

1954 - 1962

Grade School

I started first grade at St Jude's Catholic school in the fall of 1954. I think mom took me to school the first day, but after that I walked. It was about 8 blocks from home and as I remember I walked regardless of weather. I don't remember getting rides very often if at all. Some of the time I walked home for lunch. If I didn't go home I had a bag lunch. Hot lunch was available and about half of my classmates got that, but it cost extra. We bought our milk and envied the kids who ate hot lunch every day. One of my embarrassing memories was one day at morning recess, I somehow thought it was lunch time and went home. Mom loaded me in the car and took me back to school and had to try explain how I could make that kind of mistake.



Original St Jude's School building

Another time, on a spring morning, I was apparently running a little late, mom said I'd better "make tracks" or I'd be late for school. I hurried, but I was late because most of the snow had melted and it was hard to find enough to make tracks.



One of my saddest memories from those years involved the Donaldson family, specifically Deanna. She was a year older than me and while I don't remember playing with her a lot I'm sure I did. When I think of her I think of Lucy from the Peanuts comic strip; and the following is what I remember the most. In the mid 50's I had a dog named Butch. He is the only pet I remember by name. I know, from pictures, there was dog in Kalispell and I remember another dog in Havre but it got sick and was "taken to a farm". In the summer



Jim and Butch

of 1955 or 1956 we went on some kind of vacation. I'm pretty sure this was the time we went to Sidney and stayed at Grandpa and Grandma Anez's house. While we were gone the Burkett family watched Butch. I vaguely remember not wanting to leave him but I distinctly remember the day we got home. As we pulled to the curb Deanna ran alongside the car saying, "Jimmy your dog ran away; your dog ran away and it's probably dead." I didn't believe her. It couldn't be true, could it? But it was true and I was heartbroken. Apparently during a thunderstorm the dog had gotten scared and run away. I've never understood why it was so important to her that she be the one to tell me, or to break the news like that, but I'll always remember.

I believe it was on the same vacation that I broke my top front tooth. The first morning we were at the farm Ted and Marty Bakken drove up in a pickup. I was so excited to see them that I jumped up on the passenger side running board just as Marty opened the door, hit me in the mouth and chipped the tooth. I believe it was a Navy dentist that filled the chip with a "temporary" plastic repair that lasted at least 20 years.



I was always called Jimmy by family and friends. When I got in school there were three of us and to keep us separate we were "Jimmy" Anez, "Jim" Matter and "James" Younger. As I got older I tried to ditch the "Jimmy" but it wasn't until I was close to High School age that I succeeded. My aunt Shirley always called me Jimmy but she lived in Kentucky so I was always OK with that.



I learned to ride a bicycle thanks to Bob Donaldson. I didn't have a bike so I learned using his until the day I managed to go any distance. I found my balance and made it all the way to the end of the block north of our house. Unfortunately I had to turn left or right at that corner, but I didn't know how to turn so I crashed straight into the side of a hill. I didn't hurt the bike but it was the last time Bob let me ride his bike. Soon after that I got my first bicycle: a second hand, silver, girl's bike that had belonged to Susan Cassel. My main memory of that bike was that the handle bars had been broken and although dad and Wes Cassel tried several times to fix the problem they always broke again.



During the winter our favorite pastime was sledding. 10th Street from our corner to the east was a dead end street and it was uphill. The upper third of the hill was pretty steep and although it wasn't paved, there wasn't much traffic so we generally had good sledding. There were always stories about the mythological kid who went through the intersection at 7th avenue and got all the way to the busy 6th avenue intersection where he miraculously wasn't killed, but in reality we rarely made it all the way to the bottom of the hill where 7th avenue crossed.

Sometimes the lower third of the street wouldn't be usable because cars had torn up the snow or





Jim, Marge, Bob
Daryl, Cathe
(1956)

it had thawed enough that dirt and rocks were showing through. When that happened we could steer onto a driveway before we hit the dirt and sled down the sidewalk. One day Margaret and I were doing this - I was lying on the sled and she was lying on my back - and I couldn't make the turn. I hit the stone wall in front of the Johnson house and Margaret, having nothing to hold onto, slid into the wall and bashed her head. I was afraid I'd killed her.



Most of the women in the neighborhood got together at one of their homes every month for something they called "Sewing Club". I don't know how many women were involved or who they were, but

I remember that when it was my mom's turn to host she cleaned all day and we were banished to our attic bedroom (with dad) for the evening. This neighborhood networking led to one of the most poignant experiences of my life.

One of the sewing club ladies was Mrs. Powelson who lived about two blocks from us. The main memories of her are that she was nice, she was a widow (I guess), she had a big garden, and she had chickens.

One day, probably a Saturday, when I was about 8 or 9 mom called me aside and asked if I would be willing to go to Mrs. Powelson's and play with her grandson. I think she said his name was Dennis.

Then she told me the bad part.

Dennis was staying with his grandmother because his parents had gone on some kind of trip. The previous night they'd been in a car accident and both had been killed. Someone was coming to take charge of Dennis but they wanted me to play with him and help keep his mind off the situation until then.

I was stunned. Why me? I'd never even known anyone who died! What was I supposed to DO? How was I going to help this kid who I'd never even met? What would it be like spending time with someone whose parents had both just died? I didn't have any answers, but somehow - I sucked it up and agreed to go.

So, with no idea of what to expect and feeling a combination of dread and inadequacy, I trudged over to Mrs. Powelson's house and was introduced to Dennis. He was quiet and friendly and didn't seem to want to talk about his parents. The weather must have been bad because we spent the entire day indoors. We played card games and he taught me the basics of Chess and we played a few games. Maybe it was the circumstances but I've never really liked Chess! Mrs. Powelson fed us soup and sandwiches for lunch and we played more card games in the afternoon. At some point

I began to wonder if Dennis even knew what happened and somehow raised the subject of his parents. He, possibly in total denial, very matter-of-factly told me, "... they were killed in a car crash yesterday." And that was it!

I was extremely uncomfortable all day, and I'm a little ashamed to admit that I was thrilled when I was allowed to leave at the end of the day. And I never saw, or heard, of Dennis again after that day.



My best friend growing up was Gary Schnurr. I think the Schnurr family moved to Havre from Billings about 1956 and moved into the house east of Mr. Gussenhoven. I was playing cowboys with Bob Donaldson one day and this kid shows with a whole cowboy costume wanting to play. I was kind of put off initially at how gaudy he was... bearing in mind that, if we were lucky, we might have a holster for our toy pistol. Gary came equipped with cowboy hat, neckerchief, vest, chaps, cowboy boots, two matching six-shooters with holsters and an air rifle! He might have even had spurs.

Gary was a couple of years older than me but we really hit it off. He went to St. Jude's, like I did, and we became inseparable. The Schnurrs even included me in many of their family activities. Gary's dad, Al, was a meat cutter working at Krezelak's abattoir east of town.

Gary and I drifted apart after he started High School since I was merely a 7th grader. We re-connected some when I got into High School but he was an "upper classman" and our friendship was never the same. After High School he joined the Navy and married a gal in the Philippines. I got together with him in 1967 at his sister's wedding and again in 1969 in San Diego while in the Navy. At the time he was still in the Navy and stationed in Long Beach but he must have gotten out very shortly after our visit and he moved back to Havre. He joined the Fire Department and was working there into the 80's. I visited him once in Havre and was made to feel very unwelcome by his wife. While in his early 40's he had a massive heart attack and was a virtual invalid after that. I looked him up one last time in Great Falls in the early 1990s. He'd gotten remarried, was working for a company making small package deliveries and seemed very happy. He died in 2005.



My grandfather, Ira, retired in 1946 and moved to Sidney, Montana for about 10 years. They lived in a house just off the highway south of Sidney on the road leading to the Bakken farm. My memories of the house are that it was two stories, unpainted, clapboard. The extent of the plumbing was a water pump on a big porch and another pump for water in the kitchen. Toilet facilities were an outhouse a little distance to the south of the house.

Ira and Anna moved back to Havre in the fall of 1956 and, initially, moved into a little house in an alley off 1st Avenue. It was there that I formed one of my fondest memories of my grandfather and have since come to understand how our memories can trick us. I remember going to grandpa's house on Friday evenings to watch wrestling on TV and then spending the night. Wrestling was so funny and I can remember laughing till my sides hurt. It seemed like we had these fun nights

every week for a year or two. However as I researched the family genealogy I discovered that Ira and Anna only lived in that house for about 6 months and it's most likely that, at most, I only went over there about half a dozen times to watch wrestling with grandpa.



Dad developed an ulcer during the early 1950's. I don't know if he knew about it but in late 1955 while he was driving a Coke truck between Hingham and Gildford (about 30 miles west of Havre) it perforated. I was just seven years old and only remember that when I got home from school that day I learned that something really bad had happened to dad and he'd been brought into Havre by ambulance. We kids had no real idea about how serious the situation was but I remember thinking that he could have died.

I only recall two conversations with dad that related to the incident. The first time, and the only time he talked about the incident directly, was probably about 1963 when we were driving on the stretch of highway where the ulcer perforated. He told me that when it hit him it hurt so bad that he was doubled over and could barely keep his head up enough to see so he could keep the truck on the road. When he got to Gildford he went to the first stop - I believe it was called Crawford's - a combination store and café. He said he was blindly stumbling around the back room when the owner heard him and came back to find him. While they were waiting for the ambulance the guy asked him why he was rummaging around the back room and dad said he told him it was hurting so bad he was looking for the gun that he was sure must be somewhere in the room.

The other time we were discussing something that was going on with the Coke business and he said he'd just let the Cassels worry about the business. He said he used to worry about things and it just got him an ulcer so now he just did his job and let the owners do the worrying.



I never had a real paper route, but I delivered the Havre Daily News for Gary when the Schnurr family went on vacation. Since it was always summer and we could ride our bikes it was fun. I also sold "Grit" which was a weekly tabloid type paper. I hawked it on the downtown streets around the hotels and bars and didn't like doing it so quit after a short period.



The lady who owned the house where we lived passed away in the mid-1950s. The city or county took ownership of the property for the taxes due and eventually the property was put up for auction. I don't know how much notice the folks had that the property was going to be sold but in April 1957 they borrowed \$2750 from Wes Cassel at the Coca Cola Bottling Co and got a mortgage loan for \$6500 to purchase a small house about 3 blocks south at 621 13th Street. They paid Harold Burkett about \$85 for labor and material and he put in new kitchen counters and did some remodeling in the basement. Mom spent some part of each day painting and we moved about the time school ended that spring. We lived right across the street from Sunnyside Elementary School but there was never any doubt that we'd continue attending St. Jude's which was now a 10 block walk. When we first moved 13th Street was still gravel. It seems like the city put in street lights and paved the street about 1958. The year after the street was paved dad decided that we needed to get grass growing on the boulevard. It became my job to dig out the existing dirt,

which was mostly rock and gravel from the days before the street was paved. I had to move the excavated material from the boulevard to the driveway (which was never paved). It seemed like it took forever, and the progress was never fast enough for dad, but eventually, somehow, the gravel and dirt was gone and we spread a load of topsoil and got grass growing.



Home 1957-1972: 621 13th Street, Havre, MT (taken about 1965)

Further home improvements

took place in the fall of 1959 when new siding put on the house at the cost of about \$1300. It was "permanent" siding, a kind of slate, made with asbestos. I guess we're only here because we didn't know that was bad for us. In 1962 Harold did more work on the house and put a cement patio in the back yard at the cost of about \$180.

Summertime always meant work in the garden. There was a strawberry patch and we grew tomatoes, peppers, onions, carrots, radishes, beets, and corn or potatoes. The corn and potatoes were the worst crops because the corn required constant weeding and irrigation. The potatoes got potato bugs and we kids had to go through to pick the bugs off and drown them in coffee cans of gasoline or naphtha.

In the back yard on the west side of the lot there were five Chokecherry trees. Chokecherries are small berries with a relatively big pit and very little fruit. They are also pretty tart or bitter so not too good directly from the tree. They work very well, however, as a base for syrup, jam and jelly and every couple of years mom would have us pick all the fruit and then she'd go crazy canning. Mom still had jars of Chokecherry jelly and syrup in her pantry when she moved out of the house 30 years later.



During the summer I played Little League baseball. Our games were either in the east end at Lion's Park or south end at Elk's Park. I was a lousy hitter but an OK fielder and usually played left or center field. I had the responsibility of mowing grandpa's lawn and I'd do that a lot of time on the way home after baseball games. He'd stand on the porch and point out spots I'd missed and then go inside to listen to baseball on the radio. Grandma usually had Kool Aid but it was always too diluted and never sweet enough.

Interestingly we almost never had Coke at home. It wasn't that we were restricted from drinking pop, it just wasn't always on hand. When we went on picnics it was always available and dad would bring some home around holidays but that was generally intended to be used for mixed drinks.

There was a neighborhood store run by the Blairs just across the alley from our house and as we got older and had our own money to spend we bought a lot of penny candy from them. I also had my first bottle of orange Crush (which was sold by the Pepsi bottler) at Blairs and suffered severe pangs of guilt because I really liked it.

Bob and Daryl tell the story that they had "borrowed" some money from mom's purse and bought a bunch of candy at Blairs. Supposedly, I saw them with the candy, figured out where they got the money and made them give me some or all of the candy. I don't recall this but blackmail might have been plausible in the circumstances.



At school we played touch football or basketball. The city allowed the school to block 7th Avenue during recess and lunch and we played football in the street almost every day. In the fall I played flag football in a city league - our games were right across the street from our house on the Sunnyside school lot. St. Judes and Havre Central didn't have a football program because it was "too expensive" so we never had a chance to play varsity football. One year, probably around 7th or 8th grade we played a tackle game against kids our age from the public school. Everybody had helmets and some had pads and amazingly we beat them.

I've never had any musical ability. I think I got a cheap guitar for Christmas one year but wasn't talented, or persistent, enough to use it and lost interest. When I was in about 7th grade we were practicing Christmas music for some kind of program when the nun who was directing us took me aside and suggested that maybe I could just hum! The last straw was the beginning of our freshman year in high school when they were recruiting members for the band. I suggested that I might be interested in being a drummer. One of my classmates - a good friend - took me aside and kindly pointed out that to play drums you needed to be able to keep a beat. So much for that!



I don't remember going to movies a lot during the 50's. I recall that in 1956 or 1957 the whole school got to go to see "The Ten Commandments" at the Havre Theater. I believe the first movie I went to "alone" was "Jailhouse Rock" at Christmas time in 1957 with Judy Burkett and her friend. I remember once going to the drive-in, probably about 1958 or 1959, with mom and dad and being bored out of my mind. I think that movie might have been "Heaven Knows Mr. Allison" and I just remember that although it was supposed to be a war movie all the people did was talk!



I become an altar boy about the time I was in 4th grade. It was tough learning the Latin (really just memorizing the prayers) but I always felt it was an honor and took it very seriously.

Each year a local businessman, named Sonny Mack, would take the four "top" altar boys from the graduating 8th grade class to Spokane for the Ordination at Gonzaga. I don't have any idea what

the criteria was to decide who went but I was selected. We frankly didn't care much about the ordination but the trip was something we all wanted the chance to make.

It was on the trip to Spokane that I got to know Dave Craig who would become a co-worker and friend for life. Dave was a year behind us in school but was selected to go because he was deserving and it was thought that his family was likely to move. Dave's dad, George, was a professor in the English Department at Northern Montana College and his mother taught at St Judes.

During the trip I had my first exposure to priests as "people". First of all Father O'Hara, the Pastor, went along and it was during the drive to Spokane that he taught us to play craps. Then when we got to Spokane we stopped at the rectory where Father Penna, who had served in Havre, lived. We boys were each given bottles of Coke and stuck us in a room off the main entrance. After we'd been waiting a while we decided to see what was going on. We crept down the hall and I peeked into the kitchen to discover the two priests and Sonny putting away a few shots while they chatted. Father Penna came back to Havre while I was in High School and I again ran into him in Harlem in the 70's when I was driving Coke trucks.



Jim (about 1958)

I was a Cub Scout during elementary school and always thought it was cool on the days when I got to wear my uniform to school, but had no interest in continuing on to become a Boy Scout.



Christmas was always a magical time. I can remember that we would wear out the catalogues looking at the toys and it was always special when we'd get the Christmas toy supplement. I think the dreams of toys that we never really expected to get were just as exciting as the things that we eventually received.

Memories of Christmas in the old house are the most magical. Mom didn't go crazy with decorations, but we always had a nice tree and Christmas cards were pinned to the curtains. I remember waiting for dad to get home from work on Christmas Eve, of riding around with mom dropping baked goods at the homes of friends and of mom or dad reading "The Night Before Christmas" to us. I remember the difficulty of getting to sleep so Santa could come and of listening for the reindeer hoofs on the roof.

See Appendix III for a newspaper article Bob wrote about his Christmas memories

The Christmas present I remember the most after all these years was an electric train when I was as young as 4 or 5. It was a Lionel and even though I always thought it was cheesy that they had that third rail I still loved that train set. It never grew beyond the oval track and, as I recall, the engine motor burned out within a few months, but I was always fascinated by the steam engine.

We always went to church on Christmas morning - and we couldn't see what Santa had brought until we got home from church. I can't figure out how that worked in the old house because to get from the upstairs to the door we had to go through the kitchen and living room. Once we got into the house on 13th Street we had to go from the basement out the back door and just weren't allowed in the kitchen or living room.

We, of course, hung stockings and almost every year there was an orange in the stocking. I never understood why we'd get something like an orange in our stocking until recently when I realized that in our parent's youth fresh fruit in the winter was a true luxury.

The first time I can remember going to bed after midnight was at Christmas when I was an altar boy for midnight Mass. Boy did I feel grown up.

We got our first television around Christmas at the end of 1957, probably on the Saturday or Sunday after Christmas. It was purchased from Les Kenfield who owned a general store in Inverness. We'd all gone somewhere and when we got home there was a TV in the living room! Les and Ira Mae (dad's sister) had brought the TV to Havre and while we were out Les set it up. We only got one channel, KFBB from Great Falls, until KRTV was established about a year later. The signal was broadcast from a repeater tower in the Bears Paw Mountains and was sometimes pretty good. Since it was the dead of winter the antenna was standing in the front entry way and I think it stayed there until spring.

The folks never made a big deal about the TV. The only restriction I recall was that we couldn't watch TV in the morning before school. Otherwise it seems like the TV was almost always on and we usually did our homework in the living room watching TV. I guess since we mostly all got good grades the folks didn't see any reason to change things.

I always liked school and did OK and I was generally an A-B student. My favorite year was 5th grade because I was in a split classroom that was half 5th grade and half 6th grade. I learned a lot listening to the 6th grade instruction while we were supposed to be doing our 5th grade work.

The US Space program was starting manned flights during my 7th and 8th grade years and I recall that on a few occasions a television was brought into the classroom so we could watch the launches. I'd say that because of the circumstances these were the first events that I recognized as significant as they occurred.

I only received one failing grade and it was totally undeserved. I had always had a problem with colds... whenever I got sick I would get an ear infection and I remember the worst ear aches all through my young years. Every time the doctor would say that when I was well they should get my tonsils out. Finally, when I was about 13, for some reason, the decision was made to do the deed. It was the only time I was ever in the hospital and it went OK, but during the week or so I was out of school I missed a geography test. When report cards came out I discovered I'd received an "F" in geography. I don't recall what happened, I seem to remember that my mom talked to the school, but I don't think the grade was ever changed. In about 1974 I was driving the Coke route for my dad and I had stopped at the High School in Joplin. The school kept their

pop in a storeroom in the back of a classroom and the procedure was that if a class was in session I should wait in the hall. While I was waiting a student came out and told me the teacher said it was all right if I came in and made my delivery. Lo and behold the teacher was Jerry Hays, the same guy who'd failed me in geography in 1961! He recognized me and began telling the class that I'd been one of his best students when he first began teaching and how well I'd turned out. If they only knew what I was thinking about him!