extensive array of “sensor” equipment deployed AROUND THE ENTIRE GLOBE in 1960’s. In 1968 a **soviet submarine**, the **K-129**, a “gulf class II” diesel-electric submarine was lost at sea. The K-129 was one of six Project 629 **strategic ballistic missile submarines** attached to the 15th Submarine Squadron based at Rybachiy Naval Base, Kamchatka. On **8 March 1968** the K-129 sunk ~775 nautical miles NNW of Midway Island in the north Pacific Ocean in approximately 16,000 feet of depth!

I was one of several people who actually “saw” the “explosion” of K129 in real time ... the result of a missile explosion caused by a leaking missile door seal. AFTAC “saw” the explosion and subsequent implosion of the submarine on its deep ocean seismic sensors. Just like an earthquake, a nuclear explosion sub-surface can be easily monitored using seismic sensor technology¹⁷. And, just like any seismic event AFTAC was able to locate the source of the explosion to within a (<) five nautical mile radius of the event!¹⁸

The Soviet Union, after missing several scheduled radio contacts with the K-129, initiated an extensive search for the lost sub. They, of course, looked far outside the actual location of the accident ... and the U.S. did not disclose to them that we knew the real location.

At the highest levels of U.S. government, a “secret” plan was launched to determine if the Soviet submarine could be “recovered” ... as it would provide extensive intelligence on the current state of their nuclear missiles (highest priority), their nuclear torpedoes, and finally, a definitive benchmark on the construction techniques used in their submarine manufacturing and design methods. Then President Nixon signed off on the final project ... code named “Azorian” to pursue this end.

USS Halibut



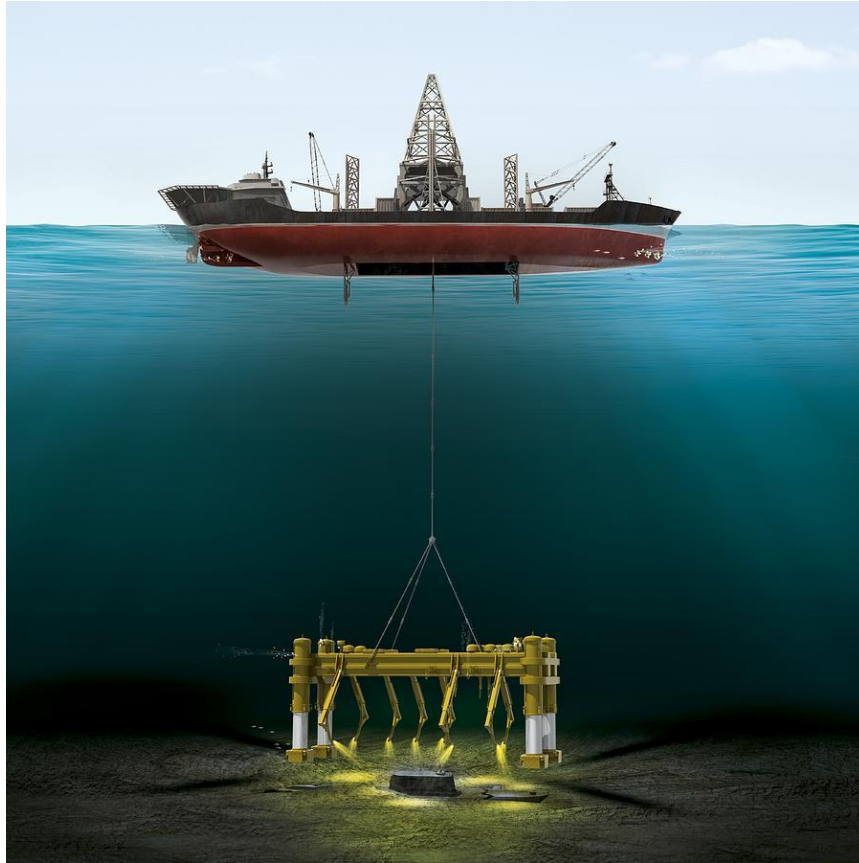
The submarine was located exactly on the ocean’s seabed (& photographed) by the USS Halibut, a special operations submarine capable of operating remote submersible vehicles (off it’s forward deck) to the 16,000 foot depths of the sunken K-129. This was in **August of 1968** after the USSR had given up their search/rescue attempts.

¹⁷ In fact, AFTAC had the largest world-wide array of seismic sensors (surface & sub-surface) which we used for our mission in monitoring nuclear detonations. This data, once used by AFTAC, was surreptitiously passed to the National Science Foundation, and from there to other “scientific researchers” around the globe for their use.

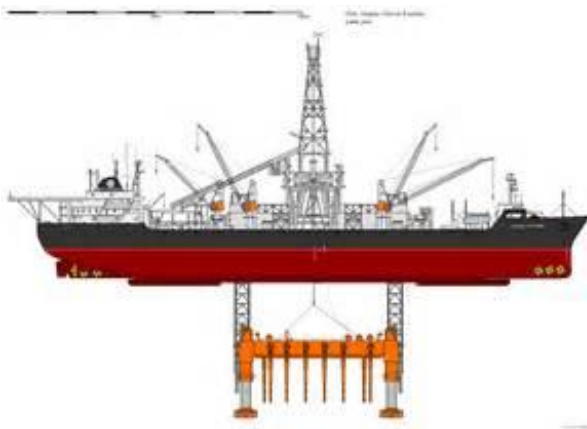
¹⁸ The U.S. Navy maintains a SOSUS System of “listening” devices ocean-wide to monitor foreign submarine transients. They too “heard” the explosion, but their acoustic sensors lacked the precision of triangulating the location like AFTAC’s seismic sensor array. Both systems, thought, confirmed the sinking.

The project then took on the most incredible part of this historic event. Under the “cover” story that **Howard Hughes** (eccentric billionaire) was developing technology for “underwater mining” of Zn, Mn, and other heavy metal nodules from the deep ocean floors a complex and amazing ship was designed. In what has been

C.I.A. SALVAGE SHIP BROUGHT UP PART OF SOVIET SUB LOST IN 1968, FAILED TO RAISE ATOM MISSILES



described as perhaps one of the greatest technical engineering accomplishments of the 20th century a ship called the **Glomar Explorer** was designed and built with the **EXPLICIT** purpose of salvaging a large part of the sunken K-129 from the 16,000 foot Pacific Ocean floor. Partial U.S. security “leaks”, and the high tension atmosphere of cold war suspicions between the U.S. and the USSR, actually



had the Russians spying on the Glomar Explorer early in its development ... and Russian ships actually sailed and followed the Glomar Explorer when it deployed to raise the K-129. This meant that the submarine had to be “hidden” inside the “moon well” of the Glomar Explorer such that the USSR would never know of the intelligence coup.¹⁹

¹⁹ In true irony, the Russian ships that followed and floated only a thousand yards from the Glomar Explorer for many days in the initial part of the recovery “sailed” off just a day or two prior to the actual recovery of the sub itself to the surface! Again, you can’t write fiction better than this!

The actual recovery of part of the K-129 occurred in **July 1974**. By this time, I was long removed from both the USAF and AFTAC. AFTAC's initiating contribution had been handed over to the CIA for both the construction of the Glomar Explorer and the actual recovery²⁰. I myself, like many other Americans, did not "know" of this part of Project Azorian until many years later. For you history buffs, the effort to recover the submarine was only "partially" successful. The missiles were not recovered, but a large portion of the sub near the "sail" was recovered successfully and raised the 16,000 feet to the inside of the ship's moon well, and returned to the U.S. Much intelligence was gleaned from the effort, in spite of the lack of total success.²¹



Project Azorian, would be one of the **most expensive and deepest secrets of the Cold War**. So, see! In some small way I guess I really was a "spy" in the USAF. But, somehow those beautiful "Bond" women never materialized! DRAT!!! ☹

Exiting the USAF

I loved my time in AFTAC. The work was cutting edge, as was much of the technology and the analysis methods (Yes, Woody ... LOT'S of cool math!! "R-values", decay curves, shielding calculations, etc.). The people were all exceptionally bright. Most of the enlisted men in AFTAC had several years of college. Living and traveling in many cultures certainly proved to be a future asset. And, the responsibility given to a young man was certainly beyond anything I could have ever experienced elsewhere. At times the work was frantic and we worked extremely long hours ... often throughout the night when mission demanded. I had wonderful opportunities to continue learning so many things during that time.

The only real negatives that eventually led me to not make the USAF a career had to do with some of the "old guard" culture. If you remember your history the time was dominated by what I still refer to as the "evil triad": President Lyndon B. Johnson (who bragged that the military could not bomb an outhouse without his permission, Robert McNamara, and William Childs Westmoreland. These three individuals and many subordinates totally mismanaged the military. Recall, that many fine young officers that lived through this damage zone turned the US military around from "lessons learned" at this time, and the results were seen in the first Gulf War. During my service I saw many "old time lifers" ... senior NCO's ... bully many of the bright young people we had in our small organization over haircuts, creased pants, shined shoes, etc. Much of this occurred in the middle of mission critical work. We had an "old school" Major who ran the lab at McClellan AFB who not only permitted this, but encouraged it. We had many senators and congressman wanting to "tour" our lab ... and in the middle of mission critical work the Major and the NCO's would shut down the lab to sweep and mop and make everything look "pretty" ... all at the expense of real mission critical work.

The other factor was the rapid change in the technology we employed. The old school management had problems with this. We were still wed to old techniques of elemental chemistry to accommodate the older NaI (Sodium Iodide) detectors ... when the already emerging GeLi (Germanium-Lithium) detectors were much

²⁰ I did, however, have an opportunity to "tour" the Glomar Explorer many years later when it was decommissioned and mothballed at Suisun Bay, California in the Sacramento River. This was circa 1993 when a friend from AFTAC invited me aboard.

²¹ Just a few hundred feet from being drawn into the "moon bay" one claw of the retractor broke dumping the missiles and a significant part of the recovered submarine back to the ocean floor!

