

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it[®]

Idaho Common Sense[®]



Craig L. Bosley, MD

Going home

September 5, 2010

For several months, I have been spending some time working in an emergency department in a suburb of Omaha, Nebraska; a few weeks ago taking a day off and driving 210 miles to the small town where I was born a little over 60 years ago, Holdrege, Nebraska. It was 52 years ago that we moved from Holdrege, and this was my first visit since that move.

Following my brother's directions, I found the home where I was born and lived in during the first months of my life. I asked the owner if I could see the home and take a few pictures. It was a yellow painted cinder block house of about 500 square feet, little changed from 1950.

And just a few houses down the street were the homes my dad built during summers off from teaching high school history and coaching high school basketball. Both homes were still there and by comparison, they were "huge," nearly 700 square feet.

I talked with the owner of the brick front home I lived in and she gave me a tour, showing me where they removed a wall, adding one of the bedrooms to the living, dining and kitchen area to create a great room. She also showed me the original oak hardwood floors they discovered when they were replacing some carpet about 15 years earlier, the oak as tight as the day dad laid it 60 years ago.

My oldest brother helped dad pour the concrete foundation, mixing and pouring one wheelbarrow load at a time. Dad did everything himself, except the

electrical, the plumbing and digging the foundation. Still decorating a wall in my garage are many of the tools dad used to build those homes.

My oldest brother told me the reason dad built two homes. The first was the larger of the two because dad thought he could afford the mortgage payment. When he realized he could not, he put it up for sale and built a smaller home next door, the one I remember living in.

Dad asked \$22,000 for the larger home, but it was not selling. One day, a man offered him \$20,000 and dad agreed. When the realtor listing the home learned about this, he came to the house, relieved when dad told him he had not signed any papers because that meant dad was not legally bound to the agreement.

The realtor told dad he could get \$21,000 for the home, but dad explained that he could not accept the higher offer because he gave his word. The realtor, not realizing the discussion was over, pressed his argument for the higher offer. According to my brother, dad finally got "fed up" and told the realtor in very understandable language to get out of his house. The \$1,000 dad turned down to honor his word? It was equal to about six months of his income.

The homeowner also showed me what used to be my bedroom window, which faced the backyard. Mom's mother, grandma Gerbeling, lived with us, and although I did not know anything was wrong at the time, she had Alzheimer's and became one of my best friends.

Whenever I got in trouble, and it seemed I did with some regularity,

dad would send me to my room. Shortly after, Grandma would sneak in to my room, the two of us able to open the window so I could "escape." Then, when dad would head out the backdoor to "fan me," all four foot ten inches of Grandma would run behind him hollering, "Don't you touch him. Don't you touch him. I did it. I did it."

Looking around the backyard, I could still see the aluminum ringed, 3-tiered strawberry patch in the backyard, along with the large garden that dad maintained with his rototiller.

When I was about 3 years old, dad could not keep the rototiller running. Finding dirt in the gas tank, he told me if it stopped one more time I would get "fanned." Mom said I came running into the kitchen, telling her I knew it would stop again and I needed her to spank me so when dad came in she could tell him I had already been spanked. In fact, she said I made her spank me three times, each time telling her it was not hard enough to convince dad.

Living in the home next door, the one dad sold, were the Fowlers. My first-grade teacher was their aunt and they called her Aunt Maud, so, she was my Aunt Maud too. Although she seemed old then, we exchanged Christmas letters into the 1990s, until one Christmas she did not write. Sometime later, we got a letter from her nephew telling us she died and that while he was going through her belongings, he found the cards and letters we shared, somewhat worn from repeated readings.

Dr. Bosley's book titled *The Truth as I See It[®]*, *Idaho Common Sense[®]* is hardcover, 374 pages, \$24.95 - available at the Idaho State Journal, 5th Street Bagelry and www.craigbosley.com. To contact him directly, you can email him at craig@craigbosley.com. His columns are available at www.craigbosley.com.

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It seems I was always going next door and driving Mrs. Fowler crazy, knocking on her door until she answered, then talking nonstop until she somehow got me to go home. Mom finally told her not to answer the door anytime she did not have time to "put up with my chatter." One day I was pounding on Mrs. Fowler's front door when some people came to the door; I turned to them saying, "Her's in there, but her won't answer."

After visiting our homes, I found the grade school I attended, some of the original swings still there. Although certain I walked several blocks to school, it was less than a block from our house, allowing me to come home every day for lunch with mom.

Mom once told me that when I was in kindergarten, a first-grader picked on me near daily. Dad told me I could take care of it and the next time he shoved me, I hit him and made him cry. I knew I could do it. Dad said so.

From the grade school, I drove around until I found the swimming pool my dad managed during summer breaks, the only upgrade a giant slide and new lifeguard towers, everything else original.

I spent a few minutes watching kids heading through the park to spend a hot afternoon at the pool, much as we did more than 50 years ago.

During summers, dad would always let me go with him to the swimming pool, which was special because occasionally he would buy us a "pop." The cooler had pops sitting under rails in ice water.

Because they cost a nickel, we would sit and share a pop together.

One day dad said I could have a whole pop myself. I put the nickel in and slid the bottle to the spot where I could remove it from the water. My preschool hands were too small and the watery bottle slipped out of my hands, shattering on the concrete floor. With tears running down my cheeks, I sat down and sobbed, a whole lemon pop gone. Dad somehow found another nickel and replaced the pop, and my heart.

Next to the swimming pool and the city park were the railroad tracks, still no fencing along them. I drove to where we used to put pennies on the rails, waiting for the train to run over them and flatten them.

I even found an old rusted railroad spike next to the rails, and convincing myself it must have been at least 60 years old, it's now on a shelf in my den.

Near the edge of town, I found the original 1910 train station, now home to several businesses. When I was 5 years old, I needed an operation and the surgeon was in Omaha, Nebraska, more than 200 miles away and too far to drive, so we took the train. The trip took forever and to this day, I can smell the ether they used for anesthesia and it still makes me sick.

Leaving the train station, I drove downtown on the original hand-laid brick streets that covered the downtown area, finding the sporting goods store my brother and I remembered, Hilsabeck's Sporting Goods. It was in the same building and had the same owners, the third

or fourth generation Hilsabecks now running it.

Diagonally across the street from Hilsabeck's was the Sun Theater, where we spent Saturday afternoons watching a cartoon and a double-feature, 15 cents buying a movie ticket, popcorn and Red Vines[®] licorice. We always got licorice because it lasted the longest.

Life in Holdrege in the 1950s was spent with my friends and our dogs (mine an Irish setter named Chuck), exploring the world, no worries. It was a different time. Our mothers had a general idea of where we were, but we offered no guarantees. We wandered the town, cautioned to "be careful" and not get hurt. What seemed like miles was more like blocks. I can still hear dad whistling for us to come home; and when he whistled, we had a finite window of opportunity to get home on time.

Looking back, I guess we were poor but I don't remember ever thinking we were. Maybe we were just poor in the things that didn't matter, but rich in the things that did.

That day in Holdrege, I remembered a lot about my family and growing up in Nebraska, nicely reminded of what's really important in life. It was a good day.

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