

First Glimpses: Painting a Picture of Life in My Early Years

My son used to say that the only memories he had of his youth were what we recorded on the videos and still photos, and of course, the stories that we would share to attend them. Back when I was a kid, photos were extremely rare, as film and the cost of developing the images at the Rexall drugstore were prohibitive. That said, memories were still story-based. My earliest 'memory' then was being 2 years old. Since I had two older siblings, my need to communicate was assisted by their capacity to understand my grunts and pointings. Mom and Dad were worried, however, that I didn't speak and I was two years old, and well, they took me to the family doctor. Dr. Julius Kantor was a well-respected medical professional, born in Michigan, and a member of the Congregation Beth Shalom in Kansas City. He would even make house calls when needed (see my life at 19!), but in this episode, my folks took me to see him at the practice in Brookside. He would later share with Drs. Metzl and Bordy.

The doctor checked me out and found nothing troublesome. I'm sure he assured my folks that there was nothing about which to be worried. As always, the appointment ended with him lifting me off the table or bed, and he handed me a lollipop. I looked at him and said my first words ever, "Thank you, Dr. Kantor." Needless to say, everyone was shocked.

Life in those days was safe and simple. Think black-and-white movies like Pleasantville meets The Truman Show (which wouldn't be hard; they were both made in 1998). The television was new, and ours was a centerpiece in the living room of our 3-bedroom ranch-style home in Prairie Village. I watched the tv as often as possible from my earliest times with Captain Kangaroo and Romper Room, then the comedies of the Dick Van Dyke Show, My Favorite Martian, the Beverly Hillbillies as well as dramas like Bonanza, Perry Mason, Dragnet and Maverick. It was ever a treat, and probably a mistake, that I got to stay up and watch the opening monologue of the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, but then was sent straight to bed. I shared a bedroom with my brother Mike who was six years my senior. I'm pretty sure I had the top bunk. My sister Judy had her own room, with commensurate pink Princess Phone and homemade decorations.

My older siblings took care of me at times, but a memory I'll not forget was a snowy day and we went up the hill from our little house on High Drive to an open field just past 75th Street. It was as yet undeveloped. It was slightly hilly, which is perfect for primary school kids. Our folks told Mike and Judy not to lose sight of me, but probably as soon as we all got to the sledding moguls, they went their way and I...well, I was abandoned. Even so, there were plenty of other kids in the neighborhood and it wouldn't have been until it was time to return home that they went looking for me. All I remember is hearing that story told and retold. Who knows what really happened that snowy day?

Mike was a drummer and a good student, but he found a niche in being a bad boy at times. By the time I was aware of socialization at school and in life, Mike was getting into trouble and one of my first memories of his teenage years was his dyeing his hair black, wearing a white T-shirt and leather jacket (like James Dean, *Rebel Without a Cause*). He even tucked a pack of cigarettes into his T-shirt sleeve at times. He didn't finish high school, dropped out, joined the US Navy and his adventurous life continued apart from our family.

I had an entrepreneurial streak in me from my earliest memories. When I heard that my elementary school was having a sale and invited people to bring books to donate, and that they would pay the donors a bit for each book and that they really wanted collections, well, it was a no-brainer that I should take the set of encyclopedias we had (and which had fallen into non-use due to Dad buying the World Book set (including the rack on which to house them)). So I took up the 6 volumes or 10 or 17...whatever, up to the school and donated them, and for the entire set, the librarian gave me \$2. That's a lot of money in 1960. Remember, a single edition of Superman would have cost 15 cents. A new family car would cost about \$2,500. So that two dollars would have taken me down a lot of aisles in the Meadowlake shops, but instead, I took the cash to Capitol Federal Savings and opened my first bank account. Of course, the bank had to phone my parents for permission and that caused the conversation, "Where did you get that money?" and then the resultant

confession of the encyclopedia sales and well, it was not a comfortable night for me and probably not for any of us.



My siblings and me in our first home



With Judy in front of our first home



All three of us with neighbors at our home