

Senior Stars: Jim Johns

By Karen Miller

No, I am not telling tales out of school. "Senior Stars" is back for this edition of Vernonia's Voice. Well, maybe I will be telling tales out of school. This edition of Senior Stars features a former Vernonia school teacher who happened to be married to one as well. As far as they are concerned, school has been out since 1985.

Did you know that Jim Johns was born here in Vernonia? Things were quite different then, back in 1927.

Jim's father was Scotty Johns, nicknamed "Scotty" since he was born in Scotland in 1896. Scotty spent four years in the Scottish Army and was also a hard working coal miner. Before WWI Scotty's brother Robert joined the Canadian Navy. Jim's dad decided to leave his native land and joined up with Robert in Vancouver, B.C.

On the maternal side, Jim's mother Katherine hailed from DeRidder, Louisiana and made her way here to Vernonia because of the mill where her brother worked.

Jim's parents met here in Vernonia at Koster Logging Camp where she was a "flunky" (or waitress) in the logging camps.

Jim has a sister MaryAnn and they started school at Pleasant Hill on Timber Road. They moved to Koster Logging Camp in 1932. The school, Jim remembers, had three rooms: grades 1, 2 and 3; grades 4, 5 and 6; and grades 7 and 8. When Jim was in 3rd grade they moved to Hines, near Burns, in eastern Oregon. After three months they returned to Vernonia to work at Koster Products.

Jim's mother Katherine worked at a saw mill here in Vernonia during WWII. Both she and Scotty also worked at a shipyard in Portland.

Unfortunately, like many of others in the industry, Scotty didn't get through logging unscathed. He was the victim of a logging accident when a log rolled on him on the rollaway. Scotty spent eighteen long months recuperating. Initially he went to St. Vincent's Hospital. Jim remembers his father in a hospital bed in the hallway and his mother being told to "...go sit with him or he might not survive." She did and he did. Back in those days, says Jim, emergency helicopters were a thing of the future.

Jim graduated in 1945. Well, truth be told, Jim did not actually graduate with his class. Christmas of his senior year he valiantly decided to serve his coun-

try, enlisted in the Navy and was sent to San Diego.

After his boot camp induction, off Jim went to another warm but not so inviting climate ...the Philippines, where he was assigned to Minesweeper #393. For some that job invokes fear—actually sweeping Japanese waters for mines—the kind that can blow you up! Jim describes how the mines, after they had cut the



Jim Johns when he served in the US Navy, 1945-46.

cables, would bob to the surface where they would be blown up by rifle fire.

Does anyone recall the name Max Willis? Jim remembers that the two of them went into the service together, Max going to Officer Training School.

Having survived WW II, after two years Jim was discharged from the Navy. He returned to attend Pacific University, where he majored in business and girls, on the G.I. Bill, graduating after four years.

Jim came back to Vernonia, where there was a shortage of male teachers, and began teaching grade school. He loved his job and especially enjoyed teaching 7th and 8th grade. He taught geography and history, civics and government. Unlike the Jim of high school days, he actually enjoyed cracking the books and learning, attending summer school at Portland State to get

certified for teaching elementary school.

After teaching for thirty-four years Jim retired in 1984. Aside from teaching his subjects, Jim also took to the basketball court and fast lane of the track, coaching both sports in 1954 and 1955.

We need to ask a member of his team, Bill Howard, if there is any truth to Jim's claim that Jim was good at motivating his teams to win the county championship. And also about Jim's fond memories of how he enjoyed taking his sports boys on camping trips to Eastern Oregon. Nostalgic, fun days; Jim reminisces.

No strangers to work, Jim and his school teacher bride Ginger had a farm of thirty acres seven miles toward Mist where they raised beef cattle and had horses, the latter being Ginger's love.

Jim talked of his 1028 Model A that he proudly purchased for, wow!, a whopping \$127 on Union Avenue.

He remembers one night going to two dances, both on the same night mind you, one here in Vernonia and one in Natal. Not sure why that memory also triggers memories of Police Chief Ace Lolly and his three daughters Kathleen, Barbara and Marge, but at any rate, Jim says everyone had nice things to say about that whole family.

He also remembers riding the milk truck around Vernonia with Gwin Graves and remembers the former Pebble Creek Dairy, located where my home is now situated.

Jim and Ginger, who retired from teaching in 1985, have a son Tim who is a building contractor. They have two grandchildren—a granddaughter in Scappoose and a grandson in North Dakota—as well as five great grandkids, aged one to fourteen.

The past two years Jim and Ginger have taken their motor home to Arizona and Cabo in Mexico. They have gone snowmobiling, on horseback trips, to Eastern Oregon, gone deer, elk and bear hunting and enjoyed fishing trips. Now they would rather go by train or fly...perhaps to Monument Valley, Arizona.

Jim and Ginger have spent the last eleven years in their beautiful home their son built. At this stage in their life Jim says he has done many fun, exciting and memorable things, but now, in his opinion, "There's no place like home."

Thanks to Jim Johns for sharing this enjoyable story with Senior Stars and with our *Vernonia's Voice* readers.

The Good Old Days

By Bob New

Call it history, trivia, reminiscence. Not news to most but perhaps of interest to several. The Vernonia "mile bridge." Interesting to some (me) and boring or of little consequence to others.

Perhaps not a mile in either case; I have not measured the distance from city limits or center of town to either of the Nehalem River bridges on either side of Vernonia. Both bridges, as I knew them when living in Vernonia, have been replaced.

Take the one at Riverview. Think of that little road that went straight to the river, from O-A Hill. On the Vernonia town side of the original bridge, there was a grocery store, Zeiner's Grocery. The original and continuing exit from that road takes you to parking at Vernonia Lake, the former Oregon-American Mill Pond and site of the log dump there.

I cannot tell you what year the "powers that be" (Oregon State

Department of Highways?) built a new bridge there. Driving through this little stretch of road you can see where they angled the road slightly, bypassing the Zeiner's Grocery Store, and built the new bridge a few feet downstream from the original bridge. I do think Zeiner's Grocery suffered financially from the slight change that bypassed their store.

For me, it seems that almost every corner or street in Vernonia has some history, event or mishap associated with it. And those two bridges are no exception.

One little kid was drowned in the millpond. And Mr. Hahmeyer lost his life in an industrial accident in the Oregon-American Mill's concrete sawdust house that still stands today. My teacher's husband had a motorcycle accident on the town side of that Riverview Bridge. Two men were burned to death when they came off that bridge, missed the turn and hit the Bill Heath gas station on the

Riverview side.

And the "Mile Bridge" on the southwest side of Vernonia? Now rebuilt and relocated slightly. There used to be a sharp turn on the Buxton side of the bridge. Bill Olnger, making that turn while going to a high school sports event out of town, had a wheel come off his car and wound up off the road there. Two of my classmates, Phyllis Belongia and Eileen Uhlin, lived in the first two

houses there. And a few feet farther on there was another sharp turn, just before Sunnyside Service. Two different people I know turned automobiles over on that curve. And alongside the curve was a house where kids were playing with a gun and an 8-year-old boy shot and killed his younger sibling. And the residence at Sunnyside Service? I was told when first built it was a sawmill. The Roediger Family lived there when I was a kid.

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