PRECIOUS MEMORIES

of our first 50 years together

Compiled by Bob

Dedicated to Sylvia with love and devotion

PRECIOUS MEMORIES

of our first 50 years together



"The Lord says to you: '**I** brought the two of you together years ago to accomplish **My** purposes for you. Your latter days will be the best. **I** will restore to you seven-fold what has been taken away. It is time for you to step out and do what **I** have been preparing you for.'"

spoken to Bob and Sylvia
by Minnie Coleman
January 28, 1996

Newbern, Tennessee



My life journey began on August 29, 1932, in Newbern, Tennessee. I was the first of four children born to Alton and Ethel West. They named me Robert Alton, Jr. My family called me Junior. Others knew me as Alton.

We lived less than a mile from the Church of Christ building. One summer weekday morning, Gaylon and I were baptized during a gospel meeting. I was 14 years old. He was two and a half years younger. We were immersed wearing the clothes we had worn to church and walked home soaking wet.

When I joined the Air Force in 1951 I began using my first name, Robert, and people began calling me Bob. I started doing the same.

After basic training at Lackland AFB in San Antonio and Shepherd AFB in Wichita Falls, Texas, and additional training at Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico, I was transfered to MacDill AFB in Tampa, Florida. Three months later my squadron was moved to the base at West Palm Beach, Florida, which turned out to be more of a blessing than I could have imagined.



Left to right, back row: Ethel, Janie, Alton, Bob. Front row: Gaylon, Linda

Warwick, Rhode Island



Left to right, back row: John, Grace, Michael Nave. Middle row: Joe, Trudy, Madeline. Front row: Sylvia, Sonny (Michael Nave II). Not pictured: Johnny.



Sylvia was born in Warwick, Rhode Island, on November 2, 1934, to John and Grace Buteau. She was the youngest of five children. Her family were members of the Roman Catholic Church.

It would seem very unlikely that a shy country boy who had grown up in a small southern town in west Tennessee and who was a member of the Church of Christ would ever meet and marry a Roman Catholic girl who lived in a big New England city up north.

However, when she was 12 years old, Sylvia moved with her parents to West Palm Beach. Nellie Hansen, who lived nearby became her best friend. Nellie invited Sylvia to attend the First Methodist Church with her. She did and soon became a member. And that's where I would eventually meet Sylvia.

West Palm Beach, Florida

After I settled at my new base in West Palm Beach, "church" came to mind, but I had no transportation. Some other airmen were going to church and one of them had a car. They invited me to come along. Over the next few weeks we visited various churches. At the First Methodist Church we found a youth group with others our own age who were enjoyable to be with. When we began to attend regularly, they asked me to be the worship chairman of the youth group. I accepted.

This period of time was one of my happiest. The best part is—this is where God brought Sylvia Buteau into my life.



















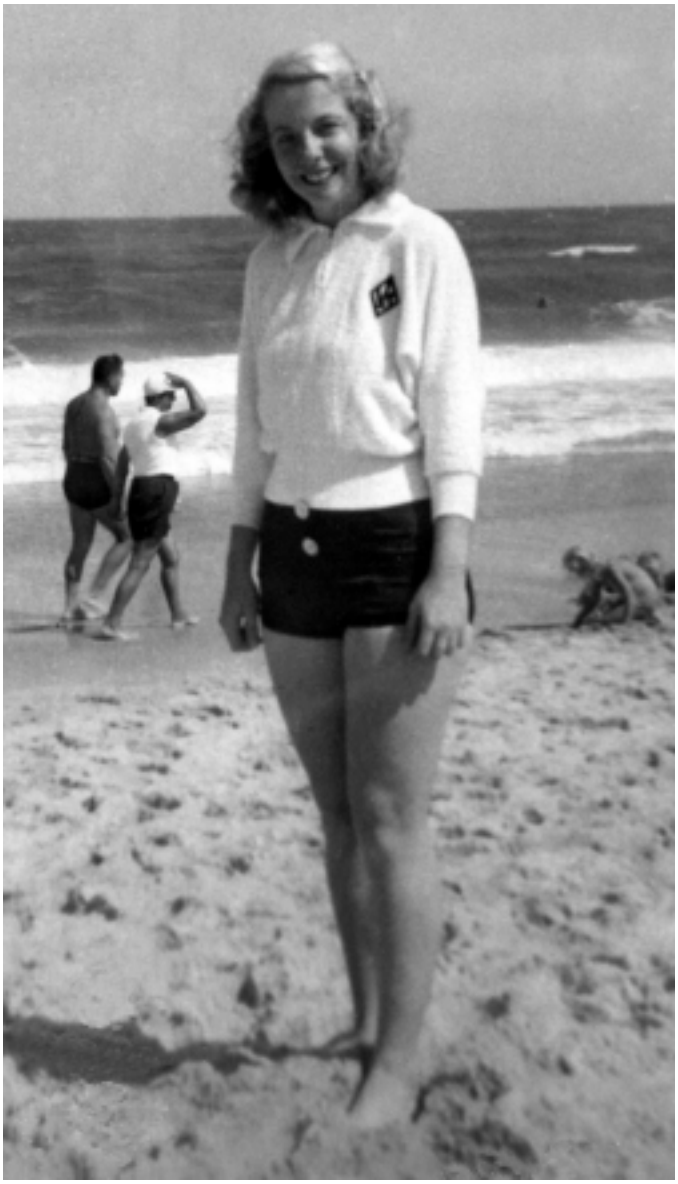


























I had never kissed a girl and had few dates prior to this. I guess I was afraid of rejection. I was also afraid of girls. Anyway, Sylvia chased me until I caught her. One day I got up enough courage to kiss her. And she kissed me back. What a wonderful feeling!

A few weeks later I heard someone who sounded just like me say, "Will you marry me?"

And I heard someone who sounded just like Sylvia say, "Yes!!!"

A few months later on December 1, 1953, we were married.



Alton West, Jr. And
Sylvia Norma Buteau Are Wed

Mr. and Mrs. Alton West, Dyersburg, Tennessee , announce the marriage of their son, Airman First Class Robert Alton West, Jr., to Miss Sylvia Norma Buteau, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John G. Buteau of West Palm Beach, Florida.

The wedding was solemnized on December 1st at eight o'clock in the First Methodist Church. Dr. Harry H. Waller, pastor of the church, officiated.

Vows were exchanged before the candlelighted altar, banked with palms and greenery and decorated with floor baskets of pink and white gladioli. Traditional wedding music was rendered by Howard B. Sawyers, vocalist, and Mrs. Louis Dring, organist.

The bride, given in marriage by her father, wore a gown of Chantilly lace and tulle, waltz length, with headpiece of seed pearls and silver beads. She carried a white Bible, topped with a white orchard, showered with ribbons.

Mrs. Michael Nave served her sister as matron of honor, Miss Nellie Hansen was maid of honor and bridesmaids were Miss Barbara Bodle and Miss Brenda Cody. They wore identical waltz length gowns of blue net with matching headpieces, caught at the sides with blue flowers, and carried bouquets of pink tea roses.

Cathy Hansen, in a white frock and carrying a bouquet of white flowers, was flower girl, and Bobby Hansen was ring bearer.

Tech Sergeant James E. West was his cousin's best man and ushers were Airman Second Class Williard Rollins, Airman Second Class Harry Boyer and Airman Second Class Billy B. Welch.

Mrs. Buteau chose for her daughter's wedding a gray and white striped taffeta frock with black accessories and an orchid corsage.

A reception in the Fellowship Hall at the church followed the ceremony.

The bride was graduated from Palm Beach High School and the Rhode Island Hospital School of Nursing, Providence, Rhode Island. She is a member of the Nu Phi Mu, social sorority.

Airman West was graduated from Dyersburg High School and is a commercial artist in the Air Force stationed at Palm Beach International Airport. He and his bride spent their honeymoon at Fort Lauderdale and are now residing at 331 Gardenia Street.

Airman West and Mrs. West will arrive in Dyersburg on Friday to spend a thirty-day leave. Airman West will leave in January for a tour of duty in Korea.

– *State Gazette*, Dyersburg TN






















JUST MARRIED

Our First Year of Marriage

After our wedding on Tuesday night Sylvia's parents took us to our honeymoon hotel in Fort Lauderdale. On their way back home to West Palm Beach alone, I'm sure the large "Just Married" banners on both sides of their car got lots of attention and "congratulations!" from those they passed.

This was an exciting time in my life. We had rented a nice apartment. Sylvia had a good job in a department store. I loved my job at the base, had made "airman of the month," and expected to be promoted soon to Staff Sergeant. Just married. A three-day pass. A honeymoon. Who could ask for more?

The next day I received my orders to go to Korea. Alone.

We moved all our belongings out of the apartment and stored them in Mother and Dad Buteau's garage. Sylvia quit her job so we could visit with my family in Tennessee whom she had not met, and accompany me to Oakland, California, where we spent a week together before I had to report to the overseas processing center and Sylvia returned to West Palm Beach.

What followed was one of the longest years of my life. While I was gone, Sylvia lived with her parents and our daughter Suzanne was born. I really missed being with Sylvia during that special time.









My voyage from San Francisco to Yokohama, Japan, on the USS Breckenridge took 12 days. To avoid KP duty I volunteered to work on the ship newspaper (top photo). Long, long discouraging lines of troops waiting to buy a cup of coffee, candy, or other snacks wrap around the wall of the ship (bottom photos).





Camp Fuchu, Japan, February 14, 1954. Top photo: Standing in front of Tent 723, where I lived while processing for our move to South Korea. Bottom photo: Tent area main street (or "Mud Alley"). We are on our way to chow in a terrific downpour of snow.



K-13, Suwan, Korea. The drafting room where I worked at 8th Fighter Bomber Wing headquarters is within the dotted lines.



Words cannot describe just how much I missed this precious lady.







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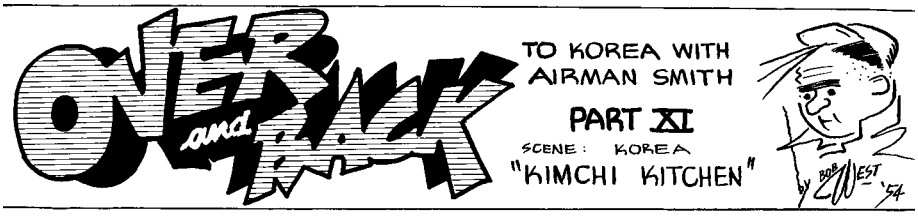
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Facing page: 1. Excerpt from one of 26 "Over and Back" episodes published in base newspapers in Korea and Japan. 2. At work. 3. Plaques I painted. 4. Nellie and Sylvia at MYF party. Above: Drawing "Over and Back". Sylvia before maternity clothes and then wearing her new maternity pedal pushers. Below: The drafting crew—Mac, Me, Gil, and Art. An unpublished "Ruff and Reddy" cartoon.









On the flight line with a F-86. Cousin Bob Yates hitched a ride from Inchon to visit one weekend. Below: I designed the birth announcement, made copies in the hobby photo lab, and sent them to Sylvia in advance. Sylvia is wearing the blue skirt and top she made in sewing class.

















The telegram finally arrived two weeks after Suzanne's birth. Later I received photos of Sylvia and our new daughter. Above right, Grandma Buteau holds Suzanne during her first Christmas. I was present in the Christmas card I made, but not in person. I was able to leave Korea and come home in January.

Altus, Oklahoma

Finally, my year in Korea was over. I was excited about being back with Sylvia and getting acqainted with my three-month old daughter, but I dreaded the days at sea on board a troop ship. Fortunately, I was one of the ones picked for a flight instead of a "cruise." I could not eat or sleep the whole trip and lost 15 pounds between the time I left Suwan, Korea and arrived at Mother and Dad Buteau's home in West Palm Beach. I remember my weakened condition as Sylvia met me at the door and I'll never forget the surge of renewed strength that I felt when she gave me a welcoming embrace.

Suzanne was sleeping when Sylvia proudly introduced us. She looked so tiny and fragile lying there in her crib. With encouragement from Sylvia, I nervously held her for the first time. It was so good to be back!

We shopped for transportation and found a five-year old Ford in pretty good shape and a finance company that would help us buy it. Dad replaced the blown head gasket when we stopped in Dyersburg for a visit on our way to my new base in Oklahoma.

It was snowing when arrived in Altus. We checked into a motel and quickly found an apartment to rent. But Mrs. Campbell turned out to be an intrusive and overbearing landlady that made life miserable for Sylvia. So, when a small furnished house became available, we quickly moved.

Shortly after I reported in at Altus Air Force Base, the public information officer asked me if I would do a series of comic strips to be published in the local newspaper, and I gladly did so. The name of the series was "Ruff and Reddy" and it was about Sgt. Ruff and Airman Rediford and their life in the community and at the base. We hoped that this would help improve community feelings toward the military and the noisy jet aircraft that flew overhead.

I also did some other cartoons that were distributed and published in SAC base newspapers, but my main job was supervising the base headquarters drafting department.

In Altus we made a fresh start. I was away from familiar surroundings, and so was Sylvia. I had begun to feel guilty about not attending the Church of Christ, but I was too timid to explain my convictions to Sylvia. I suggested that we visit around and see which church we liked the best, already knowing which one I preferred.

The Church of Christ had a cry room where a mother could attend to a small baby's needs. The Methodist Church across the street had a nursery where you could leave your baby while you were in Sunday school and church services. Apparently the nursery was the main difference Sylvia saw between the two churches. I was unable to convince her that God wanted her to go to the Church of Christ. Therefore, on Sunday mornings we went our separate ways, at least for a few weeks.

When Sylvia turned to her pastor for encouragement, he assured her, "Those people have their minds made up. There is no use trying to reason with them."

Meanwhile I turned to my preacher for assistance. He gave me a tract about the Methodist Church versus the Church of Christ and I gave it to Sylvia. She read it and looked up the Bible references. When I came home from work the next afternoon, I was overjoyed to learn that she wanted to be baptized. In the Methodist Church she had been sprinkled, not immersed.

Suzanne was healed of a physical problem that caused her to cry in pain much of the time since birth after we took her to Shephard AFB Hospital in Wichita Falls, Texas. Overall, memories of our few months in Altus were good. A notable exception is the accident Sylvia had with the deep fry oil spill that burned her arm and caused severe pain for quite some time.

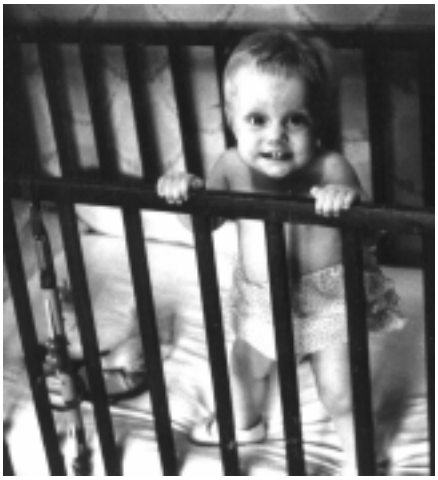
I was released from active duty on October 1, 1955. We packed Suzanne and everything we owned, plus a month's supply of baby food from the base commissary, in our car and drove to the northeast where I had enrolled in the New England School of Art.



Our first car.



Our first apartment, not counting the one we had for just a few days in West Palm Beach before I went overseas.

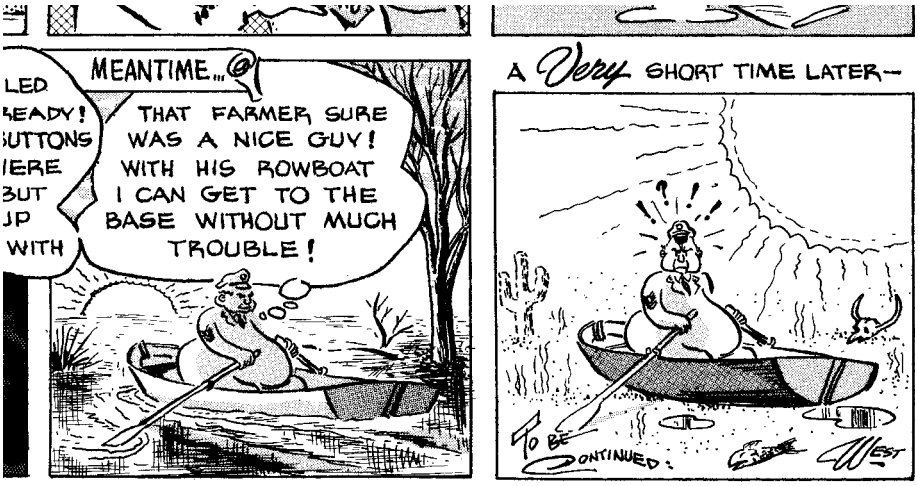





OHIO ST






LED
EADY!
UTTONS
ERE
BUT
JP
WITH
MEANTIME...
THAT FARMER SURE WAS A NICE GUY! WITH HIS ROWBOAT I CAN GET TO THE BASE WITHOUT MUCH TROUBLE!
A Very SHORT TIME LATER—
?!
!
!
TO BE CONTINUED:
WEST





Boston, Massachusetts

By now Mother, Dad, Gaylon, Linda, and Janie had moved to Florida, so we did not go by Tennessee on the way from Oklahoma to Boston.

Sylvia's sister Trudy and her family lived in Rhode Island. After a short visit, I left Sylvia and Suzanne there and went on to Boston to enroll in school and find us a place to live with the help and generous hospitality of my Air Force buddy, Ralph Zampatella, and his family who lived in Waltham.

We don't have many photos of the two years we lived in the metropolitan Boston area, but we have quite a few memories.

Our first apartment was on the third floor of an old frame house. The floors were lower in the middle than on the sides. At first we did not have a refrigerator, but the weather was cold enough for us to keep our milk, etc., on the roof outside our kitchen window. Later, we bought an old used gas refrigerator. It was mostly motor and compressor with very little storage space, and it weighed a "ton"! At least it felt that way when Ralph and I carried it up our three flights of narrow stairs.

Later, when we were able to move to a nicer (second floor) apartment in Waltham, we sold that refrigerator (or maybe we gave it away free) with the condition that I didn't have to help carry it down the stairs. We bought a new refrigerator and had it delivered to our new apartment.

For the next two years we drove from one side of Boston to the other every Sunday to attend the only Church of Christ in the area. The group was small and our "church building" was a rented house. It was here that I was encouraged to preach my first sermon, except it was called "making a talk." I was a shy person and had never done any public speaking. The thought of doing so terrified me. I was literally sick for about three days before I got up to speak.

My VA benefits paid my tuition and helped with our living expenses, but I needed a part-time job to pay the rest. My first job was cleaning tables at a Hayes-Bickford cafe near the school. Sylvia worked for a while in a dress shop in Waltham, but there was very little left of her pay after baby-sitting fees, etc. I tried free-lancing and did some art and lettering for a greeting card company and a salt and pepper shaker design for another firm, but very little else. I worked for a while retouching negatives and other pre-press work at a commercial printer. And I worked for a while at a meat packing plant in South Boston.

It was while I had this job that my classmate and fellow worker Bob Arnold and I had to abandon my car in Boston on our way home one night after work during a blizzard. The snow was over two feet deep and our side of the divided highway had not been plowed. Someone going in the opposite direction gave us a ride to the subway station. We took the subway to North Station and then took the train to Waltham and walked home in the snow storm from the depot. I arrived home around 4 in the morning, which didn't leave much time to sleep before going back to dig my car out before it was damaged by a snow-plow. Bob's uncle gave us a ride to the car and helped us retrieve the car just in time.

Parking near the art school in uptown Boston was limited and expensive. I parked on the street and moved the car every two hours to avoid a parking ticket.

When school closed for the summer, I got a full-time job as a senior draftsman at Raytheon's Transformer Division, located in Waltham within walking distance of our home. I worked hard and made a good impression with my boss. They did not have a night shift in the drafting department, but when it was time for school to start back I was able to talk them into letting me come in after school daily and work a few hours unsupervised. The model shop in the same building had an evening shift and I was allowed to work the same hours.

Bob and I took turns driving to school. He had a 1940 Pontiac, which had small windows and was built like a tank, providing more protection than my post-war model with lots of glass and thinner metal. It was my turn to drive this particular day, October 23, 1956, but we switched and he drove because his wife needed the car the next day.

Just out of Watertown Square, a speeding 18-wheeler loaded with corrugated paper, coming from the opposite direction, suddenly cut directly across our path, jack-knifed and toppled over on top of our car as we crashed into its side. The car was totaled, but we survived.

My thumb was almost severed from my drawing hand, and as it healed I had to learn to draw all over again. I would suffer migraine headaches, and chronic pain in my neck and back for years. But I was still alive, and this amazed people who saw the car. Could Someone have been watching over me and Bob? The thought did occur to me.

Sylvia learned to drive and got her driving license while we lived in the Boston area. We had a manual transmission, which meant she had

to learn to stop at traffic lights on the side of hills and use the brake, clutch, and shift to move forward without stalling the engine or rolling backward into the car behind. I was very proud of how well Sylvia did.

I continued to work three or four hours after school each day at Raytheon as a draftsman until the end of my second school year. Then I applied for a job as an artist in Raytheon's Public Relations art department and was accepted.

On June 17, 1957, our son David Brian was born. Since Sylvia had the car that day, she drove herself to the hospital.

A few weeks later we took a vacation trip to Florida to visit our relatives and to look for a better job.



On Suzanne's first birthday we were at Trudy's home in Rhode Island.



Bob and Jean Arnold







In the photo of the Pontiac above, you can see where my head made a hole in the windshield. I am convinced that only by the grace of God did we survive.