

My Later High School Days

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Hi Samantha,

In September 1958 I was 14 years old and no longer a stranger in my high school. This doesn't mean I was totally comfortable there, but at least when I looked around, I knew plenty of students. I had also gained enough confidence to join a few clubs, so I turn up in the yearbook as an athlete and a nerd (although the latter expression hadn't been coined in those days). You can see for yourself from the following photos from my high school album of that year. Can you identify which of the students is me?



Junior Boys' Baseball



Rope Climbing Club



Astronomy Club

Check out the shoes in the Astronomy Club photo! It took me ages to convince my parents that I should have a pair like this – and many hours of fussing and cleaning to keep them in shape. You can be glad that white suede shoes (along with Pat Boone) are no longer ‘in’!!

These were the years that I began to hang out with Joe. He lived close enough to the Fraser River that we would use it – and the sand banks nearby as our playground. Of course our parents told us never to play on the log booms – but, of course, that is exactly where we headed whenever we could.

Log booms are particularly enticing to young children. In those days, the logs were bigger than they are now since the oldest trees had not all been cut down. This meant that a boom would be composed of some logs big enough to stand on without them sinking – along with smaller ones that would support your weight for an instant, but sink quickly if you hesitated on them. If we were lucky we would find a number of small logs nestled between 2 big ones. This created the challenge of running from one big log to the next by scampering across the small logs as quickly as possible. Slowing down while running across this challenge would mean a wet foot – or worse – a dunking in the river.

Even getting to the next large log was not without its challenge since stepping on the log too far down from the top would set it spinning and the game would suddenly turn into a log rolling contest.

Falling into the river was one of our dangers, but the nastiest one was our parents’ fear – that we would fall in and the logs would close over us – making an exit difficult or impossible. In fact, we had learned that if you fell in, you couldn’t trust getting out on one of the larger logs because as soon as you grabbed it to climb up, it would start spinning and down you would go again. Your best hope would be to grab a log that was small enough to reach over the top, yet not so small that it wouldn’t hold your weight.

The other option was to grab a large log – but only if your buddy was already on it – and agile enough to put his weight on the side opposite from yours so that you could scramble up.

This was exactly what happened to me one memorable day when I slipped on the loose bark of a large

log and went in up to my waist. Fortunately Joe was also on the log and quickly provided me with a counter-balance while I pulled myself up the log.

The rest of the afternoon was spent around the small campfire we made on the beach – drying out our clothes so that we could go home without having to report our misadventure. I expect that our parents were glad enough not to hear of this adventure until many years later when the danger was well past.

But it wasn't only the log booms that kept Joe and I occupied. I remember one winter when it got cold enough in Vancouver (and for a long enough time) that the swampy pond across the road from Joe's house froze over. This was a well-recognized pond by all the kids in the neighbourhood, since it was nicely tucked out of sight down a gully from the road. This meant that it was perfect for hunting frogs, building camps, planning excursions, and generally doing the things that parents frowned upon..

So when word got out that the pond was frozen we were quick to grab our skates and head off down the gully path. By the time we arrived there was a gang of kids already - some of them chasing a makeshift puck around the pond, and others trying to stay up on their skates - or testing the edges of the ice sheet to see how far they could go without falling through.

Skating was not something I grew up with in Vancouver since the winters rarely produced ice sheets everywhere - as they do here in Québec. I did have some experience skating, however, since when we lived in Kerrisdale, one of our Saturday rituals was to head up to Kerrisdale Arena for the 'free skate' time. After I rented my skates I would spend most of my time going around the rink and holding on to the edge so I wouldn't fall down. I remember how exciting it was when I could finally skate around one whole cycle without holding on. Eventually, I got reasonably good (at least I didn't fall down all the time) although I could never manage to stop on a dime like I would see the players do - sending a sheet of ice chips flying on whoever was in the way.

The gully pond added a new challenge. Either playing with the puck or skating after (or away from) our friends, we also had to keep an eye out for the thin parts of the ice. This occurred wherever some of the vegetation around the edge of the pond would stick out through the ice. We learned that the plants and brush absorbed (or generated) enough heat to keep the ice from completely freezing, so if you ended up in this region (by intention or accident) there was a good chance that you would get wet. Fortunately, the pond was not deep, so if you went through, the greatest problem would be wet pants - or a wet bum. This time we didn't feel compelled to dry out before heading home since the dangers were much less than on the log booms.

Love,
Bill