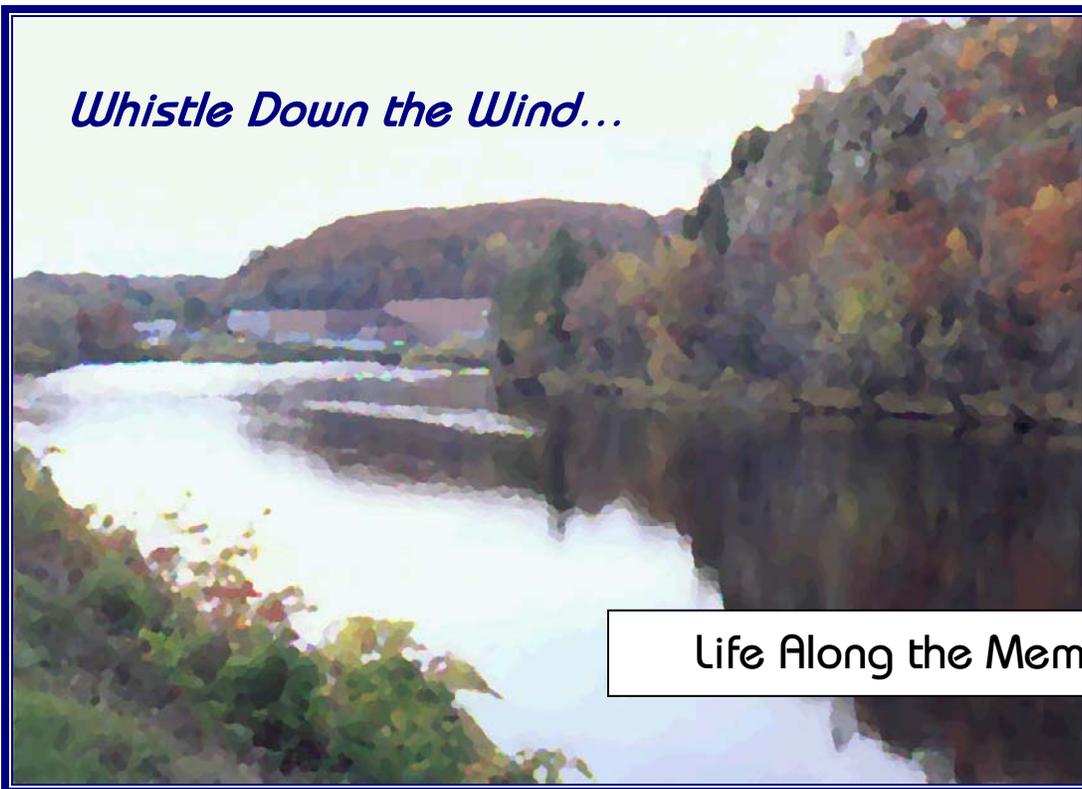




Niagara Area Historical Society \_\_\_\_\_ Niagara, Wisconsin

*The Kimberly-Clark Years... 1898 to 1972...*

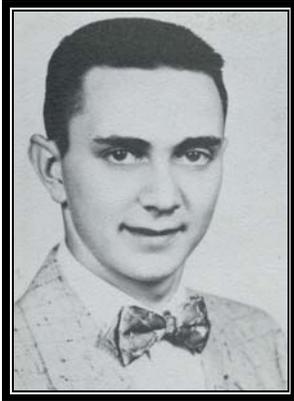


Life Along the Memominee

*NHS Class of 1954* Jim Durand...

*NHS Class of 1958* Barry Durand...

## Life Along the Menominee



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Barry

On the day the Our Theater opened there was a line of kids all the way past Sweeney's Lumberyard. What a day. A perfect day in the late forties and early fifties was a cartoon, a news-of-the-day short, the Three Stooges, (or a Pete Smith Special), and a western feature film, especially with Randolph Scott. Scott was the perfect cool, calm and collected cowboy/gunfighter. In the end, like a real cowboy, he didn't go for any mushy love scenes with the ladies, but preferred to ride off into the sunset with his horse. What a shock it was in later years to learn that Randy, our boyhood hero, also preferred other cowboys to the ladies.

Before Niagara had its own theater, brother Jim and I would go with some of the other neighborhood kids to the Braumart or Colonial in Iron Mountain. There was a bus that took us from Vine Court up to the big city. On one winter day when the snow was deep, (it seems like the snow was always deep in those days), we squandered our return bus fare on candy and had to walk home. On the hill coming into Niagara we were walking 4 or 5 abreast on the shoulder with me a little too close to the edge of the road and Viola Kososki had to swerve her car to avoid hitting me. She ended up in the ditch with her car buried in the snow and she made me stay in the car with her until her husband, Harry, arrived so she could use me to deflect any blame or anger. It was the first time that I was held captive by a beautiful woman.

Life was usually a little less exciting in those days. Joe Rouse and Andy Chamberlain kept the peace and Bing Miller ensured the justice of that peace. Maurice Norman kept the water running, Phil Meyers ran city hall, Rex Wells ran the paper mill and Pete Ruwitch swept up after all of them. On good days our dad might give Jim and me a nickel to run across the street to Cliff Towns' Standard Station for a Coke or an Orange Crush from the washtub-like vending machine. Charley Heisenfeldt organized

Story courtesy of Jim Durand \_\_\_\_\_ Niagara High School Class of 1954 &  
Barry Durand \_\_\_\_\_ Niagara High School Class of 1958.

softball games for the neighborhood kids in Triangle Park where the bases were trees and there was a one-base rule when the ball was stuck in the branches. Patty Waitrovich was the most gifted slugger and fielder, and Porky Prentice could spit farther than any kid west of the tin building. Every mother had her own special way of calling her child home for dinner. Julia Waitrovich won the Grammy for most amazing yodel and Frances Waitrovich won the most embarrassing pet name award with "Tweetle Babes." There was also a bandstand in the park where the village band would play on auspicious occasions.

Charley sometimes took the neighborhood kids out to Timm's Lake. He'd stuff ten or more of us into his car and off we'd go. I think most of us learned to swim at Timm's Lake doing a dog paddle from the rocky beach to the deep end of the dock by the scout camp. Thank you, Charley. It was more important than you knew.

Summers in Niagara revolved around the village outdoor swimming pool. The pool had a wading section for the tykes, a roped off section for the almost ready, and the "deep end" for those who had qualified by "swimming the length." The pool was operated on the buddy system, and at regular intervals the lifeguard would blow a whistle and we'd all "buddy-up" to see if anyone had floated down the drain.

The focus of the pool was the ten-foot-high diving board where we showed off our own interpretations of the diving repertoire. Tom Strouf and Bill Gronert were the most daring with running back flips, barrel rolls, and the amazing "full gainer" which required a run off the board at top speed and then throwing yourself over backward with the desperate hope you'd somehow enter the water feet first. Tommy and Billy managed it with some measure of grace, but my version was encumbered with more arms and legs than style. Once while showing off for Sally Scholz, my favorite lifeguard, I hit the back of my head on the diving board during the reverse part of the gainer. I saw stars for a few days, but fortunately there was no serious damage to the board.

In winter the two big events were the Ice Carnival and the Ski Tournament. The ice rink was a flooded backwater at the river's edge and the shows were quite impressive with music, costumes, sets and skating talents such as Kathleen St. Louis and Billy DuBord. The Niagara Ski Tournament was equally impressive with jumpers from around the U.P. Tex Brazeau and Jaren Smith paced all jumpers with leaps of more than a hundred feet.

After a fresh snowfall, Jim and his friend Jerry Waitrovich liked to buckle on their skis and trek off into the woods with hot dogs and beans in their packs. They'd build a campfire to cook their lunch and melt some snow to make hot chocolate. Over the years the menu has improved, and it's a sport Jim and his wife look forward to whenever fresh snow is in the air.

At home, life centered round our floor model Zenith radio. We never missed our favorite shows, "The Lone Ranger," "Sergeant Preston," "Straight Arrow," "The Shadow," "The FBI," "Inner Sanctum," and comedies like "Jack Benny," "Burns and Allen," and "My Friend Irma." We cheerily ate our Cheerios, Quaker Puffed Wheat (shot from guns!), Kix, Pep and Wheaties on advice of our radio heroes. And

sometimes a cereal box top and 25 cents could bring treasures like a Captain Midnight secret decoder ring or genuine cowboy spurs right to our door. Jim remembers wishing the war (WWII) would end so he wouldn't have to listen to war news all the time.

Our mother liked to listen to the radio soap operas while darning socks, knitting mittens, or patching this or that. We kind of remember "As the World Turns" and "Ma Perkins," brought to you by Oxydol, Tide or Ivory (99 and 44/100% pure...it floats!). On Saturday or Sunday afternoons our father would sometimes put on the Tigers game, stretch out on the couch and soon he'd be snoring away, but if you dared to change the station he'd open one eye and growl, "Leave that alone!"

TV hadn't yet arrived in Niagara, so on New Year's Day, 1953, Jim and his pals Ron Zadra, Bob Jensen, Jack Gustafson and Jerry Waitrovich went to Zadra's summer cottage on Keyes Lake to watch Wisconsin in the Rose Bowl on TV. Louie Zadra had put up an extra tall antenna to pick up the game from Green Bay. The guys trudged through deep snow to get to the frozen cottage, then tried, and mostly failed, to heat the place with a smoky wood-burning cook stove. There was almost as much snow in the TV picture as on the ground, but it was a big thrill to actually see the game live.

It was a couple more years before TV finally arrived in Niagara via a master antenna high atop the water tower with connections to all subscribing homes. TV cartons were piled high in front of Zadra's appliance store as everyone rushed to get a new black-and-white TV. Tim Phillips' father, Tod, was one of the organizers of the system and he hired Tim and me to do some of the work on the lines. Tim and I also painted the big TV tower that was installed on top of the water tank. We don't usually tell people this part, but we painted it *before* it was put up on the water tank.

There was always some way for kids to make a little spending money in Niagara. In summers Jim and I cut lawns, usually for 75 cents, or a dollar if we were lucky. No one had power mowers, so it was a good workout. In winter there was snow to shovel, so you could always find work. Jim had a paper route and also sold punch cards, a kind of lottery where you would buy a square, then punch it out to see if you had won a prize. In earlier days John Zaidel sometimes came through the neighborhood with his pick-up truck to get Jim and some of the older kids to work on his farm, planting onions, etc. They were treated to a lunch of boiled ring baloney and beans and paid 25 cents an hour. John also had the boys out to his lake cottage for a "fun" day in the fall...raking leaves. Jim did yard work and house chores for Doc McCormack and helped Doc put in a new tile floor in his office next to Mason's grocery store where Jim also worked as a stock boy and later delivery boy.

One summer Louie Bush hired Jim and me to clean the boiler at the school. It was necessary to crawl inside to shovel out the ashes, and Louie was a little over qualified to squeeze through the small door in the furnace. Jim and I with our skinny butts were able to crawl in and get the dirty job done. We came home looking like we were going to do a minstrel show and Mom had to wash us down with a hose. I don't remember what we were paid, but Louie knew better than to ask us again the next year.

For a year or so, Doug Maes and I delivered the *Niagara Journal* once a week in the morning before school. We had to go to every house in town and we were paid 75 cents each. One day after we'd finished and were returning to get our pay, Doug said we should ask for a raise. He said we should get another 25 cents and if we couldn't get it, we should quit. Doug also said I should do the asking, so when we got back to Martin Boerner, the printer, I told him we wanted the 25-cent raise. He thought about it a little and then said he couldn't pay us any more, so I said that I would quit. He turned to Doug and asked, "How about you?" and Doug said, "No, not me." So much for collective bargaining. The next week Doug had a new partner and I had no job, but if you're going to lose your job, that was a good one to lose.

Not long after that my friend Jan Bovee hired me to help him with his paper route. It was a big route, every day including Sundays, and I think we had almost a hundred *Milwaukee Sentinels*, *Journals*, and *Chicago Tribunes* so you can imagine the weight. On Sundays the papers were so big we had to use a wagon or sled to carry all the Dick Tracys, Pogos, Dagwoods, Prince Valiants, Phantoms, Katzenjammers, Little Kings, Li'l Abners, Terrys and Pirates. A li'l less news would have been good news. After a while Jan had had enough of the thing. I tried it alone for a year or so, but I can't say my heart was ever in it. I was good at the service part of the operation. I never missed a day or a customer, even when the temperature dipped to 40 below, but I was a little too young for the business part of it and I didn't keep proper records. If I ever overcharged you, I apologize, and if you got a free paper now and again, shame on you.

I've heard that paper routes build character and teach young guys responsibility, but about all I learned was that in the 1950's, it was still possible to exploit child labor. I guess I also learned that when there wasn't any money coming in, there wasn't any money coming in.

When I was fifteen I went to work for Henry Wagner, who owned the Niagara Dairy. Henry and I delivered milk to doorsteps six days a week from one end of town to the other. There was an electricity meter below my bedroom window that would start to hum when the temperature got down around zero. If I could hear it when I got up at 4:30 to go off to the dairy, I knew it was going to be a bitter day. Between the morning paper routes and the dairy I managed to freeze both of my ears, and don't think that doesn't hurt. I hated the crunching sound of walking on cold, hard snow, but I can still picture those beautiful starry winter mornings when steam would be coming off the river and sometimes there'd be spectacular aurora borealis displays. Ellen Wagner always had a warm pint of chocolate milk waiting for me on those cold days.

I learned to drive while I was working at the dairy. Henry had a Divco delivery truck that was made so you would drive standing up because you were constantly getting in and out. The accelerator was in the shift lever and you twisted it to give it the gas. There was one big foot pedal. When you pushed it down halfway, it was the clutch, and if you pushed it further, it also became the brake. So that's how I learned to drive: standing on one leg, holding the accelerator in one hand and steering with the other with a couple hundred bottles of milk rattling behind me. Sometimes, when Henry wasn't with me, I would let the truck idle along forward on its own while I ran to several houses

to drop off the milk and then I'd run to catch up with the truck, but I knew that was risky and I didn't do it very often.

Henry also had a big GMC panel truck that we used to get milk from the Pine Mountain Dairy in Iron Mountain. It was standard shift and I always hated stopping on a hill because I'd have to carefully synchronize the clutch, brake and accelerator pedals for a smooth start up with a full load of milk bottles in the back. When you work for a dairy, you *do* cry over spilled milk. If it conked out, I'd have to put one foot on the clutch, one on the brake, and then reach down to press the starter on the floor. I really could have used another foot. My pay at the dairy was \$16 a week and Ellen Wagner also gave me breakfast every day, an egg sandwich and a bottle of milk.

I also helped Henry farm the hills above the dairy. We were able to bale two crops of hay each summer and we'd put the bales into Henry's barn. Henry was a clever guy and he had rigged up a pulley and hooks system using the tractor to pull a rope and lift the bales from the hay wagon up to the loft in the barn. Once when I was working in the loft taking bales off the hooks and stacking them, Henry needed something from the house and took off with the tractor, forgetting that it was connected to the pulley. When he drove away, the iron hooks went flying past my head and smashed into the opposite wall of the barn. Henry was terrified that he had killed me and he was pretty shaken by it. The next day we built a conveyor belt and we never used the pulley and hooks again.

Henry and Ellen Wagner were good and fair people and I enjoyed working there, but why is it that all dogs seem to hate the milkman and the paperboy?

On days when there wasn't football or basketball practice, I also worked at Ray's U-Save, formerly Mason's grocery store. People could call in their grocery orders during the day; then I'd deliver the stuff to customers after school with Ray's official U-Save Ford pick-up. One little old lady on the route got a whole case of Bosch beer every time I went out. She must have done a lot of entertaining. Her "guests" especially liked that bock beer that would come out in the spring. Like most grocers, Ray was a butcher and he was missing a finger or two. I guess he really put himself into his work. Ray paid me 75 cents an hour and for half-hours he'd pay me 38 cents one time and 37 the next. I always thought that was kind of cheap, but I've already told you my skills were not on the business end of things.

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**O**ur father, Oscar Durand, was born in Champion, Michigan, before the turn of the century, grew up in Republic and served in the army during the First World War. He was a lifetime member of the American Legion, the Knights of Columbus and the Forty-and-Eight, (named for the railroad carriages that carried forty men and eight horses during WWI). For most of his life he worked as a teller in the Greek Temple bank building across from the school. Often in the morning Dad, Mom, Jim and I would walk together, Mom to her teaching job, Jim and I to class, and Dad to the bank. Sometimes Jim and I would go on with him to the post office in the Club House where he would pick up mail from the bank's P.O. box and chat a little with postmaster Harold Bovee

while Jim and I checked the FBI's Ten Most Wanted to see if there was anyone we knew. It was always fun to walk with Dad and see him tip his hat to all the ladies.

Because Dad had some experience in bookkeeping, he helped many people with their income tax returns. "Customers" would come to the house and Dad would send Mom, Jim and me into another room so he could work with his "client" at the dining room table. We had to be quiet and after a long time we'd hear the visitor say, "How much do I owe you, Oscar?" and he'd say, "Oh, nothing." We'd watch Mom's face turn red and she'd grit her teeth. He one time came home with some foreign money that he bought from a bank customer who had come to exchange it and we got to see Mom's face turn that frustrated shade of red again. Dad's favorite place in the house was the couch where he would try to steal a nap when he could. Jim and I would wait for Mom to call him, then we'd rush to see if he had lost any coins in the cushions of the couch.

Dad's father was also named Oscar and was married to a woman named Amanda Gravelle, (our grandmother). Her family could be traced back to 17<sup>th</sup> century Quebec. We think they may have owned or operated the old hotel on Vine Court in Niagara. They had both passed away before Jim and I were born and the hotel was abandoned and later torn down. The Alibi Bar was built on the site.

Our mother, Ruth, was one of the five Radermacher kids born of German immigrant parents on a farm near Kaukauna, Wisconsin. She attended Oshkosh Teachers College and came to teach in Niagara with her college friend, Mary Finan. In Niagara she met and married our future father, becoming the Mrs. Durand who taught second grade for more than 35 years. (Mary Finan married Hank Wagner and taught first grade for many years.) When I joined the family in 1940, Jim was already 4 years old and anxiously waiting to conduct experiments on his new bald, bouncing-baby, badger brother. Over the years Jim developed in the mold of our father and today even donates his time and expertise to help elders with their income tax as our father did. I'm more like our mother I suppose, and have even enjoyed a short second career as a teacher.

On not so rare occasions when our parents would go up to Shine's Alibi Bar for a little fun, our neighbor, Doodles Lagina, would baby-sit Jim and me. We always had a good time with her. Our mother taught during the day and she couldn't leave me home alone, so she brought me along to school. She was teaching kindergarten then, mornings downtown and afternoons at the Shattuck school, so I started kindergarten when I was 3 or 4 and went full days instead of half days like all the other kids. The highlight was playing footsie with Marilyn Miller. What a cutie she was! After a few years of kindergarten, I was glad to finally move on to first grade and get a new teacher, Mary Wagner. But the next year when I showed up for second grade, there was Mrs. Durand again, and of course when I got home after school every day, there was Mrs. Durand again. Life's not easy when your mother's a teacher.

Miss Davis and Mrs. Romitti taught third and fourth grades at the main school and those kids unlucky enough to attend the Shattuck School had the twin tyrants, Miss Blase and Miss Bryant, who ruled stalags one through four there with iron fists. Step out of line and you'd get solitary confinement in the cloakroom, although the story was they

met their match in the legendary Fifi Lanthier who, among other misadventures, ate Miss Bryant's lunch while she had him doing time in the closet.

Our father's cousin had a tavern named "Lorrain and Harry's" at the junction of US8 and 141 just south of Pembine. They had a jukebox and when they got new records, they'd give Jim and me the old ones. We had quite a stack of them at home and I had a few favorite songs that I learned. One was called "I Used to Work in Chicago" and in the third and fourth grades when the teachers would have "Amateur Hour," I'd often sing that song for the class. Many years later I was in some nightclub in Kansas City with live entertainment, you know the type, and one of the entertainers sang that song. I realized then for the first time that it was a pretty raunchy song and I laughed so hard my friends wondered what they were missing. I could picture those third and fourth grade teachers trying to keep a straight face while I was singing that raunchy tune and they must have also been wondering what was going on at Mrs. Durand's house.

Around this time Jim started taking piano lessons with a nun who played the violin, but it soon became apparent to Jim that he was being trained to be her accompanist, and he wanted no part of it. He then began lessons with Ellen Wallenfang which was much more to his liking. Mom insisted that he practice for half an hour each day and she often had to stand over him to be sure he didn't sneak out. Sometimes Patty and Jerry Waitrovich, Jan Bovee or Shorty DeLongchamp would be watching through the window with their baseball caps and gloves, waiting patiently for Jim to finish so they could play ball. It made an amusing picture worthy of a Norman Rockwell painting. Jim hasn't gotten much better over the years, but he keeps trying and still has some sheet music with Ellen's handwritten comments and instructions, so there's always hope.

My talents were more in the area of the phonograph. I had a recording of the Grand Canyon Suite, my only classical recording, which I really loved and played over and over. Mom and Jim didn't share my refined musical taste and my favorite record soon disappeared. Neither Mom nor Jim seemed to know anything about it, but I'll bet if you were to go to 848 Main Street today and dig around a little in the back yard, you might just find a well worn copy of the Grand Canyon Suite.

In the late forties an addition was built on the school, doubling its size. The new space was for K through 6 and the old school became 7 through 12. That was also the end of the Shattuck School. At about the same time Kimberly-Clark added two new paper machines that were said to be the largest in the world. With Iron Mountain having world's largest ski jump and world's largest water pump, and I think Asselin's Dairy in Norway had world's largest milk bottle, and now our mill having the largest paper machines, I began to wonder if there would ever be any reason to travel outside the area.

Often after school I'd walk home along the railroad spur behind Josephson's "Dime Store" where I could watch a steam engine shunting cars for the paper mill, the Railway Express office and the lumber and coal yards. It was intriguing as a 9 or 10 year old to stand on those tracks and realize that they led to Green Bay, Milwaukee, Chicago and the outside world, making Niagara seem the beginning of the entire line. There was also an open creek there where you could find frogs and sometimes a turtle. One day there were a lot of good-sized fish flopping around in the shallow creek. They must have

escaped from the trout ponds behind Schintgen's icehouse. I was wearing a jacket that day, so I stuffed all my pockets full of fish and took them home. Mom planted the fish in the garden but I don't think they ever took. My jacket always smelled like fish after that.

Jim remembers that he usually wore leather shoes, but on school days when there'd be gym class, he'd wear sneakers. One day he was apparently a little confused and went out wearing one leather shoe and one sneaker. He got plenty of ribbing all day long and the fashion *faux pas* was even remembered by classmates years later at Jim's 40<sup>th</sup> reunion. His story reminded me of the time I walked to school with my friend Dick Brown and when we got to school and took off our jackets, Dick discovered that he wasn't wearing a shirt and had to go back home.

Fifth and sixth grades were taught by Mr. Snow and Mr. Adams. Mr. Adams was a pompous guy who knew everything about the known, the unknown and the nonexistent. We would sometimes make up silly questions just to hear him pontificate. He disliked me almost as much as I disliked him.

It was during sixth grade, when I was eleven years old, that our father died. He was only in his early fifties, but for years he had struggled with diabetes which required daily insulin shots, and I don't suppose all those packs of Luckies helped any. I didn't realize the full impact of his passing until years later, but I knew even then that I had put away my toys for the last time.

In those years the Catholic kids had to go to catechism classes after school. The classes were taught by nuns who were not exactly gifted theologians. We had to learn one prayer or creed which had a line about how Christ would return one day which went, "...and from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead." The sister thought that "thence" was the name of some specific place, like maybe Thence, California. "Where will He come from, class?" "From Thence, sister."

For some ironic reason, the sisters always brought out the devil in us. Even the shiest girls who wouldn't say "Boo" in public school seemed to enjoy leading them into temptation. Paul Jensen was particularly adept at evoking their wrath and was sometimes flailed on the butt with the knotted white rope they all wore, but Paul simply turned the other cheek, a Christian act that somehow failed to placate the distraught theologians.

Seventh grade was a big change. Junior High. Our own lockers. Different teachers for different classes in different rooms. Miss Berry taught English and I always had fun with her, so much fun that I often had to stay after school and conjugate irregular verbs on the blackboard. It was the second time that I was held captive by a beautiful woman and I became quite an authority on irregular verbs in the bargain.

Ralph Quever taught English at the next level and also Latin, our only "foreign" language. *Graecum est, non legitor*. I used to write stories about our dog, Whiskey, in his English class and he seemed to enjoy them. Whiskey was a gift from Bill Gronert's collie and Jerry Waitrovich's Pudgley, of uncertain genetic background. Jim brought her home as a puppy and although our mother didn't much like animals, she couldn't say

“No” to such a cute puppy. I don’t remember where the name came from, but it raised a few eyebrows when Mom would be out on the front porch calling, “Whiskey, Whiskey!” Although Whiskey was a faithful friend, unfortunately she didn’t always see eye-to-eye with the mailman, or anyone else for that matter. Her big mistake was getting into a heated argument with Roger DuBord’s wife. Roger was a town cop with a low tolerance for dogs that didn’t show proper respect for the law and Whiskey soon disappeared. I still hold out some hope that she’ll return one day, but she’d be almost 50 by now.

Jim was quite active in scouting and attended summer camp at Camp Minneyata near Ishpeming a couple of times. In the second year he was ready for some more adventurous activities and did a two-day canoe trip on the Michigamme River. He figures he spent as much time in the river as in the canoe and particularly remembers spending the night in wet clothes in a pup tent shared with a couple hundred U.P. mosquitoes, the kind our dad used to say were so big they would “sit on the logs and bark.” In 1950 Jim attended the National Scouting Jamboree at Valley Forge, PA, where he got to see and hear speeches by President Truman and General Eisenhower.

Leroy Schultz was Jim’s scout leader at that time. Leroy also would occasionally put on a clown costume and ride a unicycle in parades and at other events. He let Jim practice on the thing, actually three of them of different heights. Jim and I both learned to ride and we each did a few shows with Leroy. It was fun to go somewhere with Leroy because no matter where we were, he always found a way to go by the Summit Dairy in Breitung to have a malt on the way home. A few times I even did my paper route on the unicycle, but it was pretty hard work because you can’t ever stop pedaling and hills can be a real bugger, both up and down.

Jim completed his driver training with Harold Kinziger in 1952. He was anxious to get his license so he stood on the curb, waved Joe Rouse down and asked to take the driving test. Joe had him drive once around the town. He was supposed to also demonstrate his parallel parking ability, but they couldn’t find two cars with a space between them, so Joe apparently considered it an unnecessary skill and Jim passed his test. Don’t tell Joe, but not long after that Jim banged into a parked car while parallel parking Mason’s delivery truck. (Joe Rouse later made the Paul Harvey News when he gave himself a ticket for some traffic violation. Now that’s an honest cop!)

Jim always had an interest in boats and as soon as he could put \$35 together, he bought a kit and made his own. It was an 8-footer made of plywood in a blunt nosed style called a “pram.” He put the thing together in our garage with glue, bronze screws and a minimum of tools. There must have been hundreds of screws and he didn’t even have a drill to make pilot holes, but he did a great job and we launched it on the river where Mom christened it “Wee III.” We did a lot of fishing, exploring and fooling around with that boat and I’m proud to say that Jim allowed me to be the chief oarsman. What a guy. Twenty years later when Jim got a sailboat and a berth at the South Shore Yacht Club in Milwaukee, he re-commissioned his pram for dinghy duty. Jim always had a knack for woodworking and has invested several vacations in hands-on wooden boat building seminars. After his retirement he created a museum quality wooden canoe as well as some extraordinary grandfather clocks.

Story courtesy of Jim Durand \_\_\_\_\_ Niagara High School Class of 1954 &  
Barry Durand \_\_\_\_\_ Niagara High School Class of 1958.

About the time Jim was launching his ship building career, I decided to become a circus acrobat. I don't remember what film inspired that career choice, but it probably starred Burt Lancaster or Kirk Douglas...and maybe Jane Russell. My chosen event was the uneven clothesline poles and fortunately we had such an apparatus in our back yard where I could work out on any day except Mondays. My routine featured an *inverted articulatio genu suspension*, (hanging by my knees), climaxed by a spectacular no-hands flying dismount, often landing on my feet. Once while I was hanging upside down, a young deer appeared and started licking my face. The deer was Dinky, a neighborhood resident who shared her home on the hill behind us with the Wodenka family. So there I hung, upside down, unable to get down because Dinky was directly beneath me, licking my face, while my mother watched from the kitchen window, laughing and wishing that video cameras had been invented. I don't remember how the standoff was resolved, but it's probably because of Dinky that I was unable to reach my circus career goal...or get anywhere with Jane Russell. (I did get to walk home at lunchtime every day with Darlene Kososki however, and Jane Russell had nothing on her.)

In high school my Class of '58 was shaped and molded by Messrs. Pedo, Nora, Kinziger, DeAmico, Wallenfang, Finnegan, Madsen, Lefstad, Monette, Miss Daisy Milks and others who applied their pedagogical skills to ensure we knew how to figure out how old Sally was if she was two years younger than Dick and twice as old as Jane. Then in 1957 the Russians surprised everyone by shooting the first satellite into orbit and before you could say "Copernicus," things got hairy in math and science. The extra work didn't bother me because my good friend Gary Zadra understood it all and always let me copy his homework. Gary was as bright as anybody needs to be. He was already using quantum mechanics to develop his theories on electrodynamic forces and particle physics while the rest of us were still trying to figure out how old Sally was.

Mr. Radtke started us out in band and chorus and he was followed by Elmer Schabo who got nifty new uniforms for us. Jim played the baritone horn and I played the tuba because they were instruments you didn't have to buy. Tom Strouf was the other tuba player and since he was 2 years my senior and 20 times my talent, I allowed him to be the leader of the tuba section. Tom taught me some jazzy version of a piece that the band was rehearsing and told me we would play it that way. When the next rehearsal came, I played Tom's goofy improvisation and of course Tom played it straight as written. The band director was furious and would have wrapped that tuba around my neck if it hadn't already been fashioned that way.

Have you ever wondered why there were so many nicknames in Niagara? We must have had more aliases than the entire Sicilian Mafia. I wonder if even the mothers knew the real names of: Pruner, Jap, Fifi, Wop, Baloney, Tex, Fish, Muggs, Khaki, Skinner, Doodles, Banana, Grunt, Punjab, Tinker, Swede, Fatso, Buckhorn, Dibeye, Palooka, Shorty, Nuggs, Zippy, Eggs, Peanuts, Sonny, Cuba, Porky, Gunner, Jabbo, Wimpy, Choppers, Bomber, Weinner, et al. It sounds more like some south side Chicago street gang than the sons and daughters of little Niagara, Wisconsin, eh?

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Story courtesy of Jim Durand \_\_\_\_\_ Niagara High School Class of 1954 &  
Barry Durand \_\_\_\_\_ Niagara High School Class of 1958.

Way back before there was major league baseball in Wisconsin, Dad took Jim to see a White Sox game in Chicago. Jim always had a passion for baseball and when he, Patty and Jerry outgrew the limited confines of Triangle Park, Jim set about trying to build his own field of dreams. Jim directed the cutting and cleanup of the overgrown lot behind our house affectionately known as “the snake yard.” When that proved inadequate to the growing talents of the neighborhood team, Jim selected a new site along the shortcut between Cliff Towns’ station and the ski jump. The team scratched out a regulation size diamond, but this was back in a time when leveling the playing field was not yet a going concept. I don’t know if the team was ever able to muster nine members for anything more than the team photo, but that didn’t keep them from taking on the Hill Toppers, Frenchtown, or Shattuck rivals. The vaunted Vine Court Eagles are pictured in “The Waitroviches of Niagara” by shortstop Patty (Waitrovich) Brennan. The fearless Eagles also fielded a football team that took on all comers, and as best I can remember, went undefeated throughout their entire franchise history.

In high school Jim’s attention turned to basketball. He served his two year apprenticeship on the JV’s and became a starter as a junior on the ‘52-’53 Varsity. The other starters were Tom Miller, Tom Boerner, Banana Brown and Howard Chamberlain. Jack Taylor coached that team to the Menominee Range Championship, a 17 and 4 season record, and to the state sectional tournament where it lost to Menasha, the eventual state champs. That team is remembered by many as one of the better teams produced by Niagara.

Coach Taylor had a brother who coached at Clintonville. This resulted in a home-and-home series between the two schools. The Badgers traveled to Clintonville during the ‘51-’52 season, and Clintonville came to Niagara during the ‘52-’53 season. These special events included tours of the truck factory in Clintonville, and the paper mill in Niagara. Years later Jim’s youngest son John had a physical education instructor who was originally from Clintonville and had played on that team. He recalled visiting Niagara, going on the tour of the mill and he remembered Niagara as being a pretty little village. He also told John that Clintonville had “really clobbered” Niagara in the big game. When John came home with that news, Jim turned to his yearbook for the facts and found that things were quite the other way around. John went back to his P.E. coach armed with Jim’s yearbook and the coach had to eat a generous helping of crow, then sheepishly admitted that he might have been on the “B squad” at the time. (John passed the class anyway.)

The ‘53-’54 edition of the Badgers included Jim, Bob Jensen, Don Raboin, Ron Zadra, Jerry Waitrovich, Jack Gustafson, Connie Dejardin, Tom Waldbillig, Ed Tousignant and Dick Valley. The team adopted a psychologically well-adjusted attitude that winning wasn’t everything, (9 wins, 11 losses). While they managed to split with the Mountaineers in a pair of one-point nail-biters that season, Coach Taylor went over to the enemy and married a girl from Iron Mountain. The team rather generously forgave their beloved coach and attended the wedding of Jack Taylor and his beautiful bride.

It’s amazing how often the forces of destiny turn on chance encounters. Jim had been planning to attend the University of Wisconsin after graduation, but at a post game

dance in 1954 he had a chance meeting with Father Bob LaLiberte, a Catholic priest who had grown up next door. Father Bob talked to Jim about Marquette University in that persuasive way the clergy have. Because of that chance encounter, Jim did attend Marquette and never looked back. He graduated in 1958 with honors and later returned to earn an MBA, but more importantly, at Marquette he met the girl who would become his wife in 1960. Trudy and Jim have four children, twelve grandchildren and a lifetime of adventures and memories. Thanks again, Father Bob.

I didn't have much interest in sports, but because I was already getting tall and because Jim had been a star player, I was kind of obligated to give basketball a try. As a freshman in '54-'55 I started on the Junior Varsity, but I didn't do much until about mid-season when I finally had a good game at Stambaugh and scored maybe 17 or 18 points. Because of that game, but probably more because Jim had been a good player, Coach Taylor took a chance and moved me up to the Varsity and I started every game for the next three and a half years. My buddy Tex Brazeau was moved up at the same time.

We didn't set any records that first year, but the next year with Willard Butler coaching and Leon Waitrovich leading the team on the floor, we started to get some respect. By the '56-'57 season we had a solid team with Dick Payette, Bob Brown, Ray Neveau, Tex Brazeau, Dick Doucette, Lawrence Sherman, Jim Heisenfeldt, Larry Waitrovich and myself. We ended up tied for the Menominee Range conference championship and got to the state sectional tournament before we were finally eliminated by Shawano, eventual state champs that year. There were no classes in Wisconsin at that time and I think we might have won it all if we didn't have to play those bigger schools. In the district tournament at Three Lakes we played a school that was undefeated and ranked by the Milwaukee papers as the number one small school in the state. We beat them by more than 50 points, 85 to 33! I made 25 points in the first half and spent the rest of the game on the bench watching the cheerleaders.

In my senior year we really got it all together. Our record for the year was 23 and 3. We won the championship of our conference, and for the second year beat Iron Mountain twice, which was always sweet. We were again eliminated during the sectional tournament, this time by Wausau, a school more than ten times our size. Ray Neveau was the top ball player in our conference and could have started on any team in the state. I may have scored a thousand points for the Badgers over my four years. I've read that I had more than 450 points during just my junior year. My top game was 37 or 39 points. Wish I'd have saved the clippings.

Football was one of the hardest things I've ever done. Two-a-day practices began in the muggy heat of mid-August. I would never have believed that a skinny guy like me could sweat so much. When we'd suit up for afternoon practice, everything would still be wet and smelly from the morning workout. Between the conditioning exercises and knocking each other around, the whole season seemed nothing but aches and pains.

As a team I don't think we scared anyone. We had to go as far as Bark River, wherever that is, to find someone our own size to pick on. Fortunately the season was only 6 or 7 games long.

I really didn't know anything about the rules of football. We didn't have TV and I had never seen a real game, in fact the first regulation game I ever saw was under the lights at Kingsford and I was the starting left end. In that game, or maybe it was the next game, I caught a pass down field and was within sight of the end zone. Tex Brazeau was about 5 or 10 yards away and he was yelling for me to run in his direction, "Over here, Bear! Over here!" I thought he wanted the ball so I tossed it out to him. Tex pulled it in over his shoulder like Boyd Dowler and trotted into the end zone. It was the only pass I ever threw and it was complete for a touchdown, except that I was more than twenty yards beyond the line of scrimmage so my big play was called back. I spent the next series of downs on the sidelines getting an earful about the rules of the game from Coach Ropele. I didn't know ends weren't supposed to throw passes, did you?

With a helmet and all those pads, I was pretty much fearless on the field, with one memorable exception. On the last play of the last day of practice before the last game of the year, I was playing defensive end and Dick "Nuggs" Chartier came barreling around my end with the ball. Nuggs was the biggest, most powerful runner north of Lambeau Field and he was not the kind of back who would take a quick side step at the last instant to make you miss. His style was to plow directly into you, over you, through you...to make sure you couldn't miss. When he turned that corner and locked in on me I was thinking: This is the last day. This is the last play. This is only practice. And at the last instant, I turned in front of Nuggs and ran with him as his lead blocker. Coach Ropele didn't appreciate the wisdom in this turn of events, but I knew my life was much too valuable to my country to risk it in such a trivial way.

Actually, we did have a respectable team and won, or maybe tied for, the conference championship. Larry Canavera, (later Father Larry), was a smart and talented quarterback, Nuggs and Jaren Smith were powerful, sure-handed backs, Tex and I gave it our all at the ends, (Tex could boot that ball a country mile), and Gerald Kallenbach, Dick Doucette, Tim Phillips, Ray Neveau and Larry Waitrovich threw up an impenetrable line on both offence and defense. Dennis Smith pulled down a number of interceptions and everyone put his whole heart and body into it.

Unfortunately there were no interscholastic sports programs for the girls at that time. Patty Waitrovich was the best athlete in our neighborhood. She regularly beamed me square on the head with snowballs from 10 or 15 yards, which is pretty good throwing. Try it on your neighbor sometime. She could have been a champion.

In 1957 Coach Ropele and his assistant, Lee Wallenfang, took the senior players to Green Bay to see an exhibition game with the New York Giants. Little did I know that I would be playing for the Packers the next season. But more about that later.

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**L**ife along the Menominee wasn't all work, school and sports. We also knew how to hang out and the Niagara Community Club House was the place to do it. The Club House had a soda fountain, a bowling alley, a juke box, pin ball machines, (Haven Ready was the undisputed champ), pool tables, and a gym that really smelled like a gym. The gym was the venue for everything from donkey basketball to professional

wrestling, the state marble shooting championship and some wild pick-up basketball and combat-rules volleyball. Kaye's Restaurant in the old Hohol's Tavern was another place to get a good burger and fries while listening to the latest hits on the juke box.

Music was in transition in the fifties. Many of the popular songs were instructional. One tune told us what to feed mares, does and little lambs. The Ghost Riders in the Sky cautioned us to change our ways and Tennessee Ernie told us what we could expect if we would load sixteen tons. Certainly all sound advice. The big bands and crooners like Eddie Fisher and Perry Como and stylists like Doris Day and Peggy Lee were still popular, but new styles were beginning to worry our mothers. I'll never forget the day we saw the film "Blackboard Jungle" and heard Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock" for the first time. Wow! We were there at the dawn of Rock-n-Roll with Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Buddy Holly and the All Shook Up Elvis.

Dress code of the day for the guys was usually jeans, sometimes with patches on the knees, and probably a plaid shirt. (I guess I haven't progressed much in that area.) There were no designer labels or super-star sport shoes to tempt us. Red Ball sneakers were about as fashion conscious as we ever got, until white bucks came along. For the girls, it was skirts to mid-calf with sweaters or sheer blouses, (always with a slip...and who knows what else). Girls were not allowed to wear slacks in school and jeans would have been unthinkable. I was tall, a lanky six foot four, long of limb and large of foot, so I pretty much wore whatever I could find that came close to fitting, which wasn't much, no matter what those foot x-ray machines showed. (Interestingly, when I got out of the army some years later, I measured only six foot three, but my shoe size had increased by two. Go figure.)

In 1955 the film "Rebel Without a Cause" with James Dean had a serious impact on our wardrobe. I don't think there was a kid from Frenchtown to Shattuck who didn't have a red jacket with the collar turned up after that. After years of getting scalped by Sil Marino while we stared at those two tiny fawns in the glass case, we began to wonder what would happen if we let our hair grow out a little. Larry Waitrovich took it to the limit with a spectacular DA. Have you still got all that beautiful hair today, Doc?

At sixteen we got mobile. Those kids who were born under a lucky star had their own cars, but I felt lucky enough that my mom let me use her car, as long as I had gas money. Now we could go to the Roma in Iron Mountain for pizza, to the drive-in in Quinnesec, or to Aurora or Spread Eagle to look for trouble. We could have a girlfriend from out of town, and when you looked 18, (16 was close enough), you could get a beer at Trout Haven.

A car also made it possible to go hunting or fishing on your own. There were trout and walleye to land in summer and partridge to bag in the fall. Dick Brown and I would often "road hunt" with his '47 Chevy. We'd take turns, one driving, the other sitting on the fender with a shotgun looking for partridge. At one time when Dick was driving and I was riding shotgun, we weren't seeing any birds and Dick started driving faster and faster. Pretty soon we were going so fast that my face was flattened out from the wind and I was clutching the hood ornament with one hand and my shotgun with the other. Then Dick saw a partridge and hit the brakes. I went flying off the fender at port

arms with my legs going like sixty and the rest of me almost as fast for about 20 or 30 yards down the road. When I finally got everything under control, I looked back and saw Dick out of the car and rolling on the ground with that snorting laughter of his. I can't be sure, but I think I heard a partridge laughing, too.

Dick and I had a lot of good times together and I've often wondered which of us was the worse influence on the other, (although in my heart I know that Dick was the one in league with the devil). Dick's mother, Clara, was also quite a character and I think it would be no exaggeration to say that the whole Brown family enjoyed life a little more than the rest of us. It probably peaked for Dick and me the time we spent a night in the Iron Mountain jail, busted for having a little more fun than the law allowed for minors. We sang through the whole night, which likely didn't help our case much.

But all good things must come to an end and in June, 1958, this all became history to the tune of "Pomp and Circumstance." I had no idea what the Magic 8-Ball had in store for me and in the fall I found myself at Marquette University in Milwaukee, mostly because Jim had just graduated from there. At Marquette I played in the marching band at football games and we even played at the Packer games at County Stadium, so that is how I "played for the Packers." (What did you think I meant?)

During college years it was always great to come home to Niagara for the summers. We made paper for KC by day and discussed philosophy at Carol and Bill's bar at night. Some nights after working the late shift we would climb over the fence and do some skinny-dipping in the village pool. The high board was a new experience when you weren't wearing a swimsuit. During the summer you could usually earn enough at the paper mill for the next school year with a little extra for a beer now and then.

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So now here I am, all these years later, teaching English in Prague, trying to explain to the Bohemians how a fat chance and a slim chance can be the same, but a wise man and a wise guy are not. I pretend to teach, they pretend to learn, and no one gets sent to the cloakroom. Each day I walk across a 14<sup>th</sup> century bridge that has felt the footfalls of Mozart, Beethoven, Kings, Queens and Emperors, and the armies of the Reformation, Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin, and I think about life along the Menominee. When I think about Niagara, I smell the Friday night fish fries, and I dream about Lester Kadulski's Polish sausage, (you won't find better kielbasa in all Poland), and Cornish pasties unmatched even in Cornwall. I think about Niagara and I hear the mill whistle calling out to kids lost in the woods, and I hear the telephone operator asking, "Number please." I hear bingo numbers being called at the Polish Picnic on John Zaidel's farm, and I hear a square dance caller at the Grange Hall instructing, "Alamand left with your left hand." I remember climbing the bluffs and catching lightning bugs, snakes and poison ivy with best friends Patty, Jan, Larry, Doug and Jim, and I remember being hopelessly in love with Rita and Marilyn, Judi, Nancy and Janice, Maureen and Margie, Sandy, Darlene and Jane Russell. I remember a dozen dogs (and two foxes!), that bit the paperboy and then the milkman, and I remember a dog named Whiskey who only bluffed. I remember Nuggs thundering around left end with intent to kill, (and he wasn't bluffing), and I remember shooting free throws when time had run out and the game was

on the line. I remember classmates Dick and Doug, Margie and Gary, Jane, Marilyn and Kathryn, for whom time ran out much too soon. Of course Jim and I remember our Mom and Dad with great respect and gratitude: Dad who didn't live to see his boys grow up or play ball, graduate college or find their way in life; and Mom who had to go it alone with two young boys and who made every sacrifice needed to get us ready for school and ready for life.

I remember that during the first week of October, there is no more beautiful place on earth than Niagara, Wisconsin. And I wonder how such a little town, so far from everything, could produce doctors and lawyers, executives and generals, priests and professors. And I wonder even more how such a little town, so far from everything, could produce the mothers and fathers of those doctors and lawyers, executives and generals, priests and professors. We all have to make our own way in this world and we all choose our own path, but we also have to start somewhere and I doubt if there could be any better place to start than up north, in Niagara, along the Menominee.

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**Barry Durand** is a graduate of the University of Illinois. He served in the US Army attaining the grade of Captain followed by a 25-year career in advertising in Chicago. He began teaching in 1993 and has taught at colleges in America and Europe. He is an avid scuba diver and has dived many of the world's most beautiful sites from Timm's Lake to Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Barry is also an accomplished photographer whose photos have appeared in travel, nature, adventure and diving publications. Barry has traveled extensively having visited all 50 states and more than 100 countries on six continents. He is a regular patron of the arts and an authority on irregular verbs.

**Jim Durand** holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Marquette University. He earned his stripes in the Wisconsin 32<sup>nd</sup> Division and is married to the former Trudy Dietrich of Illinois who is also a Marquette graduate. They have four children, all graduates of the University of Wisconsin: Jim, John, Ann (Hickmann) and Joan (Klimpel), and twelve grandchildren, (that they know of), all residing in Wisconsin. Jim is retired from the Wisconsin Telephone Company/AT&T/Ameritech where he was Vice President-Finance. Jim and Trudy have traveled extensively having visited Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa as well as much of America. They are enthusiastic sailors and have skippered sailboats in the Caribbean and Greek islands as well as Lake Michigan. They combine numerous interests and cultural activities with a very active family life. Jim can still ride the unicycle, but he may have lost a step in his basketball game.

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# Niagara Area Historical Society



1<sup>st</sup> Museum  
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