

From the Kirkland Courier
An interview with Annabel Jensen
2003

Annabel Jensen was born in the Highlands in 1921, and grew up in a house at NE 94th and 116th Ave NE in the 20s and 30s.

Before Mrs. Jensen was born, her father worked at a sawmill in Preston. When it burned down her parents moved to our neighborhood, which was then part of Rose Hill. Her father went to work at Monohon Mill on east Lake Sammamish. Mrs. Jensen says, "It was too far to commute in a model-T on dirt roads, so he stayed in a boarding house there and came home on weekends."

116th and 112th (Sheffield and Fir) were gravel roads then. There was no 405 - Slater Ave. and NE 90th went through to upper Rose Hill. NE 85th was called the Kirkland-Redmond Highway. All the houses were on big lots, with gardens and orchards, dirt driveways, wells, and outhouses. "It was the depression," said Mrs. Jensen, "and toilet paper was a luxury almost no one could afford. We came to hate the Sears catalog... Especially the glossy color pages!" In the 30s, a faucet was put in out by the road in front of Mrs. Jensen's house. "It was sure easier than pumping well water!" she remembers. Her family raised chickens, "until the price of eggs fell too low, and we sold the chickens. Then we cleared half our lot and planted strawberries, but there was always some disease to worry about. So then we planted raspberries. Us kids spent our summers picking raspberries." I asked her if she minded that and she said "We took it for granted - all kids had to work then." It was a rare treat to go swimming at the lake in the summer. Marina Park beach didn't exist yet. "You had to push through the bushes to the water if you wanted to swim." Instead, everyone went to one of the "resorts" on Juanita Bay, where there were "a nice sand beach, a two story clubhouse with a dance floor upstairs, and an amusement park in the summer with Dodge 'Ems." (That's what they used to call bumper cars.)

The Gateway Theater in downtown Kirkland had 10 cent movies on Sundays. They showed a newsreel first, then a cartoon, then the movie. There were three grocery stores within a stone's throw of the south Highlands! Leitha's Store, also called the Rose Hill Grocery, was on the SE corner of NE 90th and 116th Ave NE. "It had a gas pump and one of the only telephones around," says Mrs. Jensen, "so everyone came to use it." You picked up the receiver and asked the operator to place your call. Across the street was Acker's store, which later became the Grange Hall, used for meetings, dances, and voting. The building still stands. On the corner of NE 90th and 124th Ave NE (Virginia Street) was Belts store and a community center, where they had dances, fairs, weddings, and all kinds of community activities. "The stores had penny candy in glass cases," she said with a big smile, "and a vinegar barrel. Our parents would send us down with a jug to fill up."

Kids went to Rose Hill Grade School, just east of Costco, across from the Presbyterian Church. At one point the school burned down and was rebuilt. At its peak about 150 kids went there. After Mark Twain and Peter Kirk Elementaries were built, it was no longer

used as a school, and was eventually torn down several years ago. After grade school, kids went to Kirkland Junior High, then to Kirkland High School, which was at the site of Waverly Park downtown. They walked of course! There was no TV or computer games, and no junk food. Kids got lots of exercise from work and play.

She fondly remembers hearing recorded music for the first time on a windup phonograph: "I think it might have been 'Bye Bye Blackbird'."

Mrs. Jensen worked as a secretary at Kirkland Junior High in the late 30s. I asked her how she liked working with the kids. "They were wonderful!" she said. "They were nice and well-mannered and never gave us any trouble. There was no drinking or drugs, and most kids didn't have cars. Some of those kids still live around here." I asked if kids ever got sent to the Principal's office, and if so, for what offenses. "I don't remember kids going to see the Principal," she said. "Skipping school was about the worst they ever did."

After that Mrs. Jensen worked for the City of Kirkland for 25 years. She worked in several departments, including Utilities, and was secretary to the Council and to the City Manager, and was Deputy City Clerk.

The house Mrs. Jensen was born in was sold after her parents died. Years later Mrs. Jensen noticed that the house was being remodeled, and asked the workers if she could look inside. They were tearing off the layers of wallpaper in her old room. "My, did that old wallpaper bring back memories!" she said nostalgically. "My parents added on to both ends of that house. It was just a square box when they bought it. I'm glad to see it preserved."

Mrs. Jensen's brother kept the southern portion of their parents' property, on the NW corner of NE 94th and 116th Ave. NE. When Central Avenue was being widened he had one of the doomed houses moved to his land. It was built in the 1920s.

In 1958 Mrs. Jensen and her husband Hilmar moved into a house on 90th and Slater. The picturesque white farmhouse was built in the early 1900s. The property had originally stretched to about the middle of what is now 405, but then 2-lane 405 went in, in the 50s. In about 1971, 405 was widened. "We had a beautiful row of holly trees they cut down," she said, "it broke my heart." There is now about 5 feet between her house and the freeway sound wall.

I asked Mrs. Jensen what she missed least about life in the Highlands when she was growing up. Without missing a beat, she said "The outhouses!"



Annabel's house at 11630 NE 90th St. was demolished in 2016



Saying goodbye to Annabel, who moved to Oregon in 2008.

