

BIO, PART II: 1967 – 1977

After the water ski trip to Montreal, the usual grind began again. Dad would have Linda and I ski a 5 mile run around the islands at 7 AM before we went to school. We always went to school with wet hair (there were no blow dryers back then). We practiced after school and on weekends between teaching customers at our ski school on Treasure Island, FL. The only time we didn't ski was when it got cold in the winter.

Because St Petersburg was the spring training city for both the St Louis Cardinals and the NY Mets back then, we taught the kids of a few pro baseball players to water ski. Among them were Ken Boyer's kids, I think Curt Simmons' kids and Jack Buck's kids. Jack Buck was THE announcer for the Cardinals and dad always said he still owed us \$2.50. Anyone who watches sports on TV now knows who Joe Buck is. He would have been too young or not even born when the older siblings learned to ski.

Dad coached my softball team from the time I was 10 until I was 14. The league was in St Pete Beach south of the Don CeSar Hotel, famous for having been the hotel favored by gangster Al Capone decades before. The league hooked up with a girls' league in Canada and set up a series of games between the leagues both in Florida and in Scarsborough, Toronto. Their All-Star team came to St Pete Beach once and ours went to Toronto once. Each girl stayed with the family of a girl from the home team. The teenage umpire of a game in Canada kicked my dad out of the game over a rule interpretation that the pitcher (me), had to literally show the batter the ball (have it sticking out of my glove), before I pitched.

Dad started having the girls on all the softball teams come skiing in the summer on Tuesdays. For \$2.00 each, we taught them to water ski and do different show acts. On the Fourth or July, they performed in an All-Girl Water Ski Show for St Pete Beach. One year an old man was sitting in a lawn chair and was a special guest. I remember it being Maurice Chevalier.

Then he got the bright idea to have Treasure Island add water skiing to their summer rec program on Wednesdays from 9 to noon. When the bus pulled in and delivered 55 kids, dad told them to bring them back after lunch for another 3 hours. The top girls from the softball ski team acted as our assistants or we would not have managed. Kids lined up to pay their \$2.00 each and got a piece of color yarn tied to their wrist. Each color showed what stage of skiing they were in: red=beginners, green=2 skis, blue=dropping a ski and so on. Six total and when

we'd call out, "All green skiers to the dock!" and that's who would come get ready.

Linda and I switched off between driving the boat (a 1966 Correct Craft inboard with a 210 hp Chrysler engine) and skiing with the little kids. Dad put out buoys for a swimming area and every kid wore a flotation device called a ski belt (something you wouldn't get away with these days). He built a wooden ladder that fit over the seawall so kids could get out of the water from swimming without getting on the floating dock that was for skiers. At the end of the summer, the kids put on a ski show for their parents right there behind our house in the bay.

When I was in 4th grade I started taking drum lessons and my oldest sister Georgann took trumpet lessons. I got my first drum set when I was about 12 and I played in the Jr High band and orchestra. When the marching band had to be in a parade or other performance, my mom or dad always offered to drive the drums and tubas in the family van. Afterwards, we'd stop and pick up jugs of A&W root beer and cups and go back to the band room at school and share it with all the band members.



By that time my oldest sister Georgann (who had 'brain damage from birth' but was likely because mom's blood type was Rh- and Georgann was the 2nd kid) had learned to play guitar and sang pretty good. We had a water ski customer that came down from Kentucky each summer who was a band teacher. Dad gave him free skiing in exchange for writing out some drum exercises for me and giving me lessons. Linda learned bass guitar (no lessons; she just followed Georgann's chord changes. Really?) and we formed a trio. Dad got us gigs at the VFW or the city rec department and music became something else to practice. We were also in a Saturday morning bowling league in the winter.

Georgann was very musical and could play the accordion, autoharp, guitar, bass guitar, electric steel Hawaiian guitar, trumpet, harmonica and probably others. She could read music but also listen to a song and just start plucking out the notes and be playing it in minutes. She water skied in ski shows and taught skiing to friends from the HYA Club – Handicapped Young Adults. She played softball and was an excellent bowler. (She passed away at age 52 from a brain aneurysm.)

The summer of 1969, the National Water Ski Tournament was in Berkeley, CA (ironically another area called Treasure Island). I helped drive straight through in 56 hours in Dad's 1968 Ford Econoline van with no AC. In August! Across the southwest with no AC. I was 14 and if I got stopped, the plan was to show Linda's drivers license. People thought we were twins and there were no photos on licenses back then anyway.

One evening in September 1969, Dad went down the street to a bar and came back talking about the country western band that was playing. He said the drummer was fabulous and dragged us down to listen to them the next night. Long story short: that drummer was quitting soon afterward, and I got the job working 5 nights a week from 9 PM to 2 AM making \$80/week under the table. One of my parents always had to be present and I did my 9th grade homework under the light of the piano bar. This was still on Treasure Island where my big brother was a police officer and since I was a good student, there was never any problem with me being there.

Linda had gotten married in 1970 and had her daughter Cathy (named after me but nicknamed Kitty) and they took over the ski school. My husband-to-be Max was the bass player in the band and had more than a few years on me, but we ended up getting married in 1971. The law in Florida had just changed allowing married students to attend high school.



Later that year, Mom and Dad went out to Tucson and became the caretakers of a movie site owned by Old Tucson that was closer to Mescal, AZ. They had their Weimaraner dog Duke with them and you can read stories about Duke from a link in the Family Gallery.

In 1971 while running the ski school, my sister and her husband Hal put together a water ski baby carrier and had their daughter 'skiing' at 9 months old. This photo shows her then and in 1972 skiing in what dad called a trainer. It was one of the many things dad invented but never patented or got credit for.

After Dad hurt his back in AZ and went on disability, they came back to Florida. When they left again the summer of 1972, my husband and I went along. We tried to move to Las Vegas once but couldn't find work and traveled with my parents in their camper while dad sold vending machines across Texas. We ended up back in Tucson.

We moved to Vegas in 1973 and lived in the van camper in the RV parks that were on the strip at that time (we stayed at Starbuck's RV park). We were eating \$.25 hot dogs in Slots-A-Fun (between Starbuck's and Circus Circus) for breakfast, lunch and dinner by the time we got work. Max was painting houses and I started at a day care center. With our first advance in pay, we bought a loaf of bread, mayo, bologna (just a flat hot dog, right?) and a tomato. It tasted soooo good! The people whose house Max was painting owned an apartment building and needed new managers. We got the job and managed a 120unit complex for 2 years. I had my first daughter Linda (yeah, I named her after my sister) in 1974.



During a Florida vacation that year, we just had to put her on skis. She was 3 ½ months old. From left to right, that's me, Linda Beth, Linda and Kitty. Notice I have a baby bottle in my right hand.



After leaving the Vegas job in 1975, I had a temporary Civil Service job for 3 months as a bomb spotter at Naval Air Station Fallon, the current home of Top Gun. That had to be the strangest job I've ever had. There's nothing like an A4 making a run on your spotting tower at about 75 feet above ground level. By that winter, we were back in Tucson and I was working at a Pizza Hut on the east side.

The summer of 1976, we were returning from a trip and saw a sign for Firebird Lake south of Phoenix that mentioned they had a ski school. Of course, we had to stop. We went back the next weekend with

my dad, and he noticed the ski school operator was having trouble getting one lady up. He told the guy I could help and guaranteed the woman would be skiing shortly. Max and I ended up helping run the ski school all summer and that lady and her family became good friends. We lived on the lake in a borrowed RV and I taught Linda to ski on a trainer. She was just over 2 years old and by summers end, we had her doing a sliding beach take off alone and going all the way around the lake. She was on the evening news in Phoenix doing just that.

Carey was born in May 1977. We spent that next summer in Vermont at my cousin's house helping sharpen fence posts, bringing in the hay, putting up preserves and sauce and going to horse shows. My 80+ year old grandma was there too, and she read to her great grandchildren. By the end of the year, we were back in Tucson.