

The Memories of
Anthony John Paul Bellantoni
May 16, 1954 to Present (March 27, 2024)

Table of Contents

Prologue	2
School Years.....	3
First Memories.....	3
Saint Ambrose	3
Sierra Vista.....	3
Junior High	4
High School	5
Early Adult	9
You're in the Army Now	9
The Store	9
Ramsey Canyon	10
1976 - Arizona to Maine	13
Go East, Young Man	13
Madawaska.....	14
Go East, Young Couple.....	14
Married Life	16
Presque Isle	18
Mattawamkeag River Road	19
Mattawamkeag Back Settlement Road	22
Moving on.....	25
Bangor	25
Pennsylvania.....	26
Rumford.....	27
My Children Lydia, Miranda and Dominic	28
Lydia.....	28
Miranda	31
Dominic.....	32
Good Old Dad and Mom.....	33
Dad.....	33
Mom	34
Random Memories	37
Odds and Ends	37
Getting All Together	38
Christmas Reunion – 2023.....	38

Prologue

As the name suggests, my writings are entirely from memory, and memory can be fleeting. As is to be expected, the further I go back in time the foggier my memories get. Many of the dates are educated guesses. (My sister was able to confirm the lost and found of my dog Jeff, when we lived in Tucson.)

I have purposely avoided any criticisms, as the target does not have the opportunity to offer a defense. I also avoided last names in defense of the innocent.

School Years

First Memories

My first memories are when I was in preschool; five or six years of age. In those days I was allowed to roam freely; I just needed to come home to eat. One day I saw a dog. He had no collar and was very thin. I took off my belt; put it around his neck and brought him home. "Can I keep him?" "We will see," my mother replied. When my father came home; he must have said yes. We named him Jeff; proper name was Jefferson Bones.

Jeff was also allowed to roam freely. It was not long after I found him that he did not come home to eat. So, I took to walking the streets. It was after not too many days that I heard barking. "That is Jeff," I thought to myself. I followed the sound of barking to a house. There was Jeff, behind a screen door. Upon seeing me, Jeff's barking became joyous. A man comes to the door and, with some hostility, asks me what I am doing there. I say, "That's my dog, mister." He resisted, but when he realized I was not leaving, he relented and let Jeff out. What a joyous reunion.

Another fine summer day; I was outside with my brothers when we heard the sound of the ice cream truck. "Can we have some ice cream, please?" we say in unison to my mother. The truck is fast approaching and we are begging. Okay, my mother says. She goes inside, and comes out with an envelope with some money in it and gives it to us. It turns out the money was for a fine for a speeding ticket. Not sure what Dad thought of that, as my mother had a lead foot.

Saint Ambrose

My memories are vague. I do remember kindergarten, where we were taught to take a nap. It is a lesson well learned that I still practice.

First grade: I remember how scared I was of the nuns. You never, ever talked back. I also remember we wore a uniform: brown pants, brown shoes, white shirt.

Sierra Vista

I moved to Sierra Vista the summer before second grade. We lived in an apartment above the store next to Nonno and Nonni. There was a fire at the store, which spread to the apartment, so my father rented a house on Brown Drive. Once the house was built on Sierra Drive, we moved there. I lived there until I was eighteen.

Third grade.

I vividly recall being told to hide under our desks during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Another vivid memory is a teacher coming into the room after lunch, telling us that Kennedy had been assassinated. We all said a prayer. That next weekend, while my father was making breakfast, we watched live on television Jack Ruby shoot and kill Lee Harvey Oswald.

After lunch our teacher would read to us for an hour. I especially remember the Jungle Book and Charlotte's Web. My sister Tess was born on August 20th, 1962. We went to Tucson to bring her

home. During the drive home, I-10 was under construction and my father decided to check out the new road. We were going along at a pretty good speed when we approached a bridge. Problem was, there was no bridge. My father slams on the brakes, and we stop at the edge of the precipice. We all breathe a sigh of relief. My mother says, "And she hasn't been baptized yet." Moments like that are never forgotten!

Fourth grade.

After lunch we would do our multiplication tables; one through twelve. To this day I can do multiplication in my head instantly.

Fifth grade.

Not sure if this is the correct year.

We learned how to diagram sentences. I remember struggling to determine which syllable to put the accent. If I remember correctly, it was Martine who told me to just try saying each syllable harder.

Sixth grade.

We attended class on base in a former hospital.

My mother gave me a gift of an electronics kit. I built a radio and a record player. I brought a 45 record to show off the record player. I recall playing the A side. There was a mature female classmate. She had me play the B side, "Get Off of My Cloud."

Junior High

I recall Coach Gucciardo and his paddle. He taught health class, and one area we studied was the names of the muscles in the human body. At his request we made him a paddle in our workshop class. He gave us the exact specifications. One of the specifications was that the paddle have holes in the working part to lower wind resistance. He named the paddle gluteal, after the butt muscle. The paddle was very effective. I speak from experience. The boys all took shop, and the girls took home economics. The girls protested, asking why they could not take shop. This may have been the beginning of the equal rights movement. So, the boys took home economics. One skill I remember was Mrs. Winslow teaching us how to sew a button, which is a handy skill I still use.

I tried out for football and did not make the cut. That was the end of my doing sports.

One summer my parents sent me and my two brothers to Saint Joseph's youth camp near Flagstaff. The counselors were psychopaths and fools. They took a perverse pleasure in mocking us. One rainy evening they tried to start a campfire without much success. One of the bigger fools thought it would be a good idea to pour gasoline on the fire. There must have been some hot embers in the fire. The fire traveled up to the gasoline can. This fool threw the can backwards where it landed on one boy in his sleeping bag. He was severely burned. Some other boys stayed in a log cabin. One evening they come running and screaming out of the log cabin. The log cabin burnt to the ground. I am not aware of any injuries. Another counselor had a roadrunner in a cage. A roadrunner's favorite meal is a snake. I was with him in the room when it was feeding time. The counselor would kill the snake before giving it to the roadrunner. He asked me if I would like to try it. I said "sure." He then left the room. I thought it was not fair to kill the snake first, so I threw a small live snake into the cage. That roadrunner did not know what to do. The snake was wrapped around the neck of that bird when the counselor returned.

He was not happy. Horseback riding was another activity. I had never ridden a horse before. They put me on a small mare. The mare would walk, while the others would get far ahead. Just about the time the others were out of sight, the mare would catch up by galloping. It was all I could do to hang on. It was some time before I rode a horse again.

My two older sisters took the bus to San Diego, where they stayed with my father's sister, Aunt Mamie, and her husband, Uncle Paul. Not sure where my younger sister was. We learned later that my father had been diagnosed with melanoma and went to Phoenix for treatment.

High School

My most vivid memory from freshman year was how much older the seniors were. I took Algebra, English, Biology, French, PE and more. I had Mr. Bell for math. I recall the first day of class him saying, "If you do no work but do not disrupt the class, I will pass you with a D. If you make some effort, I will give you a C. If you put in the effort and do well, I will give you a B. If you excel, I will give you an A." My grades were mostly B's.

Sophomore year I recall doing double sessions. My classes were much the same as my freshman year. I did learn that I had a love for math and science and my biology teacher was worthless.

Junior year was when I started to notice women. I had a bad case of acne and my self-confidence was low. I could have fallen in love with Terri, but I was too ignorant to make a go at it. Buena had an open campus for lunch. A bunch of us would go to one of our parents' houses for lunch. I remember Vivian making us tacos. My mother would leave us pizza dough and all the fixings. One day I had a station wagon full of fellow students. I tried to hot rod it and pulled out in front of a car. The car hit us, and Patti was thrown from the car. She had serious injuries. My father was sued. It was a day I still relive often. I learned to be a cautious driver and to do a good deed whenever the opportunity occurs.

A few days before Christmas, Mark and I drove to Tucson. I knew I would be hitchhiking home, and the weather was predicted to be cold with snow so I brought my warmest clothes. My warmest clothes were my army jacket, boots, and long underwear. I also brought the matching pants and cap. When it was time to leave Mark drove me to an exit on I-10. Thinking it would be easier to get a ride I tucked my hair under my cap. I was jeered and heckled by college students and waited long before a car stopped. I got in the car. Driving was a very drunk sergeant. I took off my cap and my hair and he looked at me with surprise on his face. Finally, it dawned on me. I had heard of soldiers being treated poorly, but did not realize just how badly. He dropped me off at the intersection of highway 92. It was not long before a pickup truck stopped for me. I recognized the driver as he lived close to me in Ramsey Canyon. We called him one-arm Dick as he lost an arm in Vietnam. He says to me with obvious bitterness, "I only picked you up so you can keep the wiper blade clear of snow." I did not respond.

I have avoided expressing my opinion, but I feel obligated to speak out. The way our soldiers were treated was disgraceful. I was vehemently opposed to the war, but I never, ever treated a veteran with anything but respect. It was the politicians who sent them there for their own political gains that I had nothing but disdain for. Those who went to Vietnam were either poor boys from rural areas or those

who wished to serve their country. I seriously doubt that there were many, if any, soldiers who went to Vietnam for the thrill of being shot at.

My mother was a wise woman. She knew I needed to keep busy and that I was handy. She helped finance my car motor building. I built an awesome high-performance engine. Problem was I did not have a roadworthy vehicle to put it in. Jim F happily volunteered his Nova. We swapped out the engine, got some of the guys to tag along and headed for Charleston Road. That motor could go. Jim was going 100+ miles per hour at times. We decided to head back to town before we got caught. Less than a mile from my house, one of the wheels fell off. The wheel was attached by one lug nut, and one of the lug bolts was still there as that lug bolt had no lug nut. So, we jacked up the car, took one lug nut from another wheel and reattached the wheel. We slowly returned home. Another thank you to my guardian angel. Lesson learned: never drive with missing lug nuts.

There was a dress code; one rule was that a boy's hair could not touch his ears. Being the rebel, I let my hair grow until it touched my ears. I was suspended for three days. My parents never said anything about my suspension. So I would get ready for school and walk to the bus stop, but instead of waiting for the bus I would keep on walking. I did this for three days. I would walk the fields and walk in town. Once my suspension was complete, I combed my hair behind my ears and returned to class. Nothing was said to me. It was not long after that the dress code was discarded. Sometime later my mother learned of my suspension. I never saw her so angry. Not at me, but at the administration for not informing her of my suspension. I believe the administration was scared of her.

One Easter weekend, the family went to California and my parents offered to let me stay home. I readily agreed. We of course partied. There were at least sixteen of us. One evening Susie got drunk on cherry vodka and threw up. Some of the girls removed her blouse and washed it. When it was time to take her home, we took the Bellantoni's Furniture truck. It was a warm night, and I was shirtless. Her father, who was a local judge, opened the door. He was furious. After having daughters of my own I now understand why. I was innocent, excluding stupidity. We argued, and he called the police. As I was leaving there was a fireplug of an officer standing in a stance that said, "Don't mess with me." He asks me if I struck anyone. I truthfully replied no. He told me if I got in the truck and drove, I would be arrested for DUI. He called a tow truck to bring me and the truck home. The tow truck driver charged me five dollars; I gave him ten.

On Easter Day several of the guys and I went spelunking at the caves outside the west gate. The ladies stayed at the house cooking an Easter Day feast. I had the bright idea to bring candles. We would light the candles along the way to show us the way back. The beginning was easy as the path was well marked. So, on we went. On one point I stepped on a spot that had a forty-five-degree angle. What I did not realize was that it was wet and slippery. So down I went. I spread out my arms and legs to try to stop myself. I managed to stop myself just in time. Right past my legs was a drop off that I could not see the bottom of. I very carefully managed to climb back up. One more time I thanked my guardian angel. So, on we went. We decided it was time to turn back. We could see the candles burning brightly. Problem was there was a chasm between us and the candles. Time to breathe. Then we heard voices above us. We followed the sound and found a different exit. There was a group of people there that were partying. Weren't they surprised to see us. Another one for my guardian angel. Time to go home. We cleaned up and enjoyed a fantastic feast. The ladies cleaned the house so that the house was cleaner than before. I am sure my mother was expecting the house to be a disaster. She said nothing, but I could see the look in her eyes. I don't remember all the names of the participants, but I wish to thank all of you.

One Friday night the guys and I went to the river to drink Boone's Farm apple wine. We would hang out at the Circle K and ask a GI to buy us the booze. They never refused. After what they had experienced, buying alcohol was not a concern to them. Come the next morning I reported for work at the furniture store. My father took one look at me and told me to get a shovel and dig weeds from the parking lot. It was a sunny and hot day. The guys would drive and whoop and holler at my expense. I never did that again.

In the middle of a summer my father decided to take the brand-new Pontiac station wagon to San Diego to retrieve my two older sisters. We are on I-5, heading west, cruising along, and the car overheats. We were rescued by a kind gentleman who gave us some water to cool the motor. The rest of the way it was air conditioning off and the heater on. On the way home there was a massive dust storm. We crept along for many miles. We could not stop as that would have been suicidal. We come upon a massive pile-up in the westbound lane. There were tractor trailers on top of cars; what appeared to be bodies lying alongside the road, and others who appeared to be in a daze. Images never totally forgotten.

My father was having trouble with his eyesight. The optometrist told him he needed to get checked out. He went to the hospital in Tucson. It was not long after that mother told us my father had an inoperable brain tumor. As his condition worsened, he became bedridden and could not speak. He was given an experimental radiation therapy that shrank the tumor. He was soon up and about and could speak, although his speech was slurred. That treatment gave us several more months with our father.

Senior year. I had classes in Biology, Algebra, English, Geometry, and Chemistry. I loved Mr. Magnusson for chemistry. The chemistry I learned I still use to this day. Second semester I took a computer programming class. One day the band and cheerleaders were part of a parade in Tucson. I ditched class just to see Terri. Afterward, I hustled back to school to attend my computer programming class. I wish to thank all of my teachers for the excellent education I received at Buena, excluding Biology. Christmas Eve was difficult but my family soldiered on. Dave B and Gordon showed up with a bottle of red wine almost as tall as me and a bag of weed. We went to the river to celebrate as best we could. I will never forget their kindness.

Dave G. and I did not have a first period class. I would pick him up at his house and drive to school. One day Dave G brings a doobie of some really good stuff. Since we were both used to that Mexican weed, it hit us both really hard. Our first class was American history. Coach Coppola's idea of teaching was to put his feet up on the desk and tell us to read some chapters from the book, and read the newspaper. I would get bored and loved history so I read the history book cover to cover at least three times. We arrived late and Coach Coppola knew right away what we had been up to. He asks Dave G a question right out of the book. Dave does not know the answer. This repeated twice more; same result. My turn. He asks me a question right out of the book. I immediately answer correctly. This is repeated twice more; same result. He never messed with me again.

As graduation approached, I felt we needed to keep the tradition of senior pranks going. About twenty-five of us agreed to participate. We agreed not to do any damage. Soaping the windows and TP-ing the school was all we did. Almost done and our lookout on the roof announces the cops are coming. I grab as many fellow conspirators as I can and take off running. The lookout jumps off the roof, injures his ankle and is immediately captured. Since I had been exploring the fields for more than ten years, I knew the lay of the land. I kept us to the arroyos and led us to a trailer one of our fellow co-

conspirators rented. We all went home. The next morning, I am with Jim and we drive by the school. Many of my fellow students are working away to clean up the school. I asked Jim to let me off. He asked me if I was sure. As I felt responsible, I insisted and helped with the cleanup.

Graduation night we were ordered by height; shortest to highest. No one wanted to be first. Since I was already third in line I volunteered to go first.
Go Colts.

Early Adult

You're in the Army Now

It was the summer of 1972 and my brother Joe won the lottery. His birth date was number one in the draft. I had heard the news, as anyone with a draft card paid close attention to the lottery. When I came home Joe was lying on the couch looking despondent. I wanted to say something to him, but what can one say? It was not long after that he was sent to Basic Training at Fort Leonard Wood Missouri and then to Fort Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma. He was assigned to an artillery unit. I knew I had to go see him. Gordon and Dave B agreed to come with me. None of us had a vehicle we trusted to go that distance. Gordon's mother agreed to let us use her Ford Boss 302. She was a kind and generous woman.

Gordon and Dave drove us to El Paso, where we stayed for a few days. I believe his future wife lived in El Paso. I then drove us to Odessa, Texas. Ten hours at ninety miles per hour and when we got out of the car I looked around, noticed the landscape had not changed and said "Did we go anywhere?"

The next day I drove us to Lawton. At the gate at Fort Sill, we got directions to where his unit was located. When we arrived and got out of the car a sergeant and two of his aides began briskly walking towards us. The sergeant had murder in his eyes. I shouted out "Sergeant, permission to speak with my brother Joe Bellantoni," and under my breath I said please. Immediately the fire in his eyes went out and he granted my request. We spoke for fifteen minutes. It was emotional for both of us. I know Joe was overwhelmed and will never forget our visit. We then made the return trip. Twenty hours or more and more than two thousand miles for a fifteen-minute visit. It was well worth it.

He was stationed in Germany. As my father's condition deteriorated, some men in high places at Fort Huachuca got Joe a hardship discharge. It was good to see him, and I needed his help at the store.

The Store

I worked at the store off and on since I was sixteen. I recall that when things got slow, we had to dust. I still loathe dusting. My main responsibilities were doing deliveries, furniture repair, and the maintenance for the Modern Shopping Center. While Joe was in the army I was in charge. Nineteen years old and running a business. I had to grow up fast. I was wise enough to leave alone those who had worked there for some time. If a command decision was needed, that would be me. When Joe returned, I gladly let him take over. We managed to keep the doors open. I made a hundred dollars a week and lived like a king.

Mike hired a new salesman. He sold a lot of furniture. One day a soldier and his wife came to the store asking for their free gift. I was flabbergasted. Turns out, the new guy made them a promise he had no intention of keeping. I fired him on the spot and told Mike to give them a lamp.

Joe rented a trailer in Ramsey Canyon. I lived at home. My father died in October 1973. I vividly remember my mother coming home and announcing his death. My younger sister, Tess, was on the couch and cried and cried. It still breaks my heart whenever I recall that memory. None of my siblings were willing to accompany my mother to my father's wake. When asked by my mother I did not hesitate to say, "Sure, Mom." Six months later I rented a cabin in Ramsey Canyon.

"The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain." – Kahlil Gibran

Dave G helped with deliveries for a while. I recall us delivering a sofa bed to a third-floor apartment. That was a challenge. Dave G was a good worker. He left to seek other opportunities.

I hired a good friend and fellow classmate to do deliveries at the store. It was his first day working at the store. Our first delivery was a sofa. It may have weighed seventy pounds. I lifted my end. My fellow classmate was unable to lift his end. Later I recalled him telling me that when he lifted weights, he would purposely tear his muscles, so when the muscle would heal the muscle would grow larger. Beach muscle. I needed to find someone else to assist with deliveries.

The war in Vietnam was coming to an end. There were soldiers everywhere. I would go to Deana's cafe in the bowling alley several times a week. For \$1.25 I would get a great meal. For another \$.75 I could get a piece of delicious pie. One day, crossing Fry Boulevard I was confronted by a soldier in the middle of the road. He was angry. He asked me for a cigarette. I gave him one. We spoke for a moment, and he relaxed. The way our soldiers were treated is a disgrace. No wonder he was angry.

While staying with Jim and Mary Lou during the Buena High School class of 1972's 50th class reunion, he told me a story. Jim desperately wanted to marry the love of his life, Mary Lou. He went to a recruiter ready to sign the papers. The recruiter told him to come back after lunch. I met Jim at McDonald's, a place I did not go to often. He told me he was going to join the army. I told Jim, "Come see me Monday and I will give you a job." Now that is synchronicity. Jim was a good worker. My brother Joe loves to tell me the story of when Jim sold a dining room set. He told me he said to Jim, "Maybe I should pay you more."

Ramsey Canyon

My cabin was half of a duplex. My landlord was Cecil Fry. His brother was the man Fry Boulevard, and the township of Fry, were named for. My brother and I would commute to work together. After work most evenings I would make the short walk to his place. We would smoke an illegal substance and listen to music. My sister bought me the novel Siddhartha¹ by Herman Hesse. One of his teachings was that everyone needs to be able to wait, to think, and to fast. I thought to myself "I can wait, and I can think, but I have never fasted." So, I fasted for three days. The first day was easy, as I had often gone a day without eating. The second day was hard. It took all my willpower not to eat. The third day was amazing. All my senses grew more acute. My eyesight was sharpened. My sense of smell and hearing grew more acute. On the fourth day I feasted. I believe that fasting has a broader meaning: to be able to do without.

Mr. Fry had an amazing dog named Bozo. I raised chickens. The skunks would get into the coop and kill the chickens. One evening I was able to spot a skunk. I got my trusty single shot 20-gauge shotgun out. As I went outside, the skunk ran into my neighbor's shed. The shed was attached to the house next door. Even though no one was home I did not want to shoot a skunk in my neighbor's shed. Bozo was there and appeared ready for action. I said, "Get 'em, Bozo". Bozo killed that skunk by instantly breaking its neck. The skunk never sprayed. Good boy, Bozo. I rewarded him with some

¹ Siddhartha Gautama, most commonly referred to as the Buddha, was a wandering ascetic and religious teacher who lived in South Asia during the 6th or 5th century BC and founded Buddhism.

sandwich meat. Two days later on a warm Sunday morning, I awoke to the most awful smell. It appeared that I did not bury that skunk deep enough. There was Bozo with the skunk in front of him with that “aren’t I a good boy” look on his face. I reburied that skunk; deeper and with lots of rocks on it this time. Bozo did not get another reward.

I believe Cecil Fry was a member of the John Birch Society. He invited us to a meeting. My brother Joe, my neighbor, and I agreed to attend. It was mostly about getting the US out of the UN; there was an understandable fear of a one-world government. We all had “Impeach Nixon” bumper stickers. Cecil Fry asked me if he could have one. Surprised, I agreed and gave him one. Cecil was so far to the right and I was so far to the left that we came together.



Bozo and I.

Some years later, after Mr. Fry died, Bozo died.

His son, Tom, was my new landlord. The rent stayed at twenty-five dollars a month. Tom and his partner had a landscaping business. I felt I needed a break from the store and asked Tom if I could work for him. I had a class B driver’s license, so my primary responsibility was driving a fifteen-year-

old dump truck. The transmission was a standard 5X3 speed. I would use most of those fifteen combinations to get up to speed when loaded. I would get really angry when a vehicle would pull in front of me forcing me to slow down and go through all those gears again. One job I was given was to spread gravel in an alley. I was instructed to chain the gate, lift the bed until the gravel began to flow and drive forward. Doing as instructed, I began to lift the bed. Suddenly I was looking at the sky, with the front wheels four feet in the air. Fortunately, I was pointing straight ahead. I drove forward slowly until enough gravel came out of the bed and came crashing down. The driver of the machine used to level and spread the gravel complained to Tom. Tom asked me what happened and I told him. I will have the driver show you what to do, he tells me. Second try the driver had me do what I did before; same result. I was never asked to spread gravel again.

One other job I was asked to do was delivering some material to a job site in Bisbee. Driving a loaded ten-wheeler up and down Mule Pass using a truck with questionable brakes was an experience I never wish to repeat. By the time I approached the job site I was shaking like a leaf. As I went to cross the railroad tracks, something made me look to my left. There was a train approaching, going in reverse, with a man on the rear of a flat car frantically yelling and waving his arms. I stopped just before the train roared in front of me. Once more, thank you, guardian angel.

1976 - Arizona to Maine

Go East, Young Man

I am renting a cabin from Cecil Fry (yes, he is the brother) in Ramsey Canyon. I met several Frenchmen from Madawaska, Maine, and Edmundston, New Brunswick. Dan Bouchard from Madawaska wanted a ride home. I felt it was time to see more of the world and agreed to give him a ride. We packed up my '60 Chevy Apache pickup, with its brand-new motor I built, said my goodbyes, and off we went. It was October 1976.

Our route was north to I-10, east to I-25, north to I-40, east on I-81, east on I-70 to I-95, north to the end of I-95, then from Houlton, Maine, north on US 1 to Madawaska.

Dan had little money and he wanted to drive straight through.

We made it to central Oklahoma without incident. It was late morning; I was driving. I heard a noise from the engine, and the battery light came on. On inspection I discovered the bracket for the generator had broken. No generator and no water pump. We managed to limp to the nearest junkyard. Fortunately, it was not far.

The owner was a true Okie, with a hard accent. Fortunately, I have a knack for accents, so we were able to communicate without difficulty. We found the part we needed, replaced it and were on the road again.

We are in East Tennessee, on I-81. Dan is driving; the time is around 10 PM. We have just passed the on ramp to White Pine, Tennessee, when another, much louder noise from the engine compartment is heard. Upon inspection, the water pump pulley has sheared off, hanging by one bolt. The generator pulley is also damaged.

We proceed, going the wrong way onto the off ramp to White Pine. There is a car coming, Dan pulls as far as possible to the right, going slowly. It is a Tennessee state trooper, and the lights come on. We stop; I explain the problem. He says, "You pulled over. It is okay". He gives us directions to a truck stop. We manage to limp to the truck stop.

We had been getting sleepy, so we had taken some caffeine pills. So now both of us were vibrating at 60 cycles. I had bought a bottle of tequila, to bring up to Maine. Along with a couple we met, we drank it all. We managed to get some sleep.

Next morning; bright eyed and bushy tailed; we get directions to a garage in town. We met the owners to whom we explained our predicament, and got permission to try to do the necessary repairs. The owners are older, long-white-haired Southern gentlemen. There is an auto parts shop within walking distance, and I purchase a new generator and get directions to the nearest junkyard. I walk back to the garage, leave the generator and walk back to the road.

Thumb out, first car to come by stops. It is a black man about my age driving a convertible low rider. I tell him what I need. He asks me where I am from and if I am alone. I am ready to jump out of the car. He pulls open the ash tray, pulls out a big, fat doobie, which we then share. He takes me to three junkyards before I find what I need, and halfway back. He even apologizes for not taking me all the

way, explaining he has a class to attend. I thank him profusely. Out comes the thumb. First vehicle to come my way is a 1930's, maybe 1940's pickup truck. It stops for me. The driver is another, older, long-haired Southern gentleman. I tell him where I need to go. He says get in, but you have to ride in the back. I do not object.

I arrive back at the garage, and I repair my truck. This time I make sure I install the generator correctly, so there is no longer that small vibration.

We thank the owners and proceed on our way. Dan says to me, "They were thinking that we are two long-haired hippies, but they were all right." We share a long laugh and arrive in Madawaska without any further incidents. We stay at Dan's parents' house. I do not remember how long I slept.

Madawaska

I was uncomfortable living with Dan's parents, so I convinced Dan we should rent a house. The house was rough, and the only heat was from a kerosene cook stove.

Dan's dream was to be a drummer in a rock-and-roll band. So, Dan formed a band. Jesse was the front man and lead singer. Chirp played lead guitar. Rick played bass guitar. Dan played the drums.

They would practice in the house Dan and I were living in. I would try to go for a walk or a drive. Winter was brutal that year, so quite often I would retreat to my bedroom.

Dan's band got a gig at the local Wonder Bar. They would play Fridays and Saturdays. I would go to the bar and dance whenever the opportunity arose. It was on New Year's Eve that I met my future wife, Brenda.

There is a law that you must register your vehicle after six months of residency in Maine. There was a state trooper who gave me my last warning. So one day in the middle of February I made the forty-mile drive to Presque Isle to get my Maine license plates. On the way home, it is ten below zero and dark. I get a flat tire. While attempting to mount the spare tire, every lug nut fell inside the wheel. Fortunately, it was the front tire, so by removing the wheel bearing, I was able to replace the lug nuts. The next try I very carefully mounted the spare. While reinstalling the wheel bearing, I did not correctly install the wheel bearing, and eventually I had to replace it. I still curse that state trooper.

Spring finally arrived, and I knew that living off my savings was not sustainable. I found work as a carpenter's helper. It didn't pay much, but my expenses were negligible. I kept this job until it turned cold. No income once again.

Go East, Young Couple

After Brenda and I became engaged, she asked if we could go to Arizona. So, we packed up the truck and headed west. We took I-95 south and crossed Tennessee. The trip was uneventful. I vividly recall crossing the mighty Mississippi river at Memphis, Tennessee. That is one big river. When we arrived in Sierra Vista, I went to work at the store. My brother Joe, who was living in Bisbee, helped us find a place to rent in Bisbee. Joe and I would commute to the store, and Brenda would hang out with our neighbor Mary Jane, who was going to school to become a police officer. We stayed in Bisbee for

about six months when we both agreed it was time to head north and east. We decided to take our honeymoon prior to our marriage, so we went to the Grand Canyon and set our sights on Niagara Falls. We then headed north and east to Colorado. The interstate in Colorado was closed due to an avalanche. We were directed to a detour. The detour crosses the Rockies at Wolf Creek Pass. It was a two-lane road, steep and curvy, and we did third gear for two hours or more. My truck was a four speed, and first gear was a granny gear, so we did twenty to thirty miles per hour at best, for two to three hours. It was late spring. I vividly recall a field of dandelions in bloom. There were several acres of yellow flowers. At one point we were in New Mexico before we were able to get back on the interstate. Finally, we were going downhill. We had just crossed into Oklahoma when at my 11:00 o'clock I spied a small funnel cloud. I found it hypnotic. Looking at it, it appeared not to change, but when I looked away and then back again it would appear to have changed. So here we are with our Maine license plates creeping along while the natives blew by us. Suddenly to our left we see the grass swirling and being lifted into the sky. Right across my truck the tornado passed. Fortunately, the tornado was not very powerful, more like a strong dust devil, but my truck shuddered as the tornado passed over us. Time to quit rubbernecking. We had the radio on, and it was announced on the radio that a tornado had touched down in Goodland, Kansas. A quick check of the map confirmed what we had just witnessed.

Onward to Buffalo, New York. In Indiana we get a flat tire. I put on the spare and find a garage. Upon entry into the garage, I am greeted by a man my age burning a piece of hemp rope. With some suspicion, he asks me what I want. I tell him I need a flat fixed, and he relaxes. My tire is repaired. They charge me ten bucks, and I give them fifteen. I mount the tire and we are on our way.

We arrive in Buffalo around nine PM. The first motel we find I pull into and we rent a room. My spidey sense tells me to be careful. We rent a room and I sleep with my revolver under my pillow. Next morning, we play tourist and see the falls. The falls are best seen from the Canadian side, but we are reluctant to cross the border. We arrive in Madawaska, Maine without any more excitement. I had taken pictures with my camera. I tried to have the film developed, but I had loaded the film incorrectly. Brenda was sorely disappointed.

We had been living in a third-floor apartment in town. Brenda's parents had a two-unit apartment building across the road from their house. There was a vacancy and they offered to rent the apartment to us. We accepted. Downstairs lived Brenda's sister Bernadette, her husband, Pomme, and their daughters Carrie and Trisha. They also had another older daughter, Susie, who lived independently.

Brenda and I were married on August 19th, 1979. The reception was modest. I recall a woman singing Ave Maria with a beautiful voice. It was emotional.

My mother and my Godfather, Ernest Bellantoni, were in attendance. Ernest drove me to the church. As we approached the church, he asked me, "Turn or straight ahead?" I have to admit, I seriously considered my answer. I said, "Turn."

Married Life

I got a job working for Cecil Boulier. He had a business churning butter and making soda pop. He was also building a house on Long Lake, so when things got slow, I would also work there.

Making butter.

The dairy farmers would arrive and dump their milk into one of the two pasteurizers. The boss would fire up the steam boiler. I would then heat the milk to 183 degrees for approximately two hours. The air took on a sickly sweet smell. We would then pump the milk to the churn. The churn was approximately eight feet in diameter, and twelve feet in length. The boss would start it rotating. After maybe thirty minutes, the milk would change into butter and buttermilk. We would keep a close eye on the churn. When the milk started to transform into butter, it happened quickly.

The boss would drain the buttermilk, after calling the wastewater treatment operators. He told me that the first time he sewered the buttermilk, he did not give them notice and the treatment plant was overwhelmed.

The boss would then test the moisture content. If the moisture content was low, he would add water to the butter. Especially in the winter, the butter would have little color, and he also would add yellow coloring to the butter.

Next step.

We would package the butter into one-pound packages. The boss had this amazing machine that would wrap the butter. My responsibility was feeding the machine. We would then pack the butter into boxes.

Soda Pop.

Day 1.

The water needed to be pristine. I would fill a tank that was approximately twenty-five feet tall and eight feet in diameter from a spring-fed well. I would then climb a ladder to the top of the tank and empty a white powder into the water. The boss told me that this powder would bind to any calcium in the water and then sink to the bottom. I would then turn on a motor that would mix the water and call it a day.

Day 2.

I would turn off the mixer and wait an hour for the sediment to settle to the bottom. I would open the valve on the bottom of the water tank. When the water ran clear, I would close the valve. I would then back flush the four sand filters. There was also a paper filter for each, similar to a coffee filter that I would replace.

Using this pristine water, I would prepare the syrup. There were six tanks for making syrup, each one for a different flavor. My favorite was cream soda. We also made strawberry, orange, cola, root beer and a bar mix. Each stainless-steel tank was four feet in diameter and three feet deep. Into each tank I would add two hundred pounds of sugar. Each tank had a mixer. I would let each mixer run for a half hour or so. I would add the flavoring to each tank. Each flavoring was highly concentrated. A tablespoon or so for each was enough.

Next was preparing the carbon dioxide. The boss would buy dry ice. I would then put on gloves and put the dry ice into tanks, capping the tanks as quickly as possible.

Next, I would clean the bottles. I would load the bottle cleaning machine with a caustic solution. Each and every bottle had to be perfectly clean. I would curse those that put a straw or cigarette butt in the bottle.

Time to bottle. The boss was in charge. There was an amazing automated production line. I would feed the bottles. The water and the syrup would be added. The bottle would be rotated to mix the water and syrup. Then the carbon dioxide would be injected. The bottle would be capped. I would put the bottles into cases.

Working on the house.

Cecil was a mean-spirited man, so no one wanted to work for him, so I was not concerned with getting fired. One chore was clearing brush. If it was a nice warm sunny day, I would clear a spot and take a nap. One time, when Cecil was not there, I helped myself to some of his whiskey.

I met my future wife, Brenda, at the Wonder Bar, where Dan's band was playing on New Year's Eve. We would have two beautiful daughters and a son. Both daughters were born across the river in Edmundson, so both have dual citizenship.

We took a Lamaze class to help us prepare for their births. For Lydia's birth our Lamaze instructor asked our permission if some nurses in training could watch the birth. Brenda's contractions were coming fast and furious, so without thinking, we said yes. Turns out there were at least twenty nurses watching. We couldn't decide on a name, so her birth certificate said baby Bellantoni for her name.

I was working at the soda plant, preparing the syrup, when I got the call that Brenda was in labor. I quickly finished up what I was working on and rushed to the hospital. I got there just in time. Another beautiful girl. We named her Miranda. She favors me.

My next job was as a mason tender. Most of the crew only spoke French, so I did my best to learn French. I was never very successful. The pay was much better, but the work was hard. I have never been in better shape. One day, we were pouring concrete on the roof of an aircraft hangar at Loring air force base. We were using wheelbarrows to move the concrete. The metal on the roof was corrugated metal, so we would drive on planks. A fellow worker was approaching me. My wheelbarrow was empty, so I stepped back to let him pass. Problem was there was an opening that I stepped into. I fell sixteen feet onto concrete and metal beams. A fellow worker rushed to me to offer comfort. I had a split skull and cracked ribs. The foreman on this job panicked and picked me up in a fireman's carry. Now I had a collapsed lung. I was loaded into an ambulance for the ride to the nearest hospital in Presque Isle. I spent three days in the Intensive Care Unit. I remember the nurse holding my hand until I fell asleep. She was like an angel. I spent several more days in the hospital. I was able to collect workman's compensation for several months. The mason foreman whom I worked with the most often took me to a job site in Madawaska. The crew were on scaffolding, so I did a little jig to show them I was alright. Time for a career change. After five or so years living in Madawaska, we packed up the two girls and our stuff and moved to Presque where I would attend a vocational school. My goal was to get an associate's degree in computer science.

Presque Isle

I rented a house in Presque Isle. The landlady was a witch, the house was rough, but the neighbors were decent.

I got a job at the Maine liquor store. What a joke. There were three of us and we spent the majority of our time in the back room playing dice. One day, I was confronted by the woman in charge. Seems my register was exactly twenty dollars short. Not long after the local bigger boss showed up and fired me. When I protested, he said, "If you have been working for less than six months, I can fire you if I do not like the color of your pants." Soon after I learned that the manager at the Madawaska liquor store, who had been busted for smuggling liquor across the river, was exonerated. It was not long after that the state of Maine got out of the liquor store business.

I soon got an evening/night job at a local bank as a computer operator. Since I was attending day school the hours were perfect. I would start at 4:00 PM and get off at 10:00 PM to 3:00 AM. One job I had was running the check sorter. The machine would read the router number, account number and the amount. The amount would be manually keyed onto the checks. The checks would be sorted by bank. In-state banks got their own slot and other banks got the other slot. When I started the reject rate was over five percent. I would get the man from IBM to make fixes and the rate came down significantly. There were three ladies who approved each batch and manually entered the information. I noticed one evening when one of the ladies would scroll her screen, the machine would begin to reject a significant number of checks. I asked the ladies to wait until I was finished before working. The next day I told the lead programmer about the issue. He said he would take a look. Not many days later he comes to the bank while I am sorting checks. He says a little belligerently, "That's impossible because the program runs in its own partition". So while the machine is running, I say to one of the ladies, "Susan, do what it is you do." She scrolls her screen, and the check reader begins rejecting checks. He leaves without saying another word. The next day he tells me the problem is fixed. On a busy day, especially at the end of the month, that fix would let me go home an hour earlier.

I was able to convince the school to transfer credits from college level classes I took while living in Madawaska; another hour of sleep. My classes included computer programming, accounting, physical education, and more.

During my first day of class in computer programming, our instructor, Bob Blackmore, gave us a test. At the very top of the test was the instruction, "Read all questions before answering any questions." I had seen this before so I knew just what to do. I went to the end of the test; and as expected, the test stated, "You have completed the test." I started to bring the test to Bob Blackmore, but seeing my fellow classmates feverishly trying to complete the test, I looked at Mr. Blackmore; we exchanged a smile, and I waited to return the test.

The computer we had at school was an IBM4. The languages we were taught were COBOL and RPG. I had a knack for computer programming and did well. I graduated with A's and some B's.

A friend I had met contacted me and told me that the paper mill in Millinocket was looking for a computer operator. I applied for the job, and I was invited for an interview. I got the job.

Mattawamkeag River Road

It was early spring, 1985; the wife, our two daughters and I went house hunting. Since my new job at the paper mill was in Millinocket, we looked there first. Nothing, so we tried East Millinocket next. Nothing there. Getting frustrated, I asked around and was told there was a big construction project at East Millinocket, rebuilding the two paper machines. It was suggested to us that we try Mattawamkeag. So, we drove east the fifteen miles to Mattawamkeag. I had seen a classified advertisement for a place on the Mattawamkeag River. We finally located the house and contacted the landlord. We sealed the deal and now we would have a roof over our heads. The house was three bedrooms, one bath, with a full cellar. Best of all it was a thirty-second walk to the Mattawamkeag River. Nothing like going for a swim after mowing the lawn. I also did quite a bit of fishing.

One time when I was fishing with Lydia, who was five or six, she caught a small bass. As she was pulling it to shore a small snapping turtle latched on to the tail of the fish. My sweet daughter was angry and yelling "That's MY fish." I told her that I had no choice but to cut the line.

There were four computer operators, with two of us on each eight-hour shift. My responsibilities included: doing backups to tape, running the printer, and keeping an eye on the system. Not a bad job. The mill was currently owned by Georgia Pacific,² and six months into my new wonderful job the mill was sold. The new owners began massive layoffs. My job was one of the casualties. Someone must have been looking out for me as I never lost a day's work.

First job was printing the roll labels. It was cold, miserable work. The other operator would leave ink everywhere. I still have the jacket I wore, with ink on it. The new owners decided it was more cost efficient to buy the labels.

Next job was as a clerk in the Millinocket finishing room. I was good at the job and well-liked by co-workers. I was in a union, and there were complaints about the guy from out of town getting this plum job.

So, I was sent to East Millinocket, working for the training department in preparation for the new paper machines being started. The job was running a copying machine and lasted two months.

My next job was as a clerk in the East Millinocket finishing room. Same ending as at the Millinocket finishing room.

Next job was in the storeroom in East Millinocket. The job was shift work. Thievery was rampant. At first, I would give out some things, but decided it was not worth the risk and just plain wrong. Some of my fellow workers would refuse to give out material that was requested. My philosophy was to give them whatever they wanted, as long as they gave me a signed card. At the end of the shift, the shift foreman would need to sign the cards. I recall one night the shift foreman giving me the look, and I just shrugged my shoulders. That put an end to the thievery on my shift. I recall coming home after the 11 PM shift, seeing the fields around our home alight with thousands of fireflies. Another night, coming home on the river road, weary and knowing I was almost home, I approached the unguarded railroad crossing on River Road. A flash of red caught my eye. It was a reflector on one of the box

² For a history of the mills see [History of Great Northern Paper](#)

cars of the train crossing the road. Saved by my guardian angel again. After eighteen months a job was posted for a salary position in the technical department at Millinocket. One of the requirements was computer programming experience. I applied and got a job interview.

I got the job. My new supervisor, Skyler, had zero people skills and was highly intelligent and knowledgeable of the paper-making process. My kind of guy. This new position was salaried; so I was done with the politics of the union. Skyler told me that “This was the best interview I have ever done.”

I wrote the new program for the chip testing, data entry, storage and reporting. Since I was not formally part of the IT department, I needed permission to install this program. Since I was once a member of IT, I was not an unknown. I met with the man responsible for maintaining the integrity of the IT system at the mill. He took his responsibilities seriously. He agreed to allow me to install the program in the production environment.

I learned much about how paper is made. I had thought that you just ground up some wood, mixed it with water, sprayed it on the paper machine wire, removed the water; and you had paper. I was taught pulp testing. I learned the importance of consistency (3% pulp to water ratio was the proper mixture), freeness (the quality of pulp stock that determines the rate at which it parts with water when being formed into a sheet on wire screen or perforated plate), and more. I also did paper testing. I learned the importance of tear resistance, smoothness, opacity, and more.

I also did beater runs. The mill would purchase expensive softwood Kraft pulp. I would mix the Kraft pulp with water at a 3% consistency. I would then refine the Kraft pulp for different periods of time and create pads of the pulp and dry and label each. These pads would be tested to determine the optimum amount of refining needed.

One day while wandering at the wet end of the paper machines at the Millinocket, I was shocked at what I witnessed. The results from the pulp and paper labs were written on a piece of paper. A camera would then display the results to the paper makers. A paper maker tried to look at the results and before he could read the nearly unintelligible writing, the paper with the results was removed. All of the results were also entered into the computer. The suits in the E&R department would then do analysis on the numbers.

I made a proposal to Skyler that we create the infrastructure and install computer terminals on the production floor. I would write the software to display the test results. After a few meetings, the project was approved. The president of the paper makers’ union was a powerful proponent for the project. Had he not been the project would have never been approved. The first step was to run the network cables. The floor space of the production floor is measured in tens of acres. Meanwhile I wrote the software necessary. At some point the mill had purchased some statistical analysis software that I used to create graphs. I learned about bell curves, sigma, and the difference between continuous and discrete. The project had a lot of visibility, so I was highly motivated to do my best work. Once complete, the benefits were obvious. Less rejected paper was the most obvious. Also, since the pulp testers knew their test results had been closely watched, the quality of their work improved immensely. Once the Millinocket mill was completed, we moved on to East Millinocket.

Meanwhile, on May 26th, 1987, our son Dominic Antonio Bellantoni entered the world. Like his father, he had a full head of black hair and two black olives for eyes. Praise the Lord.

In 1981 Bowater bought the two mills. Bowater had mills in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Nova Scotia, with headquarters in Greenville, South Carolina. Soon after it was announced that they would be installing their home-grown Quality Assurance System. All my work would soon become obsolete. Phil was selected to be the lead for this project. I was supremely disappointed. Soon after, it was announced that Bowater's Project Tracking System would be installed. Peter, a fellow Italian, and I were selected to be the leads. Peter's technical skills were far superior to mine, but I knew the mill. We made a good team. The code was written in C, so there was quite a learning curve for me. Some context – we were on a mainframe, and the displays were character based. The code was impressive. There were modules that were common to all the mills, and a few that were specific to each mill's needs. Since each wrap line was different for each mill, each mill had their own interface to the wrap line. Peter wrote the interface. I did the training and testing. Later Peter was promoted to a system administrator, and I was on my own. One area of expertise was the printing of the roll labels. I traveled to the North Carolina and Tennessee mills to assist with modifications to their labels.

I worked out of East Millinocket as much as possible. Since the Millinocket mill was constructed first, the mill was named Mill 1. The people who worked there were arrogant and considered themselves superior to those who worked at Mill number 2. The mill manager at East Millinocket really liked me. One day he told me, "Tony, if you run out of work, walk the production floor, and ask the paper makers if there is something you can do for them." So that is what I did. If someone had a request that made sense, I would do my best to fulfill their request. Best job in the world.

The mill in Nova Scotia was installing a new wrap line, and I was asked to assist to create the interface to the new wrap line. The family and I drove to Nova Scotia. We were put up in a four-star hotel on the beach, and I was given a generous allowance for meals, and a rental car. While I attended meetings, the family went whale watching and other activities. Upon our return, Miranda told me it was the best vacation ever. It wasn't long after that I was told the project had been canceled. The next year I was told the project was back on and I needed to get to Nova Scotia as soon as possible. I took the ferry from Bar Harbor to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. The ride was rough, and many of the passengers got sick. Not an auspicious beginning.

My counterpart Lorne picked me up, and we drove from Yarmouth to Liverpool. I had a room at a dump of a motel. At least it had a bar. I was not given a rental, or a meal expense account. Lorne had a relative who owned a used car lot. He was able to get me a beater. At least I had wheels.

Next day I go to the mill, ready to get started. I discovered that they were one version behind. I was not impressed. I let the IT manager know (he was a good guy) and did the upgrade that I would typically take three weeks to do in three days. Fortunately, they had a test environment. So, we then got to work writing the interface to the wrap line. Fortunately, the Program Logic Controller (PLC) was the latest and greatest, and the code was relatively simple. They had a test PLC, so we were able to test everything fully.

The next morning, we put the changes into production, and the paper rolls were now being processed on the new wrap line. I babysat the wrap line, and confirmed that the data updates were correct. Success. Before leaving for the day Lorne made a "simple" change to the code. I was tired and it was his mill, so I was not concerned. The next morning, first thing I do is go to the wrap line. I noticed that the time it took to process the rolls was a fraction of a second compared the second and half it had required previously. I checked the label on a roll and then checked the label on the next roll. The labels were exactly the same! That was when I remembered Lorne telling me that upper management

had told him how important it was that the new wrap line be fast. Lorne was successful making the wrap line faster by not doing any data updates. I had them stop the wrap line. The crews were not happy. I had Lorne undo his change and had the wrap line restarted. At Mersey, they had two machines, both dedicated to the same order, so all the roll widths were the same and they would fill a ship with the paper rolls. No one outside of IT seemed to appreciate the importance of the data being correct.

I informed the IT manager, and he was able to get a list of the roll numbers that needed to be processed. I had a manual wrap line program that required the manual entry of the roll number and the roll weight. I modified the program for Mersey, and four of us for several hours manually processed the rolls. I was able to calculate the average weight, and that is what we used as the weight. I could not wait to go home.

I caught the ferry back to Maine. Fortunately, the seas were calm. Hopped in my truck and went home. I swore to myself to never go to the Mersey mill again, and I never did. I never even got a thank you from management. Talk about a ship of fools.

[Mattawamkeag Back Settlement Road](#)

The year was 1998 or 1999. The girls were constantly begging and pleading for a dog. My reply was always, “the landlord will not allow us to have a dog.” I felt secure in my job and was making a decent wage, so we made the decision to go house hunting. I found a place that was affordable. It had been uninhabited for two years and was owned by the bank. The bank was asking \$25,000, I offered \$12,000; we settled on \$15,000. The house was three bedrooms, a split level and real rough, on a one-acre lot near the end of a quiet road. My mother came to visit and helped me pay for the house. The girls cried when they saw it. Brenda and I spent one afternoon killing wood spiders. Some of them had a body over three inches in diameter. There was a bear’s den in the door yard. It was amazing. It was constructed of vines and grass, and it was a chore to dismantle it.

I said to the girls, go find a dog. Soon after, they told me they had found the perfect dog. They asked me to go to the pound and see her. I was busy. I asked both girls and Brenda their opinion of the dog. It was unanimous. I said to them, “go get her.” Her name was Taffy. She was a Shepard Husky mix. Smart and not one to bark unnecessarily. I tried not to tie her up. When she would misbehave, I would threaten her with, “Do you want the chain?” When she wanted to come inside, she would woof. If no one let her in after a few minutes she would woof again. If an unfamiliar vehicle would come down the road, she would woof. She was very protective.

I have no doubt she would have sacrificed herself to protect the children. We were in Madawaska visiting Brenda’s parents. Dominic was across the busy road visiting his cousins. He decided to come home. As he went to cross the very busy road, Taffy ran into the road. She was hit and managed to stop traffic. It was a miracle she was not hurt more seriously.

I took out a \$25,000 home equity loan. I hired a carpenter to remodel the bathroom. I had a new septic system and well installed. I hired a mason to block up the wooden wall that was falling down and pour a concrete floor in the cellar. The split level was now a ranch house. I also had an oil-fired boiler installed. My loan money was going quick, but we were able to move in.

I started doing the work myself; using the pay-as-you-go plan. I replaced the sheet rock, replaced insulation, and rewired where necessary. I also had the windows replaced, a few at a time. At first Dominic was in a crib and slept in our room. The children were growing fast, and I had paid off most of the loan. Time to increase our living space, so I got a home equity loan. I decided on a cape; two bedrooms and a ¾ bathroom. I hired a carpenter, Aldana Grant. We started with removing the existing roof. I bought several large blue tarps. After completing work for the day, I was covering the roof with the tarps, and the wind picked up. I had Brenda and the children holding the ropes, while I secured them. I went to the side where Dominic (maybe five or six) was holding his rope. There was a strong gust of wind and he was lifted off the ground. Like the fearless man he would grow up to be, he never let go.

I took three weeks' vacation time to assist Aldana. We almost had the roof completely shingled before my vacation was gone. Aldana begged me to stay, but it was not possible. I lugged all the shingles onto the roof and went back to work. A few days later I was able to retire the tarps. We now once again had a roof over our heads. I did all the finish work; including sheet rock, flooring, trim, insulation, and running the electrical wire and installing the boxes. I hired an electrician to connect everything. Aldana installed the windows.

Meanwhile Bowater sold the mills to a bunch of corrupt Quebecois. They had me doing work that was obviously illegal. When I protested, I was told to do the work or take a walk. After two years it was obvious that the mills were going broke. I found a job in Bangor, working for the local electrical utility. It was an hour and a quarter drive each way. I would leave for work at 6:00 AM and return home at 6:00 PM and have a quick bite to eat. I would then work on the house until 9:00 PM. Saturdays I would put a full day in. On Sundays I would go to Mass and rest. Once the upstairs was completed, I started working on the downstairs. Same thing all over again; sheet rock, insulation, and wiring. I had completed the whole downstairs, with the exception of the kitchen and dining room, when Brenda and I divorced in 2007. I cashed in my godson's college savings account, paid off the mortgage and gave her the house.

The church was in the next town over. At first, Brenda and the children would attend Mass with me. Brenda started to refuse to go, so it was impossible to get the children to attend. The church was small, with about twenty-five regulars, and tourists during the summer. I was a reader and server, and found solace attending Mass.

Bear story.

One night while in bed, I heard the garbage can outside fall over. I went out to investigate. Taffy was happy to assist and treed a raccoon. Another night, not too long after, I heard the garbage can fall over again. I grabbed my single shot 20-gauge shotgun, loaded with bird shot. Stark naked, I was determined to get that raccoon. The first thing I noticed was the garbage can had been moved forty yards to the tree line at the back of the yard. I also noticed the two indentations in the plastic lid three inches apart. With my brain stuck on raccoon, I dragged the garbage can back and saw movement in the woods at the side of the house. So, stark naked, with my trusty twenty gauge, I went to investigate. That is when the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. I heard a deep growl above me and made the easy decision to retreat and go back to bed. It was not too much later that same night that I heard the garbage can fall over again. I got fully dressed and grabbed my fully loaded 30-30 rifle. When I got to the back door, I turned on the outside light. There was the rear end of a very large black bear running into the woods. I picked up the garbage can again and went back to bed. I had to clean up the mess the

bear made in the woods. That bear was sending us a message. The next morning, I went into the woods where I had heard and felt that bear. There was a fir tree eight inches in diameter with claw marks. The tree had a crack several feet long. That must have been one big bear.

On January 1st, 2007, I moved out of the house to an apartment in Bangor. I brought as many of my possessions as I could, as I knew anything left behind would be gone forever.

Moving on...

Bangor

I rented an apartment in Bangor. The apartment was in a former hotel. Small bedroom, small bathroom, small kitchen, small living area. It was all I needed. The rent was \$425 a month, and the landlord was a good man. I befriended several of the other tenants. There were several nice looking, single female tenants, but I was done with women. The best part of my new home was not having to make the hour and a half commute to work. On occasion the boys and I would go out to one of the local drinking establishments. The apartment was located near downtown, so we had several choices within walking distance.

I recall the next New Year's Day we had an ice storm. There was a pretty good hill in front of the building, and my window faced the road. I was on the front porch having a smoke when a car came sliding down the hill. The car slid back and forth several times, before colliding with a telephone pole. The car was going slowly, so no injuries. That was the about it for excitement.

Eighteen months later the building was sold. The first thing the new landlord did was raise the rent. There was common agreement the new landlord was going to have only Title 30 tenants.³ I went house hunting and purchased a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house, with a full cellar, in a nice neighborhood on a quarter-acre lot. It was small, but compared to the apartment it was like a mansion to me.

On most Friday evenings I would walk to the bar. I would have a few beers and shake a leg whenever I could.

One evening, about one year after moving into the house, a few days before the fourth of July, I met Kathleen and her friend Donna at the bar. We danced the night away. I was smitten. After closing, the three of us went to Donna's house. We had a couple more beers when Kathleen announced she was going to bed and disappeared. I gave Donna a look and said, "She always does that." Donna gave me a ride home.

The next morning, I knew I had to see her again. It was not far, so I took a walk up the road where Donna lived. I got the address and went home and started an internet search. I was able to get Donna's phone number and I made the call. When Donna answered, I introduced myself and asked for Kathleen's phone number. She told me they were having a party, and that Kathleen was there. I got in my truck and made the short drive. After locating Kathleen, we sat on the front porch landing and I asked her out to Massimo's, a nice Italian restaurant. She accepted, we had a nice meal, and got to know a little about each other. We shared phone numbers and agreed to get together again.

Kathleen lived in Clifton, Maine, a thirty-minute drive to Bangor. She worked in Bangor, and moved in with me. Most weekdays she would stay with me at the "city house," and on weekends we would stay at her place. I was so in love. It was bliss.

³The Temporary Housing Assistance Program must provide assistance to persons of low income to enable them to become tenants of rental housing units in the State.

Kathleen's house was the house "out back." After her mother passed and her husband moved out (Kathleen's father died relatively young), Kathleen bought out her brother and sister and now owned two houses. The house was one of the oldest houses in Clifton but was in good condition and had a two-car garage. I put all my tools in her garage, neatly organized.



I mentioned to Kathleen that I have always had a dream to own some land. She brought home a classified advertisement for a place in Amherst, with a huge old farm house and 110 acres of the land. I called the real estate agent and we looked the place over. The house stank; I discovered later that there were bats upstairs. It was the property I wanted so I made an offer. The house was listed for \$180,000 and I offered \$125,000. The owner wanted more, so I offered \$130,000. I told the real estate agent that was my final offer. The owner accepted and we closed soon after. I now owned two houses. I moved in with Kathleen full time and let my son live in the city house rent free. After about three months, I evicted him and told him to get a job. I tried to sell the house, but had no success. I rented the house to a co-worker.

I was fired from the electric utility. I got a generous severance package and unemployment. I paid off the mortgage for the city house. I spent the summer painting Kathleen's house.

Kathleen's son Derek was living in a shack with his girlfriend and her young son. Derek bought a \$12,000 snow sled. His girlfriend had sex with another man. Derek caught them and moved in with us. That was the beginning of the end for Kathleen and I.

Pennsylvania

Kathleen had lived in South Central Pennsylvania for several years. She wanted to go back and try to find some old friends. I looked at the map and saw that Gettysburg was close to where she wanted to go. I asked her if we could make a stop at Gettysburg and she agreed. So off we go. I was driving and my goal was to make it to Scranton, Pennsylvania. I reserved a really nice motel room in Scranton,

thinking romantic thoughts. After driving through Hartford, Connecticut, I was completely wiped out. Kathleen was disappointed.

We arrive in her old neighborhood and she is able to visit her old friends. The next day we travel to Gettysburg. It was an experience that will stay with me until I die. One just needs to listen to the wind to sense the epic battle that occurred at Gettysburg.

Time to go home. Kathleen is driving. She wants to stop in Redding to go shopping. We blew by the exit for west Redding. A few miles down the road we took the East Redding exit. We were in Puerto Rican country. We circled around, getting nowhere for three or four times. My spidey sense told me that we were being targeted. I saw an easy place to park and, pointing, said to Kathleen, “park right there, right now.” There is a Puerto Rican struggling to climb the hill towards us. I get out of the vehicle and open Kathleen’s door. She is frozen with fear. I unbuckle her seat belt and assist her to get out of the car. I walk her to the passenger side, buckle her in and get into the driver’s side. Off we go. We get to a light and are first in line. We are in the left lane and need to get into the right lane to escape. On our right is a white Chevy convertible low rider with a Puerto Rican driving. I take a look at him, and I am scared; and I don’t scare easy. I am thinking this must be the leader of the gang. I am paying close attention to the light. When the light changes, I get ahead of him. I check my mirror, put on the turn signal and change lanes. We are out of there. After two miles Kathleen begins to breathe again. We found a motel, got something to eat and called it a day.

There was no way I was going to drive through Hartford. We went north to I-81, then east, then north, and then east through Vermont. We then got on I-95 and headed north to home. Took longer, but Vermont is beautiful country, so I had no regrets.

Rumford

My unemployment was running out so I started looking for work. I found a job at the paper mill in Rumford, Maine. It was a three-hour ride so I rented an apartment and would come home on the weekends whenever I was not on call. I did this for two or three years. The mill was bought by a Canadian company. My new boss lived in British Columbia and told me I could work from home. I did not object. I got spoiled. I would do my job but did not miss the commute. If I was given a new project, I would travel to Rumford to gather the requirements.

The Rumford mill and a mill that was mothballed in Old Town Maine were purchased by the Communist Chinese. I was told to start working at the Old Town Mill, a forty-five-minute commute. Like most other companies, the new owners were moving away from developing software in house, purchasing their software off the shelf. I did what I could to help and kept supporting the mill’s wood management system. I spent the majority of my time helping to install hundreds of cameras.

My new boss and I did not get along. It did not help that I was forced to blow him off during an upgrade when he failed to do the one small task I assigned him. My one-year performance review was due. I failed it and was fired. I got a generous severance package and was ready to retire, so it did not hurt my feelings. I also got unemployment and was eligible for the additional \$600 a week COVID payment. I was making as much money as when I was working! That was September 2019. I started collecting social security in May 2020, when I turned 66.

My Children Lydia, Miranda and Dominic

Lydia

Lydia was born June 5th, 1980. She was born in the hospital in Edmundston, New Brunswick; “across the river.” She was blue eyed and blonde. A good child. She hardly fussed. She matured into a beautiful child and woman. When she was three, I started reading to her before bedtime, every night whenever I was not out of town on business. P.D. Eastman was my favorite, Dr. Seuss a close second. By the time she started kindergarten she was reading fluently. She still loves to read. She was a good student and loved school. Her favorite teacher was Mr. Michaud. He taught science and math, took them on field trips and launched Estes rockets. One day she and Miranda brought home their report cards. Their grades were mostly C’s and some B’s. I asked why all the C’s. They both replied, “C’s are average.” I asked them, “Do you want to be average?” I never had an issue with their grades again.



She attended junior high school in Lincoln, a forty-minute bus ride each way. Our house was the first stop going to Lincoln, and the last stop coming home. It made for a long day. She joined band, playing the flute. Sometime later, some good friends of Brenda and I were getting married and asked Lydia to play the Byrds’ song Turn, Turn, Turn. She was nervous but did a wonderful job.

She attended high school in Lincoln. She was a good student. When she had her first date, it was the beginning of bird season and I just happened to be cleaning

my shotgun. Her date came inside and I had a talk with him. Later, Lydia told me he told her, “That was the scariest thing I have ever done.” She replied, “Oh, that was nothing.” She never had any issues with her dates.

During her sophomore year, she started cheerleading. Since she was the smallest member of the squad, she was the one they threw up into the air.

She graduated with good grades. I vividly remember her graduation. They played Time of Your Life by Green Day.

For summer vacation, we would go West to see my mother, and next year go North to see Brenda’s parents. One year we went to California. We saw my sister in San Diego and went to the San Diego Zoo and Sea World. We were feeding the dolphins or porpoises some fish, when a sea gull swooped down and stole the fish out of Lydia’s hand. I never saw her so angry. I believe she would have throttled that sea gull, had she been able to catch it.

She attended college at the University of Maine at Machias, with a major in Marine Biology. She was home about a month after starting college and announced she was changing her major to education. I said, "Don't give up on your dreams so easily." She replied, "I don't want to learn about plankton; I just want to swim with dolphins." I had to suppress a laugh. She went on to graduate and get her certification.

When Lydia was a junior, she moved out of the dormitory, to an apartment. She got a cat, Sydney. Sydney would live to the ripe old age of fourteen. I bought her a set of screwdrivers. Which reminds of the time we were playing Trivial Pursuit. The question was "What does the average male have 10,000 of?" Her guess was tools. At the time I was still working on the house and was constantly buying new tools. I laughed until I cried. The answer is whiskers.

We would travel to Machias to see her, once a month or so. One time we went to Helen's restaurant for lunch. Our waiter was this tall, good-looking man, a few years older than Lydia. That was when Lydia met her future husband, Bryan.

One day she calls me to tell me she rolled her car. It was a Toyota Tercel, which I learned later was prone to rollovers. I made the drive to Machias. I replaced the flat tire and drove her car the sixty or so miles back to the house. The insurance adjuster took one look at the car and pronounced it totaled. I said to myself, "enough of that." I bought her a new Chevy Nova, which was a Toyota Corolla, assembled in California. It was a good car and lasted her a long time.

Bryan and Lydia were married in 1996 at Saint John the Apostle Parish in Bangor. I cannot forget giving him Lydia's hand. I did it gladly, so I really must have liked Bryan.

Her reception was quite an affair. Most of my family was there along with Bryan's family. I remember the day before the reception we went to a lobster pound. I had to keep driving to the store to buy more Sam Adams Boston Lager. The bottles are not twist off, so I was kept busy opening beer bottles with my lighter.

Lydia's reception was at the Lucerne Inn. A beautiful old inn overlooking a lake. Lydia did all the planning; all I did was help with the financing. She chartered a bus to transport people from a hotel to the reception and back. There was a DJ and an excellent meal. During the reception my niece Gisella says to me, "There is someone at the gift table." I hurry over and there is a beanpole of a man, at least 6' 5", scoping out the gift table. I stand next to him, saying nothing, just giving him the vibes. It took him a minute to realize I was there. He left.

Later, I noticed two young women at the bottom of the stairs dancing. I went down the stairs to talk to them. They were Irish and told me the reception they had been at was boring. I invited them up to join us.

I was responsible for the bar bill. About half way through the reception I was told that the thousand-dollar tab had been spent. I told them to put another thousand on the bar bill. What a party!

Lydia began teaching at a Bangor elementary school. One day she calls me and invites me to her graduation. She was getting her master's degree. Bangor pays more to educators who have a master's degree. I was impressed. Bryan is a guidance counselor in Old Town.

Bryan and Lydia bought a home in Milford, Maine. It is a forty-five-minute drive, so I get to see them often. Bryan and Lydia have two intelligent, kind, sweet, and beautiful children, Jack and Scarlet, and a dog and a cat.



Miranda

Miranda was born on February 24th, 1983. I was making syrup at the bottling plant when I got the call that Brenda was in labor. She knew I was busy, so she would wait until she was positive “that it was time.” I finished up what I was doing and rushed to the hospital. It was not too long after that Miranda entered the world. Another beautiful girl. Praise the Lord.

Miranda favored me. Black eyes, brown hair, and a dark complexion.

As Miranda grew older it became obvious that she was rebellious. Not surprising as she favored me.

When Miranda got older, I read to both the girls most every night before bedtime so she could also read fluently when she started kindergarten. She got good grades in school. She played basketball for Mattawamkeag. She was not very tall but made up for it with her determination, quickness, and fearlessness. I vividly recall our team traveling to Katahdin for a game. The referees were blatantly in favor of their home team. When I confronted one of the referees, she just shrugged her shoulders and kept on walking.

Miranda played the flute. I recall that at the beginning of the football games, the band would play the national anthem. When the band played the part about “the bombs bursting in air,” she would play a trill. I found it very emotional.

She also played field hockey. Dexter was their nemesis. We would travel to Dexter for a game and there would be five-year-olds with hockey sticks.

She also played tennis. She had a match with a girl from East Millinocket. The word from her parents was that she was unbeatable. I worked with her father at the mill. Prior to the match Miranda asked me with some trepidation, “What do I do, Dad?” I replied, “Just hit the ball over the net.” That is what she did. Her opponent would make a great shot, and Miranda would return the shot. Her opponent would get frustrated and hit the ball out of bounds. Miranda won the game. Her opponent’s parents had to eat crow, and I tried unsuccessfully not to gloat.

One year we drove from Tucson to San Diego to visit my sister Rose and my Aunt Mamie. We then drove north to San Jose to visit my father’s brother, Uncle Rocco (Rocky) and his wife, Aunt Viola. We then continued north on the Pacific Coast Highway. It follows the coast and is a winding road. Miranda got car sick so I stopped and we both got out of the car. I knew she was holding back so I told her, “Go ahead, just let it out.” She vomited a little and we continued on our way. It was not five minutes later that I heard Miranda say, “I’m hungry.” That’s my girl.

Some years later when we were watching the movie Dirty Dancing, upon seeing the father of Baby, both girls said in unison, “That’s Uncle Rocky.”

After graduating high school Miranda attended college at the University of Maine at Orono. Her goal was to become a registered nurse. She did well and graduated. I do recall her senior year was expensive as she had labs. In for a dime, in for a dollar.

After she graduated, she moved to the Denver area in Colorado. She eventually went back to school and is now a licensed nurse practitioner. I wish she was closer, but I also traveled many miles away from home.

Dominic

Dominic was born May 26th, 1987, in Lincoln. He emerged from the womb with a full head of black hair, and two black olives for eyes. We were living in the house on River Road at the time. Once he was old enough to walk, he spent all the warmer part of the year outside. He got quite a tan. Brenda called him my little Indian.

He attended school in Mattawamkeag and was a good student. There were five other boys in his class. The boys would become lifelong friends. One of the boy's fathers volunteered to coach basketball. He was an excellent coach. During fifth grade they played the team from the "big" city, Lincoln. The Lincoln team was cocky and sure of an easy victory. Didn't they eat crow when the Keag team defeated them easily. Dominic was fearless and was not afraid to cause a charging foul. Between all the children playing sports we traveled far and wide to attend their away games.

He attended junior high in Lincoln. He played basketball but did not get much playing time.

He attended high school at Lincoln and was a good student. Unlike his father he never got in trouble. He played football and baseball. What he lacked in size he made up for with his grit and determination. He hurt his knee playing football and was out for the season.

He attended college at the University of Maine at Orono. He majored in ancient history. He went on a field trip to Greece. He still loves mythology and knows all the gods. He went to school for five years. After five years I told him that is enough. I let him and his girlfriend live in my house in Bangor rent free. After several months of him not working I ran out of patience and kicked him out. It was very emotional.

He got a job as a cashier at the Walmart in Brewer. I said to myself, "Five years of college and he is working at Walmart. At least he is working." He was soon promoted to customer service. Not long after that he was promoted to asset protection. He excels at the job. He travels to other stores to help get them in shape. His store has one of the lowest rates of shrinkage. One time when he was at the border town of Calais, after reviewing the tapes, he saw a customs agent stealing sports trading cards. The next time he showed up while Dominic was there, he had him arrested. Two federal agents from the federal equivalent of Internal Affairs interviewed Dominic. They were so impressed with how he documented and organized the evidence they told him he should apply for a federal position.

He knows all of the Brewer police, the judges and prosecutors. He is well known by all the local riff-raff.

After living in a third-floor apartment in Brewer for eight years, in 2021 they bought a house built in 1906 in Bangor. The house was lovingly maintained, in a good neighborhood, and is huge.

I get to see Dominic frequently. I see him whenever Lydia hosts holiday and birthday get-togethers; and Dominic always finds me when he is working and I am shopping at Walmart.

Good Old Dad and Mom

Dad

My father was born on January 18th, 1921, and died on October 2nd, 1973, at 6:20 PM.

Dad was very active in civic affairs. He taught citizenship classes, established the soldier of the month program, sponsored little league baseball, and was an active member of the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Knights of Columbus, and the Elks Lodge, and was instrumental in the financing for the building of the hospital and served as the President of the Sierra Vista Community Hospital Board. My sister Maria says, "He helped the hospital get an ambulance. Then he organized a parade for it. He walked behind it in a chef's apron, I think. With a broom and bucket or dustpan. He was like the clowns who pick up poop after the horses. He'd act like he was cleaning up under the exhaust pipe." He ran a successful retail furniture business. He also dealt in real estate. He once told me the real money is in real estate.



L to R Rosa Bellantoni (Seminara), Anthony Bellantoni, Lucille Bellantoni (West), Grandma Curry

from the family room. Curious, I entered the dining room where my father was watching television. An Italian comedian was roasting Italians. I said to my father, "Dad, he is making fun of Italians." He replied, "Son, if you cannot laugh at yourself, you are in trouble." A lesson well learned.

Dad taught me the lessons of hard work, honesty, honor, and to treat everyone with respect. I would often ask him for money. Once he asked me, "Do you think money grows on trees?" Another lesson learned. My mother was the disciplinarian. When she could not get me to obey, she would say, "Do you want me to tell your father?" One time I ignored her warning. That was the first and only time. My father did not have to resort to physical punishment. He would only have to look me in the eyes, and tell me to obey my mother. When daylight savings time was first proposed for Arizona, there was a town meeting held to discuss the matter and take a vote. My father asked me to accompany him to

He also spoke fluent Sicilian. Many Italians have difficulty comprehending the Sicilian language. He told me any Italian who is not Catholic is a fake, and that Northern Italians were not real Italians. There is some history there.

He was almost always home for supper. The store would close at 6:00 PM, and we would sit down to eat shortly thereafter. My mother would cook the dinner meal, and my father would cook us breakfast.

I recall one evening when I heard his laughter coming

the meeting. My first lesson in good citizenship. The motion passed and was adopted. The next year Arizona stopped going on daylight saving time. I recall welcoming the dark and the cooler temperatures.

My father was often accused of being “Mafia.” Maybe it was because my Nonno was an acquaintance of Joe Bonanno. He would get very angry. He once told me, “When three Englishmen get together and make money, they call them businessmen. When three Italians get together and make money, they call them Mafia.” Joe Bonanno would give us a half a wheel of Romano cheese at Christmas. On Christmas Eve, he would read Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol to my brothers and I. On Christmas day, he would make a strong pot of coffee and serve my brothers and I a cup with a shot of Amaretto.

On Sundays, during the warmer months, he would do yard work in his knee length Bermuda shorts. My friends would tell me how ridiculous he looked. He was just way ahead of his time.

Mom



My mother, Lucille Irene West, was born December 5th, 1923 in Michigan and died on May 4th, 2005 in Tucson, Arizona. Her parents died when she was young, and she was raised by Grandma Curry on a farm near Lincoln, Nebraska. Her friends called her Sandy, after the color of her hair.

During the depression she recalled people walking, who would then stop at the farm and ask for a sandwich. They would be given a sandwich and continue on their way.

She met her future husband in Tucson. She told me that their first date was a blind date. She saw my future father walking towards the apartment. She says to herself, “he’s short,” so she removes her heels and puts on flats.

They were married in Lincoln, Nebraska on October 9th, 1948. My mother converted to Catholicism before the wedding.

Being good Catholics, they had six children.

L to R Rosa Bellantoni (Seminara), Anthony Bellantoni, Lucille Bellantoni (West), Grandma Curry



Once a week she and some friends would play bridge. That was the only time I ever saw her smoke. There was an advertisement in a comic book for a tiny device that when inserted into a cigarette would explode when the cigarette was lit. Upon returning home from school, she told me about her day at bridge. Her first cigarette exploded. So, she tried another. Same result. She thought it was funny so I did not get in trouble. I never saw her smoke again.

She was a wonderful mother and a strong woman. The only time I heard her complain was when I would misbehave.

For a Cub Scout project I made her a cutting board. My cutting board had a handle. One day she broke that cutting board on my butt. I don't recall what I did, but I am sure I had it coming.

Nonni taught her Italian cooking. We had a pasta with her homemade sauce at least twice a

week. On special occasions she would make a mean lasagna. On Fridays we would not eat meat. Fresh fish was impossible to get, so she often made a tuna casserole. Not her best meal.

I recall my mother and my siblings going to Tucson to shop for clothing. She would stop by the store and send me in the store to ask my father for twenty dollars. He would glare at me and then give me the money. "Thanks, Dad." My mother knew I would have better luck than her getting the money. We would shop all day with those twenty dollars.

My mother gave me my powerful love of nature. She once told me that I have a little bit of Native American in me.

About two years after my father's death, she remarried and moved to Tucson. The family and I would go to Tucson every other Christmas. One year coming from the airport in Tucson it was snowing. She was excited. The family and I all gritted our teeth and said nothing. One year I remember going skiing on Mount Lemmon and eating lunch in the Saguaro National Monument, wearing shorts and a T-shirt.

One Christmas Eve night, traveling to Madawaska, I needed to pee. I pulled into a gravel yard just North of Van Buren and climbed to the top of a pile of gravel. While relieving myself, I looked up to the north. There was the most brilliant display of the aurora borealis I have ever witnessed. There were reds and greens lighting up the northern horizon. I hollered out to the children and Brenda, "Come see this." They were as impressed as I was.

Almost every year we would drive to California to see my father's family. My mother eventually convinced Dad to go to Nebraska. We flew to Denver, where we spent the night and then flew into Lincoln, Nebraska. While in Denver our father took us to a very Italian restaurant. It was very dark

and smelled wonderful. Before ordering dinner, my father huddled with some other men. He never offered as to what was discussed and I knew better than to ask. The food was fabulous.

Next day we flew into Lincoln and were driven to the homestead. None of us had ever experienced high humidity and none of us got much sleep. Next day for lunch my mother goes into the cornfield and picks all of us some corn, which she immediately puts in the pot. My father refused to eat corn, calling it pig food. He must have never eaten fresh sweet corn, because it was delicious.

She had a stroke a few years before her death. The hardest part for her was not being able to talk. I will always regret not learning sign language.

She was buried next to my father in Holy Hope Cemetery.

Love you. Miss you. If I go to bed without brushing my teeth, I still hear her saying, "Tony, brush your teeth."

"The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain." – Kahlil Gibran

Random Memories

Odds and Ends

A neighbor and friend of mine, Dwight, invited me to join him and his family and friends on a hike in the Chiricahua Mountains. The trail was designed so someone would drop us off at the top, then we walk down four miles and then get picked up and done. Halfway down I was in the lead. I spotted a rattlesnake stretched across the trail. It was cool out and sunny. That snake picked the perfect spot. On the left of the trail was a sheer cliff. On the right was a sheer drop off. Choices – Go back the way we came and pray we could find our driver or walk past that snake. My experience with rattlers is they are not aggressive; I am too big to eat. So, I made the decision to walk over that rattler. Walking softly and staying near the tail I crossed over that rattler. The others followed and we finished our hike.

My baby sister, Tess, got an infection in her knee; it needed to heal from the inside out. She would get in the bathtub and I would put some medicine in the water and help her exercise her knee. We did this every night for the best part of two weeks.

Getting All Together

Christmas Reunion – 2023

My niece Alyssa, daughter of my brother John, put on a Christmas reunion from her home in Mesa, Arizona.

Most of the attendees arrived in town on the 23rd. Most everyone was there, with the exception of my son, Dominic, who could not get the time off.

All my siblings, all their children and most of their children.

Rose Husband John

1. Teresea – Husband Mike
 - a. Denica
 - b. Bree
 - c. Michael
2. Daughter Gissella Husband Andy
 - a. Son EJ
 - b. Son Dominic
3. Maria – Her Husband Ed did not attend
 - a. Daughter Gina and her husband Sean
 - b. Anthony, her son, did not attend
4. Joe – wife Mellisa
5. Tony
 - a. Daughter Lydia – Husband Bryan
 - i. Son Jack
 - ii. Daughter Scarlett
 - b. Daughter Miranda
6. John and his wife Carol
 - a. Daughter Alyssa Husband Justin
 - i. Daughter Lucy
 - ii. Son Dean
 - iii. Daughter Lila
 - iv. Dog Jack
7. Tess – Husband Victor
 - a. Daughter Audrey – Husband Tyler
 - b. Son Paul and his fiancée Hannah
 - c. Son Shawn is in the army stationed in South Korea and was unable to attend
8. Cousin Vince Mow

Christmas Eve. Alyssa and Gisella put on a meal. I can't even begin to list all the courses. I do especially remember the lasagna. I do remember being full for a long time.

Christmas day. Justin and Andy put on another fantastic spread. I particularly remember the beef and sea bass.

Some wanted to go on a hike on December 26th. I agreed to go along.

We drove to the Superstition Mountains. The trail is 11 miles long, uphill and very rocky.

Paul and Hannah, having the youngest legs, went first. I managed to make it almost half way before my legs turned to rubber. At one point on the way down I could not stop, and fell. I hit my head on some rocks and bled a little. I also broke the screen on my phone. Some good Samaritans and my sister managed to get me back on my feet. I managed to make it back without further mishap. It is New Year's Day and I am no longer sore. To be young again. New Year's resolution: get into better shape.