



THE GANG OF

ROSE HILL  
SCHOOL

by Joel C. Snell



# **THE GANG OF ROSE HILL SCHOOL**

## **introduction**

I called Omaha. The operator of the Sky Vision Eldercare center said that the person that I was calling Marge Blair was moved. I said does that mean she died? No. She was moved and that was all the information that she could give me. I thanked her. Put Marge's name in the computer and discovered that she died in November of 2013. That meant that the last member of the gang was dead.

She was 103 years old.

The gang was a group of women who were born the early part of the last century. Many lived in and around the middle of the country called Omaha. They were middle class. Their Christian religion was moderate as was their Republicanisms. They all had their personal triumphs, but as a group they fit nicely as ordinary folk of the greatest generation.

My account is flawed. I can only tell you about what I saw mainly as a child. If some of my details fall from grace, they are to be expected. I have changed the names a bit, and modified some aspects just as one would do in telling a story.

I can still recall all their voices together talking about something. Their sounds came up through the heat register and into my bedroom which was two floors above them. They were playing penny poker, or pinnacle , smoking cigarettes, and drinking within moderation for a Saturday night. They were talking of the days to come and recounting something that happened just yesterday or many yesterdays so many years ago.

## **sociological definition/ primary group**

A primary group is typically a small social group whose members share close, personal, enduring relationships. These groups are marked by members' concern for one another, in shared activities and culture. Examples include family, childhood friends, and highly influential social groups. The concept of the primary group was introduced by Charles Cooley, a sociologist from the Chicago School of sociology, in his book *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*. Although the group initially referred to the first a person's childhood, the classification was later extended to include other intimate relations.[1] Primary groups play an important role in the development of personal identity. A primary group is a group in which one exchanges implicit items, such as love, caring,

concern, animosity, support, etc. Examples, of these would be family groups, love relationships, crisis support groups, church groups, etc. Relationships formed in primary groups are often long-lasting and goals in themselves. They also are often psychologically comforting to the individuals involved and provide a source of support. (Wikipedia)

## **members of the gang**

### ***Rose Hill***

Sisters Dots and Marge, sisters Marge (the last to die), Maxine, then Betty, Lorraine, Helen and Doris along with others of the gang went to the school called Rose hill. It was named after a urban farm that had a bed of roses and a later a beautiful weeping willow. The actual farm house was located next door to my parents whose home was the last one built in an a 1940's neighborhood. Much of the block was filled with a few houses and a church and the other side had just three houses and Rose hill School. I went to the same school as my mother. So did my brother . It had room for 2 grades each from K to 8th grade. I can still remember all the rooms and a dear and good friend Charlie Bercaw who died a few years ago from smoking cigarettes took pictures of the inside and outside of the school. Building inspectors deemed it was too unstable to survive and had it leveled. My mom was able to see it at an open house before it was pummeled. Much of the happy part of my life was located on those school grounds. I still vividly remember the last day. I did not want to go from elementary school of 400 to a junior and then high school s of 1500-2000. Clark Kerr said big was beautiful and a fellow named Schumacher said just the opposite. Small is beautiful. Both Monroe and Benson meant crowded hallways and fist fights after school. There were 10 to 12 seventh and eighth grades.

Besides of the small size, I still remember the chance to go to school with Jews. I would get down on my knees and thank God. Nearly a third of the school was Jewish and most lived in Country Club ( 56th and Corby to Blondo.) During High holy days, a good part of the school was gone. I ache for the cohesion in that group. Many had relatives that died in the holocaust. If you look at all the greats, you can trace Judaism to them. God's chosen people. I was small to intervene but some creep jumped Brenda K. and beat her up for killing Jesus. Although I am a Liberal-Left Christian eclectic, I am one with caution. There was this church up in Benson that promised me that I would win a gold fish if I attended so many meetings. I wanted the gold fish. Then after one meeting I was placed in a dark room and was told of hell and how I could save myself. There was

another lady in the room who was wailing and rocking back and forth. I did not know what all that meant except that I got out of there. It was terrifying.

The Jews took me in as one of their own. I attended bar and bat mitzvahs and I did not see how these folks and many other non-Christians deserved eternal damnation. Well the school educational standards were off the roof among Jews I am an A minus or B plus. Since then I have become a member of a Jewish offshoot and another that a Reformed Jew would feel comfortable. One church is rock like and the other lets my mind wander and whisper. I took the believe-o-matic and I tested as a Reformed Jew.

Many of the gang went to Rose hill. The distinguished graduate was Warren Buffet. He attended after the gang but a decade before I got there. His dad was our congressman and both of his parents had a boutique grocery store right across from Hinky Dinky on Underwood street. Buffets were not pretentious and Warren stayed in the Country Club/ Dundee neighborhood. He bought a house for 35 thousand dollars and remains there today.

There was another who became a movie star and I played softball with him. He lived around the corner from Rose hill and catty corner from a large estate named Villa Acres. His name was Nick Nolte. His house was located at 56th Street and perhaps Ohio. That's it. There is a lot more, but this was the ground and environs that begat the gang

## ***Maxine***

Maxine and Marge (her sister) lived in an apartment just above a flower store where you bought corsages before the big dance at Peony Park. Their father left one day never to return and their mother worked all of her life in and around Benson. It was there that Perry Donovan saw Maxine and instantly fell in love. Perry went beyond high school which is the exception to the norm of the group. He was to become a mortician. It is a tough profession and you can or have to be desensitized to life and death

In his mid-life crisis, he worked on a child that had been torn asunder in an auto accident. Perry could no longer work. Maxine and Perry moved to Park Rapids, Minnesota. There in 1953 they bought and opened the Wayside Resort on a peninsula at Two Inlets lake. I not only vacationed there but worked there in the summers. Wayside was originally owned by a furniture store dealer in St. Joseph Missouri. The store was known for having a house in the store. As you walked into the house, you saw the latest furnishings. Wayside was then sold to

another family and then to the Donovan's. They had it for about 10 years. Late in life, after my mother died, I asked Marge if she would be my shirt tail mother and she accepted. Perry died in the 70's. Maxine returned to Omaha and moved into Sky Vision eldercare where she passed away within the last decade. Our last conversation, she said that my biological mother in a dream told her that it was time to come home. My mother Doris had already been dead for 4 or 5 years. After she died, David her oldest son had ashes cremated and placed in Two Inlets lake just in front of a cabin that Donovan's owned, even though they sold the Resort a few blocks from their cabin. Ironically, as he was put in the ashes in the lake , two mallards swam by.

## ***Marge***

Marge (her sister) moved away from Benson to Ralston, Nebraska. It really was like Benson except it kept its identity. I liked the streets in Ralston. It was another part of the multiple nuclei of neighborhoods. There her husband Charlie had a complete gas station. That meant you smelled the gas, oil, sweat. They pushed the pump, washed your windows, and worked on your car. Gas stations sometimes had attendants that swept out your car. Benson had a huge Mobil station with a giant horse sign that stood and overlooked the area.

No one, but no one knew the power of Marge Blair behind that great big smile. She was middle class and ornery enough to live 103 years to November of 2013. She married Charlie the fellow with the shy smile. He was the heart and soul of the gas station. Most of places like that are gone. Now you get a small variety store and perhaps a machine that warms up pizza. After that came the gas that you pump and pay inside or out. Do you want credit or debit? Can't recall smelling gas or sweat? However, do you remember that most gas stations are grocery variety stores with perhaps a car wash that worked almost all year around.

Marge and Charlie had 4 children . However, I believe that I knew Jan the very youngest the best as we attended a communications class together in the early to mid 60's. She married a swell guy and often accompanied Marge to a night out at a restaurant.

One summer when I finished working at the resort we headed back from Wayside resort in Nevis/ Park Rapids, Minnesota and the Blair's and I took the standard drive in those days of the northern portion of the state to head downward on the map to Sinclair Lewis's Main Street called Sauk Center. From there to Montevideo and wandered over toward Brookings where one connected

with I -29 and headed for Omaha. I still remember reading , but was mildly interrupted by Marge. She loved to talk and talk and talk. It was all interesting and her conversations took us in chaotic fashion pretty much all over the universe. Not only did you learn something, but you can see why she died at 103 years.

## ***Helen***

During this time, a tragedy hit the Wallin family. Aunt Helen and Bill Wallin 's first child (Carol) was a pretty little girl who became sick and was sent to the hospital. Whatever she had, the doctor used a surgical instrument and lanced a boil in her nose. Within a few hours, Carol died. Much of the nasal cavity is vulnerable and instruments placed in their can infect the area and whatever the pathology may be, it goes straight to the brain. There it hits the nervous system to the of the involuntary system that sees that your heart, lungs, and other necessary portions of your body that go on their own without you thinking start to die as does the individual.

You can imagine the tiny coffin and the grieving family. Carol's history was told to me when I was quite young. No one knows how much one can deal with, but families do it every day. Her headstone is heartbreaking. She lies in a grave next to her grandmother who died of cancer in the early 30's. And that

is all part of the human condition. We cling and cleave to each and then pass into the ages.

The medical doctor expressed his regrets, but that nothing could be done. However Bill and Helen heard from other doctors that their doctor was incompetent. They should have sued him, but medical doctors were gods then and it became another tragedy to be absorbed by the family. They carried on with Louise, Jan, and Billy. My mother was Aunt Doris and she truly befriended Helen and she was always close to her brother Bill. So we were tied to the Wallins over and above the parties of the gang. Thanksgiving and or Christmas meant the Wallins came to our house and in alternating years to their house a real cute bungalow with stately trees. Recently, it was flipped and looks even nicer now. In my later years, I used to write a letter to them every week. Jan the middle daughter, a first cousin, has become a sister to me. We can talk for hours on the phone and she is most like my mom than anyone else in the family. She and her husband Jim live in a lovely home in Kansas City , Missouri. She takes care of an adult son who is slow. She also works, has numerous gatherings, and attends a number of activities. They lost their daughter in law

and Jan sees their granddaughter Ava often. The daughter in law died very early in life of Cancer.

Uncle Bill lost his life watching a Husker game and Aunt Helen died a slow painful death of cancer in her own room on North 60th street. Medicine was at a crossroads. So medical cures and antibiotics were saving more children so the death of Carol indicated that it was still more an art than a science. Carol was buried up by the Elk statue in Forest Lawn, Omaha next to Grandma Wallin as noted before, died in the early 30's of cancer of the uterus. My mother spent an entire year with her by dropping out of school and seeing that Grandma Wallin was clean and kept out of pain. She injected her with either morphine or heroin or both. After her death, Grandpa Gustaf sold his big home on 58th and Corby St and my mother moved in with Mama and Papa Ranz with Marge and Dots.

Grandpa moved into the Elks Club in the downtown area. I do remember that he also had an apartment downtown with a really high ceiling. From there he moved in with us. So my Mom had another to take care of. Tragically, Louise the second oldest died within the decade. My brother who is a minister presided over the funeral. Today, Jan and Billy are the only generation left. Jan and I are the ones that can talk and talk with each other. She lives with her husband Jim.

## **Betty**

Betty and Bill were married and soon thereafter came Phil and Bill. Bill Moulton was the success story. He was a milk man and moved into public relations of a corporation. There Moulton got interested in politics, and ran for state senator of unicameral of Nebraska. All members were called Senator and within a decade Mr. Moulton became speaker of the house and a senator. No one indicates their party affiliation, but my guess, most were conservative Republicans. I do know that our garage was stuffed with Moulton yard signs periodically.

By 1956, I became a Democrat. I felt more comfortable with their candidates and I liked or supported their causes All this means that I learned quite fast how to keep my mouth shut in a red state that was truly Republican with a few Democrats in the closet somewhere in Omaha. I was one of them.

Moulton was able to convince a number of people of the usual and to like him. At the gang's parties, his voice would grow louder after he had a few drinks so I knew if he was there. One of the last times that I heard those sounds, both my wife Jennifer and I acted host and bartender. That was in the early 70's. Up came his voice on the heat register and I knew that the party was complete.

On one other occasion, Mr. Moulton and I along with a senator from Lincoln and Joann Donovan (daughter of Max and Perry) and myself were in the back seat. Even though I am ten or so, I could tell that Moulton and the fellow from Lincoln were smart and well spoken. The driver another senator from Fremont was a jerk. He was to drive Joann and I to Wayside and then they were going on to Canada to fish. It was raining. He was driving at night at around 85 to 90 miles an hour on a two lane. Last, he had an open can of beer and was drinking. I was terrified. As usual I kept my mouth shut and this time my eyes were shut. Everything was out of my hands.

The last time that I saw Mr. Moulton was at a hospice in northwest Omaha. He did not know who I was, but I could see that he had aged and changed. He had difficulty talking. After seeing him, my mom, Betty, and I sat at a table not far from his room Betty gave an ongoing narrative of his decline. It seems to me that he died in the fall and services were held at the University of Nebraska-Omaha in the very pretty Alumni headquarters.

Tracking down Betty was a bit of a challenge, but I finally found her at an elder care in Alabama. She stayed at a place liked Sky Vision, then moved to a senior center in Arizona, followed by a similar home in Alabama. When I talked to her, it was so easy. She was so bright and alert, and age resurrected her skills in singing. She loved to sing as she or someone would play the piano and she would sing. Her goal in life was to live to be 100, She died at 99 and 1/2. She did not quite make it. However, after talking to her long distance for about 15 minutes, I got a vast panorama of the life of the gang. She was so easy to talk to and she knew who I was. I am glad to have talked to her a few months before she passed. However, the special bonus was talking to Phil and Bill their sons who are also retired. Phil was smooth. He attended a school out of Nebraska that was known to have graduates that went on to West Point. Phil became one of the lucky ones. As Phil was in the military, Bill blossomed in security work and protecting the President of the United States. At Omaha University, I briefly saw him just a few times on campus. As I arrived on campus, Peter Fonda and Stormy McDonald, heir to the Zenith fortune just left.

## ***Doris***

## ***Joel***

My mother felt the early symptoms of a pregnancy and she felt so blue. There was so much to do with two kids. My only guess is that I was swimming in stress chemicals. I believe that I came from somewhere and whatever happened the



bliss that I felt was interrupted by unbelievable pain. The delivery was a hard one. I was one really cute kid. People used to kiss me all the time and rub my blonde hair. Especially my brother, I was his furry little brother and quiet mascot to the family. In other words, I was an easy baby and much of my very early youth was great. I remember riding on the back of my father in the snow as the car broke down on Happy Hollow Blvd. in Omaha.

I had a panda bear and a special little phone. I still remember my 10th birthday. It was special. However, something was going to be lost from my life. It was a sense of community that I felt at Rose Hill. I still remember the last day and wearing a blue denim pair of pants and jackets. I was looking at the clock. I was not eager to leave. Of course time marches on and after we took pictures, that was the end of it all.

Around 1957, I was 12 and a fog began to come over me. I would pass my Rose Hill and go to a huge brick building. It was Monroe Jr. High. It was one of the first in the country and LOOK magazine came out to take a picture of all of 2000 of us. There were some teachers I dearly respected, however I hated big schools. It was a collage of dirty gray, ugly browns and related crap. I still remember turning the corner to the front of the building, and seeing Sarah Edwards and John Webster. One is now a retired United Church of Christ minister and the second was a Super of a school system in California.

In the meantime, the Supreme Court in 57' said segregation of the races was unconstitutional. I was looking forward to the change. However, the Confederacy that exist everywhere rose up and threw delays after delays. If anything, things got no better and perhaps worse. So most of the country stands after segregation by law (dejure segregation) and is now imbued with segregation in fact (defacto segregation.)

My kids went to a tiny elementary named after Herbert Hoover. On their 25 anniversary, they found a storage box, broke the seal and out came the stuff of my children and others. My kids knew about Reagan. They also came to appreciate small schools.

The peppy little guy grew up into a short kid with big nose and lips and brown hair. The fog continued on. The sense of community was lost. I still remember the thrill of Friday night as I would not see the school for a few days. Benson High was just as bad for me and so I studied and pretty much stayed by myself. On the other hand, for many Omaha Benson high school was the best days of their life.

The once confident cute little boy was an ugly kid around 115 pounds and about 5 foot ten. Then I discovered an answer my junior year of high school and it was alcohol. I could drink my blues away. The alcohol was in my parent's basement. They used the stuff to entertain their customers. I would water down the drinks and be able to have a few before I went to bed. By my second year in college, I was in really bad shape. I got an ulcer in 8th grade. By my second year in college, I was in college and also had 2 rehabs. One was very short and the second was much longer. In the mean time, I finally got a good psychiatrist. He was G. A. Bob Young. He was the Omaha guru. His premise that you learned the art of making a living, but not the art of living. He saw humans in a stimulus-stimulus situations. Humans are active. One lives on balance from their projective perceptions of what life was thought to be like. He let me wonder and wander. By the end of 65' I was getting better. Snell Putney's social science book , Normal Neurosis was a best seller that year and was a reflection of Dr. Young's philosophy(they were his patients) that was not Freudian or Skinnerian, the major academic schools of the time. Young wanted me to write for him, but I did not have the courage.

I have had the most productive years of my life starting in 1986. In 96', I taught 18 hours and had 15 publications. That was followed by a cardiac infarction (heart attack) After that I could teach, write, and join the human race. However, psychiatry still has miles and miles to go. Hopefully, the medications improve and the therapies (about 250) consolidate.

Doris and Chuck

I briefly mention my mother. She was born in Kansas City. Grandpa Gustaf as a child came over on a ship led by or sponsored by Brigham Young. However, they were to be located in Utah. Somewhere along the way, my grandpa's father decided that he did not want to be an LDS so one night or in the early morning they quietly broke camp and ended up in Kansas City, Kansas, Along the way he met Myrtle. They married and had 5 or 6 kids. Nearly all of them died of natural childhood diseases save my Uncle Bill. We talked about the Wallins earlier. However, after John, Peter, Ira, and Thelma died, time went on and there were no more children. Then one day, Myrtle had my mother. Doris owned the room. She had a radiant personality and clothes that matched. Thanks to my grandma, she wore a new outfit or combinations of outfits every new school day as her life marched through Rose hill and Benson high. She saw some of the best days of Benson.

My parents first moved into a North Omaha home when they were first married.

Grandma's living room and vestibule acted as the marriage setting in the fall of 1933. There was just a tad bit of snow and later I want to spend some time with Grandma and her home. After the two were married, off to Kansas City, Missouri to celebrate their honeymoon. My dad has just a few dollars and change when they came home. Kansas City is about 200 or 250 miles from Omaha. They met at the Masonic temple in Benson and married a year later. My grandma warned my dad, that Doris was spoiled. He was in love. They were married and my father became a clerk then warehouse men for H. Konstamm and company. It was an industrial chemical company.

Dad's boss noticed something about him. It must have been his good looks, demeanor, and facility with the English language. Further, for the customers that came in the warehouse, he was downright charming. So, Mr. Stewart promoted him from warehouseman to junior salesman on a trial basis. Chuck or Charlie loved to talk and could sense if someone was interested in his products. Additionally, he was well dressed and Mr. Stewart called ahead to encourage some of his very best customers to buy something. He gave dad a list and my father was off to his new job. Now we're talking three piece suit and a fedora. As he walked in he had all kinds of facts about the product, but more importantly information about the customer and his family.

They were to buy something. They bought big. How many other salesman knew the second daughter graduated from high school with honors? That they love to vacation in Minnesota at some resort? The first minute my father was a stranger and thereafter long lost friends to the customer. Soon my father's territory got bigger and bigger. He worked six and one half days a week. Sunday morning was for church. Then in the afternoon, he got caught up with his expense account and took a nap in the front living room on our green chesterfield or couch.

Once in awhile, he would go fishing with customers and sneak a Black washman on to the boat. Nothing was said. At Christmas, my dad gave the boss a bottle of booze and the Black washman got a bottle too. Dad said that he felt the same way about Blacks as his friends did. This of course was not true. It was a "white lie." I graduated with all white kids save one Asian and one shy skinny fellow who could pass as white. So nothing was said. My mom did the same kinds of things. There was an extra change that went to Blacks. Given the climate of the times, that is called tokenism. However, they did what they could to be able to stay in the neighborhood. Further, at Christmas, mom invited the cleaning lady named Mildred and her boyfriend (Eddie) for a drink before the holidays. I was brought into the conversation too. It was the longest 45 minutes conversation that I could remember. When I talked to Mildred alone on her day

that she came to her house which was every other Friday, we could talk and talk. She dyed my hair blonde to celebrate the summer and the Beach Boys.

My parents church asked for a special set aside money to help Black folks. A number of people in the church dropped out and went to an Evangelical Church. My mother had an open house for Black women, one afternoon. The alcohol really helped cut the tension. I worked in a poverty program of predominantly African American people. The guy next to me named Carl was extremely handsome and muscle bound African-American. I had gained a lot of weight and could have looked better. Next to him, I was homely and a "bubble belly." What I do know is that when a Black applicant threatened to kill me all the Black folks came to my rescue with money. I tried to be myself. I didn't try to act Black. As a professor, I usually fussed over my Black students. At any rate, there were bombs going off where we worked. At times, the police ushered us out the community.

### **nature and nurture**

In 1955, Dad won salesman of the year and he was promoted to branch manager of a territory the size of Western Europe. Now he was gone a lot. I remember vividly my mother crying and crying when my father would leave on a cold February day and head north in his car. He would be gone for six weeks. When he was home, he could get a call in the middle of the night that a customer needed help. He always had another suitcase prepared for such emergencies. The customer could be calling from hundreds of miles north.

The car was packed with everything including hand and body heaters in case he flipped off the road. All of his cars were darker or brighter colors. The cars had to be darker so that in a snow storm, his car was still visible up in North Dakota or Minnesota snow storms.

### ***Doris***

Doris had it easy when she was growing up. Imagine, you have a little boy. Then you have 3 other males, and a female and they all die. Then Doris shows up at the door. Gustaf and Myrtle were so happy and there wasn't anything that if Doris wanted, she got it. However, when she got my dad, childhood immunizations began to blossom. Babies no longer died as if there were on an assembly line. She had three kids and the kids drove my mom nuts. So did Grandpa Gustaf. Gramps lived in new constructed backroom and had his own bed and bath in the back of the house. As he grew old, he started to wander

away from the house. Or he would bleed on the carpet. Finally Grandpa was sent to an eldercare center, lived there about 10 days and died.

### **the fight night**

Doris ran the house as Dad was on the road. She saw her job as she saw it was to keep a lid on the house and keep it running. And so, things would go good until there was a fight. My brother and I fought all the time. My dad bought a mat and we would wrestle in the basement. My brother always won. However, we were continually in fights and mother beat both of us with a yard stick. Over and over again, I got smacks on the back of my legs, my buttocks. A smack on the nose really hurt. Toward the end of her life she apologized and I sincerely accepted her apology. With our kids, I told them to go to their room of which everything under the sun was there and available. Close to ten minutes, when we heard "can we come out now?" we would shout back, "no" At every house that we lived in there is a hole in the door, where one or both boys smacked the door.

### **mom's work week**

By Monday morning, Doris would arrange three bins and a washing machine in the basement all near a drain. After whites were washed by machine they were dragged into a bin where the soap was reduced, following again by bluing, and then rinsed and put in a large industrial dryer. Before dad could get a good deal on the dryer she hung clothes on the clothes line with newspapers on the floor so as to not dirty the sheets.

Tuesday meant that sheets and handkerchiefs were ironed. Alma came out and helped with the ironing. If mom had gone on a trip with dad, Grandma Dode took care of me. Wednesday meant special projects and Thursday was her afternoon at church. Friday, Mildred came out and cleaned the house every other week. . Mildred was African American and she was a talent. Like a puppy, I would follow her along and ask her about Black people and slavery. What did she hear about the civil war? She knew so much and my 8th grade textbook, did not describe the severity of it.. Her son in law became a city council member and her daughter was an administrator in a public agency.

No one knew all the many things my mother did, but mother listened to KFAB in Omaha to hear the Huskers football team. If Dad was home, she would go with him to see the game and go out to eat at a restaurant in Lincoln. Nebraska lost

nearly every week until a new coach came in continually won and after him another coach followed by a third coach who was fired after losing 10 games. Although the stadium is filled every week, the next two coaches did not win enough games. So Nebraskans have a coach that wins on average 9 games a season. That is not good. Something is going to happen. I cannot explain Nebraskans behavior. As I come from Nebraska I cannot explain it myself. Living in Iowa, our football team, generally has a winning season and a bowl. That is good enough for me. I like the coach too.

Sundays my mom would go to church alone as my dad was on the road. I went to Sunday school and then headed for home. That' it. Sunday through Sunday.

### **the fifth season**

All across the country middle class made their basements into 5 seasons. The fifth season of the week was the basement. The floor was a checkerboard, the walls were knotty pine, and many had a picture of a vacation area They were called recreation rooms and when all was in place, summer had returned although it was the middle of February. You could also play card games, listen to the stereo, watch television, and do related things. Before this, all the basement was a big coal furnace, coal bin, and a gray cement floor. It was transformed into knotty pine rec room. Everything that was off putting was hidden behind one knotty pine wall or another. There was also a dry bar at the back along with a pantry. Mark Pence had the best rec room and one spring vacation, it rained every day. So we played monopoly in his basement.

Much of the house was mom's. Although she was busy with lots of other activities, other mothers had the same thing or much worse. Why I say this is that in the midst of 3 kids, 1 senile grandparent, a dog, and other persons and events, Mom started crying and withdrawing. In defense of my mom, her first shift was being a homemaker. Her second shift was customers. The first floor was always spotless and customers would drop in and stay for hours. The demand was that at any time the living room was Grand Central Station. She had to entertain. It was exhausting and nothing was catered. So she was always on the alert. Even administrators or large hospitals would stop by. My job was to be polite and dive bomb into my room. Mom kept at it, all alone as Dad was gone. So the exhaustion was reduced to Dad taking her one of the pretty states nearby called Lake Okoboji, Iowa. My mother slept in bed in a resort cabin for days from exhaustion and depression. Dad did everything else. Soon, thereafter, Mom started traveling with Dad more often. Dode took care of me.

First, my mother's depression was genetic and can be traced to others in her genealogy. Second, she was a homemaker, with help, but the time off was spent with customers. Working in the community was also expected by the corporation, in those times. So her week was unpredictable, and worst of all, customers would stop by for a drink in the middle of the afternoon. as noted earlier. Further, my brother and I did pretty good, but I was trouble and not in the ordinary sense. I did fine at school, but was super shy and did not do the things that I was supposed to do in the social schedule set up by the upper middle class in Omaha. So I drank and hid. On some happy days, the fog depression would hit and I did not know what to do. It was supposed to be a good day and why I am shaking in my shoes ? Add all that up and you see what my mom faced.

### ***Chuck***

Dad carried the biggest load or the most responsibility. He could travel all day and end up at a customer's home. They knew him as Uncle Chuck. He had one lovely dinner after another and he grew to be very heavy. He still looked good in his clothes. He was Santa. He was an event and a wonderful conversationalist. For the customer, not only was this a special occasion, but my dad followed up with a nice note and described what they had to eat. Additionally, these folks got bottles of alcohol at Christmas. Later, he would take them out to eat depending on the family.

Dad's day was to find a hotel that was centered among a lot of customers and start making calls. At first, he was stopped by the secretary and the secretary had a name which he got from somebody. After a few visits, he went straight to the big boss who ran a laundry. He is the one with a daughter that graduated with honors from high school and then went to a wonderful college. That was mentioned earlier. He remembered the college from his three buy five cards that were placed in the car.

The big boss liked something and he was sure to do what he could under the law. By evening, he called his secretary Tina and went over what the customers wanted and what was the schedule like that next few days. Then he was off.

I went with him one time and made sure to be nice to the customers kids and say the right things. The problem was an ongoing censorship I did not have the 3 by 5 cards. So I had to wing it. I was shy by then and trying to make small talk was not easy for me. Looking back, I should have told them that and let them do the talking all the time.

The Reagan years were tough. Dad started losing business. His company had pictures of him in various trade magazines. When you buy H. Kohnstamm products, you get a free Chuck Snell. There was dad's picture. However, after awhile, his customer loss was due not to my dad, but the laws had been de-regulated. Dad stayed within the law. His competitors did not want to be a nice uncle and where everyone knew your name. They gave kickbacks. You buy and you also get a combination television and stereo system. So let's leave the other b.s. behind and what do you need?. The customer made the deal and they worked some scam so the customer was free of any problems. All the other products were cheapened and everybody, save the customer, got a good deal. Further regulators were hard to find.

So my father worked harder and made less and less.

They sold out, because the children of Paul/ Mr. Kohnstamm were interested in music and would without wanting to, run the business in the toilet. Another era was passing and my dad was retiring.

My father died in his sleep in December of 1990. The church was packed and even one of my dad's competitors was there. Further, our local congressman for years showed up. He did it big in the town of Omaha.

## **Jay**

After he died, I feel very close to his widow Barbara. However, when Jay was alive, we would small talk. That's it. Jay and Barb moved all over the world and I could never get an idea of what he was doing or how he was doing. However, he could talk. They lived in our town and we saw each other very few times. It was for the better. If I wanted to know how he was, I would call mom in Omaha even though both Jay and I lived in Cedar Rapids. After Dad died, my mom would come over and stay with Jay. There was a special bond there and they both shared that vision. I still miss my mom, but I think that she was most proud of Jay in the ministry. Jay died of just about everything and all the hospital staff who knew him in his earlier life was in the chapel for the memorial service. Shi his oldest daughter really ran the service and did an excellent job there and then there was one more ceremony back in the Nebraska. She did a wonderful obit too.

So I did try toward the end to close up some gaps in his life so that I would know him. He was appreciative, but there was still distance. I do know that when folks



found out that I was Jay's brother. Bells and whistles went off. Jay was one of the most popular people in high school and he won many popularity contests. This also applied in college.

## **THE REST OF THE GANG**

### ***Helen***

Helen married one of the most popular guys at Benson. However, their marriage did not last as he was involved in an auto accident and died. Helen and her children lived on potato soup. Those tough years were followed by a marriage to Eldridge Scurr, an excellent stock broker. After he died she really spent a lot of time with Betty Moulton. The two often went to the Field Club and played cards. Even at that time, much of the gang had passed on. They enjoyed each others company.

### ***Lorraine***

Les and Lorraine were the first of the group to die. Les had gone on to Nebraska University for awhile. Perhaps, he finished his degree, it did not matter to me. Lorraine married Les and they had 3 children. They lived in the Dundee area but the for the life of me they were and did move to the west. They have Jane, Patty, and Jim. Once in a great while, I would get the Huffs and the Scurrs mixed, but we did carry on. The last time that I heard about Jane, I saw her and her husband at a fast food and said hello. Patty married after high school, but something went wrong with the marriage and she married again. Supposedly, that one worked. I was puzzled about Jim but I do remember actually going to school with him. I think that he would have been younger by 2 years or so. He was very likable and became a member of a prestigious fraternity in Lincoln. The last that I heard his fraternity got hit with severe drug charges and was closed down for awhile.

The last time that I saw him, he complimented me on that my group who had just started and already had some top recruits or pledges. That was it. What I did hear after that is that he became a dentist and had a practice in the Lincoln area. However, the major tragedy was that he lived such a short life. This is just a guess, but it was in his 30's when he died. No one was killed, no drug overdose, no nothing. He died of natural causes. And that was the end of that family in my life.

Lorraine was the first to leave the group. Les often took her for awhile to a poker

of penniclule game she seem to be a aware of the game and who was playing which card. This went on until she started drifting. She was slow with a card or she began to stare into the air. For Les, he would excuse Lorraine from the game and she would sit nearby. She was not in a stupor, but she did seem to grow farther away from the group than earlier in the evening. At the end of an early evening, he would take her home and she would say her good bye.

### ***Dots***

Dots or Dorothy was the oldest sister. She dated and married Joe Neil the top athlete at Benson High. He had dated Maxine, the sister of Marge, the gangs last living gang member. At any rate, he was a catch and Dots had to share his love for her and the corporation that he worked for. He could talk about all day long the company to the point that when I see their logo, I think of them. It seems like in my early teens, Joe, Dots and their kids Barney and Susan were transferred to the south somewhere. So my knowledge of her is sparse. My last time I remember sitting in the apartment of Mama Ranz, Dots was talking about them and how they wanted so much more. They were Black people. I knew my place and , I got out of the chair, said good bye and left for home. My mother followed later.

### ***Marge***

The other sister was Marge. She lived up on 60th street and later on 56th down from Blondo. As a housewife, she depended on Uncle Bob for the family income. Uncle Bob always appeared to be involved in insurance or other financial instruments. The best thing to come from their relationship was a son they adopted who was Jewish. They were in Europe and this little boy (now probably in his 70's) would have a better chance living in America. So he did. He was raised Roman Catholic in the same tradition as his father, Uncle Bob.

Tom by that the time he was of college age attended schools in Colorado. Uncle Bob got a promotion to Littleton, and off the three went a nice little home in a town made famous years later by a mass of killings. Tom earned a degree in Biology and found a job working for one of the large retail firm that populate your grocery store shelves. His job was to see that his products would push for more room in a store than his competitor.

After a few years of that, he went graduate school and got a degree in counseling and later a doctorate in a related area. He has his own office and

practices alternative medicine. So you would not only get counseling, but back rubs, bone manipulation, astrological advice, and alternative medicines. He also puts on crowd sourcing like events where folks come to dance, yell, and get their anger out.

The more involved he became in his field the further the distance that emerged between Uncle Bob and Dr. Tom. Marge appears at least from a distance not to have gotten involved. Tom made a good living working for public schools and his own private practice.

The end of Uncle Bob came with a very painful form of cancer. At the time, you could feel relief for a short period but the medication would wear off and he would have to wait an hour or so before that next regime of pain relief was injected. Today, one has a pain relief injected in the arm and the patient can manipulate up to an extent the amount of analgesics that was need to kill the pain.

It would be great if this was the ending, but it was not. After Bob died, Marge remained in Littleton and Tom did too. He is in the Face book somewhere. The last time that I saw him and his son were at our winterized cottage on the Missouri. There were division between Father and son. However, that can be a common problem. Tom is very much alive today. Our relationship traces back to childhood.

The next generation is scattered to the winds or have now died. Most would be over 60 and the trajectory of life-long groups may come together at weddings and funerals. However, that is not necessary. Without any statistics the families of the Boomers faced divorce, constant moves with their corporations, new jobs and one knows that the generation scattered to the winds.

From a child's perspective the most people to gather that were part of the gang was the day my dad was buried. I saw so many people who been out of my life for years. That was 1990. How many years ago is that? What I was wondering and still have not found is that number of 6 or 7 women having a lifetime relationship ? I would guess that there could be many but it still stands that women unite and bond. However, are they friends from college or grade school? This essay started with the death of Marge Blair who survived to 103 and passed in November of 2013. I discovered the fact in August of 2014 and so it is time to look toward another sunset for a whole generation that lived through roughly 40 wars, the Big Recession, the sex revolution, the civil rights reform movement, the Reagan surge, and perhaps even the coming of Obama.

At any rate, perhaps the literature will have it sometime. For now let's look at the definition of Primary Group again as indicated at the beginning. To shorten it let's define it a few sections. Close this means that one is personally close to another and will to share secrets with a few others..Personal, as used here is about caring for the other person and being in their hour of need. Enduring is clearly indicated here. Imagine the group forming in first grade at Rose Hill school and living out there lives together. Propinquity is a nice word for face to face interaction. Both sisters, Dots and Marge did move, so perhaps their impact on the gang was more remote in later years. However, they were with the gang for close to twenty years.

Why might there be consistency among these families? The number properties are discussed in just a bit. However, they were hard workers and talents for the males. Most worked on commission. All had high school diplomas. There were not any major illness or addictions. There was enough money to be middle class. They had "white" privilege so that the market was more open to them. This also applies to being male. They somehow adjusted to children. Only Helen Scurr lost her husband, but found another that was extremely talented stock broker. All were in the capitalist sector and thus the Republicanism (though my father did vote Democrat at times.) Most measures include occupation, education, and income. A number of families had a second income for the household. This was especially true where both husband and wife began to work as a team. Now the numbers.

The Dunbar Number is based on a how high can a human possibly be able to sustain such personal relations? Using qualitative protocols his number is 150 or less. In Putnam's Bowling Alone, he does not cite a number but suggest all the variables untie our personal connection. This really applies to belonging to large organizations and the use of the mass media. This was also suggested in the 20's by the Middletons.

A Gallup poll suggests that when respondents are asked how many can they talk about "important matters" the mean is 2.06 or two people. Surely the social media like Facebook and the like can enhance friendships, however the Allen Curve measuring where Propinquity or physical distance does not improve the closeness in relationships. Many can become "pretend friends."

And so it goes. My wife Jennifer and I had a primary group in the 70's. It was her large extended family and friends. Then within a year or so in the late 70's death and occupational moves placed all throughout the country. The primary group faded for us.

My late father-in-law sitting with me in a home that did not exist in the 70's, said prophetically " and we thought that those days would last forever. " Now on my wife's side of the family, they too have spread to the winds.

***finis***

*prof. joel snell*

*emeritus*

*kirkwood college*

*cedar rapids, iowa*

© *copyright 2014*  
*All rights reserved*