

A FOND FAREWELL- A Time to Add Things Up

I have to be one of the luckiest individuals that ever lived. I was born to Howard and Eula Aleshire in a 3-room farm tenant house on a cold winter night, Dec 30, 1933. There was no doctor, just an aunt who served as a mid-wife. I weighed 11¼ pounds and that must have been a challenge for a mother who weighed about 100 pounds. I don't know if I was crying or screaming when I was born but I am sure my mother was.

I was lucky to have two older sisters, Eileen and Patty, who looked after me as long as they were alive. I was also lucky to have 3 older cousins, Howard, Harold, Darrell Boos who lived on a farm 3 miles away and they looked after me even through my teen-age years. Darrell was my lifelong best friend. All three cousins later became chiropractors in Oklahoma.

My youth was spent entertaining myself on the farm, hunting, fishing, and trapping. Occasionally, my cousin Darrell and I would ride our horses to each other's house to play. My father Howard taught me how to handle guns safely and how to hunt, mostly squirrels and bobwhite quail. We always had a hunting dog. My father was the most kind, fair and generous person I ever knew. My mother handled the discipline, what little there was. My father, like his father, Thomas Benton, was a cattle trader. He bought cattle from farmers and took them to St Louis, Chicago, or Kansas City to market. My most memorable experience with him was when a farmer asked a certain price for his cattle and my father offered him more than he was asking. On the way home, I asked my father why he offered more than the farmer was asking. He said it was because he wanted to buy his cattle again the following year. A lesson I never forgot. On another occasion, we came home from visiting my Uncle Frank and Aunt Alice. My father noticed I had some change in my pocket. He asked where I got it and I told him it was from Uncle Franks house. He told me to return it and apologize. I did and learned another lesson I never forgot.

I attended a 1-room elementary school, Hickory Flat, through the eighth grade. I, and my sisters, rode horses to school. It was 1 mile to school and there were about 15 children in all 8 grades. In order to reduce the teaching load they eliminated teaching 2 upper grade levels as follows: my sister was one year ahead of me so she went straight through all 8 grades. When I was in the 4th grade, she was in the 5th grade. The next year she advanced to the 6th grade and I went from the 4th grade to take the 6th with my sister. That way there was no 5th grade to teach. The next year my sister advanced to the 7th grade and I went back to take the 5th grade. My sister went from the 7th grade to the 8th grade and I went from the 5th grade to take the 8th with my sister. My last year in elementary then was in the 7th grade. And to think, teachers today complain about combination K-1 or 1st-2nd combination classes. I later never hesitated to take college classes out of order.

I was lucky to grow up during the agrarian society, before all the automation. I harnessed and worked horses in cultivating the land. We shocked oats and wheat that would then be sent through a thrashing machine to extract the grain. The steam driven thrashing machine was big and expensive so farmers would get together at thrashing parties and the man who owned the thrasher would take his machine to the party. As a kid, I hauled water to the men who were working in the field. The wives gathered to make a huge dinner (now called lunch) meal for the workers. They all ate and then laid in the yard, under a tree, for a short rest. I rode the derrick horse that pulled hay from the haystack into the barn haymow for later use by the animals. Before combines and corn pickers it took a very skilled worker to hand pick 100 bushel of corn in a day. The horses pulling the wagon responded to voice commands to start and stop as they moved through the cornfield.

As we entered the industrial age, tractors, trucks and automated machines made farming much easier. As balers became available, my Uncle Merlin Boos owned one. My cousin Darrell and I would poke and tie wires around the bales as they came out of the machine. A really dirty job. We had to wear handkerchiefs over our nose and mouth to keep the dust out. Then we had to load the bales one at a time on a haystack, called 'bucking bales' to take and store them in the barn in order to feed the animals during the winter.

Our first tractor was an Alice Chalmers. You had to hand crank it to get it started. The crank was spring loaded and connected to the front of the tractor. My sister Eileen ran the tractor into a woven wire fence at the end of the field and killed the motor. The crank was stuck in the fence so the fence had to be cut out to enable it to be started again.

The first car my dad bought me was a 1936 Ford that I drove to high school. I was no more than 14 years old. In high school, I was a rather accomplished athlete. I played basketball, football and track. I was a half-back on the football team and threw the shot-put, discus and ran sprints in track. I later received a scholarship to play football in college. I was also very active in choral music. I sang in the boys chorus, mixed chorus, and in a quartet. I will never forget performing as an end-man in a minstrel. It was great fun but political correctness ended all that. It was at a State music contest that I first saw my lifelong love, Dorothy Ann Ikerd. We boys were, as you might expect, watching the girls competition. And that is where I saw her. A friend knew one of the girls in her group and, through her, I finally got my first date. That was in 1950, my Junior year in high school. When I graduated high school in 1951 my Dad bought me a new 1951 Plymouth automobile.

I was injured in my 3rd year in college that ended my football career. I was drafted into the Army in May 1954 near the end of the Korean War. I was sent to the Nike Missile training school in El Paso, Texas. After missile school I was

sent to an island, Long Island, off the coast of Massachusetts where we installed and activated a Nike Missile site, a coastal defense against Soviet bombers. It was this experience that led me to select engineering as my future career.

Following discharge from the Army in May 1956 I went to California and stayed with my sister and brother-in-law, Jim Symmonds. I worked for a land surveyor that summer and then entered college at Fresno State in the fall. Dorothy Ann followed me to Fresno California in 1957 where she worked as a secretary for the Teamsters Union. We were married on May 2, 1958 at a Catholic Church in Fresno. Our first son, Benton Aleshire II, was born August 20, 1959 in Fresno. He became a contractor and builder in the State of Washington. He built his own house with a beautiful view near the Hood Canal Bridge.

I graduated in 1960 with a dual major in Electrical Engineering and Mathematics.

My first job was a Flight Test Engineer for the Atlas Missile at the Sycamore Test Site in San Diego for the Convair Division of General Dynamics. Atlas was deployed as an intercontinental nuclear weapon at numerous bases for national defense. In the 1960's the Atlas missile launched Scott Carpenter into a sub-orbital flight and John Glenn into our first orbital flight. In the late 1960's I was a Flight Test Engineer for the Centaur Upper Stage for the Atlas that launched numerous satellites and deep space probes.

Our second son (Brett) was born July 23, 1961 in Escondido and became a plumber. Our third son (Barron) was born November 23, 1962 in Escondido and specialized in mortgage financing.

In the late 60's I did research on an Advanced ICBM, S-3 Anti-submarine warfare aircraft, and advanced fighter aircraft. I conducted various studies for the Department of Defense, Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, Naval Research Advisory Committee, Air Force Space Systems Division, and the National Academy of Sciences. I published numerous papers on military weapon systems and space vehicles. I was awarded a Navy Commendation for contributions to anti-submarine warfare.

In the 1970's I received a Master of Science degree from UCLA and a PHD from United States International University. In 1972, I and two other engineers were the original developers of the unmanned Tomahawk Cruise Missile that was eventually used by all branches of the military service. It was a forerunner to other current unmanned drone systems.

During the 70's and 80's my three sons and I, and their friends, went on many golfing, fishing, and bird hunting trips. They all became skilled outdoorsmen and surfers. My lowest golf handicap index was a 5. That did not last long and I was usually a 9 or 10. I did win my share of tournaments.

In 1978 I began taking flying lessons, got my pilot's license, and purchased a six-passenger PA-32 airplane. I flew for 25 years taking my wife, sons, their girl friends, and granddaughters to Catalina, Morro Bay, Las Vegas, New Mexico, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Montana, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and trips to the farm in Illinois. I stopped flying when I was 70 years old due to age and lack of proficiency. I sold the airplane for three times what I paid for it.

On December 30, 2017 I celebrated 50 years of continuous public service when I retired from the Board of Directors of the Valley Center Municipal Water District. My public service started in 1968 helping my wife, Dorothy Ann, who was president of the PTA. That led to my elected office as President of the Board of Education, Vice Chairman of the Palomar Council of the Boy Scouts of America, President of the Boys and Girls Club, Director the March of of Dimes, Chairman of Walk America, member of the Association of Resident Owners, founding member of a Community Foundation, President of the Men's Golf Club, Director of the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), Director of a Joint Powers Insurance Authority(JPIA) and member of the Employee Benefits Committee for JPIA.

Now you know why, from horses to tractors to automobiles to defense missiles to space vehicles to private airplane, and numerous sporting activities, I consider that I am one of the luckiest persons that ever lived.