

## Dreams made real at Issaquah reunion

**By Dave Hansen**

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Like a once-forgotten dream slowly remembered, Sunday arrived in stages, unfolding piecemeal as each person recalled the parts of their lives long ago lived.

It was Issaquah's family reunion day; the depot was filled with old-timers, talking about the days when the mountains bore shiny coal and big timber, when Front Street was rough and dusty, and the taverns brimmed with workers and Indians.

It was remarkable history, straight from the source, the people who were actually there.

Like Nelliemae Nolet Smart, who pointed to a picture and said, "I was born there in that house."

But the house, once in the family for years, has now been moved to Gilman Village and is a candy store. Nelliemae seemed grateful that the old house is still standing, but nonetheless bittersweet, perhaps thinking of all the clueless people who now trod in her old dining room ordering chocolate truffles.

Or Eleanor Burke Harell, 87, who slowly walked by The Issaquah Press table and gazed at the yellowed, fragile copies dating back to the turn of the century. She nodded toward the papers and said with a proud, coy smile, "I used to be the society editor of The Press."

She said "society editor" with her chin lifting into the air, feigning sophistication. With that one movement and tone of voice, I knew immediately she had tremendous fun being the town's recorder of gossip.

I asked her when she worked for the paper.

"Well," she said, pausing to count the years. "I was in high school and I graduated in 1925."

I was stunned, and like that slow dream, my mind could only react in bits and pieces. I had a thousand questions for her but couldn't get them out. So I just smiled dumbly and shook her hand, knowing that she must be a remarkable person.

In the meantime, she told me that her dad owned the first grocery store in Issaquah. She was proud of that too, and I could almost imagine her as a little child in the produce aisle tasting the strawberries.

There were many such visions on Sunday, as each family matriarch or patriarch passed my table. The newspaper sponsored a booth, where we displayed old editions and assorted mementos. We hauled out a big box of discarded photos and gave them away if people recognized them.

Drury Pickering, for instance — who gracefully loomed with his big, white, Santa Claus beard and tuxedo outfit — leafed through the box and suddenly bellowed with amusement, "Oh no."

I walked over smiling, wondering what young photo had caught his eye.

"My in-laws," he said with a wicked grin, holding up a smiling couple. Drury looked around for his wife, Dorothy. "She's going to love this."

As Dorothy made her way over, Drury told me the father had passed away some time ago, but the mom was still alive.

“I have a surprise for you,” Drury said, handing the photo face down to his wife. She looked at him suspiciously and turned the photo over.

“Oh my,” she gasped, her face starting to beam with joy. “Where did you get this?”

Drury pointed to the picture box and the sign that said, “Free old photos...find a family member.” Dorothy shook her head and looked back longingly at the photo.

“She’s laughing,” Dorothy said. “Mom hardly ever laughed.”

Dorothy then brought her watery eyes slowly up to mine, and I thought she was going to burst.

“Thank you,” she said, clutching the photo to her breast.

And my dream became more real, once again, as the voices and memories of Issaquah continued to brighten the day.

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