

Early High School Days

Bill Reimer, September 17, 2012

Hi Samantha,

I was 12 in 1956. That was the year I finished elementary school (in those days we didn't 'graduate' from elementary school) and we moved from our second 39th avenue house to Marpole.

Dad wanted to move to Marpole to get a house that was zoned for small businesses. This meant he would be able to open a small fixit shop. He had always wanted to do this since he loved fixing things – from toasters to TVs – so thought that a small business doing so would be perfect.

I was not so excited about the prospect. We were moving away from my friends, my neighbourhood, and the two houses that I had grown up in for most of my life. In addition, I would have to go to a new school that was not only across town from the one where my friends would go, but it was also HUGE (with about 2000 students). I was intrigued by the fact that it had just been built (I would be going into the first grade of the first year), but this wasn't enough to overcome my apprehension.

To make matters worse, we would be moving to Marpole. This was a region of the city that I knew little about, but among my friends it was considered to be not so desirable – and the farther down into Marpole you went, the more undesirable it was. When I checked with my parents, I was dismayed to discover that we would be living very far down into Marpole.



The house, however, turned out to have a number of attractive features – like the walnut tree in the back yard that was perfect for climbing and the small shed that we occasionally used as a clubhouse (see the photo). It also had a lovely big basement that Dad turned into a haven of tools, equipment, and projects – a perfect thing for a curious teen. It was also big enough to hold my brother's car – so long as he took it apart and rebuilt it when moving it in and out of the house (which he did – several times).

My school, Sir Winston Churchill, was about 13 blocks from our house – and all uphill. This made drudgery of cycling to school, but it was very easy heading home. Most of the time, however, I remember walking.

The school was shiny new – with desks that weren't scratched or broken from years of students and a gymnasium that was huge by Kerrisdale School standards. The most intimidating part of it all was the

students – hundreds of them – and not a familiar face among them. It felt strange to be all alone even though there were people all around.

My memories of the first couple of years at Churchill are ones of isolation. It meant that every time I went to the cafeteria I had the anxiety of deciding where to sit and each time I walked home I was on my own. I'm sure this was not the case for long, however, since I somehow got connected with a crowd of interesting kids, but I don't remember how it happened. By the time I was 15 (1959) I must have been well integrated since my first high school album puts me in a class with many of the people who were to be part of my social circle for the final few years of high school. This involved 3 main groups.

The first was the group of students who were always near the top of the class when it came to grades – especially Glenda and Peter. I did reasonably well in most classes, so I remember comparing myself with these students whenever an exam or assignment was handed back. I also enjoyed their company for many things – sometimes studying together and (in the case of Peter) coming up with weird projects, plans, and even poetry to entertain ourselves with after school – and sometimes in school.

The second group was the one that included my after school buddies – like Peter (again), but including others who lived along my route home. Unfortunately, it did not include the attractive girl who lived on my paper route, but never seemed to be home when I went to deliver her paper. I remember the anticipation of finding her home – and the frequent disappointment to discover that she was not there. Of course I was too shy to knock or even to say hi to her in the halls. This was a pattern that was to be part of my love life for many years!

The third group was one of the more active crowds in the school. They were to become one of the favoured cliques of our grade but in grades 7 and 8 they were just a group of interesting kids (who seemed to be richer than me). For some reason, I was included in many (but not all) of their activities. Perhaps it was because they were into sports, and I did reasonably well in this respect. Or, it may be because Joe lived close to where I did (although across the tram tracks on the road to the Marine Drive mansions). Whatever it was, I was thankful that they let me hang out with them – but was always anticipating the points at which I was not invited to their parties and activities.

I should also mention a fourth crowd – the ones I met at Marpole United Church. This was the church where Mum took us three boys when we moved to Marpole. My taste for church was developed at Knox United Church in Kerrisdale, so although I was not as excited about it when we moved to Marpole, I was still keen enough to participate. Mostly I remember participating in the Boys Brigade at this church – where I learned to play the bugle.

Love,
Bill