

Subject: Some anecdotes from the first 75 years of my life.

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From: "Ernie Crist" <ernie_crist@dnv.org>

To: "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>, <cagebc@yahoo.com>, "Nathalie Valdes" <Nathalie_Valdes@dnv.org>

CC: "Senior Management Committee" <managecomm@dnv.org>

A FEW COMMENTS ON MY 75TH BIRTHDAY.

My father had reservations about having to contend with a new baby - it was not the right time. However, since women are the stronger sex, my mother prevailed. I spent my early childhood in a little village in Austria blissfully ignorant of the big world. My grandfather had a big farm - there were horses, cows, and snowy mountains for skiing. What more could a youngster want.

In school I learned about our Tyrolean Hero who had told Napoleon, he having invited himself into the Austrian province of Tyrol, to please leave. But like an obnoxious relative, he insisted on staying. My ancestors being polite and cultured helped him not only find the exit but also through it to the outside. The leader of the uproar was an Inn Keeper by the name of Andreas Hofer whose motto was always be honest but don't take any guff, not even from Napoleon.

One early morning at the age of ten I stood outside my door and open mouthed watched Hitler's Wehrmacht march by. They had come to liberate us from the Austrians, which was us. They spoke German like I did but with a funny accent. I did not get along very well with the representatives of the new order and refused to join the Hitler Youth. I did not like the color of their costume. It reminded me too much of cow manure.

The upshot was that I was taken to Munich to protect me from bad influences and to study. I did, but after being bombed out 3 times in 1944, I returned home to Innsbruck waiting for the end of the war. It finally came on the 3rd of May, 1945 when Patton arrived.

A few months before that I had been called up to join the Wehrmacht. By that time it was not in good shape. The German officer, looking at me, determined that I was too small to join. My class mates, who had eaten more dumplings and were all taller were not so lucky. They were all killed during the following weeks just before the war ended. They had been sent to the Russian front virtually without training and equipment.

After the war I visited their graves in a cemetery in East Germany. Here they lay along with 60,000 other children aged 14 to 18. Their commanding General had refused to surrender. Also, just before the end of the war I had a disagreement with the Gestapo. They found out that I had read a Jehovah Witness book, a crime which was punishable by death. I had only read 3 pages before I gave it back - just in time before my home was searched. Somebody had reported me.

I was interrogated for 6 hours. They found no evidence but wanted to know who gave me the alleged book. Always obliging and forthcoming, I gave them the name and address of a person. I disavowed any knowledge that the person had been killed in an air raid.

I stuck to my story even as they lined me up threatening to execute me. Finally they let me go. I had to promise never again to accept such dangerous reading material and if ever anybody would even come near me, I would immediately run and tell. I signed with pleasure. I even said Heil Hitler on my way out of the interrogation room.

After the war, I managed to finish my studies in Innsbruck with the equivalent of a BA in commerce. I had wanted to take History but I was told Commerce would be more suitable. It is just as well since, the bourgeois interpretation of history did not exactly make sense to me - it does even less now.

Not long after the war ended, the cold war got into full swing. The Yankees tried very hard to stimulate the economy back home with a little war abroad. They had a monopoly of the Atom Bomb. The Russians, being better chess players by far, did not oblige, however. Still I could not be sure and when things got rather hot and being somewhat partial to staying alive, I left for Canada. That was in 1953, which was just one day before yesterday.

After landing in Montreal, I stayed with friends in Ottawa but one day I had had enough

of the flats and left. I went on a train and headed west. When it could go no further and I got off, I was in Vancouver. I started to work for Woodward's where I was a kind of trouble shooter from sales to advertising and from display to stock control.

We had a chess club with annual tournaments. One day a top executive told me I should not play anymore because it was no fun for the other players knowing that they would never win. Let's face it some people are poor sports. I left Woodward's after 11 years and became the circulation manager of the Pacific Tribune a somewhat left leaning publication.

By that time I had moved completely into the world of peaceniks. War did not appeal to me at all and yet this is exactly where we were heading. This time they were really nasty. I took great exception at the prospect to having a whole day ruined by a nuclear war. I also had other problems. I had moved to North Van with my family into an apartment in the Maplewood area. It was brand new and somewhat expensive but we liked it.

After 6 months the landlord raised the rent by 36 %. It was the time of the 4% wage and price control. That is wages could only be raised by 4% prices too, but rents were exempt. I phoned Ottawa. They were very helpful telling me they were sorry. That was much appreciated. It got into my head that I should organize the tenants to fight back and I did.

We organized the first rent strike in the history of BC. We were successful and the landlord had to rescind the rent increase. The real success, however, was that it led to the first legislation under which both landlords and tenants were protected - the British Columbia Tenancy Protection Act. The papers were full of praise of our efforts.

While we were fighting, I went to the District Hall meekly asking for moral support only to be told by the Mayor that tenants did not pay property taxes - that I should not take up valuable Council time and should leave the Council chambers. When I refused he asked the clerk Mr. Davies to escort me out. But Mr. Davies, told the Mayor he could not do that since he was not a policeman. I then proceeded with a community wide petition requesting that every citizen whether tenant or otherwise, believer or atheist, white or black, rich or poor should have the right to address Council, hence the right to do so today. Up to that time only members of the Chamber of Commerce were allowed to do that.

One day a young lady knocked on my door and asked me to join the Seymour Planning Association. It was a Citizens Committee formed to force Council to change the Seymour Plan. Why me, I said? Oh, she said, we have been watching you. Are you aware she said that they want to put 120,000 people into Seymour and are you aware, she said, that they want to put a concrete town center on the Maplewood Mud flats? No, I said, and joined. The name of the young lady was Marilyn Baker. The plan was changed and the number of people in the plan was changed from 120,000 to 35,000 - the Mudflats were saved.

I then started to run for Council. It was an uphill battle since I had frequently been seen in the company of peaceniks. I had to explain to people, that despite my dislike for the hydrogen bomb, I was definitely a member of the human race. My mother too had told me.

After trying 6 times and knocking on every door twice over a 6 year period I was finally elected in November 1979. My colleagues were mostly conservatives. Still there was something endearing about them and we actually got along quite well, considering. At least they knew the difference between having money in the (District) bank and having debts. Politics aside, that appealed to me.

I had other ideas as well. I got it into my head that instead of becoming another Surrey, we should remain low density and preserve the mountains for recreation. I also got Council to declare the District a Nuclear free zone and we erected a big sign to that effect at the entrance of Second Narrows. Marilyn Baker who was Mayor by now supported me. That was amazing considering the conservative make-up of Council. It was a symbolic gesture, of course, but it gave me a feeling of deep satisfaction. War just isn't what it's cracked up to be. Sometimes it can be out and out dangerous and even fatal. I prefer to fight a verbal battle with Don Bell, even Janice Harris.


After being in office for 23 years, I am sure there are a few people who would have preferred if my mother had aborted me but here I am. Apart from my countryman, Hofer, who had a little row with Napoleon, my other Hero is Prometheus. The Gods punished him for

having given the gift of fire to mankind. They chained him to the rocks of Gibraltar and for an encore, they sent birds to peck out his eyes. That is quite harsh, if you think of it. They wanted him to repent - instead he told them to take a hike on Mount Olympus, which is pretty steep and rocky.

My other hero is Faust who, sold his soul to the devil in return for earthly happiness. The devil failed in his attempt. He just wasn't up to the job much to the delight of the "all upholding and the all encompassing" who had been watching from the sidelines. Faust achieved happiness in the end but he did it on his own. He helped people on an island to build a seawall to protect it from the floods. It took him a while before he got the hang of it but he did it, just as God had predicted. The devil lost the bet and had to eat crow. And such, as Homer said in the Iliad, are the fortunes of war. That I should have survived for 75 years strikes me as curious but there it is. My mother who is 96 years old is also still alive. And this is a very brief history of the first 75 years of my life - if you are interested.

Have a nice day and enjoy YOUR next birthday. By the way I did not want to write this but a friend asked me to. Thank you also to Corrie Kost and his wife Lydia for the birthday message sent from Brugge, Belgium - Jewels both.

Ernie

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