

HOMEWARD BOUND



It is strange to visit the place I used to call home. I arrive only to merge into the collective stream of tourists raising their cameras to ocean views. I am now just a tourist in a place I believe my family helped create.

I was born in Port Angeles, as were my parents. They met as children (pictured). My people were loggers and longshore men. The trails have my family's sweat and blood dripped into it. My grandpa's teeth are even there, somewhere, knocked out by a choker cable. My grandpa and uncle wore the uniform: hickory shirt, jeans with red suspenders, caulk boots (pronounced "cork") for work, and a Teamster's union pin on their hats to prove they had paid their dues. Their jean legs were always sawed off with a jack-knife "so they wouldn't get caught." (Caught on what? I never asked.)

My grandma was a conundrum of feminine and masculine. She grew sweet peas & snapdragons, bought Avon's Sweet Honesty, embroidered, crocheted, and taught me to do all those things. She also smoked camels without a filter, drank beer out of a white can with 'BEER' printed on the side. She squished caterpillars with her fingers and hunted & fished right alongside my grandpa

She always had a bowl of assorted Brach's candy out, and an old radio in the living room singing out Patsy Cline. She taught us about Jack, the elusive leprechaun who always watched us. No matter how painstakingly we looked, we never caught sight of him. We only knew he'd been there because he'd leave out a piece of Brach's candy, perhaps on the windowsill, as evidence.

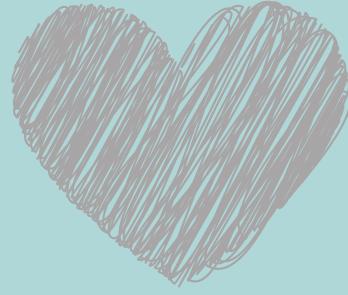
There we had cantaloupe for breakfast. To this day, the smell of a fresh cantaloupe--and the inside of an old truck--overwhelms me with nostalgia.

My grandpa and his friends fed dimes into a metal horse outside of Swain's in Port Angeles and talked as I rocked away to the tune of a whole dollar. They played cribbage, and therefore I did, too. They'd tell me they needed to bring me down to the dock to make them some money because I was that good. My uncle was the boy drafted to Vietnam, a sniper there likely due to a lifetime of hunting here. My mom was the girl riding horses who brought her Home Etc. sewing home for my grandma to do.

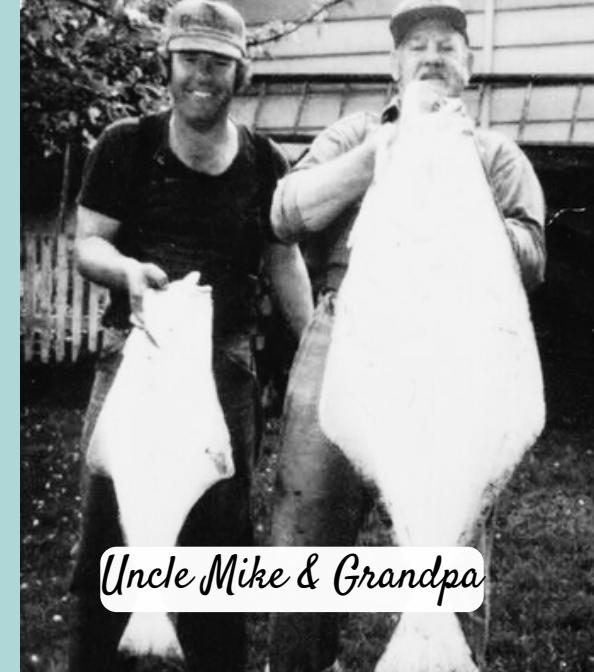


We ate so much venison, the rare beef hamburger felt like luxurious wealth. We ate so much salmon that I swore it off. One nostalgic day, after years without my uncle or grandpa bringing it home, I was genuinely shocked to discover how expensive it is.

For now, we visit. This summer, we wanted to go West, back to our roots. My mom wasn't initially going to come, but decided to, and we were blessed with a rich historian narrating our story further than I could on my own.



Queen of Angels Catholic Church, 1965



I've spent the last 21 years in Louisiana, mostly trying to make ends meet. The minute I graduated from nursing school I bought tickets to fly my sons back for a visit. They may have grown up in Louisiana, but Washington is part of them, too.

My son, Randy, is now a resident of Washington. He plans on living there when he gets out of the Army.