

# Our Neighborhood



Welcome to the launch of OUR NEIGHBORHOOD, a new quarterly publication that focuses on the lives of RWC residents – one story at a time. It's based on the idea that we all have a story to tell. OUR NEIGHBORHOOD depends on contributions from the audience – a kind of group memoire. (More on this point later.)

Here's what's inside:

“Life in Dictatorships” by Milena Van Sant describes how she witnessed two dictatorships as a child. She did not fully understand what was happening, only that she survived while millions of others did not.

In “My Horse” Harriet Dawson recalls her teen-age love for a horse that became a winner, despite a lack of pedigree. She describes Samson in loving detail.

Bob Woods tells a light-hearted story in “My Mother Meets Cronkite.” He could only guess how his mom would tell the story.”

“A Fishing Tale” by Pete Epps is not your usual line of bragging. In fact, Pete has a cartoon illustration of this tale.

Page Henley in “My Initiation to Coal Mining” recalls that the experience was quite a shock for an attorney. But it was not his last time in a mine.

“Two Sides of the Yen” by Jay Walker recounts two very different experiences in Japan. An overnight in a Japanese inn is compared to a post-tennis party.

Coming in the winter edition:

Clock man Bob Street describes his “outside job.”

ALSO

Kerley LeBoeuf has a series in mind, starting in college.

SPECIAL THANKS:

Amy Lewis designed the magazine logo and handled the production. Many thanks, Amy!

Reminder:

Got an idea for a story? Send me an email to [jay722ksr@gmail.com](mailto:jay722ksr@gmail.com).

## Two Sides of the Yen By Jay Walker

After several assignments reporting the Japanese electronics industry in the 1970s, I was told by the editor of a sister publication in Tokyo that I was now a hena guigen, which meant a foreigner who knows a lot about Japanese culture, but does not understand it.

That put me in a category with a lot of Americans, but also opened the way for two adventures – two sides of the Japanese coin.

On a visit to Osaka, I was invited to stay a night at a Japanese inn. These inns seldom welcome foreign visitors. A chief concern are guests who “pull the plug” on the tub. Okay, I knew that is a no-no.

A time at an inn is almost a mystical experience – intentionally. And the famous tub was a key element. It is not for washing up. Rather, it is for singing and contemplation. I did both while viewing the gardens. Dinner was served and I ate Japanese style.

Needless to say, I slept in a traditional bed, totally relaxed. I thought an inn would work in New York City to calm the hectic pace.

Nah. Somebody would pull the plug!

The second side of the coin was the invitation from the sister magazine for a tennis week-end. I needed a quick trip to the Ginza to get apparel. (I borrowed a racquet.)

It was a lot of fun being with this

group when we were not in formal mode. The final evening was a party. We ended up sitting on the floor and the singing began. Uh Oh. The boys and girls were singing school songs – I was told. And it was coming around to my turn.

I went for the blues. Why not go with American jazz?

So I sang:

If you see me coming, open your window high.

If you see me coming, open your window high.

But if you see me going, hang your head and cry.

When I looked around the room, the girls had eyes closed, hanging on to every word. Was I a new jazz star? Well, no. Louis Armstrong was there first.

would be right back and I heard the first call of “fire in the hole” the traditional blaster’s warning an explosion was about to go off. In rapid succession I heard two more warnings. I quickly learned that an explosion underground is more felt than heard. I was lifted off the pile of coal both by the force of the explosion and my reaction to it. I came straight up, hit the top of my helmet on the roof of the mine and fell back on the coal pile. It took a moment for me to realize I was ok when six or so miners and my guide rushed up laughing and helped me up. Several said “congratulations, welcome to coal mining,” I had received my initiation to coal mining!

After they dusted me off and made sure I was all right, I was taken back to the blast site so I could see the displaced coal being scooped up to be transported to a belt head to be taken out of the mine. Also, I was able to watch a team of roof bolters secure the newly exposed roof of the mine. This was one of the most dangerous jobs in an underground coal mine and, seeing that, greatly enhanced my deep respect for the world of coal miners.

After about a half day in the mine, I had the information I needed and it was time to leave this fascinating workplace. The miners in the section gathered around to say goodbye and to

tell me I would be welcome to come back anytime. I had one more surprise in store for me. After changing out of my mining clothes, my guide said he thought I would be back in the mines before too long and I would need the bag he handed me. It contained my boots, coverall, belt and my hard hat which I have proudly worn on many trips into many mines over my working career and which I have with me today.

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## Life in Dictatorship By Milena Van Sant

I lived as a child and young teen under the iron fists of two dictatorships – the Nazis in Germany and Austria, and Soviet Communism in what is now Czechia.

I was born in 1937 in Berlin. Even we, the children, could not miss seeing enormous photographs of Hitler proliferating next to supersized swastika flags rippling in the wind. Black-clad men marched briskly through the streets, throwing their legs high like puppets on a string. Cheering crowds watched, but in time more and more people would shrink into stores for safety, until these same stores bore the signs of “Don’t buy from Jews!” and ceased to exist. Hitler’s shrill voice set to its highest volume attempted to drown out all reason as he proclaimed that he alone could save us from all enemies, whether real or imaginary. My Estonian-born father passed as being of a superior race, presumably because of its large German population.

After a steady denial of the evil of which the Third Reich was fully capable and some futile and tragic attempts at appeasement by an unbelieving world, British bombers began retaliating against the Nazi Blitz bombings of London.

In the summer of 1940 nightly raids announced by shrilling warning sirens brought our parents rushing to our bedside to remove our limp, sleepy bodies from the warm covers to take us to a bomb shelter or a dank, dark apartment house basement. The loud noise temporarily overcame Hitler’s unhinged, bombastic speeches but we, the children, pondered uneasily if we

had misbehaved to cause the calamity of a possible death upon us as punishment.

We moved to the Austrian capital of Vienna for safety. The old manicured former royal palace gardens had become the neighborhood playground, and I felt like a child again. We lived in a 15-room apartment where my room became a bit of Paradise with its pink furniture and painted wooden plaques depicting fairy tale characters hanging on the walls. Our housekeeper prepared dumplings with a sweet surprise fruit inside, but she would later threaten to report my parents to the Nazi authorities for secretly listening to strictly forbidden Radio Free Europe broadcasts from London. The Nazis only transmitted falsehoods to fit their purpose.

Austria had become fully incorporated into the Third Reich. Some playmates began wearing yellow stars on their outer clothing, as did their parents. At the time I would not know that they were marked with the Hebrew Star of David and become publicly targeted for death. Slowly, they disappeared from my circle of friends. I admired the stars and asked my parents if I could have one of my own. My mother cried out, “My God, no!” and burst into tears. She could not give an explanation. A child’s questions could not often be answered. We children instinctively knew that bad things were happening all around us, but did not understand what they were or why they existed. Many, many years later I woke up one night with the nagging thought that the luxurious apartment in Vienna had been made available to us because

# My Initiation to Coal Mining

By Page Henley

a Jewish family had been carted off to a concentration camp for forced labor until they were emaciated and died. It is one of the sharp creases etched into the crumpled paper of my memory.

When Allied bomber planes became capable of reaching Vienna from conquered Fascist Italy's air bases in 1942, we sought refuge in a small village in the foothills of the Austrian Alps. A large lake, snowdrops poking through the frost, ripening blueberries, mushrooms and hazelnuts and glistening rainbow trout passing in quicksilver mountain brooks gifted me with another glimpse of what childhood was meant to be. We had kept our Vienna apartment until we received news that a time delay bomb had demolished my room and much of the other chambers along with their contents. I saw dust and rubble, and learned the valuable lesson of the fleeting value of objects. Of the wooden plaques only Cinderella partially survived.

We were liberated in the Alpine village by American soldiers. Their precious young years were shortened or destroyed by the bloody war. We will never forget their sacrifices. And so The "War to End All Wars" ended in September of 1945.

In November of 1945 we made the fateful decision to move to Prague. The ancient city flourished as the yoke of Nazi rule had been broken. Musicians emerged to play in public places. Cultural life proliferated. After many years of subjugation Czech freedom had asserted itself, the people rejoiced and we children peacefully resumed our plays in the cobbled streets and lush parks. It was not to last.

In February of 1948 the country

would become a satellite of the Soviet Union by a majority vote electing the communist ideology of powerful Slav brother Russia. Czech Communists did not kill children – they recruited and groomed us to become fervent followers by promising a glorious future for us and our county. It was a heady feeling for a ten-year old child. Instead, the autocratic boot came down on our fathers who were in opposition, many of whom disappeared forever. In the illogical ways of despotic regimes my father was accepted as "desirable" for having lived in Russia and speaking the language. It did not take long before he became an "Enemy of the State" and was taken for questioning by the SNB (equivalent of the Gestapo). The agents who took him into custody made it clear that there existed a dossier on our family – including my 12-year old self for failure to have participated in patriotic May Day parades.

My father's transgression? Exchanging business letters with an associate in the Netherlands. My mother was declared an "Enemy of the State" for openly criticizing the regime.

Father returned, shaken, later that day and after a year-long negotiation we were able to obtain an exit visa for Germany. Our little family, now displaced persons, were welcomed into a DP camp underwritten by American taxpayers to offer temporary shelter until we were able to support ourselves. No words will ever adequately express my gratitude. We lived a schizophrenic life but we lived. Millions were not so fortunate.

In the mid 1960's as a young lawyer in a firm in Charleston, West Virginia I was assigned to a team representing the firm's coal mining clients. One of my first cases involved alleged violations of an early Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act enforced by the U. S. Department of Labor. After reviewing the charges, I realized I had no real knowledge of how the mine operated or of the equipment mentioned in the charges. I felt the only way to solve this problem was to go underground in the mine in question and see it, and the equipment there, in real time.

After the firm agreed to let me do that, I called the head of the safety team at the mine whom I had met in earlier meetings. When I explained what I wanted to do, he asked me if I had ever been into a mine before. When I said no, chuckled a bit and said he would be glad to take me in. We agreed on a date "mantrip." Another safety lecture was given and we boarded the "mantrip."

The area of the mine I needed to see was well into the mine so the trip covered a lot of ground. We moved quickly and, because the only light was from the trolley head light and our lamps, I was not able to see many details of the areas we passed

through. The area I needed to see was called a conventional mining section which involved drilling into the coal seam on a specific pattern, inserting explosives, setting off a blast and scooping up the loosened coal and placing it on conveyor belts to the outside. There were other sections using different mining procedures which I briefly visited on the trip to my section.

When we arrived there I was introduced to the section foreman and several other men in the area. They took me to the area they were about to mine where I could see the drilling machine at work. Several other miners passed by and I could see them asking who I was and why I was here. I could see a few smiles which should have been a warning that my surprise was getting closer.

When the drilling machine finished drilling and backed away, the blast crew began inserting the explosives. My guide said it was time to leave the area. I was taken back to an open area well away from the blast site where my guide suggested we sit on a small pile of coal. Other miners gathered in a group in another part of the area. In a few minutes one of those men called my guide to come to him. He said he

"Crap, my Lucky Craft is hung into a tree," I complained.

Getting it out was now a big challenge. At this point, Jay Bird maneuvers the boat closer to the tree about 10 feet off shore.

I stood up in the boat to untangle the mess over my head when suddenly the boat moves. I lost my balance and flipped backwards head over heels into the water. (Sploosh.)

Under water, my first thought was don't panic as I wore heavy clothes. I can't remember touching bottom.

Anyway, I popped right back up. At that point I grabbed the side of the boat, was able to move to the other side of the boat near shore where I was able to roll into the boat without turning it over.

Within a few minutes hypothermia was setting in. I called to Jay to get me in and within five minutes we were at the dock. I stumbled out of the boat and hustled up to the cabin where I quickly shed all my wet clothes, watch and cell phone. Then I jumped into a hot shower, feeling that it all could have been worse. Believe it or not, the cell phone still worked.

To commemorate the event, one of my fishing buddies, "JR", a cartoonist, drew a cartoon of it and my FRIENDS presented it to me for my birthday.

To this day, I can't understand why I am not allowed to stand up in the Jon Boat.

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## My Horse By Harriet Dawson

His name was Sampson. He was a gorgeous, shiny deep brown color with an interesting white face, stunning strong legs with white socks, and a flowing black tail and mane. He was two years old when a young girl of about fourteen years of age and her father, bought Sampson from a man in South Carolina for \$200. Sampson had no pedigree, no papers, no training, and was a gelding. And, he had beautiful eyes...you know, the kind that just cause you to melt. Sampson entered a training program in Albemarle, North Carolina, and one day the girl and her father got the call to "come and see." Another purchase made on the same day as Sampson, was also in training and she came out of the stall first...a pretty little palomino that performed well and appeared to a good purchase.

And then the trainer said, "Get ready...here comes Sampson." Oh my! Head held high, chest strong, eyes blazing, ears totally alert, and legs...oh those legs prancing with authority...this was no ordinary Sampson...this was Mighty Sampson.

The girl's challenge came next. She needed to learn how to maximize this magnificent creature's gifts and talents. And so the joy began. Day after day they went to work and got to know each other, to trust each other. She learned his habits, his signals and he learned hers.

Born a natural competitor, Sampson's entrance into competitions was an easy one for he loved to win, he loved to perform, he loved to "wow"

the spectators. Winning area and regional show after show, it was suggested he perform in the North Carolina State Show...and he did...oh my did he! He was the North Carolina Three-Gaited Natural Tail Champion three years in a row. And later, he placed third and fourth two years in a row, respectively, at the World's Show in Louisville, Kentucky.



He was amazing and he knew it. He loved the lights and the applause and knowing he was the best. And yet, he still loved the country trails, the afternoon backrubs and brushings, the counseling sessions with the young girl. He lived a long life and is buried under an oak tree in Pee Dee. He never had any papers, his blood line was never discovered, but he was a champion... he was Mighty Sampson...and he was mine.

# My Mother Meets Cronkite

By Bob Woods

In 1979, while working for the Federal Aviation Administration, I was selected for the Education for Public Management program. It is a government wide program that selects high potential personnel to study for a year at one of 7 public administration programs. The next step was to then apply to the top 3 universities you were interested in. I was selected by Harvard. So Betsy and I loaded a U-Haul truck and headed up I-95 in the heat of the 1979 Summer, gas crisis and all.

The year at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government was an eventful one. The number of famous people I met was a little overwhelming, but I adjusted. They included George Cabot Lodge, Bob Hope, Ben Bradley, Ted Kennedy, Griffin Bell and others. Course work involved lots of case studies and lots and lots of reading. It was meant to be challenging and it was.

I grew up in the coal fields of Southwest Virginia. My father was a coal miner and had entered the mines at 17. He was an early member of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and was a follower of John L. Lewis. Like many mining families, we were a large family, nine children. I am the oldest of the brood. My parents valued education because theirs had been cut short. We were strongly pushed to attend school every day. I did not miss a day of school from the sixth grade through high school. Missing school was not an option.

As my parents aged they became more involved in the church. Mom was the

ultimate "church lady" and was the leader of the annual apple butter sales drive that funded the modernization of the church hall and kitchen. She took out her energy left over from not having all of us at home any more. Mom's reaction to us going to Boston for the year was mixed. She never liked any of her brood moving farther away. I kept her entertained with calls and stories about school and Betsy's family. Betsy's father was from Boston and was one of eleven Irish Catholic children. So there were lots of family in the area. As the year at the Kennedy School begin to wind down, I tried to prepare my parents to come to graduation ceremonies. There were a lot of anxieties and apprehensions that Mom and Dad thought up. I finally bought the plane tickets and put the issue to bed. So they came to Boston.

The trip was basically a whirlwind. Trips to Maine, touring the Tall Ships, meeting Betsy's large family, eating lobster rolls and touring Boston all happened before graduation itself. Graduation in Harvard Yard is historic and impressive. The schools then break out for their individual ceremonies and parties. Our speaker for the Kennedy School was none other than Walter Cronkite, the "Most Trusted Man in America." Walter had a lot to say about the state of the world and the US in 1980.

After the graduation and the presentation of diplomas there was a lawn party in the courtyard. In a scene from "The Great Gatsby", the tents and the food and drink looked the part.

I made my trip to retrieve drinks and noticed on the way back that Walter had joined the party. And he was talking to Mom! After some time we remarked how long the conversation had gone on and chuckled about what it was about. Some more time elapsed and now I was beginning to get the sense that others were looking to engage him as well. Finally in some panic I thought I should intervene. As I approached Mom and Walter I smiled and introduced myself. Walter was charming and said he'd heard a lot about me. Somehow that worried me. I jokingly asked if he needed me to rescue

him. He said that I could move along now. "Your mother is one of most interesting women I have met lately." A few minutes later Mom joined the rest of the family at the reception. She was thrilled and admitted making her first commercial flight had been worth it. After driving my parents to Logan Airport the following day for the flight back to Virginia, the only thing I could think of was those other poor church ladies at next Sunday's service. Mom had met Walter Cronkite and he thought she was interesting. They would never hear the last of it.

## A Fishing Tale By Pete Epps

It was a cold, crisp November day in 2018 that I met my fishing buddies at the Cohoke Club, Inc. fishing club located in King William County near West Point, VA. Established in 1900, the club has 50 active members, plus four Honorary Members. Cohoke Lake is an 80-acre impoundment lake and is stocked with Largemouth Bass, Brim, Crappie, and several other freshwater species.

My fishing partner for the day was Jay Bird. We had fished together many times, usually with great success. This time was no exception, because Jay was always good about putting us on fish. He knew the lake well and where the fish might be.

Early that morning we loaded the Jon Boat and set out. We had a very productive morning

catching a number of 18 to 22 inch bass (all catch and release). We broke for lunch and rest and after a couple of hours, we hit the water for more fishing.

By mid afternoon the wind had picked up which always makes fishing in a Jon Boat a challenge. Afternoon fishing was not as successful, but we plodded on. Just before dusk, as we were heading in, we decided to fish the shoreline for one more fish!

By now the wind was making casting more difficult. I could not cast my lure where I wanted it. I tried again and again. On my last cast a big gust of wind grabbed my Lucky Craft lure and flung it into a tree.