

The Spoke

Rotary Club of Danbury

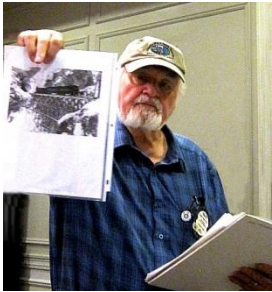
www.danburyrotary.org ,

District 7980

August 15, 2018

P.O. Box 788, Danbury, CT

From the Editor's Desk:



In 1954, I wanted an adventure before entering college. I found that adventure spending the summer in Alaska. My father worked for the Rio Grande railroad which provided a pass for all family members on any railroad in the country. I took advantage of that pass and headed to Seattle. From there, I flew

to Juneau, Alaska, then on to Skagway, Alaska, via an old WW II PBV plane that took off from the water, and landed on a dirt strip in Skagway. The vacation had barely started, but it then continued into



the adventure of a lifetime. It was an experience few 18 year old lads have a chance to have. It was a happening never to be forgotten.



Tary's Rotary Minute:

Rotary gives out many special awards, but one of the more special ones is the Pettengill given out by our District 7980. It was named after the 54th RI President, Charles W. Pettengill, a Greenwich attorney, who was the only Rotary International president who came from Connecticut... and we won the award, one year, under the guidance of Dr. Nels deAlmeida.



Yours in Rotary Service, Tary

Speakers:

- 8/22 Pool Party at Andy and Anita Ragona's, 4 pm
- 8/28 Stew Leonard tour, Off-site visit. Be there at Noon, upstairs.
- 9/5 Mayko and Chris Lucksey, AAA, Danbury.
- 9/26 Dinner at Chuck's, 5:30 pm
- 10/24 Dinner at Chuck's, 5:30 pm
- 11/21 Lions at Ethan Allen

Area Make-ups-

- Mon. 12:15 pm, Norwalk, Norwalk Inn
- Mon. 6:15 pm, Newtown, Newtown Country Club
- Tues. 12:00 pm, Westport, Branson Hall at Christ and Holy Trinity Church
- Wed. 12:15 pm, Danbury, Ethan Allen Inn, Danbury
- Wed 6:15 pm, Ridgefield Dinner Club, Bernard's, 20 West Lane, Ridgefield
- Fri 7:30 am, Westport Sunrise, The Westport Inn
- Fri. 12:15 pm, Wilton, Marly's Bistro

Your Editor's Very Excellent Teen-age Adventure to Alaska, 64 Years Ago:

Some things in our lives are more unforgettable than others. The summer I left high school was one of those magical experiences—a summer in Alaska.

When I arrived in Skagway, I had \$25 in my pocket, but knew my aunt Loraine, and Uncle Ervon Fairbanks would take good care of me. Ervon owned the only grocery store in town, the Fairway Market—and his son Ed, 86, is still there.

When Loraine found out I was practically broke, she told me, "That won't due." You need a job." I was handed a paintbrush and can of paint and sent out to paint the oil barrel. The next day, she took me to the office of the White Pass and Yukon RR where I was told I would be working as a trackman 8 miles up the line, at Clifton Station (a railroad bunkhouse). I then had a 2 minute medical exam and was deemed fit to work. I was outfitted at the local mercantile, and told by Lorraine I would pay her back with my first paycheck. Soon I was on the train to Clifton. When asked when the train would stop there, the conductor grinned, indicating the train couldn't stop there due to the steepness of the grade, but it would slow down to 6 mph and I was to throw my duffle off,



stand on the bottom step of the train car, then jump—which I did. The section foreman, George Gove, expressed pleasure that I had not fallen over the cliff, or under the train not wanting to requisition another trackman.

The work was demanding, and the black flies numerous. One day we had pulled 4 rotten ties from under the tracks, and heard the train whistle down in the valley. George yelled, "Get



moving! We don't want to send that train down into the gorge." As the whistle grew louder, we worked harder, but had the last tie barely in, spiked and tamped with ballast when the train arrived around the bend. As it passed by,

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George Gove puffed on his cigar, and proudly remarked, "Smooth as glass; smooth as glass."

We went by a motorized "casey" to Skagway on the weekends. On Sunday, we had to search the 5 bars in town for our spike maul expert, Ben Scott, pull him out from under a table, and strap him to the casey for our trip back to Clifton. Monday he could barely work. Tuesday he was fine.

One weekend I went with my uncle to Dyea, the head of the '98 gold rush Chilkoot Trail. The salmon were running, and there seemed more salmon in the river than fish. I shot a photo of my uncle that day that won an honorable mention in a US Camera teen photo contest.



Another trip was to Denver Glacier. We went inside one of the ice caves, and listen to the drips and cracking of a moving monster. Glacier ice is as blue as the sky. The glacier no longer exists—a victim of climate change.

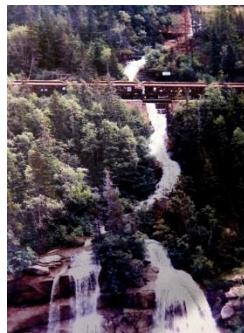


I met a girl in Skagway for a brief teen-age romance, Tookie Saldine. Her mother was the town mason and bricklayer.

On an overnight hike to Upper Dewey Lake, outside of Skagway, I met a friend of my cousin Les, Jay Braun. I met Jay years later at a convention of the Am Psychological Association, and found out he was a professor at Yale.

My trip to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, with cousin Les, was particularly memorable. We met a young man, Raymond Lortie there, who "borrowed"

his intoxicated father's car, and took us on a hair raising joyride around town. At one point he decided we would pick up some girls, and take them to a local hotel. Perchance we did meet to Alute Indian girls who agreed to go with us, but to my great relief the local police stopped Ray, one remarked, "This is the last time we're giving you a pass, Ray. You're going home without the girls, pronto." Before that encounter, Ray was wondering if something was wrong with my neck because I was constantly looking at the Northern Lights. When I told him, he shrugged, "Oh them. They're here all the time. Back in the states do you stare at the moon like that?" We never saw Ray again.



My uncle enjoyed catching Alaskan King Crabs; though the family had a freezer full of them, I never had a crab meal. My aunt explained, "We've had so much crab we're sick of it."

What a summer. I'll never forget it.

Rotary Club of Danbury

Officers 2018-19

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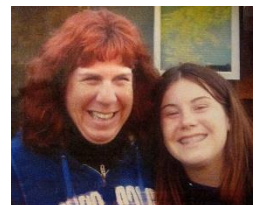
No Spoke issues missed since 1/4/06

Spoke Editor: Ralph S. Welsh

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Cast of Alaskan Characters:

(Left to right) Me from the pages of my high school yearbook, South High School in Salt Lake City, as the Photo Editor. Second is my Fairbanks family in Skagway, Leslie, Ed, Lorraine and Ervon; third is my SLC girlfriend, Nikki Cope, who was none too pleased to hear about Skagway girlfriend Tookie Saldine (not shown). Fourth is my wife, Jane, in 1955 who I met after my trip; Jane went with me to Alaska when I returned in 2000; section boss and cigar chomping George Gove, and 15 year old Smokey Knapp; and finally, Kristine Fairbanks, with daughter, Ed's daughter in law. She was a National Park Canine police officer tragically gunned down in 2008 during a marijuana bust. Others not shown, but significant are: diminutive Ben Scott, our champion spike mauler who proudly displayed a number of knife scars from an ex-wife, Ray Lortie, Canadian Joy rider, Jay Braun, who became a Yale professor, the pole gang from the Virginia Military Institute, and our expert trumpet player who was running from the law from charges in the states.



Jim Gargan has the winning ticket but pulls a losing card. Maybe next week you'll pull the King of Clubs, Jim?

