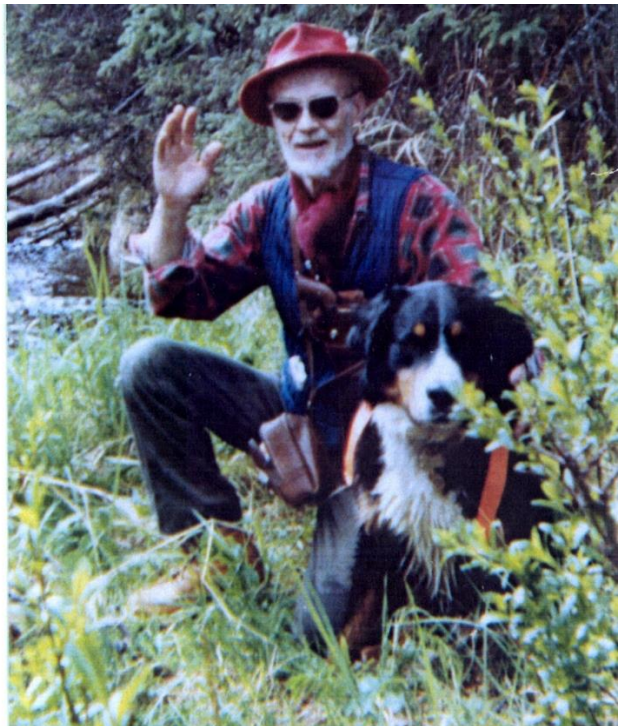
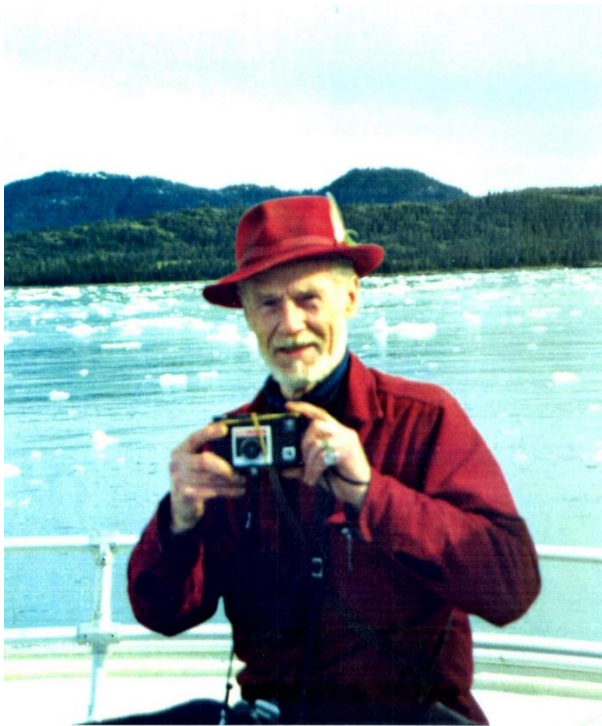


My Father (Alan E. Wicks, 1917-'91) and Me
by Rick Wicks
2022

*Are the sins of the parents visited upon the children
unto the seventh generation?
(Or are the sins of the children visited upon the parents?)*



¹ Left: Al on Prince William Sound; Right: Al with Minor; we have one of his ever-present red hats.

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It seems likely that Alan had problems from early childhood, because he had an older brother (Edwin, whom we called Brownie), and – I’ve heard, from my mother – that his mother (Maud Wicks, née Yost) next wanted a girl, so she dressed Alan in girl’s clothes for some unknown period.

I didn’t know Grandma Wicks well at all: They lived far from us – as we considered it in those days – and we rarely saw them. She had graduated from Oberlin College and then – having grown up hearing about the Gold Rush – headed for Alaska. But apparently she stopped in Valley City in southeastern North Dakota, where she met my grandfather and they got married. Years later her two sons would complete the journey to Alaska. (My father told me this story when I conducted a genealogical interview with him when he was dying of lung cancer. I had imagined that it was the Norwegian – Wicks – side, longing for mountains and fjords, that had taken them to Alaska, but no.)

I didn’t know dad’s father – Frederick Lewis Wicks – well either, though I’m named after him (“Rick” because my parents didn’t want me to be “Freddy”). He was an eye, ear, nose, and throat doctor: Yes, those were all combined in those days. He wrote a book “Your Eye! Light on Sight”, a copy of which I’ve had bound and given to my daughter who is now a doctor. Early on (~1908) he bought potential oil-producing virgin prairie in the northwestern part of the state, which we arranged to give to Audubon – bird conservation organization – as a wildlife sanctuary when my father was dying in 1991.

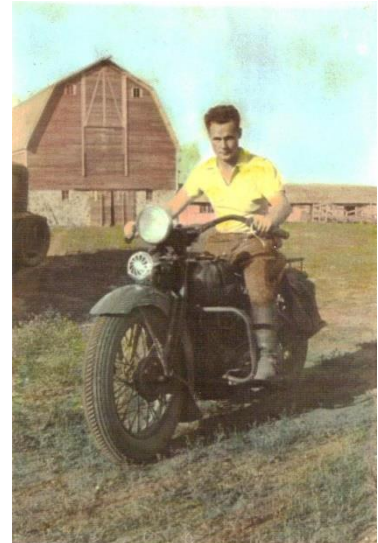
We didn’t know much about my father’s ancestry as I was growing up. We knew that mother’s side was Dutch, deriving from immigrants to (primarily) Iowa about 1850. When I was learning American history – including the two Harrison presidents – dad mentioned that we had Harrison ancestors, but we’ve never found a connection.

Decades later we learned – what perhaps he knew, but wasn’t discussed at the time – that the direct paternal line derived from Norway, in 1849. His other ancestors included English who were on the Mayflower – including John Billington, the first person executed for murder in Massachusetts – and later Germans who fought in the Revolutionary War, and Irish, and more English. Lars Wicks – who came from Norway in 1849 – fought for the Union in the Civil War, as did some Dutch ancestors.

Dad's brother is also an interesting character in this drama. A medical doctor like his father, he – according to daughter Däne who is also a doctor – liked to think that he was a psychiatrist. Once he had his own father – my grandfather – subjected to electro-shock, for depression I believe, towards the end of his life.

After college dad biked around Europe for six months – he was in Rome when Hitler came to visit Mussolini in 1938 – then road a motorcycle to and from Arizona, where he was a grad student and worked in a mortuary.

When we visited Sweden in 1989 he showed the skills he'd learned while traveling in Europe six decades earlier: Looking for a particular book in a bookstore, he wrote down the name and pushed it across the counter to the cashier without saying a word. I said, "You can talk to her, she speaks English," because of course nowadays any young Swede working in a bookstore would be competent in English.



2 Al on motorcycle ~1938

In 1940 dad followed his brother to Alaska, and my mother – Dorothy Gleysteen – followed in 1941 after she graduated college. They got married in Juneau, where my sister Sandra was born in 1943. I grew up seeing home movies of their boating and camping adventures around that area. Once they saw a small plane crash and they – primarily dad, I expect – lined up markers on both sides in two directions, so by triangulation they could report accurately where it sank.

They spent the end of WWII in Los Angeles where dad worked in an airplane factory and took pre-med courses. Then they moved back to Iowa City where I was born in 1946.

Childhood in Iowa City

As a child I looked up to my father very much of course, and he was very involved in activities with me and my 3-year-old sister. Mom and dad used to flood our small backyard sandbox so we could learn to skate, this in southeast Iowa, where likely there wasn't a convenient place to go skating. He made "skis" out of short barrel-staves and tried them on a local hill where we went sledding.



3 Dorothy, baby Sandra, Al, Christmas 1943 in LA

Dad had a variety of jobs when I was young: milk delivery, machinist, carpenter, even helping to build the Red River dam. He was always trying to educate us: For example,

once he taught me and several friends about all the sizes and types of nails, what they are called, etc.

When one of president Eisenhower's cabinet secretaries spoke at Herbert Hoover's birthplace in nearby West Branch – beginning the fundraising effort to create a Hoover presidential library and museum there – dad took me to experience this little bit of history.

At the State University of Iowa (SUI, as it was called at the time), where he worked and studied, we went to a “mountaineering” club where travel slides were shown. At home we played Pirate and Traveler – a world travel game – and learned geography.

Once I think I walked in on my parents when they were having sex. They were surprised, but dealt with my immediate question or concern, and I didn't think more about it, though that vague memory stayed in my mind.

Once the word “penis” got mentioned at the dining table, but I have no recollection of the context, and probably got the feeling that it wasn't really something to talk about, so didn't.

Lake Okoboji

Mother and Sandra and I – and sometimes dad – spent much of every summer at Lake Okoboji in northwest Iowa, where mother's family had a cottage, which I still own with some cousins, and visit occasionally. Dad had been a summer student at the nearby Lakeside Lab when he and mother met.



4 The cottage at 1005 Miller St. in 2017, with Millers Bay in the background



5 *The cottage in the 1950s*



6 *Okoboji seen from the cottage in 2013*

Dad didn't always go to the Lake with us, but one summer – in the back of Little Millers Bay opposite the cottage – he and I built a little wikiup out of willow trees and branches and spent the night there. A fierce storm blew up and mother – worried that we couldn't make it back across the Lake on our own power – called the Lake Patrol who came and towed us home.

Though dad liked mother's mother – Henrietta Arnold Gleysteen, née Hospers, called "Dora" – I think he wasn't comfortable with mother's two brothers and their families, so he didn't spend much time with us at the Lake. We were always there with relatives from one or both families. But once when he was there we mixed and poured concrete for a step at the outside door to the back-corner bedroom.

One year – since water-skiing had become a thing – dad made a “surfboard” that we pulled behind our heavy wooden boat with 5-horse motor, just fast enough that I could stand up on it. Sixty years later, I found the board when cleaning out under the porch.

The University

Dad had a mentor at the university (Prof. L.O. Nolf) who was traveling over Christmas one year and needed someone to feed his dogs, one of whom was pregnant. Dad arranged for me to have this “job” in exchange for getting one of the part-beagle puppies.

I chose the runt of the litter, who had spots over her eyes the color of light brown sugar, so I named her Sugar. She died years later – when I was in college in Annapolis – when my parents were driving to Fairbanks in mid-winter, slid off the road and banged into something, which scared her. When they opened the car-door she dashed out into the subzero (Fahrenheit) weather and probably froze her lungs. She didn’t return despite their calling for her.

Probably Dr. Nolf also arranged a canoe trip we took along the 11-Point River in southern Missouri during spring vacation one year. I learned to make “farmer’s breakfast” – eggs scrambled with fried potatoes, cheese, onions, and perhaps bacon mixed in – and enjoyed making that at home after we got back.

Dad was a zoologist and made a large terrarium for me in my room with land plants and wetland and maybe frogs or snakes or who knows what. Having been a milkman, he had kept a few large milk cans which we used for hauling pond or river water and whatever we might want to take home in it, such as little translucent freshwater shrimp we found in the Mississippi.

At Okoboji one year I rowed the big wooden rowboat at night while he stood in the front with a headlamp and speared garfish for a study of their pituitaries.

In Iowa City he worked at the rat lab and I helped feed and water the rats. He was helping with cancer research, painting cigarette tar on the rats’ backs to test for reactions.

He smoked off-and-on most of his life. Sometimes he would send me to the grocery store to pick up a pack of cigarettes for him. But we didn’t know any better. In college I sometimes carried a pack of matches because fellow students often asked for a light.

Thirty-five years after the rat experiments, dad died of lung cancer, as had his brother – as noted, a medical doctor – a few years before.

Dad himself had started medical school in Iowa City – the same year I was born – but dropped out during or after his second year. In a genealogical (and obituary) interview I conducted with him when he was dying, he said he’d dropped out because he had young kids and a coal furnace to feed. But I checked his transcript later and – perhaps

stressed by raising two young kids and feeding the furnace – his grades hadn't been very good.

When he was dying, he encouraged his doctor to autopsy him, which the doctor did. He said about dad, "He should have been a doctor."

Guns

When dad died we found over 50 guns in his house – handguns, rifles, shotguns – some loaded. And lots of ammunition. But he wasn't into automatic weapons, and he wasn't a survivalist or a right-wing revolutionary. Both of his parents had been hunters, and he liked guns. And he had a sense of humor. When Sandra got married, he gave her and Bruce a matched set of dueling pistols.

He was a hunter and fisherman and loved to go camping. Sometimes I went along duck hunting, leaving very early in the morning in order to be at the pond where there might be ducks before dawn. In the darkness, the glow of his cigarette lit his face as he drove.

He taught me to fish, and to shoot using a little Winchester Model 62 .22-pump rifle that I loved, popping cans tossed into the Iowa River south of town until they sank. We would hunt pigeons at a farmer's barn near a slough off the Cedar River. Using birdshot, I'd shoot one inside the barn, then – when others flew out – he'd shoot another with a .410 shotgun outside. We'd go fishing – or hunting squirrels – and perhaps shoot another pigeon or two on the way home. Mother made a good pigeon potpie.



7 Fishing in North Dakota 1953

But – being a kid – I couldn't keep up with him in the woods – hunting for rabbits, for example – and I grew resentful that he didn't seem sensitive to that. You can ask my kids: I repeated this behavior with them, to some extent, when looking for mushrooms.

Once when we had been hunting, dad took a picture of me holding the .22 rifle upright on a log. Presumably proud of me, he had the picture blown up. But his university-museum friend John Rohner noticed that pretty clearly the rifle had been cocked. One only cocks when preparing to shoot. How could we have taken a picture with the gun cocked?

They called me into the dining room and asked if I remembered who'd been carrying the rifle before we took the picture. I answered proudly that I had been, though in retrospect I don't know if I really remembered that – several weeks after the event – or just thought it was the expected answer, or wanted to claim it. Then they said the gun appeared to have been cocked. How embarrassing, humiliating!



8 Posing with the gun apparently cocked

Later we were out hunting, going through the woods, him ahead, me struggling to keep up, and I had a flashing thought that I could shoot him. That scared me: loss of innocence, awareness of evil.

He bought me a .30-30 deer rifle for my 11th birthday and had John Rohner engrave it with my name and the year.

Creative but inconsistent

Dad had been an Eagle Scout and, after I joined the Cub Scouts, he became our Pack Leader. During a summer camp-out he led a bunch of us on a night-time expedition looking at insects attracted to bait-stations we had put out earlier.

Dad made this “racecar” for me in 1953. I have no memory, perhaps because the steering probably didn't work very well.

When I was learning about the Spanish Armada attempting to invade England in 1588, he suggested we could make a model Spanish galleon. We glued pieces of wood together and were then going to carve it down to make the hull. But – as became typical later – the project got sidetracked and never finished.



9 Dad's ingenuity, but perhaps deficient steering?

A crossbow was similarly left unfinished. Undoubtedly the genius of his vision far outstripped his time available, and probably my attention span as well, not the last time that would happen.

Friends and I went around the neighborhood – including nearby fraternities and sororities – selling Cub Scout cookies. Dad drove us over to the city park on the other side of the river where young couples parked on Sunday afternoons. They were almost sure to buy cookies, and we sold record amounts.

Going to Alaska

As I grew older I helped with projects around the house like jacking up the porch or sanding down and painting the little one-wheel trailer that we used when we drove to Alaska when I was 11.

Dad had finished his Masters in Zoology AND gotten an elementary teaching certificate – he said he wanted to teach younger kids because college students didn't even know how to spell – and he wanted to return to Alaska. He got a contract to teach 6th grade in Anchorage.

Perhaps my parents almost split at that point? Dad had just remodeled the kitchen in our large house – 703 E. Jefferson – with wonderful knotty-pine cupboards, and we had built foundations on which to add a first-floor bathroom. Mother had found and bought the house when, for some reason, she came back from California ahead of dad – where he worked in an airplane factory at the end of the War – with 3-year-old Sandra, and me in the tummy. Now perhaps she wasn't sure she wanted to go back to Alaska, so she stayed to teach first grade another year.



10 The front of the house ~1946



11 The side of the house and garage 2009

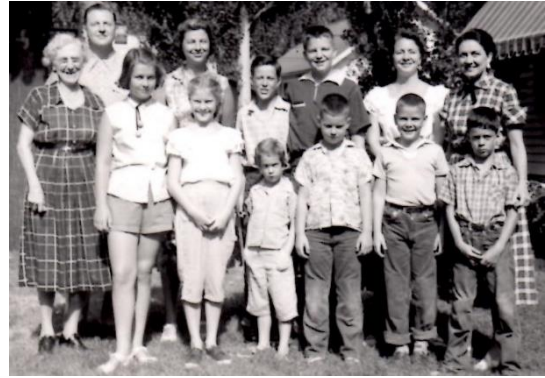
Dad proposed that Sandra and I drive up with him, at least for a short while. I wasn't as enthusiastic as he thought I should be about moving to Alaska, leaving behind my neighborhood



12 Me, John Linder, & John Corcoran plus sisters and mothers for neighborhood birthday party 1956

friends, my school, the Lake where we went every summer, and the relatives that we saw there.

Alaska sounded very special, but also very far away. And sure enough, after we completed the move, I didn't get back to Iowa for five years, and otherwise had only once made it Outside – as Alaskans refer to the “Lower 48” – briefly, to the Seattle World's Fair, the year before.



13 Grandma Gleysteen and her clan, me third from right in front

Dad said “What's wrong with you? Most kids would give their right arm to go to Alaska.” Not especially sensitive, and probably not especially true either, if the proposition was leaving your home and friends behind, rather than just visiting.

But he and Sandra and I drove up in the late summer of 1957, when Alaska was still a Territory, that is, before statehood. It took two weeks, partly because our '52 Nash Rambler broke down in Sweet Grass, Montana, right on the Canadian border. It took three days to get parts and get the car repaired. We camped out and cooked for ourselves.

The Alaska Highway – after we got to Dawson Creek in northern B.C. – was gravel and super dusty through the Yukon and probably much of Alaska. Choking dust leaked into the car constantly for over 1000 miles.

But Alaska was exciting. Uncle Brownie lived in Anchorage and we moved in with him at 2610 Northrup, later renumbered 2666. He had a small seaplane – or “floatplane”, as Alaskans call them – and he took us flying.

We landed and had lunch in Homer at the end of the Kenai Peninsula to the south. I ordered a hamburger, but it was a bit pink in the middle. Dad, as a zoologist, was aware of the possibility of trichinosis IF there was pork mixed with the beef – which seemed highly unlikely to me – but he wouldn't let me eat the hamburger. Why we didn't just ask them to fry it – or broil it or whatever – a bit more, I don't know. These trivial things stick in my mind.

We saw huge salmon spawning in ditches along the side of the road, quite amazing to us kids who'd grown up trying to catch little fish off the dock at Okoboji.

After three weeks, Sandra flew back to Iowa to start high school – 9th grade – with her friends.

Alone with dad

I stayed for the first semester, into January. We went squirrel hunting in areas that are now well-developed – both in what is now Midtown and up on the Hillside – and drove north to Lake Lucille at Christmas hoping for caribou, but didn't see any.

Going into business – or trying to – was a consistent theme of dad's life. During the Depression he had picked and sold berries. Now we collected aspen cones and sprayed them silver to make Christmas decorations. Dad suggested we could make lots and sell them. "Make 10,000 and sell them to tourists" was a repeated refrain. "Wixcraft" was the name of his fantasy (or dream) business. His "brand" – which he often marked on tools – was "WIX".

Dad was teaching at old Central downtown, and it was more convenient for me to go to and from with him than to go to the local school, Lake Otis. So after class I would hang out in his classroom, or visit tourist shops admiring "Alaskana": for example, little totem poles made to sell to tourists, or Eskimo dolls. We often went over to the YMCA or to the White Spot café to get a hamburger after school.



¹⁴Dad's first 6th-grade class, 1957- '58, photo provided by Nikki Phillips, third from right

Dad and I enjoyed grocery shopping and cooking meals together: Bell peppers stuffed with hamburger and onions was an easy favorite. In the evenings he taught me about the classes of vertebrates from fish to amphibians to reptiles, birds, and mammals, and the evolution of the heart from one to two to three to four chambers. He also taught me about chemical bonding, for example, hydrogen and oxygen uniting to form water (H₂O).

Since every summer in Iowa we were used to going to "the Lake" – where my parents had met – we scouted for a replacement. Before we realized it was part of the

Elmendorf Air Force Base gunnery range – and therefore out of bounds for private development – Lake Lorraine across Cook Inlet caught our eye. It was barely large enough to land on, but Brownie flew us over to check it out. A few years ago Hendrik and I drove by – there's now a nearby road – and I spent “an eternity” gazing at it, memorizing the lake, which looked just as I remembered it.

We had spotted a moose from the air, so – since doing so wasn't illegal at that time – we dropped our gear and set out through the woods after it. We misjudged how far we'd gone and – when we headed back – missed the lake and spent a cold October night huddled around a small campfire, on which we roasted a tiny squirrel dad shot, accompanied by a few berries we found.

By morning – listening to the pattern of aircraft coming out of Elmendorf – dad said he had figured out where the lake must be. We got back to our gear just as Brownie arrived to pick us up. On the way we found a downed target-drone that had been towed for gunnery practice, and realized we'd been in an off-limits area. Now it's open to development and very close to where a Knik Arm bridge will cross if it ever does.

I caught a bad cold and spent several days in bed, during which I heard and read about Sputnik, the first manmade earth satellite which the USSR had just placed in orbit. Brownie had a shortwave radio with which it was fun to try to tune in broadcasts from far away, including Russia.

Dad arranged a “job” for me cleaning up a local fur shop – David Green's – on Saturday mornings. I must have gotten paid a bit, but also exciting was that I got scraps of fur from various animals: rabbit, fox, hair seal, fur seal, lynx, I don't remember what all.

By now I was in love with Alaska and wanted to stay longer – especially for Fur Rendezvous and dog-sled racing in February – but the agreement with mother was that I'd come back at the semester.

The large Northwest-Orient Airlines propeller-plane flew from Anchorage to Edmonton, then on to Minneapolis, where I changed to a smaller plane to Cedar Rapids where mother and Sandra met me. Of course it was cold, mid-winter, so dad dressed me in army-surplus mukluks – triply-insulated boots – so in case the plane crashed in the Canadian wilderness, I could walk out!



15 My 6th grade class at Horace Mann Elementary School in Iowa City; I'm third from left, middle row

Red-tailed hawk

Dad flew down after school was out and we packed up our possessions for shipment to Alaska. A farmer acquaintance of dad's called and asked if we'd like a young red-tailed hawk that had fallen out of its nest. Sure!

Dad thought maybe we could train the hawk like a falcon, for hunting. I searched the library for articles about training hawks, and we shot crows out in the country with which to feed it. Or at least that's what he told the police. He had made a "silencer" out of a small orange-juice can and – out my bedroom window – we used the .22 to shoot blackbirds in the apple tree in back. A neighbor complained: I guess the silencer hadn't worked so well. But the police bought dad's innocence act.

I don't know what we were going to do with the hawk when we left for Alaska: We couldn't very well take it in the car with us. We drove to Seattle, probably taking a week to do so.

Before we left, the hawk escaped from the garage where we kept it: Perhaps one of my parents let it out? It hung around town and got itself photographed in the local paper that fall, when someone managed to capture it again. I probably have that picture in storage at my sister's house in Alaska.

Moving to Alaska

On the way to Seattle we must have visited Grandma Wicks in North Dakota – Grandpa had died the previous winter – and, before that, a last visit to Lake Okoboji and mother's relatives there – then dad's cousins in Montana, and Glacier National Park.

Somewhere in western Montana or Idaho we stopped at a roadside tourist shop where dad became enchanted with famous Indian chiefs' portraits, Chief Joseph among

others, painted on plywood cut out in the shape of large arrowheads, perhaps two feet tall. We couldn't afford them, and it was very hot. The rest of us wanted to get on the way again, so went out to the car.

Dad finally came out with a bunch of these paintings which he had bought. After he died we found them still bundled together, nothing ever having been done with them.

But we had honored the Indians and the environment that they understood better than most of us at the time, or now. Dad was an environmentalist before his time, though he also saw himself as a museum person, and shot birds he planned to mount but never did anything with, which we found in the freezer after he died.

Remodeling the house

We flew to Anchorage and moved into the house my uncle sold to us. Immediately we started remodeling, and I helped a lot, with running errands to pick up materials and with the work itself. I hated being bored, though, and frequently was, because dad could talk endlessly with people along the way, and then, when I thought we were heading home, there was just one more errand to do. I learned to take a book along to read.

We took out the old garage door in front, built a wall with windows instead, expanded our living room into that space, then added another bedroom – which became mine – in the middle section of what had been the garage, and left a storage area in back.

Soon we also started building a new longer garage on the other side of the house, with a carport in front and a “shop” – never used as such – in back. We dug deep holes and poured concrete foundations at the corners and other strategic points – mixing the cement ourselves, of course – then added cement blocks up to ground level. Then we built a wooden structure on top, with a loft area for storage above, though the whole thing ended up as storage, never used as an actual garage for cars.



16 Adding carport, garage, and storm entrance, 1958



17 The house in 2012 (trees we planted have grown up) showing carport/garage on the left and storm-entrance we built in front



18 The "shop" in 2008

Science Fair

During 7th grade I entered the Science Fair, or rather, dad and I entered: He had the ideas, and I helped implement them. From corks we cut disks and pinned them on both sides of leaves of houseplants, blocking light. After some weeks we removed the disks to reveal a pale circle with no chlorophyll, thus demonstrating the effect of (lack of) sunlight on plants.

Then – because it would be hard to preserve and present the affected leaves – we “photographed” them. In a “darkroom” we sandwiched the leaves with a piece of photographic paper between two glass plates and exposed them to light, then developed the “photo” to show a light leaf with a dark circle where light passed through more easily.

Naturally we wrote up the “theory”, procedures, and results in an attractive display, and I won a prize! But who actually won the prize, me or dad?

Dad was always eager to share his scientific knowledge. Perhaps consequently, I never developed much interest in the details of nature. I could always ask him, and be assured that I’d hear more than I wanted to hear. My kids have sometimes complained about my similar tendency when asked about history, political events, etc.

Talkeetna

Dad had a teacher-friend who had land near the railroad at Sunshine south of Talkeetna, so we went up to check out that area. On the map I spotted a large, long lake – Larson Lake – up the Talkeetna River, in the foothills about five miles east of town. It was federal land, open to entry, if that’s the right term. Over Christmas 1959 dad and I camped there – dropped off by a famous bush-pilot, Don Sheldon, with a

plane on skis – and tramped out compass lines on the lake in order to stake out a 5-acre headquarters site, a 5-acre homesite, and an 80-acre trade and manufacturing site, on which we filed claims.

I had moved on to Boy Scouts and enjoyed doing a plumbing merit badge with the troop leader, who was a plumber. Years later I would be plumber at Tassajara – Zen monastery – during two practice periods.

One summer dad and I hiked through the mountains – with my Boy Scout troop – up Indian Valley southeast of Anchorage and then out past Arctic Valley and down Ship Creek. Typically, dad stopped to examine plants and whatever along the way – telling me about everything, of course – so by the time we caught up with the rest, they were ready to move on, and we never stopped (albeit moving much slower).

But I got turned off by the regimentation – uniforms, saluting, etc. – which felt vaguely fascistic. So I dropped out of Boy Scouts. I expect dad was disappointed, though I don't recall our discussing it. I just stopped going.

Summer at Larson Lake

The summer after 8th grade – 1960, when I was 13 – dad and I camped at Larson Lake for two months, getting resupplied occasionally by floatplane. I felt quite isolated but had a battery-powered radio with which I could listen to world news. We made trails, cleared a cabin site up on a shoulder overlooking the lake, carried materials and equipment up there from the lakeshore, and started to build a cabin.

Near the outlet to Larson Creek – at the north end of the lake – was a stand of very large ferns. True to his “business instinct”, dad suggested that we could harvest and sell them to florists. But there weren't really so very many – and we'd have to fly them out – would this really be profitable?



19 Al in 1960

I was becoming old enough where I wanted to exert more autonomy over my activities, to be included in planning, which dad didn't seem to recognize or know how to deal with. Since he was aware of all the details of what needed to be done, he started each day by telling me what I should do. I became expert at anticipating that moment and, instead, announcing what I myself planned to do, something that I had figured out might be important, but quite possibly not what he had planned.

I guess he accepted that, but I felt vaguely subversive and there was a lot of unresolved stress in the relationship. A cooperative planning process would have felt better, but he didn't seem to know how to initiate it, nor did I. And I suspect that I repeated this behavior much later, with our son Hendrik when he was about the same age and we visited our wilderness land – which I purchased later – near where Larson Creek runs into the Talkeetna River.

Mother had been at Okoboji visiting her mother and other relatives. At the end of the summer she came out to Larson Lake too. One day I apparently decided to clean my gun – the .30-30 that dad had given me – and suddenly a shot fired off through the end of my tent, followed by an overwhelming stillness while the explosion echoed in my brain. I was terrified, not knowing exactly where mom and dad were. After a terrible reverberating silence, they called out if I was okay. One can only imagine what fear they felt. Thank God I hadn't hit one of them.

Why had there been a shell in the chamber? I have no idea how I could have fired the gun. Another exposure to the unconscious?

Whether that had anything to do with it or not I don't remember, but mom and I soon went back into town to get ready for school, and dad stayed longer, to close up for the winter.

My father was notoriously late for appointments, for dinner, whatever. As mentioned, over the years I had run lots of errands with him – to the lumber yard, the hardware store, etc. – and it very often happened that there was just one more errand, and then one more, and it dragged out very long.

Sandra also remembers waiting to be picked up downtown at the library – Anchorage had no public transportation at the time – waiting and waiting, until dad finally arrived, long after the agreed-upon time. I'm sure mother could add multitudes of such stories.

Brownie had agreed to fly in and pick up dad at a certain time on a certain day – after mother and I had gone back to town – shortly before the start of school, when dad would start teaching again. But dad wasn't ready, and – I can imagine – wasn't in any particular hurry either. He just seemed to expect people to go along with him, to wait for him, to help him.

Brownie may have also experienced this many times before – perhaps it had been going on all dad's life? Brownie apparently said "I'm leaving now, get in if you're going," and dad said he couldn't leave yet, because all the materials and equipment weren't stowed, covered up for the winter, whatever he thought was necessary.

So Brownie started the plane and taxied away. Dad took a rifle and fired a shot across his bow to let him know he was angry.

Now dad was a good shot. As he explained later – and I believed him – if he'd wanted to hit the airplane, he would have. But Brownie was having none of it. Would you, if you'd been shot at?

And Brownie was in a position to do something about it. He was the Public Health Commissioner for the State of Alaska – a member of the governor's cabinet – so he

knew the Public Safety Commissioner. He called and had the State Police bring dad out for a few days examination at the new psychiatric hospital.

We were all totally shocked, and I can't say that I reacted well. I was starting 9th grade. Can you imagine how embarrassing this was? I wanted nothing to do with my dad. That entire school year I avoided him as much as possible, speaking to him only when spoken to, or perhaps only when I needed or wanted something.

Reverberations

I left myself handicapped during that very important year – which didn't go especially well – and for years thereafter, and perhaps still. For many years – for decades – I sometimes tensed my jaw in a way that reminded me of dad, and I was deathly afraid that I would be “just like him”. Even after he died, I hadn't gotten completely over that. I mentioned it among the family, and Sandra's husband Bruce said reassuringly, “But you're your own person.” I had to acknowledge that that was true.

It might well have been during that year that dad and I were in the bathroom at the same time, he trimming the hairs in his nose, which probably tickled, or he thought didn't look nice. But being young and not having experienced those problems myself, I criticized: “Why are you doing that, they're natural” – as though everything that's natural should be left as-is. Meanwhile I was probably putting pomade in my hair in order to comb it into some bizarre look.

I don't remember what I did the following summer, when I was 14, before 10th grade. Perhaps that was when dad, his teacher-friend Jean MacLane, and I hiked up the ridge above Tin Can Creek in Turnagain Pass, southeast of Anchorage, looking for whistle-pigs (marmots, woodchucks).

We didn't find any, but there was a ptarmigan that would make a nice dinner. Mac took a shot and missed. Presumably hoping it hadn't been seen, the bird remained motionless. Using the .30-30 that dad had given me, I shot its head off.

In 10th grade I met and was totally smitten with classmate Alicia Selkregg, whom I eventually got up the nerve to call and ask out on a date. I wasn't old enough to drive but – at least once – dad drove us downtown to see a movie at the Film Society, and picked us up later at the nearby Hofbrau House where we'd gone for a coke. I remember that time because it was very icy and we spun out on a dark deserted stretch of road, recovering without any damage.

In early summer after 11th grade, dad met a young man from Outside who was heading to Whittier on Prince William Sound in search of a job at the Columbia sawmill. I had thought to go to Iowa – using money I'd saved from working at a vet clinic – but decided to go along to Whittier, and ended up getting a job pulling green-chain as lumber came out of the mill.

After the Great Alaskan Earthquake – March 27, 1964; magnitude 9.2 – I talked with my girlfriend (Deidre) and thought to go see the “fissures” that she reported near where she lived. Dad forbade me to go. There was tremendous chaos, so he was right that this wasn’t the time for such a frivolous enterprise, but I left anyway, going instead to check on the animals at the vet clinic, where I was again working, after school and weekends.

At the end of 12th grade I had the highest grade-point average and was elected to give the valedictory speech at graduation. With prodding from my English teacher (Joan Baxter), I wrote a decent second draft – after a much poorer first attempt – but dad read it and said it was a “call to revolution in the streets” and he wasn’t coming to graduation. It’s appended at the end, you can be the judge.

I discovered not long ago that the phrase “century of the common man” – which I referred to in the speech – was popularized by Henry Wallace in 1942 and might have been a red flag for dad, since Wallace was (I think) widely perceived (on the Right) as a dangerous radical. Though mother mentioned how shocked she’d been when FDR died – since he’d first been elected when she was only 12 – both my parents had grown up in (presumably Republican) professional households in the conservative Midwest.

I had been accepted to St. John’s College, as well as Dartmouth – both of which were quite expensive – so I applied for student aid. But Dad refused to fill out forms that demanded information about income level without taking into account the high cost of living in Alaska. So instead he – and mother, of course – ponied up the money themselves.

I was named to the first group of Presidential Scholars so flew to Washington, DC for ceremonies and then stayed – running an elevator in the Senate wing of the Capitol during the summer – before starting school at St. John’s in Annapolis in the fall.

Classmates building cabins

Given our interest in the area, my sister Sandra visited Talkeetna and heard that Eddie Barge – who had a homestead on Question Lake south of town, close to the highway – might sell us land. Dad made a deal with him for a parcel extending along the shoreline and back to the section-line to the north – perhaps 20 acres in total, I think – but the deal wasn’t recorded in writing, and dad’s subsequent monthly payments didn’t make clear what he was paying for. This was dad’s second bad real estate transaction – after filing on land we couldn’t prove up on at Larson Lake – and it also didn’t end well: After an expensive, futile legal suit, we ended up with about one acre on Question Lake. Perhaps as a consequence – after becoming a lawyer – Sandra specialized in real estate law.



20 Senate elevator I ran in 1964 (photo 1990)

During the spring of 1965 – when I was back in Annapolis after Christmas vacation at home – dad wrote suggesting that I bring some classmates to help clear brush and build cabins at Question Lake as well as on the land we'd staked out at Larson Lake. On a college bulletin board I posted an invitation – no wages, but living expenses paid – with pictures of the Alaskan wilderness.

Four fellow male freshman – with whom I hadn't previously been acquainted, since I knew almost no one – signed up to go. One female fellow freshman also asked to go along. Why not?

The parents of one of the guys (Kerry Nemovicher) had an old station wagon that they were willing to "donate" for the cause – otherwise I don't know what the plan would have been for us all to get to Alaska – so we six piled in and headed northwest. The American Automobile Association (AAA) suggested a route west by turnpike to Chicago, but I suggested we cross into Canada at Niagara and traverse north of the Great Lakes, which we did. We drove more or less 'round-the-clock, with three sitting in front and three sleeping in back, with the back seat laid down flat.

I was the driver for one shift, Kerry for the other. Once we bathed in a VERY cold melt-water stream, and later in Liard Hot Springs, much more pleasant though less exciting. When we got to Anchorage, after a week or so, I took us on a short tour of the city, earthquake damage, etc., but the others were naturally eager to get to our house and get cleaned up.

We were in and out of town several times that summer. One of the guys (David Simon) had brought his guitar along and found a little club where he played the Blues, and I was smitten: In fact I was listening to the Blues as I wrote this.

I raced my dad's '63 Chevy Carryall on the gravel Talkeetna road one day with the guys, which was a mistake because it had a broken strut on the right-front axle which dad had supported with a "splint", and now the splint broke. Not the first time my poor judgment would show up that summer!



21 Al (in the middle) visiting cousin Bill Wicks and his wife Hazel in Lewistown, Montana, when driving the new '63 Chevy Carryall to Alaska two years earlier

We made a good start on building a cabin at Question Lake before we got flown out to Larson Lake where we framed out another small cabin and started a third.



22 *The Question Lake cabin with new roof and skylight in 2012*

Nancy Franklin

On the way to Alaska I had started falling in love with Nancy Franklin – the young woman who had asked to go with us – and that relation continued to build during the summer. She got a job waitressing downtown but stayed at our house, while Mother went to Okoboji to visit her mother and other relatives.

After sending me into town for some reason, then coming in himself early the next morning and finding me in bed with Nancy, dad said she could no longer stay at our place but would have to get a place of her own.

Back at Larson Lake, I hiked way up on Bald Mountain where I could see over the Susitna River Valley back towards Anchorage. I decided to walk out to Talkeetna and go into town to try to convince mother – who was coming back from Iowa – to allow Nancy to continue living at our house. THAT may have been the craziest thing I ever did, certainly one of the stupidest. What was the chance that mother would disagree with dad about this? Zero.

But I did it. I got up early the next morning – having told the guys what I was going to do – and walked a mile down Larson Creek to the Talkeetna River, then some miles down

the south side of the river towards Talkeetna. I got about halfway by early afternoon when – exhausted by circling around wetlands and fighting through devil’s club thickets – I spotted a guided party on the other side of the river. I got their attention and, when they were finished fishing, they came over and picked me up.

I had abandoned my classmates and my father at Larson Lake. This was bear country and, though sometimes one can follow moose trails, it can be nearly impassable without a trail. Dad was presumably worried about me, and understandably furious at my leaving without telling him.

When he got back to Anchorage – I was sitting in an easy chair near the front door, probably reading the newspaper – I don’t know where the other guys were – he approached me with a note in his hand. When I reached for it, he socked me in the nose.

Many years later I had a doctor straighten my nasal septum, which I suspect got damaged at that moment, causing air to flow into my nostrils unevenly and drying out the membrane on one side. I don’t remember what dad’s note said.

At the end of the summer the guys drove back across Canada. I didn’t go with them – probably because Nancy had decided to stay in Alaska, and I didn’t want to leave so soon – so I must have flown later. Dad bought the guys some fresh clothes to thank them for their work. I have remained friends with two of them – Kerry Nemovicher and Jonathan Zavin – and have had friendly contact with David Simon too, so I guess they weren’t completely turned off by my bad behavior.¹

Losing the land

Eventually – after paying for an official survey and lots of materials, as well as flying them and ourselves out to the lake – we lost all three claims on Larson Lake because we hadn’t met the prove-up conditions. How – when both my parents were teaching school in Anchorage – could we prove-up on a home-site which required living there more than half of the year for three out of five years?

How could we show that we needed an 80-acre Trade & Manufacturing site when dad’s idea for it was to leave it “as is”, with tent-platforms and trails so that naturalists and biologists (like himself) could come from universities Outside to experience Alaska? Why would they pay us for that when they could experience wilderness anywhere else in Alaska for free?

We should at least have gotten the headquarters site, but – since we had built a cabin, and started building a second, on the homesite – it was hard to show that we were using and needed the headquarters site, so that claim was denied too. Unfortunately I – who, ten years later, might have been able to deal better with the government bureaucracy – wasn’t yet ready to do so.

¹ The fourth was Michael Gessner, with whom I’ve not had contact since that summer.

Eventually we also lost most of the land that dad thought he was paying Eddie Barge for. Land developers convinced Barge – who was known to drink too much, and may have been easy to manipulate – that he should only acknowledge a one-acre Wicks parcel and should sell them the rest, which they subdivided and re-sold for (presumably) a large profit. As noted, dad spent a lot more money on lawyer’s fees trying to fight this, but without written evidence of what he’d paid for, it was good money after bad.

A fun postscript: One time when son Hendrik and I were in Alaska, Sandra paid for him to have a few flying lessons out of Talkeetna, one of which was on floats. And they did a touch-and-go landing on Larson Lake!

We’ve also hiked in there – when at our own wilderness land at the mouth of Larson Creek – so we’ve seen the remnants of the cabins we built. If I had a lot of money I would fly in there and cart out to a disposal site all the junk we left there. But – presumably taking advantage of the surveys we paid for – someone else owns the property now, so I guess it’s their problem.

Prince William Sound, then Santa Fe

After my sophomore year in Annapolis – when, during the spring, I worked for a sailboat-rental marina and sailed Chesapeake Bay, sometimes at night – I got a job with the Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game as a stake-out guarding salmon streams in Prince William Sound. Soon I was promoted to running a patrol boat, the 24-foot flat-bottomed river-skiff Barracuda. I learned to nurse the temperamental 18- and 40-horse outboard engines and loved exploring the Sound.

As planned from the beginning, I transferred to St. John’s in Santa Fe for my last two years of college, hitching down from Prince Rupert, B.C., after a short end-of-summer stint as stake-out outside of Ketchikan. I bought an orange '52 International

pickup truck for exploring New Mexico, and didn’t return to Alaska until after graduation, which mother attended.



24 Rick & Antigone at graduation
(photos by Dorothy Wicks)



23 Rick with '52 International pickup truck 1968

Teaching in Alaska

Facing the draft and not clear what to do next, I returned to Alaska, and encouraged my college girlfriend (Antigone Phalares) to go with me. She stayed with us at our house at first, though again my parents were not comfortable with our cohabiting in their home, so she soon got a place of her own. I should have moved in with her at the time, but I wasn’t ready to take on the responsibility of a mature relationship.

Probably because of my experience in Prince William Sound two summers earlier – and perhaps in an attempt to repair our relationship – dad had bought a boat similar to the one I'd run. I was on to other things, however, and not much ever happened with that boat.

After a variety of short-term jobs, I got hired late in the fall to teach 4th & 5th grades (except math) – plus 8th grade history – in a remote Indian village (Nondalton), because some teachers there had been transferred to replace others killed in a plane crash. Meanwhile, I applied and was accepted to attend Starr King School for the (Unitarian-Universalist) Ministry in Berkeley, which provided a draft deferment, though I also convinced myself that it would be good for my personal development, which it was. Eventually I also convinced the draft board – actually, the second one to consider the case – to give me Conscientious Objector (CO) status, and later I got a high lottery number so missed the draft in any case.



25 Rick at New Year 1969

Berkeley, Napa, Tassajara

Starting while I was still enrolled at Starr King, I spent more than a year commuting to Napa State Hospital, first volunteering, then working with severely autistic children, which I loved. Thinking to become a psychiatrist, I started studying pre-medical sciences, but had also visited Tassajara Zen Mountain Center (monastery) and then started sitting zazen (Zen meditation) at the Berkeley Zendo.

After a year living at San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC) – and taking pre-med classes at SF State – I dropped out of school and went to Tassajara. During the summer – when it's open as a hot-springs resort – I worked as cabin-cleaner for guests, then spent two practice periods, through the winter, as plumber.

Doing taxes in Alaska

Throughout these six years in California I had corresponded with my parents via letters to mother – technically to both – and letters from her, including occasional financial support. While I was at Tassajara, she became anxious that IRS agents were going to come and arrest them because dad hadn't filed their taxes for a few years. We had rented out our old house in Iowa City and dad had gotten flummoxed – by expenses perhaps not properly reported by the rental manager, by depreciation, etc. – going easily into one of his negative spirals where nothing was possible because of because.

With that in the back of my mind, I returned to Alaska after the year at Tassajara. I went with mom and dad up to Question Lake, which outflows into Question Creek which flows into Sunshine Creek and then into the Susitna River. A little earlier, as we passed, dad said "There's Answer Creek." I said, "Where's Answer Lake?" He said, "There is no Answer Lake," and I got angry at what I took to be his too-clever and superior tone.

During summer and fall I had a variety of jobs: cement plant at the port, construction on Elmendorf Airforce Base, house construction (carpenter, electrician).

In early 1975 I got a job as assistant at a small tax and accounting firm, where I learned the principles of tax preparation and reinforced my confidence that I could deal with tax forms and regulations. After working on commission and making a lot of money – relatively speaking, for me at the time – I helped mother file three years' worth of tax returns and, since they didn't owe anything in that period, we called it good.

Dad's exposure to Zen

With a girlfriend (Anne Colleen Connally) – who, although it was her idea, dropped out before we opened – I started nonprofit Butterfly Children's Center to provide daycare for preschoolers as well as older kids after school.

To simplify birth control, Colleen suggested that I get a vasectomy. Not having been happy with the way my childhood turned out, I had no desire to have kids of my own – certainly not any by accident – but I didn't want to make such a decision under pressure from her.

After we split, however, I thought, why not? On the preliminary questionnaire – where it asked how many children I had – I put 40 (in the daycare center).

After a year directing Butterfly, in the summer of 1977, I took a month's vacation, including a few weeks at San Francisco Zen Center's Green Gulch Farm across the Bay Bridge in Marin County. At my invitation, dad came to visit for a few days.

Mother had visited me in San Francisco before I moved into SFZC and we had visited Tassajara for a few nights. But this was dad's first experience with Zen. He sat zazen with us – probably on a chair – and felt right at home. He said it reminded him of waiting in a blind for a deer to come by. He collected unused fruit fallen on the ground and made jam, labeling the bottles so carefully that someone commented how Zenlike he was.

Financial rescue in India

In the spring of 1978 – after another eight months running Butterfly – I took a five-month trip, along with one of the daycare mothers (Margie Yanagawa), to Japan, China, Thailand, Burma, India, Nepal, and back through SE Asia and the South Pacific.

In Calcutta – trying to get a better rate on the black market, as we'd done successfully in Burma – I stupidly let myself get swindled out of our traveler's checks. We filed a claim



26 Rick in Butterfly office with Dorothy who volunteered to help us get started, 1976

for replacement – claiming, falsely, that the checks had been stolen – and fortunately had enough cash to get to Darjeeling to get out of the pre-monsoon heat. There we tried repeatedly – with great difficulty and not much success – to call Barclay’s Bank in London to find out where our replacement checks were.

It couldn’t have helped that, when we were in northern Thailand, I had previously genuinely lost my traveler’s checks – another stupid story – so mine had already been replaced once, in Bangkok. Finally my father wired us \$500 with which we could continue our trip.

After Bodhgaya and Varanasi we spent some weeks in Pokhara and Kathmandu, Nepal, then flew back to Bangkok, where we got our checks replaced (or in my case, replaced again). Whether I ever paid back my father for that “loan”, I don’t recall, but wouldn’t be surprised if I didn’t.

Divorce

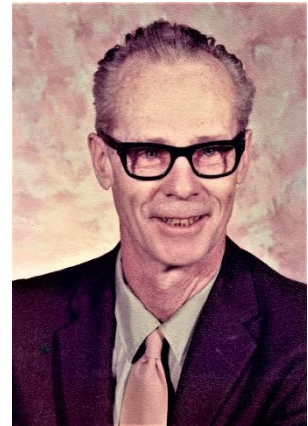
In 1979 my parents separated and mother moved to Eugene, Oregon. I was struggling to make sense of my life, getting involved in various pop-psychology self-help groups – Re-evaluation Counseling was one – and had become clear that I didn’t like being around more than one of my family at a time, because the emotional cross-currents among mother, father, sister were too much to deal with.

I’d met socially – and then done pro-bono (i.e., free to me) counseling with – Dr. Marie Doyle, professor of psychology at the University of Alaska-Anchorage (UAA). We’d become friends and I occasionally went with her to her cabin on the bluff overlooking the Homer Spit, five hours south of Anchorage. Once I invited dad to go along.

I didn’t remember, but Marie reminded me later that, on the way down, dad smoked in the car and then had been quite withdrawn during the weekend. I said, “Why? Did you say something about it?” She said, “No, you did.” I’m guessing that I had reproduced negative behavior that was so standard in our house that I hadn’t even thought about it, or what effect it might have.

I was living in a large house at 2638 Redwood Street in Rogers Park that I owned together with six other people. We organized a large party to which I invited dad and his new girlfriend Penny.

Penny lived across the street from dad. When I was in Hawaii coming home from the South Pacific in 1978, I’d arranged for a bouquet of bird-of-paradise flowers to be sent to mother. For inexplicable reasons she’d given half of them to Penny, and – she told me later – told her that that was my wish. What? Why?



27 Al in the 1970s?

I don't know what had happened to Penny's husband, who was a heavy-equipment operator, but now apparently he had died or they'd split. Dad took up with her after he and mom split. Mother wondered if they'd even gotten together in some way before the separation.

I doubt if I specifically invited dad AND Penny to the Redwood Street party – though I might have – but I didn't mind his bringing her. But she spoke to me so familiarly, like I was part of her family, and she of mine, that I didn't like it. It really turned me off, which probably showed. Soon I think she moved to the Pacific Northwest and dad only saw her when traveling through.

I proposed to dad that we should spend a few days at the cabin at Question Lake. But when I went to pick him up at the agreed-upon time, he wasn't ready, not even close. I got angry and left.

Seeing him on the street later – at a distance – I turned a corner immediately so as not to encounter him. I'd had enough.

In late winter 1982 Sandra invited me to dinner to meet her fiancé, Bruce Phelps. They planned to get married in the summer. I said clearly, I think, that I wouldn't be able to attend unless we could get dad into some kind of counseling – individual or family, whatever – before that. Sandra put it off, saying that we could deal with that later.

I didn't think so, and – ungrateful brother that I was – didn't attend the wedding, though I did send a congratulatory telegram. I just couldn't face being with all my family at the same time.

Four years later – after I'd met Ellinor in Bangladesh and she'd come to Alaska from Sweden and we were getting married – Sandra and Bruce graciously attended our civil ceremony and then took us out for dinner afterwards. Dad later attended when we had a Buddhist wedding.

Ellinor in Bangladesh and Sweden

I'd met Ellinor in Bangladesh after spending 1983 traveling in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal. Sensing a deep compatibility – and wanting to present myself honestly – one of the first things I said to her was that I'd had a vasectomy. That didn't put her off.



28 Naturally, in honor of Ellinor's Swedish heritage, I wore a Sami (Lapp) shirt I'd bought in Finland

I wrote to dad at some point – while still traveling, after meeting Ellinor – that I thought he would like her: “She’s a good shot and likes frogs.” And sure enough, they got along well.

Even before I went to Europe – where I spent 1984 – I’d come “home” to Iowa for Grandma Gleysteen’s 100th birthday. Dad didn’t come for (his ex-wife’s mother’s) birthday, but he sent me a present – a warm but light, blue down vest – that I got a lot of good use out of in Europe and afterwards.



10 Grandma Gleysteen's 100th birthday with her three kids John, Carl, and Dorothy, their cousin Rod, and of course many grandchildren were there as well

After I'd returned to Alaska – totally broke after two years of traveling – and gotten a job as bookkeeper for a title insurance company, I produced a few weekly slide shows with pictures from my travels. Dad and a few friends attended.

Wedding in Alaska

Ellinor came to Alaska for the summer (1985). We hiked in to our land at Talkeetna Bluffs and started dreaming about building a cabin there. One time dad went along with us. Another time Ellinor's mother Märta – who had come from Sweden – went with us.

Sometimes we took along dad's wonderful half-Bernese Mountain dog Minor – which Ellinor had been doing obedience training with – and he obeyed very well, sticking right

with us when we came across a black bear sow on one side of the trail, her cubs on the other, and we three backed slowly, slowly away.

Ellinor had won a “family portrait” at a local studio, so we all – including Märta and dad, whom the photographer assumed was her husband, as well as Bruce’s daughters Heather and Alyssa, plus Minor, who got overly excited and peed on Sandra’s leg – went in for the photography session.

[PHOTO?]

Dad had always been a hoarder, which had both pluses and minuses. On the plus side, when I needed or wanted something, he could say, yes, out in the garage, by the pillar towards the back, just inside the outer wall, you’ll find it. And he’d be right.

But when mother was laid up with back problems before retiring – she was too tall to be stooped over all day teaching kindergarteners, compounded by the stress of living with dad – the living room started filling up too. After she moved out, it continued filling up.

Dad was visiting the Midwest – North Dakota where he’d grown up, Kansas City where his brother lived – and I convinced Ellinor to help me clean up the house for him, since I had a key. We got rid of masses of old newspapers, empty containers of various sorts, far more than anyone could ever use.

On the floor in the middle of the kitchen were bags full of groceries he’d brought home but never shelved. He didn’t need six more canned chickens, because he already had four in his cupboards, but there they were, perhaps driven by insecurity from growing up during the Depression. I sorted and shelved everything, then took the doors off the cupboards so he could see what he already had.

We were nervous how he’d react when he got home. We decorated with a large sign labeled “Papa Al’s Grocery Store” and planned a welcoming party. Sandra had the great idea to invite his long-time friend Jean MacLane, whose presence made it even harder for him to get angry, if he’d wanted to. The party went off well, he seemed to accept our clean-up.

[PHOTO?]

Ellinor and Märta and I borrowed dad’s camper truck and drove up to Denali Park, then across the Denali Highway from Cantwell to Paxson. One morning Märta decided that she’d seen a bear when she went out to pee, and – giving us a wink – she determinedly stuck to that story ever after. Being unused to driving the big truck, I banged into something with the side of the camper, but it wasn’t too badly damaged and dad didn’t complain.



11 Märta with Al 1986

After we got married on 6 June 1986, dad took us – with his camper – first to celebrate Midsommar (the Summer Solstice) at Portage with Sons of Norway, then for a “honeymoon” to Eagle, on the Yukon River, and – at my suggestion – over to Dawson in the Yukon Territory. I joke that the Wicks motto is: “Since we’re here, why not go there as well?”



12 '69 VW station wagon outside our apartment in DC

After our Buddhist ceremony in September – when, at the informal “reception” at a friend’s house afterwards, dad read a sad poem he’d written about a child dead and buried on the prairie – Ellinor and I packed up my '69 VW station wagon and drove to Washington, DC. I worked for the Assn. to Unite the Democracies (AUD) and we found a nearby apartment at 260 16th St. in a heavily Black part of Capitol Hill Southeast where we enjoyed getting to know some of our neighbors.

DC and Annapolis

Dad came to visit with his other dog, Sera. It being much warmer in DC than in Alaska, he shaved her and – piling up the fur he’d shaved off – said “there’s enough for another dog!”

We visited Annapolis – where I’d spent two years at St. John’s – and he did one of his usual “tricks”, lagging behind us, then disappearing into a store he found interesting, without telling us, so that we turned back, wondering where he’d gone.

One day Ellinor said to me that she wanted to have children with me. Could my vasectomy be reversed? She’d trained and worked as a nurse, so volunteered to research the question. Beyond five years was doubtful, and it had been eleven years, but it might work. She found a doctor in Charlottesville, Virginia, so we made an appointment and drove down for the operation.

Christmas in Sweden

In December 1989 Ellinor flew to Göteborg to spend Christmas with her family. Dad and I met in Oslo and took the train to Stavanger to check out the emigration museum, trying to find out where his Norwegian ancestors Lars and Magdalena Wicks had come from.

In Anchorage we had started researching all ancestral lines – maternal as well as paternal – but hadn't come anywhere with the Norwegian lines. At the museum they asked if we knew the patronymic (Lars' father's name) and the parish, but those are the things we didn't know.

Much later – with help from Ancestry.com – we found the answers: Lars Anfinnsson from the Vik Farm at the head of Matersfjorden across from Skånevik in old Hordaland. "Vik" – which became Wicks in America – refers to a bay, probably related to Vikings: people from the bays (or fjords). Magdalena came from the Rygg farm on the other side of the fjord.



29 Vik Farm, photo by Wicks-descended cousin Amy Case August 2018

We stayed at a youth hostel in Stavanger. After breakfast provided in the morning, dad suggested that we could make sandwiches to take with us for later, as he'd probably done when traveling in Europe fifty years earlier. I was aghast, thinking it wrong to steal from this presumably non-profit operation, when we could afford to buy lunch.

But the ferry to Bergen had very nice reusable placemats showing the route we took through the islands, and I wanted one. Dad pointed out my hypocrisy, having criticized him for suggesting taking sandwiches, but now taking one of these myself without a second thought. Perhaps I thought this was a for-profit operation, so it was okay? Not that that follows, of course.

After looking around Bergen we took the train back to Oslo, then on to Göteborg. After a few days with Ellinor's family there, they drove and – since the car was too small for all of us – we took the train to Linköping, marveling at the purity of universal white Christmas lights in the dark countryside.

Along with Ellinor and her parents and sister Annica and her husband Ole, we then spent Christmas with Märta's sister Dora and brother-in-law Filip at their home. With their kids and families, we sang Beatles songs, followed the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania on TV, drank vodka and howled like wolves. Some of us even got up early for church service Christmas morning.

Dad wanted to use a phone to give a Christmas greeting to Brownie's widow, his sister-in-law Milly. Early in the day, I mentioned that we'd need to go to a payphone, since Ellinor's family didn't use others' phones for long-distance calls. He said he would put the charge on his credit card, but I explained that that was a no-go because, what if a charge showed up on a relative's bill later? Or what if it didn't – because at that time Swedish phone bills didn't itemize calls – but they merely suspected that it had been included in their charge? That could cause hard feelings!

Late at night, dad said now he'd like to make that call. I said, then we'll need to go find a payphone. He said, with apparent frustration, "I don't know ANYONE who wouldn't let someone make a call charged to their own credit card." I said, "Now you do." After all, this was Sweden, and Ellinor's family: Different rules applied.

On "Second-Day Christmas" (known in the UK as Boxing Day) – since Linköping is home to airplane manufacturer SAAB (Svenska Aeroplane AB) – we visited the Swedish Air Force Museum. In typical fashion – exhibiting a trait that I sometimes share – dad lagged behind, reading every exhibit. I stuck with him, impressing father-in-law Mårten and his brother-in-law Filip with my filial devotion.

Dad was to fly home from Copenhagen so he took the train there. On boarding, he couldn't find his train ticket, but Mårten assured the conductor that he had one, so he was allowed on.

Later he told us about his adventure at Kastrup Airport. He had unthinkingly packed his passport in his checked bag, which was already checked in when counter staff asked for it. He was invited back into the baggage area – perhaps the only passenger ever, he said proudly – looking through thousands of bags so he could find his own and retrieve his passport!

Lung cancer and death

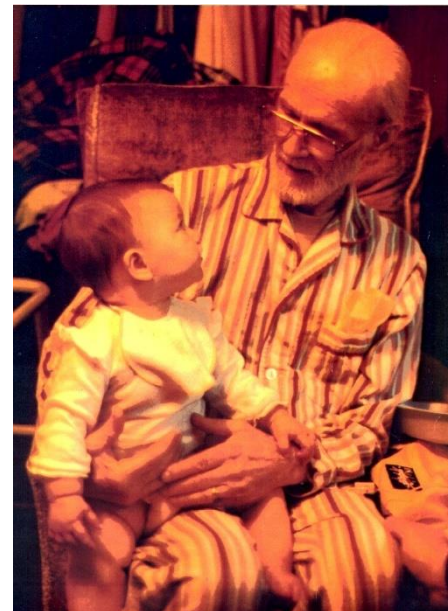
After smoking on and off all his life, dad was diagnosed with lung cancer during summer 1991. I flew out to Okoboji where – although they had been separated for over a decade, and the divorce was final in 1984 – he was visiting mother. Because he was too sick to drive himself, I drove him up to Valley City, North Dakota, where he'd been born and still managed a small somewhat decrepit office building that he'd inherited along with my cousins.

I told Ellinor – whom I called on the phone while he “napped” at the far end of the large living/dining room – that I thought it was a spiritual journey, going home. I thought I was speaking quietly, but he croaked, “It’s practical! It’s practical!” He was a scientist – with a Masters in Zoology – and apparently saw himself as nonspiritual.

Our relationship had gotten better since I met Ellinor, but I felt a real breakthrough on that trip to North Dakota when he was dying. He started doing his usual deprecatory routine: “Oh, you couldn’t possibly understand...” about some real estate issue. That was his cover for not being able to think things through and explain clearly. I said, “Just cut the crap and tell me what you’re talking about,” and he did.

Ellinor, baby Linnéa, and I flew to Anchorage – once dad got back there, staying at my sister’s because he could no longer live alone – and I told him a couple stories about Zen masters dying: One in which the master sends out postcards to friends and relatives saying, “I’ll die tomorrow,” and then does. Another in which the master asks – if Zen students die sitting zazen, and masters die standing – has anyone ever died standing on their head? And then did. His sister came by the next day – he was still standing there, upside-down – and pushed over his dead body, saying “Brother, you’ve been defying the laws of man and nature your whole life, enough!”

We returned to Alaska a month later. I’d had to return to DC because I was the only person doing monthly payroll, financial statements, etc. for the Boston Institute for Developing Economies (BIDE). He died the morning after we got back the second time, having been holding and playing with Linnéa the night before.

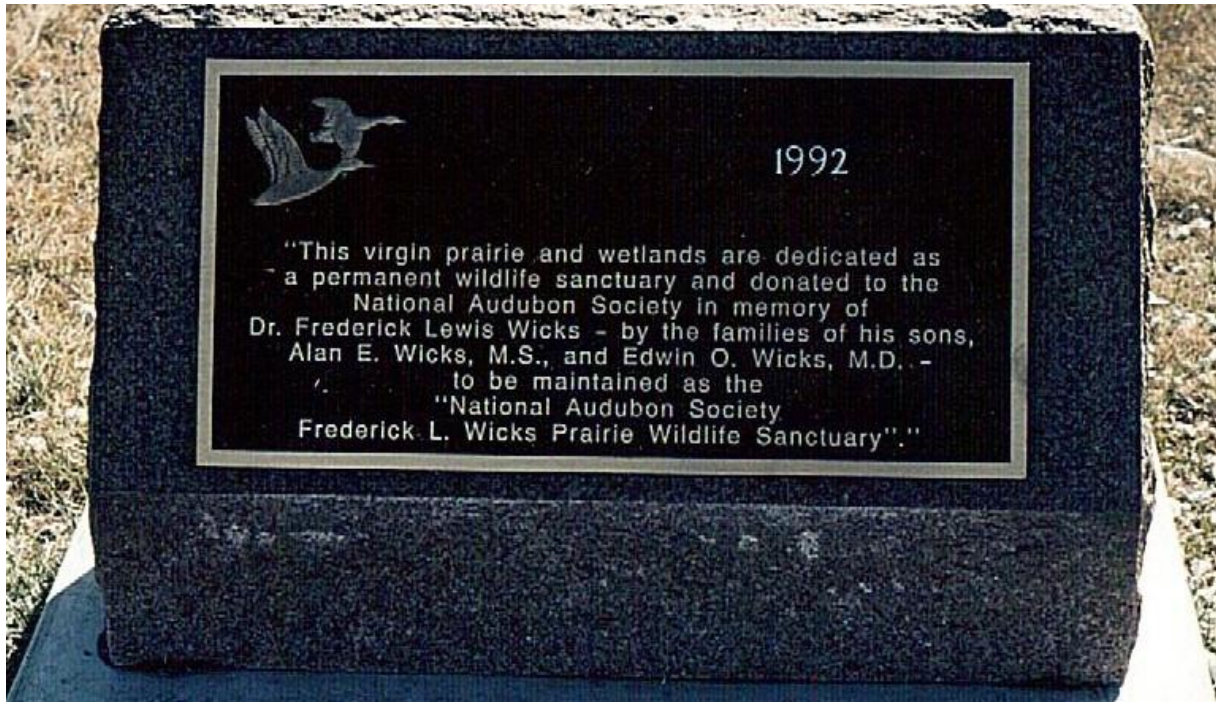


14 Linnéa with Al the night before he died

Before he died, we discussed donating grandpa’s 400 acres of virgin prairie and wetlands in northwestern North Dakota to some conservation organization. It had been split to dad and Brownie, then Brownie’s half split to his widow (Milly) and his four kids. But the decrepit office building in downtown Valley City also had the same divided

ownership. We convinced Milly and the cousins to swap their shares of the land for dad's share of the building.

Once we had clear title, we donated the land to Audubon as the Frederick L. Wicks Prairie Sanctuary, and made clear that it had been donated by the families of his sons, Edwin O. and Alan E. Wicks.



Obituaries

Alan Wicks

Alan Wicks, 74, died Sept. 20, 1991, at his daughter's home in Anchorage. He had smoked for 55 years and died after lung cancer spread throughout his body.

The longtime Alaskan was born March 31, 1917, in Valley City, N.D., to Frederick and Maud Yost Wicks. With help from his family, Mr. Wicks was able to make one last trip to his boyhood hometown before he died.



Wicks

Mr. Wicks was an Eagle Scout and a Cub Scout Pack leader. He graduated from Valley City High School in 1934, attended Valley City State Teachers College and graduated from State University of Iowa in 1938. He returned for graduate studies in museum science, public health and zoology. He worked summers at SUI's Lakeside Laboratory at Lake Okoboji, Iowa, where he met his wife-to-be, Dorothy Gleysteen. He also attended pre-med classes in Los Angeles and worked in a war plant making aircraft bushings. He earned his master's degree in endocrinology and his teaching certificate.

His adventures include six months bicycling around Europe, including Italy and Germany in 1938.

He moved to Juneau in 1940 where he worked as a bacteriologist, serologist and lab technician for Alaska Territorial Public Health and later for the Corps of Engineers. He married Dorothy in July 1941. He worked in cancer research in Iowa City, as a carpenter, in a machine shop, ran a milk route and on the Red River dam.

The family moved to Anchorage in 1957 where Mr. Wicks taught at old Central, Denali, Government Hill, North Star, Wendler and Nunaka Valley schools until he retired in 1977. He was president of the Anchorage Teachers Credit Union and served on the Board of the Anchorage Hostel Association.

Mr. Wicks was an avid outdoorsman and naturalist, hunter and fisherman. He built cabins on Larson Lake and Question Lake near Talkeetna. He loved to ski and won the senior division ice skating championship at the Anchorage Fur Rendezvous many years in succession, including 1991.

He was an outspoken advocate for the environment, enjoyed genealogical research, was a sculptor, poet, artist and amateur architect.

His is survived by his wife, Dorothy, daughter, Sandra; son, Rick; and numerous other relatives.

Donations in Mr. Wicks' memory may be sent to the

American Cancer Society, the American Youth Hostel Association or the environmental organization of your choice.

Private family services were held at the bedside before removal of his body. At Mr. Wicks request, an autopsy will be performed for research purposes followed by cremation. Ashes scattering ceremonies will be held in various locations at a later date.

15 In the Anchorage Times, the result of the genealogical interview I conducted with dad at Okoboji

This is what dad said was a "call to revolution in the streets" so he didn't attend my graduation.

Commencement Speech
Frederick L. Wicks
May 26, 1964

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests, and Graduating Seniors:

It has been said that ours is the Century of the Common Man. Our sociologists study him; our novelists explain him; our poets praise him; and our politicians seek his vote. Truly, there are more of us commoners than there are of any aristocratic groups among us. We work more and we play more, and we are the final and basic source of power in this country. But, I think that if this is really the Century of the Common Man, it is so because the Common Man has the opportunity to be great, not because we must all be common.

Greatness is both a public and a private thing. It may mean leadership in political, economic, or academic fields. It may also mean the living of a great life -- an original, independent, but personal life. Either way, in public or in private, greatness comes from individuality, for those who are to be great must be different.

We are thus faced with a challenge. We can surrender to a great impersonal society, or we can rebel. I say, we must seize the opportunity to be great. We must pick up the gauntlet and accept the challenge. We must dare to be different; sometimes, we must even dare to be the same. But whatever the outward manifestations, we must live by our own lights and march to the beat of our own hidden drums.

It seems that there are three basic qualities which are necessary for one to lead such an independent, intelligent life. They are idealism, initiative, and flexibility. We must first dare to set our goals high, to be idealistic, to challenge the practical world of reality. Then, we must have the courage and the initiative to follow our ideals wherever they may lead. Finally, in pursuit of our goals, we must be aware of all that is happening around us and take it all into consideration. We must dare to break the rules, whether written or unwritten, where they are inapplicable.

And where does this individuality and independence get us? First, progress comes from change, and change from rebellion against the status quo. Those who can rebel can change, and they will progress. Secondly, life itself is a challenge, to be lived with all our senses awake. It cannot be lived and enjoyed fully if our minds are bound by artificial fetters. So I say, let us accept this challenge; let us cast aside the chains of orthodoxy; and let us live truly great lives.

Frederick L. Wicks

From what I've written above, it likely isn't apparent that I've lived a "great life", but you'll have to admit that I've managed to break a few rules along the way. 😊