

**CARS MY UNCLES OWNED**

**REMEMBERING MY UNCLE ALBERT**

**REMEMBERING MY UNCLES**

**A NOSTALGIC VISIT TO EDGEWOOD,  
PENNSYLVANIA**

**REVISITING MY CHILDHOOD HOMETOWN**

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**

**MY 55-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL REUNION**

## CARS MY UNCLES OWNED

I believe that I will entitle this month's column "Cars My Uncles Owned" because I had quite a few uncles and they had some interesting automobiles. My paternal uncles' names were Tom and George, and my mother had three brothers, Albert, Harry, and Ralph. She also had a first cousin named Frank that we always called "uncle", so I will include him in my story.

Ralph Heeren was my youngest uncle and I saw him only three or four times in my life. I never saw any of his automobiles because he lived on the Isle of Pines, which is located off the southwest coast of Cuba. We have some family snapshots of a visit there in 1915 and they include pictures of his 1914 Dodge touring car. Uncle Ralph was a fruit grower and a real estate agent. Years later, when the Depression came, he unwillingly took over the ownership of a bakery, a movie theatre, and a Ford agency in the city of Nueva Gerona, which was near his fruit orchards. I assume that he drove demonstrators from 1930 to perhaps 1936, but I can't be sure because he died in 1937 and I never asked anyone about his cars. It is ironic to note that most of the Isle of Pines, today, is a huge concentration camp for those who disagree with Fidel Castro.

Now, my Uncle Harry lived in Sanford, Florida and raised celery and citrus fruits, but I saw him more often. I particularly recall his visit in the summer of 1931, when he drove up to see us in his new DeSoto Model SA Six Roadster. I can still see that yellow body with red wire wheels. He and my Aunt Mame always enjoyed opened cars. The last time I saw these delightful folks was in December of 1939 when I made my first trip to Florida. It was a delight to ride in their 1937 four-door convertible sedan with the top down, enjoying the warm sunshine and feeling like a celebrity on parade as we visited some of the interesting places near their home. Yes, I'll always have a mental picture of Uncle Harry enjoying his car.

My father's eldest brother, George, lived in Los Angeles most of his adult life and he was a dyed-in-the-wool Marmon owner. When my family lived in Los Angeles from 1919 to 1922, I remember his big Marmon touring cars and also a sedan. These were all called the Model 34 New Series. I know that from the year we left California until I paid him a visit in 1936, that he must have owned several other Marmons, but when I came to see him, we traveled around in his beautiful 1932 Sixteen seven-passenger sedan. With its 145 inch wheelbase, that was a huge machine and the 200HP engine that took us up all the mountain roads in high.

I heard later that the big Marmon was sold as part of his estate when he died in 1938. I often wonder if the person who bought it treasured it as he did and that perhaps, today, it is in the safe keeping of an antique car owner.

My "Uncle" Frank lived just a few doors away from us and he owned and drove Packards as long as I can remember. He had both tourings and sedans and on the many occasions I had a chance to ride with him, he never ceased to tell me that the Packard was the best automobile built by man. Uncle Frank also smoked a pipe and I

can picture him with his big pipe, his motoring cap, and the big Packard touring painted blue with a tan top, and twin side mounts. What a sight that was!

My Uncle Albert, who owned a large jewelry company founded by my Grandfather Heeren, was also a Packard owner. I use the word "owner" because he had two Packards but he never learned to drive either of them. Uncle Albert's cars were sedans and they had large disc wheels. They were driven by a chauffeur named Jack. I don't believe I ever knew his last name, but I remember his graying hair and friendly smile. He occasionally allowed me to sit in his seat and practice working the spark and gas levers and to gently honk the horn, as I pretended to drive the huge car. I also recall that about 1928 or 1929, this car was involved in an accident that injured Uncle Albert, Aunt Anna, and Jack. This ended Uncle Albert's car ownership and in the years that followed, they traveled by train, trolley car, or rode with some friends or members of my mother's family.

My Uncle Tom owned three automobiles in his lifetime and also never drove any of them. His first car was a 1920 Studebaker Special Six which he bought with the idea that he would take driving lessons from my father, but we temporarily moved to California and Uncle Tom had the brand new Studebaker put on storage jacks until we came back East to Pittsburgh. That was almost two years later and by then, he told Dad that he had gotten "cold feet" and had lost interest in learning to drive.

Somehow, he and his brother Alton (my father) made a deal and the brand new tan colored sedan became the first closed car we ever owned. Yes, dear friends, the six year old Brown boy had been hauled around in open touring cars since birth and windows that rolled up and down were an exciting new experience. A car without rain curtains! What would they think of next? I remember the sheer delight of sitting on the back seat in winter and feeling the heat coming up from the floor through a type of grill that somehow brought up warm air from the exhaust pipe below. I remember Uncle Tom riding to work in the "Studie" with Dad and I often wondered whether he might have had a hankering to take the wheel but if he did, he never said so.

A few years passed and Uncle Tom got "auto fever" again. This time, however, he bought a new car and hired a chauffeur to go with it. The car was a 1931 Lincoln Model K. It was a V-8 five passenger town sedan. I don't know why he didn't buy a limousine since he always sat in the back seat in regal splendor, while young John Floate, attired in cap and uniform, did the driving. Now those days were the Depression days and the young man performed other services such as helping Uncle Tom's housekeeper Sudie with house duties. This included beating carpets outside, washing windows, and driving her to the butcher shop, the bakery, and the grocery store.

In 1938, the aging Model K was replaced by a Zephyr which carried Uncle Tom and aging Johnny Floate around during the war years and until my dear uncle passed away in 1947.

Yes, my uncles all owned good cars and I know that they had good times while owning them.

## **REMEMBERING MY UNCLE ALBERT**

Albert William Heeren was one of my mother's three brothers and my Uncle Harry lived in Florida, and Uncle Ralph lived on the Isle of Pines off the coast of Cuba, I remember Uncle Albert the most because he lived nearby. We visited him at his apartment on Craig Street or at his office at the huge Heeren Brothers Jewelry Store in downtown Pittsburgh. His office was located on the balcony of the six story building and I remember passing by counters and showcases with jewelry of all kinds, chinaware from Europe and the Orient, woodcarvings, and statuary. On some of the floors above, skilled craftsmen created badges, medals for many foreign armies, and beautiful crystal and cut glass objects were etched or engraved with letters or monograms of affluent patrons of their store.

This store with its four-face clock bell tower and hand-carved figures above the archways on each floor, reflected the accomplishments of two young immigrant boys from Germany, aged twelve and sixteen, who came to America to seek their fortunes, knowing only a half a dozen words of English; which included "hello" and "thank you." They created and sold inexpensive lockets, bracelets, and watch fobs from door to door until they could buy a small wooden building with a large sign which read, "Heeren Brothers-Unique Jewelry."

Otto, my grandfather, and William, his older brother, prospered and built their houses on a piece of land on the outskirts of town which later became a whole city block as Pittsburgh grew. Here, they raised their sons and daughters. One of Otto's girls became my mother and his second eldest son was my Uncle Albert.

Uncle Albert was rather shy, but he told me stories about his trips to Europe as a buyer for Heeren Brothers store; seeing Queen Victoria in her ceremonial coach in London, and the German Kaiser Wilhelm in Berlin. I was fascinated by his account of how he skipped school and went to the Carnegie Street Mill at Homestead to watch Pinkerton men try to drive out the striking steel workers, only to be driven away by men armed only with sticks, crowbars, and bricks. This, I believe, happened in 1892.

Camping and canoeing with some of his almost sixty first cousins was one of his summer activities. Now about half of these cousins were young ladies and they escorted them to dances, the theatre, and baseball games. They seemed to enjoy each other's company and, of course, became chaperones who met the approval of their parents. All of this seems strange to people today, but these young people had a wonderful time and stayed out of trouble. I used to envy my parents with all of their brothers, sisters, and cousins, because I had just one sister and only five first cousins and three of them lived hundreds of miles away.

Uncle Albert's wife was named Anna. She had a voice like a parrot, and hid in the clothes closet with rubbers on her feet when there was a thunderstorm and would not sit down at a family gathering if there were 13 people at the table. She also made his life miserable by worrying about spilling salt, walking under ladders, and refusing to go out to some function if a black cat crossed her path.

In spite of her peculiarities, Aunt Anna was deeply loved by my uncle and she was always with him on picnics, family gatherings, and trips. Since neither of them knew how to drive an automobile, they traveled by train, trolley car, or rode with other relatives.

I remember quite clearly a trip our family took to the Poconos in the mountains of central Pennsylvania. We stayed at a cottage in a small village named Stoddardsville and had meals at a large house called The Inn. I was four years old at this time but I remember a lot of things that happened to me during what was supposed to be a relaxing week in the country for Mother and Dad. Well, leave it to little John to mess things up. I was to go fishing with Dad in the morning and I volunteered to catch some grasshoppers and put them in a jar. While scampering through a pasture, I blundered into a pile of watermelon rinds from a picnic and was beset upon by dozens of angry yellow jacket hornets. I believe that I was stung about fifteen or twenty times and I ran crying back to the cottage for help and sympathy. By some miracle, I survived with no ill effects except I hurt all over for a day or so and the fishing trip was called off. I did get an exciting ride in a Stutz Bearcat owned by a college student who asked me if I would like to take an "airplane flight". I was disappointed at first but when that high speed (perhaps 45 miles an hour) over winding, dusty roads, while being held on another man's lap, is indelibly etched in my memory.

A day or two later, the older folks went "bathing" in the small river nearby, but I didn't know how to swim and Uncle Albert said he would keep any eye on me as I waded in shallow water near the banks. Suddenly, I stepped into a deep pool and went under to emerge many yards downstream choking and gasping for air. The next thing I knew, my Uncle Albert had plunged in with his Panama hat still on his head and he scooped me up just above the small waterfall. He later told me that he should have let me go over falls, but since he had only two nephews and no children of his own, he thought he'd better rescue me. He stretched me out on the bank and helped me get rid of a lot of water I had swallowed. I know it wasn't an approved Red Cross procedure, but it did do the trick.

I guess that last incident I became involved in was an anti-climax. Mother didn't think that I should help myself to an unripe banana in the cupboard and I went into a convulsion, but a few plunges in hot and cold water and some kind of medication straightened me out. Needless to say, I really loused up that country trip for my folks and Uncle Albert's suit and shoes were probably ruined, but I will always be grateful for his quick thinking that saved my life.

In later years he bought a Packard sedan and hired a chauffeur to drive them around town and on trips. I remember the man's name was Jack and he showed me all of the great things about a Packard and later showed me how the car radio worked. It was a huge thing full of batteries and dials and had a large ariel that looked like a giant spider web and could only be played when the motor wasn't running, but it seemed like a miracle to me.

Several years later this car was involved in a serious accident and Uncle Albert, Aunt Anna, and Jack spent several weeks in the hospital. After this, they never owned

another automobile and avoided riding in cars as much as possible. Some years later, my Aunt died and Uncle Albert was invited to live with her two unmarried sisters. He had a room of his own and spent many hours listening to the Pirates on his radio, writing family history, keeping in touch with my sister and me, and probably daydreaming about the great years when Heeren Brothers name was known throughout the world and how the Great Depression brought about its downfall when people could no longer afford fine china and jewelry, and foreign countries made their own medal for the military.

I believe that it was 1949 that I drove to Pittsburgh and brought him down to our home for a short visit. I have a snapshot of him holding one of my sons who is now over forty, and both of them are smiling. That was typical of my Uncle Albert. He had no children of his own, but he loved children and they loved him. I have some mementos that he left me—his small coin collection, a ceramic tobacco jar shaped like a wine jug, a small diamond stickpin, a medal he won, and his gold watch.

Sometimes when I'm someplace where someone lights up a cigar, I instantly go back in time and see a mental picture of my uncle seated in his old Morris chair, smiling, and getting ready to tell me a story. Uncle Albert is missed and remembered by all who knew him as a loving husband, brother, and uncle.

## **REMEMBERING MY UNCLES**

I know that I have mentioned my many uncles from time to time and have written about them in connection with the automobiles that they owned, but I thought I would share with you my impressions of the two that I knew best; my paternal Uncle Thomas Brown and later my maternal Uncle Albert Heeren. My father had four brothers, but Uncle Charles and Uncle John died before I was born and Uncle George lived in California most of his adult life, so I saw the most of him when I was a small child living in Los Angeles and saw him only twice after 1922.

Mother had three brothers named Harry, Ralph, and Albert but Uncle Harry lived in Florida and was a vegetable and orange grower and Uncle Ralph lived on the Isle of Pines which is located off the coast of Cuba and also raised tropical fruits, so I only met him three or four times when he came to visit my grandmother in Pittsburgh. Only Albert stayed in Pittsburgh so I knew him well and will write about him next time.

Uncle Tom was a bachelor and took care of my grandparents in their old age at his large, quaint-looking house on Maple Avenue in Edgewood. When they came to live with him they brought their housekeeper named Sudie Cuppy. By this time (1903) my parents had married and lived in a small bungalow about a block away. They always wistfully referred to it as their "honeymoon cottage" and when my grandparents passed away in 1902 and 1905, Uncle Tom was concerned about what people would think of a bachelor with a "live-in" housekeeper, so he asked my folks to move in with him and it was at Uncle Tom's that my sister Adele and I spent most of our early years.

The house itself was an ideal place for small children because it had so many rooms and even the four rooms in the attic were wall papered and had the unique fireplaces that were made of cast iron pierced with many holes and covered (note, EPA) with asbestos. When lit with a match, the gas flames danced up and down on the stove front giving instant heat. We used two of the attic rooms for our play rooms and both the living room and dining room had sliding doors that pulled out of the recessed wall on both sides, making them an ideal place to plan theatricals for friends or tolerant relatives on occasion. There was also a butler's pantry between the kitchen and the dining room and a wonderful back stairs filled on one side with old magazines and papers for our enjoyment.

Uncle Tom had his conservatory; a large room he built on to the house facing south and it was filled with blooming plants of many varieties. In the room was also Uncle Tom's desk, his bookcases filled with volumes on plants and other large, leather-covered books and I was permitted to look through time to time. On a large table, there was a tiny crystal radio set with 2 pairs of earphones where my sister and I were introduced to a new form of entertainment from station KDKA, which was the first broadcasting station in the world. The transmitter was located on top of the Westinghouse building about 4 miles away.

Uncle Tom's property was about five acres in size and was filled with gardens of flowers in front and on the side. At one time he had about 75 thousand tulips and a rose garden

with over five thousand rose bushes. There were also many blooming shrubs and flowering trees. The house overlooked a ravine and on the lower levels of the property there were many stone wall terraces where the vegetables were grown and several large cold frames where many plants were started. As his hobby grew in size Uncle Tom employed two full-time gardeners; Tony Mateo and Tony Pascarelli whom I admired greatly and with whom I spent many hours listening to their stories of World War I on the Italian front.

They taught me how and when to plant tulips, roses, and vegetables of all kinds, and I would talk with Uncle Tom about the finer points of gardening. It was from him that I acquired my interest in gardening that has given me much pleasure for more than sixty-five years and I always think of him as I start my garden anew each spring.

I remember during the spring and summer months that several hundred people of all ages would come to visit his gardens and he would take each group for a tour and there was usually a rose, a Shasta daisy, or a tulip for those who showed special interest.

Uncle Tom never learned to drive an automobile and the Studebaker he bought in 1921 sat on jacks in his garage while we lived for a year and a half in California. When we returned, he sold it to my father and it became the first closed car we had ever owned. Since his house was only two blocks from the Edgewood station of the P.R.R., Uncle Tom usually walked there and caught the local to downtown and then walked about 10 or 12 blocks to work. I can see him now with his black derby hat and umbrella in the fall and winter walking down Maple Ave. to the station. When warm weather came, it was the old-fashioned straw hat that was in fashion from about the turn of the century---I believe they were called "boaters." A cheap copy is made today for people to wear to political rallies and special occasions. When he played golf, which was his favorite sport, he wore a tweed cap and knickers and then he had an old tweed hat like the stores still sell today as Irish country hats." I don't recall him going without a hat except when it was very hot and he was showing visitors his garden.

Dad and Uncle Tom took me to many baseball games to watch the Pirates at Forbes Field and when football season rolled around it was almost a ritual to go to the stadium and root for the Pitt Panthers who won frequently and had many All-Americans on their team. I have been a Pirate and Panther fan ever since. Uncle Tom and my father were contrasts in many ways; Dad was out-going and loved to drive cars and take us on many trips. Uncle Tom was rather shy and was content to stay at his home and oversee his gardens except when he took time off to play golf! He won numerous trophies but refused to have his name inscribed on them and the only trophy he really enjoyed was a silver plated water pitcher which was always on his dinner table. Today I own it and think of him when we bring it out for special occasions.

Tom was seven years older than my dad who died at age sixty while I was in high school. When mother died two years later he became a second father to my sister and me; helping us make financial decisions and helping us solve many other problems that we suddenly had thrust upon us since neither of us were of "legal age".

After I graduated from college with a major in journalism and a minor in history, I had no saleable skills in a country still in the Great Depression. Uncle Tom was one of the owners of a large apple orchard in Virginia and found out that a new manager was needed, so off I went to the little town of Stuarts Draft to seek my fortune in the apple business. There was no fortune to be made with a nation-wide bumper crop of apples and Mr. Hitler starting a war closed down the export market. Shortly thereafter, I took a teaching position at Fishburne Military School and when I informed Uncle Tom that I liked the Shenandoah Valley and wanted to stay, he couldn't believe his ears. I still recall that he reminded me that the Browns had come to Pittsburgh in 1830 and I was a part of the third generation to live there and I should come back. I told him that although I was the first Brown to leave Pittsburgh in over a century, I was going to become a Virginian. I came back to visit him many times and he met my wife and several of my little children. He came to visit us twice in his old age, but I don't think he ever became reconciled to the fact that this area was now my home.

When he was 82 years old he awoke one night and accidentally fell down the stairs breaking his hip. In a few days he developed pneumonia and suddenly he was gone; leaving an empty place in my life, but he taught me to love gardens, sports and the outdoors. Whenever I go back to Pittsburgh, I drive to Edgewood and turn up Maple Ave. which has remained almost unchanged in nearly a century. The large, old houses are still there, the trees still line the street on both sides and offer friendly shade. I always stop in front of Uncle Tom's house, which was changed in appearance some years ago by a modern architect, but the old front porch is still there and I can almost picture him coming out of the door saying, "John, it's great to see you again! Have you come home to stay?"

## A NOSTALGIC VISIT TO EDGEWOOD, PENNSYLVANIA

This past June I received a surprise gift from my son, Jamie. It was a card telling me that I would be transported to Pittsburgh to see the Pirates play three games and that we would stay at a hotel near the Three Rivers Stadium. True to his promise Jamie and grandson Matthew arrived on a Friday morning a few weeks ago and we arrived at the Pittsburgh Gateway Hilton in just a few minutes over five hours. It was hard to believe because this trip used to take almost eight hours in the days before Route 81 and the expressways that lead off the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

The stadium was on the other side of the Allegheny River, so in order to get there, we walked through the Gateway Park, climbed a long series of stairways to the top of the Point Bridge, walked across the bridge, climbed down the steps on the other side, and then finally reached the ballpark. When the game was over, we retraced our steps back to the hotel. It was good exercise for all of us but I must admit I enjoyed stretching out on my bed when we returned.

My grandson Matt wanted to see the town where I grew up and some of the things that my son Jamie had been shown when he was a boy and I was very pleased to have the opportunity to return to the scenes I associated with my childhood. The borough of Edgewood, which is celebrating its centennial this year, is divided into two areas by the main line of the Pennsylvania railroad. In order to visit some of the places I wanted to see again, we had to drive through the "tunnel" on Race Street which is the lone artery that connects the two divided parts of our small town. Ah! The tunnel! This is where we used to gallop along the narrow sidewalk shouting at the top of our lungs to hear the echoes that magnified our youthful shouts and the exciting sound that was created as our high school band in maroon and white uniforms struck up a few bars of "Semper Fidelis" as we marched under the railroad and down Race Street to Koenig Field for a football game. Yes, we thought that we sounded pretty good—all twenty-eight of us!

Race Street went up hill on the other end and connected with Swissvale Ave. At the top of the hill was the Edgewood Presbyterian Church, which was the only church in town and was attended by many people of different sects because it took a very broad view of what Christianity was all about. We went inside and looked at the huge organ which I still think is the most beautiful organ I have ever seen. Its silver pipes are enclosed by soaring Gothic woodwork of Italian walnut imported and installed almost eighty years ago. Up in one of the twin towers is a 26 bell carillon which was donated by a wealthy resident who bought the bells in Belgium and paid the bell foundry to send an expert to our Church to install them. They play the Westminster Chimes four times each hour and special music on Church Holidays.

I paused a moment to remember the Christmas programs that took place in this beautiful sanctuary and then at their conclusion I joined a large group of young people who would go to various addresses in the community and sing carols and hymns outside the homes of those who were ill or elderly and then end up in the Church social hall for sandwiches and hot chocolate.

Just across the street from the Church is a little park with a few beautiful trees and shrubbery which set off the statue of the World War I doughboy standing relaxed with his right hand on his hip and his left hand holding his Springfield rifle in a relaxed manner. Around the base of the statue are bronze plates with the names of the young men of Edgewood who served their country in the war. Other plates were added after the end of World War II and on a separate stone marker were the names of those who fought in Korea and Viet Nam. I looked at the names listed and recognized many of them. Some names had a bronze star which indicated that they had made the supreme sacrifice.

As I stood there, I could vividly recall when the statue was first unveiled in 1928. There was a parade that featured several bands and about 40 or 50 middle-aged men in khaki uniforms that seemed a bit too tight who marched with pride behind several Packard touring cars which contained about a half dozen white haired men in dark blue uniforms who had fought in the Civil War. It was a scene that I will never forget—a memory that made me proud of my community and my country.

Just a few yards away is an old building built about a hundred years ago—red brick with a slate roof built in a style that is called "railroad Gothic". This was our railroad station. I say "was" because it is now part real estate office and part antique store. This is the place where one could buy a commuter ticket to downtown or, going in the opposite direction, "shuffle off to Buffalo", Boston, or New York City. It was here also where my senior class of 1934 assembled with suitcases, raincoats, and juvenile excitement to await the arrival of the Capitol Limited, snorting steam and black smoke which stopped briefly for us to get on board on our way to Washington.

What a thrill it was to be seated in the dining car with its white linen covered tables and railroad silverware and to order lunch and stare out of the windows as the train slowed down for the famous Horseshoe Curve near Altoona, Pa.

When we passed the railroad station, son Jamie made a left turn and drove up Maple Avenue. We glanced at the old grade school, the high school, and paused briefly to look at the three houses where I dwelt in early childhood, early puberty, and what today is called "being a teenager". When we were in the time period from 13 to 19 we were not singled out as a special age group that needed special attention. We were just called "kids" and then "young ladies and gentlemen" and we were expected to act accordingly.

As we drove up Maple Avenue, I pointed out the 3 houses in which I lived from birth until college graduation and marriage. I noted that the houses that I knew in that period are still the same. I know that the people inside them are not the people I knew, but the street is no wider, the same trees grow along both sides, and the sidewalks are unchanged. It was a pleasant feeling to see things almost unchanged except that there were no Model A Fords, Pierce-Arrows, or Packard parked along the shady street. Yes, I think that I liked that very much. It was a great trip to nostalgia.

## **REVISITING MY CHILDHOOD HOMETOWN**

A few weeks ago I had an opportunity to indulge myself in a bit of nostalgia as my son Jamie and I drove back to Pittsburgh to watch my beloved Pittsburgh Pirates play three games with St. Louis. I am not a sports reporter so we will omit all further references to score, plays made, losses, etc. In a word, the Pirates were at their worst and I couldn't believe that they had been in first place almost all the time since early April but I did enjoy being at a ballgame instead of watching a game on the "boob tube".

I guess the first bit of nostalgia was to see the large statue of a bowlegged giant in front of the stadium with the inscription "John Peter Wagner". Old Honus, baseball's greatest shortstop, and my father were life-long friends and played ball together for the "Alleghenies" at Sportsman's Park which one stood almost where the Three Rivers Stadium is now. The old "Alleghenies" became the Pittsburgh Pirates and Honus went with them and wrote his name in baseball history. My dad became an accountant for a bank and finally made a good enough salary as a future son-in-law. He and my mother, after a two year engagement, married in 1903. The wedding was held at her home which was large enough to hold all the friends and relatives. There were over 100 in attendance, I was told.

I told my son about numerous visits to Honus Wagner's sporting goods store with Dad where I listened to their talk of baseball in the old days.

I was pleased to note that Pittsburgh has finally re-awakened to the advantages of the electric trolley car once more and we took a ride which started in the new subway under the "Golden Triangle" part of the town and then emerged to cross a bridge over the Monongahela River and get off at the entrance to the old Monongahela Incline, known affectionately as the "Mon". It was built in 1870 and still hauls thousands of people to the top of South Hills. There were once about 15 of these inclines built to haul workers to the steel mills by the river below but there are only two left and it is exciting to sit in the old car and move to the top and pass the other car on its way down.

The steel mills are mostly gone but we saw barges being pushed up the river by diesel tugs instead of the steam I remember. They still haul coal, sand, gravel, and other cargoes to someplace up the river. One day we had lunch in a restaurant that is part of a shopping complex built around old buildings of the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad. Later we boarded a boat made to look like a paddle wheel steamboat, but I noticed that the paddlewheels just spin around from the water stirred up by the twin propellers of the craft. Nonetheless, it was fun to go down the Monongahela, enter Ohio, and then go up the Allegheny to land near the baseball stadium. Again, no report on the games we saw.

We also had time to drive out to Edgewood and stop at the Edgewood Club which was probably one of the very first community centers. Built in 1912 by a group of interested citizens, it contains a three lane bowling alley, a kitchen, a reception room, a great dance floor and a stage. On the second floor is the town library. Outside there is a swimming pool and four tennis courts. Here we met an 87 year old man who was my tie to the past. He was a friend of my uncle, my father, and the father of a son whose

daughter I dated in high school. This man plays tennis every day when the weather is good and has won many national championships for Senior Citizens for over 20 years.

It was at this same club where my class and others held proms and we were entrusted with the family car---if we promised to be home by 1:00 a.m. We looked again to the bronze marker that stated that here, in 1920 a group of people gathered to hear a radio broadcast from station KDKA. This was a report on the Harding-Cox presidential election. That was an exciting evening for my parents and about 150 others who sat and listened to a radio voice broadcast amplified by a Westinghouse engineer. The broadcasting "studio" was a tent on top of the Westinghouse Manufacturing building. The reports were received by telegraph and then broadcast to that group of excited adults in a building about 4 miles away. Yes, folks, that was real entertainment at the beginning of the "Roaring Twenties."

Jamie wanted to see the house his mother lived in and after some difficulty we located it looking little changed, except that the trees planted by his grandfather were much taller than I remembered. We later drove to a suburb named Murrysville to visit my cousin and her husband. Their house is surrounded by their own woods and as we had a delightful lunch in a garden gazebo. It was hard to believe that a large thru-way was just a few blocks away. My cousin Betty keeps track of family and husband Jim is an expert flower gardener, wood-carver, and photographer and we enjoyed a slide presentation of their travels in southern Europe.

When we left for home Sunday afternoon, we saw signs announcing that this year is the golden anniversary of the opening of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The first segment that was built on the right of way of a railroad that was started by steelmaker Andrew Carnegie but abandoned in the early 1900's. When it was first opened, there was no speed limit and all curves were designed to be negotiated at 80 miles per hour. The road surface was concrete with a twenty foot grass median strip. After numerous accidents and blown engines, the speed limit was set at 55 and after World War II was over, the concrete was re-surfaced with black top and a heavy wire fence replaced the grass strip when the roadway was widened. Today the Turnpike looks its age but it was the first superhighway in the United States and all the interstates we have today are modeled after it in one way or another.

We left the turnpike at the Breezewood exit which is the beginning of Route 522 and had a late supper at the Gateway Restaurant. Although it is surrounded by fast food places, the food is still the best. I have stopped there since it opened 50 years ago and I recommend it. The Gateway and I are growing old together.

## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Early in June I received a note from my fifth eldest grandchild announcing his graduation from high school. At the same period in June, tens of thousands of students graduate from high school and into an uncertain and at times frightening future. I began to think back to my high school graduation which took place 55 years ago. Gosh! That was two score and fifteen years ago and how different things were in so many respects.

On that June night in 1934 the small auditorium was filled with friends and relatives who gathered to see our class of sixty-three assorted young ladies and gentlemen walk slowly down the two aisles to the traditional "Pomp and Circumstance" played by the high school orchestra. I remember that the music sounded a bit thin because twelve of the group were in the lines of seniors moving toward the stage. The girls were attired in long white dresses and the boys wore white (or almost white) flannel pants, dark jackets, and whatever color shoes they had for Sunday.

We sat down in 3 or 4 rows of metal folding chairs and, after listening to a retired minister tell us how gloomy our future would be, we filed by in alphabetical order to receive our diplomas. Things like selecting salutatorian and valedictorian and the wearing of caps and gowns were only done by college graduates.

I must mention at this time that over half of the class had been to a picnic and swim at a park called Idlewild and many of us got too much sun. The girls who went had very red arms, necks, and shoulders contrasting with their snowy dresses. We fellows had our fiery areas covered but after marching out rapidly to "The March of the Priests" we forgot and began slapping our friends on their backs in congratulations which brought about many "ouches, ows, and stop that's".

After all the congratulations by the adults, many of the fellows were entrusted with the family car for the night and those whose families had no car double-dated so everyone who went to the Senior Prom at the Edgewood Club had a ride. I remember that none of the girls in my class wanted to go with me or was otherwise unavailable, so I escorted a pretty Norwegian lass named Mossie Lyngheim, a sophomore and a sister of one of my best friends. The dance floor was smooth, the music of Will Ryshanek was great and the fellow who did a solo bit of "Stardust"—I can still hear him. In those days we had dance cards that had about a dozen lines with numbers and the fellows moved frantically to have them filled with a different girl's name during the early part of the evening. Yes, we shared our dance partners and the more fellow's names a young lady had on her card the more popular she was considered.

I believe that the dance ended at midnight so we had an hour to drive to an all-night drugstore, a White Tower hamburger palace where hamburgers with a slice of dill pickle and mustard or ketchup was five cents! I was especially proud that my widowed mother allowed me to take the big 1930 Jordan Airline Eight instead of the 1928 sedan I used when she went shopping for groceries. One of my buddies was permitted to take out his dad's brand new 1934 Pontiac, complete with red wire wheels, dark blue paint, and blue mohair upholstery. That was really living, folks. Of course, for most of us the pumpkin

coach had to be back in the garage by one o'clock. Yes, we had a great time with no cigarettes, no booze, and just a little necking if one was lucky.

That fall two of my classmates and I entered Bethany College together and we enjoyed four years of higher education before we went our separate ways. Now, this September I will see those two fellows and one lady again with more of my classmates as we converge for our 55<sup>th</sup> reunion. Perhaps it was the simple pleasures we had and inexpensive fun we had together. Perhaps it was the water, the occasional non-smoggy days in Pittsburgh when many of the steel mills were shut down and the Monongahela River almost ran clear...whatever it was, we survived the War, the Depression and times that followed and forty-eight of us survive. We have been down the road quite a long piece and we are proud of it.

## **MY 55-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL REUNION**

For almost five years I had been looking forward to a date on my calendar—September 22, 1989. This was the date that my high school class would assemble at the Station Square Hilton for a two-day 55<sup>th</sup> reunion. We were informed by our class president, who organized the reunion and who kept us in touch with one another, that forty-five of our class of sixty-five graduates were still alive and kicking and that there would be thirty-one there for the festivities which included a trip down the Ohio River on a sternwheeler complete with dinner and dancing. I was all set to go—bags packed, plane ticket from Charlottesville to Pittsburgh, hotel reservation, boat trip ticket—everything. Then came Hugo. I received a call from US Air that my 11:30 am flight was cancelled, the 2:30 flight was cancelled and the 4:30 flight was the earliest possibility if Hugo calmed down.

The winds of Hugo blew things around Stuarts Draft and made me thankful that my house wasn't "built on sinking sand." About a half hour before I planned to leave, I thought I'd check to see how Heidi, our Weimaraner hound, had weathered the storm. Well, she had and then again, she hadn't. The huge 50 year old Rambo apple tree in the middle of her fenced enclosure had uprooted, just missed landing on her doghouse and landed on the wire fence and the gate, making it impossible to get her out. Luckily, I had a chain saw in the shed that I hadn't used for over a year and a young man living close by, was able to coax the saw to life and cut away the huge old branches. After escorting a thoroughly soaked and frightened pooch into the house, I jumped into my car and headed for the airport.

After passing my suitcase through security I checked in for the 4:30 flight. The plane arrived and people got off the little 18 passenger Fairchild turbo-prop, which then "gasses up" for the return flight to Pittsburgh. I was munching on a \$1.25 hot dog hoping I would get there on time to catch the paddle wheeler and recapture some memories of those Saturday night dance cruises we used to take when we had a pretty date and \$2.50. No, we didn't have a car to drive. We took the trolley car and walked a few blocks to the pier.

I was awakened from my daydream by an announcement on the loudspeaker that the plane was having engine trouble and the flight was cancelled!! I went to the desk and the man in charge began to push computer buttons and then informed me that there might be one last flight at 7:40 pm. "Do you want to wait?" Did I! I could picture my classmates enjoying their prime rib dinner as they gazed out at the lights on the Ohio River as the band played "our kind of music."

To make a long story short, we finally took off at 7:45 pm and an hour later landed in a drizzling rain. All I had to do then was to look for the limousine that went to my hotel. The "limo" turned out to be an old city bus with only one other passenger who also paid nine bucks to ride for half an hour beside a "no smoking" sign just beside the driver who consumed at least three cigarettes before we arrived. After checking into my hotel room, I had just a few minutes to wash up and then wait a few minutes in the lobby for the "gang" to disembark from their pleasure cruise. Well, they came in and after a few hugs and handshakes they all wanted to know what had happened to me since there was an

empty seat by my name card. We talked until late in the night and prepared for a lot of visiting on Saturday.

The day went by quickly and the banquet and short speeches and singing that night came to a happy end and we voted unanimously to have our 60<sup>th</sup> in 1994. We would go back to our homes and watch color tv, watch our grandchildren work with computers, and take our medicines to try and stay healthy. Yes, we were young people who danced during the Depression, danced to the big bands on the radio on Saturday nights, drove Model A's, Maxwells, Jordans, and Studebakers without safety glass, defrosters, heaters or car radios. We didn't have vitamin pills, flu shots, or beer. We were the last generation to be raised with the Victorian morals and ideals of our parents. We have come "down the road" a long way and with a little luck and the good Lord's help, we'll meet again. We will talk about growing up in a drugless society, five-cent hamburgers, twenty-five cent movie tickets, being warned by our teachers at school dances to stay "six inches apart", and growing up in homes with two parents who sometimes thought that "nothing good could happen after midnight, so be home by twelve." They were probably right, though sometimes I wonder if I missed something.

Now Libby and I go to bed about 10:30...so I guess I'll never know.