



Charles Leslie O'Shea lives in a place called Channel Point Village. It is a retirement community similar to thousands across the United States where millions of seniors are housed together in quiet halls, only to be engaged for their meals, church services, or perhaps a weekly trip to the grocery store or shopping mall. These people, our elderly, represent a vast resource of information about our history; every one is a door into a rich context that not only encompasses our nation but the entire globe. When my grandfather, Les's brother Norman O'Shea, died, I not only lost one of my most beloved family members, but also the opportunity to learn how it came to pass that I should exist where I do in the world. The door was shut. The opportunities to ask all of those questions I had meant to, whether over dinner or the blaring television, were gone. By interviewing my Uncle Les, I was hoping to ask some of the questions I didn't get to ask my grandfather. His story demonstrates how even the simplest of lives opens the door to a historical depth that cannot be replicated within a textbook. This is a very personal history. What is interesting about my grandfather, my Uncle Les and I is that each of us spent our young life in the same small town. Places and events that had touched their lives, with all of the historical footnoting, have touched mine as well. My identity includes not only how my family made its journey into the twentieth and twenty-first century, but also how our hometown of Port Townsend, Washington shaped who we are.

Charles Leslie O'Shea was born on a wheat farm in Uren, Saskatchewan, Canada, a very small town outside of Chaplain, near Chaplain Lake. His parents were Charles O'Shea and Alice Sarah O'Shea (nee Smith). He had one younger brother Norman Frederick O'Shea. His parents were both British born, despite his father's Irish last name. Les speculated that perhaps the O'Shea's had moved across the water to England during the potato famine of the 1850's. Les's grandfather was said to have been killed in a horse riding accident, dividing his father's family. Charles O'Shea was actually raised in Porthmadog, Wales where he learned to work a farm, but never owned his own land. Les's mother was raised near York in England. Their courtship is unclear, but they didn't marry until they settled in Canada.

Charles O'Shea took a round about route to get himself to North America. Les told stories of his father's adventure on a ship bringing cattle to Argentina from England. The crew wasn't able to sell their cargo right away and ended up staying in South America for a year. Charles also worked at a sheep station in Australia and a dairy farm in New Zealand before settling as a homesteader in Saskatchewan near the farms of his brothers, William and Harry O'Shea. A broken Maori-carved club is the only evidence of my Great Grandfather's trip. Charles O'Shea then sent for his bride to be, Alice Smith, who at the time was working in a munitions factory as part of the war effort (World War I that is) in the town of Leeds. They were married in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and had their first son Charles Leslie O'Shea on September 12, 1917. Interestingly, they were both in their 30s when they had their children, perhaps later in life than the norm.

The migration of my great grandparents was not unique for the time. In 1872, Canada passed the Dominion Lands Act. This was similar to the US homesteading act, providing 160 acres for those willing to build on the land and work it for 3 years. This Act didn't have people coming in droves by any means. The popularity of the American West out shone that of the Canadian prairie, which was "conversely portrayed as uninhabitable, cold and barren" (Kitzan 2). It wasn't until between 1896 and 1911 that larger populations started to settle the Canadian West. This was partially because of factors at home. Like many, my great grandfather was a trained agrarian, but he did not have any land of his own. As Europe was getting more and more crowded, there was less and less land to go around, and for many, not enough even to sustain their families. Clifford Sifton, the Canadian Minister of Interior from 1896 to 1905, started targeting people such as my great grandfather with a major campaign advertising land in the Canadian West. Propaganda was spread all over Europe looking for able farmers. The Canadian government was unconcerned with settler's nationalities, but only with the development of the vast prairies in Alberta and Saskatchewan (Kitzan 2). My great grandfather took this opportunity like his brothers, and thousands of other immigrants, in what was called the "Second Migration" (Levinson 133).

Farms in this area typically grew wheat, but Les indicated crops of barley, oats and other grains were being grown as well. His father also fared a little better than the other farms in the area because in the winter he raised a few head of cattle to subsidize the family income.

The O'Shea's followed another pattern similar to other immigrants of this time, and Canada proved to be only a stop on their way to finally settling in the United States. Winters in Canada were hard, and the draw of the United States was undeniable. Many established themselves in Canada before moving to the more temperate south. The British Government was offering cheaper passage to Canada, in part to "counter French influence." With both nations having practically open borders, Canada became a "stepping-stone." Many Irish immigrants didn't trust the British government and were soon to follow the call to the United States where there was a more developed economy and infrastructure (Levinson 133). The O'Shea's, as well, wanted to escape the cold climate of the Prairie West, and move somewhere near a school for their two boys who were approaching the appropriate age. My family's entry into the United States, though, was more a product of chance and circumstance, than any predetermined decision to move there.

Neighbors from Canada had recently moved to a small town on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State named Port Townsend. Correspondence with these friends of the family prompted a trip to visit the town, with the intention of resettling in British Columbia. The farm was leased to another family. Les speculated that earnings from the yearly harvest were split fifty-fifty. With that, the O'Shea's set out on a train from Canada to Seattle. From there they took the ferry across the Puget Sound to what would become their new home. The boat left at midnight and arrived in Port Townsend at three in the morning. From what I gathered from Les, this boat was the lifeline of the town, not only carrying passengers, but mail, and supplies including the daily bread delivery from Seattle. I can only imagine what it was like to step off of a steam ferry in the middle of the night onto the quiet and windy streets of Port Townsend. Did it call to them from the beginning? Perhaps the seaside location reminded my great grandfather of his childhood home in Porthmadog. Les was uncertain why Port Townsend became my

family's final destination. Perhaps it was the beauty, or familiarity of the landscape that kept them there. More than likely it was out of financial necessity. Charles needed to start work and generate income immediately for his family.

Port Townsend has a rich history and one fraught with tumult, debauchery, accelerated prosperity, and ultimately disappointment for those who remained there. Situated on the northeast corner of the Olympic Peninsula, it forms a small piece of land called the Quimper Peninsula. It lies on the entrance of the Puget Sound with the Straits of Juan de Fuca, named for the Greek sailor who discovered the inlet, to the north. Ships on their way to Seattle from the Pacific pass Port Townsend via the Admiralty Inlet. "Discovered" by Captain George Vancouver in May of 1792, the bay of "Port Townshend" was named for his friend George "The Marquis of" Townshend, a British general who took Quebec from the French in 1759 (McClary). The earliest white development was in 1851 when one Alfred A. Plummer decided to form a settlement with friend Charles Bachelder. Securing land rights from the native tribes with gifts of trinkets, they built a two-bedroom cabin. The original founders adopted Vancouver's name. By that time the "H" had been dropped by the sailors traveling through Admiralty Inlet. In May of 1852 "three families and fifteen bachelors comprised the total population of Port Townsend" (Welsh 7). One notable founder was Francis W. Pettygrove who had moved to the settlement from Portland, Oregon, which he had named for his beloved hometown in Maine. In 1854 the US treasury changed the Washington Territory's Port of Entry from Olympia to Port Townsend, establishing a harbor for ships entering and leaving the Puget Sound, and collecting customs there. In the 1850s, customs duties "provided the bulk of federal revenue," making Port Townsend an important entrance to the United States from the Pacific (Reed 260). Guarding the gate of the Puget Sound, it would become known as the "Key City," a title that remains to this day. Port Townsend was anticipated to be the next San Francisco, and was officially established as a town in 1860 (McClary).

Surrounded by trees and linked to the world by water, Port Townsend was a natural for a booming maritime economy. On sailing boats "a mast or spar could only be as tall as the natural

timber” and the Olympic Peninsula boasted the tallest trees in the Union. Lumbering was the main economy of western Washington and timber from the Puget Sound was shipped all over the world (Reed 260).

As a port for wayward sailors, Port Townsend developed a nefarious reputation. Taverns, gambling halls and brothels thrived in this expanding haven. Society in Port Townsend was divided between those of decency and means on the Hill, and the debauched lifestyles of sailors and loggers near the water. Sailors were serviced by “half-breed” prostitutes closest to the ships, while captains and mates had their own brothels of white women adjacent to Chinese homes further inland. “Saloons outnumbered all other types of businesses” (Simpson 204). There was a time when there was a bar or tavern for every seventy-five residents of the town (McCurdy 216). Gambling was also a popular way for sailors to part with their money, and they assuredly did. Admiral Robert A. Coontz had this to say about Port Townsend:

There was a man’s town. When I was a young ensign fresh from the Naval academy, my first orders were to board a boat at Port Townsend for duty in Alaska. Port Townsend was wild and prosperous then. A little too wild for a young ensign from the east. The first night I spent in a hotel there a man came down with smallpox in one room next to mine. In the other room next to mine a man was murdered. (Welsh 9)

Many ships from the Puget Sound were crewed out of Port Townsend and “Crimping and Shanghaiing were considered necessary elements of a successful maritime community” (Simpson 79).

“Sin flourishes at sea level” was a popular phrase at the time, and many charitable Christians made salvation in downtown Port Townsend their mission. The earliest of these religious arrivals traveled by canoe from Olympia and were not weak in their convictions or their constitutions. Many street parsons were well respected not only by the Uptown society that applauded their efforts of reform, but by the local “riff-raff” as well.

Every moral agency in consequence looked upon the village as a little Sodom or Gomorrah, and vied with each other in sending its most efficient emissary to engage in the work of “plucking the brands from the burning.” (McCurdy 89).

I spent a lot of my youth in the five blocks of downtown that in the maritime era was a mire of sailors, gamblers and degenerates. In my time, bored teenagers were the blight on a town that had succumbed to tourism as its primary industry. The gentrified gift shops that now occupy the downtown are a far cry from a time when “the odor of whiskey permeated the soil along Water Street to a depth of ten feet” (McCurdy 216). Perhaps it was poltergeists that possessed us as teenagers to be as disruptive as possible. The ghosts of many strange and dangerous characters still roam the breezy valley of stone buildings that make up Water Street. Tourism only cheapens a history that still breathes through the tiny downtown.

There was Sebastian the “Salvation Army Barber” who would question your readiness for the Lord’s final judgment whilst holding a shaving razor to your throat. Many avoided being groomed by this man who was thoroughly possessed by the Holy Spirit, but perhaps distracted from the task at hand (McCurdy 176). Abner J. Spates known to locals as “Spades” was an African-American cook and gambler who was notorious for his bad luck at cards. Spades met his demise looking down the barrel of the royal flush that won him a sixteen dollar pot. In shock, he had a heart attack and died (McCurdy 173). Captain John Slater, also known to the community as “The Port Admiral,” told embellished seafaring stories. His storytelling was always one step ahead of skeptical scrutiny, and many of his tales ended up in the columns of area newspapers (McCurdy 174). L.W. Tripp was an attorney who proved himself handier with a shotgun than with any sort of litigation (McCurdy 201). John Quayle, also known as “Poker Jack,” was a professional gambler who was seen as a “square shooter” by most people in the town. When a young man named Thompson, angered by his loss at poker, dealt Jack two gashes to the neck, he answered in kind with seventeen thrusts of his “long clasp-knife,” leaving the young man dead in the street. “Exonerated on the grounds of self-defense,” Jack later died at the hand of Thompson’s uncle who stabbed him in the abdomen (McCurdy 203). Ah Moon, known

to most as “Bones” was a Chinese man who ran fan-tan games, as well as other gambling ventures. Half-blind, he would enter the local theater and, without paying, make himself comfortable in the front row. If the feature was pleasing to him he would “applaud loudly and pay the cashier as he went out.” More often than not he would “rise from his seat, gesticulate wildly and hurry out, muttering to himself.” “Instead of paying, he would in his high-pitched voice condemn the picture”(McCurdy 214). Finally, there is also a local legend that author Jack London spent a night in the local jail located in the basement of the city hall building. This was of course before his fame as an author. Port Townsend was a stop for many, including London, on their way to the gold rush in the Klondike. It is unknown for what reason London was jailed, or whether he actually was. While the impoverished London never found fortune in Canada, he was able to “pen out a living on the strength of the trip” (Simpson 159).

Even in its later history, I have never known Port Townsend to be want for eccentric characters. It was a big draw to those who were part of the 1970s counterculture and the multitude of abandoned Victorian houses were ripe for anyone with any notion of remodeling them. Most residents of the area were, and to a large extent still are “hippie-ish and liberal.” Tolerance and creativity were nurtured within the community and we, as children, were always encouraged to express ourselves and our uniqueness. Though the ‘H’ was dropped from its original name, Port Towns “end” became an apt title as Highway 20 ends at the edge of downtown. As the northern most point of a peninsula that looks across the straits to Canada, many a wayward soul has deposited himself at the end of the road--either running or tired of running.

At the risk of digression, I feel like I must discuss the state of Port Townsend as it stands now. This may be similar to the state of many communities whose biggest assets are their beautiful location and their preserved history. Besides the mill, which may be close to extinction, there is no major industry in the Port Townsend area besides its own tourism. Its funky temperament and out-of-the-way location once made it ideal for Bohemian escapists. Now it is a bedroom community, and the skilled hands that had remodeled many of these

beautiful Victorian homes have turned them over to a wealthier class, perhaps many times over. Enrollment at the local high school is declining, and the cost of living is squeezing many of the long time residents out. I have often pondered moving back to my hometown, but fear it might not be an option unless I secure a big enough fortune to do so. It is the “Bust” part of the Port Townsend story that made it what it is today. If it had become the equivalent of San Francisco, urban development would have buried the fantastic examples of late 19th century architecture that are still standing there. At the same time, if it weren’t for the quaint and isolated location, Port Townsend wouldn’t be much of a draw for retirees or those who have an independent income.

Anticipating the arrival of the Union Pacific Railroad, Port Townsend was a veritable boomtown in 1889. Speculation based on the arrival of the railroad had people flocking to Port Townsend, building houses and businesses. Housing prices increased exponentially. “Fifty-five feet on Water Street”-- the main street through downtown-- “went for \$27, 500,” a fortune to most at the time (Welsh 17). With all the activity in the port and the approaching railroad, Port Townsend was being groomed to be what Seattle is today. However, the once-dubbed “Dream City,” never came to realize these speculations. The railroad was to terminate in Tacoma. This decision combined with the Panic of 1893, the depression of the late 19th century, left Port Townsend all but abandoned. While it was an ideal peninsula of woods and water for the sailing vessels of the time, steamships were becoming more prevalent and could easily make their way to Seattle unpiloted. A town that was building itself to sustain 20,000 people was now bankrupt (Welsh 18). Of the seven thousand that resided there at its peak, only two thousand remained (McClary). William D. Welsh, a prominent member of the Port Townsend community, wrote in 1941:

What if part of Port Townsend’s history included stirring nights in waterfront barrooms, the shanghaiing of windship crews for long voyages and other incidents along the primrose path. What if memory bears scars of investment in mythical railroads, the lift and drop in the degree of coastal defense, the gain and fall of population, the tapering off

of six banks to one. All these were necessary episodes of the period; stepping stones for the varying degrees of civilization across some 110 years. Some were good. Some were bad. If sin flourished at sea level, religion planted her banners on the palisades above sea level. All were episodes in the dreams and drama of a city in the building, a Port Townsend which has gone through history's romantic wringer and emerged sounder for the experience. (Welsh 22)

The decision to end the railroad in Tacoma all but crushed the hopes of large-scale prosperity in the Key City. While the tall trees of the area were ideal for the masts of the sailing ships traveling in and out of the Puget Sound, the United States was relying more and more on rail transportation. For Port Townsend to prosper it must have not only the shipping facilities but also the rail line, connecting it to the rest of the world. At the turn of the century, this maritime boom-town was becoming obsolete.

So it was in this sleepy town of broken dreams and ghosts that the O'Shea's had decided to settle. By Les's estimation his family arrived around 1923 or 1924. His first memories of Port Townsend involve school yard "razzing" over their cultural differences. "It might have been the way we talked, I think, because a lot of words we pronounced differently. And, uh, also the clothing we wore. . . we had to wear short pants and long stockings, which I guess that was the tradition of the English school boys," Les laughed. In such a small town, it didn't take the O'Shea boys long to adjust, but Alice maintained an English household. He shared with me an example of her seemingly odd British verbiage. "Some terms my mother used to use, used to shock people." When discussing the living my grandmother made as a schoolteacher with some lady friends, Les quoted his mother as saying, "Mary makes a good screw." Perhaps out of context this statement might have come as a vulgar surprise, but in my great grandmother's British vernacular, "a good screw" is synonymous with a good living, or salary. When asked what his mother was like he replied, "She was typically, straight-laced English." Despite misunderstandings involving slang, there was no swearing going on in the O'Shea household.

The boys had a variety of chores they were responsible for, the biggest of which was chopping wood to maintain the cooking stove and the home's only source of heat. At the end of the day, they were also to fetch the milk cow from wherever their father had put her to graze.

One of Charles O'Shea's jobs and the place where Les and his brother Norm would spend a significant amount of time was the Chevy Chase golf course. Situated on Discovery Bay, the course overlooks the protected inlet where Captain Vancouver anchored his boat, the HMS Discovery, namesake of the bay, for repairs in 1792. Vancouver then took a five-day journey, eight miles around Point Wilson, to find Port Townsend (Welsh 4). Around 1850, a disgruntled crewman of a lumber schooner, John F. Tukey, decided to jump ship at Port Discovery. He took a "Donation claim" of a lumber tract near Mt. Chatham. The Indians called it "Crybaby Mountain" because of its reputation for raining at the slightest gesture of the index finger. The land boom of the 1890s afforded Tukey the opportunity to sell a portion of his land and build a large house (McCurdy 31). As with most in the area, boom turned to bust and in 1897 he decided to build cabins and open his house to guests, calling it "Saint's Rest." While he tended his livestock and the surrounding acreage, his wife Linnie Tukey hosted visitors in what was called a "bucolic work farm." This was a place where city dwellers could experience the peace of a farm, while perhaps not having to endure the toil. Wealthier families from Seattle, Portland, Spokane, and even San Francisco would spend long vacations enjoying the relaxing rural setting. When the Tukeys died in 1913 the Inn and farm were taken over by Mary Chase, stepdaughter of John Tukey, and "a born hostess" (Simpson 46). She named the resort Chevy Chase after the Cheviot Hills where her family came from in England. She took one of her father's pastures and built a nine-hole golf course that is still there today (though it was expanded to 18 holes a few years back).

Life went on. Yachts anchored in the harbor off Tukey's landing. Sunset after sunset faded from crimson to grey while festive groups made merry around a roaring driftwood bonfire. At the appropriate hour, adults in summer linen sipped beverages on the lawn.

Enthusiastic children pitched tents on the sand and camped out at night; the most daring braved the chilly waters for a midnight “skinny dip.” (Simpson 48)

My great grandfather worked as maintenance man, and eventually the greens keeper for the resort. The O’Sheas lived in a one-bedroom house on what was called Tukey’s Landing, the beach near the spot where John Tukey jumped ship and decided to settle. Right on the water with, as Les says, “No facilities,” the house boasted, again, a wood fired stove, kerosene lamps and an outhouse. Les recalled one winter where Mary Chase went to California and his family got to caretake the large “Italianate style home” (Simpson 46) that Tukey built, an exciting opportunity for the O’Sheas. Life on Chevy Chase sounded very comfortable and family centered. There were always plenty of other children to play with and many of the families would return to Chevy Chase, year after year. Alice O’Shea would help in the kitchen during the summertime and Norm and Les helped their dad cut the tees and the greens on Fridays and Saturdays for Sunday play. Despite being of a humble social stature, the kindness and good humor of the O’Shea family has made them historically popular. I got the feeling that Mary Chase was fond of the O’Sheas and Les mentioned at one point she wanted to move from her grand house into their tiny home on the bay.

The O’Shea boys, when not helping their father, were fond of outdoor activities. Mary Chase was known to either pick them up or drop them off at various trailheads, where they would spend a length of days hiking in the Olympic Mountains. On one trip Les brought his camera, and there are some great photos of my grandfather perched atop a rock outcropping, looking towards the horizon. The snow capped mountains look gorgeous. My grandpa has a serene look on his face suggesting that he and his brother had very few concerns in those days.

Another favorite trip was to walk the beach to Port Townsend. You can still trace the Quimper Peninsula from Discovery Bay all the way around Point Wilson to Point Hudson at the end of downtown. While I have hiked portions of this route, the adventure would probably take most of a day to do. From his anchorage on the west side of Discovery Bay, Captain Vancouver followed this same shoreline on his five-day excursion to discover the “more capacious harbor”

of Port Townsend Bay (Welsh 4). A rewarding stop along the way is a place called “Glass Beach” where the glass and porcelain trash of a hundred plus years ago, has become a deposit of sea-worn beach decoration. Beautiful pieces of glass line the shore like pebbles in a rainbow of colors. Time and the ocean have softened and worn the glass. I have filled my pockets on many different occasions, and imagine that Les and Norm had done the same. Perhaps, like them, I will someday follow the beach to this location, instead of using the overland shortcut. It would be quite a hike, though, and one that is dependent upon the tides.

While perhaps in their free time Les and Norm were not wanting for playmates or things to do, ten years on a golf course also sparked another interest: Golf, of course. Both became proficient at the sport at a rather young age. Les commented that while most attempted to learn golf in later years, the O’Shea boys had the advantage of being raised with the game. They both competed as teenagers and joined their high school golf team. My grandfather Norm became an excellent golfer and even went to the state championships. The family has always speculated that if it weren’t for the world war, he might have had a shot at the pro circuit. In college, Les would play for the Washington State University golf team while his brother Norm would play on the rival University of Washington team.

After a ten-year stint at Chevy Chase, Charles got a job at the newly built high school, high atop the San Juan valley that divides Port Townsend. It is one of the oldest schools in the northwest and the first graduating class was in 1891. Les’s class of 1936 was the first to graduate from the current site of the high school. As the custodian of the new school, Charles and his family moved into the basement of the Lincoln building, one of the predominant brick structures on the campus. As a PTHS alumnus myself, I’ve always found it strange to think of my family living in the basement of what became an abandoned hulk of a building. When I was in high school, it was a creepy receptacle of broken desks and abandoned sets from years of school plays. A prime location for a low-budget horror movie, the Lincoln building was a place to break into on the weekends and drink beer. Back then, Les would help his father sweep the

hallways on Fridays and was in charge of turning on the hot water heaters for the sports teams on the weekends.

There is a distinctive smell when you arrive at the quaint Victorian sign, welcoming you to Port Townsend. Certain pockets of the area are prone to a sulfur scent, which locals will barely acknowledge. Some have referred to it as the smell of money, but most endure it as one of the drawbacks of the community. The odor is produced by the kraft paper mill located on the Port Townsend Bay. The Port Townsend Paper mill is still the largest private employer in Jefferson County. In different places I have been in the United States, I would check the grocery bag that contained my quart of beer or bag of chips. In many strange burghs, at convenience stores I will never return to, I have spotted the logo of “Port Townsend Paper” on the bottom of the bag. These brown paper wrappers were meaningless to most, perhaps concealing a cheap bottle of wine to be drunk on the street. To me, they were like secret messages, bringing me back home every time I left a 7-11 on the east coast, or a Diamond Shamrock down in Texas. For a time Port Townsend paper bags were ubiquitous, and while no one else noticed, my hometown was everywhere.

The Crown Zellerbach National Paper Products mill started operating October 6, 1928. “Crown Z,” as it was known when I was a kid, was instrumental in introducing a new prosperity in Port Townsend not seen since the 1890s boom. The construction of the mill in 1927 brought jobs to the tiny depressed town. Pulp and paper mills require two things to operate. First, they need wood chips, usually provided by sawmills, which were in abundance at the time in the timber rich northwest. Secondly, they need a high volume water source. Port Townsend’s water system was in dire need of repair, especially if it were to support the new paper mill. Municipal bonds provided the money to channel water from the Quilcene River, which was over thirty miles away. Half of the water was piped in for use by the city and half was sent to the paper mill. The mill would then lease and maintain the pipeline, utilizing “14 million gallons of fresh water per day” (McClary “Crown”). The mill continued operating even during the Great Depression, thus a town that had been through so much economic turmoil was insulated from

even further degradation. The mill was a bubble of employment during America's most difficult time and also provided Port Townsend with a stable source of fresh water.

"The first year after high school I went to work at the paper mill," Les said. When asked what he did there, he grunted unromantically, "Laborer." Les peeled logs and unloaded the wood chips that were brought in on barges from sawmills in the surrounding area. He would go to the gate every morning to see if they needed extra help, working as a day laborer in the beginning. Jobs at the mill weren't readily available to graduates fresh out of PTHS, Les said, unless you were a "top basketball player." "During those years, all businesses had commercial basketball teams, and they were looking for the good basketball players. Those guys got jobs," Les laughed. He eventually did get hired on full time at the mill and the winter before he went to college worked in the chipping mill, which was added to the plant in 1933 to "assure a steady supply of woodchips" (McClary "Crown"). "You had to get all the bark off the logs," Les said. Any bark in the wood chips would create weak spots in the paper. The bark, called hog fuel, was burned to fuel the power boilers, which made steam to turn the turbines of the electric generators that ran the plant. Les probably never thought his intimate knowledge of the paper mill would carry over into his professional life. Though he knew he wanted to study engineering, it would be a move he made two years after he returned from World War II that would bring him back into the paper industry.

Though his parents couldn't offer him any money for college, they did allow him room and board while he spent his first year out of high school earning money to attend Washington State University. It took Les 7 years to finish his degree in Mechanical Engineering. He worked one year at the mill, went two years to college, worked two more years at the mill and then finished his final two years at WSU.

This is where the parallel lines of my great Uncle Les's life and mine diverge. We both left our hometown, perhaps a little reluctantly, in our early twenties. Growing up as the son of baby-boomer parents, I have always had a very nurtured and what I would consider, easy existence. Talking to Les about growing up, I get a sense of what pre-Depression life in the

United States was like. Hearing about my great-grandfather's journey around the globe, his life homesteading and his move to Port Townsend, I am awed by his success in carving out an existence for him and his family. "There wasn't any government subsidies of any kind; you had to make your own living," Les said. Before the safety net of the New Deal, your only insurance was that of your abilities and the help of your family. "I know my mother, when she was in the hospital, and she was real worried, and wondered whether we were on 'the dole,'" Les said, "She heard some women in the same ward she was in talking about getting their checks from the county or the state or someplace, and she heard that remark. I had a hard time convincing her that we were taking care of her expenses, you know."

Les didn't consider his family poor, as they always had enough to eat and clothing, but by today's standards they were definitely living a meager existence. A small house with a wood stove for cooking, no bathrooms, and a milk cow as their dairy, sounds like poverty, but Les among others of his generation have a gift of perspective. Opportunity was dependent on what you could do with your own two hands. Asking for handouts was shameful and unacceptable. Thus the damage people suffered during the Great Depression was not only economic, but psychological, as well. If your family was eating, had a roof over their heads, and the children were clothed, you were doing just fine for yourself. Subsequent generations have been spoiled by never knowing want. I myself often wonder how I would have fared in rural Port Townsend.

Les was a good student, and graduated as salutatorian of his class. He was also Student Body President. I asked what kind of things he did as president to which Les replied, "Nothing, I just think it was a title." This frank and unromantic response is typical of Les who doesn't mince words and tried to tell it straight. He was realistic about his accomplishments and can be a bit self-deprecating. His brother was an excellent golfer, while he was adequate. His brother was a World War II hero, and recipient of a bronze star from the Battle of the Bulge, and Les felt lucky that he had avoided combat altogether. While Les had finished college, and pursued his career, my grandfather had never finished his secondary education and had a variety of jobs over the years--an "odd-jobsman," as Les would call him, just like their father. Les never married nor

had any children. My grandfather married and had four boys, one of whom was my father. Les has always been a somewhat solitary man, not without friends, but perhaps having a more sparse social life. My grandfather on the other hand was always very gregarious and popular and warm, widowed once and remarried, but always an incorrigible flirt. Les and Norm seem to be dichotomous, almost to the point of being Yin and Yang. My grandfather being engaging and popular, but ultimately kind of a dreamer. After the War, my grandpa moved to California and never looked back, much to the dismay of my great grandmother. Les on the other hand, had a sense of responsibility. After a one-year stretch in San Francisco, Les heeded his mother's request to live closer to home. He made a good living during his working life and lived a simple lifestyle that allowed him to amass a savings. Unfortunately, Uncle Les is the only family member of any means, and perhaps he sometimes feels like he only hears from the rest of the O'Sheas when they need something.

In 1948 Les moved to Hoquiam, Washington. He probably never imagined during his days at the Port Townsend Paper Mill that his career as an engineer would bring him back into the pulp and paper industry, but that is precisely what happened. Prior to his move to Hoquiam he had lived in San Francisco where he worked for a packing company that he speculates became Del Monte. Prior to this, immediately following his stint in the Army, Les worked at Boeing, where he says he was "A draftsman in between hundreds of others." His choice to pursue engineering is a testament to the type of person he is. While every aspect of our modern industrial life can be credited to the work of an engineer, it is the architects, the politicians and the fundraisers that claim all the credit. I can imagine Les diligently working in a vast warehouse office with rows and rows of drafting tables, where hundreds of engineers were exacting the plans for every nut and bolt in the Boeing "Stratocruiser."

Because his brother was starting his family in southern California and his parents didn't have any relatives near them, Les decided he'd "better move back into the state of Washington." In Hoquiam, he worked for Rayonier, an engineering firm. Their focus was on the pulp and paper industry, and Les oversaw projects in mills similar to the one he had worked in out of high

school. In most of these projects, the mills were being retrofitted with new equipment, updating their technology. Many were adding “recovery boilers.” When making paper, wood chips are boiled with chemicals to separate the cellulose of the wood from its lignin. A recovery boiler uses the left over liquid called “Black Liquor” to fuel the power boilers that generate the plant’s electricity. Prior to this technology, the toxic liquor was just dumped in whatever body of water the mill was built on. Port Townsend’s mill was updated with a recovery boiler in the 1960s. On top of its smelly emissions that continue to this day, the mill was dumping nasty chemicals into Admiralty Inlet for thirty plus years. Thus, Port Townsend’s economic savior was also an environmental villain (Simpson 169).

Les retired from Rayonier in 1982. Besides the work projects that took him to other states, Les has lived in Hoquiam since 1948.

I skipped an important part of Les’s life for a reason. While in most oral histories, World War II would be a prominent feature, I felt strained to do the topic justice, and I’m afraid this account is highly condensed.

Les served in the Army when he was out of college. While he never engaged in combat, he was stationed in India as part of an assignment to train the Chinese to fight the Japanese on the Asian front. The journey itself is worthy of a great story. Les was on a troop transport from Virginia to Northern Africa. He spent two weeks there and then traveled through the Suez Canal to Bombay, India. After being stationed in India, he flew over the Himalayas to China. “There was a soldier on the same flight . . .and he brought his dog with him,” Les recounted, “And we had got up so high we had to put on oxygen masks . . . I’ll never forget him trying to put the oxygen mask on the dog.”

In December of 1945 Les boarded the U.S.S. General Scott bound for home. This vessel held a floating population of about thirty two hundred soldiers, all eagerly anticipating their arrival in the Puget Sound, and the beginning of their civilian lives. It was a two-week journey across the Pacific, and I can only imagine the stir-crazy excitement that must have possessed the G.I.s. A pool was started for a dollar a ticket, and whoever could guess the exact minute the

Scott would take aboard its pilot would win a forty-dollar pot ("Pilot"). Storms delayed the transport and Christmas was celebrated aboard the ship. A turkey dinner was offered that "would probably make Statesiders, in these days of shortages, slightly green with envy" ("Turkey"). It was Christmas sixty years ago, and an onboard publication, "The Scott Free Press," evoked this sentiment about the occasion:

TODAY, for the first time in four long years, the anniversary of the Prince of Peace comes to a Christian world no longer seething with hate and blindly following the pagan god of war.

TODAY, when the Christmas bells ring out, their ringing is not lost in the bloodthirsty roar of cannon. And tonight, the Christmas tree may glow brightly and bravely, without danger of offering a gleaming target to carriers of death far overhead.

TODAY is Christmas, the birthday of the Good Shepherd who walked in peace, whose words brought comfort and whose gentle hands healed the afflicted. And though yet far from home upon a mighty ocean, we may this day give thanks from our hearts and rejoice at long last in His blessing:

Peace on Earth. Good will to Men. ("Merry")

The General Scott anchored in either Port Angeles or Port Townsend before continuing south to its final destination of Tacoma. I wonder if upon traveling through the Admiralty Inlet, Les gazed over the rail to his beautiful little town on the Quimper Peninsula. I'm sure that in the cold rain and wind of December, Port Townsend looked snug in its protected harbor. If you take the ferry from Whidbey Island you can get a similar view of the Key City. Bunched on the hillside you would never think such a small and benign town could have hosted such a complex and sometimes violent history. I like to imagine the warmth Les felt in his heart when he saw that after the arduous and uncertain journey he took, his home was still there. I also like to think that even though neither of us lives there anymore, Les loves Port Townsend as much as I do.

This project allowed me to get to know my Uncle Les a little better. He is a straightforward man with a quiet sense of humor. He wasn't interested in spinning tall-tales of

family legend just for the sake of storytelling. His memory, for a man of eighty-eight was pretty remarkable. While his facts lined up chronologically, his speculations were also very reasonable, allowing my family history to have a cohesiveness. My great grandparents were transformed from black and white pictures in my parent's hallway into living and breathing people. Port Townsend went from the boring small town I grew up in, into an adventurous and fascinating place. While the history of Port Townsend stands on its own, my life and identity were enriched by exploring not only the stories of Les and my ancestors, but also the shared story of all of those who at one point shared my geography. In essence, I am a part of Port Townsend, and Port Townsend is a part of me.

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