

# My Stories | Rick Lynch





## Table of Contents

Why I Decided to Write These Memoirs . . . . .	11
My Story Begins in Keene, New Hampshire, Two Days After Christmas 1951 . . . . .	15
Toys from My Childhood . . . . .	23
My First Bike . . . . .	31
Riding the Bus to School . . . . .	35
Friends at School . . . . .	39
The Neighborhood I Grew Up In . . . . .	43
The Time Pete and I Made a Bomb . . . . .	55
My Childhood Bedroom . . . . .	57
I Was Pleased with Myself That I Had Never Broken a Bone... . . . .	61
Family Reunions . . . . .	67
With Mom When She Died . . . . .	75
My Adventures at PNSY (1984-1994) . . . . .	77
My Family Tree . . . . .	83
Some Memories of Mom . . . . .	87
I Was Not Raised in a Particularly Religious Household . . . .	93
Do I Believe in Astrology? . . . . .	97

## Table of Contents

Unfortunately, This Would Probably Be My Answer if Someone Were to Ask Me What I Was Good at in School . . . .	101
Was I a Good Student? . . . . .	103
My Biggest Learning Challenge in School . . . . .	105
Did I Fit In with Any Social Group or Clique in School? . . . .	109
Dad, for Some Reason, Collected Pianos . . . . .	113
Dad Brought Home Lots of Other Memorable Items . . . . .	117
A Favorite Meal Growing Up . . . . .	121
The One Thing in My Life I Regret Not Having Done but Had the Chance to Do It . . . . .	123
The Dumbest Thing I Believed as a Kid . . . . .	127
Suppertime Meals . . . . .	129
I Had to Sit There . . . . .	133
My Grandparents . . . . .	135
My Work History...Sort of . . . . .	141
What Was Our Wedding Like? . . . . .	153
Some Simple Pleasures of Life I Enjoy . . . . .	155
It Was Clear to Me at an Early Age What Career Path I Would Follow . . . . .	159
The Relationship I Have with My Siblings . . . . .	163

## Table of Contents

Some Memories of Dad . . . . .	165
My Father's Family . . . . .	169
My Mother's Family . . . . .	175
My Summers Growing Up . . . . .	183
Always the Youngest in School . . . . .	187
Chores I Had While Growing Up . . . . .	189
My Short Stint in the School Band . . . . .	191
Television Programs I Watched as a Child . . . . .	195
And Sometimes I Made Poor Choices . . . . .	199
Mom and Dad's Relationship: How They Got Along . . . . .	201
Pets . . . . .	205
Someone From My Past Whom I'd Love to See Again . . . . .	211
The Family Heirloom That Means the Most to Me . . . . .	215
If I Was Asked What I Wanted to Do with My Life When I Was Five... . . . .	221
The Story Behind My Name . . . . .	223
Things I May Be a Bit Afraid Of . . . . .	225
Watching Fireworks from the Front Yard . . . . .	227
A Time When I Was Truly Frightened . . . . .	229

## Table of Contents

How I Met Karen (My 1st Wife)...	233
Karen and I Have Two children: Ben and Sam	239
The Last Few Years. What changes Have Taken Place and What Memories Stand Out?	247
Something I Learned After Many Years of Marriage That I Wish Someone Had Told Me About Earlier	251
Things I Enjoy Doing in My Free Time That I Don't Consider Myself an Expert At	253
Random Early Memories...	257
Realizing How Much Time Has Gone By...	261
Walking on the Train Tracks	267
Dad's Christmas Tree Business	271
Things I Remember Collecting as a Kid	273
If I Could Pick One Day in My Life to Go Back to, to Enjoy Again, This Might Be It	277
Aren't All Kids Pyromaniacs? Or Was It Just Me?	281
Memory of a Childhood Game	287
Things From My Childhood That Aren't So Common Today	291
Dad's Hat	297

## Table of Contents

Riding in the Back of Dad’s Truck . . . . .	299
The Bee’s Knees . . . . .	301
Karen and I Used to Go Yard-Sale(ing) Quite a Bit . . . . .	303
The Tiny Beer Stein Dad Used to Catch Our Tears . . . . .	307
School Photographs . . . . .	311
When I Started Junior High . . . . .	315
I’m Better at Starting Projects Than I am at Finishing Them . . . . .	317
There Were Some Spooky Places Around Our Old House on Marlboro Street . . . . .	321
Another Early Memory . . . . .	325
Halloween . . . . .	327
Some of My Earliest Friends and Playmates . . . . .	331
During My Years at Home, the First Thing I Did When I Got Home from School Each Day . . . . .	335
We Had One Telephone . . . . .	337
I Am a Much Better Student Now, Than I Ever Was When I Should Have Been . . . . .	341
Being Left-Handed . . . . .	345
School Dances in the 5th and 6th Grades . . . . .	349

## Table of Contents

When I Lost My Sunday Shoes . . . . .	353
My First Car . . . . .	357
Famous People I've Met . . . . .	361
Playing Albums on Pam's Record Player . . . . .	363
Memorable Moments of Pamela, Peter, Laurie, and Me . . . .	365
Some of My Favorites . . . . .	369
Some Things I Would Still Like to Try - But Am Not Sure if I Trust Myself to Take Them On . . . . .	377
The Worst Job I Ever Had . . . . .	381
Learning to Drive . . . . .	383
Reading to Ben and Sam . . . . .	387
Ben and Sam Always Called Us Karen and Rick . . . . .	391
Mom Told Me Many Times That I Had No Common Sense . .	393
Dad's Carriage Stone . . . . .	395
My Fourth-Grade Fountain Pen . . . . .	397
Haircuts . . . . .	401
A Few Random Memories . . . . .	403
I Was a Cub Scout . . . . .	409
Dad Died in February of 1988 . . . . .	411



## Table of Contents

More Recent Family Gatherings . . . . .	413
The Almost-Lost Family Stories or Voice Clips from Chuck and Frank . . . . .	419
Sometimes Money Burned a Hole in My Pocket . . . . .	423
The End . . . . .	427



# Why I Decided to Write These Memoirs



Over the past twenty years, I have had thoughts of writing down some family memories, meaningful experiences (to me anyway), and stories I want my children to hear about and remember. Some of these stories involve my children and I want to leave them with my side of the story, while some of the other stories they may have never heard before.

My daughter-in-law, Jenn, started the ball rolling at the beginning of this year (2023) when she and Sam opened an account on a website called Story Worth. This, and many other similar websites are meant to be used as a way to create an autobiography. The format uses a weekly question as a writing prompt and is sent to me in an email. At the end of one year, all the stories I've written and saved to a repository on the Story Worth website will be printed into a hardcover book.

I have to admit, in the beginning, I wasn't all that excited about the idea, but I thought I'd give it a go and see what I could come up with. This kind of project was new to me. At first, it felt a bit like I was writing an essay in high school, and it wasn't going well, it didn't feel natural. My thoughts didn't flow onto the page like I had hoped they would. I tried to relax a little and told myself to just start writing and see what happened.

I thought that even if nothing comes of it I may as well give it a try, telling myself that I could quit any time I wanted to if it became too difficult for me. I hadn't done any writing, of any kind, for a long, long time, but started writing down my thoughts and eventually, I had a couple of paragraphs. I'm painfully slow at this. I write a sentence and then change it around a couple of times and then spend the next five minutes debating with myself which version is better.

I've never thought of myself as a writer, and it's not easy for me to put my thoughts into words. When I read what I've written, the words don't even sound like me sometimes. But if I just start writing and not be too concerned about how it may sound to others, then I can at least get my thoughts written down. That's my starting point. I can edit later.

When I started, I used the supplied questions as writing prompts. Then I found myself changing a question around to suit what I wanted to write about and that evolved into making up my own questions. The more I wrote the more I realized I didn't need the

writing prompts all that much. I could begin writing on a subject and then ramble on and digress as much as I wanted to, until finally coming around to where I started and getting back on topic.

I'm learning a few things that I need to keep in mind while I'm rambling. It's always better if I can get the reader to see and feel what I'm experiencing. I'm not very good at doing this yet but I try to be mindful of it. I've also realized that I have a somewhat limited vocabulary and therefore I tend to use some of the same words and phrases repeatedly. Luckily, I have my thesaurus and I often rely on it to find better words than those in my own vocabulary.

A story may be about an event that took place when I was five years old but the words I'm using and the pictures in my mind are from my seventy-one-year-old point of view. Time can change my perception of things a lot. The memory of a sad or embarrassing moment in a ten-year-old boy's life has probably softened a bit over the years and maybe now I can see humor in something that was not at all funny for me at the time.

As a youngster, I lacked confidence. My self-confidence came along when I was older, in my 20s, after I was out of school and away from home and away from Keene. I had moved to Portsmouth and had a new group of friends and in some ways, I was able to reinvent myself. It's not that I was pretending to be something I wasn't, but I found I could approach situations

differently than I had previously. I could change the ways I presented myself. I could try things that I would have hesitated to do or would have felt uncomfortable about if I were younger and back at home. I wonder if I could have accomplished all of that earlier when I was still in school. That might have changed the path I took in life—just a thought.

My recollections of a childhood event are often different than how my siblings remember it. I've talked to Pam, Peter, and Laurie about things I remember happening when we were young that they remember quite differently than I do. Some events that were important in my life, or that I still have vivid memories of, they may have no recollection of at all. Some of the stories I've written may come across as unremarkable and even a bit boring, and I admit that some of the things I've written about are uneventful and ordinary. So be it. No one ever referred to me as "Mr. Excitement", at least not to my face. And I hope I haven't consciously tried to spice up any of the stories. I probably couldn't do that without sounding a bit phony anyway.

An important point I keep reminding myself of is that this is not a paper that is due Monday. I can take my time to edit and re-edit, and I've spent a lot more time on this project than I first envisioned. But I have plenty of spare time these days. I just needed to cut down on the hours I spent on Facebook and Pinterest and watch fewer old black-and-white movies on YouTube.

# My Story Begins in Keene, New Hampshire, Two Days After Christmas 1951



I grew up in the 1950s and 60s under the direction of a reasonably strict Mom (Anna) and a Dad (Dick) who, when we were young, was very much a part of our daily lives, but was less and less present as we grew older. Mom earned a teaching degree in the mid-1940s, then taught fifth grade in Laconia, New Hampshire for a few years before getting married. After that, as was the custom in those days, she became a housewife and a stay-at-home mom.

I have a few memories of our house on Elm Street in Keene. Mom and Dad owned the house, and we lived upstairs and rented out an apartment on the first floor. The refrigerator was in the corner by the door and stairway leading down to the driveway out back. I took a tumble down those wooden stairs, at age two or three, and I recall seeing drops of blood, dripping from my nose

and splashing onto the bottom step. Also, from our house on Elm St, I remember Dad's big dark green Naugahyde easy chair with long lines of large brass upholstery tacks adorning the front that I thought they were gold or jewels. The first Christmas I can remember was in that house. Santa brought me a fire engine that made a siren noise when I pushed it.

We lived in that house until 1954 or maybe 55. By then Pam was five so she must remember more about the Elm St house than I do. Our house was at the corner of Elm and Union Street, three or four blocks from Central Square (the center of downtown Keene). Elm Street Market was just a few hundred feet up the street from our house. Pam tells the story about Mom sending her to the market alone, with a note and a dollar bill pinned to her sweater to get cigarettes. Peter was born when we lived on Elm Street, but he was so young I don't have any memories of him during that time.

Then we moved to Marlboro Street in Keene, about a mile away from downtown. The room just off the kitchen is where all our toys were kept and we always called it the playroom, even after it became the boy's bedroom. Dad built bunk beds for us. But for the first few years, I slept in the big room upstairs at the front of the house. Mom started me in kindergarten in the fall of 1956 when I was four. She already had Pam, Peter, and me and was pregnant with Laurie, who was due in November. I think that's why I started school at four. All through school, I was always the



youngest in my class and probably the most immature. I've always felt that I should have started school a year later. I would have benefited socially.

I lived in that house on Marlboro Street until I moved to Portsmouth in the mid-1970s. Mom lived there until shortly before she died in 2003. Dad died there in 1988, in his bed, asleep, at age 63. Dad was always a drinker. I think he preferred beer until later in life when he switched to things like coffee brandy. But when I was little, it was always Schlitz beer in the 16oz can. No pop-tops or pull-tops back then. You needed a can opener to punch two triangular holes in the top - one to let the air in. I was about five when he taught me how to do that. Then he could say, "Hey Ricky, would you go get me a beer?". It wasn't long before I realized I could take a gulp or two before bringing it to him.

Dad drank too much though. I don't think he was ever a falling-down drunk. He could function and even drive home usually. But on that point, the police disagreed with him a few times. He drank at home in the evenings, but very often, after work, he preferred the company of his drinking buddies at the Legion or Elks Club or one of the other organizations, he belonged to in town that happened to have bars with low-priced beer. Sometimes Mom would phone the clubs looking for Dad to "remind" him to come home for supper. Most of the time we ate without him.

Pam was born a little more than two years before I was, but because I started early, she was just a year ahead of me in school. Even at a young age, she liked to draw and paint. We had a large slate that Dad leaned up against the garage door so we could all draw on it. Pam's drawings were always the best and very imaginative. She took weekly painting lessons at the YMCA and Mom displayed some of her paintings around the house. What I remember the most about her artwork was from when she was older. In high school and beyond, she created many beautiful items by sewing, embroidery, needlepoint, and crochet. She was, and still is, a very talented and creative artist. She currently specializes in cake decorating and gardening at her home in Virginia.

Peter was born in March of 1954. We got along ok when we were younger, riding our pedal cars around the driveway, but in school, we were two years apart and had different groups of friends. We went in two different directions. Looking back, I admire the path he took and the things he's accomplished. He began, what became his lifelong career when still in high school, working for Kingsbury Tool Manufacturer. Years later that led to various positions in the automotive industry. He's taught himself many skills over the years and has mastered one hobby after another in what seems like his never-ending quest to stay busy. He builds stuff and he fixes things; that's Pete. He's a craftsman. Rebuilding and reconditioning antique radios, steam

engines, and tools are just a few of the many interests he's immersed himself in over the years. One of the many interesting hobbies he has pursued is designing and building, what I would describe as eccentric musical instruments, which he then gives away to family and friends. I have a three-string cheesebox guitar he built.



Peter, Karen, and Laurie playing instruments Pete built

Something I wasn't aware of for many years was that Mom gave birth to twins in 1955. I was in my teens before I learned that. Mom and Dad's grave marker in Monadnock View Cemetery in West Keene shows twins Edward J. and Charles R. - 1955. Edward is a Lynch family name and I imagine the J. is for James, also a family name. Charles, of course, is from Grampa Rob - Charles Robinson and perhaps the R. is for Richard. I believe they were premature babies and lived only a few days.

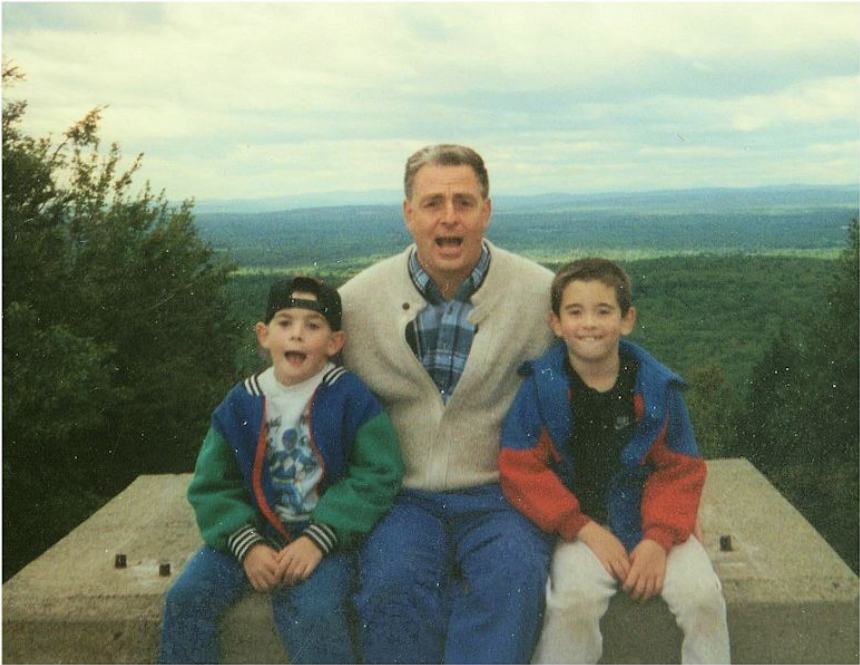
Laurie was born in November of 1956. I remember Mom being at Eliot Community Hospital on Main St in Keene and I was standing outside on the hospital lawn, along with Pam, Peter, and Dad, waving to Mom through a window. Mom has told me that I was very put out with this new baby in the family and that I even resorted to placing a pillow over her face one time while she was sleeping. I eventually got over my jealousy and accepted her presence, but probably just ignored her after that. Laurie, like her sister Pam, became a very good cook and also is quite talented with needle and thread. She is known for crafting beautiful and very imaginative quilts, especially baby quilts she likes to give as shower gifts. Laurie and her husband, Kevin, live in Kevin's family home on the York River in York, Maine - a wonderful place for family and friends to gather. Laurie has also mastered the art of hosting.

Like my siblings, I suppose that I too have talents, or at least after enough repetition I've learned to do some things well. I

consider my two strongest and most important traits to be patience and attention to detail. Nothing has ever come easily to me. I've had to work hard at everything I've ever wished to accomplish. It generally takes me longer to learn something than it does for the average person. If I did not have patience and an understanding of my limitations, I could easily become frustrated.

I don't consider myself to be all that creative. I view myself as a copier more than a creator. If I see something I like I can try to make something similar, and most of what I make, or build does not come out of my own head. I don't think I can come up with anything truly new and unique. That takes a person who can see things that don't yet exist, a dreamer. That's not me.

Some of the smaller items I make in Sam's woodshop are plant stands, cutting boards, coasters, jewelry boxes, bird houses, and clock faces. I've built a few Adirondack chairs as well. I like to make multiples of a project. I find that it's not that much harder to make two of something than it is to make one. Also, when I'm making something that's new for me, I find that the first one is usually a challenge, a learning experience. Sometimes I make four or more of the same item. The last one always comes out the best and takes the least amount of time. Every time I try something new it's a challenge for me.



Sam, me, and Ben. I had on Dad's sweater - I still have it

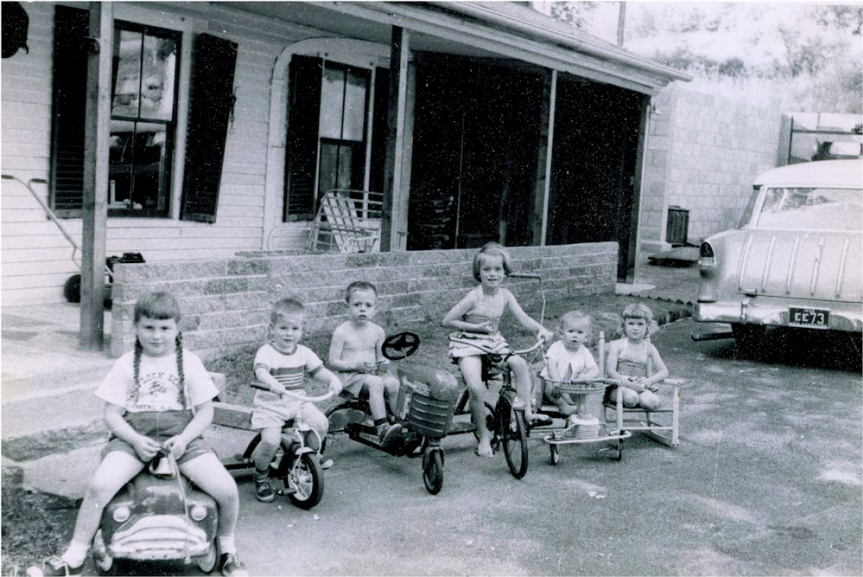
# Toys from My Childhood



I'm sure that I had plenty of toys as a young child. Some I remember only because Dad took lots of pictures. If I'm just working from memory, then I think that many of the things I recall from 60 years ago are probably a little exaggerated. The earliest toy I remember playing with was one of those cars you push a few times to get the wheels going fast and then put it down to race off and crash into a wall. I think the reason I remember this is because the wheels left black streaks all over the kitchen linoleum (the tires must have been real rubber). I guess Mom was a little upset about that because she snatched that car out of my hands, and I don't think I ever saw it again. I'm pretty sure I was two or three years old at the time because we were at the house on Elm Street, and I remember that kitchen floor very well.

From photos, I can recall playing in our driveway on Marlboro Street (it was paved). It was quite wide and long. All of us kids had some sort of ride-on pedal toy. I had a tractor. I thought it

was great. It had a pretend gear shifter and everything.



At left is Pam, then Peter, me, Gudren, Laurie, and Branka. We had wagons too. The driveway went a little bit downhill towards the street. Peter and I played a game we made up that I think we called “crash”. One of us sat in the wagon, starting at the top of the driveway, and steering with the handle folded up (you could turn sharp corners that way). Also, the driver got to wear this really cool big old WW2 rubber gas mask that Dad had acquired somewhere. It had big googly eye lenses and a rubber hose thing coming out the bottom. It covered your whole head and we imagined that it would keep us safe somehow. The other would run, pushing the wagon down the driveway, and at some point, would yell “crash”



and the daredevil driver would turn the wagon handle sharply - thus crashing. Mom didn't like it much when we played that game. If she saw us, she'd come out and yell. She'd say something like "If you break your leg don't come running to me".

Dad sometimes made us toys. Guns were easy to make and were very acceptable as toys back then. They were pretend guns mostly but when Pete and I were a little older (eight or ten maybe), he made us guns with a big elastic band attached to the tip that would shoot a projectile. Dad always made things out of what was lying around the barn, left over from a job he had finished. I remember some of the 'projectiles' he made were of a short, thick, piece of soft metal wire (aluminum or lead probably) that he bent in half and looped over the elastic band. That thing shot pretty straight and quite a distance too. We wouldn't shoot at animals or anything, just at each other. Dad made us nice slingshots too. Peter was deadly with that thing. We used acorns and sometimes rocks as ammo. I remember getting hit in the side of the head by Pete from about fifty feet away as I darted across the lawn trying to get to the safety of my fort. It knocked me right down, but I was more surprised than hurt. Peter fell down laughing.

Dad made us all stilts one summer. He built a bunch of them out of wood, even enough for some of the other kids in the neighborhood. Some short, for the smaller kids, and some taller

ones. They kept us busy for a while. Each of us had our own way of getting up onto them and then moving around, but I don't remember any of us mastering the art of stilt-walking.



Here is Pam on the left, a couple of neighbors (Jill I think, and her little sister), then Laurie and Me.

One winter Dad got a bunch of old skis somewhere. He screwed on a post, about a foot high, in the middle of a ski and nailed a board across the top as a seat. Mom called them puddle jumpers. You had to have pretty good balance to ride those things down the “sliding hill” (the back lawn). For the little kids, he made them with two skis for stability.

I took archery lessons for a couple of years in the basement of the YMCA building in town. Mom (or maybe Dad) bought me a

bow and arrow set when I was in the fifth grade. All the new bows were made out of fiberglass, but the one I had was wooden. This was the late 1950s and items that used to be made of wood or metal were now going plastic. I was a little jealous of the kids who had the bright colored fiberglass ones but I got used to my wooden one and grew to like it. Dad set up hay bales on the lawn and attached an official archery target to them. I know the bow and arrow was not exactly a toy, but we sure treated it like a toy sometimes. We did some stupid and really dangerous things with it. One of us would shoot an arrow straight up into the air and then everyone would run around trying to avoid getting hit when the arrow came down. I don't recall anyone ever saying - "This is stupid. Someone's going to get killed", and no one ran in to tell Mom what was going on. We played it only a couple of times. I think we knew the odds of someone getting hurt would eventually catch up with us. Mom should have outlawed using that thing at home and limited my use of it to just the YMCA basement.

I'm remembering some of the many common toys that every kid had back then, at least the boys did.

Rubber-tipped, spring-loaded dart guns - These were pistols and usually came with some sort of target the darts would stick to. Mom got shot in the eye with one of those darts. It wasn't me that time, I think Laurie was the trigger man, but it was an accident. I don't recall any details though she was very little and

should not have had access to one of those toy guns.



Balsa wood glider planes - They cost ten or fifteen cents and lasted about ten minutes but were fun until a wing broke or they got stuck in a tree. For a little higher price you could get one with a wind-up propeller, a rubber band, and wheels for landing.

Bags full of plastic green army men - These, I played with a lot. They were good for all kinds of uses and were not just to play army with. I got them caught in trees on homemade parachutes, buried them in the dirt, and melted them on the radiator.

Plastic bubbles that come from a tube and you blow up with a straw (don't inhale the fumes). They stayed blown up for a few minutes and then slowly deflated and were useless. It's funny how the commercials made these things look fantastic, magically floating around the room. We had short memories and kept wasting our money on the same junk time after time.

I never bought a comic book or a baseball card. Lots of my friends read comics and thought they were fun. Not me, I viewed comics as just more reading and it didn't interest me. And baseball cards didn't interest me either, except for using them in your bicycle spokes to make it sound like a motorcycle. If I collected those kinds of things when I was little, I could be rich now, but kids don't think like that, at least I didn't. I only cared about things I could shoot off as soon as I got it home.

Aside from store-bought items, our world outside the house provided all kinds of fun and adventure. And I really believe I learned a little bit about how the physical world around me worked just by playing in the neighborhood. In the springtime when everything was wet and muddy, Mike and I built dams out of dirt and rock, blocking the water flowing down the side of the street in front of his house. We pretended we were engineers and could control nature. We also had spots nearby on hills and inclines that we set up and caused small (to medium-sized) avalanches. At the bottom, we built houses and towns to destroy. We had the train tracks to play on too. One time (around the fifth grade), a school friend was playing at my house and he tried to talk me into jumping onto a caboose on its way toward town. I don't think he was serious, he just wanted to watch me do it, but I didn't. Luckily, I wasn't so gullible that I couldn't see the danger in trying something like that. I did plenty of stupid things when I was young, but I was usually the coward in the group and

hesitated to be the first to try anything.

Do mosquito spray trucks still drive around streets in the summertime? Karen tells me about her and her friends running through the mist behind the truck as it drove slowly through her neighborhood. In the 50s, DDT was the newest and most common insecticide and was thought to be safe and used everywhere.

Except for the DDT, I feel fortunate that I grew up in a time when the outdoors was our playground and Mom shooed us outside for a good part of every day.



# My First Bike



We spent a lot of time playing in the driveway at the house on Marlboro St. We had tricycles and pedal cars and four-wheeled wagons when we were little, but I don't recall having any of those little kiddie bicycles with hard rubber wheels and training wheels on the back.

That changed one day when I got off the school bus and walked up the driveway. I saw something on the side porch leaning up against the house. It looked like a bike. It was a beat-up blue and rusty two-wheeler Dad had pulled out of the dump that morning (Dad found many treasures at the town dump). The bike had old fat balloon tires and big fenders – it was beautiful! I didn't even care that it was a girl's bike. I was about eight years old then and I finally had a real bike! I was barely big enough for it, but Peter was too small, and Pam wasn't very interested in it, so I got to claim it. From then on, I don't think I was ever without a bicycle. It's odd to me that I don't have any recollection of learning how to ride a two-wheeler. That was usually an ordeal for any kid to

go through and often resulted in at least a few bumps and scrapes.

There wasn't much tread left on the fat balloon tires, and even though I tightened every bolt and nut I could find on that bike it rattled. It rattled a lot. With every small bump I rode over, the bike sounded (and felt) like it was about to shake itself to pieces and lose a fender or chainguard or something. I added a mirror on the handlebars and plastic white and blue streamers to each of the hand grips. Despite the squeaks and clangs that bike made, it was pretty rugged. I rode it hard, over dirt roads and rocks and through fields and puddles but it never broke down, except the chain tended to jump off the front sprocket occasionally but that was easy to put back on.

Yet this is not an entirely happy story, for that first bicycle came to a sad ending up at camp. The bumpy dirt road coming down the steep hill towards our house had a flat smooth spot at the bottom that was an ideal place to set up a jump to ride our bikes over. Peter, Mike Doody, Nancy Kohler, and I stacked up some bricks and leaned a board on top. In the beginning, the ramp wasn't too high and seemed reasonably solid, at least it didn't collapse as each of us took our turn going down the hill and off the jump. After each turn, we all got braver and built the ramp a little higher. Eventually, we got a little too cocky and made the jump one wobbly brick too high. It was my turn, and I pushed the old bike to the top of the hill. I hopped on the seat and as a dare, I



got Pete to ride on the back fender. We had that bike flying down the hill pretty well, avoiding most of the rocks, as I aimed for the narrow ramp, but everything went wrong just as we got there.

The flat smooth spot at the bottom of the hill, where we built the ramp, was right in front of the Murphy's cottage, and lucky for us, the retired Dr. Murphy was home. He heard Peter's screams and he and Mrs. Murphy came out to see what had happened. Either we hit the jump and crashed, or Peter somehow put his leg through the back wheel of the bike and caused the whole thing himself. Either way, Pete was under the bike with his leg up through the wheel which now had several broken spokes, two of which were embedded pretty deeply into Peter's right calf. Dr. Murphy assessed the situation, then went inside and came out with a bottle of alcohol and a big pair of pliers. He proceeded to cut more spokes out of that wheel than I thought was necessary, but he was in charge. I just knew that I could never fix that wheel now, with so many spokes missing. He finally got Peter's leg out and poured the alcohol over the wounds.

A short time later I got my second bike, a brand new, store-bought, streamlined Columbia bike, with lots of chrome and dual headlights over the front wheel. I put a lot of miles on that bike over the next several years. But nothing would ever top the excitement I felt when I saw my first bike, rust and all.



Me with a Candy Bar on Dad's Willys Jeepster



Dad's For Sale ad from 1955

# Riding the Bus to School



Our family lived about a mile down Marlboro St from downtown Keene, which was too far away from the schools we attended to walk there and back. So, we always rode in the big yellow school buses beginning in half-day kindergarten. I went to the morning session in kindergarten and at noon, I and two or three others climbed up into the huge empty bus and headed home. Wheelock Elementary was the name of the school on Marlboro St. Mrs. Kline was our teacher. She played the piano and taught us songs. I still remember “Good Morning to You”. We danced a lot too. Here’s a vivid memory I have — one day, as Mrs. Kline played one of her songs, she said “Ok, everybody skip now”. I had never learned to skip - no one ever taught me. I probably didn’t even know what it meant. I looked around at the other kids and they were all skipping, except for Tommy. We looked at each other and were a little embarrassed that we didn’t know how to skip so we kind of moved to the back of the group and hopped around on one foot pretending we knew what we

were doing.

But it was always a bus ride to school, every year. I never walked or rode a bike to school, and I didn't have a car, or a friend with a car, in High School. The bus rides were a big part of my school day and social life because they were usually long rides. Coming home, down Marlboro St the bus driver wouldn't let me out on the "other" side of the street (where I would have to cross over to the left side of the road to get to our house). Instead, I had to stay on the bus and wait for the return trip so I could be let off on the side of the street our house was on. But that meant riding all the way to the next town (Marlboro), a few miles away. So, I was always the last one off the bus even though I was one of the kids that lived the closest to the school.

The Junior High building was, at that time, right in downtown Keene, just off the Square. The bus ride home was an adventure those years as well. The bus went north into the next town – Roxbury, up and down and around hills traveling quite a few miles until we were finally in Marlboro again and then back to Keene where once again, I was the last one off the bus. I remember that some years there were bullies on the bus. I don't think I was picked on too much myself but sometimes the bus rides could be tough for some kids.

In Junior High and High School, there was always a "2nd" (later) bus I could take home leaving downtown, by the big clock in front of Tilden's bookstore on the corner of Gilbo Avenue, about

an hour after school got out. I took that bus quite often, especially in High School. Not because I had any after-school activities, but mostly I just enjoyed roaming around downtown on my own. Many times, I would skip school lunch and spend the money (35 cents) on snacks in one of the candy stores or soda shops in town. There was a Rexall drug store on Main Street, close to the corner of Roxbury Street where they sold different kinds of nuts by the pound. My favorite nuts, because they were the cheapest, were Spanish peanuts. I always got a quarter pound for nineteen cents. I hung out at the newsstand quite a bit too, checking out the latest sports magazines. That was right next to the bus stop where the train tracks crossed Main Street.

I could have walked home from downtown and sometimes I had to - because I dilly-dallied too much around town and ended up missing the 2nd bus. It was only a mile or maybe a mile and a half but that always seemed like a long way to me. One time in Junior High I walked home from downtown by way of the train tracks. After all, the tracks led right to my house up in back of the garage. I went that way just that one time though. Going that way felt a little scary to me. I had to go through neighborhoods I had never seen before, and I wasn't sure what I would run into. Sometimes I would call Mom to see if she would come and pick me up but usually, she told me to get walking.

My Stories | Rick Lynch



Me, Pam, and Peter



The Hutch cabinet outside Mom's bedroom

# Friends at School



**M**y first friend was Rudy. We didn't go to school together, he attended the Catholic school on Main St, and lived a little further down the street from me, at what became the dead end when they built the highway bypassing Keene. Before that, our street was the highway from the east and a very busy road. I couldn't have met Rudy on my own, I was too young to go wandering down the street. Mom and Dad must have been friendly with his folks, and we ended up playing at each other's house. Rudy had an older sister too. Maybe Pam was friends with her. Anyway, they moved away when I was in the 2nd grade, back to Texas, where they were originally from. I sensed I would never see him again. I remember that being a little traumatic to me, losing a friend like that. Up until then, I assumed friends lasted forever. Another lasting memory for me was from 1st grade on the school playground. I still have dreams about it occasionally. There was this giant slide, very high. You had to climb up about a dozen steps to get to the top. One friend, I don't remember who was

going down the slide, and another friend, Kenny, thought it would be fun to see if he could hit him with a rock as he slid down. I was standing beside Kenny but being the coward that I was, I backed up enough to be able to say, "It wasn't me". Anyway, the kid started down the slide and Kenny's rock hit him in the jaw. One of our teachers watched the whole thing out the window ran out and grabbed the three of us. I learned what detention was that day. In our school, it meant sitting in a chair, with our backs against the blackboard in front of the 6th graders. We were marched in like we were going to jail. Grammar school justice was tough and I learned to not ever be around when bad things go down or you'll get sucked in. It was all Kenny's fault, I didn't even do anything except maybe I did encourage Kenny a little. The funny thing is - even the kid who got hit with the rock got detention with us. Five years later when I was in the sixth grade, I loved seeing the little kids being all sad and crying up in front of the blackboard on detention days.

Around the fourth or fifth grade, Tommy Forcier became my best friend at school. I don't know what led to that relationship. He turned out to be a bit of a jerk for a while later on, but maybe we were all jerks to each other at one time or another. I lived about a mile from Wheelock School and rode the bus, but Tommy lived only a half mile from school, so he had to walk to school. I remember playing at his house quite often. I liked his mom; she was nice to me. She was a working mom which I wasn't used to



seeing. My mom and most other moms in my neighborhood stayed home and took care of the house and the kids. At Tommy's, we roamed around quite a bit. It was a much more populated area than my neighborhood was and there were businesses and factories and old abandoned buildings as well. Luckily, I don't think we got hurt or got into trouble, but we had lots of chances to get hurt in some of the places we explored. Tommy and I chummed around together on and off all through our school years. It seemed to depend on whether or not we had the same teachers in school. And there were a couple of years we didn't see much of each other at all. Then in high school, we ended up playing neighborhood baseball together quite a bit in the empty fields across the road from my house.

Later on, there were a couple of kids in my neighborhood that I spent a lot of time with. First, there was Mike Dratwa. He was the nerdiest kid I ever met but we had fun doing stupid things around home. Mike's mom and dad were even nerdier than he was. But I liked that family, and they welcomed me into their house each day as if I were one of theirs. His house was down near the dead-end where we all got on and off the school bus after the highway was built. I met Mike by getting into a fistfight with him in front of his house one day. I don't recall what the fight was about exactly, but I was probably picking on him for being a nerd. Neither of us could punch very well so it was more like wrestling. After scuffling on the ground for a while we both

just sat there resting and he said to me, ‘Hey, you wanna be friends?’. That sounds like a stupid way to become friends but that’s what happened. I was a year older than Mike and I thought of him as my sidekick. Bobby Healy lived a little further past Mike’s house, beyond the dead end, and past the train trestle. Mostly we played baseball together in early high school. There were never enough kids around our part of town to get full teams for a game, so we made up our version. All we needed was a pitcher and batter and an outfielder or two.

Occasionally I visited kids, school friends, who lived in other neighborhoods. But most of the time I found things to do in my own yard and played with kids in my own part of town. My part of town included: the railroad tracks, the open fields across the street before the highway was built, and Beech Hill up behind the house. I couldn’t get into too much trouble because it was just woods and overgrown fields. There were no fences keeping us off the tracks and none of us thought it was dangerous to play there. Trains went by a couple of times a day, but we could always hear them coming from a distance.

# The Neighborhood I Grew Up In



**M**om and Dad owned a two-story house on Elm St quite close to downtown for the first three or four years of my life. We lived upstairs and another family rented downstairs. I vaguely remember the layout of the apartment and the door to the stairs leading down to the backyard. I took a tumble down those stairs one day and rolled down to the bottom, though I don't remember being hurt. When I was three, we moved to 534 Marlboro St, into an old farmhouse that needed a lot of updating before it was ready to be lived in. At that time, Marlboro St was what amounted to a highway into town; route-101. All traffic into Keene from the east went right in front of our house. Not ideal for a family with four kids but I guess we learned to stay out of the road.

The train tracks were right up behind the garage, not more than fifty feet from the house, running parallel to the street in front.

Back in those days, there were still a lot of trains running. Passenger, as well as freight, trains ran from Boston up to Montreal and back. When a train went by it was very loud and everything in the house shook, especially Mom's dishes in the kitchen cupboards.

When I was about ten or twelve, a new section of the highway was built which resulted in our neighborhood becoming a dead-end street. From then on, the street became part of our playground. Mom didn't have to worry as much about us playing in the street, and we were older and more capable of taking care of ourselves and using our own judgment. Now we could cross the street and ride our bikes on the dirt roads and paths through the empty field and play in the pond created when the highway was put in. Another area we discovered to play in was on Beech Hill up the hill in back of our house.

Across the railroad tracks, and up the hill was the Chapman Road which runs along the base of Beech Hill. Beyond that was nothing but woods, all running uphill. After a half-hour climb were some large rock cliffs. And once those were climbed you got a nice view of the whole town below. In the late 1800s, there was an observation tower on top of those cliffs. The man who built the tower and owned the land charged people fifty cents to climb the stairs to the top and enjoy the view. The tower is long gone but I remember being shown the fieldstone foundation it was built on. I camped out a few times with friends up on top of

Beech Hill and in the woods down below.

In front of our house, Marlboro St ran in a straight line for five hundred feet in each direction and you could see if any cars were coming from a ways off. After the street was dead-ended, it was a great place to have bicycle races and build rickety jumps to fly our bikes over. Bobby Heally and I played a lot of baseball in the street, practicing hitting ground balls to each other. On the pavement, the ball would go a hundred miles an hour and we figured if we could learn to field a baseball going that fast then we would do fine when playing on dirt. The road surface was very tough on the ball though. The stitches quickly tore out and to repair it I wrapped the ball in black electrical tape. That worked well but I had to put new tape on the ball every day.

Out to the right side of the house was a large lawn terraced into four sections (each one flattened and leveled) starting at the top by the tracks with each successive terrace about five feet lower than the one above and the bottom terrace at street level. Thinking back, I imagine that the lawn area must have been changed from a long slope at some point to the terraces for farming and gardening purposes. The surrounding area was all farmed way back when. On the left side of the house was our sliding hill, from the tracks down to the street. Dad placed a log the size of a telephone pole at the bottom to keep us from flying out into the street and getting run over.

Keene was known for having a great number of elm trees all around the town. And we had some in our yard, providing lots of shade in the summertime. The official nickname for Keene used to be “Elm City”. Our telephone number was EL-2-5065. Business ads in the newspaper showed phone numbers as ELMwood-2-xxxx. Phone numbers everywhere began with a word like that back then. Then EL-2 turned into 352 sometime in the 60s. It sounded less quaint, but I guess whoever was in charge of those things thought that phone numbers should be numbers only and got rid of the old-fashioned way. That’s about the time zip codes came along too.

The elms were terrific shade trees but had no branches lower down on the trunks. Branches started about thirty feet up. We had a row of large elms along the street a few more huge ones up on the lawn and a couple up close to the house. These were three, four, or five feet in diameter. Then, in the 1960s, they all died. Dutch Elm disease came along and killed them and within a few years, there were none left. They all had to be cut down before they fell.

We had some big maple and evergreen trees as well. My brother Peter and I each claimed our own trees. Mine was the tall pine tree by the driveway. His was a maple out in the middle of the lawn. Both Pete and I built tree houses in our trees. My tree house was a simple one built with a few thick boards across two branches ten feet off the ground and that was it, just a floor. All

the branches on my tree were two or three inches thick and grew straight out from the trunk. And there were lots of them spaced a couple of feet apart, so it made for great climbing. Except for the tree sap. Pitch, we called it. It was tough to wash the dirt-encrusted pitch off our hands.

Further up the tree, about twenty-five and maybe even thirty feet off the ground, I had what I called, “a lookout”. Just a single thin board across two limbs for a seat and another board, just above it, for a table. I invited Peter to have lunch with me up in the lookout when I got it finished. I remember Mom bringing out peanut butter and jelly sandwiches wrapped in wax paper, and we climbed up. Pete was only about six or seven and after sitting up there for a few minutes he began to get scared. Mom climbed up, all the way to the lookout, and helped him get down. I was impressed that Mom would do that, but she was always pretty spry, and I believe when she was young, she considered herself a tomboy.

Dad also built us a very large set of swings suspended by ropes from a big 6-inch steel pipe with one end up in Pete’s tree and the other end in an elm tree. There were four swings, one for each of us (Pam, me, Peter, and Laurie). Those were very long swings. We all learned to be real daredevils on them. Standing up, jumping off, and everything. Spinning on the swing was fun too. And that’s how I found out I had some kind of dizziness disorder. I was probably about seven at the time. I remember, for

a while, I could spin without any ill effect but then, one day, the spinning made me sick, and I had a hard time getting everything around me to stop moving. And my balance was a little off too. This went on for a day or so Mom thought I might have a concussion and called the doctor. Keep in mind that Mom did not ordinarily take us to see the doctor or even call unless she was convinced whatever was ailing us was beyond her ability to fix. There were times when I should have gotten stitches, but Mom just closed up the wound with two band-aids instead of the usual one. The doctor ran some tests. I never knew what he concluded about my dizziness, but I do know the result was that I had to start taking the most fowl-tasting medicine every morning. As soon as it touched my tongue, I gagged on it and had the most difficult time swallowing it. Finally, I was able to convince Mom that if I could wash it down with grape juice, I could swallow it. After that, I don't think I ever outgrew getting dizzy, easily. Even riding in the car sometimes made me dizzy and then car sick. Dad also made a nice rope swing for us, which hung from a branch on the other side of the elm that the swings were on. He had a long, thick cotton rope that he attached far out on a limb about thirty feet up. Then he tied a big knot at the bottom of the rope, forming a ball to sit on. We had a platform, a few feet high, that we climbed up with the heavy rope over our shoulder, so we could get a good jump, then swing way out and try to avoid crashing into the tree on the way back. Laurie was an early



victim of that do-it-yourself amusement ride when she required several stitches in her head after she came in contact with that tree. That rope swing lasted for several years, surviving winters, but it was made of cotton. I was in the ninth grade Mike Dratwa and I were on the rope together when it broke. We flew down the hill crashing to the ground on top of each other. We both wet our pants.

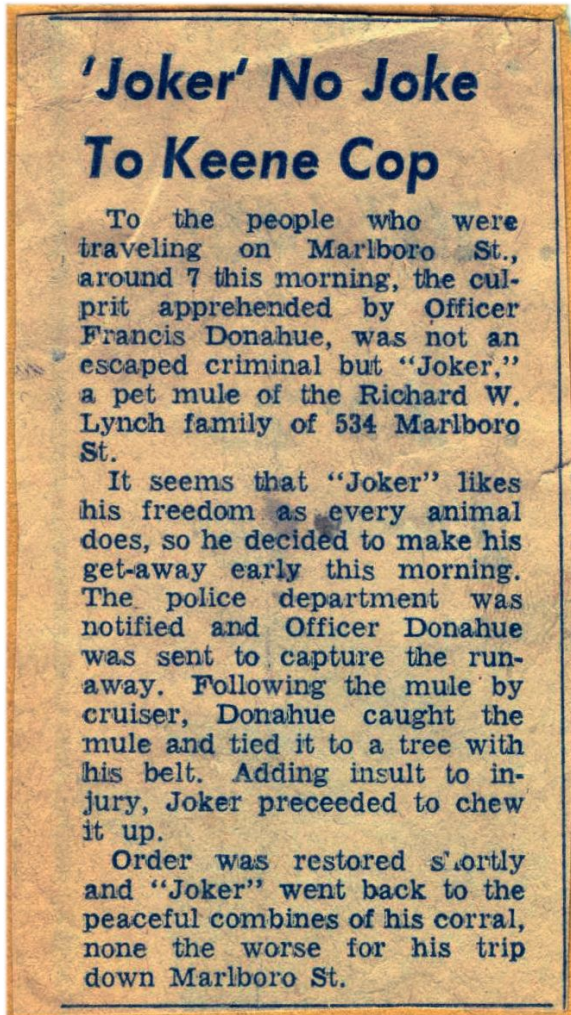
We had a donkey for a few years. To me, he wasn't much of a pet. We got to ride on him sometimes (bareback) and I think Dad even had a saddle on him once.



His name was Joker (good name for a donkey, don't you think?). I'm not sure if he came with that name or if Dad gave it to him. Joker tolerated us but I don't think he liked us kids and he was a little ornery. I never asked Dad, but I wonder now, why he wanted a donkey. Probably got him in a trade or maybe someone just wanted to get rid of him because he was such a nuisance.

Joker had a fenced-in area – fifty by fifty feet or so. The story goes (and I was there to see it), that Pam decided the best flowers in the yard were located in the donkey's corral and she went in to pick some of them. I don't know if Joker was annoyed by her presence or just wanted to have some fun, but he began to chase her around the corral. Eventually, Pam fell, and Joker proceeded to lie down right on top of her. I was hysterical; the funniest thing I had ever seen. Pam did not think it was so funny though. I forget how it ended but I think Mom heard the screams and had to come out and get involved. I don't think Pam was hurt at all, except maybe her pride, just a little. Pam has recently reminded me of the time I stuck my hand into Joker's mouth, and I wasn't able to pull it out. Joker wouldn't let go. Finally, Dad had to pry Joker's teeth apart with a screwdriver to make him let go of me. I have a vague memory of this incident. One would think that something like that would create a clear and lasting impression, but I just don't have that. It's funny that you can recall some insignificant things but not some of the more important or potentially traumatic events such as this.

Joker was well known around our part of town; he even had a police record of sorts. He escaped from his corral a few times and ran down Marlboro St toward town. Sometimes Dad would fetch him home but one time the police got to the scene first.



We also had a pony for a while. Now that I'm thinking about it, I believe we had the pony before we had Joker. She was white with black spots and named Pepper, if I remember correctly. She had a red saddle, and we would take turns going for pony rides around the yard. Dad also had a red two-wheeled pony cart that would hold a few kids at a time. From photos I've seen, I was around five or six years old when we had Pepper. Mom told me that Pepper was quite old when we got her and "on her last legs" as she put it. I don't think we had her very long, maybe only a couple of years. Dad built a stable for her up in the far corner of the lawn, by the tracks. Even after the pony and the donkey were long gone and the stable was just used for storage, it was always referred to as the "pony barn".



Pepper in front of the pony barn. You can see part of the old wooden railroad crossing fence in the background. An old, abandoned portion of the Chapman Road came down a steep hill from the right, turned to the left at ninety degrees, and crossed the tracks here. We used that road for a sliding hill in the winter.



Dad took this photo from the Chapman Road about 500 feet up the hill behind the house. Note the railroad tracks. My tree was the tall pine in the center. This was taken before the 2nd barn was moved onto the lawn at the left edge of the photo on the street, and before the pony barn was built up by the tracks. Also, note that this was before the swings were put up between the maple and the elm in the middle of the lawn. You can see the large elm trees surrounding the house.



Newly built garage - 1955



Mom hung out the washing in wintertime. Note the old wooden fence up at the railroad crossing.

# The Time Pete and I Made a Bomb



I was the one who came up with the idea, though I don't recall where I got it from. Like everything else we played at or tried to build, we probably saw it on a TV show or a cartoon and then tried to come up with our own version of it. I was seven or eight and Pete, being a couple of years younger than me, just went along with it.

We weren't looking to do any destruction with this thing, we only wanted to see if we could actually make a real bomb. Mom even approved of our experiment and gave us the go-ahead to try it. She gave us one of the plastic cups we drank our chocolate milk out of. It had a snap-on lid. This was going to be a chemical bomb. Mom put some baking soda into the cup I was holding and then gave Peter a second cup with vinegar in it and told us to go out onto the lawn with it.

I honestly thought, if we weren't careful, there was a chance that one or both of us might get injured when this thing went off. I set my cup, with the baking soda, down on the grass in the middle of the lawn. Peter handed me the vinegar. I carefully, but quickly, poured it in on top of the baking soda, snapped the lid on, shook it up a little, and put the cup on the ground. Then we ran for cover. Peeking out from behind the large elm tree by the swings, waiting for the explosion. And then we waited some more, not daring to approach it just yet, fearing that it might go off in our faces. But, after a couple more minutes I realized that we were not going to get the same effect with our bomb as Wile E. Coyote got with his.





# My Childhood Bedroom



**O**n Marlboro St my bedroom was upstairs. It was a large room at the front of the house with two windows overlooking the porch roof and the street below. The floor was made of very wide pine boards with many knots. I was fascinated with those knots because, to my three-year-old eyes, they looked like they could be made of chocolate. I remember trying to bite a particularly large one and was disappointed when I found they had no taste at all. The windows let in the afternoon sun and made it difficult for me to settle down at nap time even with the shades pulled down and the curtains drawn shut. I imagined that the room's wallpaper was from some earlier time though it was in good shape. It didn't seem like it was anything Mom would have picked for a kid's bedroom though. It had a Grecian urn pattern and seemed a little depressing to me.

That room and another small room (Pam's bedroom) off it were the only two rooms we had upstairs. The rest of the second floor of the house was an apartment Mom and Dad rented out. There

was a door with windows from top to bottom separating my bedroom from that apartment. I don't think I was more than four years old then, but I have a very vivid memory of Dad opening the door and introducing our new neighbors and tenants, the Goedeckes and their two little daughters Gudren and Branka. They were from Germany and the time was the early 1950s. Dad explained to us that they were refugees and that one of the Keene churches sponsored their coming to our country. Branka was my age and Gudren was a little older. We must have played together but I only remember them from school. I considered Branka my first girlfriend, but I don't think she shared that notion.



I remember a phrase Mom would use at bedtime. She'd say, "Up the wooden hill". I knew she meant the stairs, but I never asked

where that came from. I doubt she made it up. Thinking back, it could have been from a story she read to me or perhaps a story from her own childhood. I googled it once and got - “When you go up the wooden hill, you go up the stairs to bed”.

Each night at bedtime, before shutting out the light and heading back downstairs, Mom wound up the music box she kept on top of the dresser. It played a lullaby, slowly winding down, slower and slower, then stopping.



Peter eventually joined me in that upstairs bedroom, but once Laurie outgrew her crib a couple of years later everything changed. Off the kitchen, downstairs was a big room that we always referred to as “the playroom”. All our toys were kept and used in there when we were little. For a couple of years, there

was a long wide table against the far wall that Dad built, and it was set up with my official Lionel train. The set had bridges, mountains, and tunnels. It was quite a layout. He put it all together late one Christmas Eve in the mid-1950s. It was as much a toy for him as it was for us. Model trains were the rage back then.

So, Laurie and Pam got the upstairs bedroom, and the playroom became mine and Peter's bedroom. Dad tore out the train table and built bureaus and bunk beds. I got the top bunk. And that's where I slept until I moved out twelve or thirteen years later.



Our house at 534 Marlboro Street

# I Was Pleased with Myself That I Had Never Broken a Bone...



U  
ntil that day I tripped over the dog. I certainly had my share of falls cuts and bruises while growing up. Mom told me of the time (about age four) when I fell off a ladder onto the cement porch floor and got a concussion. A few times I had stitches - once while walking barefoot in the lake right where we had foolishly been shooting rock with our slingshots at a floating beer bottle. One of us finally got a lucky shot in and sent the bottle to the bottom. A few days later I was wading in the water and felt a sharp pain. It required seven or eight stitches. A few days later I fell and cut my knee playing in the woods. The cut probably should have been stitched up, but Mom said, “You just had stitches last week, we’re not getting any more for this cut.” (that’s a true story). The cut was right below my kneecap. Mom said keep your leg straight, and she put a bunch of band-aids on

it. It wasn't easy keeping my leg stiff for the next week. It never healed right, and I still have the scar.

In the eighth grade me and a few bike-riding friends would often pedal up to the far end of Chapman Road on Beech Hill (this was the hill directly behind our house on Marlboro Street.) From there it was a couple of miles, all downhill, to my house. I bought a speedometer for my bike just to see how fast we were going when we raced down that hill. The highest the gauge read was 50mph and I swear that the needle was buried at 50 coming down that hill. One day three of us crashed together and went off the road into the bushes. Someone should have been killed but we managed to avoid the trees and the stone wall and miraculously no one was hurt. Our lucky day.



This is not a photo of my actual bicycle, but it is exactly what my Columbia Thunderbolt looked like. White wall tires, single speed,

coaster brakes (great for skidding out - slamming on the brakes and sliding sideways). I didn't have that bike for more than twenty minutes before I lost control on a sandy spot, dumped the bike, and knocked the two headlights off. After that, they were held on with electrical tape. I didn't ride much at night, so I didn't need the lights, but they did look cool - like little jet engines. I beat that bicycle up a lot, crashed it, and dumped it. Luckily, they made bikes very rugged back then and it lasted for years.

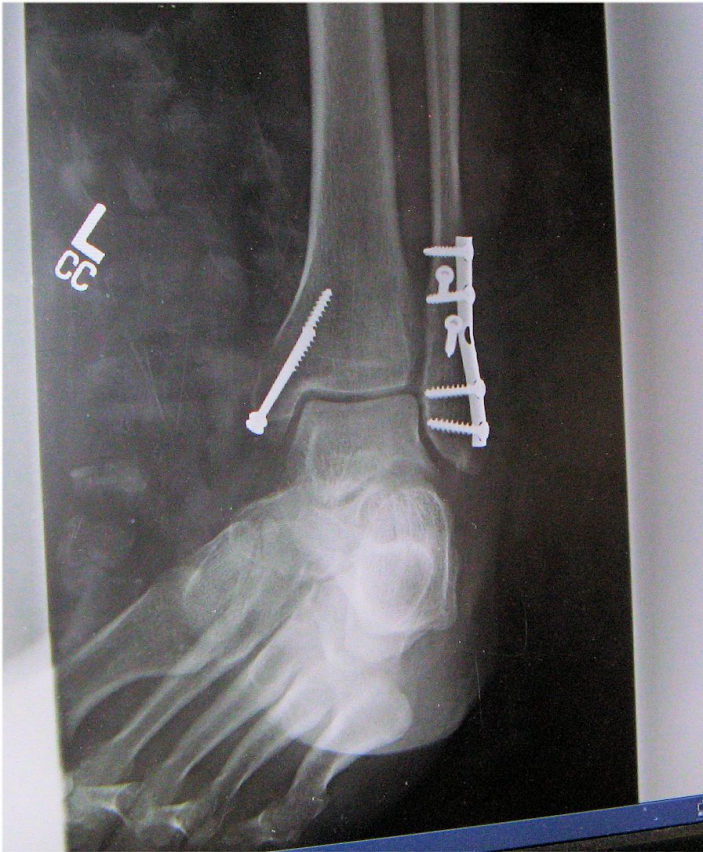
As I grew older, I periodically patted myself on the back over the fact that I never had a broken bone. But eventually, the day came when I could no longer say that. I was fifty-seven at the time and Karen and I were at one of our favorite dog-walking parks in a wooded area in Stratham with nice wide trails. I had my camera with me as we started walking with our two golden retrievers, Ella and Timber. I had Timber on a leash, and I was taking a few photos as we started out. I didn't notice that Timber had stopped to sniff something he found interesting. At the last second, I awkwardly tried to step/jump over him and landed badly on my left foot.

I spent the next four days sharing a hospital room with a young man who had just gone through gastric bypass reversal surgery. He moaned and cried the whole time I was there. I had surgery to put my ankle back together and came home with two metal bars and six long screws added. On the bright side, during my stay in

the hospital, I was introduced to The Cowboy Channel on my television. I watched a ton of old cowboy movies and took naps. Then I got the next six weeks off from work and got paid for it. Who's better than me?

You know, I never felt any pain from that injury, so I wasn't even sure if I did break it when it first happened. Karen asked me if I was alright and I said, "I don't know, maybe it's just sprained". I got myself up off the ground and tried putting a little weight on it. "Nope, it's broken". But during the long car ride to the emergency room and waiting to get the break looked at by a doctor (this was a weekend, and the emergency room was understaffed) it never really hurt too much. The first doctor who came in (a young guy) wanted to wrap the ankle tightly in a pillow and send me home for the night. But then a real doctor came along and told me I would be staying the night, and he would operate first thing in the morning. They hooked me up with a morphine drip for the pain, where I just pushed a button when I needed it, but I never needed it. I was advised to use the morphine before I started feeling a lot of pain. I didn't like it. It only made me sick. So, I stopped. I've got a couple of nice photographs of the hardware they used to put me back together with. Doctors told me I would likely develop arthritis in that ankle as I get older. So far, that hasn't occurred, but I do get flagged for extra pat-downs when I go through airport security.







Me, Pam, Laurie, and Peter - October 2023

# Family Reunions



In 1957, Mom's family, the Robinsons, gathered at the family dairy farm in Marlborough, New Hampshire for a reunion. This would be the final reunion for all of Grampa Rob's generation.



Grampa's siblings, Edgar, with Guy, Lilla, and Will on the right

He and his siblings, all born between 1884 and 1896, were the last Robinson children raised on the farm run by their father George, and their mother Anna. By 1957 Will, Lilla, Charles - (Grampa), Guy, and Edgar were all in their 60s and 70s. I don't have a clear recollection of that day, but Mom told me about all the people there and how they were related to me.

After that family reunion, I never saw Lilla or Will again. But I did see Uncle Edgar occasionally when we visited the dairy farm he continued to run until he died in 1966. I got to roam around in the large barn looking at the cows and the two really big bulls they had. In the summertime, Mom took us to pick blueberries from the bushes Will planted and cultivated forty years earlier, and other times Dad took us there to get a load of cow manure for Mom's garden. When Grampa Rob died in 1973 that generation was gone. It would be more than a decade before the Robinson family gathered together again. By then, the family farm in Marlborough, known as Sunnynook, was no longer owned by the Robinsons.

It would be thirty years before Mom arranged the next Robinson Family reunion at the house on Marlboro St. in Keene, in 1987. Dad put up a large canvas canopy on the lawn. It was nice to sit in the shade on that hot Saturday in July. Mom's two brothers, Chuck and Frank, and her sister, Margaret were all there with their families. I enjoyed listening to them talk about their days growing up in Marlboro and retelling family stories. Mom,

Margaret, Chuck, and Frank all stayed in touch, usually by writing long letters to each other and occasionally talking on the telephone.

That was the last time I saw Aunt Margaret (Mom's sister), who we always called Aunt Peggy because Mom grew up calling her Peg, they were very close. Years later, my cousin Sandy told me that her mom hated that name. I wish I had known. For some reason, no one thought to take a group photo of all those who attended the reunion in 1987. What Mom organized instead was a series of photo shoots of all the individual families that attended.



Here's Mom surrounded by her children and grandchildren.

Fifteen years later, in 2002, another reunion of the Robinson family was held at the house on Marlboro St. It was not as well attended as the previous meeting had been. Several aunts, uncles, and cousins had passed on and the children from the previous get-together were grown and were less interested in this kind of celebration. Mom, Frank, and Chuck were the center of attention, holding court as we dug out old photos of their younger days.



Anna with her brothers, Chuck and Frank

I'm happy that Mom arranged this family gathering. I'm sure she realized this would be the last reunion for her and maybe her last chance to see many of those in attendance. Her health had been in decline for a couple of years. The previous year she had sold to house to tenants living upstairs and was now renting from them. She moved to a nursing home the next year and died there in December 2003.



This is a photo of the Cousins in 2002. Left to right - Brenda, Bruce, Rick, Jan, Laurie, Ruth, Peter, and Lonnie. Notice the pony barn still standing in the background at the top of the lawn.

There were a couple more, smaller gatherings at Uncle Frank's house in Marlborough between 2006 and 2009.



Standing - Ben Helm (Sandy's husband), JoAnn (Lonnie's wife), Lonnie, me, (Aunt Cherry's twin brother Chan), Karl, and Scott (Karl's son). Seated - Aunt Cherry, Jan, Uncle Frank, Ruth, Brenda, Sandy, Uncle Chuck.

Although many of the Robinsons lived far apart, they kept in touch with one another, and a close relationship between members of the extended family was maintained. The same closeness did not exist in Dad's family. I don't recall there being anything resembling a family reunion for the Lynch side of the family. Grampa Lynch was an only child and both of his parents died when he was still a teenager. However, Dad's mother (Helen



## My Stories | Rick Lynch

Valida Butler) was from a large family raised in Keene. Helen had nine brothers and sisters, some of whom remained in the area their entire lives, but I don't remember meeting any of them, except for one of the youngest siblings, Pauline, who we visited when I was very young, and she was quite old.

Dad rarely mentioned his Butler family relatives and I don't recall him telling any family stories about them. All of Dad's siblings had children, but we visited our Lynch cousins only occasionally. Some of these cousins I didn't meet until many years later when we were all adults.

So, there were plenty of Lynches, and Butlers, in the area but it seems they didn't have the same sense of family that the Robinsons had. I have seen very few group photographs of Dad's family and I have only a single photo of Dad together with his siblings when they were young.



Marion (in front) with Jim, Bob, and Dick - Eddie is missing

Dad's mother Helen died March 8, 1943. I assume the following photo was taken on the day of her funeral.



Uncle Bob, Uncle Eddie, Aunt Marion, Grandpa Lynch, Dad

# With Mom When She Died



**I**t was twenty years ago (2003) this Christmas. I was at Mom's bedside in Keene when she died. She was at an assisted living facility called Langdon Place on Arch St and was in a comatose state following hip surgery. She had fallen a couple of days before and broke her hip after getting out of bed on her own. I say comatose though I don't know the medical term for her condition. It was as if she were sleeping and sometimes talking in her sleep. She would recite the alphabet as fast as she could, over and over again. Although she didn't respond when I spoke to her or even acknowledge my presence, I think she could hear what was going on around her.

A nurse brought in a cup of ginger ale into which she dunked a small stick with a sponge on one end and placed it against Mom's lips. Mom sucked hard on that little sponge and resisted letting it go. Every few minutes I refilled the sponge and gave it to her again.

The night before, Peter and his wife Pam were there with me at Mom's bedside, and I remember Pam quizzing a nurse about Anna's condition. The nurse told Pam matter-of-factly that Mom was now dying, her body was shutting down and the end would probably come within a few hours. It was late. Pam went home and Peter and I stayed at Mom's bedside. Just before sunup, Peter decided to make a quick trip home (just a few miles away) to shower and change and then come back.

Mom's breathing was labored, though I don't think she had difficulty breathing, it just seemed like she was bothered by something. I was holding Mom's hand when her bedside telephone rang. It was her close friend Shirley whom Mom worked with years before at the Keene State College cafeteria. They had remained close friends and spoke together often. I remember very clearly as I said, "Oh hi Shirley", Mom suddenly took a very deep breath - and that was her last. I continued talking with Shirley, not telling her what had just happened. I think Mom just let go when she heard me mention her friend's name.

# My Adventures at PNSY (1984-1994)



I enjoyed my time at the Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, but things began to change in the late 1980s because of economic and political reasons. Since the Yard was owned and run by the federal government, changes tended to come more slowly than they would have in the private sector and those changes appeared in strange ways at least from my point of view. There was more competition for the work we did (repair submarines) from private shipyards than in previous times. In previous times there was no competition at all, and contracts were just awarded. The government did their own building and repairing in their own shipyards. But then politics changed all that and private shipyards were encouraged to bid on the work to be done. Political decisions were made to cut costs, and this resulted in lots of changes. Layoffs (they called this downsizing) were coming. But the way this was done affected more people than just the workers that were let go (or terminated as the

government liked to call it). Everyone who works for the government has a rating. This is a way to categorize everyone but also to rank them in terms of importance or significance. An additional factor was service time (how long you worked for the government), and military service time counted toward this. It was like a big machine where everyone fell into a slot based on performance, job level, and longevity. It got complicated.

When it comes to layoffs, the government does things a little differently, which can be viewed as a good thing or a bad thing depending upon which side of the layoff coin you happen to be on. If the number of General Foreman needed to be cut, a General Foreman earmarked for layoff who had more service time than a Foreman or Mechanic below him (or her) could “bump” that person out of their position and take it for himself. And the bumped person could do the same to another that was ranked below them. It was a big, long, drawn-out process. About six thousand of the eight thousand yard-workers at the time (around 1991) were affected. Most of us were bumped to different positions (which hardly anyone was happy with) and two to three thousand would be out of a job.

Originally, I was hired into the apprentice program at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in the sheet metal shop in 1984. Karen had encouraged me to see if I could find a job there for years before I finally applied. Her father Jimmy had worked there most of his life. Before I went to work at the Yard, I was

self-employed (vinyl siding) and did not have insurance and besides, that work was seasonal. I did get to loaf from November through March but that meant not making any money. Insurance was the main reason Karen wanted me to go work at the Yard, so I went. Turned out that I loved the work, and enjoyed working with my hands, and making things. We used a lot of aluminum and thin steel to build ventilation ductwork, living quarters, storage units, doors, tables, and the like. Kind of like woodworking but with metal instead of wood. Everything I learned in the sheet metal shop was new to me; from welding to cutting and forming metals to design and layout.

I was quite successful in the four-year apprentice program which consisted of on-the-job training (both in the metal shop and on board the subs), trade classes, and regular academic classes. At the time I was in my mid-thirties and I approached things more seriously than I did when I was a teenager. I performed very well, earned high grades in my trade work as well as in the academic portion of the apprenticeship, and was rewarded with being selected as the top graduating apprentice out of a class of two hundred. But, as it turned out - that, and fifty cents would get me a cup of coffee.

By then Karen and I had bought the little cape on Wood Ave in Eliot, Maine (a mile or so from the shipyard) and little Ben and Sam greeted me in the front yard each day when I came home from work. Then the Reduction-In-Force came along, and I got

bumped, but I was fortunate enough to remain at the yard because I qualified for other positions, though not in the sheet metal shop. For the next couple of years, I got bounced around between positions in the ship fitter shop and the plate yard. Then I got the chance to go back through the apprentice program again as a metals inspector (shop-33). The sound of that job appealed to me for some reason. I thought that maybe it would be a less strenuous job, and I hoped it would mean less crawling around in the claustrophobic bowels of a submarine. Nope - it was worse. As an inspector, I found myself in some absolutely scary places. There were a couple of spots that I thought I might have to get rescued from because the lazy dufus I was assigned to work with sent me into spaces he refused to go.

For several months I worked in the radiography inspection group. That involved lots of radiation you had to watch out for and hide from. It was safe enough I guess as long as you could duck behind something that would block the beam. There were extremely elaborate safety precautions we went through each day (each night actually - radiography inspections were performed at night when no one else was around. We worked from 11 pm to 7 am).

As an inspector, I needed to be certified in a particular type of metal inspection. The two most common certifications were “liquid penetrant testing” and “magnetic particle testing”. These were used to find flaws in metal surfaces and in welds.



Everyone in the shop must be certified in these two methods. We had lots of training and classroom time, and I thought I was getting pretty good at finding the hidden defects in the sample pieces we worked on in class.

It turned out that I was really bad at inspecting. To be certified I had to pass tests where I was given a metal plate with certain known defects. Sometimes there were several issues on the same plate. I always took my time performing the tests and thought I did a bang-up job of finding and labeling all those little cracks and holes. I failed. Every few months (after more practice) they'd have me test again. I failed - multiple times. I somehow just couldn't seem to get the hang of it.

But, you know, everything happens for a reason (I've always thought that). That year (1993) another RIF (Reduction-In-Force) came along. I thought I was going to be laid off for sure and I was on the list to go. I had almost 800 hours of sick time saved up, which I would not have been paid for if I was let go or terminated (the official Navy Yard word for it), so - I started to take time off just to burn it up, calling in sick to my very understanding boss each day. After a while I didn't even bother to call in anymore, it was just assumed that Rick is out sick again today. I did go in to work for a day or two every couple of weeks, just to visit. Mostly I stayed at home and got things done around the house. I wallpapered almost every room in the house (Goodwin Road in Eliot then). But then - I got pulled off

the layoff list. Don't know why really, maybe someone retired, and the numbers got shuffled around again.

The next year (1994) there was yet another round of layoffs and I was on the termination list again. But this time I wasn't 'saved'. 'Saved' was part of the layoff lingo - saved, bumped, riffed. I've forgotten the rest of the terms. And it was time for a change. I didn't realize it at the time but leaving the Navy Yard was a very good thing for me. The government had all kinds of help for laid-off workers and I took advantage of that. I went back to school for a year, fully funded by the federal government, started my career in networking, and earned certification from both Novell and Microsoft. The following year I started work at Cabletron in Rochester, New Hampshire. But that's another story. Things always seemed to have a way of working out for me.

After re-reading this story about my time at PNSY, I have to apologize for the boringness of it all. I'm so happy I didn't stay there any longer than I did.

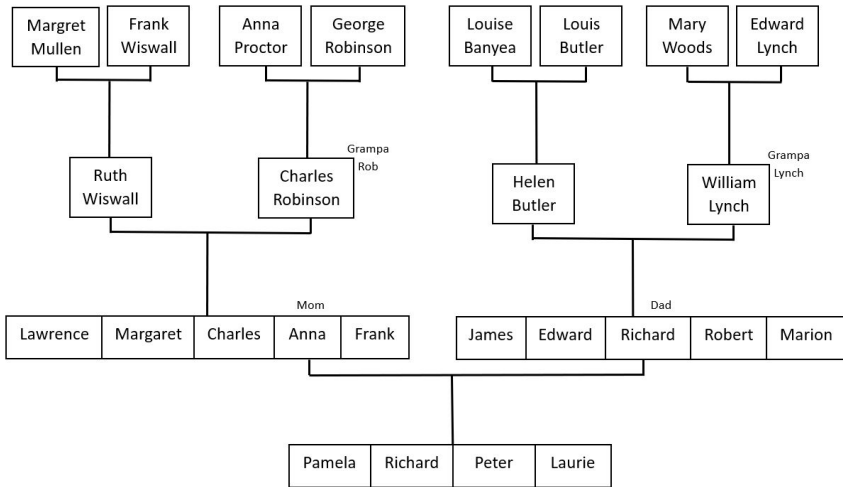
# My Family Tree



I am Rick Lynch. My full name is Richard William Lynch Jr., born December 27, 1951, at the Eliot Community Hospital in Keene, New Hampshire. The Jr. part of my name of course means that I am named after my father Richard William Lynch Sr. Dad was always known as Dick. I became Rick. Mom was Anna Elizabeth Robinson.

Dad (Dick Lynch) was born in Keene on November 8, 1924. His parents were William Joseph Lynch (1894-1979) and Helen Valida Butler (1893-1943). Helen was born in Hillsboro, New Hampshire and William was born in Keene. They were married in 1917 and raised their five children (James, Edward, Richard, Robert, and Marion) on Cedar Street in Keene. William's (Grampa Lynch) parents were Edward P. Lynch born in Boston (1853-1912) and Mary Elizabeth Woods (1859-1909). The Lynch family ancestors came from County Longford, Ireland on the ship Tarolinta in 1841 with part of that first family eventually making their way to Keene around 1880. Helen Butler's (Dad's

mother), parents were Louis Albert Butler (1861-1943) and Louise Angeline Banyea (or Bernier - it's a French-Canadian thing) (1865-1922). These French-Canadian families came to Keene in the mid-1800s from Northern Vermont and Quebec Canada.



Mom (Anna Robinson) was born in Marlborough, New Hampshire (a town just east of Keene) on June 8, 1924. Her parents were Charles Harrison Robinson (1889-1973) and Ruth Lawrence Wiswall (1890-1946). Both were born and raised in Marlborough. They were married in 1915 and raised their five children (Lawrence, Margaret, Charles, Anna, and Frank) on Terrace Street in Marlborough. Charles' (Grampa Rob) parents were George Alfred Robinson (1859-1937) and Anna Elizabeth Proctor (1857-1936). George Robinson was born and raised in

## My Stories | Rick Lynch

Mont Vernon, New Hampshire. Anna Proctor's family was from South Acworth, New Hampshire (a little north of Keene), George and Anna were married in 1883 and raised their family of five on their dairy farm located about a mile east of Marlborough center on Highway 101. Ruth Wiswall's (Mom's mother) parents were Frank Trowbridge Wiswall (1854-1945) and Margaret Ellen Mullen (1864-1950). The Wiswall ancestors came to Marlborough from Massachusetts in the early 1800s. Margaret Mullen was born in Rutland, Vermont. Detailed histories of both the Lynch and the Robinson families can be viewed online at the following website I created; [lynch-robinson.com](http://lynch-robinson.com)



Mom - Anna Elizabeth Robinson



Dad - Richard W Lynch Sr



Grampa Rob - Charles H Robinson - High School photo



Grampa Lynch - William Joseph Lynch

# Some Memories of Mom



**M**om always laid out my school clothes for me. Every school day when I woke up in the morning, I could see the neatly folded pile of clothes she had chosen for me to wear that day. A nicely ironed shirt hung above them. Everything I needed was there: socks, underwear, and pants stacked up in the order in which I was supposed to put them on. Mom didn't leave much to chance. I went along with it and accepted that as normal and that's the way it was right up through high school. Of course, when I was little, she bought all my clothes and selected what she wanted to see me dressed in. When I was older, she brought me along with her so I could try on pants and shirts then she would determine what fit and what didn't. She gave me choices of color and style, but I don't think I cared too much about that sort of thing until later on in High School. Mom's favorite clothing stores, for me and Peter anyway, were Roussell's and Fay Smith's in downtown Keene. Any shoes Mom bought me came from one place, Boccia & Grout shoe store on Roxbury St. We had leather shoes for

school and Keds high-top sneakers for play.

Mom often joined us in playing games out on the lawn. She taught us games like badminton and softball and even tried throwing a football around with me a little. We had a nice area on the lawn for those kinds of games, just below where Dad built our big set of swings. Out in the shed was a big wooden barrel where we stored our outdoor equipment such as basketballs, tennis rackets, softballs, bats, and baseball gloves. I'm sure Dad found the bats and the gloves somewhere because they appeared to be very old, unlike the modern ones some of my friends had. When played softball on the lawn and we had a small infield. It was only twenty-five feet from where I was, in the batter's box, to first base, where Mom was standing. I hit the ball on a line, I watched it head straight toward Mom's head. It was a good thing she was paying attention because she ducked just in time. Mom got back up and looked over at me, with big eyes, and said, "I quit". I was about twelve at the time and we were beginning to play a little rough. That was probably the last time she played ball with me.

One April vacation when I was about 14 Mom thought it a good idea that I learn to do some kind of work around the house, and she didn't mean just regular chores. She wanted some painting done which I thought should have been Dad's responsibility. However, if left to him, it might never get done. So she convinced me, or more likely had to bribe me, to tackle it. She wanted the



wooden windows with fancy trim in her bedroom painted but insisted I remove the old paint first. She showed me how to use a nasty chemical paint remover and to how scrape all the paint off down to the bare wood. It was difficult work because of the ornate casings. It took me a few days just to get the paint off. Applying the new paint had to be done just so. She wasn't going to let me slap the paint on like I did on the back of Dad's barn. I had to load paint onto only the very tip of the brush, and there would be no drips allowed. She told me to plan on at least two coats. I think the deal was, that I had to pay half the cost of that brand-new Columbia bicycle that I wanted. She paid me the time it took to finish all three windows and that went a long way toward the amount I needed. Mom would probably say the real reason she had me paint the windows was to get my "lazy butt" off the couch.

A shelf in the kitchen behind the refrigerator was just deep enough to hold a long flat object like a yardstick. When Mom felt she needed it, it was within easy reach. She liked to hold it up and threaten me with it. I can't recall any particular reason why she would resort to trying to hit me with a stick, but I must have been pretty good at pushing her buttons. One particular time when she grabbed the yardstick from behind the refrigerator and came after me, chasing me around and around the kitchen table. She had the reach, but I was faster than she was.

I wasn't exactly scared, but just the same, I didn't want to get hit with a stick either. I quickly realized I was fast enough to stay just out of Mom's reach. She chased me around the table one way, then switched direction and chased me the other, but I was quick. Quicker than she was anyway. This went on for a bit and then I started to laugh which only seemed to make her even more furious for some reason. We were both getting a little tired, but she smoked, and I didn't, so I knew I could outlast her. Finally, she began laughing too. I think she was laughing at the futility of her efforts, and I saw my chance to escape out the door. I didn't go anywhere, I just rested on the porch, ready to run some more if she came out after me, but she didn't. I'm not sure what Mom would have done if she had caught up with me. I think all she wanted to do was to smack me once on the butt to show me "who was boss" as she liked to say. Guess I was lucky she didn't trip over a cat and break her arm - then I would have been in big trouble. And to set the record straight - I don't remember ever getting a real paddling though, the kind I would have felt for a while. I told this story to Karen many years ago when Ben and Sam were young. She threatened them with a wooden spoon instead of a yardstick.

In my eyes, Mom was very practical, and I doubt anyone would remember her as a dreamer or idealist. She probably would have scoffed at anyone she saw exhibiting those characteristics. She was a no-nonsense mom who focused on making realistic and

sensible choices. As a child, I'm sure Mom had a rich imagination as all children do. She told me her playground was the outdoors, the woods and the stream running behind her Gramp Wiswall's house. She fancied herself a bit of a tomboy too, but I think, after becoming an adult she suppressed that part of herself and became more realistic and unromantic. It seemed that, to Mom, everything was cut and dried, right or wrong, and she seldom kept her opinions to herself. She felt it was her duty to let others know what they were doing wrong. Yet, I'll always be convinced that she meant well and wanted the best for others, but her opinions were often harsh, and she didn't mince her words. In later years, after I put on more than a few pounds, she didn't hesitate to tell me - "Ricky, you're getting fat". She didn't hurt my feelings too much when she came out with things like that because, after all, she was only stating the obvious. But she had a tendency to be direct, even if it meant being insensitive. It wasn't in Mom's nature to sugarcoat her words and she would not hesitate to tell you her version of the truth. Regardless of Mom's motives, her opinions could sometimes hurt the feelings of the people around her. That was Mom, especially as she got older.

Mom didn't push this on us, but more than a few times she stated that when Pete and I grew up she would like to see one of us become a barber and the other to be a dentist. She reasoned that no matter what the economy was like or how the world

changed, people would always need their hair cut and their teeth fixed. Mom always approached life from a practical standpoint.



# I Was Not Raised in a Particularly Religious Household



...though Mom saw to it that we all got baptized into the Protestant Church and she brought us to Sunday School each week. If my memory serves me, that went on for a few years and then it kind of faded away until Sunday became just another day off from school. I think eventually we were given the choice of going to Sunday School or not, and we chose not to go. I believe that for a while, Mom attended church services while we kids were down in the church basement classrooms in our small groups learning Bible stories such as “Daniel in the Lion’s Den” and “David and Goliath”. Dad never went to church with us, at least not that I remember. I believe the Lynch family was Catholic, but probably not very Catholic. Dad never talked about going to church, so I doubt he ever did. I’m not sure just how religious either Mom’s or Dad’s family were. I don’t recall Mom

or Dad telling us stories of their childhood that included anything to do with church or religion. Knowing a little about what Mom's family was like, I imagine the Robinsons attended church services on Sundays mostly as a civic duty rather than out of any deeply held religious convictions. Mom tried to carry on with that tradition for a while and then let it go.



Here we are home from Sunday school. Mom carrying the Sunday papers.

Yet Sundays were always different than all the other days of the week for us. For one thing, Dad was home, and we had our Sunday routines as a family. Mom always made a big Sunday dinner such as roast pork or pot roast. In the summertime, Mom grilled steak on the back porch. When I was old enough, I got to

stack up the charcoal briquets, douse them with lighter fluid, and then throw lit matches at them until they burst into flames. I always enjoyed fires. But I wanted to keep that fire-starting chore for myself, so I tried to stay under control and not overdo it with the starter fluid.

Usually, we sat down to eat at about two o'clock, and twenty minutes later we were done. Dad would sit down in his chair in the living room to read the paper, Mom would clean up from dinner and the rest of us find something to play at. After Mom finished cleaning up from dinner, she and Dad would take us all for a 'Sunday drive' which was a very common thing for families to do in the 50s. We all piled into the station wagon and fought with each other to get our favorite seat. No one wanted the middle seat in the back.



Dad always did the driving. He enjoyed taking us on back roads through the small neighboring towns around Keene, stopping the car here and there to point out where so-and-so used to live or to show us the spot where the first church in town was built but had burned down fifty years ago. Sometimes Mom would tell him he was full of beans and Dad would get that 'how dare you question me' look on his face and we'd be on the verge of an argument, but he'd usually just let it go. I (naively) believed every word he said. I enjoyed listening to his stories.

I realized after a few of these Sunday drives that all roads in the area inevitably led to Mackenzie's Ice Cream stand on upper Court Street in Keene. That was a dairy farm, that delivered milk around town, made their own ice cream, and ran a dairy bar where carhops (popular in the 50s and 60s) would come out to your car and take your order. Dad turned the car headlights on when we were ready to order. We took many Sunday drives over the years, and I have fond memories of those times.

Instead of a meal on Sunday evenings, Dad cooked up lots of popcorn. Mom told me that was a family tradition from her childhood too. Dad popped the corn in Mom's biggest Revere Ware pan on the stove and made enough for everyone to have as much as they wanted. We each had our own big bowl of popcorn, slathered in butter. I liked mine topped with grated parmesan cheese the way Dad ate his. Then we settled down in our pajamas in front of the TV to watch Walt Disney.



# Do I Believe in Astrology?



**T**here was a time when I dabbled in astrology to some degree. Not that I depended on it to make decisions, but I think I just wanted to explore what might be out there and the possibility that some force might control it all. I was in my late teens or early twenties and that was an age when I was a bit naive and even gullible, contrary to what I thought of myself at the time. The more I think about it, the more I realize - the reason astrology held a fascination for me, was its mathematical element. To me, astrology was pure mathematics. Everything in astrology depends on things like angles of inclination and planetary positions and time, right down to the second. I enjoyed doing the calculations, the geometry, and the trigonometry, figuring out very precise locations and times, and drawing charts. That aspect of astrology is fact-based and could be visualized and drawn on paper. The work could be very complicated and often very exhausting. But math was my thing. In math, there are certain paths to follow and rules to observe.

There is only one answer (usually) and if you reach it (without making mistakes), you won. My prize was self-congratulation. Anytime I successfully navigated a problem to its logical conclusion, I was pleased with myself. But the “without-making-mistakes” part was sometimes difficult and time-consuming. Double-checking my work became an obsession. Once math started to become more complicated for me (probably when I encountered Algebra in Junior High), I realized I had to be patient, and take my time, and be more careful when calculating. I made sure to double-check my work every time. I always did well on tests in math class, in part because I was never in a hurry to finish. While others passed their papers in as soon as they could, I usually took the entire allotted time to check and double-check my work and was often the very last to finish, right along with the classmates who struggled with math.

Once the calculations were finished and an astrological chart was completed for a person’s birth time and place, the various planetary influences came into play. And at that point, I lost interest. The influence of planets and signs of the zodiac was just too ambiguous for me to believe in. So, after completing a few astrological charts (my own and for a couple of friends), I was done with Astrology. Although the charts themselves were interesting to look at, I wasn’t interested in predicting the future based on thousand-year-old gobbledygook.

In the same vein, I was, at one time, drawn to the “science” of numerology, which I kind of believed was related directly to numbers and numerical values and how people are affected (not controlled but maybe swayed) by dates and times depending on their date of birth. This was a little like Astrology but without the planetary influence. Instead, numerology took into account rhythms or cycles that occur in people’s lives. The version of numerology I had read about involved three separate aspects of a person’s personality (Strength, Luck, and Sensitivity) which increased and decreased (or cycled) in influence beginning on the day that person was born. Each of the three aspects had a different cycle time. For example, strength started at zero on a graph and increased for nine days until reaching its peak and then decreased for eighteen days until it reached its trough, or lowest point on the graph. So, the thirty-six-day cycle starts at 0, gradually goes up to +9 (in nine days), and then goes all the way down to -9 (in the next 18 days) and then back up to 0 again nine days later. The Luck cycle is forty-four days long and the Sensitivity cycle is thirty. All three cycles start together at zero on the day you are born and then vary up and down in intensity along their different cycles.

To me, this was pure mathematics and geometry and right up my alley. I found it easy to produce the graphs and then I wondered about what might happen when all three cycles hit their peaks at the same time (which is pretty rare), or what

happened on days when the three cycles were all at least reasonably high. I drew graphs for my cycles and tried to see if there were any special events in my past that coincided with the high points on my graphs. I started thinking about important events in the past and the people connected to them and calculated their graphs.

At that time, I was also very much interested in baseball statistics. A baseball player's performance can be quantified mathematically in many different ways. The effectiveness of one player can be compared to another very easily. And it's all done through the magic of math. I wondered if I could use numerology to find some way to help predict when a player might be getting ready to go on a hot streak, and conversely, when he may be ready to begin a slump. I had a notebook filled with statistics I had gathered to try to see (and predict) patterns in the daily performance of ball players, especially Boston Red Sox players.

Alas, I could find no real connection between my graphs and real life. Who'd have thought? Occasionally, a player would hit two home runs somewhere near the day their sensitivity cycle was at its peak but that's about the closest I got to finding any magical way of becoming the prognosticator I'd hoped. Just one more disappointment in life I had to live with. It all started that day in the 2nd grade when I learned there was no such thing as a thinking cap.

# Unfortunately, This Would Probably Be My Answer if Someone Were to Ask Me What I Was Good at in School



**M**y favorite subject all through school was math. I thought that was the only subject that counted! - pun intended. Early on, I realized I that I liked to count things, to tally them up. But I took it a lot further than most people would have and although I considered it a game, it probably turned into an obsession. Sitting in school and being a little bored, I'd look for things to count. For instance, I tallied up the tiny holes in the ceiling tiles in the Junior High library. It was quite a high ceiling, and I remember staring up at it one day and I could clearly see the pattern of tiny holes in each of the two by four-foot ceiling tiles. I counted the rows and the columns of holes and then counted

the number of tiles in the entire ceiling. I even subtracted the number of holes missing where the tiles went around the large hanging light fixtures. I guess I should have been doing homework or something else constructive. But for me, this was an interesting diversion and a worthwhile challenge. I don't recall the number now, but when I was finished counting, I wrote the answer on the underside of the table I was sitting at.

In high school, there was always a "second bus", a late bus, and quite often I just wasn't ready to leave when the first buses left right after school got out. I enjoyed taking the second bus because it would take me from the high school in West Keene and drop me off downtown where I would catch the 'late' bus going down Marlboro Street. That way I got a chance to wander around downtown for a while. Once while waiting for the second bus at school, I found I had about twenty minutes to kill so I decided to calculate the number of floor tiles in the main corridor at the front of the building. That corridor was something like seven hundred feet long. While sitting in math class one day, I calculated the number of seconds old I would be when the bell rang at the end of the period. I also calculated how far a beam of light would have traveled since the moment I was born - in inches. Wow, I sound like I must have been such a loser back then. But I don't care, I had fun with it. However, I never told any of my friends about this obsession I had with counting.

# Was I a Good Student?



I was a good student when I wanted to be, but the trouble was, that desire wasn't there most of the time. If a subject interested me, I was more willing to put in a good effort and do well. Math was my strongest subject. There's something about math that made me feel comfortable. I think that's because a math problem always has a definite answer and doesn't involve opinions, and I didn't have to write a lot of words trying to support or justify my answer. Also, math assignments didn't involve a lot of reading. I never had to read fifty pages from a math book for tomorrow's class.

During my school years right up through high school, I rarely took school very seriously. Later on, starting when I entered the apprentice program at the Navy Yard my perspective on school began to change. I had matured and was able to see that I had a chance to learn new things and even excel at them.

Why didn't my younger self understand that I should have taken advantage of the opportunity I had during those first twelve

years in school? Instead, I spent much of my time trying to have a good time and coasting along, just getting by with average grades and no desire to exert more of an effort than was required. Since I had to attend school all day, every day, why did I not realize I should have made the best of every opportunity and made more of an effort? One of Grampa Rob's sayings he liked to use was, "If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well".

Those words meant little to me then, so I didn't take them to heart. A bit of self-motivation would have been required, which I lacked.

Then, thirteen years later I found myself back in a classroom, at the Navy Yard. But now I understood and agreed with what Grampa meant. I felt motivated and learned how to become a better student. I studied and worked hard, did the best that I could, and was successful. Almost all of the other students around me were quite a bit younger than I was and now they were the ones who didn't do very much. They didn't want to put in the effort it took to do well and were satisfied to just get by. I watched them and I realized that was me at their age. I remember saying to a friend, "I am a much better student now than I ever was, back when I should have been".



# My Biggest Learning Challenge in School



I have always been a poor reader. By the fourth or fifth grade, my teachers recognized that I had a problem with my ability to read at grade level and I started receiving quite a lot of specialized help to improve my reading skills. A few times each week I met with a reading specialist. In the beginning, it was all testing and not just speed and comprehension tests. They tested my vision, my ability to focus on a task, my hearing, and even my sense of taste and smell. I never understood what smell, taste, or hearing had to do with my reading difficulties, but at the time, I enjoyed the attention I was getting and didn't ask any questions. Looking back, I think they were trying to figure out what made me tick, and they snuck in some psychological experimenting on me.

After this, they brought in machines designed to help me focus on lines of words and prompted me to move faster from line to

line. That helped some, but at the same time, it was hard work mentally and it was tiring. My reading speed improved when reading with the aid of one of these machines but once I was back at my desk my reading ability reverted to its old below-grade level.

I continued to receive reading help on and off into Junior High and High School, but I don't think any of that helped much. I don't recall there ever being a time when I felt I read fast enough to keep up with the amount of reading that was expected of me, especially in High School. If we had a few chapters to read for the next day, that was quite a chore for me. I could get it done but the amount of time it took was just too much. I had to read everything slowly because the only way I could comprehend what I was reading was to read each word fully. If I didn't read each word carefully, I often found that I had no idea of what I just read. Those reading comprehension tests in school were just torture for me. At best, when I really concentrated and read as fast as I could, I ended up with below-average scores. So, when it came to reading for enjoyment - that just didn't exist for me, at least with the books I was exposed to back then.

As I've gotten older, I do enjoy reading, but not fiction. The only fiction I've ever read (outside of school) was *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. For some reason, those stories drew me in, but they took me a long, long time to get through. I like to read histories and biographies and things like that now. And I

still read very slowly, a few minutes per page. But of course, now I don't find any need to rush. I don't need to get that fifty or a hundred pages read tonight like I did when I was in school.

Sure, I would like to have been a better reader, but I'm resigned to the fact that I'm not. I know I would have had more success in school if I was able to read even at grade level. Moreover, I feel I'm missing out on some of the benefits of reading for pleasure, such as improving my vocabulary and boosting my levels of creativity. I watch Karen read two or three books in a week. I'd like to be able to do that, but I know that I can't. I listen to Karen and her friends share their thoughts about books they're enjoying and talk about authors they like. I can't relate to that. The enjoyment one gets from that type of reading, I have never known. I've always found books useful, but I've never been able to look at reading as a source of relaxation or pleasure. Instead, I regard reading as a tool to learn how to do things or to learn about people and places - things like that.

During my childhood, I'm sure that I had books, and I remember the Golden Book series. Mom must have signed me up for some sort of book club because I recall getting a Golden Book in the mail every week and she would read them with me. Then, in school in the third or fourth grade, each week everyone got a newsletter-type booklet called 'The Weekly Reader' to bring home. That was sort of a newspaper for kids. I wonder if that is still published.

## My Stories | Rick Lynch

I've come to believe that the reason for my poor reading ability is inside my head - it's how my brain works. When I read text, my brain simply works slowly. That's really what it feels like to me when I read. And over the last few years, I feel that it's gotten even worse. I wear reading glasses and have for the past twenty years or so. But once I get the least bit tired, my eyes stop working together and I start reading with just one eye - my left.



I wear inexpensive readers. I'm up to 2.25 now.

# Did I Fit In with Any Social Group or Clique in School?



I'm not sure where I fit in socially in school. I didn't feel like I was a cool kid and didn't play sports in high school, I wasn't near the top academically, so I kind of fell through those filters and landed where I probably belonged, where I was safe and didn't feel small when I compared myself to the people around me.

As I wrote about my lack of motivation academically in school, I thought that might apply to my social life as well. Looking back to when I was young, I think my approach to life in general was to sit back (where it was safe) and see what came along. I don't remember making any great effort to be part of a group. At school, I didn't join clubs or committees, and I didn't play sports - except for the fifth grade. My social life may have reached its peak in the fifth grade. That's where I played in the small school band we had, and I also played on the football team.

In Junior High, everyone was divided up based on academic ability and placed into one of twelve classes, called divisions. Students placed into the top class in the 7th grade were labeled as being in division 7-1. Similarly, the top class in the 8th grade was division 8-1. Divisions 1, 2, and 3 were comprised of students considered to be college-bound and were generally taught higher-level courses than those in lower divisions. There was a line drawn between the top three divisions and everyone else as if those above the line and those below it were to be kept apart. Divisions 4 through 9 were for kids who were not considered college material and would have to learn a trade to make their living. Divisions 10, 11, and 12 were for the kids who looked and acted like losers who would probably quit school as soon as they could.

I was in division 7-4, and in the 8th grade, I was in 8-4. At the time I felt that Division 4 was almost the same as Division 3 but was made up of underachievers like me. In div-4, we certainly looked down upon those kids in the lower divisions. Likewise, those in the top three divisions looked down on everyone else. Dividing us up based on our past academic performance seemed logical at the time, and nobody seemed to question it, but I can't imagine that would be acceptable today. And looking back, I'm surprised it was ok even then, in the early 1960s.

Everything was different once I got to High School. We didn't have divisions in High School. We had homerooms, of course,

divided up alphabetically but aside from that everyone was lumped together. We had certain classes that everyone was required to take and then we were supposed to choose some of the classes we wanted to take and begin to plan our future. So, I had to start finding my own way and learn to make some decisions for myself, and at first, I didn't feel very comfortable with that. It was easier for me when I was handed my class schedule in the 7th and 8th grades. I had no idea what wanted to do after I graduated, and I had a difficult time figuring out which classes to sign up for. Once again, I took the easy way and asked some of my friends what they were taking, and I followed them.







# Dad, for Some Reason, Collected Pianos



Way back when - (late 1800s and early 1900s) the upright piano was very popular in churches and schools. Many families, if they could afford one, also had a piano in their home. This was before radio existed and before recorded music was available. Someone invented a way of automating a piano using a foot-operated bellows and a perforated paper roll to play the notes. These pianos still had the 88 keys so the instrument could be played in the conventional way by banging on the keys, but now, for those who couldn't play or didn't want to, it was like putting a disk on a record player. But instead of a record, a paper roll (kind of like a scroll) was inserted to play each song. As a song was playing, the piano keys went up and down as if invisible fingers were playing them. We learned many old-time favorite songs from these rolls (each roll had the words to the song printed on it and you could sing along as the music played). Lots of fun.

I assume that Dad came across these “player pianos” occasionally during his days of wrecking houses. He called it wrecking but it was usually the very careful dismantling and selling of all parts of a structure from the roof slate and chimney brick to the granite foundation blocks. This was in the 1950s and 1960s mostly and sometimes I would get to go along with Dad for the first day (before the actual tearing down began). Dad tore down some really nice, big, old houses in the Keene area. We’d explore all the rooms including the attic and cellar to see what we could find, what might have been left behind by the previous occupants. Dad liked to call this stage of the job, “looting”. People left lots of things, like books and clothes, and small objects such as coins were often lost in the floorboards or under a baseboard. I remember checking out an old dark and funny-smelling cellar and finding dozens and dozens of jars of canned fruits and vegetables. No telling how old they were but they were covered in dust. I thought it was such a waste that they were abandoned after someone went to all that work preserving them. Some things were left behind just because they were too big to move easily. My guess is that’s where Dad’s first player-piano came from. Plus, I think people simply didn’t have any use for them anymore and lost interest in them.

Eventually, Dad acquired several player pianos. Two up in the barn that he built over the garage, one on the back porch, one on the front porch, one in Mom and Dad’s room off the dining room

(this one was hooked up to an old canister vacuum cleaner attached to the ceiling in the basement with a hose running up through the floor to power the piano, so we didn't need to pump the pedals on this one, just start the vacuum using a switch mounted below the keyboard). There was one up in our tiny camp on the lake in Alstead, and another at Grampa Lynch's house. Grampa called his piano a pianola. They were everywhere. After a while, Mom got a little tired of Dad's player pianos taking up so much room. They were quite a novelty to have around when at first but after a few years I think we all lost interest in them, including Dad. One by one he got rid of them somehow. Maybe he found takers from among his many drinking buddies at the Legion or Elks. The ones left outside on the front and back porches probably didn't fare as well. I imagine they eventually succumbed to the harsh New England weather and were junked. I recall one day, many years later, when I was back in Keene for a visit and, as I usually did, I looked around for things that were still left from my childhood. Not a piano anywhere, only a few of the boxed paper rolls, slowly rotting away on the shelf under the broken window in the back of the barn where that first player piano belted out its tunes many years earlier.



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SOLD BY \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_ 19\_\_\_\_  
 NAME Richard W. Lynch PHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS working years!  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. #	Greenwood Farm	1936	50¢ Day
2	D.A. Mosher Farm	1936-37	20¢ Day
3	Henry Danforth Farm	1937	50¢ Day
4	A. C. Whitcomb Farm	1938	50¢ Day
5	C. Mosher Farm	1938	50¢ Day
6	M&K "Wing Wood"	1939	1.00 Day
7	L.H. Chapman	1939	1.50 Day
8	C.S. Geo. S.	1940	60¢ H
9	New England Box	1940-41	65¢ H
10	Faulkner + Colman	1941	60¢ H
11	L. Elting Corp.	1941	80¢ H
12	New England Box	1942	80¢ H
13	E.D. Sweetie	1942	85¢ H
14	New England Box	1943	85¢ H
15	USA	1943-46	1.00 Day
16	Wood cutting Stoddard	1946	\$20. P. Day
17	W.H. Cranston	June 1946	1.25 H
18	Bowers Boston	June 1946-47	1.25 H
	Siding	Bz [S]	200. P. W
	Roofing	Lynch & Lynch	

RECEIVED BY

Dad wrote down his work history beginning in 1936 (he turned 12 in November of that year)

# Dad Brought Home Lots of Other Memorable Items



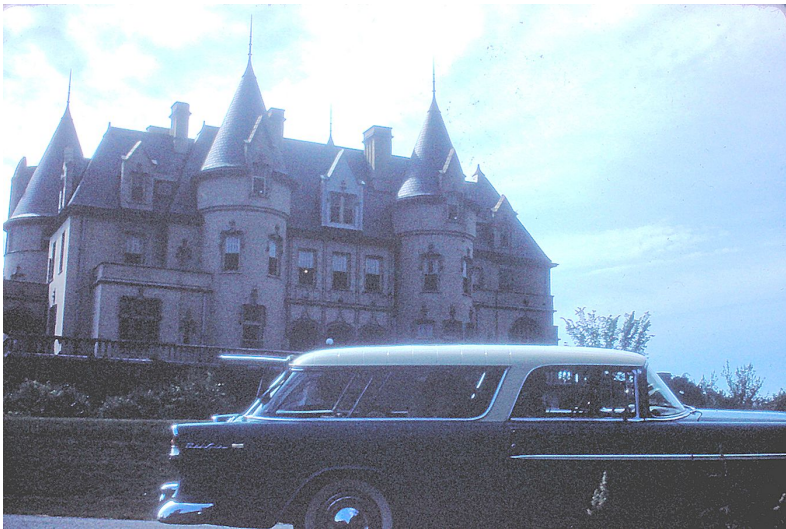
**M**ost of what Dad dragged home were items he found in the old building he was hired to tear down. If it wasn't total crap, then it was worth saving from the junk heap, destined to be sold on-site or brought home to be further evaluated and saved for a time when it could be put to use. Often these were small items such as coins, marbles, newspapers, and books. Old hand tools were some of Dad's prized finds and he built a display on the back wall of his woodshop for many of these.

Then there were larger items he brought home and dumped in one of Mom's gardens on the side of the driveway - temporarily. Some of these things would be sitting around for months, or even years before Dad relented to Mom's badgering and let things go. He always seemed to have good intentions and clever ideas for the items he brought home. Sometimes his schemes turned out to be a little too grand, like the thirty-foot-long

section of the Baptist Church steeple he had dumped on the front lawn. He demolished the church, on Court Street just off the square in downtown Keene, and after the crane pushed the steeple over, he was surprised that it remained intact and so decided to save it and bring it home. His idea was to place it up at the top of the back lawn (our sliding hill) and turn it into a “guest house”. But there it stayed, lying on its side in front of the house, waiting for a plan, for months. I don’t recall any conversations Mom and Dad had regarding the fate of this “guest house”, aside from Dad trying to convince/bribe me and Pete into venturing into the thing and cleaning out all the pigeon poop, but I imagine Mom nagged him daily about it. I can’t imagine that she even knew anything about the steeple coming to live with us until it just showed up one day on a flatbed trailer truck. I never knew what became of that steeple, but Peter recently informed me that Dad had it moved to an empty lot somewhere near downtown. I guess he still had hope that that thing could somehow be of some use - if not him then maybe for someone else. I guess he didn’t find any takers because Pete says he ended up tearing it apart a few months later.

I understand how Dad felt about not easily letting go of things, like the steeple. How many people have a piece of a church steeple in their backyard? They’re not easy to come by. I bet he regretted not finishing that project. He had good intentions; he just had a hard time finishing things sometimes. In the

mid-1960s, Dad was hired to tear down a castle, complete with turrets and spires, in Northfield, Massachusetts, not far from Keene. An industrialist, with too much money, built the ninety-seven-room estate for his wife in the early twentieth century. By the 60s, the town had taken over the property but could not maintain it and decided to demolish it.



The one item I remember that Dad brought home there was a fifteen-foot-long metal spire. It sat upright on the front lawn for several months before Dad was able to find a buyer for it. I used it as an oversized trumpet one day. Me and Mike tipped it over and placed the large end in my wagon and there was a hole in the other end, just big enough to stick the mouthpiece from Dad's bugle into. We carted that thing up and down the street for a couple of hours making it sound like a foghorn.

The church steeple had to be the biggest eyesore Dad ever put on display and he had plenty of unsightly piles of various things over the years. I remember there being many lumber piles around the yard (mostly on the far side of the lawn along the stone wall). But I have to give Dad credit - lumber was always stacked nicely and often it was covered up with canvas to protect it from the weather. Sometimes there were giant piles of bricks or cement blocks, from some building he had recently torn down, dumped on the side of the driveway, next to the carport. Dad taught me how to knock the mortar off the bricks and the blocks and paid me by the brick. Dad called that piecework. I “cleaned boards” quite a bit too. This meant pulling all the nails out of lumber Dad brought home from houses he dismantled. Some of the houses were very old and the boards, along with wood beams, doors, windows, roof slate, etc. could be quite valuable. Even nails could be valuable. If the house was old enough, the nails used in its construction would have been handmade - pounded into shape one at a time by blacksmiths. With lots of practice, I got really good at pulling nails. Dad always gave me a fair price for the work I did.



# A Favorite Meal Growing Up



I considered Mom was a good cook. She made what I would call, traditional meals, that she learned from her family, though for the most part, I wouldn't say she made fancy meals. Most meals were meat, potatoes and vegetables and a dessert of course. On Sundays, around 2 o'clock, we would have the most elaborate meal of the week, usually steak or some kind of roast. The Sunday meal was my favorite. Mom was very good at cooking meat in my opinion - always very tasty and tender. I think she knew how to select a nice roast.

Mom cooked a great pot roast, a two-inch thick slab of beef weighing four or five pounds. She slow-cooked it in the oven surrounded by potatoes, carrots, and onions. You didn't need a knife to cut it, you could pull it apart with a fork. Mom often cooked a roast on Sundays, either roast pork or roast beef. When they were nearly done cooking, she'd open the oven door and

slice little pieces off to test and I'd beg her to give me a taste. To go along with her roast beef she made Yorkshire pudding, from a family recipe. This was not really a pudding at all but a poofy pastry cooked in the oven with the roast beef drippings.

Mom spent a great deal of time preparing meals; everything was made from scratch. On weekdays we always ate supper at five o'clock, but she started cooking at three. On Saturdays, we had hotdogs and baked beans. We always seemed to have some kind of dessert. Sometimes ice cream, but often it was a pie or cake or something Mom made that day. When Mom made pie, she always used the leftover dough to make what she called pinwheels. The dough was rolled out thin and sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar, then rolled up and cut into quarter-inch wheels and baked. Those were quite a treat.

Mom made her own pizza dough too. She made almost everything from scratch. The pizza dough was placed on the radiator in the kitchen and left for a couple of hours to rise. To be honest though, once I tasted restaurant pizza, I realized that Mom's version wasn't anything special, especially the crust - thin and crisp. I like thick and chewy.

# The One Thing in My Life I Regret Not Having Done but Had the Chance to Do It



**T**he stories here are all from my point of view, from my own experiences, and my memories, and I look back, with regret, thinking about all the stories that will never be told now. I know almost nothing about Dad's childhood and his experiences. The stories he never got to tell as well as the stories I wasn't interested in listening to at the time. I regret that now. I feel the same about every family member that has lived before me. Grandpa Lynch loved to tell stories, but I never listened carefully enough to remember them. Therefore, I have very little idea about what he was like growing up, raising a family, and going to work each day.

I know a little more about Mom's family because she did leave journals and letters. But even in her writings, which were mostly short narratives of a sentence or two, the people she knew were rarely described in any depth or detail that would provide insight into their personalities. I had plenty of chances to put down in writing or even record on audio and video devices, recollections of family members from my parent's generation and even my grandparent's generation. I regret not taking advantage of those opportunities.

In more recent years I've made a point of gathering what information I could from the oldest family members. Uncle Frank and Uncle Chuck, who were both wonderful storytellers, provided audio clips of some of their memories of growing up in Marlborough. Also, I have some recordings of conversations I had with Aunt Marion several years ago. She enjoyed reminiscing and telling family secrets I had not heard before. Most of the journal entries, letters, and audio clips I have in my possession are posted on the "lynch-robinson.com" website.

Mom started writing in her journal in the 1970s after we were all grown and had left to begin our lives elsewhere. She didn't write daily and occasionally there were long periods with no entries at all. Almost all of what she did write concerned the weather (temperatures, how much snow we got last night etc.), how her vegetable garden was faring, and comments about Dick not coming home again last night (I guess he preferred the company

of his drinking buddies at the Elks to going home and getting scolded).

I regret not taking the time to sit with Mom (and Dad as well) and ask questions about their lives and families while growing up. Over the years I heard bits of information that would come out during everyday conversations about this cousin or that uncle and I half-listened to stories the older folks would tell each other of their experiences going back several decades before I was born. I regret not writing down details of their recollections or making some kind of audio recordings. I have even forgotten what their voices sounded like. It would be nice to hear them again.



Uncle Frank, Aunt Margaret, Mom, and Uncle Chuck



Dad - in the Army WWII

# The Dumbest Thing I Believed as a Kid



When I was in the first, or maybe second grade, there was one thing that I remember believing really existed and that I really, really wanted to get my hands on. And that was a “Thinking Cap”. I don’t know if that term is used anymore, and I don’t recall how I first heard of it. Maybe our teacher told us to put on our thinking caps or something like that. Maybe I heard it on TV from Captain Kangaroo or Big Brother Bob Emery. But I do remember thinking that if I could get one - I could do all kinds of wonderful things; schoolwork would become easy and I would have a quick and easy way to know everything, I could be the smartest kid without even trying. Of course, maybe I was just lazy and didn’t want to put in the work it took to be successful at school.

I had never really seen a thinking cap, but I had a picture in my mind of it looking somewhat like one of those flat, square caps

they use at graduation ceremonies. I asked Dad if he could get me one and he told me he would try to find out where he could get one. I waited patiently for him to come home the next evening to see if he had found one for me. No - the man who Dad thought might have one was not in the store that day. That was the Goodyear store on Main Street run by his friend Baldy Taffe. They sold tires and washers and refrigerators so why not thinking caps? Dad said he'd try again the next day. The next evening Dad tells me they were all out of thinking caps. I was frustrated but still hopeful. This went on for a few days - a couple of weeks, I think. I recall Mom finally telling me that there was no such thing as a thinking cap and that Dad had just been playing along with me. I don't think Dad wanted to hurt my feelings so he just told me each day that he would try and get one. Mom, on the other hand, was more down-to-earth and less imaginative. I knew it wasn't any good to ask her to find me something like that. She just wouldn't understand. But Dad understood.

I remember being disappointed when I realized I wasn't getting my thinking cap. Still, for a while, I held out hope. I thought maybe Dad just wasn't looking in the right places, and that someday he would surprise me with one. Reality slowly settled in, and I realized that this school thing was not going to be such a piece of cake as I thought. That was a dumb thing to believe in, wasn't it?



# Suppertime Meals



**M**ost of the meals Mom made us were pretty basic. That could have been because she didn't have that much money to spend on food though I don't recall that ever being mentioned. On Saturday we had hotdogs, cooked in the frying pan, and baked beans and on Friday it was fish sticks or something similar. She made her own tartar sauce. I did enjoy Mom's grilled cheese sandwiches. She called them toasted cheese sandwiches, and I still do too without thinking. People look at me funny and say - 'you mean grilled cheese'? Maybe that's the type of meals you cook for kids when you have four of them running around. We had the same meals over and over again, week after week. That might sound boring, but it really wasn't. I enjoyed simple foods like those. But there were meals that I recall not caring for as much. One was liver. Karen likes liver and says it must have been the way Anna cooked it. When Mom was done cooking it in her frying pan it had a dry, pasty taste and I had trouble chewing it up and swallowing. I remember sitting at the table long after

everyone else had finished, not being allowed to get down until I finished the last of the liver on my plate. I debated with Mom about how many more pieces I needed to eat, as she finished up washing the dishes.

Another unappetizing meal Mom liked to make for us was something she called Salmon Wiggle. This wasn't made with real salmon but was the almost-real kind that came from a can and was mixed with peas and a milky gravy and served on a piece of toast. I'm not sure what the 'wiggle' part was. Although this was not a favorite of mine, I have to admit it didn't taste too bad. It just didn't look very appealing. Another meal was Creamed Chipped Beef on Toast. The beef part was tolerable - it was salted and dried and sliced into thin pieces and came in a glass jar, but it too was mixed with a light-colored gravy and poured onto a piece of toast. Dad said they served that in the Army all the time and they called it 'Shit on a Shingle'. Then there were a few things that I really hated to see on my plate. This list included beets, brussels sprouts, and lima beans. Mom always made us eat at least a little of everything she served. Our supper usually included rolls (or bread) and butter. Actually, not butter. We never had butter. We grew up on margarine because that's what Mom grew up using. I never tasted butter until I ate at a friend's house one night. Mom also made some kind of dessert for every evening meal.

Looking back, we had a rather odd kitchen table. We referred to it as a bar, and that's what it was. It was bar height - about forty inches tall. And we all sat on bar stools. We couldn't just come to the table and sit down. We had to literally climb up to the table - the bar. Dad built the bar out of plywood. It was about three feet wide and six feet long with a red formica top and a metal band around the edge. There was a narrow raised shelf in the middle of the bar top, about eight inches high where Mom kept mail and other everyday items. I don't know if the bar was Dad's own design. Maybe Mom saw it in a magazine and liked it. There were thin plywood sliding doors on one side of the bar, behind which was a shelf for food storage. Mom kept the cereal boxes down there so we could select our own. That was a good hiding spot when we played hide and seek inside the house.



Somebody's 4th birthday. Mom had a bowl of something rising on the radiator in the background. The red curtain on the back door covered the top-to-bottom rows of glass that Laurie would one day smash her arm through.



1961

# I Had to Sit There



...at the dinner table, staring at the beets or the liver or some other item I found disagreeable, but was told I had to finish. Sometimes I sat for a half hour or even an hour while Mom finished washing the dishes and cleaning the kitchen. At least it seemed that long. I knew I was missing playtime (we ate supper at 5 o'clock every night so I had a good hour or two left to play) but some of the foods Mom put on my plate were so unappealing to me that I just couldn't give in. I think it usually turned out to be some kind of a compromise, but Mom was tough. She wasn't one to just give in. Cauliflower, brussel sprouts, salmon-wiggle, but liver was the big one.

Liver was the most disgusting food I was required to eat. I think it was the way Mom cooked liver that made it so unpalatable to me. It was always fried, very well-done, cooked to death really, and very dry. I hated everything about liver; the texture, the color of it, the smell. Mom's attempt to impress upon me the fact that liver is one of the most nutritious foods was a waste of time.

Even though the portion on my plate was small, I struggled to get even a small piece down while choking and gagging. Even the threat of missing dessert couldn't sway me.



Top of Mt Monadnock 1906 - Grampa Rob to the right

# My Grandparents



I got to know and spend time with both of my grandfathers, who I knew as Grampa Rob and Grampa Lynch, but I never knew either of my grandmothers. They both died in the 1940s, several years before I was born. I've learned a few facts about my grandmothers, but nothing about what they were like; what kind of people they were. It would have been nice to know what their voices sounded like, if they had a temper, or how they treated their children. I never heard those kinds of things talked about. So, aside from photographs, what I'm left with is mostly names, dates, and places.

Ruth Lawrence Wiswall (Mom's mother), and Grampa Rob (Charles Harrison Robinson) were both born around 1890 and raised in the small town of Marlborough, New Hampshire, the next town east of Keene. They were married in 1915 and raised their five children in Marlborough. Ruth attended Keene Normal School (College) and became a teacher in area schools for a few years before marrying. The following is from a journal entry

written by her daughter Anna (my mom) – “She was taken ill in about 1932 - and spent months in Keene Hospital (septic poisoning in hip). She was never completely well after this, and the family had a housekeeper for a few years. Mother died in 1946 (Jan 24). An autopsy revealed she died of Addison’s Disease, about which they knew very little of at the time.”



My grandmother Ruth and grandfather Charles (early 1940s)

Charlie Robinson (my Grampa Rob) was raised on the family dairy farm and graduated from the University of New



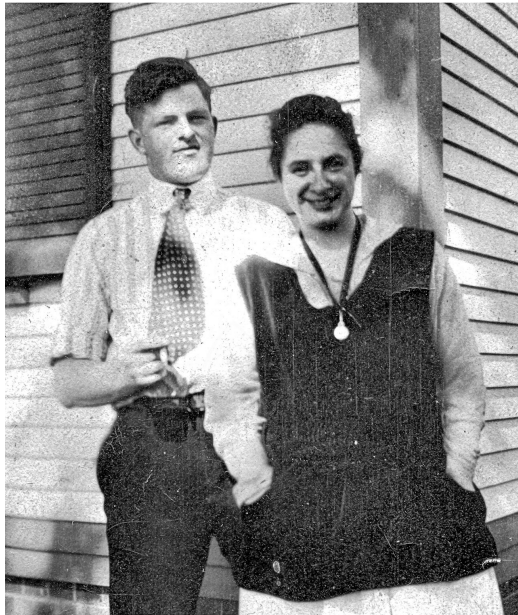
Hampshire. For the next forty-something years, he worked for the State of New Hampshire building and maintaining roads. In the late 1940s, he remarried; Cora was step-grandmother's name. I have vague memories of visiting their house in Marlboro when I was very young and not being allowed to sit on any of the furniture. It seems that Cora did not like children very much, and consequently, I never got to know her at all. Grampa sold that house in the mid-1950s and moved to Florida. He would fly up to visit every few years until Cora died sometime in the 1960s. After that, he came to visit more often and stayed for longer periods. That's when I got to know him a little better. I was older; twelve or thirteen.



This is how I remember Grampa Rob. In the 1960s

Gramp always liked to stay busy around the house and yard when he visited, and he sometimes got me involved. What impressed me the most about Grampa Rob was that he was a very hard worker and enjoyed doing a job to the best of his ability. Grampa died after moving back to Keene in 1973.

My grandmother on Dad's side was Helen Valida Butler. She was born in 1893 into a French-Canadian family of ten children and was raised in Keene.



Grampa Lynch and my grandmother Helen (Butler)

And that's the extent of my knowledge regarding her personal life. Dad didn't talk about his family very often. In contrast, I often hear myself saying - "When I was little", or "Back in the

day”, before going on about something Mom or Dad did with us - thus shedding a little light on what they were like as parents. But I don’t recall Dad saying things like that or reliving any childhood memory. It is my impression that, for whatever reason, Dad did not enjoy looking back; reminiscing about his earlier years and the people around him. That’s just the way Dad was.

Grampa Lynch was born William Joseph Lynch in 1894 and lived his entire life in Keene. He was an only child and before his eighteenth birthday both his parents were dead. His mother died in 1909, at age 49, and his father in 1912, at 58. I didn’t learn this fact until I began researching our family history around 2004 and neglected to ask Grampa any details about his early life with his family. So, it seems that from the age of seventeen, Grandpa Lynch was on his own, though he did have many relatives in his mother’s family living in the area. He joined the army and took part in the military operation led by General Pershing against Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution in 1916 and was also a soldier in the First World War. He married Helen Butler in 1917, just before heading to Europe to fight. Grampa Lynch worked in area factories his entire career, particularly in some of the large chair-producing businesses in Keene. He was steadily employed as what he described to me as a finisher. After his first wife died, he married Hilda Kaija in 1953. When I was young, I knew Hilda as my grandmother and was unaware that my real grandmother

had died several years earlier.



Hilda and Grampa Lynch around 1960

When I was born, Grandpa was fifty-seven and was beginning to lose his eyesight and by the time I was a teenager, he was totally blind. Hilda died in the mid-1960s after which Grampa was cared for by various family members. He died while living with his daughter Marion and her family in Berlin, Connecticut in 1979.

# My Work History...Sort of



I haven't had a great number of different jobs in my life, just five or six. And most of the times I left a job it was not my choice to do so. More often than not, the job left me. Sometimes companies downsized or closed, and other times companies merged and then eliminated redundant positions. At least four times in my working life I was forced to seek a new job and sometimes that meant a new career; an entirely new line of work altogether.

I had a couple of summer jobs while still in high school. One as an electrician's helper and the other as a house painter. But I didn't enjoy working at either of those jobs. Not because of the work though. It was more a case of me missing out on summer fun. While still in school, I didn't have a great need for money. I didn't have a car and I stayed around the neighborhood mostly. And for me, summertime was a blast, spending carefree days at the lake in Alstead with my summer friends. I didn't want to miss any of that by holding down a job if I could help it.

After finishing High School, I went to work with Dad and his brother James (Uncle Jim) in the early 1970s. They were roofers. Jim was the oldest of Dad's brothers. He was a big man, 6 ft 2in and 220 pounds, and very physically fit. He told me he did 50 push-ups every morning right after getting up. I never thought of Uncle Jim as an educated man, I don't think anyone in that family (except for Marion) received much of an education. Dad didn't go beyond the 8th grade. Looking back, I think it was nice to have a job working outdoors. Sometimes it was cold and other times hot but I enjoyed the physical work and the fresh air. Plus, every day or every 2 days we were working in another location. I found that interesting. But roofing can be brutal. We did everything by hand. Today they have air-nailers and electronic lifts to carry the heavy asphalt shingles up to the roof. We used regular hammers and heavy wooden ladders. I remember lugging shingles over my shoulder up the ladder. A bundle of shingles weighed 80 pounds. I couldn't make it up a ladder with a full bundle so I cut open the paper bundle and hauled up half at a time. I was amazed, and kind of humiliated, that Uncle Jim could throw two full bundles over his shoulder and get them up to the roof with no problem at all. They paid me twenty dollars a day and Mom had me pay her for room and board each week. I think that was eight dollars.

In the spring of 1973, I and a couple of friends from Portsmouth (Mike Barnett and Brian Ashford) decided that we would travel

up to Alaska to work on the oil pipeline. The Alaskan oil pipeline was a really big deal at that time. I think that as a result of the oil embargo from the Arab countries and gas shortages in this country, the government opened up oil drilling in northern Alaska. And to get the oil to “the lower 48” they decided that a one thousand-mile pipeline was needed. We were just three twenty-one-year-olds without any particular skills, but we figured if we went up there, we could find great-paying jobs and lots of adventure.

Turned out that we arrived to work on the pipeline a year too early and the real adventure was the car trip from New Hampshire all the way to Alaska. Mike was the only one of us who owned a car. He had a Chevy Vega - a tiny, little, subcompact car, good on gas but small. Did I mention it was small? We packed our belongings and our camping gear into the hatchback and a carrier on the roof. Mike even packed his all-important stereo system which included these giant wooden speakers, a rather large receiver, and a turntable, Oh - and about fifty albums. Mike’s stereo took up half the available luggage space. That should tell you something about our priorities. Back then, of course, there were no cell phones, no iPods, no Walkmans. We had the car AM radio and at home, some of us had a stereo.

I had been outside of New England only once in my life and that was to Long Island. So I was excited to go on this trip. We headed

first to Colorado, where Brian had a cousin living at the time (he also had a sister in Anchorage, Alaska who planted the idea of coming up to get jobs on the pipeline in Brian's head). We camped out along the way. That was a pretty inexpensive way to travel. We spent a few days in Colorado Springs then headed north along the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains up into Canada.

That was a great trip...Crossing huge mountains and rivers and camping in the wilderness. Everything was so much bigger than I was used to back in New Hampshire. At that time the single road into Alaska was a twelve-hundred-mile-long dirt road. Not much traffic and only a gas station every fifty miles or so. We got to Anchorage and found that there weren't any pipeline jobs so we got what jobs we could find. I worked construction jobs for a while. Mike decided to head back to New Hampshire in the fall, but Brian and I decided to stay the winter. Winter starts in late September in Alaska. I should have gone home with Mike. That winter was so long and dark. The sun comes up at 11 in the morning and goes down at 2 in the afternoon. I enjoyed the summer up there, it was beautiful, but by next spring Brian and I were ready to head home.

Now that I think of it, that wasn't the first trip outside of New England. A couple of years before our Alaska trip Brian and I decided we were going to drive across the country. Brian had this tiny sports car called an Austin Healey Sprite. It sat low to the



ground and had two very small bucket seats and not much room to store our gear. We brought along a tent, a small camping stove, and some clothes. Brian's guitar took up half the storage room by itself. We each had saved up a couple hundred dollars which we hoped would last us maybe a month or two. I don't think we had a definite plan on where we were headed. We were just going to see what each day brought. Kind of like what we had seen on TV and in movies - such as Route 66 and Easy Rider. Actually, we had no idea what we were doing, and you wouldn't consider either one of us out-going or even brave at all. Some nights we stayed in campgrounds and other times we found a nice place on the side of the road to pitch our tent. We stayed off the highways, we liked smaller roads and going through towns. Anyway, Brian's car couldn't do more than about forty miles an hour, so highways were a little scary in that car. It was late April. We traveled south through Pennsylvania and Virginia and then turned west into Kentucky and Tennessee. I remember touring around Nashville one night. I really enjoyed seeing new places and experiencing things we weren't used to back home.

We had crossed the Mississippi and were riding across Missouri, debating whether or not to head south and go to Mexico. Brian didn't like that idea and thinking back, I'm not sure why I was for it. Brian wanted to go to the west coast. In Missouri, the roads are straight and flat with grassland as far as you can see. Just then fate stepped in; as the saying goes. Brian swerved to

avoid hitting a good-sized bird sitting in the road. He lost control, went off the road, and hit a ditch. Other drivers who saw us stopped and said that we flipped end-over-end a few times. Both of us were thrown from the car. Somehow we were both relatively okay, just sore. But that was the end of our trip. The next day we flew into Boston, and I took a bus home to Keene. Mom picked me up at the bus station downtown and I remember telling her I was really happy to be home. Our big adventure had lasted all of twelve days.

In the mid 1970s I was back working with Dad but each weekend I would spend in Portsmouth. Through Brian, who grew up in Portsmouth, I met quite a few people in the area who I enjoyed spending time with. One of these was Karen Blethroade, a friend of Brian's girlfriend. Each Friday evening, I drove Dad's 1948 Willys Jeepster the three hours from Keene to Dover, New Hampshire, where several friends rented a house. Then Sunday night I returned to Keene for the week. After traveling back and forth across the state for a year, I felt it was time to stay in the Dover or Portsmouth permanently. And I was tired of working with Dad and living at home. It was time for a change. In Portsmouth I worked at odd jobs for a while, not making much money. I shared an apartment in Seacrest Village (in Portsmouth) with Gary (one of the gang from the house in Dover), and I was able to work my rent off by working with the maintenance/trash pickup crew in the village. Karen lived nearby

and we started spending time together. We talked about finding an apartment together somewhere in the area and to do that I needed to stop being a bum and find a real grownup type job.

I learned how to pound nails from working with Dad, so I was able to find work as a vinyl siding installer. I liked that kind of work. It was outdoors and it paid pretty well if you were willing to work hard. I worked six days a week and even worked right through the winter, unlike many of the people I knew in the business who didn't like working in the cold and took winters off. The tough part about working in construction is that it's not stable; there are up times and down times, depending on the economy. When the economic climate is good, people will spend money to build and improve property but eventually, there will be a downturn and work becomes scarce. So after five years at that job, Karen convinced me to go to work at the Navy Yard in Portsmouth.

I started work in the sheet metal shop in the fall of 1984. I liked it there and I enjoyed the work very much. Working for the government was certainly different than anything I had experienced before; there were lots and lots of rules and regulations. Luckily, I found that if I just did my work and minded my own business, I could be happy there, and I was. But then, once again, a changing economy had a negative effect on the work being done at the Navy Yard. Cost cutting led to less work which, in turn, led to downsizing the workforce. That

meant it was time to change careers again.

The government was nice enough to fund a re-education program for laid-off employees. I took advantage of that, went to school for the next year, and then began yet another new career in information technology working for a company in Rochester, New Hampshire called Cabletron. The year was 1995. The information technology field was very young but growing fast. I had a lot to learn, this was all new to me, but I enjoyed this kind of work. Working with circuit boards, cable connections, computer monitors and keyboards suited me well and I quickly began to feel comfortable with the work. And it was a lot less physical than any of the positions I previously held. While at Cabletron I went back to school to complete my bachelor's degree and after four years at Cabletron, it was time for another change, but this time it was my choice to make a career move. At the time (1999), every tech company was busy hiring all the people they could find, and quite often, to obtain a sizable pay raise, you simply needed to go to work for another company. For a while, it was quite common to stay at one company for only twelve to eighteen months and then move on to other opportunities. Cabletron was a great place to learn, but it was time for me to take advantage of the continuing hiring frenzy and see if I could get one of those bigger-paying jobs I'd heard about.

A company called Siemens in Chelmsford, Massachusetts hired me as a test engineer and paid me twice what I was making at Cabletron. The first day there was my 48th birthday. My job was to test communication equipment that the large networking companies around the world used to operate the internet. The funny thing was, I worked there for several years and all during that time our products were always in the 'developmental stage'. We never actually sold any products. However, Siemens employed millions of people worldwide and was into everything from managing healthcare to building diesel locomotives. The branch of the company that I worked for employed a few hundred people and had been bought by Siemens only a year before I started work there. Siemens wanted to be involved in networking and bought into it. It sounded strange to me that Siemens didn't seem too concerned that we weren't making any money for them. Eventually, they gave up on us. I went to work one day in December 2007. It was no different than any other workday, except I had an email early that morning inviting me to an all-hands meeting at 9:00 AM. Everyone received the same email. We were ceasing operations, and closing down, and everybody was told to go home. I was shocked, but life goes on. The job market was no longer as hot as it was when I left Cabletron. I learned to enjoy interviewing over the next few months and then I found my next position, at Motorola in Lowell, Massachusetts, as a software/hardware test engineer.

The days were long, but I loved the work. I liked explaining to people that - “Motorola lets me come in and play all day and even pays me for it”, and that’s what it felt like. The test group I was in was small, with only five or six of us, and we all got along well. I was the oldest in the group, but not by much. When I started work there, I was fifty-six, two others were around fifty and the youngest was thirty-five. Only one coworker left the group during the ten years I was there. The division I was in consisted of a few hundred workers and over the next several years was spun off, re-organized, and bought by other corporations repeatedly. At different times we became part of Castle Networks, then Google, and finally Arris.

I made it to the ten-year mark at Motorola-Google-Arris in 2018. I had never stayed at any of my previous jobs for that long. I was sixty-six and I wanted to continue working until age seventy. But if there was one thing I had learned throughout my several different careers it was that nothing is forever; all things come to an end. The company decided they needed to cut costs, so they hired less expensive personnel in India and let go about thirty percent of the people in our group. And I was one of them. Companies always try to make this kind of action a total surprise, and it was. I sat there in the conference room with the other departees and thought to myself - ‘I suppose this is my first day of retirement’.

I went home with my severance package, filed for unemployment, and started rebuilding my deck. That kept me busy a good part of the summer and I didn't have any difficulty at all adapting to retired life. I had plenty of time to keep the lawn mowed and watered and even started dabbling in woodworking again, setting up a shop in our tiny garage. Then in November, I received an email followed by a phone call from Mike, my test group leader Lowell. They wanted me to come back. Working at a regular job again had faded from my mind completely since I was let go in June, and at first, I thought it was not something I wanted to go back to. I was used to staying home, making my own schedule, and having no responsibilities. Then they offered to pay me so much money, I couldn't believe it. It would be contracting work, I would be paid hourly, and I could work any hours I wanted. I said OK.

I went back in December and decided I liked working from 5:00 AM to 3:00 PM Monday through Thursday. I had three-day weekends, the best parking spot, and I avoided both the morning and afternoon rush hours. This was great. I was making tons of money and enjoying my work more than ever. This went on until the following June when once again, everyone received an email to attend a 9:00 meeting in the conference room.

So, when asked how I decided when to change jobs, I would have to answer that it was usually not my decision. My job, my position, often just disappeared and I was left to find something

new.

By coincidence, Karen retired from teaching the same week I was let go for the final time. We headed into retirement together, both of us wondering what that would be like.



Jimmy (Karen's dad), Dad, Mom, me, Karen, and Liz (Karen's mom) at our wedding



# What Was Our Wedding Like?



**K**aren and I were married in a parking lot, but it was a nice parking lot.

We moved in together into an upstairs apartment in an old house at the end of a dead-end road in Newington, New Hampshire in 1978. Newington is a small town just outside of Portsmouth. Karen grew up Portsmouth and I lived there for a few years when I first moved to the seacoast area. The only buildings in Newington, other than homes, were an elementary school and a town hall. That's where our wedding was, at the Town Hall on August 29, 1981. It was very modern and had a large function room. We paid for the wedding ourselves, so the cost was important, and the use of the town hall was free for residents.

We planned to have the ceremony outside if the weather was nice, and it was. The corner of the parking lot we chose was clean and nicely landscaped. The setting was very pleasant. I was

supposed to memorize vows, which I didn't really spend too much time doing, and consequently, I stumbled through my part of the ceremony.

All of my family came over from Keene and all of Karen's family was there and assorted friends attended as well. The catered meal cost us only a few hundred dollars and that was the only real expense we had that day.

The next day we drove up the coast of Maine to Mount Desert Island for our honeymoon and pitched a tent in a campground for a few days. We had some money saved up but that was intended for a downpayment on a future house, so most everything we did was done on the cheap. On most days, for lunch, we split a bag of chips and a Pepsi.



# Some Simple Pleasures of Life I Enjoy



I like to play cards. When I was younger and hung out with friends we would play whist, cribbage, and hearts and for several years we had a weekly poker game - usually in a barn somewhere where we could throw peanut shells on the floor and not worry about making a mess. The stakes were pretty low - just nickel, dime, and quarter. This was back in the 1970s. I was never a very good poker player. I think I usually came to the table with five dollars, had a few beers, and went home broke.

Now I only play cards online. Sometimes against other people - though that's often difficult. I guess people online are just difficult. No manners. No consideration for others, and no face-to-face consequences. So, most of the time now I play against a computer. That's ok - the computer never judges me which I appreciate, and Bill, Jerry, and Lisa are always there any time I feel like playing hearts or bid whist. Playing cards helps

keep me sharp – not that I'm as sharp as I used to be though. I also enjoy some of the word games available online. For the past year, the first thing I do each morning, after pouring my first cup of coffee and settling into my easy chair, is to play Wordle. That game shows me how limited my vocabulary is.

Riding my bike was always enjoyable. Riding around the neighborhood when I was young and then exploring further around town and beyond as a teenager filled many hours with fun and adventure. Sometime around the 10th grade I got my first ten-speed bicycle. For some reason Dad brought it home in the box, completely disassembled. I slowly and methodically put it together piece by piece in Mom's kitchen. It took me a couple of days during which I had brakes, innertubes, reflectors, and cables spread out around the washer and dryer. Actually, by putting all the pieces together myself, I learned how everything on a bicycle worked. I rode that bike everywhere, but not to school though. The high school was miles away on the other side of town and that was too much work for early in the morning. Anyway, I rode for pleasure, and going to school was not.

Over the years since high school, I've had opportunities to ride a bicycle again, though only occasionally. While Ben and Sam were growing up, we lived on, what turned out to be, a busy and narrow rural road in Eliot, Maine. You would see bike riders on the road, but you had to always be on the lookout for inattentive drivers, as there was seldom any kind of a shoulder to retreat to.

The kids learned to ride bikes in our own driveway but eventually, they wanted to venture out onto the roadways and explore. I found a bike at a yard sale and when Sam and Ben were about nine and ten, we sometimes went for rides on some of the side roads around town and a few times I threw all the bikes in the truck, and we'd drive to neighborhoods with lots of room and few cars. But for me, nothing beat biking alone, at my own pace, turning down roads I had never been on before just to see where they led to. I got rid of my last bike about ten years ago. It wasn't a very good bicycle; it came from China, was cheaply made, and was difficult to ride. Since then, I've thought about getting an electric bicycle. I tried one out a few years ago and came close to buying it but eventually talked myself out of doing it. I'm much more cautious than I used to be and for good reason. I have a feeling that because I'm older now and less steady than I used to be, me and a bicycle would eventually prove to be a bad combination.

Since I do not read for pleasure (explained elsewhere), I find enjoyment and relaxation in watching movies. In recent years I've come to appreciate older movies and in particular older black and white movies that I'm able to easily find on YouTube. Karen and I used to share the television upstairs, I got to watch what I wanted between 7:00 and 8:00 PM and then we watched Karen's shows. And then I got free reign again after she went to bed. I bought my first recliner about five years ago and built a

sturdy cardboard platform to fit snugly over the arm for Gary (the cat) to perch on. I covered it with layers of padding and a terry cloth top.

Eventually, I moved my chair to the finished apartment we had downstairs which had been little used except for storing all of our clutter. After some effort, by Karen mostly, I had a couch, a nice fur rug, a TV, and my chair just the way I wanted them. Now I can watch old crime dramas anytime I desire. My second bedroom is downstairs as well. It was serving as a guest room, but nobody ever visits us, so that's where I sleep most nights now. Besides, the trip to the bathroom is shorter downstairs and I don't disturb Karen when I need to visit it during the night.



Sam, waiting patiently

# It Was Clear to Me at an Early Age What Career Path I Would Follow



**W**ait, that's not exactly true. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. It would be correct to say that I stumbled through my career(s), not knowing what was coming next. Yet somehow, I always landed softly and carried on.

When I was young, I thought that everyone, once they graduated, was supposed to find some kind of work they enjoyed doing and just do that one thing until they were too old to work anymore. Then you moved to Florida where it was warm, and you didn't have to shovel snow anymore.

I didn't have a clue about what I wanted to do with my life or what type of work I might want to do when I got older. I was too busy being a kid. I never had any of those long-term goals our High School teachers told us we should be thinking about and working toward. I was reluctant to commit myself to a specific

goal or any particular path. I may have had vague ideas about what I imagined myself doing after finishing with school. But no particular occupation or trade really attracted me. In school, I liked math and science and for a while, I thought that maybe I'd end up being some kind of scientist or mathematician. I saw myself possibly working in an office or some kind of laboratory perhaps. I didn't like the sound of 'factory work', so future endeavors I considered for myself didn't include that.

I also enjoyed working with my hands and building things. Though I had already ruled out (for no good reason) following in Dad's footsteps, I wasn't opposed to physical labor. I rather liked working outside in the fresh air. But Mom had a little bit to do with steering me toward college. She probably had a clearer vision of my future than I did. She told Peter and me several times, while we were in school, that she wished for one of us to become a barber and the other a dentist. Her reasoning was those two professions would always be in demand. As the end of high school approached, I ended up applying to technical schools, even though I wasn't even sure what branch of technology I wanted to pursue. To be honest, it felt like I was throwing a dart at a list taped to the wall. I didn't have a clear picture of where I was heading.

When I graduated High School in 1969, I thought I had another summer at the lake to look forward to. I was all set to go to Concord Tech in the fall to study Mechanical Engineering and I



wanted to enjoy my last couple of months, pretending I was still a kid. But Mom suggested, in her do-it-or-else kind of way, that I get a job for the summer. Through Uncle Eddie, I found a job working in a factory. Yup. That's where I didn't want to be, but it paid. I needed some money because, at that point, Mom was charging me room and board: eight dollars a week. But it turned out that I wasn't going to be doing actual factory-type work at that job. I was assigned to the maintenance department. The head of maintenance, the man I worked for, was about sixty-five years old. He could stand up straight in a doorway raise one leg over his head and touch the top of the door casing with the sole of his foot. I was impressed.

My job that summer was up on the roof, above the factory floor, replacing all the window putty in something like two hundred and forty skylights. All of July and August I spent alone up on the roof, scraping out and replacing the old, cracked putty and painting window frames. I had a little pocket transistor radio with me that could only tune in to the local AM stations. I listen to music on WKBK and Red Sox games on WKNE (in those days most of their games were played during the daytime).

So, I went off to school, that fall, in Concord, New Hampshire, my first time away from home. I shared a room with Paul, a friend from Keene High, in the one dormitory on campus. I didn't really like it there. To put it more accurately, I didn't want to be in school. I had just finished my sixteen years of schooling

in Keene, and this felt like more of the same. I don't know what I expected, but I wasn't happy there. I didn't have a good attitude and I just wasn't motivated to be in school and do the work required. I stayed through two semesters and then left in the Spring.

I met Brian while attending Concord Tech and visited his home in Portsmouth a few times. That was my introduction to the seacoast area that would later become my home for the rest of my days. After I left school, I worked with Dad on and off for a few years, spent one year in Alaska, and then finally settled down with Karen in Portsmouth.



Ben and Sam in front. Little Pete, Matt, Patrick and Patrice

# The Relationship I Have with My Siblings



**F**rom my point of view, I don't recall feeling a chumminess or family togetherness toward my brother Peter and two sisters Pamela and Laurie. That wasn't the way our family worked. It's not that we were cold to each other, it's just that Mom and Dad didn't instill a family-first attitude in us. We are all roughly two years apart in age, Pam was born in 1949, me in 1951, Peter in 1954, and Laurie in 1956. As young children, we played together in the yard. At that time Peter and I had some common interests. We enjoyed little boy things like playing Cowboys and Indians, riding our wagon over jumps in the driveway, and climbing trees. Laurie always seemed to be too little to join in some of the rougher activities we liked. I don't have more than just a handful of memories of Laurie playing with the rest of us at all. By the time she was five, I was ten years old and probably off riding my bicycle most of the time. And as for Pam, I don't think she was ever the tomboy type. She didn't understand the thrill that Pete

and I got when we smashed a whole roll of caps with a hammer or a big rock.

As we grew older, the four of us all developed different interests and followed different paths. We each had our own sets of friends and as adults, we've always gotten along with each other well. We see each other only occasionally now and when we do get together, we sometimes reminisce about our earlier lives together and our shared memories. Sometimes we discover that each of us might remember some long-ago event a little differently than the others.

During the 1980s and 1990s, we all came home to the house on Marlboro Street to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas. Some years, those were the only times I saw my siblings. We would invariably get out Dad's slide projector and screen and spend a couple of hours going through the collection of photos Dad took over the years and reminiscing about our childhoods. We would get lost reliving the old days while our spouses got bored with the same stories they heard the year before, and the year before that and wandered off and waited patiently until we finished.

Pam now lives in Virginia, Peter is in Chesterfield, New Hampshire (just outside Keene) and Laurie is in York, Maine. We're still not close. We enjoy each other's company when we get together, but we never were and probably never will be, siblings that need to call each other weekly on the phone.

# Some Memories of Dad



When I was little, I think Dad spent quite a bit of time at home with us (not so much in later years, but that's another story). Sister Pam was born in 1949 and by 1956 there were four of us. Any break Mom got by Dad taking one or more of us with him while he ran errands around town, I'm sure she appreciated. That was only on Sunday of course because Dad usually worked six days a week. Back then you couldn't buy beer on Sunday before noon, so it was often late morning that I would go with Dad to one of the small corner grocery stores near the school or to Doody's Market to get the Sunday papers. Sometimes he'd take us to visit Grampa Lynch.

I recall an overnight stay with Dad at a campground on a pond somewhere around Keene. I can remember lots of people around us putting up tents and building campfires. One time Dad brought along a small inflatable boat and in the morning, he blew it up and began paddling Pam, Pete, and me away from shore. Soon the boat started losing air and Dad told us we had to

get out of the boat so he could re-inflate it. I was scared and crying because he knew I couldn't swim. What did he expect me to do? But he picked me up and stood me up outside the boat. The water was only about eight inches deep. I recall standing there in the muck and the sticks, and weeds for the longest time while Dad blew into the little hole in a vain attempt to blow the boat up again. But the leak was too big, and he gave up. Pam wasn't afraid; she walked back to shore while Dad carried Pete to safety. I stayed with the boat not daring to move. Then Dad waded back out the twenty feet to where I was and rescued me.

Another time Dad took me fishing on Silver Lake. That was probably my first time fishing. I was sitting in the back seat of a wooden rowboat with Dad in the front and Eddie Weeks in the middle rowing the boat. I wanted to hold my fishing pole while Eddie rowed us out to the middle of the lake. Dad was busy digging through the can of worms he brought along, and I was dangling my pole over the side of the boat when suddenly the pole somehow slipped out of my hand and disappeared into the water. Eddie continued to row, and Dad was still looking through the worms. They didn't notice the what-did-I-just-do look on my face. Dad told me to hand the pole to him so he could put a worm on it for me. I told him I dropped it in the water and began to cry. He looked disappointed and furious at the same time but didn't say much. The funny thing is, other than this one time, I don't think Dad was a fisherman and I don't recall ever seeing

any fishing gear around the house.

Dad had a very nice camera that he brought home with him when returning from the war in Europe. I believe he told us it was from Switzerland. He took pictures of everything, especially the family. Occasionally he was in a picture, but usually, he was behind the camera. At first, he used only black and white film and had the photos made into little three-inch flip booklets. Then in the 1950s he started using color film and had the developed film made into projector slides. I think the slides show us lots of evidence of Dad's influence on our young lives. Some of the pictures in this book are from those same slides. I remember he enjoyed digging out the boxes of slides and setting up the projector in the kitchen in front of the white refrigerator door we used for a screen for many years. Even after Dad died, Pam, Peter, Laurie, and I would reminisce at Thanksgiving and Christmas time while viewing the slide show. Sadly, sometime in the late 90s, all the slides (probably two or three hundred in number) disappeared. I realized they were gone when Laurie and I were emptying the house after Mom no longer lived there. The slides were the most important thing I was interested in ensuring were saved. I was so disappointed when they were nowhere to be found. But that story had a happy ending when some twenty years later Peter found some of the missing slides in the bottom of a box he had stored away. Peter gave me the slides he found but some slides which I vividly remember seeing

again and again over the years are still missing.

Dad spent less and less time with us as we got older. To be fair, maybe as a teenager, I became less interested in doing stuff with him. He worked every day, either roofing or wrecking while we were in school or at home with Mom, and his workdays usually ended at the Legion or Elks or similar watering hole. As time passed, Dad being late for dinner became the norm. And when he finally got home each night Mom would often 'let him have it', lecturing and nagging him. She could be brutal. That seemed like it came naturally to her. But looking back, I can't blame her. She had plenty to crab about. She took care of the house and four kids. Where was he at six o'clock?



Pam, Peter, and me with Grampa Lynch. Hilda is on the porch of their house on Victoria St in Keene



# My Father's Family



Dad's father was William Joseph Lynch. Even though he spent his life in Keene I don't remember seeing him with any regularity; not every week or anything like that. He gradually became blind later in life, caused by glaucoma I believe. I recall one day when I was twelve or fourteen walking down Main St in Keene with Gramp. It was winter and I had on a bright blue nylon down parka. He looked at me with his head tilted sideways a little, straining to use what little eyesight he had, and said, "That's the color I can see best, Ricky". After Hilda died in the mid-1960s and he could no longer see well enough to live alone, our family and Aunt Marion's family cared for Grampa Lynch almost constantly. Either he would be at our house for supper, or someone would keep him company at his place. He lived in a little house down an alley just a block off Main St, sandwiched between the school bus garage and an electrical supply company. I stayed overnight with him at his house a few times. He could do a lot for himself, but he had me open his mail and read from the

local newspaper to him. That was the late 1960s and early 70s. He told me family stories and asked questions about the way downtown looked now and would compare that to how he remembered things. There was a picture hanging on the wall in his living room. It was a very wide photograph of hundreds of World War 1 soldiers lined up in five or six rows. I think he told me that was his Army division and that he was in the top row, fifth from the right end (or something like that). Everyone in the photo was so tiny I couldn't tell if it was him or not even using Grampa's magnifying glass. It's a shame that I don't remember any of the stories. If only I had written things down. What a missed opportunity that was. I have a favorite memory of Grampa Lynch sitting at his kitchen table with Dad and Marion and a few others, drinking beers and softly singing "My Wild Irish Rose". He enjoyed singing and entertaining the group after having a few.

Dad's mother was Helen Valida Butler. She died in 1943, at age 49, several years before I was born. All of Helen's ancestors were French-Canadian who had migrated from Quebec several generations ago. She grew up in Keene in a family with ten children. Other than that I know almost nothing about her. Dad rarely spoke about his family but did, on occasion, refer to an aunt or uncle and since Grampa was an only child, these must have been Butler relatives. I found out later that a few of Helen's siblings stayed in the Keene area their entire lives, though the

only one I recall meeting was Pauline, the next to the youngest. Gramp remarried sometime in the late 1940s so the Gram Lynch I knew was “Hilda”. I remember her, rather unfairly I think now, as a very stern-looking, no-nonsense type of grandmother. When talking about Hilda with Mom many years later, she said that Hilda was a quiet but very nice lady and that if it wasn’t for Hilda, Grandpa Lynch would have drunk himself into an early grave (Mom’s words).

Dad had three brothers and a sister. James, Uncle Jim, was the oldest. I got to know him a little when I worked with him and Dad in their two-man roofing business. He struck me as a rather uneducated, but very opinionated man. I liked Uncle Jim and he and I got along well, because whatever he said I just went along with. Sometime around 1960, he married Joyce, a girl Aunt Marion told me, “Rode into town on the back of a motorcycle”. Mom told me Jim and Joyce spent their time in bars, getting into brawls - with each other mostly. Eventually, they both stopped drinking and raised a son, James. Jim lived to age 75. He was still roofing at that age, and he had a heart attack and died while he was up on a roof, working.

The next oldest was Eddie. I remember him as a wall paperer. He, his wife Florence, and their three children - Bill, Debbie, and Mark lived in West Keene in the same small house on Cedar St that Dad grew up in. Uncle Eddie was probably the only brother who finished high school or even went to high school. He died of

a heart attack while getting ready for work one morning in 1968. He was only 46.

Next came Dick (Dad), then Bob, the youngest of the four boys. He was born in 1926. He married and had three children, but I don't recall knowing his family at all. I think the only time I remember seeing them was at Bob's funeral. He was 45 when he died in 1972. Aunt Marion told me he was the wild one in the family, as a teenager he was always in some kind of trouble and that the police knew him very well. When I worked with Dad for a few days one summer, tearing down a house, Uncle Bob was there ripping out all the copper plumbing and electrical wiring to sell for scrap. That's what he did for a living - he was a scrap metal dealer.

Aunt Marion, the youngest in the family, was born in 1930. I haven't seen Aunt Marion in a couple of years, but she is still with us at 93 and is living with my cousin Maryann in Connecticut. Marion is the exception to the Lynch family's lack of education. She earned her master's degree in education and taught school her whole working life. Marion and her husband, Paul Trudelle had four children, Peter, Pat, Maryann, and Jeff, whom I saw occasionally over the years and got to know a little bit. Aunt Marion has been a wonderful source for firsthand family information. She is a good storyteller and I've been fortunate to get a few audio recordings of her reminiscing about the family. She seems to take a particular interest in revealing

family secrets. Not that the secrets were that bad - nobody murdered anyone or anything like that. She happened to be going on one day about Dad and casually informed me that I may have a red-haired half-brother or sister somewhere in Pennsylvania, from Dad's time in boot camp after he was drafted into the army in World War 2.



Butler family 1903. My grandmother, Helen, in front



(Grandmother) Helen and Grampa Lynch

# My Mother's Family



**M**om (Anna Robinson) was born and grew up in Marlborough, New Hampshire, a town bordering Keene to the east. The Robinson family story began in Marlborough when Mom's grandfather, George Robinson, married Anna Proctor of that town. Anna's father, as a wedding gift in 1883, bought a dairy farm for them on the main road heading out of town. They named the farm Sunnynook, and this is where they raised four sons and one daughter.



Sunnynook



George and Anna's 50th Anniversary. Mom is in front  
William (known as Will) was the oldest of George and Anna's children followed by Lilla, Charles, Guy, and Edgar. Charles was Mom's father, my grandfather. I met all five of those siblings when I was very young, in the 1950s at a family reunion held at the farm. Four of the five (all but Edgar) graduated from New Hampshire College (which later became the University of New Hampshire), in Durham between the years 1900 and 1912. Many years later I learned that there were two additional children in the family; Freddy who lived only a few days, and Mabel who died at age five. I had never heard about these last two children until I did some extensive exploring of the Robinsons after Mom died in 2003. I visited the cemetery in Marlborough where George and Anna are buried and found two



additional markers, one for “Little Freddie” and the other for “Mabel”. Later I found, among Mom’s things, a long letter from one of her cousins, which read - “... dad had a little sister that was born when Grandma Robinson was fifty years old. She was accidentally scalded to death when she was twelve years old.” This was Mabel, however, the cemetery marker indicated that she was five years old, not twelve.



Young Grampa Rob at work on the farm

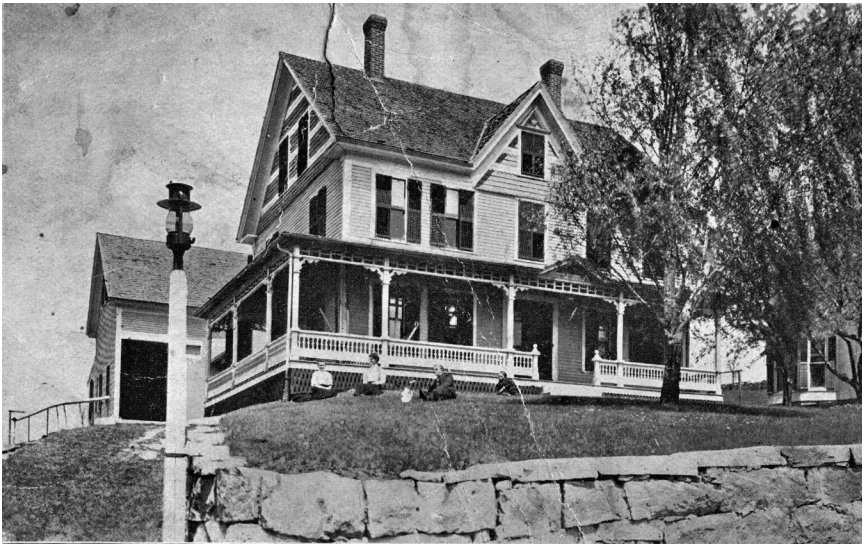
My Grandpa Rob (Charles) married Ruth Wiswall in 1915 and they raised their five children in Marlborough in a large two-family house close to the center of town. This is where Anna (Mom) was born. Her oldest brother, Lawrence (born 1916), died during World War 2, so I never knew him, but from family

stories, I have learned that he was a very intelligent, inventive, clever, and hard-working individual.

Next born was Margaret (1919), who I knew as Aunt Peggy. Mom referred to her as Peg, but many years later Cousin Sandy told me Margaret hated that nickname. I felt bad when I learned that, but she never indicated any displeasure when I referred to her as Aunt Peggy. She was very good to me as well as to Pam, Pete, and Laurie. For several years, I was invited up to her summer camp house on Canaan Street Lake for a week or so. I learned to water ski there behind Uncle Tommy's aluminum motorboat with its big Evinrude thirty-five horsepower outboard motor. That boat got so hot in the sun that if you sat down on the bare metal you'd burn your fanny. During those years we also were invited to spend every Thanksgiving Day with Aunt Margaret, Uncle Tommy, and cousins Sandy, Bruce, John, and Ruth at their home in Enfield, about an hour north of Keene. Margaret graduated from Plymouth Teachers College and taught school until retiring in the mid-1970s.

Next was Uncle Chuck (Charles). He was born in 1922. He moved to Colorado sometime in the 1950s. He returned to New Hampshire every few years to visit relatives. Over the last several years of his life (he died in 2009) I corresponded with him frequently while I gathered Robinson family history. Uncle Chuck provided hours of audio recordings of his memories of growing up in Marlborough and also wrote a very detailed autobiography

which is posted (along with his audio recordings) on our family history website 'lynch-robinson.com'. With his vivid descriptions and humor, he made his memories come alive and didn't mind sharing family secrets and dirty details. He was a captivating storyteller. When remembering his grade school days in Marlborough, he was very open about his lack of academic ambition and his tendency to misbehave.



“Overlook” Residence of Fred E. Adams, Marlboro, N. H.

This is the house on Terrace St Mom grew up in Mom was born in 1924, and then her brother Frank was born in 1925. Uncle Frank spent his entire life living in Marlborough. Like his brother Chuck, Frank loved to tell a story, and he also provided us with hours of audio recordings relating his views on Robinson family history and memories of growing up in a small

town. I reconnected with Uncle Frank and his family after Mom died and I started collecting family history data. Frank was one of my primary sources for family photographs, family bibles, letters, and his memories of the two generations of Robinsons before him. Frank married Cherolyn Wyman in 1947 and my cousins Lawrence (Lonnie) and Brenda were born in 1948 and 49 respectively.

I visited the Robinson farm in Marlborough many times over the years. I remember the huge red cow barn was a great place to explore. The bottom level had whitewashed timbers and a cement floor and there were rows of cows in their head yokes waiting to be milked. Just behind the row of cows' hind feet was a trough, a few inches deep, that the cows could do their business in if they were so inclined. The trough had a conveyor belt that was activated periodically and sent the waste along to a special room at the end of the barn. That's where Dad went each Spring to get fertilizer for Mom's garden. There were at least fifty cows on the farm, perhaps many more than that. I recall walking down the three-foot-wide aisle between the rows of cows and learning, the hard way, to watch out when one of the cows lifted its tail.

Dad recruited me one time to go help out on the farm bringing in the hay from the field across the road. It was the day before my first day of high school in 1965. Uncle Edgar's health was failing and he was no longer able to do any of the chores he had taken

care of for so many years. So, Dad, his brother (Uncle Jim), and I helped Karl (Mom's cousin) load the hay bales onto his truck and hoist them up into the loft in the cow barn. Four hours of work on the farm showed me how difficult that life is. I used the hemp twine holding the bales together as handles when lifting them onto the truck. I went to school the next day with blisters on both hands.

Mom's favorite spot on the farm was her Uncle Will's blueberry patch. Before Will left the farm to go to work for the government in Washington, D.C., he went to great effort to gather many different varieties of blueberry plants from around the world and planted them in a plot of land at the top of the hill behind the farm. This was about 1910 and the plot was thereafter maintained by family members. Every summer, Mom took us to pick blueberries in that patch. There were dozens of large, well-cared-for blueberry bushes. I recall filling many quart baskets with the large and delicious berries. Mom made pies and muffins and other treats with the blueberries and always froze a good amount to use right through the winter.

Springtime was maple syrup season and Uncle Edgar tapped the many large maple trees in the pasture and up the hill out behind the farmhouse. He had a large open tank in the back of his truck and drove from tree to tree emptying the sap buckets into the tank. The sap was then boiled into syrup in a small outbuilding built for that purpose. We visited that sugar shack often and were

treated with a small bowl of snow with maple syrup poured on top. Both Chuck and his brother Frank often helped out on the farm in their teenage years. Chuck remembered riding with his grandfather, George Robinson in his truck, delivering milk around town. After Uncle Edgar died, the Robinson farm was sold out of the family, and within a few years, it ceased to be run as a dairy farm. In the 1980s one end of the cow barn was converted to an antique shop and over the next forty years the property slowly declined. The cow pastures became overgrown with weeds and trees and the barn and outbuildings were all in desperate need of painting. Occasionally I stopped by the side of the road by the farm to take a few photographs. When I drove by there in the Fall of 2023 on my way to Keene, I saw that a large section of the barn roof had caved in.



Mom reading to a neighbor boy

# My Summers Growing Up



**T**he only summers I remember growing up began when I was in the fourth grade. Dad bought a small summer camp on a lake, Lake Warren, in East Alstead, fifteen or so miles north of Keene. We always referred to it as “camp”. It had one small bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and living room. Of course, Mom and Dad had the bedroom and the rest of us slept on the floor around the woodstove in the living room. Nights were very cold even in the summertime in Alstead, and Dad always started a fire in the stove before he left for work early each morning.

After we spent our first summer there, Dad added two bunk rooms and a big sun porch with windows all the way around. That became the main room in the house. The bunk rooms were tiny, just barely big enough for the Army Surplus store bunk beds. On the lake-side of the house the “lot” ran downhill a couple of hundred feet to the water – but usually there wasn’t any water there, just muck and overgrown bushes. In the early summer, when the water was still high, we did have one little

spot where the water was at most six inches deep, enough to get our little rowboat into. That led out through the brush and weeds to the cove and then out further into the lake itself.

The shoreline along our part of the lake was like that for several hundred feet until you got beyond the cove and into the open water. That's where the "public dock" was and that's where most everybody congregated to go swimming or to tie their boat up. The dock was thirty feet long and five feet wide and was built long before we got there. All the moms lay on the dock sunning themselves while the kids played in the water. It was great swimming there and the water was over my head at the end of the dock so we could dive in. Some of the dads at camp built a raft one year. Dad supplied the parts – a big old barn door and six beer kegs to keep it afloat. That thing lasted many years.

Even though our camp was only a short distance from our home in Keene, it seemed like another world to me. Lots of woods to explore with streams and rocks and trees to climb. The area actually had a name (on a map). It was called "Shadowland". There were twelve or fourteen houses altogether. We always referred to our house in Alstead as "camp" for some reason. It was just a summer camp after all, but friends back home in Keene thought I attended a boys' camp when they heard me say that I spent my summers at camp. Most of the houses were summer vacation homes and had to be shut for the winter. Most of the families that summered in Shadowland owned their



camps, but there was one house that was rented out weekly. We were friends with two different families from New York that stayed there for a couple of weeks each year.

Many of the families were from Massachusetts and several were from Connecticut and New York. My best friend up at camp was Chris, we were the same age. He and his mom and dad (Mr. and Mrs. Southland) lived in East Islip, Long Island, a four-hour car ride to Alstead. Chris and his mom would stay for two or three weeks at a time, but his dad would drive up every week after work on Friday and go back every Sunday night. When I was fourteen, the Southlands invited me to go back to Long Island with them for the week. That was the first time I had really been anywhere outside of New England. It was a fun week. Chris and I hung around his neighborhood and did stuff 14-year-olds did. But I remember that it was a little bit of a culture shock. I realized how isolated my life had been and I felt unsophisticated compared to the teens I met there. Shadowland itself was like that too. That was where I learned that people from different places all spoke a little differently with accents used funny-sounding phrases and had unfamiliar names for some common objects like soda/pop/tonic.

By the time I became a teenager, many of the kids who summered in Shadowland were my age. There were about ten of us, all from the class of 1969. I think of how fortunate I was to have so many good friends and fun times from my summers in

East Alstead, my summertime home every year until I finished High School.



Addition being built following the first summer

# Always the Youngest in School



**M**om started me in kindergarten when I was four and I turned five on December 27, 1956, at the end of that calendar year. The end of December was the cut-off date used to determine what year a five-year-old could enter the first grade. So, if I were born a few days later (in January) I wouldn't have been eligible to start school until the following year. As a result, I was usually the youngest kid in my class and probably the most immature.

At the time, Mom was six months pregnant with Laurie, Pam was already in school, and Peter was about two and a half. She had her hands full, so off I went, ready or not.

At age four, I may not have been ready for school, socially. I remember being very shy and never wanted to stand out. I felt safe staying in the background with one or two others who were quiet like I was. Now that I think of it, that might have shaped

my approach to school for the next twelve years.

Karen and I kept Ben home an extra year before sending him to kindergarten. We thought he was quite socially immature compared to other kids. I'm glad we did that. I think he turned out great.



# Chores I Had While Growing Up



I don't remember having any traditional kind of chores I had to do around the house. Nothing like taking out the trash, feeding the pets, or even making my bed. Those were chores Mom took care of. She also did a lot of the lawn mowing and snow shoveling. Mom was a little fanatical about getting every last piece of packed snow or ice off the driveway as soon as the sun came out to help melt it. I do remember having to help mow the lawn in summertime and shovel snow from the driveway in winter, but I don't think I received any kind of regular allowance. Though when it was time to go shopping with Mom, at the stores along Main St in Keene, I always had ten or fifteen cents to spend on some small item from the Woolworth's or Newberry's toy department.

Ten or fifteen cents went a long way in the 50s. I could spend an hour examining all the toys in Woolworth's toy department,

debating whether I needed any more army men or should I get a new bubble pipe. The table-top bins with glass dividers were filled with a large variety of small items. Mom was always somewhere in the store (I think), but I was usually allowed to browse but myself, even at age six or seven. Some of the toys on display costing from five cents up to a quarter or more were cowboy cap guns, water pistols, rubber balls, little cars, marbles, balsa wood gliders, play money, tiny dolls, and dinosaurs. One of my favorite things to spend my dime on was rolls of caps. They were meant to be used in a toy gun to make a bang when you pulled the trigger. Each box of caps contained five rolls and each roll had twenty dark red spots on it. When the red spot was struck, it exploded with a bang. They were meant to be used in cap guns but more often than not I'd end up pounding them with a hammer or a rock. They were like fireworks to me. You could get a pretty big bang if you hit a whole roll at once.

Though I don't recall getting paid to do specific chores, there were a few ways for me to earn a little money from Dad. One of the first jobs I could handle was scraping off the old mortar from used bricks, or 'cleaning bricks' as Dad called it. Between that and pulling nails out of the old lumber Dad brought home, I always had a dime or a quarter I could take to Woolworths.

# My Short Stint in the School Band



In the 5th grade, I joined the band at school, though I don't remember any desire on my part to join. I probably brought home a note from school about it and Mom signed me up. And Dad somehow came up with a horn for me to learn to play. Like most everything Dad brought home, there's a good chance he found it at the town dump.

It was a pretty poor example of a trumpet, very dinged up with scotch tape covering the holes where the two spit valves used to be, and they leaked. I didn't have a case for it. I carried it to school wrapped up in a paper bag with Mayes Supermarket advertising on it. There was one other trumpet player in the band. I don't remember who it was, but he had one of the instruments you could rent-to-own from the music store in town. It had that sharp-looking black alligator skin case. Right away I was envious. The valves on my horn often stuck making it

difficult to play and it wasn't long before I lost interest in it. I don't think the music instructor liked me or my horn very much. Mom told me he informed her about my lack of musical talent and his disapproval of the condition of my trumpet.

Dad had an old bugle he let us play with and I got so I could make some pretty loud noises come out of it. Of course, we all played Army when we were kids, and that old banged-up bugle was nice to have. Dad said he got it when he was in the army. His story was - sometime after the war ended in 1945, he was set to be discharged from the army and he learned that he was listed in the record as one of the company buglers. No one had ever told him that he was supposed to be a bugler. So, he asked for his bugle, and they gave it to him, and he brought it home.

Dad didn't talk a lot about his time in the service during World War 2, but I do remember him telling us that his job in the army was driving the left side of a tank. I'm not sure what that means now that I think of it. Did tanks have two drivers? He told us he drove the tank over his colonel's jeep and flattened it. I'm not sure if he said it was intentional, but they hid the jeep and didn't get into trouble for it. I recall asking him if he ever shot anybody in the war and he told me he didn't think so, but that he himself had been wounded. He was shot in the fanny (a flesh wound in the check - not too serious) and it was friendly fire. A soldier was cleaning his gun, which went off with the bullet passing up through a ceiling and into the upstairs room Dad was in. He



spent some time in bed, on his stomach, recovering from that mishap.

Besides the bugle, Dad had a few other souvenirs from his time in the army. I remember an army helmet, a couple of bayonets, and a gas mask. I don't think Dad brought these items back from Europe or anything like that, he just probably picked them up somewhere during the 1950s. I'm sure there were lots of war surplus items available back then. He also had a military rifle that he let Peter and I shoot blanks from out in the yard. That might have been the same rifle Dad marched with in parades as part of the color guard. Parades were a very big deal back in those days, especially military parades like the ones celebrating Memorial Day. I remember being very young and watching lots of soldiers, in uniform, come marching down Main Street, followed by all kinds of military vehicles including big guns and even tanks. Marching bands played patriotic songs. It was all very thrilling to me. Eventually, in the '60s and the '70s, military parades lost some of their luster and their popularity, and all the veterans got old. It was exciting while it lasted.



# Television Programs I Watched as a Child



**T**he first TV program that comes to mind is The Howdy Doody Show. It was strictly for kids and featured puppets and cartoons. That ran through most of the 1950s. Each show ended with a closing theme song saying, “We’ll see you next week” and I remember, on the very last show, Howdy and Buffalo Bob said something like ‘Bye kids. We’ll see you some other day.’ I was sad, and I think that taught me that nothing is forever.



Another show I remember watching was called “The Big Brother Show” hosted by Big Brother Bob Emery - a fifty-year-old with white hair and glasses, kind of grandfatherly. It was a local show on one of the Boston stations and came on at noon every weekday. The one thing that sticks in my mind about that show is when Bob asked us all to join him in raising our glass of milk in a toast to the President. A large photo of President Eisenhower hung on the wall behind Bob’s chair, and he would turn in his chair, face the photo, raise his glass, and make the toast. I got a kick out of doing that with him.

The television we had in the living room on Marlboro St. was a big floor-standing model about three feet high. It was like a piece of furniture and had wheels on the bottom. The picture tube wasn’t that big I don’t think - maybe 20 inches or so and it was only black and white of course.

We had a 2nd TV in the playroom. I spent a lot of my indoor time in that room and that’s where we kids watched our shows. The TV was a small portable black and white set (we never did have a color TV). We would line up four chairs across the middle of the room facing the TV on Sunday nights and watch Lassie and then Walt Disney’s Wonderful World of Color. We had to use our imagination when the NBC peacock showed its colors, but it didn’t seem like we were missing anything. Dad cooked the popcorn and went back to reading his paper in the living room.

Of course, Saturday morning TV meant cartoons including Bugs Bunny, Quick Draw McGraw, and Huckleberry Hound. Then on Sunday morning before Sunday School, I watched Davy and Goliath cartoons followed by “Boomtown” with Rex Trailer. That was a Boston-based show that had local kids come on. Another live show that had kids on was “The Uncle Gus Show”. That was out of Manchester, NH on channel 9 and was on about 5 o’clock every weekday. Uncle Gus showed Popeye cartoons and played a “Simon Says” game with all the kids in the audience - he was brutal.



He sat at a small desk and about twenty kids sat on folding chairs off to the side. One or two kids got to come up and be interviewed on live TV. That was a fun show. Some of my friends were on it.

Bozo the Clown was another favorite weekday show.

Some of the other TV shows from the 50s and early 60s that I enjoyed were - "Sky King"; he flew a small plane out west - kind of a western but with an airplane instead of a horse, "The Three Stooges", "Rescue 8"; I remember playing our own version of Rescue-8 where someone would pretend to be in danger (like falling down a cliff or trapped under a collapsed building) and we'd rescue them. We played that game very seriously.

Another TV I know I watched quite a bit was Captain Kangaroo. Though, I'm not sure what he was the captain of. I thought he might have been a train conductor because of the uniform and hat he wore. His sidekick was Mr. Green-Jeans who wore bib overalls and a straw hat. Three other important characters on the show were, Bunny Rabbit, Mr. Moose (both puppets), and Grandfather Clock, which was a kind of a moving mechanical face on a grandfather clock. Bunny Rabbit didn't talk of course, but both Mr. Moose and Grandfather Clock did. They ran Felix the Cat and Tom Terrific cartoons on that show.

# And Sometimes I Made Poor Choices



**T**rying to swim across the pond was not a good idea. I was never a great swimmer even though I spent a good part of my summers growing up playing in the water at the lake in Alstead. I was in the eighth grade, riding bikes with some buddies of mine around Wilson Pond. We stopped for a short rest and then went for a swim. My three friends, apparently good swimmers, decided to head for the opposite shore. It wasn't a long way, perhaps a thousand feet, but for me it might just as well have been a mile. I told myself that I could probably make it across, but it was a poor decision. About halfway there I had second thoughts. I was tiring rapidly and finally let the others know I was having a little trouble. Two of them were way ahead of me and the third came back a little way to try to kind of talk me through it. It wasn't working and I started to panic and let everyone know that I didn't think I could make it across. I was

about three quarters of the way across the pond when all of a sudden, I felt someone come up from behind me, grab my arm and hold me up. Two gentlemen in a boat heard me and came to my rescue.

## Skating Project Planned by Club

The Keene Y Men's Club met Monday night at the Keene YMCA. President Richard Lynch presided during the business meeting as work projects were planned for the YMCA skating area in West Keene. Members of the club will meet at the skating rink Sunday afternoon and Monday evening to work on the warming hut.

Following the business session refreshments were served by Robert Coates and Thomas Sutton. The program was in charge of Albert Garno who showed slides of recent club activities.

Keene Evening Sentinel - Feb 1957



# Mom and Dad's Relationship: How They Got Along



**M**ost of the time, I don't think Mom was very happy with Dad and I believe it all came from the fact that Dad liked beer. And, likely, the reason Dad stayed out drinking with his buddies at the VFW or the Legion was because he knew if he went home, he'd get nagged. I couldn't blame him for that, and I couldn't blame her either. I'm pretty sure that when we (Pam, me, Peter, and Laurie) were little Dad did a lot with us but as we got older, I think he began getting home late for supper more and more often.

I recall a lot of fighting at the dinner table. Bickering really. One of them would say something to the other, a sarcastic remark, and the other would have to return fire. I don't think they ever exchanged clever remarks, just things that were easy to think up but were hurtful, nonetheless. And of course, neither one of

them would let a dig go by without a response. So, it kind of went on and on sometimes. I was okay with Dad coming home late because then there would be less bickering at the supper table. As I got older (ten or twelve maybe) the arguing at the dinner table began to bother me. It upset my stomach. I couldn't eat. Eventually, I ended up eating my supper each night in the playroom, just off the kitchen, where I could turn the volume on the TV up and eat in peace.

I don't know how this is going to sound to Pam, Peter, and Laurie, but - I don't recall ever seeing Mom and Dad show any affection towards one another. That would have looked weird to me and would have been out of character for them. I doubt if they ever loved each other. Heck, most of the time it didn't appear as though they even liked each other. The truth is - they got married because Mom was pregnant with Pam. I don't think I've ever said that before or even heard it said out loud, but that's what happened. I did the math. They were married in May and Pam was born in November. But that's what you did back then - you got married. Mom was doomed. I always thought that she regretted how things worked out. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong, maybe she really did love Dad. Though I doubt it.

I think they stayed together for a few reasons. I believe Mom's upbringing dictated that you got married and you stayed married. I can almost hear her saying those words. She had four kids - of course she was going to stay married, what else could

she do? She was trapped. I believe Dad was lucky to have Mom. She made everything run. I can't imagine what he would have become without her. So, in that way, he was stuck too. He needed her. She made him a good home and he tolerated her. But she was a nagger. Not a complainer but a faultfinder. She had no problem telling you what your faults were.

All that aside, we four kids were well cared for and loved by both Mom and Dad. And they showed that love in their own ways, just like everyone does. Not all kids had a great yard and a nice neighborhood to grow up in, their own pony and donkey, and a camp on a lake to run wild at in the summertime. Mom and Dad treated us kids really swell, but not each other.





# Pets



We always seemed to have pets growing up. First, there were Dad's dogs for a few years, but then we switched to cats. Mom liked cats. At times we had one or two cats and other times we had way too many, even a dozen or more. Back then it wasn't common to get your pets 'fixed'. Cats just kind of happened. We always seemed to have pregnant cats and lots of kittens to play with. It was Mom's job to feed the cats and the cats quickly learned what the sound of the electric can opener meant. There would be cats running from all directions into the kitchen to make sure they got their share. Mom also had a peculiar, even unique, way of calling the cats in from outside. She'd stick her head out the door and make this rapid-fire 'heeeeere kitty kitty kitty kitty' call with her tongue fluttering and sounding almost like a yodel. She described it as a warble or a trill. I was very impressed with the sound of it. She could make it a long call or a short one, probably depending on her mood. I don't know where she got that call from or if she made it up herself, but I suspect

someone in her family taught it to her. I enjoyed hearing Mom make that sound and tried to imitate her. Several times she tried to teach me, but I never got the hang of it. Even now, I can recall the sound of Mom calling her cats better than I can remember what her voice sounded like.

We had fat cats, thin boney cats, clumsy cats, one deaf cat, a stinky cat that farted a lot, and a couple of cats that lived to be twenty years old. One cat, Snowball, whom we had for many years, disappeared suddenly. This wasn't all that uncommon since they were all outdoor cats who hunted and sometimes got into scrapes with other animals in the neighborhood. After several months passed, we surmised that she met her match and crawled under a porch somewhere to die. Then she reappeared. We guessed that Snowball had found a better home for a while but decided to return. She did this several times, always returning after long periods.

At times we had other kinds of animals as well. We had a few chickens for a short while. Dad had a drinking buddy who had lots of chickens running free around their overgrown yard. The man told us we could have some of the chickens if we could catch them ourselves. Pam, Peter, and I were about four to eight years old, and it took us quite a while to catch any of them, but we did manage to take home three of the younger (slower) chickens. I don't think Mom was very happy about having chickens to care for, but we convinced her it would be nice to have the eggs. Dad

## My Stories | Rick Lynch

built a fenced-in pen with a little henhouse in it. Once the chickens grew up, we found out they were actually roosters - all three of them. We looked every day for eggs but didn't find any. Then they started to crow. Luckily, we never got attached to them as pets because we ended up eating them for one of our Sunday meals.

We had a donkey for a couple of years. We called him Joker. I don't know the story of how Dad came into possession of a donkey, but knowing Dad, it was probably a good story.



We had a pony called Pepper for a while too. She was white with black spots. She had a red leather saddle and also a red pony cart Dad hitched her up too. The cart could seat all four of us, but Pepper was old and wasn't up to pulling much of a load anymore.



Here is a photo of Mom riding Pepper with her red saddle. Thirty years later - when Ben and Sam were small, we had a few cats, some hamsters, birds, and even some rats and one guinea pig. When they were a little older, we switched to dogs. We had a nice big yard for dogs to run around in when we lived on Goodwin Road in Eliot, Maine. Dogs were certainly more work than cats were. Our two cats just wanted to be left alone and fed once in a while. They did their thing outdoors mostly. You know - hunted, pooped, found comfortable places to nap. But cats can



be kind of boring, especially for kids.

So Karen looked for a dog and found Flag. She came with that name. She was a full-grown golden retriever. Ben and Sam were still in elementary school at that time. Flag was a nice pet but she was a runner - as in, she liked to run off every chance she got. More than once she was brought back home in the backseat of a police car. So she had to be on a leash and I put up a nice long dog run for her. Karen wanted a second dog so we got a puppy we named Fay, from a neighbor. She was a nice enough dog, a mutt, and a little timid. She became very devoted to Karen, and I'm sure, of all the dogs we had over the years, she was Karen's favorite.

Then we got a third dog, a tiny little golden retriever runt-of-the-litter puppy, barely eight weeks old, we named Ella. Ella was everybody's favorite. She loved to run and fetch, was very obedient, and was devoted to tennis balls.



Karen then got into the habit of bringing dogs home from school. These were pets that students or staff couldn't care for anymore. First, there was Timber, a favorite of mine. He was a large golden retriever who enjoyed being held and loved to roll in the mud. Then there was Sophie, an Australian Sheppard, who was smarter than both Karen and I and she knew it. She was a beautiful dog, but we were not the right family for her. Our veterinarian was able to find her a more suitable home where she could run the show. Our last pet dog was Ginger, another golden retriever Karen brought home from school.

The tough thing about having pets is they all eventually grow old and die but we value the companionship and affection they give us. We had all of our pet dogs - Flag, Fay, Ella, Timber, and Ginger cremated, and all of them are in nice wooden boxes with their names engraved on them.



# Someone From My Past Whom I'd Love to See Again



I'd like to see the summer friends I had at the lake in Alstead. We spent our free summers together right up through High School. As I've mentioned elsewhere, we happened to all be the same age - we all graduated the same year - 1969. Then it was gone. We all went our separate ways after that. When the next summer came, I missed everyone, and I remember just then realizing how special those people and those times were to me. There was Chris (longest and best friend) from Long Island, Paul (from someplace in Massachusetts), the Karpinski twins, Hania and Dania (from Vermont). They went on to nursing school in New York City. Then there were the Stone twins, Lynn and Sue. Their family lived somewhere near Boston (Newton maybe). I went down to visit Sue and Lynn after not seeing them for a couple of years. But it wasn't the same. There's that saying that

goes - 'You can't go back'. You can go back to visit a place or a person, but you really can't recapture what you once had. Appreciate it while you have it, I guess. I Haven't seen any of them since. Kind of sad about that.

Another group of friends that were very special to me at the time was the gang a 'Dover-B' as Karen called it. Dover-B was a two-story house just off the Weeks traffic circle in Dover, New Hampshire. Neither the house nor the traffic circle is there anymore and all the people I spent the early 1970s there with are now scattered around the country. The group included Dave, Brian, Paul, Mike, another Mike, Linda, Karen, Donna, Tommy, Ray, Gary, Kent (and a few others who came and went)

If I were to choose one person I'd like to reminisce with, it would be Mike Brown. I haven't seen him in at least forty years. There was a time about ten years ago when Karen got most of the Dover-B group together for a reunion, but Mike declined to come. His wife Nancy was all for it but she couldn't convince him to join us. He must have had his reasons. I'll leave it at that.

Mike attended Concord Tech, and that's where Brian and I first met him. He grew up in the seacoast area though not in Portsmouth. Throughout the 70s, while I still lived in Keene and after I moved to the seacoast, Mike and I spent a good deal of time together. He was the only friend of mine that my dad seemed to like. Mike came over one weekend specifically to work with Dad reconstructing the roof on his new barn.

## My Stories | Rick Lynch

I got along very well with Mike. I felt a bond with Mike that I didn't feel with any of the others in our group of friends. I think each of us felt comfortable when we were together. He understood how I viewed the world and what made me tick. He's one of the few people I've known that I felt I could ask advice from or confide in.

But that was long ago and by now both of us have probably changed more than we realize. I doubt, even if we did meet again, that it would feel the same, that I would get the same vibe now as I did forty years ago.



David, Tom, Deb, me, Brian, Donna, Mike, and Karen



Dad, in Ireland with a friend



Uncles Chuck and Frank around 2006

# The Family Heirloom That Means the Most to Me



**T**here were a few items around our house that could be considered heirlooms. Mom had a silverware set in a wooden case that was passed down in the Robinson family, and also a porcelain tea set she kept displayed on a hutch cabinet in the dining room. The cups always rattled when anyone walked past. Dad built that hutch cabinet. It stood just outside Mom & Dad's bedroom. Early Christmas morning, Pete and I tried our best to tip-toe past their open bedroom door, on our way to see what Santa had left us under the tree in the living room. Those rattling teacups were like a bank alarm - "Ricky, get back in bed".

That tea set once belonged to Mom's grandmother, Anna (Proctor) Robinson who raised her family at Sunnynook, their dairy farm in Marlborough. I believe Laurie has the tea set and the silverware now. The hutch cabinet is still in the family somewhere. Pamela may have it. She was very fond of that piece

and used it during the years she still lived in Keene.

I have several small items from the house on Marlboro Street, but they aren't things that have been passed down through the family. These were just objects that Dad found while tearing down old buildings and brought home for no particular reason except for the fact that they were interesting. He enjoyed having something that only he knew what it was. It could be an old obsolete tool or a personal item like a pair of nineteenth-century opera glasses or a gallstone the size of a billiard ball that was removed from a horse. (I have the gallstone)

I don't have anything like a treasured tea set or jewelry box handed down from generation to generation. Laurie and Peter have some of those kinds of things and I remember Pam asking if she could have Dad's old copper bucket he kept in his truck and used as a filing cabinet for bills and notes and papers he needed for work. It looks like it was used as a cooking pot at one time; it was about eight inches in diameter and ten inches deep with two big handles at the top.

Maybe they're not heirlooms in the traditional sense but some of the things I have evoke special memories for me. I have a small piece of broken slate that Dad had scratched some figures on. It could have been a bill he made out for lumber, windows, and doors he sold from a house he was tearing down. He often used a piece of slate (from the roof he just finished removing) to record things on. He could write on it with a nail and the lettering would



appear white.

I have a few tools from Dad, mostly woodworking tools that he used occasionally over the years but these don't mean that much to me because I don't think they meant that much to Dad. I spent a good amount of time in Dad's little workshop he set up in a room in the back of his 2nd barn. This was a building Dad had moved across town and onto the far edge of the lawn by the stone wall. This building, originally a carriage house, had been part of the Horatio Colony estate on West Street in Keene, built in 1806. Instead of tearing it down, Dad had Stanley Payne move the two-story building to Marlboro Street. That was around 1970. Sadly, Dad never built a proper foundation for the barn and over the years the back of the building began to sink into the ground a little.

On the back wall of the shop, Dad liked to display a lot of the interesting items he had obtained over the years. I'm not sure if many of them had any real value, but Dad didn't like to sell his stuff anyway. The objects he displayed on the wall intrigued me but I had no idea what many of them were. I'm sure that many of them were just old-fashioned, outdated, and obsolete, but usually interesting. I remember a little sign he had tacked up over the doorway into the shop. It said, "If we don't have it, you don't need it".

Sometime in the 1990s, years after Dad died, Mom got rid of lots of Dad's junk. She told me that she and Laurie filled two large

dumpsters with junk they dragged out of the two barns. Mom also got in touch with some of Dad's friends he often swapped with and sold items to. She must have seen value in some of the items she came across while cleaning out the barns.

There is one item that means a lot to me, that always makes me think of Dad when I see it or take it out to use. It's a tool Dad used a lot, a tool I watched him use many times when I worked with him, and a tool that he taught me how to use and appreciate. This was Dad's wrecking bar; a solid iron hex bar, about four feet long, weighing twenty pounds or so, with an inch-wide prying blade at one end and a six-inch L-shaped prying blade at the other end which doubled as a nail puller. He could do a lot with this tool. As a wrecking bar, it could be used to pry up floorboards or pry roof boards off their rafters. The hooked end was used to tear at ceilings and walls. With the straight blade end, you could gently pry off baseboards, door casings, and fireplace mantles. It's been used to break apart many a brick wall. You didn't have to use a lot of muscle with this bar, you used its weight to your advantage. Dad liked to say "Work smarter, not harder". It was such a terrific wrecking tool. That's why Dad always called it his wrecking bar. Others might call it a crowbar or a pry bar. And it was useful in other ways as well. It's a very good tool for digging in the ground, especially rocky ground where large rocks need to be pried out of the soil and the hooked end along with the bar's weight makes for a nice

trench-digging tool. My favorite use for the bar is as a lever. Many, very heavy granite blocks have been moved with that bar. Step stones and foundation blocks, things like that.



One summer when Grampa Rob was up visiting from his home in Florida. This was in the mid 1960s so I was a young teenager. Even though he was in his mid-seventies then, whenever Grampa Rob stayed with us he always found some kind of work to do around the house to keep himself busy and sometimes he recruited me to help. He knew that several large rocks around the lawn were almost completely underground but still stuck up high enough to nick the lawn mower blade once in a while. A few of the rocks proved to be about the size of a bowling ball and he managed to dig up and dispose of these by himself. But there was this one rock that, after probing the earth with Dad's wrecking bar, he determined was probably a couple of feet long and much too heavy for him to pry up out of the ground by himself. So he said to me - "come on Ricky, you're going to help me move this rock for your mother". Mom did most of the lawn mowing and complained the most about the rocks sticking up. We dug with

shovels and we dug with the wrecking bar and got the dirt out from all around the rock. It was big and the two of us certainly couldn't lift it out of the hole. I think it was about thirty inches long and maybe twenty inches wide and had to weigh several hundred pounds. Grandpa knew what he was doing and used that bar to pry the rock up a little at a time, and each time he had me shove a little bigger chunk of wood under that thing until it was up on top of the ground. Then he used the bar to slowly roll the rock down towards the house to its new home at the top of Mom's rock garden between the clothesline and the driveway. I think that ended up being a two-day project.

I still have Dad's wrecking bar. I took it home with me more than thirty years ago (soon after Dad died) and have used it many times since then. I used it recently to roll logs cut from a fallen tree, into the barn at Ben's house in Ipswich. Presently, I'm taking up to Sam's house to help dig some deep holes to put in wooden posts for a swing set. Very rocky ground up in York, Maine, I'm sure the wrecking bar will come in handy. Dad's wrecking bar should last forever, it's indestructible.

# If I Was Asked What I Wanted to Do with My Life When I Was Five...



**H**as there ever been a five-year-old that knew what they wanted to do with the rest of their life? I don't see how that's possible unless you're in the line of succession to be the next king of England. A five-year-old wants to be a mermaid or the guy who drives the garbage truck.

Ok, let me start over. I think I should answer this question from a child's point of view instead of an adult's. An adult wrote that first paragraph. But a five-year-old has ambitions too I suppose. When I was five, I was in kindergarten and after summer would be going into first grade. My little world was beginning to open up.

I got to go shopping with Mom, that was always an adventure for me. By then, Laurie was born, so Mom had as many as four of us in tow. Mom shopped at Mays supermarket, just down the street

a little way from our house. I'm sure that Pam and I helped out to some degree, fetching items and putting them in the shopping cart. Though it was called a supermarket, it was very small in comparison to the huge, crowded ones we have today. This store had only two checkout counters and usually only one of them was open. It had a meat counter that was more like a delicatessen, and nothing was pre-packaged. I enjoyed watching the man, the butcher, behind the case where the meats were displayed cutting big slabs of meat with his sharp knives. Mom would point out a piece of steak from the case and the man would wrap it up for her. If she asked for eight hot dogs, the butcher would pick them out of a box and wrap them in paper. All meats were wrapped in paper. For a short while anyway, I thought maybe when I got bigger, I could learn how to cut meat up like the meat man at Mays did. And I'd get to wear that long white coat with meat stains on it and a funny-shaped white paper hat too.

# The Story Behind My Name



Apparently, when Mom was pregnant with me, she was certain she was carrying another girl, and my name was to be Cynthia. Consequently, they were not prepared with a boy's name for me. But, in the unlikely event that I turned out to be a boy, there was a backup plan. I was to be Richard Junior. Dad was Richard William Lynch Senior, and I became Richard William Lynch Junior. But it remained undecided what my nickname would be. They didn't want to just leave it at Richard as almost everyone back then ended up having some kind of nickname and Dad was known to everyone as Dick. After Mom and I stayed in the hospital for a few days after I was born, one of the nurses who helped care for me started calling me Ricky and it stuck.

I never thought to ask Mom, but I wonder why she didn't use the name Cynthia when Laurie came along. The name Cynthia did not come from anywhere in the Robinson, or Lynch, family. I

don't know where she got the name from. She never elaborated.



Dad with Peter, me, and Pam by the living room mantle



# Things I May Be a Bit Afraid Of



I think I'm scared of the usual stuff. The dark, heights for sure, and certain bugs. The larger bugs are the more menacing they appear, like those four-inch-long beetles they have in Indonesia. Crawly things with lots of legs are scary. The more legs they have the creepier they are. I don't have a valid reason for disliking bugs, and I understand their importance in keeping ecosystems in balance, but I have a dream sometimes where I am confronted with hordes of fast-moving bugs in a small room with no way to escape. I always wake up before they get to me though. The bugs I'm threatened by the most now are the ones Karen calls stinkbugs. She says they stink when you squish them. I don't know about that - I don't stick around to find out - I send Karen in to take of it. I think I hate them more than I'm scared of them. I've always been somewhat afraid of the dark, but only when I'm alone. Fear might not be the way to describe it. Feeling very

vulnerable is a better way to put it. A good example of this would be the many times I walked home in the dark up at camp, in Alstead. And this was when I was a teenager. Heading home from a friend's house in Shadowland after dark was only a two-minute walk but parts of that narrow dirt road were desolate, very dark, and overgrown with thick woods on both sides. Things, animals, or maybe even a crazed person, could be lurking there and I wouldn't have seen them until it was too late. I was never one to whistle past the graveyard. I walked quietly, but quickly, and usually, I ran the last few steps to the door, just in case I was being followed. Even now, at seventy-one, I feel a bit defenseless when I'm alone, outside in the dark.



# Watching Fireworks from the Front Yard



On Marlboro St, directly across the street from our driveway, was a dirt road leading downhill to a large open field. When we were little, it was just a big empty space except for the Keene Drive-In Theater at the end of Optical Avenue. It was a great place to ride our bikes around. There were no cars to look out for and just some dusty pathways to race around and build jumps on.

But, for a week or so each year, that's where the circus set up when it came to town. From our yard, you could see the big tents and the bright lights at night. It's funny but I don't have any memories of actually going to the circus there, although I can't imagine Dad not treating us to something that big, especially since it was right in our front yard. What I do recall is that after the circus left, we would comb through the grass where the grandstands had been set, looking for items, money in

particular, that people had dropped while attending the shows. I don't remember ever finding anything - just lots of trash. The bigger kids always got there before we did and if there was anything of value, they would have found it.

That field was also where the town had its Fourth of July fireworks display in the 1950s. I remember being very young, sitting out on the front lawn watching the fireworks explode in the sky. The time of night when they started was way past my bedtime, but I recall Dad waking me up and bringing me outside to watch. At first, the noises scared me, and Mom put her hands over my ears. Eventually, I got used to the big booms and enjoyed the show.

# A Time When I Was Truly Frightened



**T**here was that one time I got the bejeebers scared out of me. I'm guessing I was about ten years old. It was getting dark, and I was home alone which was probably a little bit unusual. Mom was always home or if she went to the store or on some other errand the rest of us usually went along with her. I didn't like being home alone. There were too many spooky places around that old house.

There was a knock on the front door. Only a stranger would knock on the front door and I'm not liking this. I get up from watching TV and slowly head to the front hall (hoping whoever it was would be gone by the time I got there). The front door had sidelights on either side covered by thin curtains. I left the hall light off so I couldn't be seen and peeked out, but no one was there. Then there was a sharp wrap on the back door in the kitchen. Damn! That scared me - I thought whoever it was had

gone away. What the hell! I went toward the dining room window where I could see out to the back porch, but there was no one at that door either.

I started to become frightened and was freaking out a little bit and trying to think of a good place to hide until Mom got home. Suddenly something was banging on the windows around the back side of the house in Mom and Dad's room.

What did I think this thing was? Was it some escaped maniac? A robber? I was truly scared at that point and was not thinking clearly at all. I grabbed Snowball the cat (for safety) and hid in the dining room closet. I was in there just a short while though. I figured that if this guy, whoever it was, wanted to get me he would eventually look in this closet and I'd be done for. Then I remembered there were people upstairs, our "tenants" - I don't remember their name but there was a Mom and Dad and one little boy, Joey, I think. So, I dropped the cat, ran up the front hall stairs, and banged frantically on the door separating the upstairs bedroom and their apartment. Then I remember bursting the door open and running through to their kitchen where they were eating their supper. I was both out of breath and scared to death while I tried to tell them about the maniac outside. The Dad calmly went down the stairs to our front and opened it. There was Peter with his face all distorted, pressed up against the storm door glass. Then he fell down laughing.

## My Stories | Rick Lynch

I guess I was a little embarrassed but relieved at the same time. Pete was just dying to tell Mom about how he had me scared out of my mind and I guess I must have filled in the details because she always had a good laugh reminding me about the time I hid in the closet with the cat.

And that was the time Peter scared the ever-lovin' bejeebers out of me.



Peter





# How I Met Karen (My 1st Wife)...



**A**ctually, Karen and I first met when we were very young, as toddlers in daycare.



Just Kidding! (I wanted to get this doctored photo in here somewhere - created by Tobias Heaton).

Karen and I were friends for a few years before we became a couple. I first came to the Portsmouth area after meeting Brian Ashford in 1969. He had a close group of friends from High School, most of them from the neighborhood he grew up in. I visited a few times, always staying at Brian's house for the weekend. Brian's girlfriend, Maureen, and Karen were good friends. So, eventually, through Maureen, I met Karen.

Brian's close group of friends became mine. I traveled from Keene each Friday after work to Portsmouth and back home again Sunday night. I earned enough during the week to pay for drinks and food on the weekend. We all hung out together, strictly as a group. Couples were paired off here and there but for the most part, we were all just part of the group. There was Mike and Ray and Tommy (three brothers) and Paul and Kent and Dave and another Mike and Nancy and Linda and Donna and Pam and Karen and Me and some others who came and went over time. At that time, Karen was attending UNH and lived on campus.

This went on for a couple of years and then Brian, one of the Mikes, and I took a year out for our Alaskan adventure. When we came back, I continued to work in Keene and spent my weekends on the Seacoast. By that time some of the gang was renting a house in Dover and that became the place to gather each weekend. It was an old farmhouse painted brown. We called it the Brown House, or Dover-B. For a while, there was an old car

bench seat sitting on the front porch. We hung there on warm spring mornings sipping coffee. I had a photo of us on the porch that always reminded me of a Crosby, Stills, and Nash album cover.

It was around 1975 then and we spent every weekend together as a group. At noon every Sunday in the summertime we jumped into Paul's van, and the yellow Jeepster Dad let me drive, and enjoyed a cookout and played softball and Hilton Park in Dover. Lots of hot dogs and beers were consumed and there were always random people there to join our game and make friends with.

Many weekends were spent at Brian's camp in Wakefield. We'd even go up there in the wintertime when it was completely snowed in. We left the cars out on the main road and lugged supplies down to the camp on a toboggan. Karen tells the story of the time she helped drag the toboggan through two feet of snow, loaded down with Mike's stereo (with huge speakers) and boxes full of record albums. After finally getting everything inside and set up, they realized they forgot to bring a turntable.

We often drove to Boston to attend concerts at the Orpheum and the Music Hall or sit in the bleachers at Red Sox games. We also visited the Science Museum and the Aquarium. Back then, most concert tickets were less than five dollars and it cost only a couple of dollars to sit in the bleachers at Fenway. None of us had that much money and we seldom did anything that cost much. We did take a drive to the mountains to ski one time. That cost a

bit more than most of our other activities. That was my first, and last time skiing. That trip was memorable because we spent hours in a snowstorm trying to dig out and push Paul's van back onto the road from the field we had skidded down into.

There were many times we amused ourselves just hanging around the house in Dover, playing cards, and listening to music. There was a Chinese restaurant within walking distance, and we'd pool our money and enjoy a feast at the kitchen table. We played games like Rinky-Dink and Killer. To play Killer we all sat around the living room in a big circle, whoever was dealt the ace of spades was the Killer and would patiently look around the room and secretly wink at a person. The 'killed' player, after waiting half a minute or so, would declare out loud to the others that they were dead. The object was to catch the Killer winking before he killed everyone in the game. I wasn't good at that game because I can't wink.

Occasionally we'd go camping in the mountains either in a campground or some nice spot out in the woods that Paul or Dave had learned about. Someone in the group had this gigantic canvas tent. It slept about twenty. I remember starting off after dark to go camping. We'd get the tent up, sit around a campfire for a while, go to sleep in the tent, then get up early, take the tent down, and head home so we wouldn't miss our Hilton Park barbeque-softball game.

## My Stories | Rick Lynch

I don't remember when I began to view Karen as more than just one of the gang and I don't recall that we ever had something that I saw as a first date. Maybe Karen sees this matter a little differently than I do. That's very possible. I imagine she has her own story to tell. But Karen always made me feel welcome and I sensed that she liked being with me. Eventually, my first stop, when I drove over from Keene each Friday night, was at Karen's house. The two of us would grab something to eat, then join the others. To me, it felt like, little by little, we were becoming a couple, and as time went on the group slowly became less important to me.





# Karen and I Have Two children: Ben and Sam



**K**aren and I have two children. Benjamin James was born in 1985 and Samuel Richard was born in 1987. Both boys also have a second middle name, Blethroade. There was the time when Sam applied for a passport and had to state his name. He wasn't aware that his full name was Samuel Richard Blethroade Lynch and he left Blethroade out. To his surprise, was told that was incorrect, according to records. He phoned Karen and got things straightened out but asked Karen, "Why the hell didn't you ever tell me my real name?" Karen says she didn't hyphenate the middle names because she didn't want to burden them with it, but she wanted to add her name. At the time, there was no way of carrying on her family name. Since then, a male Blethroade has been born.

Karen decided she wanted to be a stay-at-home Mom. I think that benefited the boys quite a bit. By the time both Ben and Sam

were walking, the three of them had a busy weekday routine of visiting family and friends, stopping by the library, going to the beach in summertime, and playing outside in the snow in the winter. On weekends I was added to the mix, and we explored every playground we could find within a half-hour drive and searched for new places where the kid could run around and get their ya-yas out. The old Newington Mall was a favorite because, by that time, its popularity had declined and was often almost empty.

For a time, when he was ten or twelve years old, Sam enjoyed fishing. I, myself didn't fish, so he probably acquired the desire to fish from a friend at school. I don't recall that he went fishing with any of his friends. There were many times he told me about a pond or a stream he wanted to try to catch some fish at and I'd drive him there, but he seldom asked a friend to come along. At the time, I was attending school nights to earn my degree and would sit in the car and study while Sam fished for an hour or so. One day Sam asked if I would fish with him the next time we went. I said I wasn't interested in fishing and besides, I'd have to go get a fishing license to make it legal. He looked disappointed and said, "That's ok". What a thoughtless thing for me to do. Honestly, that is the biggest regret of my life. I should have been overjoyed that he still wanted my company. Instead, I turned him away. Soon after that, Sam stopped fishing altogether.



Sam was miserable for the first two years of his life. We thought he was just a fussy baby, and he cried a lot. He didn't just cry, he screamed, when he wasn't sleeping. But after two years of this, doctors discovered he had ruptured eardrums and was in constant pain. Sams's ears were eventually fixed to a degree but he continued to be troubled by ear infections periodically for years.

As a three-year-old, Ben gave us a lot of resistance when it came to bedtime. Either he wouldn't stay in bed, or he wasn't relaxed enough to go to sleep. For a long time, I had to talk him into falling asleep. In a monotone, hypnotizing voice I would get him to relax his shoulders, then his arms, then his fingers, and so on. I used the corner of the satin trim on his blanket to gently stroke his forehead to get him into a relaxed state. I referred to this as the paralyzer. It usually worked though it often took a half hour or more.

On Sunday mornings when Ben was old enough to walk, he and I went on small adventures, to the mall or a playground or to Prescott Park in Portsmouth where he had plenty of room to run around. When Sam became old enough, he joined us, and Karen stayed home. This was my time with the boys; besides, Karen needed a break for a few hours after having them all week. There was a weekly column in the Portsmouth Herald about the town's history that I enjoyed. Each week it described a historical marker an old structure or an event that took place in town. Eventually,

part of our Sunday morning time together included things like finding the last square telephone pole (still in use today), from the time when the very first electricity-producing company in Portsmouth was set up in 1885. We visited the various cemeteries in town looking for the oldest gravestones. Ben took some interest in that, reading off the year carved into each marker. We also found every park and every monument that was written about in the paper that week. Those kinds of places also gave the kids plenty of room to run, explore, and have fun outdoors. My mission was to tire them out if possible.

While Ben and Sam were still young, a favorite game we played was called 'The Direction Game'. Not a very clever name for a game, I know, but it's a game I made up myself. I first played it with Ben alone, and it proved to suit him well. I would quickly make up a short list of things for him to accomplish. We could play it anywhere, but large open spaces were ideal. At a playground, for example, I would tell him, "Run over to the water fountain and circle it two times. Then walk to the slide and pound your hand on the bottom of the slide so I can hear it. Then go over and touch the big white rock by the swings, and run back here to me." He took it as a challenge and always wanted to know if he missed anything, and then he wanted a longer and longer list of things to carry out. When Sam was big enough he joined in, but he was not as fast as Ben, and therefore always came in second. Years later, Sam told me that when playing the

Direction Game, he didn't bother to listen to the directions, he just followed Ben. That was Sam, just happy to be included.

At age ten or twelve, along with several of his friends, Sam became a skateboarder. He took it very seriously and spent many hours practicing. Sam inherited a huge, curved ramp, a quarter-pipe, I think he called it. It was at least six feet high and sat at the edge of our driveway for one entire season. I stood off to the side, watching as Sam balanced on his skateboard on the edge of the platform on top of the ramp, trying to gather up the courage to plunge down the steep slope for the first time. He stayed there a long while, debating, calculating, almost going and then hesitating, then almost going again, and hesitating again. Finally, he leaned into it and down he went, nailing it, with a big smile on his face.

As Sam got older, he migrated from skateboarding to surfing. Today he lives less than a mile from the ocean in York, Maine, and surfs every chance he gets. He's even built his own boards.

Ben tried skateboarding but didn't stick with it. I think he liked doing his own things and avoided following the other kids, especially his brother. He tried many different activities, but if he didn't get the knack of something right away, he would drop it and move on to something else. It seems that he liked to master things that others were not into. For several weeks he practiced balancing, twirling, rolling, and flipping his Devil Sticks. He walked through the house manipulating the large stick

with the two smaller ones, doing tricks, and occasionally losing control, forcing anyone close by to duck for cover. His non-stop practicing enabled Ben to master his Devil Sticks, and then, just as quickly as he took them up, he dropped them and was never interested in them again. He also got a book on how to solve the Rubik's cube and practiced that until he could do it from memory. Just recently, I saw someone hand Ben a Rubik's cube and ask if he could still solve it. He humbly said he'd try. This was twenty-five years after memorizing how to do it, but he handed it back a few minutes later, solved.

Ben somehow learned to open the combination locks on the lockers at the High School, and he charged kids, who had forgotten their combination, fifty cents for the service. One thing Ben hated was being quizzed about school. I guess that's not unusual for kids to be like that but still, it was a little frustrating for Karen and me. In the fifth grade, he told Karen that if we never asked him about his schoolwork again, he would get straight A's from then on. And he did just that.

Eventually, when Ben and Sam were older, Karen went back to work. First, as a substitute teacher to have the same hours as the kids. By that time, we had three kids really. Ken Lucas had joined our household. This was Ben's friend, whose occasional sleepover gradually evolved into a full-time guest and then part of the family. Ken stayed with us until the end of High School when all three kids went their separate ways.

Years later, Sam married Jenn. They bought a house in York, where they are raising their two sons: Miles, age three, and Porter, age one. Ben married Allison. They bought a house in Ipswich, Massachusetts. They have a one-year-old son, James. Karen and I are in Seabrook, which is a half-hour north of Ipswich and a half-hour south of York. We see everyone at least weekly.



Sam and Ben



Ben, Allison, and James



Sam and Jenn with Miles and Porter

# The Last Few Years. What changes Have Taken Place and What Memories Stand Out?



**T**hough I thoroughly enjoyed my jobs, it feels good knowing I don't have to go to work every day. Getting up in the morning knowing I can do anything I want to today is satisfying. I don't have a schedule and can make up my day as I go along. Even though I say that I miss the work, I don't wish to go back. It's been four years and I'm used to my life now. I enjoy what I'm doing. If I feel like taking a nap, I nap. When I'm hungry, I eat. I do still have some responsibilities: laundry, dishes, take out the trash on Fridays. Life is good. But, even though my life seems to have gotten easier, I've grown older, and that brings on a whole bunch of new issues. For one thing, I have to pee a lot more often now, and I have to consider this when going anywhere. How long

will the ride be? I'll need to find out where the restroom is when I get there. I see that Amazon has Portable Camping Pee Bags. I may get some of those. I know I'm not unique, but this getting old stuff is relatively new to me.

Having good balance is something I don't take for granted anymore, and handrails on stairways have become important to me. Yet, earlier this year, I was distracted and not paying attention, and I missed a step. Lucky for me it was the bottom step. Still, I got a sprained or hyperextended toe out of it. When you're twenty you don't get sprains easily, or if you do, they heal in a few days. When you're seventy-one, you can sprain your knee getting out of bed in the morning. And they may not heal for months, if ever.

I have become more aware of my limitations. If I spend all day on my feet, at work in the shop, my knees and hips will be a little sore the next day. I drink a lot more water than I used to because my body tells me to. If I don't have enough water, I'll have a mild headache when I wake up in the morning. But of course, drinking more water at night means that I wake up to go to the bathroom two or three times.

Over the last few years, I've found (or more correctly, it has been impressed upon me) that I need to walk more to keep all my joints well lubricated, and wandering around Home Depot for an hour is not enough. For me, walking keeps those aches and pains from settling in and making themselves to home in my neck,



shoulders, back, and knees. If I miss a few days, I pay for it. So I'm working on finding a balance between not walking enough to keep myself in shape and pushing this walking thing so far that I wear my knees out. But I do think that I'm a reasonably healthy seventy-one-year-old.

Things like cholesterol level and blood pressure I've got under control. Also, I exercise, moderately, most(some) days. But the one thing I do not have a good handle on is my weight. The funny thing is, growing up I was always skinny and from the time I was in High School right up until I was about thirty-three or so, I weighed a steady one hundred and fifty-five pounds - just a tick over eleven stone. At age thirty-three I started work at the Navy Yard in Portsmouth. From that point on my work became more sedentary than it had been previously. Within a year I gained twenty pounds and as the years went by it became much easier to put the weight on and more difficult to exercise and diet it off. Now I have modified my goals to include just getting down to a weight where I call myself a regular size 'large' without the added x's.

To keep my weight down I need to avoid some of the foods I enjoy the most. When I was younger, I never had to worry about my weight. I must have been able to burn off calories at a sufficient rate to prevent gaining weight because I liked a lot of the same foods back then that I do now. But that's changed now. I've been told that I can eat anything I want if I do it in

moderation, but that's not me. Part of me is all for setting limits, but the other part is telling me I want just one more. To do something in moderation, I need to cut it out completely. And I can do that successfully for a while, but not forever. The thought of never again being able to enjoy a Boston cream doughnut or a stick of pepperoni depresses me.

The next aspect of my weight loss effort I need to work on is portion control. I've thrown out some of the larger bowls I used to over-serve myself, and which Karen referred to as my Jethro Bodine bowls. I have not yet gotten to the point where I weigh food portions, but I may need to start doing that. Now I've convinced myself that if I'm good for an extended period (maybe three months is good) and I shed a reasonable number of pounds, I can have a day to enjoy some of the treats I've done without. However, the first time I tried this, I realized I couldn't finish the apple pie I bought in a single day, so one day became two days. It's a slippery slope.

The trouble is - I enjoy many foods and things like Taco Bowl Tuesday at a favorite restaurant just down the street doesn't help. If I had to choose two foods to live on (and of course if nutrition and calories didn't count) I might choose Salami and Whoopie Pies, but that would mean leaving out some of the most pleasurable treats in the world, like pie, cheese, ring-dings, cream horns, chips, bread.... It's a long list.

Walk more, eat less.

# Something I Learned After Many Years of Marriage That I Wish Someone Had Told Me About Earlier



'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus'. That's the name of a book we were assigned to read and discuss in class when I went back to school for my degree at age forty-five. At that point, I had been married to Karen for about fifteen years. She and I always got along ok with no huge issues between us but there were many times when I just failed to understand what she was thinking or what she wanted from me. Sometimes she would tell me about something that was bothering her or maybe a disagreement she was having with a friend or a colleague at school. So, what do I do? My first reaction is to offer solutions and try to fix things for her. That's what guys do - we fix things. I think that's in our DNA. I don't mind her telling me her troubles, but I feel I shouldn't make it worse by saying dumb

things like - 'Gosh, that is terrible' or 'You must feel awful'. No, a husband's first reaction is to think of ways to make his wife's problems go away.

Come to find out though, in general, women don't think the same way that men do. They see things differently. Our brains work differently than theirs do. It's like we're from different planets. Hence, the book, 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus' (John Gray, PhD). What I learned from that class, and especially from the women in that class, is that women don't want you to solve the problem for them - They Just Want You to Listen to The Problem. Wow, what a revelation that was for me. It all made so much sense after I learned that. That's why Karen always seemed irritated at me when I offered her what I thought were very sensible solutions. It's not that she didn't like my solutions, she just didn't want me to butt in and try to fix things for her.

I'm doing better now. I try to listen instead of offering a fix, which remains my first instinct. But it's hard to break a habit that's been around for thousands of years. I can't help it - I'm from Mars.

# Things I Enjoy Doing in My Free Time That I Don't Consider Myself an Expert At



I don't see myself as an expert at anything. Being an expert means (to me anyway) that you have mastered a process through hard work, repetition and study. And there is always more to be learned no matter what one might think they are good at.

I'm not even sure I like the word "expert". Being expert at something carries a degree of responsibility with it. It means, through experience, you've reached a level of competence where you are expected to make very few mistakes, if any. Mistakes in judgment or mistakes in calculation or mistakes in interpretation are committed by people that are less skilled.

That's not me. I live on mistakes. I learn from my mistakes (hopefully).

One thing I can honestly say I am NOT an expert at is writing. Writing is a painfully slow process for me. Even after I have built a thought into a solid form, I then usually struggle to find the right words to accurately explain myself. I do lots of deleting, rewording, and rephrasing. I take something out, I put it back in. I'm never finished with a story or a paragraph until it is time to hand in the paper (as if I were in school).

So, I have established that I consider myself an expert at nothing. But there are many things that I like to do, and that I get enjoyment out of doing. And out of the many things I enjoy, I have come to be pretty good at some of them.

Now, concerning "Free Time", I have nothing but free time these days. I last worked at a paying job four years ago. It's now 2023 and I have three grandchildren: Miles (age three), James (age one), and Porter (age one). I visit Sam and Jenn's house in York each week where I get to play with Miles and his little brother Porter. I consider it my job to teach these two little people how to pretend, how to use their imagination, and how to be goofy and show that grownups can act goofy too.

No one assigned me this task; I just took it upon myself. A grandparent can get away with a lot. Parents, not so much. I don't do discipline - don't have a reason to and don't want to. I can wind them up and then give them back to mom and dad. I like to engage with Miles and Porter in any way that makes them happy and ignites their imagination. That usually means

showing them my silly side. Making up rhymes and songs and stories, whatever comes into my head. Right now, when I act silly with Porter, he just smiles at me like he smiles at the spinner on his busy board, but when I act goofy with Miles it's different. Miles gets it. His make-believe skills are beginning to show. He told Karen today that when he and I play school together, he is not a real teacher, he is only pretending.

On Tuesday evenings, Karen and I go down to Ipswich to visit with James and have a light supper with Ben and Allison. Until the last couple of months of visiting on Tuesday, we didn't see James very often. And when we did get together, he always had an anxious look in his eyes whenever saw me. I was a stranger to him. But now that we see him more often, James is getting a little more comfortable with us. He lets me hold him and smiles when we blow raspberries together.



Porter, James, and Miles - November 2023





# Random Early Memories...



**T**he Lynch family lived on the lower part of Elm Street just a very few blocks north of Central Square in Keene in the early 1950s. I believe that Mom and Dad owned the two-family house, and we lived in the upstairs apartment. I've seen an old photo of their car parked in the back of the house and I remember the stairway leading up to where we lived. Perhaps my earliest memory is of me sitting in that huge green naugahide chair opposite the back door. I'm waiting for Mommy and Daddy to come home. I was very upset and crying. I still have the picture in my head of Daddy finally coming through the door dressed up in a dark suit and Mommy in a little white half-hat she wore mostly on Sundays. Reminiscing with my aunt Marion a few years ago, I told her about this early memory of mine. She remembered that day too. She was babysitting for me that day in 1953 while Mom and Dad were at a wedding and I was inconsolable, crying over and over "I want my daddy". That two-family house on Elm St. in Keene with its gray asbestos

siding with dark-colored trim looks the same today as it did sixty years ago.



I also recall, having my first taste of sweet apple cider while we were living on Elm Street. I guess I enjoyed the taste so much that after everyone was asleep that night I sneaked out to the kitchen and opened the fridge, intending to somehow help myself to some more. The glass gallon jug of cider weighed as much as I did, and I promptly dropped it on the big toe of my right foot. The memory of that experience stayed with me for many years in the form of a very distinct crack down the middle of the toenail. I suppose sometimes your strongest memories, from early childhood especially, stay with you because they were in some way traumatic or disturbing.

We moved from Elm Street to Marlboro Street in 1955 and in December of that year, I had my 4th birthday. I recall helping Mom with the laundry out on the back porch by the shed. I don't know how much help I could have been at three or four years old and it's likely she had me out there with her just to keep an eye on me. She was using one of those wringer washing machines that had an agitator for washing but did not spin the clothes to remove the water. Instead, there were two rollers set above the tub. Mom fed each piece of clothing between the rollers and squeezed the water out of the clothes and back into the tub. Talk about a lot of work! I read somewhere that the advent of the modern washing machine, which washed, rinsed, and spun the clothes, was the home appliance that freed up the most time for the housewife. I imagine she used the washer outside because it was difficult to contain all the water being "wrung" out of the clothes. I stood on a chair or next to the washer helping pull clothes up out of the water, then handed them to Mom. She warned me repeatedly to keep my fingers away from the rollers. She must have made it scary sounding because I remember thinking if the rollers got me I get pulled right through and flattened.

When Peter was about two (he's an important part of this story), I received as a Christmas present, a drum with drumsticks, and a crank on the side that, when turned, would tap out a brrr rum-pum-pum, brrr rum-pum-pum like the drummers in a

marching band. Other than having a crank, this was a very authentic kind of drum for a four-year-old to have. It was more than a toy to me. I could see myself, someday marching with my drum in one of the bands marching down Main St in the Memorial Day parade. I don't think I had that drum for more than two days when I looked over and saw my drum lying on the floor with Peter standing inside of it.



# Realizing How Much Time Has Gone By...



**H**ave you ever been thinking about some point in your past or maybe remembered a friend you once had or a place you used to visit and been surprised when you realized how much time had gone by since then?

Often during my adult lifetime (during the last thirty years or so anyway), I've tried to recall where I was and what I was doing at previous points in my life. For instance: I'd try to think back to where I was and what I was doing ten years ago today, or twenty years ago, or thirty? I think I did this to sort of get my bearings, so to speak, to put things into perspective. I remember exclaiming, to myself, something like - "wow, it's been thirty years since I worked there", or "I had forgotten about that one summer I lived there". I never wrote down the results of these recollections before, so I'll try here.

60 years ago, 1963 - I was done with grammar school (Wheelock school) and on to Junior High and a bigger world, at least there will be a lot more kids. I reconnected with Gary Tolman on that first day of 7th grade. He and I were in "Division 7-4" (that means the fourth class from the top academically). His family and mine hung out together some during the 1950s when his dad, Walter, and mine were officers in the management of the YMCA. Dad bought the camp in Alstead a couple of years earlier and we spent our summers there. Also, that year I spent a week with Aunt Peggy's family at their camp in Canaan, New Hampshire. Uncle Tommy took Cousin John and me to a local fair or carnival where admission was free for kids eleven and under. I was eleven and John was two years older than me but when we drove up to the gate Uncle Tommy told the man that we were both eleven. For some reason the memory of that moment, when an adult lied right in front of me just to save a couple of dollars, has stayed with me all these years.

50 years ago, 1973 - I was in Alaska. Brian and Mike (two friends from Portsmouth) and I had made the long drive from New Hampshire, via Colorado, in April of that year. We were in search of those reported high-paying jobs being handed out by the oil companies building the one-thousand-mile pipelines from the oil fields in the north down to the city of Anchorage in the south. Guess what - we were a year too early - the pipeline was still in the planning stage and work wouldn't begin until the following

spring. So as long as we were already there, and so far away from home, we decided to get what jobs we could and see what happened. But nothing great happened. The reason we went there in the first place turned out to be a bust and after a long and dark winter, Brian and I drove back home in the spring. Mike (the smart one) had ditched us earlier and came back at the end of summer in 73. Traveling to and from Alaska, through the Canadian mountains, and camping along the way was a wonderful experience though.

40 years ago, 1983 - Karen and I were married in 1981 and had bought our first house - a small cape on a quarter acre lot in a neighborhood of similar houses in Eliot, Maine. I was working as a vinyl siding installer and was technically self-employed, so I usually worked six days a week. No kids yet; Ben would come along in 1985 and Sam two years later. I got together with friends each Thursday night to play poker and on Friday evenings, Karen and I went over the bridge to Portsmouth to her folks (Liz and Jimmy's) house to visit and play cards. Karen's sister Joan would join us as well as her husband Dick and sometimes their children, Doug, Marcy, and Brian. Karen and I always spent Sunday afternoon with Liz and Jimmy for a nice traditional Sunday meal of pot roast, roast pork, or boiled dinner (ham, cabbage, and potatoes). After dinner, Jimmy and I would put the ball game on TV and then fall asleep.

30 years ago, 1993 – Ben was eight years old and Sam was six. We had moved to a larger house on Goodwin Road in Eliot a couple of years before – we had the house built actually after we looked and looked and just couldn't find just what we wanted in a home. We had a large lawn to play on and Karen and I spent all our spare time doing things with the boys. I had been working at the Navy Yard in Kittery for several years, starting in 1984, but by 1993, after several rounds of “downsizing”, working at the Yard was no longer that attractive to me and I could see the end in sight. Karen did not work (outside the home). Since Ben was born in 1985, she stayed at home with the kids. She did go back to work eventually and became a Middle School teacher, but that wasn't until kids were in Junior High. We didn't have a lot of money but I liked that she was willing to stay home and take care of things there. Mom drove over from Keene with her friend Shirley to visit for a few days that summer. She spent a lot of time being active with the boys. Mom was living alone at the house on Marlboro St since Dad died in his sleep on February 15, 1988.

20 years ago, 2003 – Karen, the boys, and I were still living at the house on Goodwin Road in Eliot. Ben and Sam were in High School with only a year or two left to go. Karen was teaching at the Middle School in Seabrook, New Hampshire. The boys had a poker game at our house every day after school and when Karen got home, she would make supper for six to eight people. We



enjoyed having the house that everyone liked to hang out at. We knew where our kids were and what they were doing. Or so we thought - but that's another story. Karen's father, Jimmy, was living like a hermit, in the basement apartment where no one except Karen saw him for the last two years of his life. He died in January 1995. I was in the midst of my third career, working for Siemens, a networking company in Lowell, Massachusetts. That meant a long commute and typically a twelve-hour workday. Mom sold the house on Marlboro St and, after multiple falls, was living in an elderly care facility called Langdon Place, on Arch Street, in Keene. She died there on the 21st of December 1993.





Pam, me, Laurie, and Peter - Ready for bed

# Walking on the Train Tracks



I never strayed far from the house when playing outside until I was seven or eight years old. There was plenty of room and lots to do right in our own yard. We had swings to play on, trees to climb, and a big lawn to run around on. In back of the house was an empty lot overgrown with ancient apple trees. At the top of the lawn by the railroad tracks was a row of small elm trees covered in vines. A narrow footpath wound between the trees and went on for about fifty feet. My imagination told me that Indians made that path long ago and in my little world, that clump of trees was the wilderness. I always called it the woods.

As I got older, I ventured out a little further. We played on the Old Chapman Road. This was an old, discontinued road that came down the hill in back of the house, crossed the train tracks, and ended beside the stonewall at Marlboro St. It had been closed years before because it was dangerously steep but turned out to

be a great sliding hill in the winter. We just had to be careful at the wicked sharp turn just before the tracks and of course the possibility of a train coming along.

A sound we heard almost every day growing up in the 1950s and 60s was the train whistle and the rumble of the trains going by. The tracks were just up behind of the barn. Sometimes an engine pulling passenger cars went by, but most of the trains carried freight, pulling box cars, tankers, coal cars, and flatbed cars. The trains were pulled by big diesel engines and their whistles were not really whistles at all but instead were huge, ear-splitting air-horns that you could hear from miles away. If I was near the tracks as a train rumbled by, I tried to get the engineer to toot the horn for me.

The engineer kept the train's speed down when traveling through populated areas to what seemed like only ten or fifteen miles per hour, but the noise they made and the rumble, shook everything in the house. All Mom's dishes in the kitchen cupboards rattled like crazy. The noise the train made was so loud, that it drowned out the sound coming from the TV, and if we were talking when a train went by, we learned to stop and wait for it to pass before resuming our conversation. If I remember correctly, trains came by at only certain times of the day. In the mornings and then in the late afternoon, during our supertime.

My favorite train car was the caboose. I always looked to see if the train going by that day had a caboose on the end of it. Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't. After seeing trains in the old movies, I watched on TV, I imagined that the caboose was where railroad men lived, set up like the inside of a house. I thought they must have tables and chairs to eat their meals at and bunk beds to sleep in. Sometimes I'd see a man in a caboose window or outside at the railing on the back end and I'd wave to them. Most of the men I saw riding trains past the house seemed friendly and would usually wave back to me.

Being so close to the backyard, we used the railroad tracks as part of our play area. Trying to walk on a rail like it was a balance beam was fun. Most of the kids in the neighborhood got pretty good at it. Each rail was about thirty feet long and we would count the number of rails we could walk before falling off. We used the tracks as a shortcut to other houses in the neighborhood. There were well-worn paths leading from most houses up to the tracks.

I do recall one incident up on the tracks that at the time was a bit dramatic. A boy from some other neighborhood was up on the tracks with a few of us one day and decided to show us how brave he was (or maybe how stupid or how attention-starved he was). He laid down, placed his head on one of the rails, and announced that he was going to let the train run over his head the next time it came along. I think the rest of us were a little shocked and

worried that he might carry out his plan even though there was no train in sight, and they didn't come along that often anyway. But he insisted he was going to do it. One little kid that was with us (probably Laurie) panicked and ran and told Mom what was going on. Mom came up and scolded us all for being on the tracks in the first place. She must have known we played up on the tracks sometimes, but I guess she felt she had to break up the fun that day. We were all a little bit anxious that the kid might carry through on his threat. Mom shooed him away, back to his own neighborhood but I also think she felt bad for him (that he needed to do something like that to impress us).



Pam, Pepper, me, and Peter

# Dad's Christmas Tree Business



Pete had to fill in some of the details of this story about Dad selling Christmas trees. I recall being with Dad on a snowy evening, just before Christmas, outside the Goodyear store on Main St where he and his brother Bob had Christmas trees for sale. The trees were set up around the corner on Eagle Court, lined up and leaning against the side wall of the store. One of Dad's good friends and drinking buddies was Baldy Taffe, the manager of the Goodyear store. I imagine he was very accommodating and gave his blessing for Dad and Bob to set up shop there, even providing a string of bright lights to hang above the tree so they could peddle their trees into the evening hours. Uncle Bob had found some good-looking spruce trees, just the right size, growing in a wooded area in West Keene, around the WKNE radio tower. I'm sure he didn't have permission to cut the trees and I doubt he even knew who the land belonged to or

cared. So, he cut several trees, dragged them through the woods out to his truck, and brought them into town.

I don't know how long this enterprise lasted. I believe the partnership continued for more than just one Christmas season, but it came to an end when Uncle Bob was caught red-handed dragging the cut trees out of the woods. Either the police were alerted, or the police were the ones that caught him, but they brought him into court, and he was forced to pay a fine.

As the following article, from the local newspaper, shows - managing a business can sometimes be tough.





# Things I Remember Collecting as a Kid



I don't remember seriously collecting anything of value as a kid. But then again, value to a kid can take lots of different forms. Looking back, I wish I had spent my pennies and nickels on baseball cards and never opened the packs and then buried them in a waterproof box in the backyard. But Dad never brought home that crystal ball I wanted so I grew up having to use my own judgment and like most kids would have, I ended up satisfying my immediate desires and forgoing any long-term benefits.

When adults collect things, such as stamps, coins, or baseball cards, they usually do so with some sense of importance or value in mind. But kids - not so much. I did collect coins for a while, though I don't think I considered them valuable at all. I looked at collecting as just a hobby. Kind of like collecting rocks or driftwood. I believe it was Mom who bought me some of the

folders that you pressed the coins into that had a place for each year's various versions of coins. There were three or four versions of each coin based on where it was minted. I had one folder for pennies, one for nickels, and another for dimes. They were for coins minted starting about the year 1900, so there were wheat pennies, buffalo nickels, and mercury dimes. The folders were for coins only up through the late 1950s.



I didn't have any money of my own, and if Mom or Dad gave me any coins it was always for spending - Immediately! But I periodically went through any coins Mom or Dad had to see if I could fill some of the spaces in the folders. I remember polishing up some of the pennies with Mom's copper cleaner she used to keep the bottoms of her Revere Ware pots and pans looking new. I didn't know it at the time but that's about the worst thing to do

for old coins. It destroys their value. But I didn't care, they looked better that way.

I kept these folders for a few years. I never completed any of the collections though I did have many spaces filled. Occasionally I would get the folders out and try to add more coins, but, as time went by, I found that I just wasn't passionate about collecting. It was just taking too long to complete a collection and I was impatient. Finally, one day I emptied all three folders, took every coin out, and put them all in an unused marbles bag, then went shopping downtown with Mom at Woolworth's or the J.J.Newberry's store on Main St. I don't recall what I bought or how much I spent, but I do remember how disappointed Mom was when I told I spent my coin collection. Grampa Rob gave us each a silver dollar once. I think mine was dated 1878 - I spent that too.

One time Dad brought home a boulder with mica embedded in it. I thought it was interesting stuff, how it flaked off in sheets when you picked at it. Turns out there were rocks around the yard and around the neighborhood that also contained mica. So, I started to collect it. Occasionally I found some good-sized pieces - maybe two inches across, but most of what I gathered were small pieces and ended up not much more than dust after being shaken around in the pickle jar, I kept them in. Dad told me that mica had some value to it too, and that it was worth six dollars per ton. Wow, this stuff was fun to collect - And was

worth money. Now I had big plans.



I must have been pretty young at the time and probably didn't understand money very well. But six dollars sounded like a lot of money. Maybe I didn't know how big a ton was though. On one of my visits home, many years later, that jar of mica was still out in the garage where I left it.

# If I Could Pick One Day in My Life to Go Back to, to Enjoy Again, This Might Be It



**B**en and Sam were somewhere around Junior High age. They wanted me to take them camping somewhere and I suggested we head over to Jaffery, New Hampshire (near Keene), and climb Mount Monadnock and find a campground in the area for the night. Ben wanted his buddy from school, Nick, to join us and Sam invited his friend, Elliot.

It was about an hour and a half drive from our house in Eliot to Jaffrey, and it was a beautiful late September Saturday. The summer traffic was gone and there were plenty of campsites open in the area. We pulled into a campground near the mountain, set up our tents, and got ready for our hike. Nobody had bothered to tell Nick of our plan to climb the mountain and

the only footwear he brought along were sandals. Nick was a bit upset and at first, he said there was no way he was going to climb a mountain in sandals and told us to go ahead without him and leave him at the campground, and said he'd be fine. It was already two o'clock and it was a two-hour hike up and another two down, so it was too late to run off to a Walmart somewhere to buy Nick boots, and there was no way I was leaving a twelve-year-old alone at a campsite in the woods. We talked him into trying to climb with sandals but promised we'd turn back with him if he couldn't do it.

Turns out the climbing Monadnock is actually more of a hike than a climb but it is certainly all uphill. It's been a very popular mountain to hike up for many years and there are several well-worn trails to the summit. There is even a trail with a portion, several hundred feet in length, on which some very energetic and well-organized group of youths (I would imagine) lined up blocks of granite to form a staircase. Perhaps this portion of the trail was easily washed out and the problem was solved by laying out the stone steps. This, by chance, was the trail we chose that day. It made that part of the hike a little easier for us.

Nick, in his sandals, was doing ok. Then it was my turn to complain. I quit smoking ten years earlier, but after an hour of trudging uphill, I got winded. I had to stop every five minutes to catch my breath. Finally, I told the kids to go on ahead without

me if they still wanted to go to the top and to pick me up on their way back down, but they hesitated to do that. They wanted me to go up with them. Ben calmly talked me into starting up again, walking with me and coaching me along. I didn't want to let him down by stopping again, so on we went to the top. It was worth it. Ten- and twelve-year-old kids don't usually want to hang out with their parents too much. I know that my kids didn't, especially Ben. But that day at the top of Monadnock was different. Everyone helped each other up that last few hundred feet of climbing. Then we rested together, looking around at the view, and enjoying the day.

It was much easier on the lungs going downhill, but it wasn't long before my knees and ankles started to be bothered by the pounding of each step downward. Sam felt the same way and, walking together, we slowed down a little and thus fell behind the others. But once we were out of their sight they stopped by the side of the trail and waited until we caught up again. We finally made it back down to the bottom, to where we left the car. Everyone was tired and hungry and looked forward to getting back to the campsite. Near dark, Nick and Ben built a nice campfire and we cooked hotdogs and baked beans. The evening we sat there admiring the flames and telling stories.

I slept well and no one woke up too early so I assumed the boys slept well too. We packed up our gear and headed off to find some breakfast. After our stomachs were full we started home.

The boys brought along fishing poles so we decided to stay on back roads and try to find ponds and streams that might be good for fishing. We stopped at a couple of places we saw other people fishing at. The kids had a blast wading in a stream and jumping from stone to stone. No one caught anything, but that didn't seem to matter much that day.

We took our time heading home on small roads, enjoying the ride, and listening to music. They even let me play some of my music. Did you ever hear four pre-teen boys singing along to a Frank Sinatra CD, belting out "High hopes. He's got high hopes. He's got high apple pie in the sky hopes."



Nick, Ben, me, Elliot, and Sam



# Aren't All Kids Pyromaniacs? Or Was It Just Me?



In the 1950s most people burned their own trash in some kind of backyard incinerator. Dad had an old oil tank, with a door cut into it and a smokestack on the top. It was set up at the top of the lawn near Mom's lilac bushes. We didn't have nearly as much trash as everyone seems to have now. No plastic. Everything bought at a store came packaged in paper or cardboard. It was almost all burnable. And there was no recycling back then. Food waste was separated out by Mom. It didn't go in with the regular trash which we called rubbish and collected in paper bags destined for the incinerator. The food waste was discarded into a small metal trash can (with a tight lid so animals couldn't get in) that was kept outside at the end of the porch next to the garage. Once a week a man stopped his garbage truck in the street out front and walked up the driveway carrying a metal bucket and a

stick. He used the stick to scrape out our garbage into his bucket and then he dumped it into the back of his truck. The garbage man had a contract with the city to collect everyone's food waste, which he fed to his pigs. He had lots of pigs. In my grandfather's generation, everyone fed their own pigs with their garbage.

When we had larger items to throw out - (and too big to burn, or at least too big to fit into the incinerator), we took them to the dump. The dump that I remember in Keene was a very large pit that you backed your car up to. At the edge of the pit was a telephone pole laid on the ground so you wouldn't accidentally back over the edge and down into the pile of trash. I loved going to the dump. I got to heave things off the back of Dad's truck, smash things, and act like the hooligan I wasn't allowed to be at home. And the dump is where the garbage man's pigs lived too. I visited them when I got the chance to go to the dump with Dad.

When the rubbish bag in the house was full it was taken out and put into the incinerator. I think Dad burned the rubbish on weekends. He didn't really have to tend the fire, just make sure it was going good. The fire would eventually burn itself out after consuming all the trash. I was fascinated with watching the fire burn. Dad taught me how to set the trash on fire using a match. And they weren't wooden matches either but one of those paper matches you had to tear out of the matchbook and rub against the abrasive strip on the outside. I don't recall getting my fingers

burnt but I can't imagine that I didn't get singed once in a while. Occasionally Dad would make an open fire out on the lawn, to burn things that didn't easily fit into the incinerator. Sometimes that meant fallen tree limbs and other yard waste, but he'd put almost anything in the fire that would burn, thus saving a trip to the dump. One time when he had one of these open fires going, he left me to tend it while he went to the store down the street. He told me to make sure it didn't flame up too much or spread anywhere, like the pony barn, which was not too far away. Then he got into his truck and drove off.

I watched for a while as the flames danced around and crackled and then the fire started to die down. It seemed like no amount of stirring or prodding could save it. It was going out. I wanted the fire to keep going, so I looked around for more to burn. I found a pile of asphalt shingles Dad had left over from a job and I broke off a piece and threw it on the fire.

The shingle began to give off smoke, and then lots of smoke, finally bursting into a bright orange flame. Then the smoke got black and nasty, but the flame was magnificent, though it didn't last too long. I needed more. I ran and got another piece, bigger this time, and the flame lasted a bit longer. I kept this up for a while, enjoying the flames. I can remember the sound of the asphalt being consumed - it was like a little roar - like a tiny jet engine burning its fuel.

Then I got a little stupid. I bought back whole shingles this time, three feet long, four or five of them, and spread them out across the fire. In less than a minute there was smoke everywhere and then fire. I had to jump back from the flames. I think I panicked a little bit and thought about running away, maybe climbing a tree and hiding. Just then, our upstairs neighbor, Joey's Dad, showed up and complimented me on the fire I had going, but warned me that it probably wasn't a good idea to burn up all Dad's shingles like that. He had been watching me the whole time.

Fireworks are great too. They have the same kind of attraction as fire does but with better sound effects! I recall one July 4th night, when I was ten or twelve, and all the people from around Shadowland were down on Doody's beach for the fireworks.



Doody's Beach at Lake Warren

The little kids and some of the ladies lit sparklers and Mr. Doody and Dad were shooting off bottle rockets in the sand by the edge of the water. Dad gave me a string of about twenty two-inch firecrackers to set off. I didn't want to waste them lighting the whole string at once. I liked to throw them in the air, like little hand grenades, one at a time. I was having a blast until one of the fuses burned down in about half a second. You couldn't trust those cheap firecrackers. I barely got it out of my hand when it went off, numbing my thumb and the first two fingers on my right hand. I pretended like nothing happened. I didn't want Dad to know that I couldn't be trusted to not blow myself up. I quietly gave the rest of my firecrackers to two older boys who were off to the side watching, not having any of their own fireworks to shoot off.

I had a mishap with the cigarette lighter in Mom's car one time. I got a little too curious.



Funny thing about those car cigarette lighters; they didn't glow red for more than a second or two after you pulled them out of

their socket. But they remained plenty hot enough to light a smoke on. I tested it once. I remember thinking it must have cooled off because it wasn't red, and I touched the coil inside the lighter, very briefly. I could smell my finger burning right away. That was about the most painful thing I ever did.



# Memory of a Childhood Game



A game I loved playing in grade school was marbles. It was a simple game, you just tried to roll your marbles into a hole. It didn't seem to matter how big the hole was, sometimes the size of a cereal bowl, other times, especially from far away (fifteen feet) a much bigger hole was useful. If there wasn't a hole left from a previous game we made a new one by digging with the heels of our shoes and made it round by sticking your heel in the center of the hole and spinning around. The game was played on hard dirt cleared of most of the rocks. A starting line was drawn at an agreed upon distance from the hole. There was no official distance it needed to be. It depended on what the players wanted and how much time was left to play at recess before the bell rang. To begin with, you needed to agree upon the stakes, meaning how many marbles to play with and therefore risk losing. Everyone in the game (usually two or three kids - sometimes

more though) shot the same number of marbles. Whoever got all their marbles in the hole first, won the game and all the marbles. To complicate things, marbles had three different values - the same as pennies, nickels, and dimes have different values. There were the plain marbles. These were solid, not see-through. They were usually white with another color (or colors) swirled onto it. These were the lowest rank - like the pennies. Next were the catseye marbles, which were clear glass but with a flowery-looking color in the center that I guess looks like a cat's eye, hence the name. At the top of the marble ladder were the purries. These were also clear glass but had tiny bubbles and looked a little hazy on the inside - these were the prettiest marbles. Everyone kept their marbles in a leather drawstring bag. I liked the way the glass marbles sounded as they knocked against each other in the bag.





There were also larger versions of the plain, catseye, and purrie marbles. We called these 'boulders' and according to our value system, a boulder was worth five of its smaller version. You could buy marbles at the five and dime stores - for me that probably meant Woolworth's, but you could find marbles for sale at lots of places, even corner stores and food stores. We never had anything like a Walmart back then. But we did have four different five and ten cent stores all on the same side of Main St. They were Woolworth's, J.J.Newberry, Kresge's, and Fishman's. I also liked the toy department downstairs at Wilbers supermarket in Swanzey when Mom shopped there.

Marbles etiquette dictated that we all took turns rolling our marbles. There were strict rules and never any chaos, like fights or arguments while playing. But like any other high-stakes sport, tensions probably did arise occasionally. We learned who the friendly players were who the troublemakers were, and we were smart enough to avoid the latter.

We took turns rolling. The first throw was standing up behind the drawn line. Getting the marble in the hole on the first throw was great, that's what you wanted to do. For each marble still in play (not yet in the hole) players would, in turn, give a quick push from an index finger cupped behind the marble toward the hole. This continued until one player managed to get all his marbles into the hole. No dragsies - meaning you couldn't drag your finger along the ground for any distance in an effort to

guide your marble toward the hole.

I eventually found out that there was a proper marble season - that would be Springtime. I remember a friend and I were ridiculed one time for playing marbles in the Fall because it just wasn't marble season then.



Grampa Lynch, under Mom's clothesline

# Things From My Childhood That Aren't So Common Today



**T**oy guns seem to be frowned upon these days and are probably banned if they resemble a real gun at all, but in the 1950s, when I was little, toy guns were da bomb. They were an essential component of our backyard adventures. And no orange tips (that would have looked silly). In my mind, there were two types of toy guns, and both were equally popular. First, there were army guns. Keep in mind that this was only a decade after World War Two and all things military were still very popular. We had helmets and rifles and jeeps and tanks and all sorts of other olive-colored equipment. The second type was cowboy guns. They were more stylish than army guns, always chrome colored with a plastic handle grip made to look like carved bone or deer antler. And they almost always came in a holster, some pretty fancy. Some holsters had one gun, and some had two.

My favorites were the western guns or cowboy guns, I think because they were prettier and fancier than the more practical-looking army guns, even though the army issue Tommy Gun I had was pretty cool. An essential accessory for any gun we played with was caps. Sometimes I'd spend my entire allowance (ten or fifteen cents) on cap rolls, and many times those caps



never made it to the inside of a cap gun. Peter and I would see who could make the biggest explosion by pounding on a roll of caps with a large rock or a hammer on top of the little cement block wall Dad built on the back porch. I can still recall the sound (and the smell too, for that matter) of a cap being fired off in our toy guns. Pow - Pow - Pow.... But there were many times (when we were out of caps - which was five minutes after we got them home) that we had to be satisfied with making our own sound

effects (pow, pow, bang, bang, bang). That worked too.

Then one year Mattel came out with guns that you loaded with real-looking bullets and actually shot out little pointed plastic projectiles. I was enchanted with those things from the first time I saw them on a TV commercial one Saturday morning and I remember showing them to Mom in the Sears Christmas Wish Book Toy Catalog. That Christmas, Santa brought me a Mattel Shootin' Shell Six-Shooter with an imitation leather holster. The bullets consisted of a brass-looking metal casing with a pretty powerful spring inside. To load the round, you pushed the gray plastic projectile into the casing, depressing the spring. The whole thing was only about an inch long and a quarter inch wide - I thought it was quite a marvel of engineering for a kid's toy. Then you peeled off a self-sticking cap from the sheet they came on and stuck it on the bottom of the casing. That thing had about a fifteen-foot range and was reasonably accurate if you were close enough to your target. My favorite target for a couple of days was Mom's glass Christmas balls on the tree. I nailed three or four of them but was able to blame the damage on one of our cats (who liked to bat at them and often knocked them off the tree). Peter had the Mattel cowboy belt buckle with a derringer in it that swung out on a hinge and fired a Shootin' Shell at the same time. That's so if the bad guy had the drop on ya and you had your hands in the air you could push your stomach out, triggering the gun to swing out, and shoot the bad guy first.



We never considered toy guns as being violent. Powerful and exciting maybe, but not violent. We would act out getting dramatically shot and make-believe getting killed, and then, just like in the cartoons we watched, we always got back up to play another day.

One of the big fads of the 1950s was the Coonskin Cap. This was inspired by TV shows about American pioneers Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone in the early 1800s. The real hats were made of raccoon but I'm sure that the ones all the kids got were synthetic. The hats had sides and a flat top and featured a long, furry raccoon tail hanging down in the back. I do think I had one as a three- or four-year-old but I don't recall any photographs of me wearing it.

Another fad that came along when I was in the 3rd grade was the Hula Hoop. The first time I saw one was when the girl who sat

next to me brought one in for show-and-tell one day. She got up in front of the class and demonstrated how to hula with it. She wasn't very good at it but she had just gotten it and was learning. Pretty soon a lot of the kids had them and brought them to school to play with them. This became a problem in class when there were a dozen lined up on the back wall and they'd fall over and roll and become a distraction. Finally, we were told that no one could bring their hula-hoop to school anymore.

Hula-hoops were cheap, fun, and pretty easy to learn how to use. Mom didn't let me take mine to school, but we all played with them at home. At first, they were just a plain solid color. Then they got fancier and had colored designs on them. Then one came out that made a sound like zip-zip-zip as it went around. Then there was one that had tiny lights in it and lit up as it went around.

Silly Putty and the Slinky were a couple more of the toy fads from my childhood. I played with these some, but they failed to hold my interest for very long. There is only so much you can actually do with a hula-hoop, silly putty, or slinky. Your imagination reaches a dead end pretty quickly with these three toys. But give a kid a toy gun as an inspiration and his day will be filled with adventure, daring, bravery, and probably some boneheadedness as well.

Believe it or not, I can remember playing with lead and mercury. When I was six or seven years old we didn't know anything about

hazardous waste. Anything could be a toy if it was interesting enough. Dad used sheets of lead in his roofing work for waterproofing around chimneys. It came in a roll eight inches wide and the thickness of about twenty sheets of paper. I found it interesting because it was so heavy but soft at the same time. I could easily bend it or wrap it around my arm and I could cut with scissors. It was soft enough to write on with a nail too. And more than once I left teeth marks in it. This might explain my reading issues.

Mercury was even more fun to play with than lead. Having a ball of that silvery liquid rolling around in your hand was mesmerizing. If you break it apart, all the little pieces seem to want to join together and form a ball again. One time we had a piece of mercury about the size of a pea or maybe a little bigger. It must have come from a broken thermometer or maybe a thermostat. I loved rolling it around in the palm of my hand and dropping it into a bowl. It shattered into little beads and then reassembled into a ball again like tiny magnets. Eventually, one of us would get careless and the magic mercury ball would get dropped on the floor where it would disintegrate into pieces too small to find. Like all fun things - it couldn't last. Obviously, Dad let us play with just about anything.



# Dad's Hat



**F**or many years, Dad's work clothes consisted of coveralls and work boots, manufactured in a local factory (Roberts-Hart Shoes on Water St). I'm not talking about overalls like the ones farmers wore in old movies and cartoons. These coveralls (dull green or gray) were made of heavy cotton with long sleeves and a collar. A zipper ran all the way up the front with snaps on the flap covering the zipper and snaps on the breast pockets as well. They fit loose and were meant to be outerwear. Dad usually wore them over pants and a sweatshirt. In the winter he added a wool blanket-lined jacket made of denim or canvas. Dad's work, especially his wrecking jobs, caused him to get pretty filthy some days. The coveralls, which he peeled off after work each day, helped him to stay reasonably clean. For a few years, part of Dad's outfit was a hat.

I don't remember him being a big fan of hats though, just that one hat. I probably didn't like it at the time (being a young teenager, I'm sure I didn't even want to be seen with him) but

thinking back, I have to admit that it was an unusual hat, maybe even an exceptional hat. It was made of sheepskin with the wool on the outside and shaped like a tall, round cake, or one of those formal-looking top hats, but without the brim. It was about six inches tall. There was no lining on the inside, just the stitched-up hide. The color was white. Or at least it was white when it was new. Dad wore it all the time and it got very dirty - unpleasantly dirty - skanky even, and after a while, it acquired a smell too - a gamey one. I remember liking the feel of that hat, burying my fingers in the fluffy, but scratchy, wool. I wish I had that hat now as something to remember Dad by, though I'm sure Mom threw it out and possibly even burned it. It's a shame I haven't been able to find a picture of Dad in his overalls and wearing that hat.



Dad's barn - he moved from West Keene in 1970

# Riding in the Back of Dad's Truck



People wouldn't dream of letting their kids ride in the back of an open truck these days but there was a time, before seat belts and airbags, that it was ok to pile a bunch of kids in the back of a truck, tell them to hang on, and go for a ride. In Dad's truck that usually meant finding old no-longer-used dirt roads to explore and getting jostled up and down, and side to side. Sometimes it was a struggle to hang on. Even though we weren't going seventy miles an hour on the highway, we still needed to find a good place to hang onto back there. In the back of Dad's flat-bed truck was a steel bar running horizontally just behind the cab (to carry ladders on) and this was perfect to hold onto while standing up. It was also the only fun way to ride while ducking under low-hanging tree branches. The truck had dual wheels providing lots of traction. I don't recall ever getting the truck stuck anywhere but sometimes there were obstacles.

Dad usually had his chainsaw in the truck because he never knew when he was going to need it. There was bound to be a fallen tree across the road somewhere and if they were too big for the truck to climb over then he'd cut them up with his chainsaw. Then we would all help move the pieces out of the way so we could continue on.

The back of the truck was a rack body which meant the sides were removable sections resembling a fence about three feet high. We were safe enough back there, at least we had plenty to hang onto and therefore had a low chance of falling out. Branches were the main hazard but getting thrown around like a rag doll back there was inevitable if you didn't have a tight grip on something. Some of the old logging roads Dad drove us on could hardly be called roads anymore they were so overgrown. He always drove very slowly trying to avoid ruts and bumps. We had a blast.



# The Bee's Knees



I bought a suede jacket when I was a senior in High School. It was beginning to be kind of a popular style. It was dark brown, with the long, western fringe and gold-colored silk lining.



I thought it might make me look cool. I wore that over a nice, pinkish-colored button-up shirt with a high collar, and black and white herring-bone bell bottoms with big cuffs and tiny red and pink threads that matched the shirt. Pam macrameed me a wide belt to go with this outfit. It hung down the side to my knee like a sash. I thought I was the bee's knees. I still have the jacket, but I'll never fit into it again.



# Karen and I Used to Go Yard-Sale(ing) Quite a Bit



**K**aren enjoyed going to yard sales by herself back as far as forty years ago, in the 1980s. Eventually, I started going along with her on Saturday mornings and found that I did as well. I found it was a great way to meet and talk to people, all kinds of people, and to visit places you probably wouldn't have otherwise. People like to talk about themselves (and their stuff) and when they're at their own house they are relaxed and talk freely. If I was in the mood to, I would ask lots of questions, sometimes just to start up a conversation. Other times I just wanted to be left alone to search through boxes of junk, looking for nothing in particular. Sometimes you would run into someone who felt compelled to tell you about every item you touched, describing what it was, how to use it, how long they have had it, and where they got it. That could be annoying, but I usually had fun. I met some interesting people, visited some rather scary places, and once in a while I actually bought something.

When Ben and Sam were babies, we stopped yard-sale(ing) for a while, but when they were old enough to appreciate the chance to rummage through piles of toys they happily came along with us each week. Lots of their clothes came from yard sales and when they were young they didn't mind that. Getting them used to second-hand clothing at a young age was a good thing I guess because they grew up not caring if their clothes didn't come from the Gap.

Karen always found plenty of stuff to buy. She's not really a collector though. She bought things that appealed to her eye. Home furnishings, jewelry, knick-knacks, wall hangings, especially if they were kind of off-beat. I think that the kinds of things she liked to pick up at yard sales she couldn't justify (to herself) buying from a store at full price. But when paying yard sale prices, just about anything was ok. She has always said she didn't want to worry about losing something she paid a lot of money for but if it cost only fifty cents or a buck at a yard sale, then who cares?

Another thing Karen bought literally tons of were children's books. For a time, she was a fifth-grade reading teacher and she could never pass up kids' books. Over the last ten years or so she has found she had less of a need for them and has thinned out her bookshelves several times.

Now with the coming of our grandchildren she has found a new home for some of them. Until their first birthday, she gave each



grandchild a book containing a photograph of Sam or Ben (their Dad) along with a personal story befitting the book's theme, inside the cover. I think it's her way of giving a bit of herself to her grandkids. After they've grown up, maybe the books will be a way for them to remember their grandmother.

I'd find things at yard sales as well. I would buy a book now and then and maybe an album from the '60s or '70s (back when you could still find them at a yard sale for fifty cents). But there was one thing I was always on the lookout for and would almost always buy when I found some. I'm talking about McDonald's Toys. Beginning around 1990, I bought lots of them, bag-fulls. For a while, I could get a bag full of McDonald's Toys for a dollar or two. No one else seemed to want to buy them and there were many families with tons of them they were just trying to get rid of. I tend to call them all McDonald's toys but they were from all kinds of sources (Burger King, Wendy's, Arby's, Pizza Hut, etc). Each Saturday I'd come home with my fast food treasures and dump them out on the countertop. I'd ask the kids what toy this was or that was. They knew them all and usually the story behind them as well, such as what collection they were part of or what cartoon they were from. Ken was the best at this, he knew every single one. By the way, have I mentioned Ken? He's the friend who came for a sleepover and ended up spending the rest of his childhood with us.

Ben and I had the idea one day to take all the boxes filled with the fast food toys I had collected (for about ten years at that point) and dump them out into a pile on the living room floor. Karen wasn't at home at the time so there weren't any objections. The pile was probably five feet high. Then Ben wanted to sort them. I wasn't up to the task myself, but he sat there and sorted for two or three hours. He didn't make much of a dent in the pile, but he had little armies of Halloween McNugget Buddies, Mini Furbies, Flintstones Race Cars, and Glamour Barbie Figurines all over.

At first, all the toys were kept in cardboard boxes stacked up along the back wall of the garage. Eventually, I moved them all into large plastic storage tubs. They're still in my attic thirty years later.

# The Tiny Beer Stein Dad Used to Catch Our Tears



Dad had two or three antique ceramic tankards (or steins) from Germany that were displayed on the mantle in our living room for years. Peter or Laurie may still have them, but no one has mentioned them in a long time. I'm not sure how Dad came to have them. He may have brought them home from Europe with him at the end of WW2. They each a German Beer Garden scene in relief and were brightly painted. Each had a hinged pewter lid which was opened using your thumb.

Dad had another stein. This one was a little unusual and was used for a very special purpose. It was all pewter, only about an inch tall and as wide as my little finger. When we were young, in his efforts to console us, if we cried, Dad would catch the tears running down our cheeks in this little stein. Then place it in the freezer. I think we were so impressed that Dad thought our tears were special that we stopped crying.



Now, bear in mind that I do not recall doing this, but I've been told that I was the one that filled Dad's tiny little tears stein with toothpaste and put it back in the freezer.

Maybe I've blocked that memory after I realized that it wasn't a nice thing to do. I do remember Dad being very disappointed in me, in fact, angry really. Why did I do it? Maybe I thought it was a funny thing to do. If that's the case, then my sense of humor was a little off. Perhaps I was jealous of something, or maybe I was trying to spoil the fun for others. I think that I had become a little bit of a wise guy and was trying to be a bad boy. But that was the end of the little stein with the frozen tears inside. Dad tried to fix it but couldn't clean it out well enough to use it again. I do feel bad about it if that makes any difference.

Then there was the time I very matter-of-factly told Laurie there was no Santa Claus. Mom shot me her quick disappointing look and I knew I had crossed the line. I went a little too far with

being the wise guy, know-it-all that day. I felt bad about it right away, but that was probably guilt, not remorse. Mom or Dad's disappointment in me always hurt more than any guilt I might have felt for doing something wrong. I must have had some Eddie Haskell in me because I could be a little dink sometimes. Not that I am admitting any guilt in this matter (as I've said - I do not recall doing it), but I've often wondered, why toothpaste?



Before we had cats

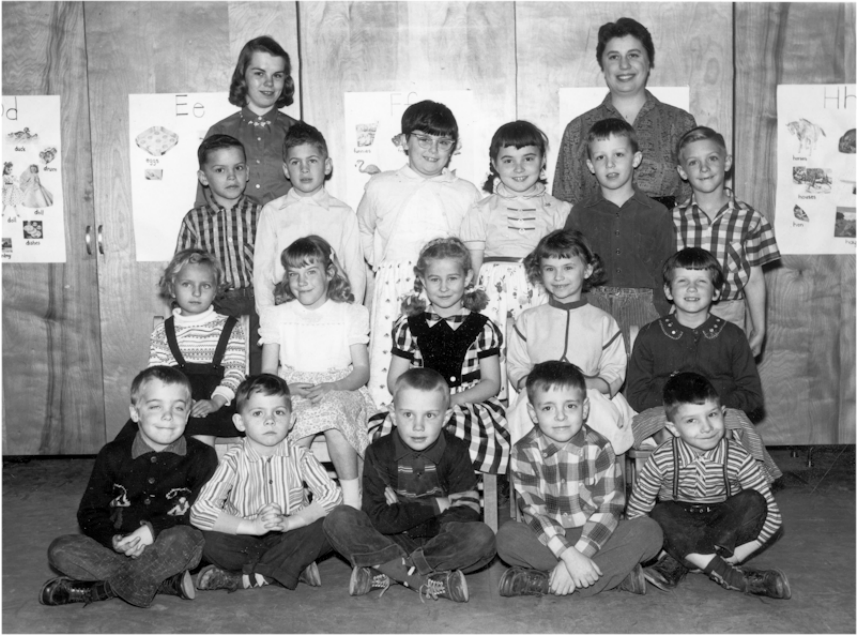


High School Senior photo

# School Photographs



Kindergarten at Wheelock School. The year was 1956 or 57. Our teacher is Mrs. Kline. She played on a small, white, upright piano and taught us many songs. That's me in the center of the second row - with my mouth open. There were lots of funny looks in this photograph as if most of us didn't know what was happening.



Wheelock School, First Grade, 1957-8. The kid in the checkered shirt in the front row is me. That's Mrs. Mallet on the right. Directly behind me is Branka, my first girlfriend, though I never told her so. On my left is Kenny. His favorite color was black. And he's the one who threw the rock that got the both of us detention. That's Tommy at the other end of the row in front. By now, most of us learned how to smile.





Wheelock School, Third Grade, 1959-60. 3rd Grade. Top row left - (unknown), Bob, Andy, Bruce, Elaine, Tommy in his cub scout uniform, Mrs. Bennett. Middle row - Tommy, Katrina, Frank, Brenda, Kathy (she had a crush on me), and me on the right. Front row - Kenny, Linda, Sherry, Joy, April, Douggie. It is amazing how easy it was for me to recall all of these names.



Wheelock School, Fifth Grade, 1961-2. 1st row. Joy, unknown, Branka, Sherry, Patty, Janice Clark, April. 2nd row. Me, Doug, Kathy, Brenda, Tommy. 3rd row. Mr. Mcloud, Hal, Tommy, Andy, Dale, Jimmy. I think I have the same shirt on here that I did in the third-grade photo. This was the year we started having Friday afternoon dances in the gym.

# When I Started Junior High



I was pleased to find out that I got home about an hour earlier than I had the year before. And I was the only kid around - the other kids must have been a year or two behind me. I had time to myself, which I had never experienced before. I could pursue my own agenda. I decided to build a secret hideout in the overgrown field out back. It was thickly covered with sumac trees, raspberry bushes, and milkweed. I made my way to the middle of the lot and using the pocketknife Grampa Rob gave me when he taught me how to whittle, I cleared out a little area to build a lean-to. I cut sumac branches, then wove them together to form walls and a roof. After a while, I sat down and rested in the sun. It was very quiet and secluded in there. I looked to my right and not five feet away was a small deer. Not a fawn but probably a young doe. It stopped nibbling whatever it was chewing on and looked at me. I didn't move, I just enjoyed the sight of a little deer looking back at me, standing quietly in the bushes. We both stayed there like that for what seemed like a while but in reality, was most likely

only about twenty seconds. Without thinking, I was holding my breath, trying to keep silent. Finally, I had to breathe and when I did, the sound of it startled the deer and it leaped about ten feet and disappeared. I sat there for a minute thinking about what just happened and how cool it was. Then I heard the school bus come and I climbed on my bike and headed over to Mike's house. I considered not sharing about my encounter with the deer that day, but it seemed like it might make it less special if I did that. But my excitement got the better of me. While Mom was finishing up with the dishes after supper that night, I told her about it. Her indifferent response was something like, "Oh, that's nice. Did you do your homework yet?", leaving me disappointed. The next morning, I shared my story with Mike, and he immediately came back with, "Yeah, I saw a deer once in my yard too."

So, I dropped it and never again tried to explain, to anyone, the connection I felt I made with the deer that day. I should have kept the whole thing to myself.

# I'm Better at Starting Projects Than I am at Finishing Them



**T**hat sounds a lot like Dad. I think he had the same problem. He redid the bathroom for Mom but left it unfinished for years. It's not as if we couldn't use it or anything like that. Everything in the bathroom was torn out and new walls, floor, and ceiling were put in. The new toilet, sink, and bathtub were all installed and functional. It's just that some of the less important details were not completed. A lot of the molding and trim wasn't there for a long time, and the built-in clothes hamper, kind of a pull-out bin, which was supposed to be one of the highlights of the room, didn't get completed for a couple of years. And that's just the kind of thing I would do, be almost finished with something and then just let it sit.

For example: Five summers ago, right after I was laid off from Arris (the first time), I replaced all the flooring and the railing on

my deck and the stairs leading down to ground level. New decking, railing posts, and nice metal balusters. The last thing to complete was the stairs, which I did, but I forgot to order enough balusters to complete the railing on the stairs. That's ok (I told Karen), everything is fine, the stairs are usable, railing is there. It's just missing a few pieces. I ordered the additional balusters - and they're still sitting in a box in the garage, five years later. I told Karen I would finish it, and I will. There's no need for her to remind me every six months. I don't know why I do this. Is it procrastination? In a movie I saw once, a character said, "I don't procrastinate. I wait until the last minute to do things, because I will be older, and therefore wiser." I wrote that down to remember it.

I certainly don't feel driven to complete most projects. If I have committed to making something for someone else I may be more compelled to wrap things up but otherwise, I feel that I can take my time and even step away from a project for a while. I do a lot of stepping away. I have many projects that are in various stages of completion. I have boxes filled with pieces of wood that I have prepared (cut, sanded, stained, etc.) waiting to be taken out again. But they just sit there while I contemplate my next move, while I plan and replan, then change the plan again. I'm big on planning. I need to have a clear picture of the finished version in my mind before I move forward. I'm not too keen on winging it, and I very rarely start something without a plan. That approach

would most likely be a waste of time for me.

When I look around my wood shop or my office or on my computer desktop with all the started but unfinished projects I have, I feel good about that in a way. It means that I have a lot going on and I have plenty to do. I will never get bored. All I have to do is look around at all the half-finished projects and something will catch my eye and rekindle my interest. Perhaps I just need some inspiration or motivation, and the right time will come.

I even enjoy having five or six projects all actively being worked on at the same time. I can get a little bored with one and move on to another. Sometimes I get to a certain stage or step in a process that is difficult or even stumps me. Instead of being stopped in my tracks with nothing to do, I can move on to something else. Eventually, I will find a solution for the project that had me defeated and I can proceed. I may revisit the same project three or four times before I decide to push forward to completion.

I usually have a clear picture in my mind, or most likely a scale drawing of what the finished object will be like. If some part of the process begins to vary from that picture, if it's not turning out as good as I anticipated, I might stop and rethink my plan. If I can find a way forward that feels satisfying, I'll continue, otherwise, this could be a candidate for the half-finished project pile.

I think procrastination can be thought of in a couple of different ways. The first is - putting off a task because you don't think you will enjoy doing it. I can see why a person would put something off if they disliked doing it or found it distasteful, but I don't think this describes how I feel. I do enjoy the kinds of projects I work on and look forward each day to making progress on one or more of them. The second reason for procrastinating that I have read about is - the fear that I won't perform well, or that the finished project will not be very good. This second motive for procrastinating feels like it fits me a little bit.

I have to admit that I do feel self-conscious, unconfident even, about some of the woodworking projects I start, particularly if I see them as being more art than functional. I don't consider myself an artist, I'm more of an engineer. My comfort level dips when I stray from precise measurements and geometry in favor of relying on a vision for shapes and colors. But I am drawn to some of the artsy things I see other woodworkers producing. To move in that direction, I realize I am going to have to get over my feelings of insecurity and timidity. I need to learn to play it by ear a little bit, to improvise, to wing it.



# There Were Some Spooky Places Around Our Old House on Marlboro Street



**T**o me, the cellar was the scariest. When we moved to Marlboro Street the house was at least a hundred years old. The foundation was made of rock. Some of it was granite block but most of it was large irregular shaped boulders with lots of rubble in between. Originally the floor was just dirt but at some later date, cement was poured in the area where a furnace was installed. The cellar had a musty odor due to the dirt floor and a perpetual dampness. In fact, it was very wet. Dad fixed it by digging a deep hole under the stairs and putting in a fifty-five-gallon drum with a sump pump in it. Dad told us there was actually a small underground stream running into that hole. The pump was set to automatically turn on when the water reached a certain level inside the drum. A pipe ran from the pump out onto the lawn by the bathroom. It was amazing how

much water came out of that pipe several times each day.

The one bathroom we had, off the kitchen, was not original, and when it was added on there was no cellar dug under it. But, near the bottom of the cellar stairs, there was an opening toward the top of the cellar wall, big enough for a small person to crawl through, into the void beneath the bathroom. There was no light in there and whenever I went down into the cellar, I had to pass that dark opening. I had a pretty good imagination and if there is one thing I've always been scared of, it's the darkness.

The cellar was rather dimly lit anyway. There was a single lightbulb near the stairs and another over by the furnace in the middle of the cellar. That left the perimeter in near-darkness. When I was down there, I imagined there were things in the darkness watching me. The scariest part of the cellar was the area beneath the kitchen, on the 'other side' of the stairs. It was dark over there, with no light at all, and was only a crawl space. I never ventured into that area on the other side of the stairs. The cellar stairs themselves were scary. The tread boards were rounded and very beat. I tumbled down those stairs more than once.

There was an old fuse box at the bottom of the stairs, beside that crawlspace opening under the bathroom. It had those screw-in fuses. Dad showed me how to get the electricity back on after one of the fuses burned out by putting a penny in the socket, behind the fuse.

At the top of the front hall stairs, on the right, there was a walk-in closet. When I was little, my bedroom was up the stairs and to the left. I never liked that closet and was a little afraid when I had to creep by it on my way to bed. Mom had it jam-packed with her old stuff, family things, I think. Now that I think of it, that's where she kept all her Christmas Tree decorations. She kept the same old lead tinsel for years, carefully removing it from the tree laying it out in neat flat bundles and returning it to the same packaging it came in when she bought it. That always struck me as being a bit frivolous, but after a while, I realized she did that with a lot of things. She reused paper towels if they weren't dirty, and tin foil was cleaned off and folded up to be reused. Mom grew up during the Depression in the 1930s. Her family wasn't poor, but people learned to be frugal during those years.

The closet had a single bare bulb for light. The walls were wallpapered but it was the oldest-looking, dingiest wallpaper I had ever seen, leading me to wonder if at one time that small space was used as a bedroom.

Those things in the cellar, watching me from the darkness, were in the walls and in the ceilings too. I could hear them right above me in the top bunk after the playroom became Peter and my bedroom. I could hear the mice tunneling on many nights, keeping me awake with their chewing and scratching and nest-building. Sometimes it sounded like they were about to

come right through the ceiling. Other times I could hear them running up and down the walls. My imagination told me they were running errands and, the young mice were playing games. I guess it made sense that Mom always wanted to have cats around.



Christmas Tree in the playroom

# Another Early Memory



I came across a box Mom had labeled with Dad's name. In it were photographs of Dad and his army buddies during WW2 as well as a couple of letters he had written to his dad from boot camp. There were some random newspaper clippings and some papers that looked like meeting minutes with a letterhead of YMCA, Keene, NH.

Turns out that Dad was, for a few years, some kind of office holder at the local YMCA in Keene. I had a membership at the Y in the early 1960s when it was located on Roxbury St., just off the Square. Roxbury St. was the YMCA's new location. The old YMCA, where Dad attended meetings, was on West St. That was the original YMCA in town and was built in the 1880s. I remember going to the old building on West Street where there was a long, wide stairway leading from the street to the Y entrance on the second floor. I had to be pretty young because I recall climbing up one step at a time while holding on to the railing above my head. At the top of the stairs was a lobby with a seating area and

a Coke machine in the corner. Dad put a coin in the machine and bought me a soda. I don't think he knew that was the first one I ever had. I was used to having milk or juice in a sippy cup at home. For some reason, I was dressed in a nice white button-up shirt. The next thing I knew, root beer was coming out my nose, onto my shirt, and all over the floor. Dad cleaned me up the best he could with a towel from the bathroom. I guess you could say my first taste of soda was not as enjoyable as it could have been.



# Halloween



On Halloween, I was usually dressed up as a bum - an old torn hat (Grampa Lynch's), torn pants, and shirt. Stick over my shoulder and all my belongings in a tied-up cloth sack. Probably with a mustache and beard painted on. Sometimes I had a store-bought plastic mask of Bugs Bunny or a clown, but I didn't like having my face covered up and it was difficult to see when wearing one of those masks.

I don't recall attending any Halloween parties, just trick-or-treating. We always stayed in our neighborhood and that gave us the chance to fill our bags. Right next door to our house (past the overgrown empty lot where crabapple trees grew) were two old, very long 2-story apartment buildings used for Keene Teachers College family housing. We knew those buildings as the barracks. There were at least thirty apartments in those two buildings. That made up about half of our trick-or-treat stops right there. There were a dozen more houses up and down our street that we stopped at as well.

We always had an adult with us on Trick-or-treat night, usually Mom. Marlboro St. was not yet a dead-end street (that would come a few years later) and so there was a fair amount of traffic going to and from downtown. And no sidewalks. There were dirt sidewalks at one time but over many years they became overgrown and disappeared. So, the only place you could easily walk was on the narrow shoulder of the road.

I remember one rainy Halloween night when I was about eight. There was a very large, young lady who walked from her home in South Keene into town almost daily. We never knew who she was, but we saw her walk past, either toward town or back toward South Keene quite often. I remember she scuffed her feet as she walked, her footsteps sounding heavy. Just before dark, a couple of hours before we went out Trick or Treating, as the lady walked past our house and was almost to the barracks, she was hit by a car and killed.

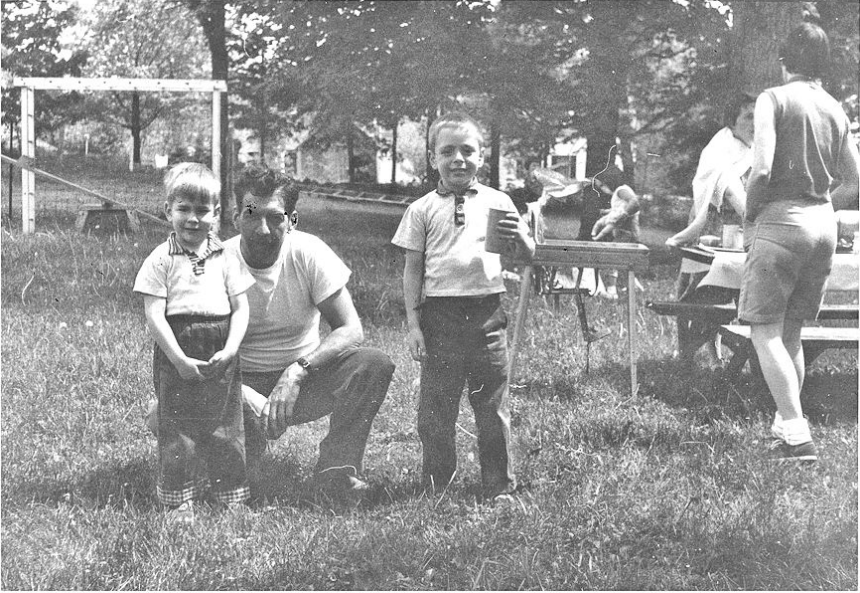
I was aware of what had happened a short while earlier as Mom walked with us toward the barracks that night to begin our trick-or-treating. We must have walked over the spot where she was hit. After that, whenever I walked past that spot, I remembered that lady and how she died right there on the side of the road. It always made me sad.

Several years later, early one school morning before I was even out of bed, I heard Mom rush out the kitchen door and come back in a couple minutes later. I heard her talking to someone but



couldn't tell what was going on. Then she rushed back outside again. I could see a few cars stopped in the street in front of the house. I didn't go outside to see what going on. I waited for Mom to come back in and asked her. She said she heard a car crash in the street in front of our house where Optical Avenue came up through the fields across the street and intersected Marlboro St right across from our driveway.

A young man riding a motorcycle was hit and he and his motorcycle were lying on the grass in the front yard of the house across the street from us. It was Mom who made the calls to the police and ambulance and then brought blankets out to try to make the young man comfortable if she could. I asked about him and she said that he was in a bad way. She looked very upset about it. That man died on that lawn a short while later, just after the ambulance arrived. Mom and a few other people from the neighborhood were with him trying to comfort him. As I got myself ready for school that day, I remember Mom sitting at the kitchen table crying.



# Some of My Earliest Friends and Playmates



When I try to remember my earliest friends, I don't recall what they were like. I don't remember if a friend was generous, or mean, or hyperactive, or anything like that. I only have memories of us doing things together. They were just kids, like me. Nobody stood out as a bully or a clown or a know-it-all, at least not while I was in grammar school.

My first friend was Rudy. He lived a little further down Marlboro Street than we did, just before the overpass (that was the train trestle that allowed the train to pass over the street). Marlboro Street was eventually dead-ended right there at his house when the route-101 bypass was built several years later, but when Rudy lived there it was a busy road. I think we were in the 3rd or 4th grade, something like that, though Rudy didn't go to Wheelock School where I did. He attended the Catholic school. Mom and Dad probably knew Rudy's family first and that's how I became

friends with Rudy. I remember playing at his house quite often, mostly outside. There was an empty lot on a small hill next to their house which was very sandy and had a large, very old-looking, and very weathered box-shaped thing that we imagined was the remains of a covered wagon left behind from a wagon train heading west many years ago.

Thinking back, that area was most likely the remains of an old gravel pit or something similar, but to us, it looked like a scene from one of the Cowboy and Indian shows we watched on TV. The box had a lid we could open and inside were old, rusted horseshoes, tools, and lots of other items we played with but had no idea what they were. Maybe it was a tool storage box from the railroad, which ran directly behind Rudy's house. I had lots of fun at Rudy's house and his mom made nice lunches for us all the time. Rudy his mom and his sister moved back to Texas, where they were originally from, but Rudy's dad stayed in Keene. It was all-of-a-sudden. Mom told me Rudy would be moving away and a day or two later he was gone. I remember that being a little traumatic to me, having a friend move away like that. Guess I thought things were supposed to last forever.

Then there were the friends I met at school. First, there was Tommy. We were on-and-off best friends through the sixth grade (at Wheelock School). Tommy's in the front row on the left in my 1st grade class picture. Starting in about the fourth grade, on Saturdays, Mom would drop me and Tommy off at the Scenic

Theater downtown. We'd see two movies and some cartoons for a quarter. Mom always gave me money for popcorn, candy, and a drink too. Other times we'd go bowling, candlepin with the little balls at the Pastime Lanes upstairs over a bicycle shop on Mechanic Street. I think Tommy had been bowling for a while because he was pretty good at it. He beat me by a score of something like 75 to 16. I remember him laughing at how bad I was that first time. We joined a league together. That way we got a discount. We bowled three strings for fifteen cents per string, and a dime for shoe rental. That kept us busy for a couple of hours.

Kenny was another friend I had somewhere around the 3rd grade. He lived on Marlboro Street right near Mays Food Store where Mom did most of her grocery shopping. When I played at Kenny's house there were always a good number of other kids around. Lots of families lived on the short side streets in that area. Kenny's dad worked in a bakery, and I remember being impressed with the variety of cakes and pastries his mom brought out for us for snacks.

Some of my playground buddies at school were Andy, Tommy (different Tommy), Hal, and Dale. I went to play at Dale's house one time. He lived over by the college. We played outside around the yard by ourselves for a while but then Dale's older brother started tormenting us and throwing rocks at us. We ran inside for protection from Dale's father, who was working at a big desk

in his office, but he barked at us to get out, that he was busy. I ended up calling Mom on the phone to come get me. I never played at Dale's house again.



Ella and Timber enjoying their pool

# During My Years at Home, the First Thing I Did When I Got Home from School Each Day



**G**ot a snack. When I was old enough to get my own snack, it probably would have been potato chips. Mom always bought Wise chips, the one with a picture of an owl on the bag. Your fingers got greasy eating them.

I wonder if many people would have said that the first thing they did when they got home was - do their homework. Not me. For me, homework was a low priority. Snack time, play time, and lounging around watching TV were all higher on the list. I disliked homework and avoided it until the last minute. And Mom let me get away with it too. In my high school years, she would ask me if I had any homework that night and I often told her “No, I finished it at school” or “I’ll finish it in study hall

before class tomorrow”. That may or may not have been true. All through school, my report card grades were, not always, but generally average and showed that I didn’t put much effort into my work. Occasionally, I showed that I could do better, but that happened only if I was somehow motivated to do so. If a particular class or subject piqued my interest or if a teacher somehow inspired me, I could up my game and put in the effort required to receive an A. I admit that I didn’t have very much self-motivation. Most of the time I was satisfied to coast along and be part of the group labeled average that never stood out. At times I went too far in my effort to remain average, or my lack of effort to excel and brought home a D on my report card. I don’t recall ever getting an F but it’s possible that I did and just blocked out the memory of it.



# We Had One Telephone



**I**t hung on the wall beside the cellar door in the kitchen. It was a dial telephone with a long spiral cord that could be stretched across the room and if you wanted privacy, it was long enough for you to sit on the cellar stairs and close the door. In later years, Mom kept a rocking chair in front of the wall phone on one of the braided rugs she made. Grandpa Lynch spent many hours rocking in that chair in the last years of his life. He kept Mom company while she washed dishes and prepared meals. Mom kept that phone forever. It actually belonged to the phone company; she just rented it for two dollars a month. The phone company wanted to replace it with a modern pushbutton model, but she liked the dial, or at least, that's what she was used to. She was like that. I don't think she liked changes. If something worked well for her, she wanted to keep using it. She used the same clothes dryer for over forty years. Mom was never one to be impressed by new features on items she already had. To her, added bells and whistles just meant that there was more that

could go wrong. If the dyer spun and dried her clothes, she was happy. Besides, she always had a clothesline and hung out her wash when it wasn't raining or snowing. She used the electric dryer as a backup.

Mom didn't want a color television either, and all my years growing we had only black and white sets. We had two, one in the living room and one in the playroom. Even in the 1960s after all the new shows were coming out in color, she claimed she had no interest in getting a color set. We watched *The Wizard of Oz* when they showed it on TV once each year, and we never knew that everything changed to color when Dorothy landed in OZ. Mom maintained that simpler was better. Her line was - "That's just one more thing that can go wrong with it". She claimed she never wanted a car with an automatic transmission for that reason.

In the 1990s when everyone would gather at Mom's house for the holidays, the grandkids - Ben, Sam, Peter, Mat, Patrick, and Patrice - treated Mom's dial telephone like it was a toy. It was the only rotary phone they had ever seen, and they took turns playing with the dial.

I've gotten accustomed to using my smartphone after twenty years of practice and now I don't feel comfortable going anywhere without it. I, like everyone else, have become dependent upon it even though I use only a small portion of its capabilities. I have the feeling that operating systems assume I

am stupid and will try to do things for me, thinking it knows what I want to do and goes ahead and does it for me before I can stop it. Despite its many benefits, I'm still wary of how dependent on technology I have become. I feel that a little of the simplicity Mom enjoyed would suit me better. I bet Mom never butt-dialed anyone with her dial telephone.



Pete and Pam out by the pool



Mom

# I Am a Much Better Student Now, Than I Ever Was When I Should Have Been



I started in the apprentice program at the Navy Yard in the fall of 1984, when I was 32. To my surprise, as part of the training program, there were academic classes we were required to attend during working hours. Every quarter, for four years, all apprentices spent two weeks of half-days in the classroom. The subjects included math, English, mechanical drawing, public speaking, writing, and metallurgy. If you failed any class, you were out of a job. The instructors were all very capable and very bright individuals. I'm not certain they all had teaching degrees, but they all knew their subjects thoroughly.

Most of the others in the program with me were younger than me. Many were in their twenties, and some were just out of high

school. It was amusing for me to watch as a few of the younger people in class sat back and made little effort to do well or to learn anything new. And then I realized, that's what I was like at their age. If I was younger, I probably wouldn't have taken the schoolwork seriously either, but a dozen years had passed, and my outlook had changed. I found myself enjoying the opportunity to be back in school with the chance to do it right this time. It helped that the class time was limited to four hours a day for two weeks. I was at a stage in my life where I was ready to be serious about school. I worked hard, put in the time, and did well.

In the early 1990s, I was still working at the Navy Yard in Kittery. By that time, Karen and I had Ben and Sam, and we had the house built on Goodwin Road in Eliot. I had to figure out what I was going to do for work in the future. I had always thought that a job at the Navy Yard was secure, but I found out differently. Yard closures elsewhere in the country showed me that I better have a backup plan. I started thinking about going back to school and getting some kind of degree that I chose not to pursue when I was younger. But I still didn't have a clear picture of what I wanted to do. The subject I enjoyed the most and felt the most comfortable with was math, so I selected Accounting as a suitable career direction in case my time at the Yard was cut short. I enrolled at Hesser College in Portsmouth, in a two-year associate degree program, attending classes two or three nights

a week. However, once I understood how accounting worked, with credits here and debits there, I developed a distaste for it. To me, it wasn't really math, it was anti-math. Accounting rules are too strict. You can't use your imagination, without getting into trouble. But - I worked hard, and did well, and got my degree.

Sadly, my time at the Navy Yard finally did come to an end. I was cut loose in 1994 and the government, as part of their outplacement effort, was nice enough to offer funding for a variety of retraining programs. Several recruiters came to speak to us and explained what they had to offer. The one that caught my attention was a small school in Massachusetts that offered training for computer networking certification. I attended The Computer Learning Center in Methuen for the next ten months. Most all the students there were older. Hardly any were fresh out of high school. The school was meant for people looking for new jobs and also needed training for some of the new technical jobs being created. Like the schools I had previously attended, as well as those that would come in the future, you get out of it what you put in. The more effort you put in, the more you will learn. Again, I worked hard and did well.

Computer networking was just starting to boom in a big way. Dot.com was beginning to grow. Through a job fair, I went for Cabletron Systems in Rochester, New Hampshire, one of the first big computer networking companies. Cabletron was, very

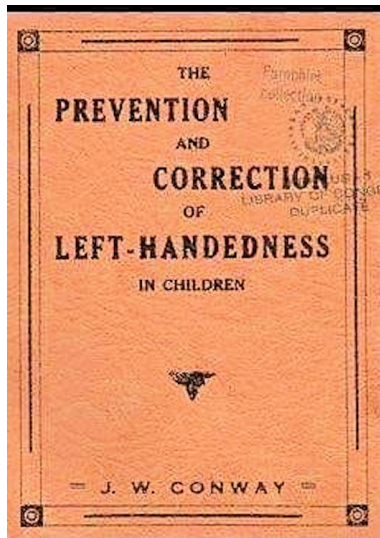
unofficially but affectionately, referred to as Cabletron University. Meaning they hired lots of intelligent, but untrained, people and then put them through extensive training, taught them valuable and sought-after skills, and gave them hands-on experience. Then many of their workers, within a year or two, took their skills and found higher pay and more opportunity at other rising companies. I stayed for four years but during that time I determined it would be to my advantage to go back to school and get my bachelor's degree. I looked for an affordable school where I could attend evenings. Another three years of classes, a few nights a week at the Franklin Pierce University campuses in Portsmouth and Concord, and at age forty-seven, I finally earned my four-year degree.



# Being Left-Handed



**I**t's a decidedly right-handed world. That hasn't always been the case though. I've read that two thousand years ago the ratio of right-handed people to left-handed people was 50-50. Whereas today, ninety percent of the world's population is right-handed. There has been an effort, in the past anyway, to persuade people to abandon their left-handedness.



There was a time when being left-handed was thought to be an indication that you might develop a mental illness later in life. So, here I am, favoring my left hand, being one of the ten percent. I think it was in fourth grade we began to have penmanship class at school. It must have been when we started to learn how to write cursive. A special teacher was brought in from Keene Teachers College, Miss Tuttle, and she was quite old. She was very strict and very persistent. First, she insisted that correct posture was essential to good penmanship. We had to sit up very straight and could not have our backs against the back of the chair. She constantly roamed the classroom running her hand up and down between our back and the chairback.

I can tell you right off - there was no accommodation for left-handedness in penmanship class. I wasn't forced to use my right hand, but I was repeatedly corrected to hold my pen, and my paper as a right-hander would - paper tilted to the right and hand placed below the line being written on. I couldn't do it. To me, that was backward. Somehow, I survived penmanship class, but like many lefties, I hold a pen with my left hand curled clockwise, and the pen point toward the bottom of the page. That works for us, except, all the writing is smudged as you progress down the sheet.

Using my left hand to write defines me as left-handed. But writing is one of the very few things I do with only my left hand. Another one is using scissors, though most are designed to be

used by righties. Scissor handles designed to be used in the right hand are almost painful for a leftie. I can use a hammer with either hand. I can pound harder with my right but I'm more accurate with my left. I'd bet Dad kept putting the hammer in my right hand when he taught me how to drive a nail.

Because right-handedness is so overwhelmingly prevalent, we lefties are forced to learn to use our right hands for many things that are taken for granted today. In most cases, we left-handers are not catered to. That means, most items are designed to be used by right-handed people, and we lefties just have to adapt.



Some examples - The pencil sharpeners, at school, the ones that are screwed to the wall and you turn with a crank. The crank is

always put on the right, of course, to accommodate righties. So, we learned to crank with our right hands. After a while, it feels natural. It's the same for can openers. Wristwatch buttons are on the right side and are more easily pressed by the right hand, not by the left. Measuring tapes read upside down for lefties. Car driver's seat; there's no cup holder on the left. Back when most cars had standard transmissions, the shift handle was on the right, not for lefties. Those High School chair-desk combination things are definitely not left-hander-friendly. It's a long list, and I'll keep adapting.



Fifth-grade city football champs

# School Dances in the 5th and 6th Grades



**F**riday afternoon dances in the Wheelock School gymnasium were run by Mrs. Clark, the 6th-grade teacher. I think it was meant to be our introduction to socializing with the opposite sex. Shortly we would become young adults and the grownups around us thought it was necessary to give us a boost in the right direction.

Everyone in both the 5th and 6th grades attended. There were around sixty kids in total. There were two long rows of folding chairs set up, one on each side of the floor, facing each other. Girls sat on one side and the boys sat on the other. I never noticed if there were an equal number of boys and girls in attendance so that we could all be paired off for each dance, but that's probably not likely. I don't recall that I ever sat out a dance though.

The records that Mrs. Clark played at the dances were all very tame with no hint of anything that smelled of being rowdy or rambunctious. Records featuring Elvis or Little Richard were nowhere in sight. This was 1961 and 62, and we danced to a lot of Nat King Cole, Perry Como, Pat Boone, and Johnny Mathis. The only up-tempo dances were polkas, danced to songs like Roll Out the Barrel by Mitch Miller. I liked the polkas. Those were more like skipping along with your partner and twirling now and then. All the slower dances were waltzes where I had to concentrate and pay attention to what my feet were doing. We also did a little square dancing. That was challenging for me also, trying to follow Mrs. Clark calling out to go left, go right, and then to remember what allemandes and do-si-dos were. Some of my school friends became pretty good dancers during this time. I was not one of them.

I imagine that, for most of us, these Friday afternoon dances were our first introduction to social dancing. We had brief lessons on dancing etiquette. We were taught how to ask for a dance, how to properly hold on to your partner, and what to do with your feet. And there was no foolishness tolerated. Whenever I picture Mrs. Clark's face, it has a scowl on it. I don't think she liked me. It didn't help that her daughter, Janice, was in my class. Janice always appeared to be perfect, in the way she dressed and spoke and acted. At least that's how I remember her. I remember that Janice and I did not get along very well either,

but I don't recall why. As I think back about it now, the reason was me. I was jealous perhaps because Janice was actually a very nice girl, even to me.







# When I Lost My Sunday Shoes



I don't recall what my school shoes were like, most likely some kind of casual tie-up shoes, but they definitely were not sneakers. Sneakers were for playing outside. Mom would never let me wear sneakers to school, or jeans either (we called them dungarees). She always laid my school clothes out for me each day and that was right up through High School. That sounds kind of embarrassing now that I think about it, but I never questioned the clothes she put out for me.

When I was young, I'm sure she bought all my clothes without consulting me, but as I got older, I got to accompany her to Rousell's Clothing Store on Mechanic Street. She was okay with the latest styles and knew what other kids were wearing. I felt pretty cool wearing my new duffle coat and desert boots in the mid-1960s.

However, our Sunday clothes were different. For one thing, they were for Sundays only, unless there was an event, we needed to look sharp for, which I can't recall any of. So, Sundays only. And, for us kids that didn't mean church. It meant Sunday School. I don't think we ever attended an actual Sunday Church service. Mom did though, and while she did that, we sat in classrooms in the building next door to the church, learning Bible stories. I wonder if churches still have Sunday School for kids. I remember sitting around a small table being taught about characters from the Bible from books geared toward little kids; lots of pictures. Nope, not interested. We went for a few years and then after a while, because of our lack of enthusiasm, we just stopped going. I've included a photograph, somewhere in this book, of us dressed in our Sunday best. For me, that meant creased pants, a white shirt, a bowtie, a blazer, and sometimes a hat. I looked pretty sharp. My Sunday shoes were always shiny black tie-ups, that were never really broken in because I outgrew them before wearing them out. Dad taught us how to shine our shoes, which we did on Saturday night in preparation for the next day. I usually got the black paste all over my hands and my fingers remained stained for the next few days. That was one chore that I enjoyed doing. I liked making the leather shine when I used the polishing cloth and the brush. But I did not like the shoes. They were stiff and uncomfortable.

Then one Sunday (when I was eight or nine years old) the shoes went missing. I looked everywhere; Mom looked everywhere. She knew something was up. Shoes just didn't disappear like that, and no one would steal my shoes. She was mad at me, but it was getting late, and we had to leave so she told me to put on my school shoes. Later that week the Sunday shoes still hadn't turned up. Now, it may look like I was the culprit. I was the logical choice and I know Mom thought that I disposed of them somehow. I honestly do not remember hiding or otherwise doing away with my Sunday shoes. I remember looking all over the house for them myself, wondering where I could have left them. There is that possibility that someone else in the house is the actual offender here. Maybe someone else, for whatever reason, did something with my shoes - I'm looking at you, Peter.

Peter could be sneaky. Not mean, but maybe a little devilish. He's clever. Maybe he wanted to see if he could get me into trouble. If that was his plan, it worked. Anyway, that's a theory I've developed over the years when I think of losing those black dress shoes. How do you lose shoes anyway? Nobody loses shoes. I must have gotten new ones, but I don't remember them. I only remember the ones I couldn't find.



Our living room TV set was similar to the one shown here in the photo. The cloth grill toward the bottom had a large speaker behind it, but otherwise, the lower half of the set was empty except for a board across the bottom, like a shelf. A long while (maybe a year) after the shoes went missing, I had some reason to look behind the TV. I moved the TV out a little and peered around and into the back of the set. MY SHOES! There they were, in the back of the TV set. “Hey Mom, I found my shoes”, I said. But she didn’t share my excitement. She was convinced that I was the one that put them there.

# My First Car



**T**he very first car that I could call my own, I bought from Peter for a hundred dollars. If I remember correctly, it was a 1962 Chevy something. I want to say it was a Nova but I'm not sure. Pete got it from the family across the street who gave it to him around 1970.

I had the car for a couple of years, but I didn't know much about cars at all back then. I had never even changed the oil in a car. Consequently, I didn't maintain it at all, and little by little it started to fall apart and toward the end of its' life (or at least the end of me owning it) there were times when it refused to start. At that time, I lived in Troy with Brian and Rick, who were both attending school at Keene State College, and I worked at a factory on the upper end of Washington St in Keene. When I couldn't get the car started, either Rick in Troy or a friend at work would get it started for me, usually by fiddling with the carburetor or banging on the starter, or tightening some wire that had worked itself loose.

One day while I was stopped in traffic on Main Street in front of Goodnows, a lady backed out of her parking spot and right into my car. There wasn't too much damage. The front fender on the right side was bashed in a bit but my lights still worked. The lady was all nervous and apologetic saying how mad her husband was going to be. She ran to a payphone and called him, and he showed up in about two minutes. He asked me not to report the accident and offered me twenty-five dollars. I didn't have to think about it long. I took the money. That night I bumped into a friend from high school who wanted to sell a flute he used to play in the school band. It just so happened that I had been thinking about learning to play the flute for quite some time and somehow this opportunity just fell into my lap. I told him I had twenty-five dollars, and now I had a flute. I bought a book about how to play the flute - the first half of the book was instructions on how to breathe with page after page of detailed illustrations. That's not what I thought learning to play the flute would be about. I taught myself to play a little bit but gradually lost interest.

The worst experience I had with that car was the time I was driving back toward Keene from Alstead one night. The metal straps holding the gas tank up under the trunk let go. They had rusted through and the weight of the gas in the tank caused them to break. The front edge of the tank was somehow still attached but the back edge of the tank was dragging on the pavement,

making a terrible noise and kicking up a shower of sparks. I was in the dark on a small, desolate road but as luck would have it, a short distance away I could see house lights. A nice older gentleman allowed me to come in and use his phone. I called Dad and told him what happened. He showed up a half hour later. He disconnected the gas line from the tank and dislodged the tank from under the car. Thankfully, I was running on empty, so the tank wasn't too heavy, and we were able to lift it into the back of Dad's truck. He had a metal five-gallon gas can that was half full and he put that on the back seat floor in my car. Then he bent the gas line to come up through an existing rust hole in the floor and into the gas can. I had doubts that this would work, but Dad assured me it would. He had done it before.

I didn't have the money to get the gas tank fixed so I continued to drive the car with the gas can in the back seat. I even filled it up a couple of times though the attendant at the gas station wouldn't fill the five-gallon can unless I took it out of the car. I even smoked cigarettes in the front seats, but I did warn anyone riding in the back that they probably shouldn't light up. How that car kept from exploding is a mystery. I must have been either fearless or just plain stupid. I ended up giving the car back to Peter. He fixed it up and sold it again.



Dad doing farm work 1930s



Dad and Ben



# Famous People I've Met



I shook Alexander Haig's hand outside the Navy Yard when he was campaigning for the Presidency in 1988. He stood at the end of the bridge, in the middle of the wide road at Gate 1. The Four O'clock whistle had just sounded and the stampede leaving the Yard had begun. No one approached him. Everyone kind of peeled off twenty feet to either side of him and just walked past. My first inclination was to follow the herd and keep going and not stand out or bring attention to myself. But I wanted to shake this man's hand. I walked up to him, stuck out my hand, and said, "Hi, my name is Rick", and he said, "Hi Rick, I'm Alexander Haig and I'm running for president". And that was it. I hurried off to my car parked in one of the lots outside the gate, trying to beat the traffic.

Another time - I spilled a beer on Dudley Dudley. It was in 1976 while talking with her at a Beerfest she was campaigning at in Portsmouth. I was having a difficult time standing up straight and poured some of my beer on her shoes. She ignored the beer

and kept right on talking.

I almost met Rex Trailer when he and his horse Goldrush were in a parade coming down Main St in Keene one time when I was about ten, but he turned to the other side of the street just before he got to where I was standing.



# Playing Albums on Pam's Record Player



**A**s a teenager, I never bought any 45rpm records. For one thing, I didn't have a record player, but Pam did. One Christmas in the mid-1960s she got a Motorola Stereo record player. Stereo sound was just becoming popular about then. The top of the record player swung open and separated into two speakers with log wires attached so you place them on either side of the room. And over time Pam bought several albums too. That was my introduction to listening to singers and bands that I wasn't familiar with from just listening to the radio. She had records from Bob Dylan, Barbara Streisand, The Monkeys, The Byrds, The Dave Clark Five, and more. I played The Monkeys songs over and over again to learn the words - sitting on the floor up in Pam's room when she wasn't there.

I listened to music on AM radio quite a bit beginning when I was in the ninth and tenth grades. It was strictly top 20 hits that got

played over and over again on one of the local radio stations in Keene: WKBK. I moved the tuner on Dad's portable AM radio up and down the dial looking to see what other radio stations might be out there. At night many of the less-powerful stations went off the air and thus the airwaves were quieter, and you could tune in stations from much further away. That's when I discovered station WABC in New York with disk jockey Cousin Brucie. He was the first real high-powered, entertaining DJ I had ever heard, and it was great. I listened in bed every night through a primitive radio headset Dad dug up somewhere for me. WOWO in Fort Wayne, Indiana was another big-time AM station. The local FM station: WKNE played the kind of music that older folk listened to. So, my first few years of radio listening were spent all on the AM dial.



# Memorable Moments of Pamela, Peter, Laurie, and Me



I have a somewhat vague memory of the time Pam, Peter, and I ran into the house and slammed the door behind us, trapping Laurie outside. The wooden door had ten or twelve eight-by-ten-inch panes of glass from top to bottom. Four-year-old Laurie pounded on the glass to be let in and pushed her fist clean through one of the panes. There was lots of blood and frantic screaming, by everyone. Mom wrapped up the gash on Laurie's arm tightly and took her to get it stitched up. I don't remember any details of the incident except the sight of Laurie's arm sticking through the broken glass. I'm sure she still has the scar. If we totaled up the number of stitches each of us received growing up on Marlboro St, Laurie would win, hands down.

Of course, the Pam vs Joker-the-Donkey incident was a very memorable one as well. I've talked about this event elsewhere in this book but every time Peter, Laurie, and especially Pam and I reminisce about our childhood, this episode comes up in the conversation. Apparently, Pam was a very trusting eight-year-old and ventured into Joker's fenced-in area to pick wild flowers which grew exceptionally well in the Joker-fertilized soil. Peter and I watched from a safe position outside the horse corral fence, as Joker appeared to be playfully chasing Pam around and around, finally pushing her down and sitting on her. As you might expect, Pete and I saw the humor in Pam's predicament. Pam seemed to be more mortified than in any real pain. As usually happened, Mom came running out and saved the day, though I don't recall just how she did it.

One time Dad brought home a very large piece of slate that was once a part of an old schoolhouse chalkboard, about 8 feet across and four or five feet tall. One of the missing slides shows that chalkboard (with a chunk of the slate broken out of the top left corner) leaning up against the garage door at the top of the driveway with chalk lines drawn vertically dividing the board into four sections. Pam, Peter, Laurie, and I were all busily filling our spaces with our artwork.

Opposite our driveway, across Marlboro Street, there is a road sloping gently downhill for a thousand feet. When we were young, the road was unpaved and seldom used. In the winter, we

had our sliding hill on the lawn in the back of the house, but occasionally, Dad brought us across the street to slide down the dirt road, if the road was sufficiently snow and ice-covered. Somewhere in his travels, Dad had found an old, very long sled that could carry several people and was perhaps ten feet long. He called it a traverse. The whole family rode the traverse down the hill together. Dad rode in the front to steer, but sometimes, if the road was icy, we got going sideways. I loved it. Sparks flew from the metal sled runners running over small rocks sticking up through the ice on the dirt road.



We didn't often go too far outside of Keene when we rode in the car with Mom and Dad. It must have been a little hectic with four kids in a station wagon, one in the front and three in the back seat. One of the few times we traveled any distance was our visit to Aunt Margaret's house each Thanksgiving Day. That car ride was an hour or more through every little town along the way. This was before all the highways were built and every town became an exit. That trip always had one stop along the way, in Newport. Dad treated us each to a small butter-soaked paper bag full of popcorn from a street vendor who had an ancient

two-wheeled cart where he popped the corn over a gas flame. The last time we drove through Newport on our way to Enfield (around 1967), the popcorn man was no longer there. I remember feeling sad about that, but it helped teach me that nothing is forever. On these longer trips, Mom came up with things to keep us busy. A favorite of ours was the four-legged animal game, where you got a point for each animal (with four legs) you saw out your side of the car. It was left side vs right side and if you sat in the middle you got to choose what team you wanted to be on. Finding a grinding stone/wheel counted for one hundred bonus points, but passing a cemetery took all your points away and you had to start over. Mom also kept us amused by singing songs with us. Mom knew lots of sing-along-type songs (probably from her childhood). I remember singing what Mom called a 'round' where we each had our own part or came in at separate times - like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat". She had one she called "White Choral Bells". Those were probably the only times I ever enjoyed singing.



# Some of My Favorites



**F**avorite Movie - Because I'm not much of a book reader (explained elsewhere), I've become more of a movie watcher. I love old movies, usually black and white movies, and especially those that are categorized as 'film noir'. These are usually crime dramas, where the principal actors are cynical and pessimistic. Most of these films were made in the 1940s and 1950s. However, my single favorite movie of all is "The Music Man", which isn't a dark, crime drama at all, but instead is an uplifting, romantic musical. The most moving scene in The Music Man is when Marian Paroo, the librarian who gives piano lessons, finally realizes that "Professor" Harold Hill, who this whole time she has been trying to expose as a fraud, has stolen her heart, and he realizes that she, who he initially sought to bamboozle, has stolen his. They begin to sing each other's song, and I start bawling. It happens every time. I first watched this movie many years ago when it first played on TV in the late 1960s, but then, about the time that Sam and Ben were born, I found that this

movie was featured on the TCM channel every year on Christmas morning. It became a tradition for me. A few years later Karen bought me the DVD.

Another film that always gets me is 'The Human Comedy'. Mickey Rooney plays a teenager, Homer, who stays at home in small-town Ithaca to support his family while his older brother Marcus goes to war (1943). Wonderful characters and a very moving story.

Favorite Actors - Humphrey Bogart, John Payne, Richard Widmark. The characters they often played were tough guys, especially Payne, who may not be as well-known as the others but made some of the film noir classics that I like best. They weren't brutes and they wouldn't start a fight but could take a lot of punishment.

Favorite Actress - Claire Trevor. She was in a lot of the old black-and-white crime mystery movies I like to watch.

Favorite Singer - Starting in the late 1950s, "The Wizard of Oz" was broadcast on television once each year, in the fall. It was on in the early evening on a Saturday or a Sunday so kids could watch. I always felt that getting to watch that movie was a special treat and that's where I fell in love with Judy Garland and the way she sang. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is perhaps her most well-known song but she had many other hit songs that she always sang with warmth and passion. There are other singers I enjoy listening to, mainly because they have wonderful

voices. Karen Carpenter, Nat King Cole, and Frank Sinatra come to mind.

Favorite 1960s-70s musical group - Moody Blues.

Favorite Records - "Dark Side of the Moon" by Pink Floyd is probably my favorite album. I also enjoyed all of the Firesign Theater albums. Not music, but really good comedy theater and fun to listen to.

Favorite Food - Unfortunately, I have lots of favorite foods. I enjoy cakes and pies and pastries in general. Flakey pastries really get my attention, like croissants fruit turnovers, and some of the rolls Mom used to make. I enjoy cheese, I could live on cheese and not get tired of it. I like a sharp cheddar cheese. Dad liked the stinky cheeses like Liederkranz and Limberger. I sampled some of the cheeses he brought home but I usually couldn't stand the strong smells and either spit them out or they never made it past my lips. Mom wouldn't let him keep his cheeses in the refrigerator because they stunk everything up she said. So he kept them sealed up tight in a box out in the garage.

Favorite Dessert - Chocolate Steamed Pudding. After Mom realized I liked this dessert so much, she made it for my birthday every year and even made it a few times in later years when I came home to visit. I have Mom's recipe book and I've made this myself a couple of times. The recipe book page for her Chocolate Steamed Pudding is stained with the splatterings of chocolate pudding batter from her electric mixer. Imagine a warm, moist,

chocolaty cake topped with sugary, maple-butter frosting. That's my number one favorite, but Mom's apple pie was right up there too. Oh - and her blueberry pie as well.

Favorite Meal I Cook at Home - I don't do a lot of cooking, and when I do, it will be something relatively simple. A boiled dinner of corned beef, cabbage, potatoes, and carrots is a favorite of mine that Karen enjoys too.

Favorite Thanksgiving food - Barbara's Spinach Casserole and her Sausage Stuffing. Barbara was Karen's oldest sister. She hosted Thanksgiving at her house in Portsmouth every year.

Favorite Snack - Oh boy! Don't get me started.

Favorite Junk Food - ditto

Favorite Color - I Don't think I ever had a favorite color, but when I was in the 2nd grade, my best friend Kenny's favorite color was black. I always thought that was funny.

Favorite Number - For as long as I can remember my favorite number has been 42. I don't recall why it is or when I first selected it as my favorite, but it always felt like a special number to me. One time Laurie came into my room with a handful of coins and said to me "If you guess how much money I have in my hand, you can have it". Without thinking I said, "forty-two cents", and I was right. She had this look on her face like I cheated or something, but she gave me the money. I feel bad now. I shouldn't have taken it. The 'Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy' confirms why 42 is such a special number. The essence

of that story is the all-important question - “What is the meaning of life, the universe, and everything”? Yup, the answer is 42.

**Favorite Sport to Play** - Throughout the 1970s I played a lot of softball, first with the Dover-B group (we enjoyed a cookout and played softball every Sunday at Hilton Park), and then at the ballfield in Seacrest Village in Portsmouth, where I lived for a couple of years.

**Favorite Sports Team** - When I was young, I was not a sports fan, didn't watch games on TV or listen to them on the radio, and was not a follower of any teams. It had been many years since the Red Sox were a competitive team and exciting to watch and at the end of each season, were usually at the bottom of the American League standings. That changed in the Fall of 1967 when the Red Sox won the pennant and went to the World Series. I was in the 10th grade and leading up to that September and October everyone around me (friends, kids at school, people on the street and in the stores) was excited and talked about the Sox, how the team did last night, and their favorite players. It all sounded kind of exciting and eventually, on the last few days of the baseball season, I got caught up in it myself. For the first time, I watched an entire game on TV. Back then it was pretty rare for games to be televised, usually only one game per week, on Saturday afternoons. But because it was such a tight race right to the end, the last few games of the season were all televised. All of the

World Series games were on TV as well. Two of the games were played during school hours, and believe it or not, the high school principal, Mr. Burns, allowed the radio broadcast of the games to be played over the school intercom to all of the classrooms. After the baseball season was over I discovered the mathematical world of baseball statistics, and I was hooked.

Favorite Video Game - Berzerk

Favorite Board Game - Karen and I lived in Newington (just outside Portsmouth) in the late 1970s and early 80s. Brian and Ray and some others rented a house nearby where they hosted a poker game every Thursday night. Then someone from that group introduced us to the board game called Risk. We ended up playing Risk more often than poker. While yardsaling with Karen, I bought an original version of the game from the late 1950s with wooden playing pieces, these seemed much nicer than the molded plastic pieces in the newer versions of the game. Years later, I was delighted that Ben and Sam, and some of their friends, enjoyed playing the game as much as I did. They always asked me to play too.

Favorite thing about Christmas - In the 1950s every town decorated and lit up their downtown for Christmas (but not until Thanksgiving was over with first). Everything was made red, white, and green. Strings of lights and garland and evergreen were stretched across Main Street, row after row from the head of the square down to the Goodyear store and the Ellis Hotel.

Bells were ringing playing all the traditional Christmas songs. This was recorded music coming from the church in the Square but I enjoyed hearing it while waiting to catch the late bus home.

Favorite Memory About Going to School - Just before the beginning of each new school year, Mom would do some back-to-school shopping with us. It could be new clothes, shoes, notebooks, pens, pencils, and erasers, or maybe even a new lunchbox. The thermos that came with a lunchbox was glass-lined and, at least for me, they broke pretty easily. I went through a lot of thermoses. I remember a new Superman lunchbox I got one year that I was so pleased with that I carried it around the house with me for a few days even before school started - sort of practicing. There was something about the very beginning of the school year that excited me. But the excitement only lasted a day or so, then that feeling evaporated, and school once again became boring and tedious for me. So, no I didn't have any particular memory of actually attending school, that I would call a favorite. The anticipation of the new school year is the only memorable highlight that has stayed with me.

Favorite lullaby as a child - There was a music box in my bedroom upstairs that played Brahms Lullaby and I fell asleep each night listening to that tune. Mom wound the crank on the bottom and opened the lid to start the music as she turned out the lights and went back downstairs. Opening and closing the lid pushed a metal rod down, with a very distinct slow creak, which

started or stopped the tune. This is one of the few mementos I have from my early childhood. I always imagined that the music emanated from the rows of holes inside, similar to a pipe organ. Pam explained to me, just a couple of years ago, that this music box is actually a cigarette holder. I still have this music box, but it no longer plays its tune.

Favorite lunchbox snack - I don't have a clear memory of a snack Mom would have been likely to put in my lunchbox. But I do recall some of the snacks we had as kids, or at least the ones I enjoyed. Number one on the list would have been a Ring Ding. Not the little inch and a half, two bites and they're gone Ring Dings that come in a box of twelve nowadays. When they first came out, in the 1950s, they were large, about four inches in diameter and they cost a nickel. One to a package. And they tasted like real chocolate - I believe that they were made with real chocolate, unlike today's version. I've gotten used to the taste of the modern chocolate-covered snack cakes. It's like getting used to Diet Pepsi after switching from Regular Pepsi. Over time, you can get used to anything and it becomes the new norm. Next on the list of favorites is Devil Dogs, followed by Twinkies, Snowballs, and some kind of cream-filled cookies like Hydrox. Modern moms would not consider anything on my list as healthy.



# Some Things I Would Still Like to Try - But Am Not Sure if I Trust Myself to Take Them On



I've thought about adding a lathe to the woodworking shop at Sam's house. I've watched lots of YouTube videos of guys doing some pretty cool stuff on a wood lathe. I haven't been up close to a working lathe and to tell the truth, they look a little bit scary with a chunk of wood spinning around a million miles an hour. You have to creep up on the whirling chunk with a big screw-driver-shaped cutting tool. Stupid and careless people must get hurt attempting that kind of thing. Maybe I should pass. I sprained two fingers just walking down the stairs into the shop last week, by catching them on the railing.

A couple of years ago I came close to talking myself into buying an electric bicycle. I took a short ride on one and felt

comfortable. I also liked the idea of being able to travel a considerable distance on a bike without exhausting myself. In my teens and early twenties, I put a lot of miles on my ten-speed. As I coasted down some of the long hills around Keene, I imagined the feeling I had was a little like flying. Back then nobody wore bicycle helmets. You couldn't find them in a store if you wanted one. Even when I started wearing a helmet in my 40s when I occasionally rode a bike to work at the Navy Yard, it felt awkward to have one on, but the guard at the gate wouldn't let me pass without wearing one.

Karen encouraged me a little bit, to go ahead and buy an electric bike if I really wanted one. But at the same time, she cautioned me that maybe I'm not as steady as I once was and that I weigh a little more now than I did in my younger bicycling days, and bumps and bruises will take longer to heal now than they did when I was twenty. She wasn't exactly trying to discourage me, just pointing out the realities of the situation. I realized I had to consider my limitations based on my age and current physical (as well as mental) condition and I eventually talked myself out of getting a bike. The kid in me still wants one but the bottom line is that I just can't trust myself anymore. Now I sometimes think I should be wearing a helmet just to go for a walk.

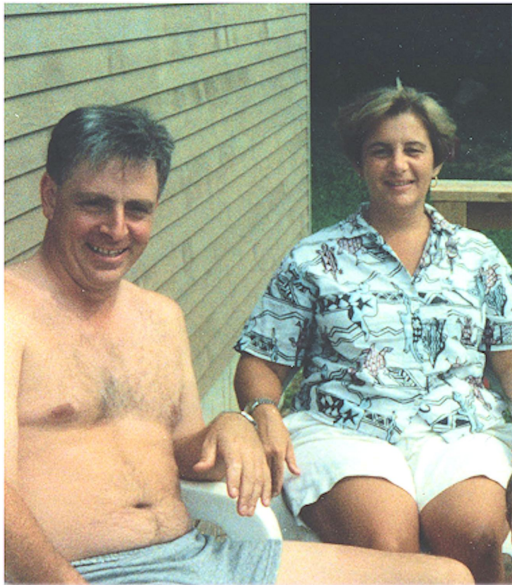
I don't think of it as a bucket list item but I've thought of taking a train trip, alone, before I'm too old to enjoy it. Sitting comfortably looking at the scenery seems like an enjoyable way

to travel even if I have no particular destination in mind. Maybe I'd even spend a few days in a city somewhere along the way. I've never done anything like that before, especially overnight and I've become so dependent on others (Karen in particular) that I would have to learn how to do some things for myself. Find safe places to go, make reservations, plan what I need to bring along - that sort of thing. Sometimes I daydream about going on adventures like that but then I start to think of things that could go wrong. What if I got off the train at a rest stop and didn't get back on in time and was left behind? What would I do if I found myself in an unfamiliar and unsafe-looking place, alone? What if I got lost, or hurt? I can talk myself out of things really quickly sometimes.

Perhaps I should dial it back a bit and just plan a day trip, driving my car to places within an hour or two from home. I haven't done that kind of thing for several years but there were many times, while I was researching my family history, that I made day trips to towns throughout New Hampshire and Massachusetts. I think I should drive over to Keene and spend the day reminiscing with myself. I can handle that.



At Karen's house around 1980



Fifteen years later on Goodwin Road

# The Worst Job I Ever Had



**I**t was the summer before I started my senior year in High School. Pam had a summer job working as a waitress in a small restaurant on Granite Lake. They were looking for kitchen help and she asked if I was interested. The pay wasn't very good, and the hours were from four in the afternoon until closing time. But I thought to myself, why not? How difficult can working in a kitchen be? Maybe cook some burgers, wash a few dishes, eat some good food!

I worked with the head cook (actually the only cook). I was the helper, which meant, do whatever the cook told me to do. He and I had a simple routine. He would say something like, "Four plates. Two pork chops. One fish. One chicken". I put out four plates on the counter, then I had to remember what sides went on each plate along with the pork chop, fish, and chicken. Was it baked potato, green beans, squash, etc? I wasn't allowed to get the baked potatoes out of the oven with tongs. "They might damage the potato", Hank said. I had to use my hands! I hated

that because I burned my fingers on the rack many times and dropped more than a few potatoes on the floor, then had to pick them up quickly and brush them off.

I got along with the cook; he treated me fairly. He and his partner (Hank) owned the restaurant. Hank ran the dining room and made sure each plate that left the kitchen had the correct items on it. That's where I had trouble. Apple sauce went with one thing, mint jelly went with another, and a lettuce leaf or a cream sauce went with something else. That was the toughest part of it all for me - trying to remember what garnish went with each entree. Hank gave me a hard time whenever I put the wrong garnish on the plate. He never came right out and told me directly what garnish should be on that plate. He only told me that what I had on there was wrong. It was like playing twenty questions and I had only five seconds to guess the right answer. It was very stressful, and I've never performed well under stress. I couldn't take it anymore, so I quit after my second shift. Pam brought home my paycheck for the week. It was just under sixteen dollars. That was the only time I ever worked in a kitchen.

# Learning to Drive



I'm sure this is just my point of view, and they wouldn't agree, but I don't recall Mom and Dad teaching me how to do things. By that I mean, they wouldn't demonstrate how to do something. Instead, they would hand me a tool, like a paintbrush, and say "Put some paint on the brush and then paint it on the wood", leaving out details like - paint with the grain, using only the tip of the brush, be careful not to put too much paint on the brush, etc. Dad would hand me a hammer to pull nails out of a board and say, "Put the claw under the nail and pull it out". Then they would proceed to tell me how I did it wrong. At that point Dad might grab the hammer out of my hand and say, "Like this", but I think, usually on my first try, I was left with little direction. I can't imagine that they didn't show me, by example, the way something should be done, but what sticks in my mind is that they were quick to tell me when I was doing it incorrectly. The all-time king of examples of this would have to be when Dad tried to teach me how to drive a car. Pretty simple you'd think.

Gas pedal, brake, turn signal, but most cars back then had a 'standard' transmission - nothing automatic about it. So, there was an additional pedal on the floor called a clutch pedal, that you needed to use every time you started to move the car from a stopped position and every time you changed gears. When starting in first gear you had to let out on the clutch as you simultaneously stepped on the gas, and that was my introduction to how a clutch worked. "Let out on the clutch and step on the gas" were Dad's instructions. I had no idea what I was in for. I am very much a visual learner and I just couldn't picture how this clutch thingy worked. I either had the car bolting forward and stalling or not moving while the engine revved up. Dad's next comment was - "No. No. No, not like that". After a half dozen more tries and no more explanation from Dad than "No, not like that", I got out of the car and walked home. Fortunately for me, we were in a parking lot across the street and just down the hill from home. I don't remember who it was, but someone ended up drawing me a picture of a clutch and how it worked and then it clicked. I now understood what I had to do and with a little practice, I was able to get the car moving and could start learning all the other stuff I needed to know to drive on the road.

My memories of things like this could be somewhat distorted by time and if Mom and Dad were here to tell their side of the story, I'm certain it would include details I've forgotten or choose to



ignore. I confess that when I try to show someone how to do something I have a habit of overexplaining to the point of becoming obnoxious about it. Karen's pointed out to me, many times, and I must agree, that's a poor way for me to explain a process. I need to keep my instructions concise but the urge to cover all aspects of a task is overwhelming for me. I've always had a problem being brief and tend to lose my audience through sheer boredom. I'm sure Ben and Sam can give you examples of this.





# Reading to Ben and Sam



**T**here were a few short years when Ben, Sam, and I had a bedtime routine that ended with a book of some kind. On most nights, just before bedtime, the three of us settled down close together and I read a book aloud to them. We liked doing our read-aloud in Sam's room. He had a queen-sized bed that we could all fit comfortably in. I read and they listened quietly. Sam usually fell asleep first and I would finish the chapter for Ben and then bring him into his room.

We liked picture books. Richard Scary stories with Lowly Worm were a favorite. Also Mr. Little's Noisy Truck (or as Sam called it - Mr. Noisy's Little Truck) with its flaps the kids opened throughout the book revealing the causes of various noises hidden around the old farm truck.

"I Spy" and "Where's Waldo" books were more suited for Ben at the time, but Sam enjoyed them as well. I liked them too. We spent lots of time searching and searching around each of those pages looking for Waldo in his red and white striped shirt, hat,

and glasses. Even though Sam was younger he was very good at finding him.

Karen introduced us to some book series. Two series I remember very well. The first was “The Boxcar Children”. This story was about four orphaned children living in the woods in an abandoned train boxcar and fending for themselves. As I read the stories to Ben and Sam I thought to myself that these books were probably written some time ago. I couldn’t see a story written in modern times placing young children in such a potentially dangerous scenario. Yet there was nothing in the stories that made you feel the children were ever in any danger and in fact, were living rather comfortably in their makeshift home. Ben and Sam only saw the adventure and the happiness in the children’s lives. Sam liked to play in the woods (just over the stone wall, within shouting distance from our deck on Goodwin Road). I like to imagine that he was living out some of the adventurous times we read about in our books.

The second series was “Goosebumps”. These stories were a little bit scary and came along when the kids were a little older. By that time, they were beginning to read books by themselves. Karen always had a great variety of children’s books in the house and consequently, Ben and Sam both became good readers and enjoyed reading. In the summertime, she paid the kids a penny a page for all the reading they did.

## My Stories | Rick Lynch

I attempted to read the *Hobbit* to them but after several pages, I saw that they were getting a little restless and concluded they were not very interested in that story. The story was probably too slow-moving, and their imaginations were not yet ready for some of the long-drawn-out descriptions that the story was full of. Plus, there weren't any pictures.





# Ben and Sam Always Called Us Karen and Rick



When he was very young, Ben realized our names were Karen and Rick and started using those names when he spoke to us. At first, I looked at it as a novelty and thought it wouldn't last, but he reasoned with us that those were our names and everyone else called us Karen and Rick, so why shouldn't he? The only answer I could think of was children should refer to their parents and mom and dad, but to Ben that wasn't good enough. We thought after a while he'd go back to calling us mom and dad again, so we didn't make a big deal out of it.

Anna, their grandmother was appalled that our kids didn't call us mom and dad, but then Mom was appalled by a lot of things. And after a while of being called Rick and getting used to it, I couldn't think of any reason for that to change.

There were a couple of times, at the Kmart store in Portsmouth, that Ben and Sam wandered off, probably in search of the toy

aisle, but Ben made Sam think they had been abandoned. We heard over the store loudspeakers - “Karen and Rick, please come to the customer service desk. Two little boys are looking for you”. Sam especially, panicked when he found himself separated from us. He would call out our names, hoping we would come find him. I learned to appreciate the fact that if I heard a child calling - “Mommy, daddy. Mommy, daddy, where are you?”, it wasn’t Ben or Sam.





# Mom Told Me Many Times That I Had No Common Sense



I never took that as an insult, though I probably could have. I understood that when Mom said something about me or someone else perhaps, she always meant it as constructive criticism. I think that's how she thought of it. Like the time she told Karen and I that we were getting fat and should get a dog so we could go for walks with it. Karen's feelings were a little hurt but I brushed it off. Karen claims that she seriously contemplated getting a pig she could walk and more importantly, bring over to Anna's house and have it sh\*t on her red shag carpet.

Mom never hesitated to let others know what she thought. But when she told me, 'Ricky, you're a smart kid, but you have no common sense', I wasn't sure what she meant and just shrugged it off. Many years later I looked up the definition of common

sense. It means - good sense and sound judgment in practical matters. OMG, I think she nailed it! She was right about me. If I take my time and think things through, I can make good choices and sound decisions, but if I make a quick guess or jump to a conclusion - then I am often wrong. Karen sees the same thing in me. I have a couple of examples.

More than once I've dismantled what looked to me like a malfunctioning power tool trying to find out why it wouldn't start when I pressed the trigger, only to find out later that the power cord was the problem. One of those times I had borrowed a friend's circular saw and when I opened it up, the trigger spring flew out never to be seen again. It cost me forty dollars to get a sixty-dollar saw fixed. In the meantime, I discovered the one-hundred-foot extension cord I was using had a break in it.

Then there was the time Sam had my car and was driving to Portland. He called me from the side of the highway saying the car had broken down. I went to help but was unable to start the car. We ended up having the car towed to a garage near Portland and then a few days later to our neighborhood repair shop in Eliot. After two expensive towing charges, I was informed the car had run out of gas. Do you see a pattern here? I tend to overthink a situation and fly right past the obvious answer. I didn't know what Mom meant when she told me many years ago that I lacked common sense, but I think I understand now.

# Dad's Carriage Stone



Dad always had a truck he used for work. He bought new ones periodically, but in the 1960s and beyond, they were always the same style. They had rack bodies which meant they had a high wooden bed with removable wooden fence-like panels on all sides and dual rear wheels to carry a lot of weight. For a while, he carried a large granite block in the back of his truck for traction in the snow. Most people used sandbags or cement blocks for traction, but Dad always did things a little differently.

The granite block was an old carriage stone dug up from the front yard of a house on West St that Dad tore down. Granite is very heavy, and this stone must have weighed twelve to fifteen hundred pounds. Pete tells me Dad's 1967 GMC truck was only three months old that snowy night he came home late from the Elks Club and made it down to the upper end of Marlboro St. before crashing into a tree. That block slid forward crushing in the back of the truck cab but somehow left Dad completely unhurt. That was one of the times they took Dad's license away.

He hired the teenage son one of his buddies to drive him around and work with him for the next ninety days.



Dad's truck in the mid-1950s at the house Mom grew up in. Note the for sale sign on corner post.

# My Fourth-Grade Fountain Pen



**I**n elementary school, beginning in the fourth grade, everyone was taught how to write in cursive. Teaching us to write cursive became known as penmanship class. In every classroom, up above the chalkboard and the windows was an alphabet-themed banner or border displayed in both block and cursive lettering. Everyone was expected to learn to write in cursive and all future schoolwork would be completed in cursive in preparation for the adult world.

Pencils were for arithmetic, but for everything else, pen and ink would be used. Luckily for me, the inkwell was outdated before my time, though every wooden school desk I ever sat at had that inch-and-a-half or two-inch hole up in the right-hand corner for the small bottle of ink, called an inkwell, to sit in. Old fashioned pens, or dip pens, had a tip that held a tiny amount of ink and was dipped periodically into the well to get ink onto the

tip. Then fountain pens came along. These had a bladder inside the pen and by pulling a lever on the side of the pen, the ink would be sucked into the bladder, eliminating the need to constantly dip the pen in the inkwell. In the 50s, when I started using a fountain pen, a replaceable ink cartridge was introduced. This made the process of refilling a pen a lot less messy. But I still managed to get plenty of ink onto my fingers and my clothes as well.

Among the stupid pranks I pulled in my grade school years was the time, in Miss Lancaster's fourth-grade classroom, I thought it would be 'witty of me' to 'spill' a drop or two of ink from my pen onto the wooden seat of the desk next to me before the girl who used it sat down. Patty didn't fall for it and showed the teacher who, for some reason, immediately suspected me. It wasn't a very good plan and I hadn't foreseen the possible consequences of my actions. I was forced to clean that chair and every other chair and all the desks in that room over the next several days during morning AND afternoon recesses. Looking back, I can see that my sense of humor was woefully underdeveloped. I still suffer from that today. When I try to be clever, I don't always come across that way to others.

I recall filling a bladder-type pen from an inkwell a few times, but I don't think I used that type of pen often and it was probably just a novelty for me. But I did use the cartridge pen for a few years and remember still using it in Junior High. Ball-point pens

had been around since the 40s, but they were costly until a French company named Bic came out with an inexpensive disposable version and then everyone switched to using those.

In the fourth grade writing with a fountain pen made me feel all fancy-pants; a little like a snob. There was something about unscrewing the cap from the pen and scratching out words on a sheet of paper that felt satisfying. Words set down on paper with the nib of a fountain pen look distinctly different than those written with a ballpoint. It's been many years since I last used a fountain pen and occasionally, I contemplate revisiting that experience, buying a pen, and writing a letter to my Aunt Marion. She might appreciate seeing that.







# Haircuts

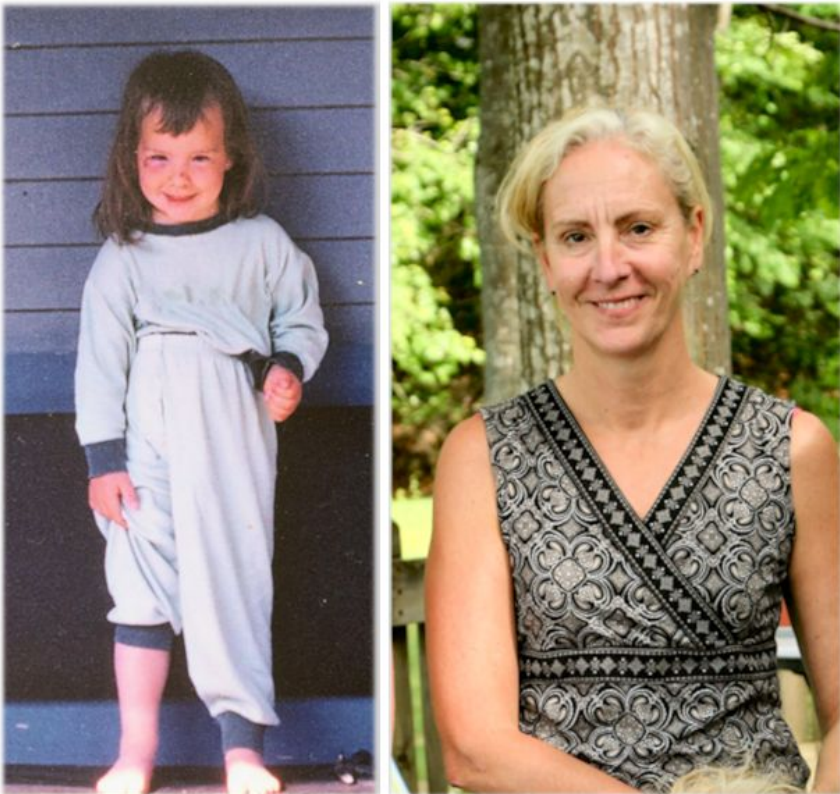


When we were little, Dad cut Peter's and my hair. I didn't get my hair cut in a barber shop until I was in the fourth or fifth grade. Dad told us that he went to barber school. Peter tells me that Dad learned to cut hair when he was in the army during WW2, and that's where he got his electric shears with all the attachments.

In the summertime Pete and I always had our hair cut really short; a buzz cut (in the 1950s it was called a crew cut). Neither one of us enjoyed getting our hair cut. I wanted Dad to buzz my hair quickly and be done with it, but it always felt like it took Dad forever. The solution he came up with was for him to pay us a penny for each minute it took him to cut our hair. For that, I could sit there quietly and stop complaining.

One year, once school was out for the summer, Dad let Pete and I choose the hairstyle we wanted. I had always begged him to give me a mohawk haircut and that summer he finally did. I loved it. Mom didn't like it, but she went along with it probably thinking

that we would get tired of it in a day or two and Dad would cut it off. She was probably embarrassed to be seen with us. I got the regular one stripe mohawk and Pete two stripes. I wish I had a photo of us sporting those haircuts. Laurie tells me Dad was ready to give her a mohawk too, but Mom stepped in and put the kibosh on it.



My little sister, Laurie Ann (Lynch) McKinney

# A Few Random Memories



I'm sitting on the floor in the living room, playing at something while Mom is doing her ironing and watching TV. It's afternoon because one of Mom's soaps is on. I think it's 'As the World Turns'. That was probably her favorite. I must have watched that show a lot with her because I remember most of the characters in it, though I had no idea what any of the drama was about. It could have been summertime, and that's why I was not in school. Or, it could have been when I was in kindergarten because that year, I went to school mornings and came home on the bus at noon. Mom spent a great deal of time ironing in those days. She ironed everyone's shirts and dresses and pants. She had a twelve-ounce Coke bottle with a stopper on it that was perforated, and she sprinkled water out of it onto the clothes. This was before she had one of those irons that shot out steam through holes in the bottom and sprayed water when the button on top was pressed.

Even though Mom had an electric dryer from about 1960 on, she preferred to hang clothes out on the line. Dad set up two wooden poles twenty feet apart with cross members at the top, then ran four rows of clothesline rope between them so Mom could hang out lots of washing. Her clothespins were kept in a cloth bag hung from one of the ropes. Mom had these expandable wireframes that were put inside each leg of a pair of dress pants to stretch them tight and put a crease in them as they dried. I thought whoever came up with those things was pretty clever. Mom hung the wash outside year-round. She claimed that clothes dried outside on the line always smelled better than they would if run through the dryer. In the winter, if the temperature dropped the clothes would freeze solid. I recall seeing Mom stack up the frozen clothes to bring them inside.

Both Mom and Dad could ice skate pretty well and introduced us to skating at an early age. Mom had white figure skates and Dad used a pair of brown and black hockey skates. I wore skates called double-runners which were more stable than adult single-blade skates. I am not sure if the skates didn't fit, or my legs and feet just weren't strong enough to enable me to stand up but I remember Mom telling me to stop skating on my ankles and stand up straight. I couldn't stand up on the skates at all and gave up. So, Dad pulled me around the ice on a sled that he brought along for Peter but we both fit on. I never did learn to

skate when I was young. One Christmas Mom bought me a pair of black figure skates thinking that maybe I could do better with that kind of skate. They were very high and gave my ankles a lot of support. But skating was not my thing. I found it too difficult and a lot of work. I had more fun sliding on the ice with my boots on. When I started coming to Portsmouth in the early 70s, I developed a renewed interest in skating because my new friends there all played hockey.

In the 5th grade, I dressed up as a girl for our Cub Scout Halloween party. The whole Cub Scout Pack (about thirty kids), all their parents, and lots of siblings attended. The party took place at our regular monthly meeting in the Wheelock School gymnasium, though any official Cub Scout business was quickly concluded so we could enjoy the games and refreshments. Mom, who was also our Den Mother, helped me with my costume. Without her, I would have been dressed as a hobo, the same as I always was for trick-or-treating. But this was a special occasion and Mom put a lot of thought and effort into my costume. I assume that I wore some of Pam's clothes. I wore a white party dress with colored polka dots that stood way out from my legs like an umbrella. I imagine this was accomplished with a petticoat underneath. The outfit included white ankle socks, shiny black shoes with a strap over the instep, white gloves, and a white wide-brim flat-top hat with a red ribbon hanging down

in the back. Mom put some makeup on me too. I recall having red cheeks and a little lipstick on. As an added touch, she had me put on a simple red mask covering just my eyes. I got lots of attention when I walked in. I played it up and no one could guess who I was. I loved it. Mom did a great job.

Mom and Dad both smoked so there were always matches lying around the house. I've written about my fascination with fire elsewhere in my stories so it shouldn't be too much of a surprise when I confess to the time, I started a fire on the living room rug. I was about five at the time and found a book of matches on the table in the living room and couldn't resist. How I learned to light a match I don't recall but I think I was pretty good at it. There was a large glass ashtray on the table as well and I thought it would be safe enough to make a small fire in it. In the ashtray was a used, balled-up tissue, and when I touched the burning match to it, it caught on fire quickly and burned up nicely. Now I needed another Kleenex. Mom usually kept a box by her bed, so I got a tissue from there and brought it back into the living room. I held the burning match in one hand and the tissue in the other. The tissue went up in flames much quicker than I anticipated and, in my haste, to throw it down into the ashtray I lost control of it and it fell onto the rug. The tissue was fully engulfed, and I started to panic and didn't know what to do. Luckily, this was before Mom had her red shag carpet installed. That carpet might

have caught fire quickly and who knows what would have happened. But the rug we had then was a light gray, very dense, and short-piled. I ran to the kitchen to tell Mom that there was a fire in her living room. She saved the day, once again. I remember that she scolded me for playing with matches, but I didn't receive any real punishment. I wonder how she broke the news to Dad when he got home from work that night. I don't recall anyone ever mentioning that incident again.



For many years, our house was painted gray with pink trim. Note the large elm at the foot of the driveway. There were seven of these big, beautiful shade trees in our yard.





# I Was a Cub Scout



I joined the Cub Scouts in the fourth grade when I was eight. I don't recall wanting to join or asking Mom if I could. I think it was a case of Mom signing me up and telling me to go. I belonged to Den number four (Cub - Bear den, get it?) and our Pack was 303, which included kids from Wheelock School. The Pack had a monthly meeting, run by the Pack leader, in the school gym. Each of the four Dens in our Pack also met weekly after school at the house of one of the two Den mothers. There were about ten of us in Den-4. I was a Cub Scout for three years and during that time we had many different Den moms. I think we burned them all out. We were a pretty wild bunch: at least some of us were. Picture two ladies trying to lead ten eight-year-olds in some kind of constructive activity while three or four of the lads just want to raise hell. It must have been a daunting and thankless task. I recall getting yelled at quite a bit. Mom took her turn and became our Den mother for quite a while. I was probably a little better behaved for her only because she

could punish me more effectively than the other moms could.

We actually did lots of fun things in the Cub Scouts, especially as a Pack. We went on hikes through the woods and climbed Mt. Monadnock. We had winter skating parties and bonfires, and we marched in parades on Memorial Day and at Christmas time. Once or twice I got to march in the front row of the Pack, carrying the Pack's blue and gold 303 banner.

The biggest Pack event of the year was the Pinewood Derby. Every scout designed and put together, from a kit, a racecar to compete in the derby. Everyone took turns racing their cars down a fifty-foot-long, downhill track, three cars at a time, until one car was determined the winner. I kept my car and my fourth-place ribbon for many years.

I spent three years in the Cub Scouts but didn't want to move on to the Boy Scouts when I became old enough. I went to a step-up day with the Boy Scouts to get a taste of what that would be like. I was shocked at how serious they were at their Troop meeting. That wasn't for me. I was just in it for the fun.

Ben and Sam were in the Cub Scouts, at least for a short while. We had a few Den meetings at our house. I helped out when Karen wanted to teach all the boys how to use some simple tools. I brought a five-foot length of square wooden post inside the house, along with three or four hammers and some long nails, to teach the kids how to drive a nail into wood. What could go wrong?

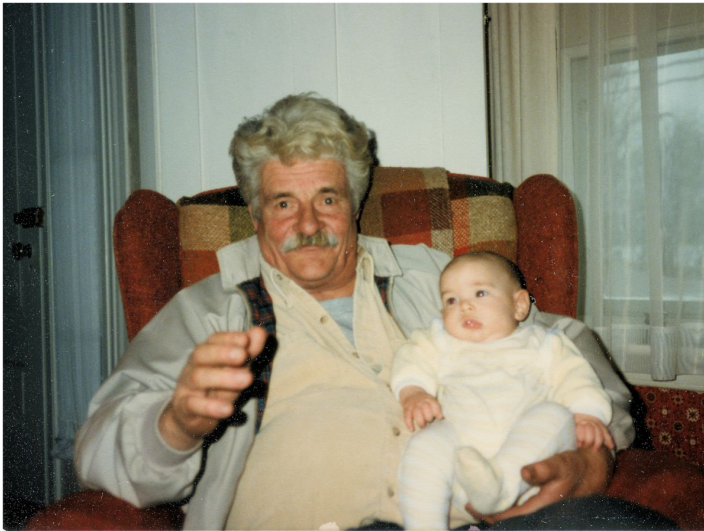
# Dad Died in February of 1988



**I**t was early morning and I was still in bed having just woken up when I heard the phone ring. Karen said hello, but said very little after that and then hung up. She came into the bedroom and said, “Your father died last night”, and then she burst into tears. I took her in my arms, hugged her, and said, “It’s ok, Hon”, trying to comfort her. We sat there for a few minutes while she explained what Mom had told her: that Dad went to bed the night before and never woke up. I was sad of course but I didn’t cry. I comforted Karen for a bit and then got up and got ready for work.

I had assumed that he had a heart attack in his sleep but when I saw Mom later that week, she said the doctor explained to her that Dad simply stopped breathing. I’m not sure if I understood how a person just stops breathing but I didn’t press the issue because Mom was satisfied with that for an answer.

The last time I saw Dad was when we visited him and Mom that Christmas (two months earlier). He was reading a book in his chair in the playroom when we were getting ready to leave and I went in to say goodbye. We spoke a few words to each other then I leaned down, kissed him on the cheek, and whispered in his ear. “I love you, Dad”. I don’t ever recall doing that before that day and I thought about that on my way to work the morning he died. I was glad I dared to finally tell him how much he meant to me.



Dad and Ben. The grandkids called him Popon.

# More Recent Family Gatherings



**A**fter Mom died in 2003, I visited with my Robinson relatives occasionally at Uncle Frank's in Marlborough. Over the last ten years, after both Uncle Frank and Uncle Chuck passed, those have occurred less and less often. As Pam, Laurie, Peter, and I have grown older and have our own grandkids, family get-togethers have shifted away from Mom's Robinson family and have centered more on our Lynch clan.

When we were younger, we all came home to the house on Marlboro St at least a couple of times per year, sometime around Memorial Day and usually the weekend after Christmas. By then, these were just Lynch family get-togethers: Peter and Bubbles (his wife Pam) and their sons Peter and Mathew, Pam and Phil and their kids Patrick and Patrice, Laurie and Kevin, and Karen and I along with Ben and Sam. After Mom died in 2003 everything changed.

Now when I visit with my siblings and their families it's usually not in Keene (unless Pam comes up for a visit from her home in Virginia). Laurie and Kevin have hosted many summertime get-togethers over the last thirty years at their home in York, Maine. They have a lovely place on the York River where we've gathered, sometimes for special occasions like anniversaries and wedding parties and other times just to relax, enjoy the day, and catch up on the latest family news. Ben and Sam and their families are often with us, as well as Peter and Pam. In recent years Peter's son Little Pete along with his wife Meghan and their four boys have often attended. In the last couple of years, two new places have become popular Lynch family gathering places. One is Ben and Allison's home in Ipswich, Massachusetts. Each October Ben hosts his Ciderpalooza where we make cider from apples in his orchard and spend the day together. The other is at Little Pete and Meghan's home in Westborough, Massachusetts when they host their January Lynch Party. There are lots of kids around now, and that number seems to grow every year.

When Karen and I became a couple, I was welcomed into the Blethroade family and joined in their family celebrations. Each Thanksgiving was celebrated at Barbara's house in Portsmouth. Those gatherings occur a little less often now since Barbara's passing in 2017, and the coming of a new generation of grandchildren in the Blethroade family. Ben and Sam each have

their own families now and they spend some of their holidays with their wives' families. This means that Karen and I are sometimes left alone on Christmas. But that's fine, I think we like it that way, and holidays can be just another day for Karen and me. We see our family often and don't have to rely on holidays to ensure a visit with the grandchildren. It's now become a tradition for us to join Sam and Jenn on Thanksgiving at their house in York.



Thanksgiving at Barbara's house

Christmas Eve was always a special night for Karen's family to get together. Soon after Karen and I were married, we hosted a Christmas Eve party at our house that included Karen's mom and dad (Liz and Jimmy) and her siblings, Barbara, Joan, and Glenn, and their families. Sometimes twenty people or more. In the first few years, Karen supplied some special fun for the family. On Christmas Eve each year, she wrote a poem including everything

every family member that went to the tune of “Twas the night before Christmas”. Everyone enjoyed it so much that we all excitedly looked forward to Karen’s new edition of the poem when the following Christmas grew near. She also came up with a hilarious family game where she cleverly enticed everyone to secretly, using anonymous notes, spill the beans about themselves and others and divulge family secrets. Then we all had to guess who it was about. Lots of great family stories came to light that way. We always had Yankee Swaps and played other games that everyone in the family now expects to see on Christmas Eve. Just this past Christmas (2023) the marshmallow game the saran wrap ball and the Yankee Swap were all played. It’s nice to see that Ben and Sam and all of their Blethroade cousins want to keep this tradition going.



The Marshmallow Game on Christmas Eve



Another family gathering tradition that lived on for a number of years was Karen's 4th of July party at our house on Goodwin Road in Eliot, Maine. I don't recall the reason why we decided to begin hosting this annual get-together for family and friends, maybe it was just to have a good reason to mix up a bunch of margaritas. The first year we hosted this party was in the mid-1990s when we invited a few friends and family over for a cookout to celebrate the 4th and enjoy playing games in the backyard and swimming in the pool.



I always wanted to make a professional-grade slip-n-slide and this was my chance. I bought a roll of heavy gauge plastic sheet twenty feet wide and one hundred feet long and spread it out in the back yard which had a nice gentle downhill slope to it. A water sprinkler at the top of the slide provided enough lubrication for the kids to go down at a pretty good clip, but it wasn't long before someone suggested a little dish soap could make them go even faster. In later years the slip-n-slide grew into a two-hundred-foot-long monster. The only thing it lacked

was a mud pit at the bottom, but Karen wouldn't let me dig up the lawn. We had our July 4th party almost every year from then until we sold the house in 2012.



Barbara, Joan, and Karen

# The Almost-Lost Family Stories

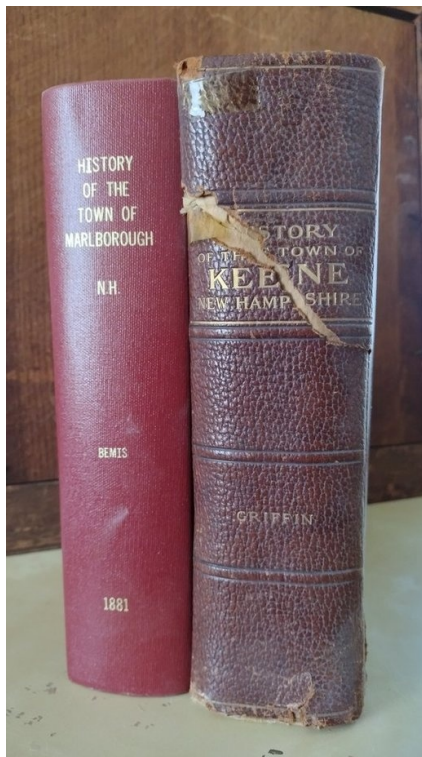
or

## Voice Clips from Chuck and Frank



**D**ad had a small collection of town history books. These books were popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s and eventually just about every town in New England had published one. These town histories were monumental efforts and went into great detail and many of them devoted a considerable portion of their pages to family histories - genealogies. When I was still a teenager, I became interested in seeing if there were any names in these books that I could tie into Mom's or Dad's family. At the time, I knew virtually nothing of my family history. I knew who my grandparents were, as well as a few of their siblings, but that

was all. Among Dad's collection was a history of Keene, one of Marlborough, and a few other area towns around Keene, such as Roxbury and Marlow. Mom was able to point out several of her family members from the 1800s in the Marlborough volume and Dad found a few connections to his family in the history of Keene.



It fascinated me to find small bits of information here and there and I was able to start putting together a map of our family tree. But I could only go so far with the resources available to me and there were many dead ends. So, I put all my notes and my

drawings of family trees into a shoebox and stored them up on the shelf in the pantry, where they sat for many years. Later, when the internet came along, I discovered lots of additional resources for family history research, such as – census records, maps, newspapers, wills, town directories, birth, marriage, and death records, and military records.

With all these new sources of information, I started adding more and more to what we knew of our family history. The familiar family lines grew further back and branched off to more and more surnames and many more locations. I also began visiting cemeteries in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, where I found names and dates to be more reliable than some of the scribbled census records I had been relying on.

I followed Dad's family back to County Longford, Ireland (thanks to Kevin for finding that one), and Mom's back to early colonial Boston. Yet, almost all of that information is limited to only names, dates, and places. There was only a very rare glimpse into what these relatives of ours were really like. What was missing were the personal stories and descriptions of family members most of us never knew. At our family gatherings many years ago, when Mom's and Dad's generation were still with us, there was always lots of storytelling and reminiscing but sadly, many of those memories are now lost. I neglected to write the stories down or try to record them in some way. That's one of my biggest regrets.

After Mom died in 2003, I realized that I had started losing the ability to save our oral family history. My grandparents and their generation were gone, and now both Dad and Mom were gone so their memories, and their stories were gone forever too. Luckily, Mom did leave a few journals and letters which contained family details here and there, but she had the habit of mostly just reporting the day's weather and what time Dick arrived home from the Elks Club that night.

I wanted to start focusing on collecting and preserving any family stories that could be saved. So beginning in 2005 I compiled lists of questions for Uncle Frank and Uncle Chuck. They were both in their 80s at the time. I sent each of them a small digital voice recorder and pages of questions and prompts to stir their memories. My intention was to get them to tell their own life stories but also to give us a sense of what some of the other family members were like. I posed questions about their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, and all the other important people in their lives such as teachers and friends. Both Frank and Chuck were good storytellers and as I expected, they did not disappoint. They both did a terrific job. The recordings are not only full of almost-forgotten family stories but are very entertaining as well. These recordings can be listened to online at [lynch-robinson.com](http://lynch-robinson.com) (follow the first Robinson link and then hit the "voice clips" button at the bottom of the page.)

# Sometimes Money Burned a Hole in My Pocket



In the summer of 1971, I worked for Dad and Uncle Jim, roofing. On hot days we started early and knocked off at noon time because the asphalt shingles got too soft to work with and the temperature up on the roof was unbearable. And during that summer there were many days where the temperature reached the mid-90s. Every evening, after it cooled down, I got on my new, ultra-lightweight ten-speed bicycle and rode all around Keene and the neighboring towns. I had been riding bikes all over for many years but this summer, because I was working, I had a little money in my pocket, and I enjoyed spending it frivolously.

I don't remember how it started but each evening when I went out riding, I had a craving for a banana split. I liked everything about them, the ice cream (in some places you got to choose what flavors), the chocolate and strawberry sauces, the bananas,

the whipped cream, and especially the nuts - if they were the right kinds of nuts. Not only did I have a craving, but I also wanted to find where they made the best banana splits. Every place made them a little differently. Some had very generous portions of ice cream, some used peanuts instead of walnuts - I learned to ask when ordering because I didn't care for peanuts on a banana split. In the ice cream take-out places, they were served in a thin plastic boat that made it easy to spill. If it were particularly hot out, I would look for a place where I could sit inside in air conditioning because the ice cream wouldn't melt as fast.

Each late afternoon I roamed the streets searching for new places where I could get one. I was surprised at the number of stores in the area where I could buy a banana split. They were all good in one way or another. One had the best whipped cream, another had the best chopped walnuts, and another had the best ice cream flavors. But I don't recall having a favorite. I think what I liked best was finding a new place to sample.

First, there were a few ice cream parlors in the area. Some of these establishments were seasonal and specialized in serving ice cream treats. But banana splits could also be found in many restaurants, diners, and lunch counters - like the one I visited several times in the Woolworth's store downtown. They made a nice banana split, served in a glass pedestal bowl. What attracted me to Woolworth's lunch counter, for a short time anyway, was



their pricing policy, or gimmick that pertained only to banana splits. They had a big bunch of inflated balloons perched on a stand on top of the counter. Inside each balloon was a small folded-up piece of paper with a price written on it, between one and forty-five cents. When you were served your ice cream, you popped a balloon to determine its cost. I remember twice I paid forty-five cents and a third time I paid thirty-nine cents.

After three or four weeks I was tired of banana splits. I probably moved on to something else to obsess about. I don't recall what that might have been, but I imagine money continued to burn a hole in my pocket.



# The End



So, these are some of my stories. I say “some” because, quite frankly, there are some things I would sooner forget. Everyone has their secrets, and I am no different. When I started writing this little missive a year ago, I began by compiling what turned out to be a long list of topics and memories I wanted to consider. Over time, I revisited that list and started moving some of the topics to a second list I named “maybe don’t write about these things”; like the one or two times in my life I’ve almost been arrested by the police. Usually, those instances involved me being embarrassingly stupid and/or drunk. There are things I will probably never write about. But who knows; the older I get, the less I care what anyone else thinks of me. Maybe in my next volume I can include some of the more uncomfortable memories I’ve been unable to forget about completely.

I hope you’ve gotten some enjoyment from reading my stories, though some may not be very interesting, especially for those of you who weren’t there. Pam, Pete, and Laurie may have more of

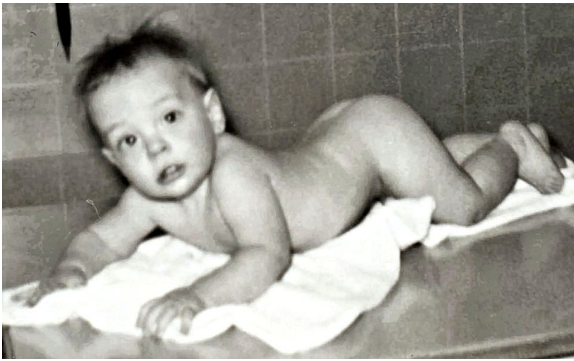
an appreciation of some of the reminiscing I've done about our home on Marlboro St or our grandparents, aunts, and uncles. I can imagine almost everyone else gets a little bored listening to someone, like me, go on and on about those things. I myself find some of the stories about work or family a bit boring, but I wanted to write my memories of them down - especially about family - so they won't become lost.

While I could have written more, what I have written covers a lot of ground. I think it's enough for now. I thank you for taking the time to read through this book, or at least some of it. Also, accept my apologies for any redundancies you may have noted.





No resemblance between Sam and me, except for the chapeau



The naked baby photograph (me, of course)



Pam, Laurie, and me in Keene 2013



Karen and me in Mom's living room - it looks as if I were dating a fourteen-year-old



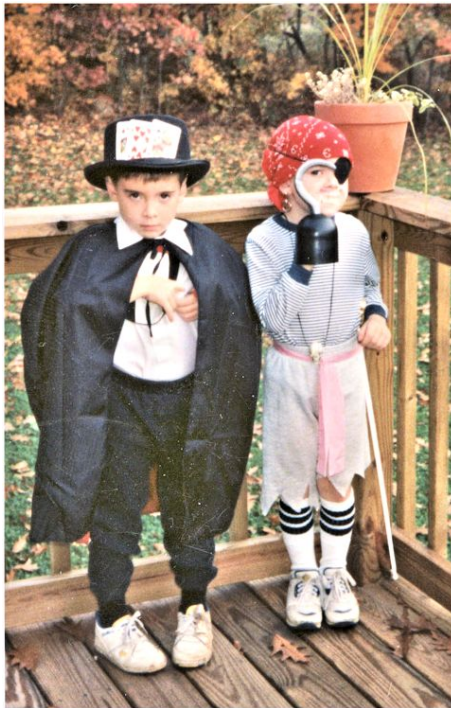
Karen's family - Barbara, Karen, Jimmy, Joan, Liz, and Glenn



Barbara, Joan, Glenn, and Karen - Thanksgiving at Barbara's



Ben took dressing up for Halloween very seriously







Ben, Mom, and Sam at Prescott Park in Portsmouth

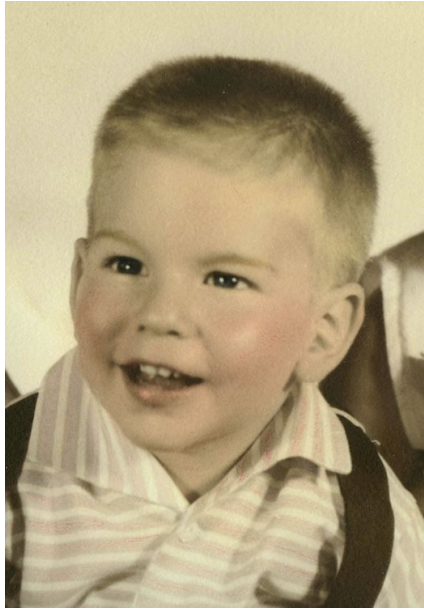




Pam and me, on Elm St



Pammy and me watching television in the living room on Marlboro St, a long time ago



Peter Michael (Henry) Lynch



And a few years later



Laurie Ann Lynch



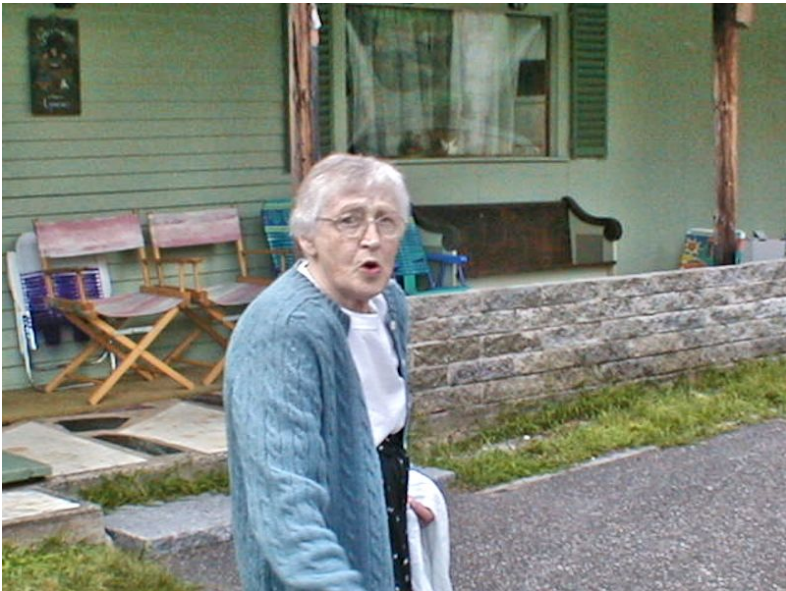


Pamela Ruth Lynch





Mom with grandson Patrick - 1980



Mom in 2002



Miles Elliott Lynch



Porter Blethroade Lynch

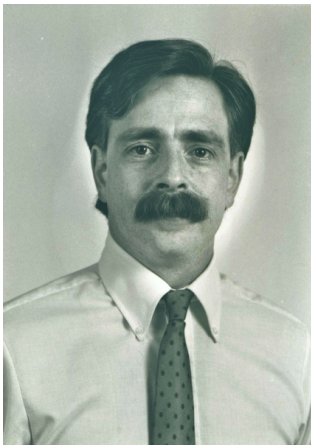




James Jeffrey Lynch



Meghan and Peter's house, January 2024



1988 Navy Yard photo



Pam and Ricky



1981



