

***THE WAY  
IT  
WAS***

**GROSSE ILE**

1934 - 1952

By

***Tom Lennox***



# Why I Wrote This

The police didn't come. We weren't suspended. We didn't even get detentions back in 1950 when they found out that the loud booms that reverberated off the Canadian shore at lunch time were coming from the cannon a friend and I had built in the school shop and were shooting across the Detroit River .....

A few years ago, I realized the way kids are growing up nowadays seems a lot different from the way I grew up. It just isn't the way it used to be. I decided to write down some of my memories before I forget it all. I don't think that some of my growing up was much different than in other small towns, but there were some things about Grosse Ile that were unique - and I suppose I did some things that were somewhat unusual.

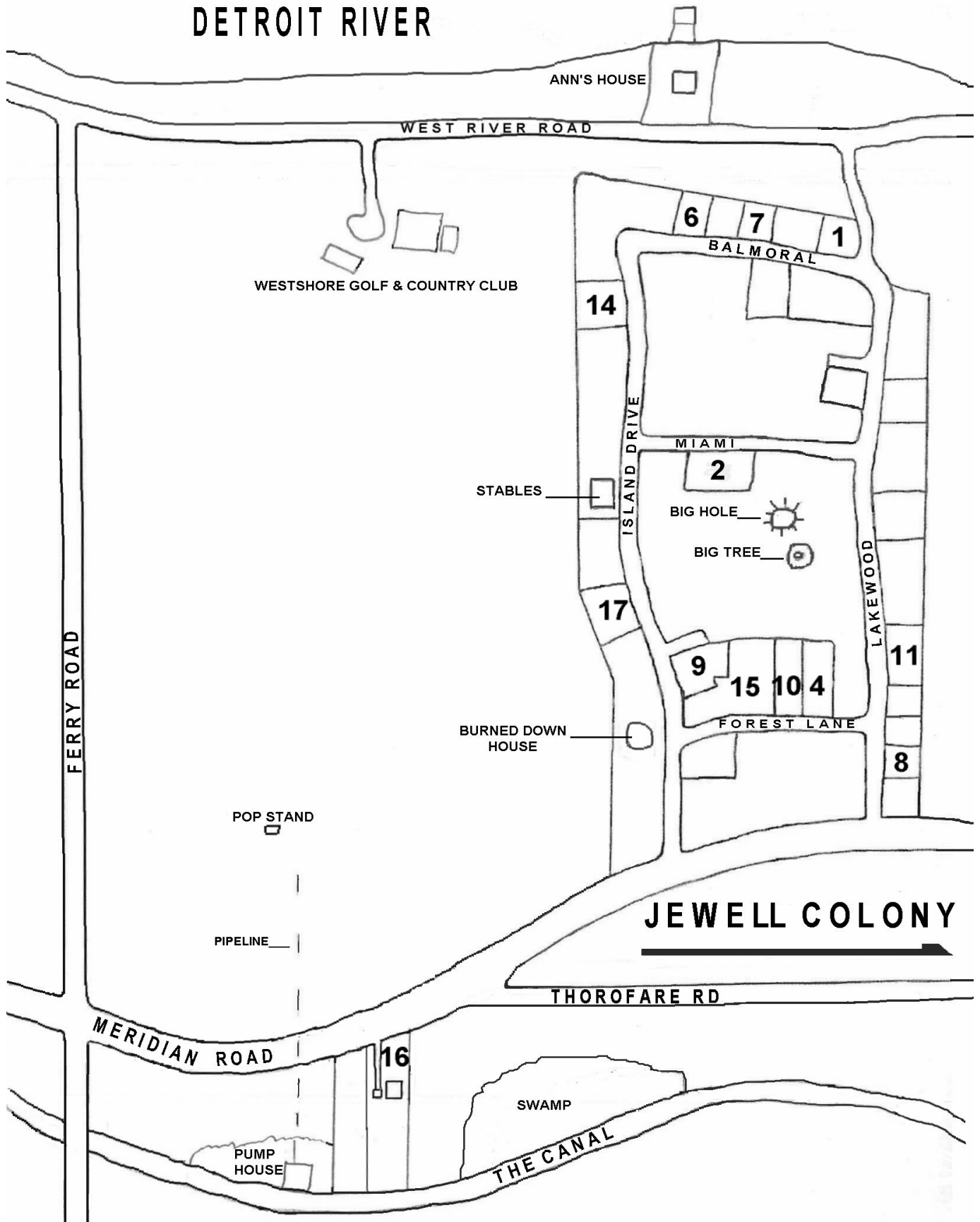
Grosse Ile was a small town - population about 2,000. School classes were smaller - about 30 students per grade level. We knew all the kids in the class and their families - and probably had been to most of each others homes. Some of the parents had labor jobs, some were sports personalities, many were engineers or executives in some of the large Detroit companies.

I wasn't aware of any major clicks among the kids. We all did a lot together. I don't think we were too worried about the times or the state of the world even though our grade school years were during World War II. Most of our class would go on to further education. I wasn't the best student and I wasn't the worst. I didn't join any gangs - I don't think there were any - or break any bones or get expelled - quite. I wasn't on the baseball or basketball or football teams, but I could run a pretty good half mile in track. Most of the girls thought I was cute and the boys didn't and that was fine with me.

I've tried to remember things as well as I can. I can't remember a lot of names or dates. I'm sorry if I left anything out that anyone else remembers and thinks should be included, but it was a long time ago. So this is the way I remember it was.

Tom Lennox

# DETROIT RIVER



JEWELL COLONY & WESTSHORE .... The Way It Was

# The Way It Was

## Memories of Grosse Ile, Michigan - 1934-1952

My family included my father, Thomas Smith (Scotty) Lennox, who had moved from Falkirk, Scotland to the US in 1921, my mother, Frances Dorothy Griffing Lennox (always called Billie) who came from the Jackson, MI, area, and my sister, Billie Jean (BJ), who was 4½ when I arrived on Tues., at 8:00am, Sept. 11, 1934. I was born at Wyandotte General Hospital, down river from Detroit, Michigan. They named me Thomas Morton (Morton was my Dad's mother's maiden name). I weighed 8 lbs., 1 oz. My mother said that I was born hungry and demanded two bottles right from the time I came home from the hospital - and I still can eat a lot!

We lived in Bretton Woods in Trenton, MI, then moved to Grosse Ile 1936 into a small house in the area of the intersection of Thorofare Rd. and Church Rd - none of which I remember.

Grosse Ile is an island about 10 ½ miles long and 2 miles across the middle. (See map) Its north end is in the Detroit River and its south end is in Lake Erie. It has area of about 10½ sq. miles and was, before the Europeans arrived, occupied by the Potowatomis, who called it Kitch Minishen. Over time, it was owned by the French, the British and the United States. It was purchased from the Potowatomis by the McComb brothers on July 6, 1776.

Two bridges on the west side of the island connect it to mainland Michigan, about a 3<sup>rd</sup> of a mile away. The northern bridge was built in 1913 and was, until recently, a toll bridge. When I lived there, many people went down to the southern bridge, built in 1931, to avoid the toll even though that meant several more minutes of driving. The main north/south channel for Great Lakes shipping is dredged along the eastern side, which is about a mile from Ontario, Canada, with several small islands in between. (See maps.) These islands were the last link in one branch of the Underground Railway, making a pathway for escaping slaves to cross the river to safety in Amherstburg, Ontario. Several of the houses along East River Rd. have extra rooms in the basement with outside exits. Some have larger than usual tool sheds in the back yard. These facilities supplied a safe resting place for the fugitives until the time was right for the crossing. There is now a museum in Amherstburg telling about the slave trade and the Underground Railway. It's well worth visiting.

From 1871 to 1915 the New York Central Railroad crossed on a bridge from Trenton, ran on tracks parallel to Grosse Ile Parkway and then crossed a bridge to Stony Island, but never made it all the way to Canada. Several of the old supports still remain on Stony Island.

There is a 60 ft wide canal, cut in 1895, diagonally northeast to southwest through the top two thirds of Grosse Ile. It is only 3 to 8 feet deep and the water moves quite slowly. It drains the water out of the low center area of the island to keep it from being so swampy. Residents living along the canal use it to get their small boats out of the fast 8 to 10 mile an hour current in the river - and it allows them to park their boats in their back yards. When we lived on the canal, we had a row boat and the "Buccaneer." (More about that later).

When we arrived, a great many of the Grosse Ile breadwinner residents were upscale owners, executives and businessmen from large corporations around Detroit - Charles and William Fisher of Fisher Body, Ransom E. Olds of Oldsmobile, William S. Knudsen of General Motors, Vernor of Vernor's Ginger Ale as well as men from Ford Motor Company U.S. Steel, Wyandotte Chemicals and many others. Henry Ford and his wife had property but didn't build a house. There was very little industry on the island, but there were a few local businesses - a grocery store, a drug store, a beauty shop, a barber shop, 2 gas stations, the Post Office, a welding shop, and a channel dredging company. The Navy Base was on the south end - and a chemical waste dump, which produced a great deal of tax money, was on Hennepin Point at the north end of the island. The Coast Guard had a station on the East Side, facing Canada. There was a boat house and a residence for the station keeper. That assignment was good for several years of duty - one officer did everything, customs, river patrol and immigration control.

In 1937 we moved into a larger house, which was in Jewell Colony (#1 - see map). Jewell Colony was originated in 1925 by the three Jewell brothers, Wayne, Frank and Henry. It was a very early planned community, about a half a square mile that had once been part of a 9 hole golf course, so most of it had no trees. Only about 18 of the 95 lots were occupied when we arrived, mostly around the perimeter of the colony and only one (#2) in the center section. The colony was crossed by two north/south roads, Miami and Forest Lane. The area east of Forest Lane hadn't been part of the golf course and was all woods. The area west of Forest Lane, about 2/3rds of the colony, had open fields. The section between Miami and Forest had "The Big Hole" (more farther on) and "The Big Tree," a large oak tree, probably 3 ft in diameter - which looked gigantic to a kid. If you climbed it, you could look across the "vast" grasslands and see the whole colony.



I'M THE LITTLE ONE IN  
THE MIDDLE

Every couple of years several of the residents got together and had a fall "burning" party. Since that one house in the open field area had a large yard around it, they were able to burn off all of the fields without much problem. This meant that for years small trees never got started and

the land always looked the same to us - and the kids had a large field, about 700 ft. x 800 ft., to play in that never had growth more than 3 ft. tall. Several years later when the burning was stopped the trees quickly grew up and took over.

By 1938 or 1939, we were in house #10, on Forest Lane and a family named Overesch lived



I WAS GOOD AT HOLDING UP TREES

next door in #4. They had three children, Kip and Kay were twins, about BJ's age and an older sister, Connie. I played with Kip sometimes. He had a large supply of toy guns and he had big trucks with seats on top so that you could ride on them. A hook and ladder truck was given to me and I had it for years. I'm sorry it wasn't kept for my own children. Mr. Overesch had a large ad agency in Detroit and they entertained a lot.

One year Mrs. Overesch was planning a spring garden party in their backyard - a major social event. All the tulips and spring flowers were just beginning to bloom. A friend of mine, Jim Stadler, and I decided to pull up a lot of her plants in the morning of the day before the party. Why? I don't know. Jim's Dad was an executive at Chrysler Corporation and my Dad was the manager of the Socony Mobil Grease Plant in Trenton. Having fathers with fancy jobs doesn't give little kids any more sense than anyone else. My Dad, sent some of the Socony Mobil yard maintenance men over to replant everything that afternoon.



OVERESCH HOUSE -  
ALWAYS BEAUTIFULLY LANDSCAPED

In 1939 or 1940, the Rodericks moved into house #9, diagonally behind ours. Mr. Roderick was a chemical engineer at Wyandotte Chemical company, one of several chemical engineers who lived in Jewell Colony. I don't remember much about them then because the oldest child, Grace, was two years younger than I and Sally was 4 years younger. Lee, Judy, Jim and Connie were yet to arrive. When the Roderick girls got a little older, we became good friends and I spent a lot of time with them - especially after their cousin Kay, who was my age, began to visit them a lot. There seems to be a story that one time I put kerosene in Sally's hair and told



DOESN'T SHOW MY WINDOW ENTRANCE

her that I was going to get matches and light it. I don't remember it. I don't think I would have done that - especially lighting it - but Sally still remembers being afraid that I would.



The Roderick's back yard had a low spot that in springtime formed a pond, about 50 ft. long, about 30 ft. wide and about a foot deep. Mr. Roderick would run a couple of garden hoses from the pond up over a higher area of land by the house and down into the basement drain and start a syphon to get rid of the water. This sort of thing was a great attraction for me. The only problem was that in playing around with the hoses, I sometimes pulled them up to in the air and they then they lost suction, so when he got home from work he'd have to go into the basement and get the syphon started again. At times like that, I don't think he was too happy with me.

On the south side of Island Drive, just opposite to where Forest Lane connects, there had been a house at one time. It had burned down and about 2/3rds of the basement had been backfilled with dirt - and there were some hills of dirt around the perimeter of the foundation, too. The chimney still stuck up about 3 or 4 feet above ground level and there was also part of an old fireplace. You could get down about half way into the basement level where it hadn't been completely filled in. It provided the Jewell Colony kids with a fascinating play place.

In the summer of 1939, our family went to Scotland to visit my Dad's parents in Falkirk,



MOM, BJ AND I ON THE MONTCLAIR

about half way between Edinburgh and Glasgow. We went over on a large steamship - the SS Montclair - a 5 or 6 day cruise. Cruise ships were the only reasonable way to go - not much in the way of commercial trans-Atlantic flights at that time - and, besides, cruising was elegant (at least in 1<sup>st</sup> class) with formal dinners and dances and a lot of entertainment. Mom and Dad had one stateroom and BJ and I had another. There were air conditioning ducts connecting to the rooms. BJ tells me that about 5:00am in the morning I would yell into the vent which woke up several other travelers. They

couldn't tell which room the sound was coming from, but apparently there was discussion around the ship about noisy kids in that area.

In Scotland, we stayed with my grandparents at the "Gas House" in Falkirk. It was a 2 story red brick building with apartments that allowed the managers of the gas plant (coal gas) to live on the plant property. My grandfather was the assistant manager. The front of the building faced the road, the back was adjacent to the railroad tracks. The plumbing pipes for the building all ran up and down the back outside wall of the house since there were no freezing temperatures. And there was an area - what we would now call a patio - where there was a separate wash house for doing the laundry. The railroad delivered coal to be baked into coke to produce gas. The gas was stored in tanks for the town to use for heating, cooking and lighting. The coke was sent to the steel mills or sold for use in home heating.

While Mom and Dad were out sightseeing at castles and gardens for a few days, our grandparents took care of BJ & me. Knowing that we might find some of the Scottish food different from what we were used to, our parents had brought several cans of some of our favorite foods, particularly canned fruit and Chef Boyardee Spaghetti. We begged our grandmother to open one of the cans of spaghetti for lunch. When she opened it and looked inside, she was horrified and exclaimed, "Ye canna' eat that - it's all turned to worms!" and threw the can away, refusing to believe our pleas that it was fine to eat. Obviously she had never seen spaghetti before.

We came home sooner than we had planned because things were becoming uneasy in Europe and there was fear that a war (WWII) might soon start. We sailed back in very stormy weather on the Duchess of Athol. My Mom was extremely sea sick and stayed in bed most of the time. I've read since that our course was very close to the Queen Mary's and that passengers on that ship actually had broken bones from being tossed around so much.



DUCHESS OF ATHOL

Billie Jean tells me that on my 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, which was on the ship coming back, I was presented with a dark brown cake. It was not the chocolate devils food that Mother would have made for us. It was a plum pudding!! BJ said I had the most disgusted expression on my face she's ever seen. Neither one of us would touch that cake. It was probably the only time on the trip we refused food.

Unfortunately I remember nothing of the whole trip - most of my memory doesn't date back to any earlier than age 8 or 9 - but I have been told about it by my parents and sister - and fortunately I had a chance to visit Scotland and the Gas House again, as an adult in 1981.

Another story I heard was that when I was 5 or 6 I left a stuffed panda out in the driveway. My parents had been out for dinner and came home after dark. In the car headlights, the panda looked like a skunk - which just sat there in the driveway and wouldn't move. It seems that they stayed there in the car for quite a while before they finally realized what the furry creature was.

When I was about 7 or 8, I used to sit out on the garage roof, accessible from my bedroom window and offering a much better view of the neighborhood. The roof was made of wooden shingles, which tend to get slippery when damp. One time I slid off, my toes caught in the gutter and I fell onto the gravel driveway, hands and face down. I got a little scraped up. This event I still remember. Maybe that's why I don't like heights.



There was a horse riding stable on the south side of the colony between Westshore Golf & Country Club and the colony property just west of Waldeck's (#17).. Sometimes the kids in the neighborhood went over and watched the horses when they were exercising them in the outdoor corral. One time someone cracked a whip and a small piece of the leather tip on the end of the whip flew off and hit my right little finger. That knuckle still has a bump on it. After a while the stable went out of business and was vacant. Then it made a great place to play in - dark stalls, haylofts, mysterious rooms, and owls and pigeons flying around inside overhead. It would have been a wonderful place to put on a circus (- but maybe none of us had seen enough circuses to think of that. I don't remember anything about going to a circus or anyone I knew going to a circus.) A few years later, the stable burned down.

## SCHOOL DAYS

Helen Virginia Beyster (#8) was a friend of mine even before we started school and we went all through school together. In Sept. 1939 we started kindergarten, along with 9 other kids, at the Grosse Ile grade school. Our class was mostly the same group all the way from early elementary school through high school graduation in 1952.

Our kindergarten teacher's name was Mrs. Harris. The next year, in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, the teacher was Mrs. Walker. I believe she taught there for 27 years total and was very well liked by all. I can't remember much of kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade - a few things about a lot of large wooden building blocks, nap rugs, wooden floors and the location of the rooms and that reading was difficult for me all through grade school.

The elementary school, built in 1911, had Kindergarten, 1st, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades and the office on the first floor, which was up 4 to 5 steps from the ground level. Lavatories, kitchen and cafeteria were in the basement, down about 4 or 5 steps from ground level. The basement windows had long, low window wells half above the ground, half below so you could see out somewhat - great for hiding in during recess. You had your choice between staying in the class room with the lunch you brought or going to the cafeteria.



I must have taken my lunch all of the time. I remember eating in the classroom - I don't ever remember eating in the cafeteria.

Each classroom had its own attached coatroom with rows of hooks to hang coats and sweaters. Just coats, hats and boots - and leggings for the girls - but no back packs back then. I don't even remember that we had book bags - I just remember carrying the books. The coatroom

had a door to the center hall and a door to the classroom. The floors were well worn varnished hardwood. It was similar in many ways to Center Street School in Mentor that all of my children attended, but it was made of grey block and covered half way up the walls with ivy.

K through 3<sup>rd</sup> used the playground in front of the school with swings, teeter-totter, merry-go-round - and lots of nice bushes that were good to hide in. The playground was about 100' x 150' with a 4' chain link fence around it (no escaping!!). The older classes used the back yard.

The 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades and the library were on the second floor. There were two doors leading into the balcony that overlooked the gymnasium and stage. The second floor classrooms each had a fire escape chute out the side. You got into them through double folding doors about 40" wide and 3 1/2 ft. high. The chutes were about 3 feet in diameter and about 30 ft. long. With a bit of wax paper under you, off you went. We had fire drills now and then - and sliding down the chutes kept them clean. (For some reason, though I remember the fire drills well, I don't remember any air raid drills.) There were no doors at the bottom of the chutes and in bad weather we'd climb up inside them from the playground to keep dry and to play. In the winter, the wind blew into the classrooms under the fire escape doors. That area was always the coldest spot in the rooms.

During those years I was in most of the school music programs held at Thanksgiving, Christmas and in the Spring. I didn't play an instrument so I was a Song and Dance Man. I even had a solo - I remember it just a little - sitting in a chair in the middle of the stage singing about spring fever and not liking books, which I guess was very appropriate for me.

## **1940S TO 1950S - SOCIAL LIFE IN GROSSE ILE**

My parents belonged to the Grosse Ile Golf and Country Club. This was the major social club on the Island. It had a large, fan-shaped swimming pool ringed with 3 ft. high concrete urns filled with flowering plants. The pool had 1 and 3 meter diving boards, with an overflow area of shallow water for little kids. One time they filled the overflow area with sand to make an artificial beach. The golf course was nationally known for pro tournaments. During the summer, on Thursdays, the Club had "Family Night" in the club house dining room. There was a buffet - fairly simple food that the kids and adults would both like - hot dogs, potato salad - picnic type food. The families sat at round tables - all with white linen tablecloths and napkins. Afterwards, the parents retired to the bar or the porch for cocktails and the kids (about 25 to 30 of us) went into the lounge next to the dining room. All the chairs would be turned to face one wall where a movie screen was set up. Someone on the staff would pull the curtains to make it dark and then would show old 16mm cartoons. These were 15 to 20 min, black and white, silent films. Occasionally a color film would show up. The younger kids liked it, but the older kids like my sister often snuck out. They didn't want to watch the

same old cartoons week after week. Sometimes they went to play pool with the kitchen staff. All through the 50s and 60s this was still one of the main social clubs for Grosse Ile and the southern Detroit area. There was a similar club in Grosse Point serving the area north of Detroit.

My Mom was one of the Grosse Ile champion women golfers. One year she won the Championship at Grosse Ile Golf and Country Club and was the Runner-up at Westshore Golf and Country Club, which was adjacent to Jewell colony and which was eventually partly owned by my Dad - more later.

The week before deer season each year, Dad and some of his friends would take the bar tender, Jacques, from Grosse Ile Golf and Country Club (which had curtailed operations for the winter) up to Northern Michigan to act as a cook at a hunting lodge that one of them had in the Traverse City area. Their most important supplies were poker chips, cards and bottles of whiskey. Dad and several others would head for home the day before hunting season opened. Many of them never did any hunting - just dealing and calling. In the spring, the whole group would go back to the lodge to cut wood so they'd have a supply for the next fall.



DAD'S THE TALL DARK HAIRED GUY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BACK

The Martins, who lived on the South Eastern part of Grosse Ile (see map), were quite well to do. They had large green houses and several acres of gardens. There was a tall pine tree in the front yard with buried electric cables running permanently to it. Every year from the 1920s to 1965 they lit it up as a huge outdoor Christmas Tree, except for 4 years during WWII. Our family and others on the Island would stop over before Christmas for the adults to have a drink or so and the Martins would give the kids a large jar of all kinds of hard candy. They were very nice and this was just something they did to be sociable. From what I hear, this custom was discontinued due to some vandalism and Mr. Martin's death. The garden acreage eventually became a sub-division with lots of houses.

For the fourth of July, a lot of the Islanders, went to O'Connor's house on the NE side of the island on the edge of the river. (see map). We'd put down blankets in their large back yard and eat the picnic dinners we had brought. They supplied kegs of Vernors Ginger Ale. When it got dark sometimes we could see some of the big fireworks display from Detroit about 15 miles up stream - but that didn't matter so much to the kids because the O'Connors would set off a large fireworks display themselves - shot them out over the river. This went on for several years and there was

never any charge. Everybody just came and the O'Connors liked to do it. (I'd like to do that, too!!!) There was no worry about fireworks laws and regulations - city officials would have been attending and "supervising."

It was common during those years for the two churches in town to have bingo parties before Thanksgiving and Christmas for fund-raisers. It didn't make any difference if it was the Catholic or the Episcopal Church - everyone just went back and forth. Mom was very fond of going to the bingos and quite often won something. The prizes usually were turkeys or chickens. The problem was that when you won a bird you got a large wooden cage containing a LIVE turkey or chicken. You'd have to take it home, kill and dress it yourself and cook it up and eat it soon. There were very few home freezers at that time. Dressing your own bird was quite a normal thing to do. The same for ducks shot during hunting season in the fall.

For many years, Mom drove BJ and me up to Detroit to Hudson's Department Store before Christmas to see Santa, have our pictures taken, see the fancy windows and go shopping. This was equivalent to going to Macy's in New York at Christmas - THE place to be! We'd have lunch at Hudson's restaurant - white linens and heavily embossed silverware and fine china - a major event in a child's life. At that time there were lots of jobs in the auto plants and steel mills. Detroit was a bustling city with lots of shoppers and businesses downtown.



OUR DOG BRUCE GETTING A TREAT

Every year after Christmas Mr. Day had a dog party in his back yard. All the neighborhood dogs were invited and were supposed to come with their owners on a leash. In the afternoon, Mr. Day set out pans of "dog stew" that he had been cooking all morning long. He had a tree with hot dogs on it so the dogs could pick off their own treat. There were also hot drinks of various kinds to keep the human guests warm inside.

On New Year's day, a family who had a large Tudor style house brought in a pipe (bagpipe) band. There was a large inside balcony at the second level around 3 sides of one of the rooms and the band played from there. You could hear them quite well from the outside - many people would stop to listen - and their friends would drop in for a little " warm cheer." Dad and some of his buddies drove around in tux and tails and top hats stopping often at other friends houses, too, to wish them a good New Year and get another - and another - bit of "cheer."

Many times when we had a good snow we could sled down the hill on Lakewood Drive to where it connects to Forest Lane. There was not a lot of traffic, so it was a good place to sled. The roads were not plowed out and the snow was often well packed. You also could tie a rope from your sled or toboggan to the back of a car and be towed around the roads.

## CLARK LAKE VACATIONS

In the summertime during the early 40's & 50's our family would sometimes rent a cottage for a few weeks at Clark Lake southeast of the Jackson area where



I LIVED IN A LIFE JACKET

Mother had grown up. Clark Lake is big enough for sail boat races, which was what made it a popular summer resort area. We usually rented the same cottage each year. A house keeper was hired to come along so that Mom could have a real



LOTS OF FRESH AIR, NO HEATING OR AC

vacation herself. Dad took a week or so off but the rest of us stayed longer. When he was there, Dad was usually on the lake by sunrise and was done fishing by about 8:30am. Then we could use the boat. It seems we just about lived in the lake. The water all around the edges was shallow and great for wading.

Clark Lake is in the Irish Hills - a glacial hills area - and fed by deep springs from beneath and from the edges. The incoming water was very clear and cold - 56 F. - and we kept our pop in a box in a spring in the back yard.



CREAM SODA & GINGER ALE



UNCLE DON'S FISH POND

Mother had a brother and several sisters in the area - we sometimes went to visit. Our Uncle Don had a pond in the backyard with goldfish. We enjoyed chasing the fish around with our hands - Uncle Don didn't mind but I don't think the fish were too happy to see us. But most of our time was spent in Clark Lake, so Uncle Don's fish didn't have to worry very often.

World War II lasted through grades 2 to 5 - 1941-1945. I remember that we had a hard time getting rubber boots and that people couldn't build houses. In school, we were often given dried fruit and canned juice for morning breaks. With the wartime scarcities, maybe someone thought we didn't get enough fresh fruit at home. I never did like the dried apricots.

Sometime in 1943 there was a scrap metal drive on the island to collect metal for war materials. All the metal was brought to the high school and piled in the back yard. There were old cars, windmills, hot water tanks, kettles, all kinds of good stuff - copper, steel, aluminum, brass - the pile must have been 75 ft. wide and 30 ft. high. It probably got rid of a lot of antiques, which made the ones that were left a lot more valuable, no doubt. The antique market must have profited in later years.

### SPRING OF '43

We moved out of Jewell Colony and rented house (#16) about 500 ft. southeast on Meridian Road and next to -THE CANAL! When the canal was originally dug, the dirt was piled up at the sides, creating dikes along the edges about 5 ft. high and 10 ft. wide. This made the canal seem deeper and wider than it really was. By the time I lived there, the dike was well covered with trees and bushes, some leaning out over the water.



THE UPPER RIGHT WINDOWS WERE IN MY ROOM

Since much of the land around the canal was generally low, water built up between the wall of the dike and the higher ground, where the houses were, 50 to 100 ft. away. This formed nice swamps with marsh grass. In some places, cuts were made through the bank to drain the water into



WINTER VIEW OF THE CANAL

the canal. High water levels in the lake and canal in the spring would reverse the flow of water and fill up the swamps, especially when there was a strong northeast wind. In some areas the land owners filled in the low spots so that their yards could run continuously to the canal. This gave them a nice place to build their fancy boat houses - some with living quarters upstairs. Boat wells were cut back into the bank and many of the boats could be lifted out of the water in the winter time. Most of the boats were small

power boats since low clearances under the bridges prevented most of the sail boats from coming in without the hassle of dropping masts, which most people didn't want to bother with.

Our back yard and our neighbor's were filled in and went down to the water (more grass to cut), but on each side there were several empty lots that had not been filled in and there was about 1,000 ft of swamp, about 75 ft. wide on each side of us. These swamps made a great place for fish to come in and lay eggs. There was a good supply of 10" to 12" bullfrogs - good eating - 4 legs on each - and lots of turtles, mostly the "snapping" type. They would feed on fish, frogs, and sometimes, our ducks.

For a few years we had a flock of about 50 mallard ducks. Some left in the fall and came back in the spring. Others wintered over in and around our chicken coop on the edge of the next-door swamp. We kept food and fresh water out for them during the winter. Sometimes one of the ducks would sit in the water dish overnight and got his feathers frozen into the water. This resulted in our taking him into the house, into the basement coal room. We had a room in the basement to store the coal (prepackaged in bricks in a paper wrapper - less mess) for the furnace. The room could be closed off to keep the duck out of the rest of the basement. Of course, while the duck was thawing out from the ice, my sister and I would always give him special treats. Most of the time it was the same duck that did this. Not too dumb!! I'm still very fond of mallards.

While we had the ducks, there was a lot of traffic on Meridian road due to the activity on the Navy base. Many of the base personnel (civilians) were let out at 5:00pm. Several times our ducks decided to try out the water in the ditch on the other side of the road. They would cross in a single file line of about 20 ducks, stopping all traffic. This did not go over well with the local authorities, so we had to put a fence up on the street side of their pen area.

For a couple of years we also had a pair of Canada Geese who took over the place - chased our car and our dog - and there was no getting near their nest.

The chicken coop, housed about 10 chickens. They gave us a supply of eggs and occasionally a chicken dinner. I got the job of cleaning the coop. 10 chickens left a lot a droppings in a day or two. Some years, in the spring, a strong easterly wind would cause the water to rise. The chickens apparently didn't know enough to look before they jumped out for their morning dirt scratching and sometimes found themselves in water about a foot deep swimming to the high ground about 30 ft. away. There was lots of flying water and wing action. Chickens are not intelligent, friendly or cuddly birds. I still don't like chickens except to eat.

Often we had to move the nesting ducks back to dry ground to save the eggs. This usually meant several bites on the knuckles from the beaks of the mother ducks. We didn't do this with the geese - they could break a human wrist with one blow from one of their elbows.

Since we had lots of grain around for duck and chicken food, the local rodent population moved in. The hill sloping down from the garage to the chicken coop was an ideal place for the rats to burrow. This way they could grab the grain and retreat into their tunnels and not be seen. The tunnels usually had 2 or 3 entrances/exits, some near the top and some near the bottom of the hill. I remember I'd pour a little gasoline into one of the top holes and wait a few minutes, then toss a lighted match into the hole. Kafuff!!! Dirt and rubbish would fly out of the bottom holes. I don't



know if this ever really stopped the rats, but it must have slowed down their housekeeping. We also had a couple of mink that would get into the henhouse. Big egg eaters - and sometimes they enjoyed a chicken dinner. We never did find out where they lived.

One year we tried to raise pheasants. We got about 100 eggs and an electric incubator that we put in the basement. They needed to be kept in the incubator for about 25 days. During that time, the thermostat on the incubator failed and we lost heat for several hours. Only about 11 eggs hatched. We transferred the hatchlings to a pen we had built outside. To keep predators out, the pen had fine chicken wire on the top as well as the sides. All went well for several days. Then a couple of garter snakes got into the pen to keep warm too. This scared all the chicks to death - literally. So ended our pheasant business.

Our dog was a black cocker spaniel named Bruce. His doghouse was built up into the ceiling of the basement - a box about 3' x 3' x 2' tall. The front door was mounted against the opening where the window had been and covered with a rug flap to allow the dog access but keep the wind and snow out. Inside the basement there was a small, latchable door to reach in and clean out the bedding or put in food. One night Bruce spent the night in the house. When he went back outside next morning he was soon standing outside his door barking and barking, so we went downstairs and looked inside his doghouse and found that one of the ducks had moved in overnight - built a nest and started to lay eggs. Bruce had to sleep elsewhere for several weeks until the eggs all hatched and the ducks moved out. Since we lived across the street from the Westshore golf course, it was a quick run for Bruce to dash across the road and grab a golf ball from the fairway and then run back to our yard to play with it. Usually a very unhappy golfer would follow shortly. (Note for non-golfers - tooth marks ruin a golf ball!)

At Christmas when I was 12 I received a BB Gun rifle - good for shooting at cans and targets. I don't remember shooting any other kids with it and no one has ever said that I did. I set up a board in the basement that I could pin targets to and shoot at - about a 25 foot range. A few years later, I received an air rifle - pump type with lots of power. Later on I got a .22 caliber semi-automatic rifle, which I still have.

On our side of the canal, about 1,000 ft down the bank south of us, there was a pumping station to supply water for the golf course. There was a 6" diameter steel pipe that ran across the swamp, suspended about 6" above the water. This gave us kids a bridge across the swamp. There was about 75 ft of it that we could walk on - like a large tight wire - nothing to hang on to. It wiggled some and was a might slippery from the interesting green things growing in the swamp - so, of course, it wasn't unusual to fall off, which meant you'd be covered with duck weed and other green and brown stuff. The water was usually only about a foot or so deep, but the muck underneath was

about 2 ft. deep and quite rotten smelling, with a few big, 4" black leeches to boot. A good wash down with a hose did the job of cleaning up. *We spent a lot of our time in the water and mud.*

The area really was a nature lover's dream. You could hear bull frogs at night, sounding like cows stuck in the mud - and we had all the bugs and mosquitoes anyone could possibly want.

## FISH STORY

BJ and I were always trying to catch fish, either in the canal or the swamps, One time in the spring, we were wading around chasing the carp, which would come in during the



FISHERMAN 1

flooding season and lay their eggs. We saw one rather large fish but trying to catch a large fish in two feet of water with your hands is a bit hard to do. Billy Jean was wearing a wool babushka (a square scarf). She gave it to me and I grabbed the fish with it - it stuck to the fish so it couldn't slide out. We took it up to the house. It was 36" long and weighed 10 lbs. - quite difficult to handle. We thought we had a really big northern pike. It turned out we had a medium size muskie. There was a standing rule in our household - you catch it, you clean it. When Dad saw what we had he volunteered to clean it so we wouldn't mess it up.



FISHERMAN 2

He gave half to some good friends of ours and we kept the other half. It tasted VERY good.

The mid 40s was before anyone had a TV. We listened to a lot of radio - homemaker type programs in the morning, soap operas in the afternoon, and then, after school, from 4:00pm to 6:00pm, several stations aired children's adventure programs - *Captain Midnight, Tom Mix, Jack Armstrong, Little Orphan Annie, Buck Rogers, Hop Harrigan*, etc. These were 15 minutes long, with about half the program being commercials, mostly for cereals and children's drinks like Ovaltine. There were lots of special offers for kid-appeal prizes - like whistles and decoder rings and patriotic things to make a kid feel like part of the war effort. All you had to do was send in a box top or label along with 10 cents or a quarter. 6:00pm to 7:00pm there were news programs, 7:00pm to 8:00pm was for ½ hour family adventures like *The Lone Ranger, I Love a Mystery, The Green Hornet and Sgt. Preston of the Yukon*. 8:00pm to 11:00pm had half hour and hour comedy, drama and variety shows. *Lux Radio Theater, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Fibber McGee and Molly, The Great Gildersleeve, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy*. On Saturday mornings there was *Let's Pretend* - dramatized fairy tales - and *Land of the Lost* about a kingdom under the sea where all the lost articles on earth were collected. BUT, at 10:30pm on Sunday night - past bedtime for me - Olga

Coal sponsored *The Hermit's Cave* - "ghhoossttt stories, weeiirrrdd stories and murders, too" - really frightening for a kid. I often snuck into BJ's room and we listened to it on her radio with the sound turned down low and the lights turned out. Not to be listened to alone. Very scary!!!!

Harry Bennett, a major Auto Workers Union executive, built a Japanese pagoda style house on West River Road (next to the home of Mickey Cochran, a famous catcher for the Detroit Tigers). The house was situated between the road and the Detroit River, with half the house over the water. Beside the fireplace there was a secret passageway that led into the boat house to a ready-to-go motor launch which could be dropped instantly into the river. The passage from the fireplace also went in the opposite direction, down underneath the road to a garden house about 100 ft. away. Apparently he was very worried about being caught by "somebody!" - the Mafia? The Feds? There were rumors about the Purple Gang! Whoever, Harry could escape by land or by sea. Eventually it became a rite of passage for kids my sister's age to sneak into the house through the tunnel and back out again without being caught. Years later, I heard that someone bought the house and filled in the tunnel with concrete. Party Pooper!!

#### **4<sup>TH</sup> GRADE - '43-44, 44-45**

Upstairs - away from the little kids - a big deal! And more possibilities. From the 4<sup>th</sup> grade up, it was a common thing for boys to have some sort of pocket knife all the time as long as the blade was less than 3 inches long - used to sharpen pencils, etc. - hopefully not to carve up too many desks.

Mrs. Callahan was our teacher. She also taught geography for the 7<sup>th</sup> graders. She was very active in Michigan geography. She - or her son - or both of them - wrote a book or two on geography for the schools. One of our main projects was to recite how to get an iron ore boat from Duluth, MN, through the Great Lakes to the St. Lawrence River and out to sea, naming, in correct order, the rivers, lakes and locks you would go through. Each student had to get up before the class and give the same list - a couple of kids each day. I did OK on that. (I can still remember: Lake Superior, into Whitefish Bay, through the Sault Locks, down the St. Marys River into Lake Huron, into the St. Clair River, into Lake St. Clair, through the Detroit River (passing Grosse Ile) into Lake Erie, into the Welland Canal, (bypassing Niagara Falls), into Lake Ontario, through the St. Lawrence River into the Atlantic Ocean.) And we read the story, "Paddle to the Sea," by Holling C. Holling, about an Indian boy who made a toy birchbark canoe that made the whole trip from Duluth, MN, to the Atlantic.

One of the things I was very good at was to tell how to break down crude oil into different oils, fuels, tars and coke. Mrs. Callahan had a display case with about 20 sample bottles of all of these materials. My readin', ritin' and 'rithmetic, though, were not too good so I stayed in 4<sup>th</sup> grade

for a second year. (They didn't know anything about dyslexia back then.) Staying behind put me with the class of '53 instead of '52. Yvonne Haensler was in that class and became my person "of special interest" for the next few years. She was taller than I was at that age. We rode bikes around the island a lot in the summer and went to a movie or two in Trenton.

During WWII, the Navy Base on Grosse Ile kept a group of POWs, mostly German or Polish, I think. They did yard work for area residents. I remember that they wore grey uniforms with a big white "POW" on the back. I don't recall seeing much supervision, so things must have been better here than "Over There."

Another memorable part of the WWII years was RATIONING! Every family was sent a book (or books) of commodity stamps. Some were for food such as meat, sugar, butter and coffee. Some were for gasoline, oil and automotive supplies. Each family received a book each month and when you went to the store you had to turn them in according to what you bought. You were only allowed to buy as much as you had stamps for, so you had to make them last the month. You got more or less stamps according the size of the family. I don't think you were allowed to accumulate them so you couldn't hoard something that was in short supply - they wanted to keep the flow moving at predictable rates. The government was also trying to guard against inflation and put on price controls. Another thing that was rationed was liquor - which was sold at Brown's Drug Store. It was not unusual to see a long line of housewives there. Mother didn't enjoy being part of the line in order to get Dad's whiskey. In general though, people didn't complain much about rationing. They felt it was part of what they could do on the home front to win the war.

Since Dad's work at the refinery was a strategic wartime position and gas was rationed to only a few gallons a week, the refinery was allowed to deliver several 55 gallon drums of gasoline and a hand pump to our garage so that he could fill the tank on his car whenever he needed to.

Our garage was a 2 car unit about 50' from the house. When the house was built the owners didn't want to lose the huge oak tree in the side yard so they split the driveway to go around it. Over the years, the tree acquired quite a few nicks and bruises about fender high. A loft had been built above the back half of the garage, with a door on the front inside. You needed a stepladder to get into it. It was used to store summer things in the winter and winter things in the summer. It made a great place for a clubhouse. We kids often hung out up there in the afternoon and ate "rations" - Milk Bones and jelly. The problem was that it got hot in the summer (no windows) and cold in the winter and it had no lights - though light leaked through the holes in the boards - but it was still a fun place for a lazy day.



2 DOORS. 1 TREE

We had a large “victory garden” for growing tomatoes, beans, peppers, carrots, eggplants and such. All of this required someone to pull the weeds and pick off the bugs. Guess who???

The vegetables were cooked, “put up” into glass canning jars and stored in our fruit cellar in the basement. Everybody was encouraged to be as self sufficient as possible during WWII. There were few frozen foods yet. Most refrigerators had only a very small freezer compartment with just enough room for two trays of ice cubes, so fruit and vegetables were canned and ice cream was purchased in pints and usually most or all of it was eaten as soon as it was brought in the door.

### **5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE '45-46**

I don't remember much special from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I think I had some teacher and academic problems. I got along with the kids in the class pretty well, but I still hung out a lot with my original class. That made it difficult when we were having class wars on the playground with sticks and stones and I was on the side of my old classmates, which did not endear me to the future class of '53. One thing I do remember was that I found a new hiding place. The gymnasium in the elementary school had a balcony at one end with a projection booth in the back wall. The projector had been shut down years before, but I could slip through the projection slot and get into the booth, which was dark - no lights and a lot of dust - but there was a good collection of gears and pulleys and other parts left behind. So I had a good place to scavenge and I could disappear for a while during lunch and no one really noticed. I still have some of the pulleys and gears in my basement.

In the winter, the ice on the river was too dangerous to go out onto because of the strong currents that left weak spots in it. Along the shore, the wind piled the ice up in jagged hunks. The slow moving canal water froze thicker with a much smoother surface.. Kay and some of the Roderick kids would come over and skate. We had to be careful of soft spots where drain and sewer pipes emptied in. We'd sometimes cut a 6 ft. square hole out of the ice to allow our ducks and a few other wild ducks some swimming time.



BACKYARD - TOWARD THE CANAL



SLEDS HAD STEERABLE STEEL RUNNERS

The slope from our house to the low area by the canal made a great sledding hill. But the best place for winter play was the hills on Westshore Golf Course - longer hills and high enough so a kid could ski a little. This was much safer than using the roads in Jewell Colony - and lots more snow. All I had were old war surplus downhill skies, so I'd loosen up the bindings and use them for cross country to go back and forth across the course in the snow.

## 6<sup>TH</sup> GRADE - 1946/47 WE WERE TOP DOGS NOW!!!

We had one of the best teachers in grade school - Mrs. Burdeno. She spent about 30 minutes after lunch reading us continuing mystery stories. I think she taught for about 30 years. Because I was a year behind, I was one of the oldest kids in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. And I was one of only a few Boy Scouts in the class, so I was frequently assigned flag duty. This entailed putting the flag up on the flagpole in front of the school when classes started and then taking it down in the afternoon when school was over, which meant it was done during the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> class and the end of the last class. Most of the time it just took a few minutes, but in the winter, ice and snow would get the ropes stuck, so the time spent could often be pushed to about 20 minutes - that much more time we got out of class. Since I had to take the school bus home, they had to let me out of class plenty early so I could take care of the flag and not miss the bus.

The Boy Scouts met in the study hall of the High School once a month. One of the things I remember best is that they had training movies from the Air Station - including "How to Crash and Survive in the Arctic" and "How to Crash and Survive in the Jungle." The Arctic movie used a 1 or 2 man plane, the Jungle movie had a 5 or 6 man bomber. The movies were about 30 minutes long and were commercial Hollywood productions using well known actors. The movies somewhat paralleled the woodsman skills being taught by the Boy Scouts.

There weren't any science projects in grades 1 through 6, but I had been acquiring a lot of my own things - chemical sets and electrical stuff. I was already a science nerd, I guess. In the basement I had a 2 ft. x 6 ft. workbench, but I did developing in the kitchen sink. Some of the photos in this write-up are pictures I took, developed and printed back then.

All the time we lived on Meridian Road, I went over to Jewell Colony to play with my friends there. When Kay was visiting the Rodericks, I spent lots of time with her - and the other girls were usually there, too. There was a large bedroom over their garage that some of the girls used, especially when Kay was there. By climbing on the edges of the uneven bricks on the back garage wall, I could grab onto the window ledge and climb in the window. I don't know if their parents ever knew about it.



MY WINDOW ENTRANCE



DAVE'S HOUSE

One of the more popular games in the neighborhood was Kick-the-Can. This might be played in an area a quarter of a mile square, with the goal usually in my friend Dave Burchfield's yard (#6). The field across from Dave's house was often used for soccer or baseball depending on how the grass was cut. I can't remember who cut the grass.

We played outdoors in the daytime or at night. It wasn't unusual for us to be outside long after dark. We built a lot of campfires. One time we threw a couple of CO2 cartridges into a fire we had in the woods and then hid behind the trees. Very soon they exploded and shot sharp pieces of metal all over the place, along with sparks and ashes. We were smart enough to realize it wasn't a good idea to do that again - the trees weren't really big enough to protect us very well.

My fiends and I didn't do lot of overnight camping. We were out so late we were probably glad to get back in and go to bed. Sometimes I would sleep out on the screened in front porch, though. And I do remember a couple of camp outs. One night 3 or 4 of us decided to camp out in the "Big Hole." (See Map) It was a partial excavation, maybe 20 ft. in diameter, 8 ft. deep, from a house that was never built in the middle of Jewell Colony. It was about 10 or 11pm and we were getting hungry, so one of the kids whose house was nearest ventured home to get some goodies. He came back with a brown paper lunch bag with several hot, grilled peanut butter sandwiches. I still cringe at the memory of the smell.

Another time, three of us rode our bikes up to the north end of the island, Hennepin Point, about 4 miles. It was the middle of August, so we took very light sleeping bags and no tent. The area had a sand beach and dirt hills along side the river. When I say river, I mean the wide part of the Detroit River with 3/4 mile of open water to the east. We camped on the flat sand area near the water. The nearest house was about a half a mile away. That night a northeastern wind blew up. The water rose about 2 feet, which covered the beach, so we moved about 10 feet up onto a hill of dirt. There wasn't any rain, but the wind was very damp and cold from blowing across the water - too windy to keep a fire going. We really didn't get much sleep, just lying on the ground in our sleeping bags feeling miserable. In the chilly morning we still had to ride 4 miles back home for a hot breakfast and back to bed.

In the winters, with the river frozen over, wolves sometimes came across from Canada - and there were rumors of bobcats. The wolves had sometimes been found scavenging in the garbage dump at the Navy Base - and some people claimed they had heard the bobcats crying,. We didn't seem to be concerned that there could easily be some of them living on the island year round that we might run into, especially in remote areas after dark.



In 1903, at the south tip of the Gross Ile, next to Round Island (see map), someone drilled a well - hoping for oil. At approximately 2,200 ft. they ran into a pressurized cold mineral spring. The



WONDER WELL

well pipe was about 8 " in diameter and the water pushed up about 10 feet in the air above ground. Millions of gallons of water flowing. The owner had a store next to the well to sell this "WONDER WATER." Some of the water was diverted into pipes where he could fill gallon jugs. The rest ran over a water wheel that turned a generator to light the lights in the store. Then the water flowed about 50 ft. in a little creek into the canal that went into Lake Erie. The

water was filled with all kinds of minerals, tasted poor and smelled BAD from hydrogen sulfide. The owner, Don Swann, made his own fireworks and sold those, as well as the water, along with various novelties. Several of us often rode our bikes down there (about 5 miles) in the summer to get candy and other goodies - but never to drink the water!!! The Wonder Well went dry in 1994..

The Waldeck kids, Bob, Carol and Pete, lived in # 17. The family had a large garden and greenhouse.. After the first frost, there were lots of tomatoes and small melons that had been damaged. Sometimes we had vegetable fights. You haven't been in a vegetable fight until you've been hit by an overripe, soft melon. It's almost like being slimed - plus the seeds. Again, this meant a good wash down with a hose to clean-up.

Sometime in the late '40s, Dad, Wayne Jewell and Jim Stadler, bought West Shore Golf and Country Club. During WWII, part of the golf course had been leased to the US Navy. They needed the top 3" of sod to cover their ammunition bunkers and other parts of the Naval Base as it expanded. After the war, the Detroit Lions football team leased that section as a summer practice field. You could stand around all summer and watch them. Turning that area back into a golf course meant that all the grass and sand traps had to be redone.

The main building on the property was built in 1875 - a large, four story house, facing the Detroit River. The first floor had a large ballroom, a separate dining room, an outdoor dancing porch about 60 ft. square, a grill room and bar, and to the back, the kitchen, scrub rooms and storage rooms. The second floor had two connecting apartments up front (which became Stadler's place to live in the summertime), a large conference room, and living quarters for 4 staff members.



EASTWARD VIEW FROM WEST RIVER ROAD

A grand staircase went up from the first floor main entrance to the second floor. There was also a small staircase at the back from the staff rooms down to the kitchen. The third floor was a tall attic over the apartments and conference room. In the center of the attic, was a staircase leading up to the cupola - one room about 10 ft. square, windows on all 4 sides - great view! Under the building was a basement, only about 6 feet deep, with an earthen floor. It contained mostly a large coal fired, hot air furnace to heat the building in the spring and fall. When the building was locked up in the wintertime, I could crawl under the outdoor dance floor, go through a basement window and feel my way over to a large cold air return in the floor just inside the front door. By pushing it aside, I could crawl up into the first floor, then go anywhere in the building, even all the way up to the cupola and look out - and go down and get out again without anyone knowing I had been there. Sally or Lee Roderick went with me sometimes. One time we sneaked into one of the rooms that was used by the kitchen staff and found they had left several girly magazines and pictures, so we got a bit of non-textbook health and hygiene education.

When the course was shut down in the winter, Dad and I did a lot of work on the building. Several of the rooms needed to be upgraded. While remodeling, we found that a lot of the roof boards were 16" wide and a full 1" thick. They probably were from locally cut lumber. The nails were square, wrought iron. The 2x4 studs in the walls were a full 2" x 4" inches. These, too, probably were local - the surfaces were quite rough cut. Some of the walls had 10 to 12 layers of wallpaper - some likely had been hand painted in place.

Socony Mobil had annual meetings for their high level executives and their wives. They were held in different cities around the country. Mom and Dad attended several of these. I remember that one was in Beaumont, Texas, and another in San Francisco. Dad was involved in the meetings, of course, and Mom often was in charge of planning the social activities for the wives - fashion shows, garden tours, etc. The meetings were usually in September when we were in school. Children were not invited - adults only - very formal. Tuxes and evening dresses for a lot of the events. They'd take the train and be gone for about a week. Back then the train was THE way to travel. They had about 5 or 6 bags each, all in matching sets, of course. Mom had a hat bag, a shoe bag, a cosmetic and jewelry case, and two or three suitcases, one very large to handle formal attire. Billie Jean stayed at a friend's house. I stayed at the club house at Westshore. Since things were slowing down at that time of year, the only people there were the cook and several of the kitchen staff. I stayed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room, which had 10 to 12 ft. ceilings and windows 8 to 10 ft. high, with a lot of heavy furniture and a very large central table that could be used for meetings or dinners and a large couch or bed of some sort that I slept on. At night the walls creaked with temperature changes or when the wind was blowing. Since I was the only one in the front of the house, it was a bit creepy.

There was a little TV available by this time - a few stations around the country on for a few hours in the evening. We didn't have a TV, but had the one from Westshore during the winter to "keep it safe." I still listened to the radio a lot and I built a "crystal set." That's a diode receiver which doesn't require any electrical power - just the energy from a long antenna wire. It would pick up a few very powerful stations such as WJR, Detroit, CKLW, Windsor and "WCKY Cincinnati O-HI-O." You had to use ear phones, so only one person could hear at a time, but that was great for late night listening without parents hearing.

### **7TH/8TH GRADE - '47- '48 - MY HALF AND HALF YEAR.**

I got put back up with my regular class 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. We were now in the high school building, built in 1929, which was next door to the elementary school about 100 ft. away. The area in front was a lawn, not fenced in. The picture shown is the south side of the building. The center doors were not used - there was a fenced in, wooded piece of property just 8 feet away. The doorway made a good place to eat lunch.



MORE RECENT PICTURE - LOTS OF BUSHES AND TREES IN MY DAY

Both schools used the same back yard about 200 ft. to 300 ft. wide and 800 ft. deep, with lots of room for playground, baseball field, football field and lots more backwoods area beyond that. The space between the schools was concrete and was used as a play area and for deliveries of supplies to both buildings. A tunnel with heat and power lines was underground connecting the two buildings. I was never able to get into the tunnel - the basements were always locked.

In 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade we moved around from room to room for classes, but since we had such a small class, we were always together - history, English, whatever. The classes and lockers were mostly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. At that time, nobody locked their lockers - just as most people didn't lock the doors at home. A few years later they made us use locks at school.

There were lots of good things to do in Jr. High! I made several model volcanos for geography class projects - the same teacher as the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. By that time I had a good supply of chemicals at home from several chemistry sets and from the lab at Socony Mobil. I put together some pretty good mixes since I had a better chemical inventory than the school had. The best volcanos used potassium permanganate and glycerin (lots of purple smoke and red fire), or ammonium dichromate (yellow orange flame and large amounts of green ash. With a few match heads sprinkled on top there were lot of sparks. The smoke probably was quite toxic, but at that time nobody much cared - they just opened the windows and let it all blow out. Another neat thing was "torpedoes." These were made from 2 large bolts 3/8ths to 1/2 " in diameter, screwed into the same nut with match heads in between. You would tighten them down just snugly, but not too tight, then

flip them into the air and run like heck before they hit the ground. KA-BANG! Watch out for flying bolts!!! We usually set these off before school when there weren't too many kids or teachers around. You could use them a few times before the threads were stripped out completely or the bolts were lost in the blue. You don't see many of these things around nowadays.

I also made a couple of zip guns. All that had to be done was to take a 6" long piece of 1/8th" iron pipe, connect a coupling to one end and thread in a spring driven puncturing tool that was used for CO2 cartridge models, place a 22 caliber short or shotgun shell primer into the end of the pipe and let the spring go to detonate the shell. Made a nice do-it-yourself pistol even though it didn't shoot very far or make a lot of noise. But I didn't take these to school.. It was one of those do-at-home-only projects!!

Since I was the science guy, I had several requests from other students for tear gas bombs to be used against the kids in Trenton across the river - an American-side village a little larger than Grosse Ile. These didn't work too well. It was difficult to get the right chemicals and they were pretty nasty stuff. The smoke bombs were much better. You'd take a good mixture of sulphur and aluminum powder, pack it into a cardboard tube with one end sealed off and a match head on top to ignite it. If you really wanted it to stink, you could mix in a few strips of old nitrate movie film and scraps of plastic. This was all made up at home, not at the school - they didn't have the right chemicals at school anyway.

Wood shop was a 2nd semester class, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys together, so we did the usual - made small tables, serving trays, plant holders. I think I still have some of them. But this still allowed time for us to make very nice, polished billy clubs, 18" to 20" long. The shop teacher finally had to make us stop because we were using up all the good maple and hickory hardwood.

Once in a while, due to weather or lack of other activities, I did have to stay in study hall - but that got to be boring. Sometimes there wasn't any homework to do or I just didn't want to do the work then - but if you didn't look busy, the teacher would give you a list of 10 words and you had to go the dictionary (large edition) and copy all the definitions for all of the words. So at home I cut out the inside of an old book and built a 2 tube radio in the hollow area (transistors were not developed until 1953), complete with batteries and earphones. It looked just like any other book on the table. That worked OK for a while, but eventually the teacher realized there were too many students collecting around my table, so I had to take the radio back home.

Another fun thing was Mini-Rockets. We'd take matches, usually the paper type, place a pin along the cardboard stem, the point toward the match head, then wrap a couple of layers of thin aluminum foil around the head of the match and most of the pin. You'd squeeze the foil tightly

around the head, then pull the pin out, leaving a long tunnel along the match stick, up to the head - then balance the match on the edge of a book or table or desk and heat up the aluminum foil head with another match or with sunlight and a magnifying glass. Phfftzoom!!! The head exploded, the gas shot out the small pin hole tunnel and the match made a smelly smoke trail as it shot across the room. The only problem was that the smoke trail led back to where it was launched.

A little more dangerous device used a large wooden kitchen match - the type that you strike on any rough surface to light. You'd use your jack-knife to split the end of the matchstick two ways so that you could insert little pieces of paper to make fins like a dart. Then all you had to do was throw it at a wall or something roughish and when it hit, it would ignite and fall to the ground, catching anything around it on fire. Better used outdoors. Or you could just put a match, without the fins, into the barrel of a BB gun and shoot it. It went farther then.

Starting in 7th/8th grade I was one of the students who set up and ran the portable movie projector for a lot of the classes. One afternoon the girls gym teacher had me set up a projector and film in the science lecture room, which could be darkened with heavy shades. The girls in our class came in and someone turned off the lights and I started the projector up. About the time the screen was showing "This Picture Presented by Kotex," the teacher noticed I was still there and said, "OK, Tom - get out." Later, some of the girls told the guys what the movie was all about. There never were any "special" movies of any sort for the boys.

### **SUMMER OF '48 - BETWEEN 8<sup>TH</sup> AND 9<sup>TH</sup> GRADES**

I spent most of the summer riding my bike in the morning with 2 other Grosse Ile kids across the bridge to Wyandotte to take summer school, since GI didn't offer school in the summer. It was about 5 to 6 miles each way. I had to take English class and math, the things I needed to catch up on to make it legal to stay with my own class again. One good thing about it - we had to ride by a doughnut shop every day - Good Doughnuts! In the afternoons, I raked and cleaned the sand traps on the golf course for 50 cents and hour. The course itself required a great amount of rebuilding work for the grounds keeping staff, which meant there was always plenty of work for me to do in the summers. (I had papers signed by the county for working when under 16.)

I still had some time free that summer. Somehow a friend and I got hold of a couple of sticks of dynamite - I can't remember how we got it. It was just 40% gelatin. We thought it would be a quick way to dig a hole to make a fort. It didn't work well at all. First we tried to set it off with firecracker, which only spattered some of the dynamite around. We finally got a blasting cap. That did the trick, but the hole was too small for a fort and all torn up around the edges.

Every year In the mid-summer Kay and the Rodericks disappeared and I didn't see them for about a month. Their father was around every so often for a few days and then left again, so I assumed they were going on various vacations. I didn't find out until 2002 that their mother's family had a farm in Western New York and all the relatives went there to stay for parts of the summer. Lee and her youngest sister, Connie, still live at Olmsted Camp. It's a great place - not only a lot of farm acreage with a beautiful old farm house and barn, but also several sleeping cottages, another barn where they put on plays (and the top floor is a big bunkhouse for kids), and a summer house in the Roy Croft /Arts and Crafts style. The summer house has several bedrooms, a kitchen that can serve a



THE OLMSTED CAMP SUMMER HOUSE

big group, and wide porches around two sides with swings and chairs overlooking a wonderful view of Cattaraugus Creek, 100 ft. down a wooded bank. It is used for many parties and special events, such as fund raisers for the Western New York Land Conservancy.

## SPRING CYCLE

One of Dad's partners in Westshore, Jim Stadler of Chrysler Corp. got to keep a project from one of Chrysler's development labs - a light weight motor bike using 2 pieces of 2 inch wide leaf spring for the frame, powered by a 2 HP single cylinder engine - called a Spring Cycle. The wheels were 16", spoked, heavy duty bicycle wheels. It would do about 35 to 39 MPH on a flat road, but



A BARE BONES MACHINE

was very quiet. The Stadlers took it down to their farm in Urbana, Ohio, part of the time and I got to use it the rest of the time. It was great for riding on the golf course in the evening - it didn't leave any tire marks. I got it licensed so I could drive it around the streets in Grosse Ile. Licenses weren't too important at that time and there wasn't any class for that type of vehicle anyway, so I could get a license even though I was only 13 or 14. Cushman Motor Scooters were just coming in about then. A friend of mine had one and it didn't go any faster and was a lot noisier.

## 9<sup>TH</sup> GRADE '48-'49 - HIGH SCHOOL!!

I took print shop the first semester of 9th grade. There were about 8 in the class. The print shop class printed all the school tickets, forms and stationery. I think one group of students stayed there for about 3 years. There were a few root beer parties. They didn't have much supervision, but they got all the printing work done.

My schedule worked out so I had Tues. and Thur. afternoons free from lunch until 3:20. Mon, Wed. and Fri I had a 1:00pm to 2:00pm gym class ( boys only - the girls had class Tuesday and Thursday - some of them used the boys shower room - bigger and more showers than the girls' own shower room.) The rest of the time I should have been in study hall, so some friends in the print shop made me up 2 pads of official looking passes with my name on them showing that I would go either to work on the athletic field or to the science lab to work for the biology teacher - who was also the basketball coach. (Remember, this was a school of less than 200 students total.) All I had to do was to drop a pass on the study hall teacher's desk and I was gone.

Before a football or baseball game I helped put the marking lines on the field with lime or chalk. Otherwise, I'd go to the science lab which was empty most of the time, so the lab was usually "mine-all-mine" - or the biology and general science teacher, Mr. Fedoric, and I would get in his car - an old, green Hudson - and drive around the Grosse Ile swamps looking for plant specimens and small aquatic animals. It was his first year of teaching and I think he liked getting away from the school, too. Most of the time I would take care of the biology specimens - I ordered the pickled perch, frogs, worms and grasshoppers and made sure they were ready for the biology class dissecting projects. I had charge of the aquarium and kept it filled with tadpoles, catfish and other things I found in the swamp. Sometimes I got help from Helen Virginia Beyster, who was often in the lab correcting tests for Mr. Fedoric. When we had to clean the aquarium and refill it, it took most of the afternoon. If it took too long, the busses would have left and we walked home - about a mile and a half. We were good friends most of the time, but we did bicker a lot.

I had a hard time with Algebra class. Helen Virginia didn't say much or speak up in class but always turned in homework with very few mistakes - possibly related to the fact that she had a great tutor at home - an older brother who was a real math whiz! I could have used some of that kind of help.

The school baseball diamond didn't have an adequate backstop. Dad sent some of the refinery pipe fitters over to the school. They brought a lot of scrap pipe and welded up a large backstop and covered it with wire mesh - one of Socony Mobil's community betterment projects. Good will and all that.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> semester was metal shop - same room as the wood shop - just different tools. One of our projects was to make hunting knives with blades over 6" long out of metal-cutting power hacksaw blades. These were very hard, tough metal, 1" x 3/32nds by about 10" long. They would cut just about anything. (Over 50 years later mine is still at use at my company, Luminaud, Inc.).

As mentioned earlier, we had a wooden rowboat, which was actually quite heavy, but it was good and rugged and great for the canal. It had two sets of oar locks and one in the rear so you could use an oar rudder. We could row back and forth to the other side - often a help, since there were few bridges across the canal and it could mean a half an hour's bike ride to get to a the other side of the island using just the roads.

Having four 55 gallon drums left over from Dad's wartime gasoline supply, Billie Jean and I decided to make a raft to use on the canal. We rolled the drums down the hill and laid them in a rectangle, two barrels long, two barrels wide. We got some wood boards, put them and top of the barrels and tied everything together with rope. Then we got a paddle, climbed on and pushed out toward the middle of the canal. The barrels were totally empty, which meant that even with our weight, they barely sank into the water. With the combination of the boards and our weight, it put the heavy part on the top and the light part on the bottom. Within a few seconds, the problem corrected itself with the light part on the top and the heavy part on the bottom. This rapid reconfiguration not only dropped us into the water, but loosened the rope tying the whole mess together. We recovered two barrels. The rope, wood and the other two barrels were never more to be seen.

Sometime in the 40's, Dad bought a boat with an engine and small cabin. We called it the Buccaneer. It had obviously been around for quite sometime. It was about 27 ft. long and 12 ft.



BRUCE & TOM ON THE BUCCANEER

wide with only a 6" to 8" draft - looked something like a tugboat. The prop and rudder went down a foot deeper. It was driven with an old Ford, model T engine - 4 cylinder. Cooling water was sucked in from under the boat and pumped out through the exhaust system. There were metal rollers along one side of the boat to launch smaller boats used in duck hunting. It wasn't the fastest thing, but it was good in shallow water and quite stable on the lake and good for fishing around the weed beds near

shore. It could carry several hundred pounds of cargo

To get the boat to our house, it had to come up the canal from the south end, which was close to where he bought it - probably Monroe at the western tip of Lake Erie above Toledo. The first two bridges over the canal were arched concrete with 8 to 10 ft. of clearance under them. The 3<sup>rd</sup>

and last before our house was an old metal frame bridge (taken down about 10 years later). Dad and his friends moved the boat at night and when they got to the 3<sup>rd</sup> bridge, they took large wrenches and unbolted the cross tie rods in order to slip the boat underneath and then replaced them after they got by.

After Dad brought the Buccaneer home to fix it up, we found extra space under a false deck. The space was exactly one whiskey case high. It apparently had been used to bootleg whisky from Canada to Detroit during prohibition in the 30s. (In the winter, when the ice was thick enough, they could bring the stuff across the river by truck instead of by boat.)

The boat was one of those hobbies that you spend about as much time maintaining as you do using. One time it sank (probably someone poked the drain plugs out) and we had to winch it up and pump it out and rebuild the engine. We took the engine into the basement by the coal bin to work on it. The problem is that was the same room that we brought our "dumb" duck into to thaw out and we soon found that we had to cover it carefully because once he was loose from the ice he'd jump up and use it for a perch - and also do what ducks do when they're on a perch.

Usually in the winter, we'd jack it up on a pipe rack over the water, with just enough room for the rowboat to slide in underneath so that I could scrape and paint the bottom in the spring. Eventually Dad took it to the Round Island Hunting Club.

Round Island was a small wooded Island on the Southern tip of Grosse Ile (see Map), right behind the Navy Air Base, It was only about 1/4th a mile across in any direction, but there was a 30 foot wide canal cut between it and Grosse Ile. This meant it was not part of Grosse Ile, which was a game preserve, so the GI "no discharge of firearms" law did not apply. A group of Dad's friends - one of whom owned the island - set it up as a hunting club - most of the time shooting clay pigeons (skeet), though they did plant buckwheat to hoping to attract the local pheasants and rabbits. By the time I was in my teens I went there with my Dad most Saturday mornings.

The skeet shoot faced out over the lake. It was a spring device that could sling the clay pigeons (which look like cheap 4" ashtrays) out at various angels in a random pattern. The marksman would try to break them with a shotgun blast. When it was over, I'd go out into the soft grass of the swamp and pick up the ones that didn't break to be used again.

The Buccaneer was used to transport supplies and people to the island and they took it out into the lake to launch the duck-hunting boats. To make a boat well for docking, one of Dad's friends, who either owned or was a manager at a limestone quarry, put 4 or 5 sticks of dynamite in a line in the bank and blew most of the dirt out - then they pulled the boat in there and ran the

engine full throttle so the prop wash cleared out all the loose silt and dirt. At Round Island, the Buccaneer was sunk twice more (by axe holes created by vandals). Each time we got it back into operation, we had to rebuild the engine. That's when I learned how to take an automobile engine apart and put it back together, including cleaning out the bugs and water that got inside.

The members of The Round Island Hunting Club were the shakers and doers of the down river Detroit area - owners and executives of large companies - but they enjoyed roughing it. They built a cabin with 2 rooms, and a bunkhouse on the back and a screened in porch on the front - no electricity, no telephone, no running water, no central heat - and no women - though they did have Ladies' Night a couple of times. Heat was from a fireplace and Coleman and kerosene lanterns supplied the light, and the outhouse was out back. The large room contained lots of cast-off chairs and a big table for playing cards, a couch or so, an old wind-up Victrola and a couple of deer heads. The second room was a kitchen with a big wood burning stove, an ice box and a sink that had to be filled with water carried inside in pails.

For a few years they also raised Guinea-hens - all dark meat - then turned them loose for hunting. To keep the Guinea-hens there, they built a tractor out of old car parts, made a hitch for a plow and harrow and turned up about a 200" circle in the middle of the Island. They planted it with buckwheat and soybeans. They also used this "tractor" to drive a 36" diameter saw to cut up the wood for the cook stove. I don't think anyone ever found a Guinea-hen to shoot at - just heard a lot of noise up in the trees. Next they raised exotic pheasants - all kinds of colors. For this they had a caretaker who lived there.



ROUND ISLAND CHRISTMAS PARTY

We'd spend most of Sat. mornings fixing/repairing/building. Wayne Jewell would usually do the cooking - lots of baked beans and wieners and fresh bread. Then after lunch the men would settle down, usually with a good supply of booze, to play cards and dominos all afternoon.

While the guys played, I had Saturday afternoon to roam around the island in the swamps and the woods, doing a lot of bottle and can shooting with my 22 rifle - the same one I have now. Interesting things would float up from the Lake and River. Supposedly you would get \$20 for every dead body you turned into the police. I never did find any - just a pig or so.

## **THE SPRING OF 1949**

The Tom McGuane family moved into the house (#9) after the Rodericks moved out and went to the larger house with the tennis court on Lakewood (#11). My Dad was named Tom (though almost always called Scotty) and I was Tom and Mr. McGuane was Tom and his older son was Tom. I used to baby sit young Tom McGuane and younger brother, John, and sister, Marian. By that time, television was here. We watched a lot of Howdy Doody!! We also used the bedroom window over the garage to go in and out - the same as when the Rodericks were there.

Mr. McGuane liked boats and owned two of them - first a 32 ft. boat with a 100 hp engine for a year or so. Then he sold it and got a good price on the 43' boat with two 100 hp engines by buying it from it's previous owner AS-IS while it was stuck on a sand bar. They usually went over to Amherstburg, ONT to buy gasoline - 100 gallons to fill a tank. Sometimes I'd go with them when they went out into Lake Erie to fish for bass and perch. We tried to get back to Grosse Ile by dark. It gave me a lot of good experience navigating on the lake. Mr. and Mrs. McGuane went to Florida often in the winters, so one year Mr. McGuane had the bigger boat shipped down there. After he saw the bill for that, I don't think he ever brought it back up north.

One Saturday one of the McGuane kids had a birthday party. I was asked to come over and help watch the 10 or so kids and help with taking them to a movie in Trenton. The other sitter was a girl about my age from a farm just outside of Trenton. I sat on one end of the row and she sat on the other end, keeping all the little critters in line. That was OK with me because she was a lot taller than I was, cleaned out horse stalls every day and could fling a full bale of hay around - nobody to mess with. Young Tom McGuane grew up to be the author of several well known books and also a screen writer and Montana rancher.

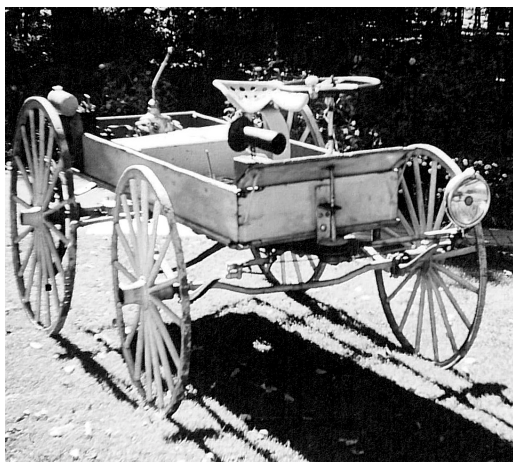
## **SUMMER OF '49**

The pro shop on the golf course helped me renovate an old unused outhouse into a pop stand and move it to a location where 3 holes came together out in the middle of the course. They installed an ice chest cooler and stocked it every morning with ice, soda pop, chewing gum and candy bars. I got 50 cents an hour, all the pop and candy I wanted (which soon was of little interest) and a free lunch brought out to me from the clubhouse kitchen. That was the best part of the deal. The cook made GOOD lunches! My favorite was the hot ham on oatmeal bread. She baked her own bread every day and the slices she cut for me were much larger than store-bought slices and about double thickness. My hours started out be about 9:00am to 4:00pm, but slowly worked into about 8:00am to 5:00pm. The money was probably pretty good, but it was a long time to be out on the golf course by yourself in a 5' x 7' box - but it kept me busy all summer long. Not much to get into in the middle of a golf course.

In the summers in the 40's and early 50's, the kids in our neighborhood would think nothing of riding our bicycles 5 to 8 miles around various parts of Grosse Ile without even telling anybody where we were going or even that we were going. There were usually 2 or 3 together. We really didn't think of crime or danger, boys or girls. We'd build platform tree forts up in trees, maybe 20 ft. high, in people's back yards - and nobody thought about liability or accident insurance or seemed to be worried about being sued.

Tom McGuane found a lineman's telephone out in the field - apparently had fallen off a service truck. I talked him out of it. The dial didn't go around, so as far as he was concerned, it didn't work. I took it apart, cleaned and oiled the spring mechanism, put it back together and it worked perfectly. This was a telephone that was just a rubber handset with a dial on the back and two wires with sharp pins in the clips, so the lineman could get ahold of a telephone wire, pierce the insulation and tap the phone. There was a switch on the side that allowed you to monitor a call without being detected, or you could flip the switch and join in the conversation. Since most of the telephone lines usually ran around the backs of the houses where the trees were, all you had to do was climb up in a tree, grab the telephone lines, click in and start listening. Sally or Lee and I listened to Helen Virginia's line. I never did hear anything exciting, but it was fun to call someone up when you could see through their window what they were doing and make comments about their actions. One thing you did have to be careful of was not to have both hands on both clips when ring signal came down the line - that's about 90 volts. It might cause you to let go of the tree and fall out. I only got hit once, but grabbed on and didn't fall. Over 50 years later, I still have that phone and it and it still works.

The Day family had moved into #10 where we had lived. Bill Day, his wife and his daughter



PROBABLY GOT 75 MPG-

Mary. Mr. Day built a motorized Buckboard. It had 4 ft. diameter steel rimmed, wooden spoked wheels, a 5 horse power engine, belt driven to the back wheels and one large headlight run off a battery. A steel cable ran from one end of the front axle to a 6" hub on the steering wheel to the other end of the axle. The axle pivoted in the middle for steering. He drove it around Jewell Colony on weekends and gave the kids rides. After a few years, he took the engine off for other use and gave me the buckboard. I put on a 1½ horse gasoline engine and a little Crosley transmission - top speed - 5 to 10 MPH,

really noisy - steel wheels on cement roads. All this work was done in the shed - only CARS in the garage. I can't remember who I gave the buckboard to when I left for college in 1952 - maybe Tom McGuane.

Most of that summer I worked at Westshore again. There was always plenty of work for me raking the sand traps. I still got 50 cents an hour and the "older guys," 19 or so, got 90 cents an hour. In the evening I often raked balls out of two creeks that went across the course and then I could sell them for practice balls. This went well for a while until the greens keeper had the bright idea of laying chicken wire in the stream beds. Then the golfers could just pull up the edge of the wire and the balls would roll right out - so that pretty much killed my used golf ball business.

At night the skunks came out onto the golf course to dig up bugs. I would take a 3 " piece of rope, put a slip knot in one end. You could shine a flash light in a skunk's eyes, then walk up to him, slip the loop over his neck, reach around and hold his tail down and pick him up. It was a great way to catch skunks. I rarely got sprayed. I'd let them go a few minutes later. I still like skunks.

### **TURTLE STORY.**

The swamp around our house was an excellent place for turtles - large snapping turtles - 25 to 30 lb. snapping turtles! Billie Jean and I tried to catch the turtles to prevent them from eating our ducks. Dave Burchfield's father wanted one for turtle soup - a great delicacy - some parts taste like chicken, some like pork, some like beef - so I've been told. We gave him a big, 25 lb, turtle and he spent the weekend preparing turtle soup. I was invited over for dinner Sunday night. While his wife and 3 kids and I were in the dining room eagerly awaiting the soup, he came through the door with a huge metal pot, caught his foot on the edge of a rug and the whole pot of soup ended up on the dining room carpet. I still don't know what turtle soup tastes like. (P.S. Don't feel too sorry for the turtle - snapping turtles are mean, nasty, smelly critters who eat every duck they can get - and your hand or foot if they get a chance. They can cut a broom stick in half with their jaws.)

One time Ann Devendorf, who lived on the river behind Dave Burchfield's house, had several girls over for a slumber party in their boat house, which was over the water with a dock along each side. About 10 pm that night her mother came out of the house and down one dock to check on the girls. The light she turned on warned Dave and 2 others of us boys who were visiting (entirely innocently) that we'd better leave, which we were able to do unseen by going out a side door and using the other dock. (Dave and Ann and I were good friends all through high school and often went places together. After college, Dave and Ann were married.)

### **10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE - '49-'50**

No Science classes in 10<sup>th</sup> Grade - but I still took care of the biology and general science lab for the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. There was mandatory 10<sup>th</sup> grade speech class and our new teacher decided to put on a spring play, which she would direct. Someone was needed to the technical part - not her thing - so I volunteered to do the sets and get the props for the show - "Aaron Slick From Punkin' Crick" - my first stage show.

I really didn't know much at all about theater technical, but the senior home room teacher, Mrs. Sawitski, was a member of a local amateur theater group that used the school stage. She showed me where their stuff was and gave me permission to use it. I didn't put enough glue in the scene paint the first time and had to repaint it the set - a gorgeous lemon yellow kitchen with brown wainscoting. Most of it I did at night on my own time with two helpers. It seems that we were able to come and go in that school building as we wanted to - I don't remember anything special about how I got in and out. One of the kids with a driver's license, was allowed to borrow the Chrysler "power wagon" - a 4 wheel drive truck with all the attachments from the Kelseys of Kelsey Hayes, a large manufacturing company in the Detroit area. Mr. Kelsey was on the school board. He loaned a lot of things to the school. We used the truck to pick up all the props, furniture and materials for the play. There were always volunteers to drive that truck.



READY FOR THE SET PIECES

From 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades, several of us ate lunch outside - even in bad weather. We could leave the school property as long as we were not late for the 1:00p class. A few friends and I would find a cosy spot where the wind wasn't blowing - often a spot where there was an unused side door. By 9<sup>th</sup> grade we had found an old pump house set into the side of the riverbank, about an eighth of a mile down river from the school, that had been used to pump the river water into an orchard that had long since gone. The pump house was about 8 feet square and 7 feet high. All the motors and pumping equipment had probably been donated to the scrap metal drives in the early 40's during the second world war, so the building was empty. It was about 6 ft above the river with two thirds of it buried back into the 20 ft. high riverbank. This made a great spot winter - or spring or fall. It was just a few minutes from school. This eventually became the base of operations for our rocket launchers, hand grenade and pipe bomb experiments and cannon testing. It was missing most of the front wall by the time we were done - which made a large window facing the Canadian shore, about a mile away.

Our geometry teacher, Mr. Gingrich, (who was also the chemistry teacher, the physics teacher, the algebra teacher and the football coach - and eventually, after our class was gone, the high school principal), taught navigation to navy pilots during the second world war, so a lot of our geometry material was in the form of navigation. He'd give us air speeds and wind speeds and directions and we would have to plot where we were - often on the Pacific Ocean. It made the class more interesting than Algebra. I did OK in Geometry and was still helping out in the science lab.



For Christmas, I got an insecticide kit, complete with powdered DDT, Rotenone, and Pyrethrum - all good poisons. These kits were made and sold for kids - REALLY!!! I worked out the lethal doses for killing different kinds of bugs according to their weight. I also had to figure out the right disbursements that would carry the insecticides and mix with a fogging material. It turned out that benzene (now a No-No) would dissolve lindane. Mr. Waldeck got me some lindane from Wyandotte Chemicals. I added the benzene/lindane mixture to 9 parts of fuel oil, which made lots of smoke when ducted through the exhaust of a lawn mower. One loop around the house once a week sure kept the mosquitos down. It worked better than DDT. At the time, nobody knew the long term effect that DDT had on birds. DDT, Benzene and Lindane (Benzene hexachloride) all are now banned in the United States.

At school, I was responsible for the care of a 3 foot long milk snake in a terrarium in the biology lab. Somebody else named it Macduff, not me (we had read Macbeth and Macduff was a "friend of Lennox" in the play). One weekend in the spring, Macduff must have flown the coop. That Monday we all searched the classrooms, but there was no snake to be found. The next fall when school started, I was informed that one of the electricians working in the service tunnel between the two school buildings, ran into a very fat, 5' long milk snake - lots of mice down there. The electrician was not too happy about it. I was never told what happened to Macduff but I never saw him again, of course, so I don't have many doubts. After that, no more snakes were allowed in the school building. I still think snakes make good pets - but I don't keep any because I don't like to feed them live mice. I think mice are nice, too.

### Spring of 1950

We were building a house - #15 - between #10 where we had lived earlier, which was now occupied by the Days, and #9 where the McGuanes lived. Contractors did most of the construction, but Dad and I nailed on most of the roof boards and shingles. It was mostly a single story, but Jewell Colony building restrictions called for 2 story houses. My parents came in under the letter of the law by including a tall attic with one finished upstairs room reachable with a set of pull-down stairs. The house was built on a cement slab, with oil fired hot water heating. Coils of 1" iron pipes were laid into the concrete under each room, connected back to the furnace through a master set of valves so each room could be controlled separately - no drafts from air vents, nice warm floors to step on when you got up in the morning. Since the pipes were in 6 inches of concrete, we hoped there would never be any leaks.



BACK OF HOUSE, VIEWED FROM GARDEN  
SHOWING "UPSTAIRS" WINDOWS  
GREENHOUSES NOT ADDED YET

There was a greenhouse on the south end for my mother to grow orchids. On the north end, attached to the master bedroom, there was a glass block greenhouse, with no direct sunlight but



ORCHID HOUSE

with incandescent and fluorescent lights that could be raised and lowered, for starting plants, both flowers and vegetables. An old guard house from the refinery was set up in the back yard for a tool shed. It had an oil stove for heat and a gas fired, hot water furnace that piped heat to the orchid house. The furnace had to be kept out of the orchid house because the orchids were very sensitive to the

exhaust fumes. The shed was wired for electricity with a lot of outlets. The west side of it was expanded to make a small greenhouse for starting plants in direct sunlight and to hold the garden tools. In the east section of the shed I had my electronics equipment and a fairly well stocked chem lab so I could brew up lots of good things. In the middle, next to the greenhouse, was a large workbench with power tools and space for both Dad and me to work on various projects.



MY END OF THE SHED

By now I had a good short wave radio to listen to in the shed. I had set up several long wire antennas and could pick up a lot of foreign stations and amateur radio - and I used one of the antennas with the 2-tube radio transmitter I built. It broadcast out about 1,000 ft. I played 45 rpm records and also sent out some voice and narration - but I doubt that anyone ever listened to it. I spent many hours in the shed - a few sparks, zaps or explosions didn't bother anyone. Chemicals and electronics were not allowed in my bedroom. My bedroom, according to my Dad's decree, was for sleeping or doing homework, not for playing or for research and development. I had to beg him for a long time to let me put the radio into my room.

My Dad was really a stickler for neatness. One day I came home from school and charged into jeans to work in the shed for a while. Since I knew I would be picked up by friends just an hour later, I laid my school pants across the bed ready to be put on again. Soon my Dad appeared in the shed door - "Let's get in there and get that room cleaned up!" The pants on the bed were absolutely the only thing not in perfect order.

## SUMMER OF '50

I worked at the pop stand again. A little more pay, but not much. After a few weeks the pro shop decided to make more money by putting beer in the cooler also. That job didn't last too long for me - it was quite illegal for me to handle the beer when I was still only 15, so the pro-shop manager put his nephew, who was older (18), out there.

Because of the sod removal from part of the course during the war, some of the waterlines had been removed or buried and there was no remaining record of where all the pipes and valves were located. I bought a war surplus mine detector and used it map out the locations of the missing pipes. That paid for the mine detector and gave me a little extra pocket money. It also got me interested in metal detecting..(I still have some of the parts - and two modern metal detectors - one for gold and one for coins.)



MILITARY PHOTO - NOT ME

We still had Bruce, the cocker spaniel. It was common then to let dogs out at night. Eventually we found out that he'd often go over to the McGuane's kitchen door, push the screen door in and go into the house, then go upstairs to sleep with the kids. (Many people didn't keep their doors closed in the summer. It was before the time that most people had air conditioning.. Everyone let in as much cool evening air as possible and blew it around with electric fans.) The problem at McGuane's was that the screen door swung only inward, so in the morning Bruce would come down and bark to be let out - probably by the housekeeper who lived downstairs.

Grosse Ile at that time - 40's and 50's - did not take well to blacks. The steel mills were becoming more mechanized and weren't hiring many of the unskilled people who had come up from the south, so there was a lot of unemployment, both black and white, and lots of competition for jobs. Some families had household staff who were black. Most of them would come onto the island in the morning and leave before 6:00p at night. A few residents, including the Rodericks and the McGuanes, had live-ins who acted as housekeepers and nannies. The Rodericks employed a nice couple - she did a lot of the housework. He worked elsewhere, but helped part time with the lawn work. The lady at the McGuanes was a little older - a friendly grandmother who brought her grandson to stay in the summers. The kids all played together.

About this time, Joe Louis, a champion boxer who was black, wanted to buy a house for his mother on Grosse Ile. Somehow this leaked out and all of a sudden there were NO houses for sale anywhere on the island!!!

The Roderick's house on Lakewood was very memorable - a large grey wood and stone house. One side yard had a full professional grade red clay tennis court, with 3 sides fully fenced in and then surrounded by pine trees about 12 ft. high. No one was allowed to walk on it unless wearing real tennis shoes. The upstairs of the house had several bedrooms, with a recreation room, that also had a couple of beds, at the top of the large staircase. There was a passageway between one of the bedroom closets and the hall linen closet. Downstairs there were the usual rooms plus an apartment for the couple who worked there. In spite of having help, the kids had to do chores. If I came over too soon after dinner I'd be handed a dish towel and expected to help.

By now a lot of people were getting TV sets and there were more programs. Some of the stations signed off their regular radio programming at 10:00pm. Then they played background music and generated black and white patterns on the screen for an hour or so. Kay and I - along with some of the Roderick girls - would often sit around and watch the TV with the lights turned low until about 11:00pm - when I would be kicked out.

One time I was over there in the upstairs rec room where the girls were staying when we realized that it was quite late - past time for me to leave. I headed quietly down the stairs and met Mr. and Mrs. Roderick coming up. They had turned out the lights and were coming up to bed. They were rather surprised to see me, I think. I can't remember what we said to each other, but I was glad to get out of there without being questioned.

### **11<sup>TH</sup> GRADE - '50-'51**

I was the lab technician for the 8<sup>th</sup> General Science, 9<sup>th</sup> Biology and 11<sup>th</sup> grade Chemistry classes, so I got to spend a lot of my free time in the Chem Lab. I was available for students who had missed an experiment, so I'd get out all the equipment they needed and make sure they knew how to set it up. Meanwhile, while Mr. Gingrich was coaching football or baseball or some other activity, I'd be in charge. Most of the time things would be reasonably quiet in the lab, but sometimes some of the students would start making too much noise. Mr. Smith, the principal, had his office just across the hall. He'd come in and I was the one who always got blamed for the commotion, my fault or not.

Helen Beyster, whom some of the teachers thought could do no wrong, was often in there with me grading papers. She never got blamed even though she was sometimes the one who had caused the disturbance - but my day came. I was just going into the storage room one afternoon when Helen stood up on a chair holding several lit matches in the air - and Mr. Smith came in the door and saw her standing there! "You're the Statue of Liberty, Miss Beyster?" he asked. There were a few less disturbances after that and I didn't get blamed as much for them.

Back in those days no one worried about being in contact with mercury, so during chemistry class we'd sometimes dip our fingers in the mercury because it felt cool. When it got on our gold rings it amalgamated to the rings and made them look silver. Eventually it would wear off. We'd sometimes push the little balls of mercury around on our desks. If this had happened now, the school would be closed for months and we'd all be taken to decontamination centers. None of our brains seem to have been affected by it - at least not that I've noticed!!!

Thank goodness Mrs. Sawisky, in the room above the chem lab, didn't know the kinds of things I could be doing. I didn't broadcast it around when Tom Langley, my lab partner, and I were

making gun cotton. Mr. Gingrich was out on the football field, but he know about it and didn't make any objection. He knew I would take safety precautions. Gun cotton - cellulose nitrate - a very good explosive. It was used in early depth charges. It involves cotton balls soaked in very concentrated sulphuric and nitric acids, all kept in an ice bath so the mixture got only slightly warm. Too much heat during the reaction and something devastating could have happened - even disastrous. When we were done we washed and dried the cotton balls, and then a simple spark or even the bare touch of a match would make them explode instantly. Nice stuff.

I bought some plans to make a small (1 ½" bore, 2 ½ ft. long) impulse type jet engine at home, but I was having problems with fuel and sustained ignition, so I brought it into the school where I could set it up in the lab during my free time. It used a mixture of alcohol and ether as a primary fuel. Pretty wild stuff!! Since I was having trouble with the combustion I used the natural gas (that was for the Bunsen burners) to sustain the ignition. I clamped it to the lab table with the exhaust pointing out the window since the smell was rather strong. The problem was that Mrs. Sawitski's history class, in the room directly above, had their windows open too and the air from the lab was blowing up and in. Considering the noise it made as well as the smell, it only took a few minutes for her to get my project shut down. The engine never would run on its own. I found out later that there was a mistake in the drawings I had purchased and the manufacturer had included a mimeographed correction sheet which had gotten lost. This was only a small jet intended for model airplanes. It's a good thing I hadn't tried to build the 6 ft long version that would power a motorcycle.

Driving class was the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. The first days were in the classroom, learning all the laws and regulations. Then we went out in the car, four at a time. The first driver drove us up to the north end of the island where we got stuck in about a foot of snow. (The road crews didn't clean many of the smaller roads.) Then the teacher said, "Tom - your turn. Get us out of here and back to school," which I did.

Up until shortly before the time I got my driver's licence, kids on Grosse Ile drove the local police car to take their driver's tests, but you weren't allowed to turn on the flashing lights or siren. The cars only had radio-telephones at that time, not their own base station radios, and there were only 2 cars. One of my radios could pick up one side of the conversations. By the time I got my driver's license, if you'd taken a driver's training course in school, you only had to pass the written test and didn't actually have to do a driving test to get your license.

Even after we had our licenses, bicycles were still the main method of transportation for most of us, sometimes to school, but mostly on our free time and in the summer. All had 1 ¾" to 2" tires - single speed coasters - no racing bikes then. Even in high school, very few of us had cars.

I borrowed my Mom's Buick Roadmaster a few times for special events such as basketball games and dances. Most of the time we were all just dropped off by parents or older brothers or sisters.

That year, the chemistry class, about 20 of us, took a field trip to the Mobil Oil refinery in Trenton. (Dad was the General Manager by then.) We got to climb up the 100+ ft. cracking towers and also went through the testing labs. These labs were not for research and development but were set up to do quality control checks on the various gasolines and fuels that produced at the refinery. Also, testing was done on competitors' products. The technicians boiled gasoline in glass flasks. Sometimes - not while we were going through - the glass cracked and the gasoline spilled on the heater and put out a nice ball of flame which usually went out in the few seconds. Probably nobody other than employees would be allowed in that area now. All the plant workers knew me and a lot of them said "Hello, Tom" or "Hi, Tom" or worse, "Hello, Tommy" as I passed by, which I found rather embarrassing.

Since I had a lot of time in the school chem lab, I was able to use the scales and equipment in the lab to measure out all the gunpowder and metal parts that Tom Langley and I used to make pipe bombs. I had been making my own black powder from a mixture of 75% potassium nitrate, 15% charcoal and 10% sulphur. It was good for lots of smoke and fire. For fireworks - OK - but for pipe bombs we needed faster burning powder. We were able to buy black powder, intended for muzzle loading rifles, without any difficulty, from a friend, Bill Bilk, who had a muzzle loader collection. In the lab we were trying to determine just how much powder you really had to have to make a good pipe bomb and which grades of black powder would give the biggest bang - F, FF or FFF. That's how our lunch hour experiments removed most of the front wall of the pump house. (Details of bomb design available only upon authorized request.) Of course we kept all the pieces and parts from the blasts in our locker - which was right by the principal's office - we wanted to study them to see how well they had disintegrated with a given amount of power. Fortunately, no one seemed to notice the smell of burnt powder that drifted out of our locker into the hall.

We also got into building rockets since you couldn't buy Estes rocket engines back then. We made our own rocket fuel - mixtures of zinc dust and sulphur. They were small rockets about an inch or so in diameter and two feet long. We used the base of an old windmill in front of our pump house as a launch platform. We'd light the fuse on the rockets and then jump back into the pump house for protection in case anything blew up - but apparently making rocket fuel was rocket science after all, because we never got any of them to take off. All we got was lots of smoke, flame and melted metal. Maybe a little gunpowder or perchlorate would have helped.

## SUMMER OF '51

I still worked part of the time at Westshore. There was a lot of grass at home to cut, too. Dad had a large garden in the lots behind the house. There were several rows of corn, 12 or 15 tomato plants, green peppers and egg plant. We tried to grow pumpkins, but the first frost got them before they were large enough. We had problems with raccoons coming in at night and eating the corn just before it was ready to be picked.



VIEW OF GARDEN LOOKING SOUTH

Dad and I set up a battery powered electric fence around the garden with one wire about 6 inches off the ground and the other wire about a foot off the ground so we could the critters whether they were crawling under or climbing over. This helped some, but they still were getting part of the corn. Hoping to scare the rest of them away, I hung some flourescent lamps on the fence wires so they'd flash when the high voltage pulse went through - about once a second. The racoons must have thought we were advertising a restaurant grand opening. That night they cleaned out all the corn. So much for that bright idea.

## 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE, '51-52'

I was the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Physics lab assistant, 11<sup>th</sup> grade Chemistry lab assistant, 9<sup>th</sup> grade Biology lab assistant and 8<sup>th</sup> grade General Science lab assistant. I kept the inventory of all the chemicals, the physics equipment and the pickled specimens for biology, and everything else that was needed, and I ordered what was necessary for the next year and helped students in the afternoon with experiments they had missed. There were a couple of other science nerd students starting to come up - hopefully they took over eventually.

At home, I built an electronic multimeter and used it to build a 5" oscilloscope. These were both kits and had to be completely assembled, tested and calibrated. Both worked for me for years, in college and long after.

That year there was a big new gymnasium, built on the east end of the building. It opened just before Christmas. There were bleachers on both sides of the basketball court and large shower rooms on each end of the gym so the visiting team didn't have to use the girls shower room. A concession stand was built into one wall, complete with electric coolers and a popcorn machine. The cheerleaders operated the stand and. I went early and helped them set up. I had no interest in watching the game, so I manned the stand while they were cheering during the game and they came back during the breaks and worked with me. That gave me a chance to hang out with the cheerleaders. Several of them were in our class and all of them were pretty cute.



That Christmas, I moved up from Gilbert's poisons to nuclear radiation. I got a Gilbert Atomic Energy Set. They really made one! (I had to pay for half of it.) The set contained 3 radioactive sources (a Gamma Source, a Beta Source and an Alpha Source), a Geiger Counter (which I still have), an electroscope to measure very small amounts of radiation and an alcohol cloud chamber that allowed you to see trails left by the particles emitted from the radioactive sources.

I set up several demonstration experiments for the physics class showing how different materials such as paper, wood, your hand or strips of lead, would stop radiation. I hope none of the students died of radiation poisoning years later. It didn't seem to bother me! Actually, the samples had fairly short half lives ( a few years) and weren't really all that "hot." This was the new age of atomic energy and these experiments were a lot more interesting than the school's outdated books. Today this would have forced evacuation of the entire school and several of us would probably have been quarantined for close observation - to say nothing of being brought up on some sort of juvenile delinquency charges or worse.

Later we used some of the lead to make lead weights and poured it in molds to make sinkers and toy cars and little soldiers and never thought anything about it. Just having the lead sheets in school now would probably shut the place down.

All during high school I was usually on the decorating committees for all the dances and proms, which were usually held on Friday nights. A lot of the class would work on decorating for a dance - often right up until 5:00 or 6:00pm. Then we'd dash home and clean up and change clothes - suits for the boys, party dresses for the girls. Only a few had floor length formals. I usually went to the dance with one of the girls who was taking tickets or doing some other job, so I got out of dancing most of the time. Every so often, though, a group of the girls would get together and drag me out on the floor for at least one dance or so. Probably \$10 took care of the whole night's expenses and we went home by 10:30 or 11:00pm.

For our senior prom, we took a 2 ft. square cardboard box and glued 1" square mirrors all over it. I installed a bar diagonally through the corners and hung it on through a hole in a board with a small bearing. A pulley was attached to the shaft and a belt connected it to a small motor, similar to a rotisserie motor. We hung it across the gym on ropes between two basketball backboards and aimed two spotlights at it. The light reflected off the mirrors and looked like bubbles floating all over the walls of the gym. It was great!!! But that night when we came back for the dance, it would NOT move no matter how I adjusted it. The next morning when we came back to take everything down, it worked perfectly.

Our class had a paper drive that year. The whole class got involved. Some of the kids borrowed their parents cars, which let us collect from all over the island quite quickly. We brought in several tons, which filled the stage of the old gymnasium about 5 ft. deep. We had to rent a bailer since the paper company wouldn't pick it up unless it was bailed. We accomplished the whole thing in one weekend - including spending some time looking at the pictures in the medical journals. The school gave us Monday off and most of us decided to go over to Trenton and see the afternoon movie. When we got there the ticket office wouldn't sell us tickets and called the Trenton truant officer. He called the Grosse Ile school system and then finally approved our seeing the movie.

The money from our paper drive and other projects paid for our class gift to the school, which was rubber mats for the new gym to protect the floor when people walked around the outside edges. We also donated some money to help one of our classmates who had broken his neck in gym class and had a lot of medical bills.

The Physics Class went to the Great Lakes Steel plant south of Detroit. They had blast furnaces for producing iron and open hearth furnaces and Bessemer Converters for producing steel. We got to walk along in front of the open hearth furnaces and watch the women workers - most quite large and muscular - shovel, mixtures of various metals into the furnaces. These additives determined the types of steel they poured out. It was extremely hot. The workers had to pick up a shovelful of material, take it 30 to 40 feet, pitch it into the opening in the furnace and move quickly away. The temperature in the furnace was about 2,000F. There was a metal walkway above the rolling mills where the ingots of red hot steel were rolled into sheets. Even at the distance away we were from the steel - probably about 70' - the air was filled with hot steam and ash particles and we put our hands in front of our faces to protect them from the radiant heat while we moved along quickly to a cooler area of the mill.

Second semester I took typing. I hoped that some of my written work would be more readable and I'd be better prepared for college. It was a full class and the teacher didn't think that anyone who was not going to be a professional female secretary should be wasting her class time. Some of the typewriters were broken, so there was not a usable one for me. I had to bring in my own personal portable typewriter. It was slow and had a smaller keyboard, which made things more difficult. For the whole semester, she never quite got around to having any of the other machines repaired. The rules were that there should be no mistakes or erasures on any of the work handed in. Anything wrong with grammar or spelling or any typos would result in a loss of 5 words per minute from your typing score. I came out typing a negative 20 words a minute.

## DRESS UP DAY

In the spring the senior class had a dress up day. We all came to school in wild costumes. We had some pirates, a naval officer, Little Bo Peep, presidents and other interesting characters. I was "Rocket Man." I had a helmet with radio tubes sticking out of it, a control box, with lots of switches and knobs, strapped to my chest, a war surplus transmitter on my back - complete with antenna, rubber boots and rubber gloves, and riding breeches. It was a bit difficult to sit during class and was especially a problem during typing class. The teacher wasn't really in the spirit of the day and didn't see any reason that we shouldn't do all our work as usual.



A MOTLEY CREW

Dad and I looked over several colleges around Michigan - Adrian, Hillsdale, Albion, Houghton School of Mines. We found out that Dr. Potter, who was in charge of the Socony Mobil refinery labs, had gone to Albion and said that Albion's chemistry department had a very good reputation. Since I was interested in chemistry at the time, I decided to apply to Albion and I was accepted.

We had machine shop that year. It was a great place for Tom Langley and me to build a cannon. I think we were supposed to be making metal lamp bases. We used 1" pipe for a barrel, with several larger pipes around it and lead poured in between. An old small snow plow blade we found was used for the base. The whole thing weighed about 60 lbs. The barrel was just large enough that we could drop in CO2 cartridges or 12 gauge lead balls. When the teacher figured out what we were doing, we were asked to take it out of the shop, so we took it down to what was left of our pump house, with the nice open front "window." Again we got powder from Bill Bilk and during school lunch hour we shot lead balls out over the river towards Canada. Large echos boomed up and down the area about 10 seconds apart. The Canadian shore was about a mile away - but nothing except the sound ever got beyond a hundred yards or so - the ships in the channel and the Canadians were quite safe. All went well until we noticed that the breech was taking more powder than it should have. We figured we had a cavity opening up someplace between the pipes, so we melted our lead out and dismantled it - which we would have had to do anyway, since my Dad had gotten wind of the activity and had strongly suggested that we cease and desist. As for the school, we didn't ever hear anything from them directly. I was never told that they caught on to the source of the lunch time booms . We were not called into Mr. Smith's office or disciplined in any way. Probably Mr. Smith quietly tipped off my Dad and left me for him to deal with.

I have always wondered what the teachers told the FBI and security people about me in future years when I got my security clearance while working at Rand Development Corp. I heard they talked to several teachers and I know it took about 6 months to get it, even though I'd had a Secret clearance in the Navy.

Talking about the Navy, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1952, I joined the Naval Reserve at Grosse Ile Naval Air Station. The station had started as a small air field in 1927. The navy used it in the '30s for blimp development projects and then expanded it during WWII to about 600 acres and 3,000 personnel. In 1969 it was closed, reduced in size and turned into the Grosse Ile Township General Aviation Field - just about what it was when it started.

When I joined, only 100 or so planes were kept at the base. It was used to train Naval ground crews and to allow Naval Reserve pilots to keep their flight hours, which gave them a higher pay scale.



(George H. W. Bush took some of his pilot training there, as did Bob Barker, the TV game show host) Also it provided a reserve air field to bring in planes from coastal stations during a severe storm.

The base allowed local residents to use the theater and swimming pool. Most of the kids went there to see movies for only 6 cents. They had colored fluorescent light tubes across the proscenium opening and they were connected to the sound system so the music would make them flash in neat patterns - really innovative at that time.

The officers club was a social hangout for some of the businessmen in the community - who actually had had it built during the '40s. Talk about a low security base! The weekend after some of us had signed up for the Reserve, we went over to the Officer's Club and watched the running of the Kentucky Derby. After all, we still looked like civilians then.

In the Reserve Program we were on duty at the base one weekend each month - usually just daytime - not sleeping there. The first weekend we new recruits went to the base, we spent one day taking tests very similar to SATs - English, Math - also general aptitude for various possible trades. Most of us were not too thrilled to be taking these tests but we were told that as soon as we were done we could go home for the day, so most of us didn't work too hard on them. In the usual military manner - "Never tell anyone anything up front" - we found out months later that the grades from this test determined what we would be allowed to do the rest of the time we were in the Navy. It's a good thing I scored high on most of the tests.

On Navy weekends after that I went to school on aircraft maintenance and military procedures and worked with the airplanes on the ground. We learned to start up the aircraft and perform checkouts on the engine and controls. We also had to gas, oil and repair them.

Of course, there was the end of my senior year to finish, too. Just before the end of school each year there was a Senior Class Skip Day. Our class chose to go to an amusement park south of Detroit - not the one on Boblo Island. It was another park, but I can't remember the name. It was a nice place with a roller coaster right next to the water. That was my first and last roller coaster ride. Birds fly up and rocks fall fast when they're dropped - people shouldn't! That evening, we went to a Chinese diner, all getting different foods and sharing them around. Mrs. Sawitzky was our class adviser and came with us as a chaperone, as she had done for years with every other senior class.

To the surprise of some people, I did graduate in June of '52, as did 29 others in the class, although all 32 of us went through the graduation ceremony. I don't know if the other two officially graduated the next year or not, but we were all treated the same on graduation day. About 2/3rds of our class was headed for college that fall. The class of '53, coming along, was much larger - 40+ students - and the classes in following years kept getting larger - so where we had been a one classroom class, future classes needed two classrooms.

## **SUMMER OF '52**

That summer I had a job in the testing labs of the Socony Mobile Refinery. I helped out when one of the 5 chemists was on vacation. This also gave them someone to do all the "odd" jobs. I rode into work with Dad. We were always there a half an hour early and left a half an hour late, but the extra time was not on the books. The first day I was there, Dad came into the lab and told Dr. Potter that he did not want to see me sitting down any time he came by. That meant I was kept pretty busy. Sometimes I had to get the crushed ice that we used to pack the intake manifolds of the anti-knock test engines that ran in the basement. The ice machines were in the cafeteria right next door to the lab. This usually meant that I got some free lemonade or snacks that they were preparing in the morning. The food was great, especially the fresh baked pies. Of course, all the cooks knew Dad and sometimes they would send a pie home with us.

At the lab I ran tests to check the age of the gasoline and to be sure that there were no additives that were not supposed to be there. I was also in charge of cleaning a lot of the lab glassware after the tests were completed. And, as low man on the totem pole, I was chosen to mix up the standard test fuel for the anti-knock engines. This was a gallon of N-Heptane with about 3 drops of butylmercaptan. (One drop would chase you out of your house. This is the odor that is put into natural gas so you can smell it if it leaks). The butylmercaptan was kept in a refrigerator in the

back of one of the warehouses so nobody could smell it. About once a week I had to take a gallon can of heptane out to the warehouse, get the butylmercaptan container out of the refrigerator, carefully measure 3 drops into the gallon can of heptane, return the butylmercaptan to the refrigerator and take the heptane back to the lab. For a couple of hours afterward I smelled as if I had been sleeping with a skunk.

Every time there was a price war at the gas stations in Detroit, we'd get dozens of samples of gasoline to test. We wanted to find out if competitors were diluting the gas or changing the octane rating. This only happened two or three times while I was there, but it did cause a lot of extra work. The rest of the time we just tested daily samples of our own products, such as gasoline and jet fuel, to be sure that they met specifications.

Since I had just joined the navy that spring and was only on the base one weekend a month (hence the term: Weekend Warriors), it would take a long time to move up from my rank of Airman recruit (E1 - the lowest rate), so in the summer I went to a mini boot camp and took a training session for advancement in rate. It lasted four weeks and moved me from Airman recruit to Airman apprentice. The first two weeks we had to stay on base 24 hours a day, the next two weeks we could go out for the weekend. We had to get up at 6:00am and go out on the field to do calisthenics. Then we went to chow hall for breakfast. From 8:00am to 10:00am we were in the classrooms. From 10:00am to 12 noon we were in the maintenance shops - the prop shop, the metal shop, the engine shop, the carburetor shop and hydraulic shop. Then to the chow hall for lunch - all marching in as one group and eating together. Afternoon, depending on the weather, there was marching on the parade field or swimming, or water survival - including jumping, wearing no bathing suits, off the ceiling beams which were 25 above the swimming pool. The water was 15 ft. deep but very clear, so it looked as if we were jumping down 40 ft. - not to my liking! Evening chow was 5:00pm to 7:00pm on your own - at the chow hall, the PX or cafeteria. From 7:00pm to lights out at 10:00pm was time for studying for next days classes, watching the one TV in the lounge or washing and ironing uniforms.

There were about 80 of us and we lived in the "White Barracks," the only white building on the base. It was built in 1942 for Waves and in the mid 40's was converted into the barracks for the British pilots who came over for training. It was right next to the officers club, which was now off-limits to me. At that time, Captain Dahl was the commander of the base and lived just across the street from our barracks. His son, Pete, who had been in our graduating class, sometimes invited me over to their house in the

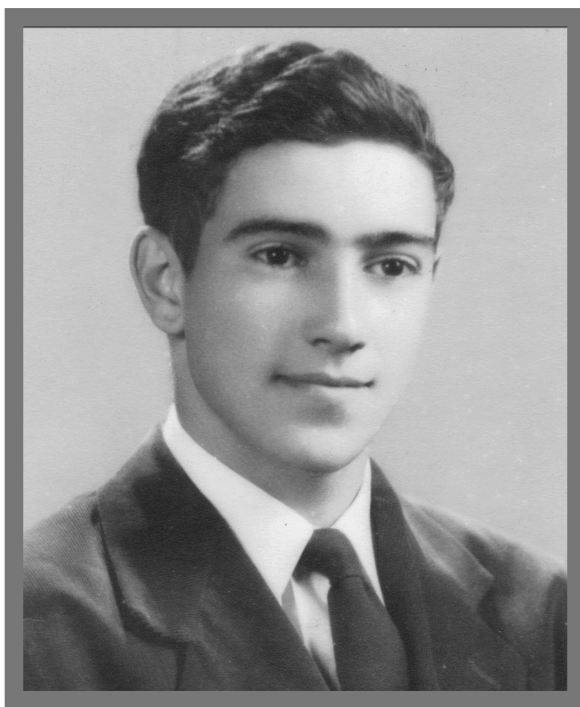


WHITE BARRACKS - MY HOME FOR FOUR WEEKS

evening to watch TV. Our training officers weren't sure what to think when they'd see me coming out of the Captain's house at night and coming back to the barracks. None of THEM were invited to the Captain's house.

After the training program, I returned to the refinery labs to finish out the summer. Almost everyone else in the class had jobs, too, or was beginning to prepare for college, so we didn't see much of each other. Some of the colleges had their freshman classes come in early in August but I don't remember going very early or having much to do to get ready - just take some clothes, my radio and tools. I could add other things later since I'd be coming home one weekend a month for the Navy.

I don't believe that Albion College was quite ready for me. I was about 10 years ahead of the times and they were a little conservative. But with a little black powder here and a few wire taps there, I tried to make it through. That turned out to be two years at Albion and two years of Active duty with the Navy. Details in Episode 2.



SENIOR PICTURE 1952



