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Ernie Bonner Family

Ernest Bonner

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The Ernie Bonner Family

From Logan, Iowa to Portland, Oregon--through Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Idaho, New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, California, Ohio and Massachusetts.

Ernie Bonner was born on Dec. 2, 1932 in Logan (Harrison County), Iowa to Orlo Roy Bonner (Dad) and Maybelle (originally Mable) Lizzie (Rea) Bonner (Mom). He was the second of six children born to Orlo and Maybelle: Robert, Ernest, George, Elizabeth (Betty), Quintan and Brian (in order of descending age).

Over the next few years, they would move to various towns in eastern Nebraska, including Howells and Albion. Dad worked mainly in print shops, becoming a well-known and expert printer. But even though he was sought after, he didn't get paid very well during the depression. [One story he told: on Saturday afternoon when it was quitting time for the week (unless the press broke down), the owner and Dad would get into the cash register and split what was there, right down the middle. I'm sure there were some weeks when it was very disappointing for both Dad and Mom when so little could be brought home for expenses.] *STORY OF GRAMPY SNEAKING HOME.* We moved to the big city (North Platte) just before the war. I entered the third grade there. I had a paper route. Betty, our only sister, died there of polio. (Bob had a real severe case of it and had to go to Lincoln for therapy. George even had polio twice, bringing him much fame from national newspapers.) I attended Junior High School and my first year in high school in North Platte. I remember competing in the soap box derby, going to boy scout camp, playing in the marching band and taking Latin.

In the summer of 1947 we moved to Morrill, Nebraska where Mom and Dad had bought a weekly newspaper, The Morrill Mail. Dad had a column in that newspaper called, "Beets, Beans, and Bull!" The older boys learned how to print there--Bob learned the linotype and Ernie learned the presses and composition. Ernie gave up band, and played basketball and ran track. Bob played football, Ernie never could stand physical pain. Ernie got to go to Boys' State *because he gave the best speech at Rotary--or, rather, he told the best joke at the beginning of the speech.* Ernie and Bob graduated from Morrill High School in May of 1950. Bob and I (and probably George also) both liked being in Morrill. It was a small high school and we got to do things there we couldn't dream of doing in North Platte High, so when Dad approached us with the idea of selling the paper and going to Scottsbluff to get work, we weren't happy. To Dad and Mom's great credit, they put off selling the paper for a year so we could finish high school in Morrill. I know that put them even further in debt than they were, and was a great sacrifice to make for us. I really appreciated it then, and I still do. *WHAT IS THIS?*

MORE MEMORIES OF GRAMMY & GRAMPY (i.e.: CHEKOW, ETC.)

In 1950, Dad and Mom sold the Morrill Mail and we were off to Scottsbluff, a whopping 15 miles away. Dad worked at the newspaper there, and eventually got a job at a job print shop. I got a job working at the same newspaper as Dad at night, and went to Scottsbluff Junior College during the day. I was just beginning to see the world, and was fascinated. Needless to say, I didn't study much--mostly hung out with the big guys from the big city and dreamed of chasing girls (I wouldn't have dreamed of actually chasing them!), and worked half the night at the newspaper. After a semester of that, I quit the Junior College and worked for the remainder of the year. The next year I was off to Chadron State Teachers' College in Chadron, Nebraska--first time I was away from home. Again, I got a good part-time job at the local newspaper and went to school part time. I remember only taking Spanish there. Again, not much studying. But I did have a couple of exciting romantic interludes. And, oh yes, another guy and myself tried out for cheerleader, just for a lark--and we won. Then we had to be cheerleaders! I lasted at Chadron only two years.

Got anxious to travel the world, so I joined the army (specifically, I volunteered for the draft). But before I got out of boot camp, the Korean war had been halted, and my great chance to go overseas melted away. Instead, I stayed at Fort Riley, Kansas for a year, and then was sent to Fort Carson in Colorado for the second year of my tour. During that tour, our whole regiment hiked from Colorado Springs to Vail, Colorado. I haven't liked camping and hiking since. I left the Army in June of 1955, moving to Sterling, Colorado where my parents were working at a newspaper and job printing shop. I spent the Summer there and then enrolled at the University of Colorado on the GI Bill.

The day I left Sterling for Boulder, with my old chevy loaded up with all of my earthly possessions (actually, only had the back seat filled), was one of the most exciting of my life. I remember the feeling still. Off to the big university to become rich and famous. And for the first month or so, it was truly exciting. Then I had to start studying. Actually, after an uncertain start, I did pretty good there. I started in architecture, then transferred to Architectural Engineering and Business, a joint 5-year degree that was supposed to be what the big firms hiring wanted. As usual, I worked part time at the local newspaper and went to school full-time. Lots of time it was rough, but it now doesn't seem like it was difficult at all. I got interested in musical comedy there, getting into two campus musical productions (played Scranton Slim in Guys and Dolls). I stayed in rooming houses, mostly, and ate lunch and dinner with other students at a house near campus. The Army was a real eye-opener for me, as I had never seen ethnic diversity in Nebraska. There were African Americans (then called negroes), Italians, Irish, Jewish and others with urban backgrounds and then there were us rural types. It was quite a mix. When I got to the university, it was equally as diverse, but the great differences there were those of class. And it was the first time I came across individuals who were citizens of other lands.

WHERE? I met Glenda Louise Prosser in my last year at Colorado, just about Christmas time. She worked at the Boulder Daily Camera where I did. Her parents, Glenn and Carleene Prosser, owned and operated the Estes Park Trail, a newspaper and job printing shop in Estes Park, Colorado. We got married April 16, 1960 and went on a honeymoon in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. I remember I took a lot of photographs of bridges and mountains and streams and other natural wonders, but only a few of people.

After my 4th year at Colorado, I came across the idea of city planning. I thought that was pretty neat. Why satisfy yourself with the design of just a building. Why not go for the whole city? I took a class in the Fall of my last year, and got the bug. So when the new year came around (just about the time I met Glenda), I applied to MIT, Cornell and the University of Washington for financial assistance to go to graduate school in urban planning. I was turned down by MIT, but accepted by the University of Washington, and heard nothing from Cornell. So Glenda and I decided to enroll at Washington. And, as luck would have it, Frank Brown, a classmate of mine, offered me a job working for him designing a prefabricated a-frame cabin using scrap lumber from his father's lumber mill in McCall, Idaho. So we went up to McCall to help Frank for the Summer on our way to Seattle to enroll at Washington.

McCall was great--the place where rich people from Boise go to swim for the Summer, and ski for the winter. It was a nice little town, with a great little golf course. But our accommodations were the pits! They were free, but they were the pits! We lived in the last of several old cabins on the lake. When we first got there, it was great. Just get up in the morning and walk down to the lake. But before the Summer was out, they had begun construction on a new lodge there and our little cabin got squeezed more and more between the road and the new construction. And to add to that, there was no bath, toilet or shower in our cabin, and only a wood stove for cooking. So we were glad to get out of there before the Summer was over. It must have been about the end of July when we finally got word from Cornell. Surprise! They not only offered a scholarship but a part time research job at the University. So we reversed gears, and made new plans not to go west, but to go east to Ithaca, New York.

Glenda's mother gave us her car, and we loaded a trailer on back, and in September of 1960 we headed for New York. We lived in a basement apartment when we first got there, and were glad to get it. Housing was tight, as it always is around universities and colleges in small towns. Cornell was difficult for me. I did not get good grades there. I did get a good education about banking and housing issues from my research job. And I first worked with 'computers' there, running a huge IBM sorter to do statistical analyses of data series. When money got scarce after a few months, it became obvious that I would have to get a job to be able to support us. And, of course, Glenda was pregnant.

Kathleen Louise Bonner was born March 2, 1961 in Ithaca (Tompkins County), New York. She was born prematurely, so she was very tiny. She used to take about an ounce of milk every hour or so. It was hard to see her with her miniature hands and feet and realize that she would grow to become a beautiful person. She was a great delight to me, and more engrossing than going to school.

But it was clear that we had to find a solution to our financial problems. So I decided to cut back to part time at school, and get a job downtown at the planning office in Ithaca. This turned out to be a great move. The Director was Tom Niederkorn, a wonderful person and town planner, who helped me understand a lot of what goes on in planning offices to compare with the theory that I was learning up on 'the hill.' It meant that I would be 3 years getting a Masters Degree, but I really believe it contributed greatly to my career. For instance, I first met Rai Okamoto there, as an urban renewal planner from a firm in Philadelphia. And in every class from then on, I knew from personal experience why the methods and practices being taught were sometimes useful, and how they sometimes didn't help that much. At Cornell, I didn't really get into the history and the design, but I did get into the finance and the forecasting methods. In short, I liked techniques of analysis, but was weak in design and history.

In the meantime, we moved from 'the hill' to 'the flats,' and began the 9-month vigil for our second child, Christine Lynn Bonner. Christine was born on June 13, 1963, again in Ithaca (Tompkins County), New York. At the time we were living in an upstairs apartment over a barber shop and grocery store about 10 blocks from downtown Ithaca, close to Cayuga Lake. The doctors feared that she, too, would be premature, so Glenda was forced to curtail a lot of activity. But as it turned out, she was a healthy, full-term baby, all bubbling and burping and And soon she would join us for the trek back to Colorado.

In my last year at Cornell, I took a planning analysis and techniques course taught by Barclay Jones. This course included material on input-output analyses, my first encounter with this at that time sophisticated forecasting method. Because I was at the time preparing material needed for a comprehensive land use plan for Ithaca, it seemed this method was made to order for planners who need to understand the interactions and effects of economic activity on the range of land use demands in their jurisdictions. And when I learned that an economics professor at the University of Colorado was doing such an analysis on Boulder, Colorado, I immediately wrote and asked if there were room on the staff for me. He seemed interested in having a person trained in urban planning on the team, so he agreed to hire me part time on the NASA-funded research project, and he got me a part time job teaching in the Architecture Department. I finished all the requirements for my Masters degree at Cornell in the Summer of 1963, just hours before we headed west to Colorado.

In Boulder, we lived at the faculty housing complex--probably the best housing for a family I have ever lived in. Kathleen and Chris ranged widely about the safe, interior court of the apartments, and there were a lot of friendly people as neighbors. I enjoyed the research, and eventually was a co-author on the final report. During that research, I met Charlie Leven, an economist from Washington University in St. Louis, who suggested that I go on to get a PhD in economics. In fact, he helped me get an NDEA fellowship to the University of Pittsburgh to do just that.

So in the Summer of 1965, Kathleen and Chris and Glenda and I headed off in our little Volkswagen beetle to the steel City on the Monongahela River in western Pennsylvania. At the University I had the luxury for the first time in my life of going to school full time, without having to work at another job to support ourselves. I majored in International Trade, Economic Development and Quantitative Methods. I even had my own office at the school.

When we first lived in Pittsburgh, we lived in public housing a short distance from the University. This experience demonstrated clearly why we did not want to be poor and without hope like many of the people there. I will never forget the struggle it was to live in that place. I know a lot of my growing liberal sense of economic injustice got a good watering there. We moved (at some considerable financial sacrifice) to a more suburban area called East Hills in our second year there, where the kids had a large open forest to run in and we had a brand new 2-bedroom town house. Compared to the public housing accommodations, that was heaven. We had great neighbors. - CAN YOU NAME THEM - And I had a 20-minute commute to work—with a colleague at the University down the street. I got good grades. I finished all of my course work and passed my qualifying exams. and I began my dissertation—on the migration patterns of black households in major American cities. And in the Spring of 1968, I got a call from Ved Prakash, a friend and colleague from Cornell, about the possibility of teaching urban and regional planning at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Wisconsin. I visited Madison, talked to Ved and to Leo Jakobsen, then the Chairman of the Department, was offered the job and accepted. And before I finished my dissertation Kathleen, Chris, Glenda and I were back in our Volkswagen beetle, this time heading west to Wisconsin.

We started off on the wrong foot in Madison by being forced into the only available home we could afford, which was across the tracks, close by an industrial area. There were some wonderful places to live in Madison, near lakes and forests, but we were not able to find a place at our price. I didn't particularly like the petty politics I saw among the university faculty. And I never did get over the perception of my lack of intellectual prowess amidst all those brains. And then Glenda fell in love with one of the professors at the university and we separated in the summer of 1969. (At the end of the fall term in 1969, Glenda left with Kathleen and Christine for California with her new husband who was to teach at UCLA).

↳ SHOULD WE GIVE HIM A NAME? 😊

I sorely missed the kids, but I also really enjoyed being single for the first time in 10 years. I had lots of girl friends, and I could spend a lot of time at my job, which I did. The students were great; particularly those in a special class we designed and conducted during that fall term. But my teaching days were over. During that fall, I finally gave up on my PhD dissertation and the idea of ever getting a PhD. I also made plans to go to Chile at the end of the Fall term, to work at a research institute there for a friend of mine from Pittsburgh. And then Norm Krumholz called me from Pittsburgh and asked if I would like to go to work for him—he had just been appointed the Planning Director of Cleveland by Carl Stokes, the first black mayor of a major American city. Obviously, I said yes, and in January of 1970, I headed to Cleveland.

Cleveland was fun and exciting. I was Chief Planner in charge of comprehensive planning. Our job was to develop a comprehensive plan for Cleveland. We also got a lot of interesting assignments on transportation and housing. And we even recommended that the city buy the giant electric utility. We eventually produced a body of work that gained national attention for its emphasis on equity and justice, rather than land and development. I visited Finland on a visiting professorship during the Summer of 1971. I had a heart attack (pericarditis) in San Diego.

And Cleveland was where I met Lynn, my second wife. We met at a class at Case Western Reserve University in the Fall of 1971. She was a student there, getting a social work degree. I was a visiting lecturer, on why crime was a rational enterprise in Cleveland. After the class we made plans to meet at City Hall and talk about her project there, social indicators for the city. We both fell in love quickly. And on May 31, 1972, Ernie Bonner and Lucy Lynn Guilbert Bergstrom got married in Cleveland (Cuyahoga County), Ohio. Lynn had a son, Dirk Bergstrom, by a previous marriage. TO TOSY BERGSTROM born on Oct. 6, 1967. We lived at the corner of Cedar and Belvoir in University Heights, Ohio.

TRIP TO FINLAND?

Carl Stokes left the mayor's office at the end of 1971, due to a 2-term limit on the mayor's job at the time. The new mayor was a so-called white ethnic named Ralph Perk. Ralph was a nice guy, and a bit of a populist, but he somehow didn't appeal much to me as a boss. So I started looking around for a new job. A friend of mine at Cleveland State University happened to mention to me that his aunt in Milwaukie, Oregon had told him that there was a new young mayor in Portland, Oregon who was looking for a planning director. I wrote immediately, and was contacted soon by Bill Scott, in the Mayor's office. We made plans to meet in Los Angeles so we could size each other up, and we both liked what we saw. I did apply for the job, beating out 2 other candidates. And in September of 1973, Lynn and Dirk and I headed west on the Canadian National Railway for Oregon.

The job as Planning Director for Portland was much more responsibility than I had ever assumed before. I worked very hard, over long hours. It was in those years during the seventies that the groundwork was laid for the City of Portland that everyone touts today.

Dad died in 1974, of complications from a gall bladder operation in a San Jose hospital. He was a great guy. He was smart. He was inventive. He worked hard. I miss him a lot.

By the middle of 1978, I had had enough of the hurly-burly of planning, and left the city to strike out into something new.

We moved to our first house on the east side (2836 SE Main) in 1976, and stayed there for 20 years. Lynn got involved in some interesting challenges. She ran the first successful tri-county campaign for a zoo tax levy in 1976. And she joined the Tri-Met Marketing Department in 1977. While I was leaving the city to pursue other interests in 1978 (and wasn't able to promise the same level of household support), Lynn signed on as a staff assistant to Commissioner Connie McCreedy, and brought in the bulk of the funds we needed to run the household. I worked as a consultant for awhile, but wasn't that successful. I wouldn't really get well financially until I got the job of advising Rogers Cable on their successful bid for the cable television franchise in Portland.

TRIP TO DC . . .

In 1979, Kathleen graduated from University High School in Los Angeles, and would go on to UCLA for two years. Ernie was appointed in 1979 to the Metro Council, an elected regional governing body in Portland. He would run unopposed for the remainder of the term, then win in a general election for a full 4-year term. Over his term of office, he would hold the chairs of the Transportation and Recycling Committees, and the position of Presiding Officer.

In 1980, Lynn went to work for Don Clark, the Chairman of the County Commissioners. And Ernie invested in a solar energy firm--a distributorship for Grumman solar water heating products. Lynn made a lot of good friends and a lot of money for the next 3 years. I made a lot of friends as well, but I lost a lot of money in the solar energy business.

In 1983, I went to work for Bonneville Power Administration, where I worked until retirement on April 1, 1995. In 1982 Lynn went to work for the Jewish Federation of Portland. She ran the Portland-Multnomah County Public Safety Commission from 1984 to 1985, and in August of 1985 she began her job at Kaiser. She was laid off at Kaiser earlier this year and began preparations for a new career as a paralegal. Recently, she was re-hired by Kaiser, but will continue her studies.

Lynn's parents died within a few months of each other in a retirement home in Cleveland, in 1982. Lynn's Dad was an ardent collector and restorer of (now valuable) antiques as well as a skilled craftsman. Her Mom was a social worker. Her influence is still felt around here when Lynn wonders out loud why she does this or why she feels the way she does. Ernie's Mom died in October of 1993, after a brief stay in a nursing home in Burlingame, CA. She was a woman before her time, a feminist when no one knew what that meant yet. I'm sure she would have been surprised to know that her son, Quintan, would follow her in death in just a few short years--in 1996 of a massive heart attack.

Kathleen married Tick Houk on July 3, 1989 in Los Angeles, and they bought a house in Culver City the same year. They have had two children: Ernie Houk, born Feb. 27, 1992 in Santa Monica Hospital; and Carly Houk, born Aug. 4, 1994 in the same hospital. Kathleen worked until 1992 at TGA Enterprises in Los Angeles, as their Office Manager. She now works full time raising the children. Tick Houk designs integrated circuits for International Rectifier Corporation in Los Angeles.

Christine graduated from University High School in Los Angeles in 1981, went on to the University of California at Santa Cruz for two years, then on to the University at Berkeley where she graduated with a degree in Resource Economics in 1985. After a few years in Los Angeles, Christine moved to Portland, and has established herself as a successful realtor here. ~~She is now in negotiations to purchase a local real estate brokerage firm.~~ (3)

Dirk Bergstrom graduated from Cleveland High School in Portland in the Spring of 1985 and went on to graduate with a chemistry degree 4 years later from Williams College in Massachusetts. He worked for a time in the San Francisco area as a chemist, and now has a job doing on-line data and literature searches for Stanford Research Institute.

Lynn and Ernie had their 25th wedding anniversary party on July 27. They served champagne and chocolate, to everyone's delight.

MAYBE ALSO SOMETHING ABOUT:

OUR TRIP TO EUROPE

OUR TRIP TO NICARAGUA

YOUR VIDEO WORK

YOUR CHARITY WORK (METRO 7)

YOUR CURRENT PROJECTS

LYNN'S JUDAISM ACTIVITIES + INTERESTS

DIRK'S HOBBIES (ie: PORSCHE, ETC)

GREAT STUFF!

