

Clifton Presbyterian Church

MEMBERS' MEMORIES OF THE DECADES

1960'S

Jim's Story

In 1958, Norman and Ruth Petersen bought a house with 35 acres on Route 612 (which eventually became Henderson Road) from the Compton family. What more perfect place to raise four growing boys in the footsteps of their Minnesota farm boy father turned Navy fighter pilot.

Commander Petersen was transferred to Hawaii in 1960, and when the family returned in 1963 they found that their home, which in their absence had been rented out, had been turned into a mire of neglect. The yard could have been bailed like a field of hay, and the interior was a disaster.



While repairs and clean-up were undertaken, the Petersens lived with the McIntyres on Chestnut Street in town. Minor McIntyre, a former town mayor, and his wife Hazel, were members of CPC. It took about two months to bring the Petersen's home into livable condition.

At the time of the family's relocation in 1960, the Reverend A. Ray Howland was pastor, and his wife was a Sunday school teacher. During the Petersen's stay in Hawaii, Reverend Howland died, and the Reverend Elwood Scofield was called to the pulpit. He wore a full velvet robe with a long, draping hood behind; "Jimmy" used to put his head in it because it was soooo soft. He and his wife lived on Chestnut Street. He was a gentle, soft spoken man whose hobby was lapidary.

Originally from Canada, he often spoke wistfully of returning to Nova Scotia someday, where they did eventually retire. The Rev. Ellwood H. Crick was called to the pulpit in the mid to late 60s. His wife and three children resided in the manse adjacent to the church building until his departure in the 1980s.

Clifton had for many years been a farming area, but in the 60s began to morph into a transient area for military and government workers because it was a low cost suburb. From the early to mid-60's, the prominent member families in the neighborhood were the Buckleys (of Buckley Bros. Store fame), Detwilers, McIntyres, Clintons, Buffingtons, Webbs, and many more whose names have faded in memory.

Helen Hayes had a relative in town with whom she frequently stayed, and she often attended the church when she visited. However, due to its proximity to Washington, D.C., many members came and went through duty assignment rotations.

Brigadier Gen. Willard Webb, whose numerous wood carvings grace many walls of our building, held wood carving classes at church for the youth. They were attended by youngsters who were anxious to learn the secrets of how Gen. Webb lovingly produced the many panels that graced the church's halls. His wife, Margaret Webb, was a wonderfully vibrant part of Clifton's life and was known and loved by many.

In those days, neither the sanctuary nor the rest of the building were air conditioned, so ceiling fans were installed to at least keep air moving in the stifling summers. Thank goodness for summer breezes!

Over many wears, the church pews' old finish of who-knows-what blackened from age. On one particular church work day, Ruth Petersen volunteered, with her sons Doug and Jim, to strip off the old sticky finish and polish the new-found oak underneath to a bright luster.

Clifton Elementary School hosted a carnival of sorts. Many booths were set up with games and challenges for all, and refreshments of all sorts. This was the earliest precursor to Clifton Day.

Mr. Green, a D.C. social worker, rented and lived at Ivakota Farm on what is now Compton Road north of town. On many weekends, he brought inner city kids "out to the country" to learn about farming, "country life" that they had only heard of or read about in books. He learned about the community's efforts to have a wide reaching festival gathering, so with the town's help, "Ivakota Day" was begun, where he, his young guests, and towns people put together quite an abundance of fun: fishing contests in any one of three well-stocked ponds, various games of skill and luck, a hayride behind a real tractor on an actual hay wagon, arts and crafts, and a water battle between Clifton VFD (featuring their brand new 1966 Ford Fire truck) and neighboring Centreville VFD. Even the on-lookers ended up wet!

Of course, there were locally prepared foods, beverages and canned goods to be had all day long.

The choir was directed by Patrick Clifford for many years, and since Norm and Ruth were members of the choir, all the Petersen boys were "recruited" at some point. Ruth often substituted when need be; thankfully the old pump organ had been replaced sometime before 1960.

Back in the day, there was a Sunday school service, then Sunday school classes, then the "adult" service. The kids would go to the Clifton Store for treats between Sunday school and church, then occupy the rear pew by the bell pull and try to stifle the sound of candy wrappers, much to the chagrin of the adults. It was tolerated...

Ahhh, it was grand growing up in the church on the hill!