

Romance at the Old Mill Dance Hall



It was fifty years ago, and this is what I remember. It was also a most wonderful time of my life, I might add.

January 12, 1957 was my first visit to the Old Mill. The music was grand, "Good Ole' Fashioned Dance Hall Western Music."

Let me tell you how this all came about.

On June 30, 1956 soon after my graduation from Entiat High School in eastern Washington, I boarded a Greyhound bus headed for Seattle. My father, John S. Olin, tried to put on a brave smile as he kissed and hugged his little girl good-bye, but I saw the tears. I told him I would be back often and not to worry about me. My school buddy, Doris Huffman, and I were going to start a new life in the big city and become rich.

The dream of young girls in those days was to become a movie star, a famous dancer, or an executive secretary. Of course, I wanted to be all three. Never doubted that I could do it, not for one moment. I was just a country girl from an apple ranch on the Columbia River, but I had big ideas (I guess I read too many movie star magazines). In the 50s innocence abounded, so the road ahead was clear, and without any fear I contemplated the future.

My girl friend and I were picked up at the Seattle bus station by my Uncle Claude Cooke. We stayed with him and his wife for about a week. During that week I found a job at Frederick and Nelson department store, took an orientation class on how to be a sales clerk and was immediately put on the floor to work. I was required to wear a suit and high heels which was a disaster (I was used to blue jeans, sweatshirt and saddle oxfords). Each purchase had to be written down in a sales receipt tablet, each sales receipt had seven carbons, and the pages were numbered. I could not get it right!! Some sales were cash; some sales were charge. "Charge?" The word was not in my vocabulary. I had never heard the word "charge" in my life.

Because of the pointy-toed high heels, after one hour I was unable to walk. I had to buy myself some slippers. And I limped out of Frederick and Nelson. A lesson learned. I was no glamour girl, and a job that required me to dress to the hilt and wear high heels was out of the question. I decided a glamorous job was not worth the pain. No executive job for me!

My Aunt Blanche Yatsunoff (who had worked at the telephone company for years) pulled some strings and I was hired at the General Telephone Company. I became a draftsman. Great job--casual dress--no high heels!

Doris found a job too, and we soon found our own apartment. We went to Woolworth's and bought 4 glasses, 4 plastic plates, cups, saucers, bowls, 2 little tin pots, a frying pan, and a toaster with sides that came open (someone must remember those). We got 2 sheets, 2 pillow cases, and 2 pillows. We then went grocery shopping. I remember so well what we bought: orange juice, 1 loaf of bread, 1 gallon of milk, 2 cans of Spam, 2 cans of beans, 2 lbs. of potatoes, 2 cans of tomato soup, and 1 box of crackers, 1 lb. of flour, 1 lb. of sugar, and 1 quart of milk.

Our first apartment building still stands at East Madison and East Union with 13th Avenue cutting behind it. We did not stay long in this apartment because the door into our apartment consisted of French doors covered with wallpaper. Besides one night we thought we saw someone burying a body down by a billboard in the alley. Our imagination ran away with us, and we nearly scared each other to death. It took us a month, but we found a safer place.

Our new apartment was in the Texado at 1128 13th Avenue in Seattle. It is still standing and is still an apartment house.

Over the Christmas holidays in 1956 I traveled via train over to Entiat to see my family. Upon my return I found that Doris had moved. She had found a place closer to work. She had taken with her 2 glasses, 2 cups, 2 saucers, 2 plates, 2 bowls, 1 pot, and 1 frying pan, 1 sheet, 1 pillow case. (I got the toaster which I still have today.)

As the story continues, I was working at the General Telephone Company as a draftsman. The General Telephone Building was (is) on East Madison. Here I met many local girls from Auburn,

Kent, and Puyallup. One of the girls, Norma Johnson, had a brother living in Seattle. He said "yes", and so goes the story of the rest of my life.

It was January 12, 1957. We spent hours primping. Norma, Sandra, MaryLou, and I were picked up by Norma's brother at 6 p.m. on the dot and were on our way to the "Old Mill". Upon arrival the music was playing and people were just having a wonderful time. It did not take long for nice gentlemen to ask us to dance. Oh, the music was great. Good ole western music. We never sat down the whole night. There were soldiers from Fort Lewis and airmen from McChord Air Force Base. There were many more guys than girls.

Along came the most handsome man I had ever seen in my life and asked me to dance. He was so polite that he called me "Ma'am". He told me he was from California. Well, I thought everyone from California was a movie star. His name was Jack. As I think back, "movie star" must have meant really really handsome to me. I only danced one dance with Jack that night. I kept looking for him, but there were so many dances and so many men to dance with that I lost track of him. When the dance was over, we girls got back into the car and headed for home, but we were hungry so we stopped at "The Mint Cafe" on Cole Street in Enumclaw for a much deserved hamburger and fries and a shake. Let me tell you, after all that dancing our curly hair was straight, our makeup sweated away, we had grit in our mouth, and even our teeth were dirty from the sawdust we had ground up on the dance floor. I think we wore out our shoes, too. Luckily we had Sunday to recuperate because it was 7 a.m. to work on Monday.

AT THE MINT

As our food was being served, guess who walked through the door. Jack!! There he was again, smiling at me with these perfect white teeth, coal-black hair, nice casual suitcoat, just as neat as a pin. . . . I thought to myself. . . I look awful. . . too late now, he had taken a seat beside me and pinned me in the booth. He had some buddies with him, and we all talked until the early morning hours. I gave him my name, address, and telephone number. (I still have the paper that I wrote it on.)

The next Saturday night we girls headed for the Old Mill to do it all over again. I sat in the canteen at the Old Mill for a little while waiting for my special guy (Jack) to come through the door. Then all of a sudden I saw another guy even more handsome than Jack. He had coal-black hair and a light aqua-colored jacket. I said to myself, "To heck with that guy I met last week. I am going to go out of my way to meet this guy." As I nonchalantly moved toward him, he turned, smiled, and to my surprise he just happened to be named "Jack" also. He politely asked me to dance. Infatuated and googly-eyed, I accepted.

While we were dancing, I smelled something just awful. It was a very bad smell. I wanted to get away from him, away from that smell, so I excused myself to go to the restroom. In the restroom there was plenty of commotion. The girls were wiping mustard off their sweaters and dresses. I did not have any mustard on me, so I began helping the other girls. It was so funny, and everyone was

laughing. I emerged from the restroom laughing so hard that it made my stomach hurt. Outside Jack was waiting for me. He took my hand and we started to dance. Then Norma asked, "My gosh, what is all over his jacket?" He turned around and the whole back of his jacket was covered with stinky mustard. Every person we had bumped into on the dance floor had mustard on them. Rumor had it that some girl was mad because I had stolen her boyfriend. I am guessing that when we had danced past the canteen, she had squeezed a whole container of mustard on the back of Jack's coat.

From that day forward "Jack" was called "Mustard" within our circle of friends.

As time went on, the number of girls going to the Old Mill increased from four to ten. My Uncle Ed Pierce had moved to Seattle. He had an old 1949 GMC Suburban. He was a very trusting person and told me that I could use the truck on Saturday night to go to the Old Mill. His daughter, my cousin Rondella, wanted to go too. I had to travel via the metropolitan bus out to Alki Avenue, pick up the Suburban, drive all over Seattle picking up the ten girls. We sang songs and just had the greatest time driving out to Puyallup. Mary Lou was scared to ride over the railroad tracks. We had to drive over one set of railroad tracks to get to the dance. When we crossed the railroad tracks, she always closed her eyes, kicked her legs, and screamed. We always laughed. And the tracks were a sign that we were getting close to the Old Mill. The excitement mounted and we rolled down the windows and burst out in unison singing, "Give us some men who are stout-hearted men . . . and so on. (This song was sung by Nelson Eddy in the musical "Stouthearted Men" with Jeanette McDonald.) We would arrive at the dance, meet our boyfriends, and dance all night.

Sometimes we would get to the dance early just so we could all get a chance to dance with one special guy we called "Little Elvis." It was only safe to dance with him before his other fan club arrived (on motorcycles). When they arrived we faded into the woodwork. Boy, that kid could really do the "Bop."

Somewhere in this memoir I must write about the music and the dance. There was a song the band played called "Pink Cadillac." It was probably a two-step. There was a drum crescendo which turned into a tom-tom sort of beat. Everyone was bopping and stomping the floor in rhythm to the drum. This dance was called "The Old Mill STOMP." The drummer would play the same beat for about four minutes and then instantly STOP. . .the entire band was silent. Everyone just kept dancing to the beat, and that building rocked on its foundation. Believe me, it was a test of endurance. You never knew when the band was going to fire up again. No matter how long it took, no matter how long we stomped, no one ever got out of step. It was a sight to see.

One cold Saturday night in April 1957 we could not use the Suburban. We did not care. No matter what, we had to go to that dance, even if we had to walk the fifty miles. Aunt Blanche and Uncle Bill finally gave in to our whining and begging and decided to take us to the dance. Like good sports, they drove all over Seattle picking up

the girls. After awhile they were having a good time too. Our laughter and fun was just too contagious. By this time the usual group of girls had increased to ten plus my two cousins. Only six of us and one of my cousins went that night. Aunt Blanche and Uncle Bill reminded us repeatedly that we would have to find our own way home. We told them we would walk home if we had to; we were not about to miss the dance. We wore extra heavy coats that night. Fifty miles in winter was a long way to walk.

We were just getting into the "Old Mill Stomp" when something landed on the floor at my ankle. It looked like a rock. Then smoke started coming from it. I didn't care; I was a stompin' fool. Then the smoke got heavier and soon filled the entire Old Mill, and we were all crying and laughing at the same time. Someone got us all out safely. It turned out to be a teargas bomb. Gee, was that girl still mad at me?

Well, as luck would have it, Jack (the handsome gentleman that I had chosen for my own) had seen fit to bring a new buddy from Fort Lewis (Lefty) who just happened to have a car. Jack asked if he could drive me home to Seattle and if one of my friends would like to join Lefty. Of course, I told him "yes". My cousin was the only one who did not have a boyfriend at the dance, so she was the one who kept Lefty company. Exiting the Old Mill without grace and glamour, the girls followed Jack and me to Lefty's car. To the surprise of Jack and Lefty, all seven of us piled into the car. (Try to imagine all these crinoline petticoats and poodle skirts squeezed into that car.) The boys were speechless. As tradition would have it, off we went straight to "The Mint" for our hamburger, fries, and shake. It was quite embarrassing figuring out the check. Jack wanted to pay for me, Lefty did not want to pay for anyone,

and some of the girls thought the boys should pay it all. We got through that ordeal. The next challenge was giving them directions to drive all over Seattle to drop off the girls at their homes. To make it a little easier on Lefty, I had a couple of girls stay with me. Immediately after the car door closed, that car and those boys took off like a bullet. They did not look back, they did not say "good night". THEY WERE GONE!! I think that we girls just overwhelmed them. Poor guys, they probably expected more mature women. But we were just girls. I was wondering whether I would ever see Jack again. I DID!

Jack and I continued to go to the "Old Mill" almost every Saturday night. Since neither of us had a car and he was stationed at Fort Lewis and I lived in Seattle, it was the only way we could see each other. In October Jack went on leave to his home town in San Fernando, California and brought back a 1952 Dodge. Now he would come to see me on Sunday.

Keep in mind, I told you that I was a country hick, gullible, and believed anything anyone told me. I asked Jack what his favorite food was. He told me "Spam." Each Sunday when he came to visit, I proudly set in front of him a large platter of Spam sandwiches (he never told me any different).

Jack and I used to go all over the Seattle area on Sunday drives. We went to the Zoo and the Wharf (remember that little shop with the mummy and the flea circus?). We were in Seattle when a new hamburger joint came out and hamburgers sold for 10 cents. I think the place was called "Dick's", but it could have been called "McDonald's". It may have been the first McDonald's. Looking back now, I still regret that I never saw Underground Seattle.

On October 31, 1957 on our way home from the Old Mill, Jack asked me to marry him. We never went to the Old Mill again. We were married December 28, 1957 at St. James Cathedral in Seattle (in the chapel). After he was discharged from the army on July 7, 1958, we moved to San Fernando where we stayed until 1977. We then moved to Redding, California where I still live. We have five children--four boys and one girl. My beautiful, handsome Jack passed away December 20, 1993.

Four of us married the men we met at the Old Mill in Puyallup. Mary Lou Sanford grew up in

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Racine, Wisconsin, and Robert Granstrom grew up in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Growing up they lived 20 miles apart, but they finally met at the Old Mill, married and had two children. They have both died.

Norma is in a rest home in Kent or Auburn. She has had a stroke, but she can still talk fine. She remembers the names of many of the girls because she remained in the area and at the job longer than I did.

Uncle Ed has passed away, and Aunt Emmy is in her 80s. Rondella is fine and lives in Reno. Aunt Blanche and Uncle Bill are alive and well in Moses Lake. My other cousin (who kept Lefty company) died at the age of 36 of cancer. My daddy, John Olin, died at the young age of 60 during the Hong Kong flu epidemic.

The rest of the girls, I wish them well, but I have lost track.

Sincerely, Beverly

From the Editor:

Beverly Olin Brunet discovered our organization while searching the Internet for any information she could find on the Old Mill dance hall. We sincerely thank her for mailing us her memories of a special time in her life, and a dance hall that many of our members also remember fondly.

Where to Find Us

The South Hill Historical Society meets regularly on the **THIRD TUESDAY** of the month 11:15 AM (*No meetings July and August*) at the Highlands in the Community Center. This complex is located at 502 43rd AVE SE, adjacent to and east of the Mel Korum YMCA.

We welcome you to our monthly meetings. For more information contact our former president, Paul Hackett, at **(253) 845-7691**.

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11711 92nd AV E
Puyallup WA 98373

From the Treasurer

by Ben Peters

Reminder

Please don't forget that we are a 501(C) (3) non-profit organization. Dues, donations, etc. are fully deductible from your income taxes, if you are able to do so.

We're at the Fair Again This Year!

The South Hill Historical Society will be part of the Puyallup Fair again this September. Our booth will be in the Pavilion Education complex. The Pavilion Education complex is the first complex to the south as you enter the main, Gold Gate entrance to the fair.

We will have a booth set up from Friday, September 7th to the following Tuesday, September 11. As done last year, we are asking our membership for volunteers to represent our society at the booth. This is your chance to get involved promoting our organization. All volunteers get a free vendor's gate pass with free parking. If you want to volunteer act quickly. This is our most popular volunteer activity.

Get hold of Bill Goelzer, our Fair team leader—organizer—coordinator, at 253-841-4149

In Memoriam

The South Hill Historical Society
regrets the passing of

John Mosolf

January 8, 1909 - April 6, 2007

To: