

Jim Reuter's History
In Tacoma's North End

January 2023

I was born in Seattle on Sept. 10, 1942. When I was a young child, my family moved to Lakewood. For the past 50 years, I have lived with my wife on 2201 North Union Avenue.

My Childhood Memories in Tacoma's North End

My paternal grandmother was Beulah Reuter. Her grandchildren called her "Kitty" because she owned a big black and white tabby named Vicky. For many years, Kitty lived in a 2-story house on 1721 North Oaks Street. I have many fond memories of staying with Kitty on weekends when I was a child.

Heating Grandma Kitty's House with Coal

When I stayed at Kitty's house, I would help her shovel coal into the firebox in the basement. Then the coal would cook slowly all night long. In the morning, we would need to add more coal to keep the house warm. Once a week, Kitty would need to clean out the firebox and add new coal to it. A truck would deliver the coal to the house about once a month.

After a few years, they bought an automatic coal bin feeder and I was taught how to use it to add more coal.

Grandma Kitty Earned a Living as a Seamstress

The owner of Lou Johnson's (the well known women's shop in downtown Tacoma) asked Kitty to work for her and even offered to send her to Paris to attend the fashion shows. Yet, Kitty declined her offer and continued working out of her home as a seamstress. I remember seeing many of Tacoma's most prominent women coming in and out of Kitty's house and watched them being fitted for fancy dresses.

Going to the Local Movie Theater

On some Saturdays, my neighborhood friends and I would each get a quarter from our parents and together walk about 12 blocks to the movie theater on 6th Avenue called the Sunset Theater (renamed The Guild in 1963 and no longer a movie theater). We would watch cowboy movies featuring such stars as Tom Mix. The movies would always end with a "cliff hanger" so we would need to wait until the following Saturday to see more of the movie. Unfortunately, because I didn't stay with Kitty every weekend, I missed the endings of some of the movies.

Riding the Streetcar to Woolworth Department Store

Grandma Kitty didn't drive and so she relied on public transportation. On some weekends, Grandma Kitty and I walked the 3 blocks from her house to the street car stop at the corner of North 21st and Oaks Street. We traveled downtown to Woolworth's Department store where we ate lunch at the soda fountain counter. I remember enjoying delicious ice cream cones for dessert.

Selling Ladybugs

One day, I had a great idea of how I could make some extra money. So I decided to walk down to John Slipp's Grocery Store (located on the corner of N. 21st and N. Oaks) and share my idea with the owner. I so was happy when Slipp's gave me permission to set up a table on their sidewalk so I could sell ladybugs.

Occasionally, Kitty would give me a grocery list to buy items at the store. I remember seeing the sawdust that covered the floor where the meat counter was.

General Store

Across from Slipp's, was a store that had big glass cases that were full of candy. I remember buying wax whistles that I could blow and then proceed to chew on.

Radio Time

During the evenings, Kitty and I would sit in her living room listening to the radio. Oftentimes, we'd listen to the serial programs. There were so many fascinating sound effects, that I could close my eyes and use my imagination to visualize all the events that were happening in the stories. I even can remember listening to the broadcast of Charlie McCarthy shows.

The First TV on the Block

Two houses up from my grandma Kitty's house, a family bought the first television on the block. The TV was very small - about 6 inches in diameter. So all of us neighbor kids would need to crowd around it trying to see an image. In front of the TV was a huge magnifier glass that enlarged the TV's image. We were all so very excited even though the new TV just produced a very shadowy, black and white picture. (Many years later when I saw the live broadcast of the astronauts landing on the moon, it reminded me of how that first TV picture looked like decades earlier).

A Variety Of Churches

I'm not sure why, but when I spent the weekends with Kitty, she would take me to a different church each Sunday.

The Buckley Gulch

Back in the late 1940's or early 1950's I remember that there was wooden bridge over part of the Buckley Gulch that extended from 20thst Street, going south. The planks on the bridge would rattle as cars drove across it. (Years later, this part of the gulch was filled in). The gulch was a fun place for us kids to play. My friends and I loved building camps among the jungle like vegetation and tall evergreen trees. And there were even long ivy vines for us to swing on!

Riding a Bike

One day, a neighborhood friend loaned me his bike. I was so excited to finally learn how to ride a bike that I rode all the way to the University of Puget Sound campus. But once Kitty found out about my adventure, she was quite upset with me for traveling so far from her house.

My Later Years in the Proctor Neighborhood

I graduated from Clover Park High School in Lakewood in 1961 and then returned to Tacoma's North End while attending the University of Puget Sound. I was drafted during my senior year and sent to Viet Nam in 1967. Upon my discharge, I returned to Tacoma and graduated from UPS in 1969 with a degree in Business Administration. I was the general manager of Never Never Land at Pt. Defiance Park from 1964 until 1982. After that, I worked as a professional photographer for many years.

I met my wife Georgette while she and I were students at UPS. We were married at the Kilworth Chapel on the UPS campus in 1971. Two years later, we bought our current home on 2201 N. Union. Here we raised our two daughters (long with numerous pets). Our older daughter attended Washington Elementary

School, just like her mom, grandpa and step-grandpa had done years before.

In 1973, when we bought our house on North Union Avenue, the Proctor shopping district looked quite different than it does today. At that time, there was a "10 Cent Store" located where Peaks and Pints is now located. I remember the wooden floors and the wooden display cases full of inexpensive items. Also in Proctor, there were 3 taverns and 2 bakeries - Henry's Bakery and B & B Bakery were across from each other on N. 26th street. There was a Union 76 gas station on the corner where Starbucks is today. We oftentimes would go to the McCormick Public Library to check out books. A vacant lot was located on the east side of the library - and a set of concrete steps was all that was left of the former house that had occupied that space. Years later, we happily watched the construction of the Wheelock Library as it was added to the McCormick Library.