

Chapter One

The Lacey Leader

I didn't own *The Lacey Leader*, but that didn't make any difference. Many people thought I did and that was good enough for me. Unfortunately it eventually got me fired.

The Lacey Leader was founded in October 1966 just a couple of months before Lacey became an incorporated city.

The founders were a trio: Gordon Schultz, UPI correspondent in Olympia; Leroy Hittle, AP correspondent in Olympia; and Sid Morrill, who at that time was working in advertising sales for *The Daily Olympian*. Hittle and Schultz kept their regular jobs and only Morrill worked full time at *The Leader*, although in the beginning Schultz did some writing and editing for the paper.

The Lacey Leader was encouraged during its infancy by Bob Blume, who had just opened South Sound Center and was in the process of forming a city. He knew that a city needed a sense of identity and one leg of that was its own newspaper. He also understood that his shopping center needed an advertising outlet which would be a booster for the city and for his center.

He failed to realize that Schultz was a reporter and it was only a matter of time before his desire to report the news outweighed boosterism. Eventually Blume and *The Leader* had a falling out.

It came about gradually as the newspaper began to take a long, hard look at Lacey and at the city government which was running the operation. Schultz found many warts and pointed them out in the pages of *The Lacey Leader*. It culminated when Schultz demanded that then Mayor Al Homann, a friend of Blume's, make public, charges he had against the Lacey Police Chief Chuck Neuman which resulted in his firing. Homann refused. City boosters began to withdraw advertising and as the 1970's dawned, Schultz ceased to be a managing partner. Operation of the paper was left in Morrill's hands.

He went through a number of editors and reporters during the next few years until I came on board in February 1973.

As an intern from The Evergreen State College, I had been working at *The Olympia News*, the area's other weekly newspaper, under the tutelage of Eddie Alexander, a one-time editor of *The Daily Olympian* and a partisan Republican whose newspaper reflected those views. Although Eddie was well-respected as a community leader he is probably best known for his son Gerry Alexander who went on to become the chief justice of the Washington State Supreme Court. It didn't take me long to outgrow the small newspaper and within three months I had learned everything Eddie had to teach me. I started looking for new challenges when an internship with *The Lacey Leader* arose.

Editor at that time, John Ellingson, a former reporter for *The Olympian* was looking for someone to step in and do his work. I fit the bill.

Two weeks after he hired me (with no pay I might add) Ellingson got into an argument with Sid Morrill and left. The burden of running the news operation

fell on me – who with only about four months experience – seized the opportunity - - and as they say - - and ran with it.

Then it happened. Morrill found a buyer and I had my first experience with a big time newspaper man. The new owner was Bob Brown, a former AP correspondent from “back east somewhere.”

Bob was a charmer, a sweet talker, the kind of boss that asks you to work overtime and makes you glad you did. He took me out to lunch and when we finished it was obvious to me that the paper couldn't function without my expertise. No money but all the experience I could swallow.

He warned me, “I'm bringing out a young man from back east who is a great newspaperman,” he said. “He appears slow, but he has a sharp mind. Listen to him and learn from him.”

That's when Ed Bagley strolled into my life. Slow was right. Ed walked slow, moved slow, talked slow. But his demeanor didn't echo the man. He was a cross-country runner in high school and attended Michigan State on an athletic scholarship. Ed was shy and a lone sport like distance running was a perfect fit. He had worked as a sports writer, sports editor and eventually found himself in Winsted, Connecticut where he became the editor of the city's local paper and where he encountered Bob Brown.

It was great. Bob spent money, hired new staff and gave *The Leader* a big city look. Ed worked hard, not only in getting the paper out each week, but in teaching me the newspaper game.

When I graduated from Evergreen in August 1973 I looked to Ed for a decision. Would he hire me and finally give me a wage? It came down to me and a young woman who was a part time stringer and a community activist. Ed hired me, not because I was the best choice, but because the young woman had some personal problems, as he reminded me on numerous occasions.

Bob Brown left the day to day operations to Ed and went to Las Vegas where he purchased another newspaper *The North Las Vegas Times*. As Ed took on more work running the business side of *The Leader*, I began to assume more and more of the news operation, until Ed was almost completely out of the news side. Soon he began relying on me for overseeing everything except advertising, circulation and accounting. Ed continued to write the occasional story and his own column, but for all practical purposes, I was the editor of *The Lacey Leader*. Ed eventually appointed me “city editor.”

In 1975 the troubles started. Bob Brown had taken the corporate books of *The Lacey Leader* to Nevada and the rumor was that Bob was running mob money through the corporate books.

Ed believed it. He expected a big, black limousine to drive up to the front door of the newspaper any minute and thick-necked Italians in business suits to come in the door. Ed wrestled with the decision for weeks about what to do and finally instituted a lawsuit against Brown to bring the corporate books back to Washington state.

In a decision handed down in Judge Robert Doran's courtroom, Bob Brown was ordered to return the books and sell *The Lacey Leader* to Ed Bagley.

While the exact price was never made known to me, I suspect it was somewhere in the neighborhood of a quarter of a million dollars..

Ed was happy. He worked hard. He organized, he even made a few decisions. But he lacked one quality most successful businessmen and all successful newspaper men had - - he was shy.. He liked people, but would rather avoid them if he could. Whether it was natural shyness or some other deep seated anxiety I never knew for sure. But representing the newspaper fell on my shoulders.

I loved every minute of it. I joined every local organization that would have me. I worked long and hard on community projects. If Lacey flourished as a city then *The Lacey Leader* would flourish as a newspaper. Before long, I was the public face of *The Lacey Leader*. Some people were unable to tell us apart and more often than not someone would call me Ken Bagley probably because our last names were so close.

I was oblivious to the money side of the operation. It only affected me when I couldn't buy something we needed, or if Ed asked me not to cash my check for a few days. Other than that, I worked the news and left him alone. He generally left me alone as well. He promoted me to editor and gave me a small increase in pay.

Our hard work and efforts began to pay off. *The Leader* was beginning to gain some recognition and respect within the community and the greater newspaper community as well. I received numerous writing and reporting awards from state associations as well as national associations. I felt I had finally made it.

We took *The Daily Olympian* head on and beat them in Lacey coverage. We out-reported and out-wrote them when it came to Lacey.

The Olympian increased the number of reporters covering Lacey which had previously been the poor stepchild when it came to space in *The Olympian's* news pages. We forced them to pay more attention to local sports and when we began to cover girls high school sports *The Olympian* began to realize that here was a whole new arena of sports to cover.

And, we knew we had arrived when the local democratic party discovered us. In the early days we ran a small print shop and were a non-union shop. We were on the democrat's "labor boycott" list because of that. Although we gradually got out of the outside printing business we remained on their boycott list. Only republicans used us for political advertising although candidates from both parties sought our endorsement of their campaigns. Until Ron Keller.

Ron Keller was the first democrat to place political advertising in *The Lacey Leader*. "I did it," he explained "because *The Leader* had better coverage of the 22nd Legislative District and practicality rules out politics." Ron was elected to office and that burst the dam. We had arrived as a political force in the community.

Unfortunately, that new power didn't always come with responsibility. I used to joke that "I never let facts get in the way of a good story," and too often that view was true.

Ed's management and money troubles left me free to decide what was and wasn't news. Many times I made the wrong decisions. I made the right decisions too, but it was those wrong decisions which spelled the end.

I had power and I sensed it. There's nothing like the feeling of power to make one's sense of responsibility take second place.

But the biggest mistake *The Leader* made during its entire operation was a joint decision by Ed Balsley and Ken Bagley. We became curious to know who the highest paid county employee was. That led to a story listing the top 40 highest paid county employees and their salaries. We listed the names and what they were paid.

Interesting reading. Papers were snapped up left and right and we had to do a rare second printing. We decided to do the same with each agency of state government and began our series listing names and salaries for the top 25 or the top 40 employees of each state agency. It took an attorney general's opinion to provide us with that information but we got it. We went through a half dozen state agencies in about three months.

And was *The Leader* ever popular. Our articles were picked up and reprinted in newspapers all over the state including the *Yakima Herald Republic*.

But that was the beginning of the end for *The Leader*. We had violated one of the major tenants of journalism. Never attack your readers. Because most of our readers were state employees they found the information on their co-workers fascinating until their own names appeared. We received dozens of phone calls complaining about our series and complaining that we had violated secrecy in releasing their salaries.

The cancellation of subscriptions started.

Overwhelmed with a declining subscription list, burdened with paying off long term debt to Bob Brown and concerned about my growing arrogance towards our supporters, Ed developed a severe case of shingles, a painful and debilitating disease. For nearly two months he dropped out of sight and when he returned, Ed was determined to take back a public leadership role with the newspaper.

As he tried to take a greater hand in the news operation our conflicts grew culminating in a disagreement over the future of the newspaper. Ed wanted to turn it into a shopper with free distribution over the entire county. I wanted to hunker down, ride out the storm, raise advertising rates and aim for an exclusive audience. I issued an ultimatum. "You need me more than I need you," I told him. "Either you do what I want or fire me."

Ed fired me.

Less than ten months later Ed Bagley closed down *The Lacey Leader* and sold off what assets he could.

Chapter 2

The Red Bull

If ever a business was said to be the heart of a community, it was the Red Bull in South Sound Center in Lacey. As surely as any restaurant serves its customers, the Red Bull served the residents of Lacey.

Originally called The Barb, the restaurant opened with South Sound Center on October 12, 1966 and was an immediate hit. While the mall had many restaurants, only The Barb had a full-service coffee shop, a full-service restaurant, a full-service lounge and bar and an upstairs that could hold banquets of up to 200 people.

In 1968, the restaurant was bought by Jerry Craig, owner of the Olympia Oyster House who changed its name to The Red Bull. After a few short years, Craig sold it again, this time to the McWain family. With its purchase the McWain's owned three restaurants in town. The Oregon Trail in Tumwater, The Spar in downtown Olympia and the renamed Red Bull in Lacey. Ron and Donna McWain were the operators of the new Red Bull.

Because banquet facilities were in short supply around the greater community, the Red Bull served as the headquarters for most major groups and organizations. The Lacey Chamber of Commerce met at the Red Bull as did the Olympia Chamber of Commerce. Many service clubs called the Red Bull home as did the Lacey Rotary Club. Organizations like the Realtors, the home builders and half a dozen organizations met in the upstairs of the Red Bull on a regular basis.

Its coffee shop served as a meeting place for those using the mall or those just looking for a location to meet and drink a cup of coffee. The lounge and bar hosted some of the best entertainment in the area and every weekend was live entertainment, whether it be a hypnotist, a piano bar or a stand-up comedian, everyone came through the Red Bull at some time. For a fine evening of dining for the special occasion or just for a quick meal, the Red Bull was "the" place in Lacey.

I was at the Red Bull several times each day. I met people for coffee and meetings in the coffee shop and I ate lunch in the restaurant most days. At least once a week I had my Rotary Club meeting on the second floor, and the weekends would often find me in the lounge enjoying an evening's entertainment. The Red Bull was more than a second home to me. It represented Lacey and my home town.

The McWains ran the place for several years before embarking on other adventures. It was sold to Forest Wilcox, who suffered from lack of restaurant experience and the McWains had to take the restaurant back.

None of the customers seemed to know about the financial problems of the place and it continued to be a major hangout for every important person in

the community. It wasn't unusual to see a state senator and a lobbyist in the corner, or a top banker and a small businessman in another booth. The Red Bull was the place where people went to meet people, to conduct business and to be seen.

Ron and Donna McWain eventually sold the Red Bull to the mall owner Bob Blume. The McWains moved to Reno where both Ron and Donna went to work for local casinos.

Then one day a hepatitis scare hit Lacey. One of the employees of the restaurant was found to be contaminated. Everyone who ate in the Red Bull for a week was required to go to the Thurston County Health Department and get a shot.

During the next week, more than a thousand people got those shots. Reviewing the line of people waiting for their shot found every important person in the community. The Red Bull's customers were legendary.

Blume paid for every shot, but he also saw an opportunity to shut down the Red Bull, and a few months later he did so, citing the hepatitis as the excuse.

He had often said that he didn't know how to run a restaurant and wasn't in the restaurant business. And he proved it by shutting the Red Bull down for good.

An auction sold off most of the furnishing and in no time, the Red Bull was no more. The place sat, empty for several years while Blume tried to do something with the mall.

Eventually he tore it down and built a strip mall. Where the Red Bull used to sit was now a Target store.

The Red Bull is gone. The heart of the city was completely ripped out. The various groups which once used the Red Bull as a meeting place have scattered to different locations, but there is still no one place which can take the place - - or the heart of the Red Bull.

Chapter 3

Press and Police

Every Tuesday evening the police would show up at the back door of the newspaper. It was always for some stated reason. Either they'd seen someone in the back parking lot, or there had been a strange car cruising the area; but almost every Tuesday night they'd be at the back door.

The Lacey Police were always a little concerned about what would appear on the pages of *The Lacey Leader* on Wednesday and often what we were publishing was not what they wanted to read. They knew we laid the paper out and put it to bed on Tuesday night and that's when they would show up, to get a heads up on Wednesday's headlines.

Larry Dickerson and Ed Sorger would always show up when they were working the graveyard shift. At other times, different cops would be at the back door. They'd walk in if the door was open as it often was during the summer, or they'd knock and wait for one of us to open the door and let them in.

They'd make some excuse, wander around the room, looking at the stories on the layout board or gently peeking at the copy waiting to be set. Seldom did they find anything about the department. When I had been working on a story about the police I'd get it done early and out of the way, anticipating they'd be at the back door before morning came.

Working on a story I had been hanging around the Lacey Police Station, which at that time was located in the old 1930's style white farmhouse which used to sit on Pacific Avenue and is now the home of the Lacey Museum.

I had discovered that the department had become computerized thanks to the expertise of Bob Ingram, a Lacey cop with some computer background, and reams of copy was spilling out of the printer. Bob was cooperating with me and giving me lots of computer printouts.

The department knew I was writing a story but they had no idea on the exact subject. Lacey Police Chief Jim Land had refused to meet with me, so I was on my own interpreting the information I had. I expected a visit from Dickerson or Sorger and I wasn't wrong.

Sure enough, on Tuesday night it came, about 11:30 p.m. A knock on the backdoor and there they were. I let them in and engaged them in conversation while the story had been pulled off the story board and tucked between pieces of paper in a drawer under the counter.

While not exceedingly large Ed Sorger reminded me of a St. Bernard dog, kind of loopy and ungainly but able to smother you in a minute if he ever got out of control. His face would turn red when he got upset and his whole body would swell up.

Larry Dickerson always made me think of "Opie" from the "Andy Griffith Show". He had that farm boy quality about him which was disarming because he

had a good police mind and very little escaped him. Unusual for a cop, he had a wife and family and a marriage that seemed to be going well. He had started out in the jewelry business but gravitated to law as a reserve officer.

Larry edged past me in the narrow hall and asked for a cup of coffee as he wandered over to the layout tables and started looking over the stories for Wednesday's paper.

Finding nothing about the department he resorted to the question "What are you working on?" he asked.

"A little of this and a little of that," I replied.

Ed Sorger jumped into the conversation. "If you're writing anything bad about the department, we'll get you," he said.

That challenge brought my response. "If you haven't been doing anything wrong then you've got nothing to worry about," I said.

Things returned to a fairly normal course quickly, some small talk, and then they left.

Having worked late I didn't get back into the office until noon on Wednesday. The paper had been printed and distributed. There on the front page was the story: "Three cops write most of the city's tickets." It told how a small handful of the Lacey department appeared to be doing most of the work while the others seemed to be engaged in very little."

When I left work about 6 p.m. that day, I didn't see the white Lacey cop car sitting across the street from the newspaper office. Two blocks down the road he stopped me.

I can't remember the cop's name but I haven't forgotten his comment as he handed me a ticket for going four miles over the posted speed limit. "We don't write enough tickets – huh?"

When I walked in my house the phone was ringing. I answered it and a male voice on the other end said, "We told you we'd get you Balsley," and then hung up. That was it.

During the next two days I received 12 more tickets and numerous phone calls reminding me of why I was getting the tickets. Some of the calls came from women including one who asked me why I was telling lies about her husband.

I called Lacey's city manager Bob Williams and told him about the police harassment. "That story's all wrong and unfair," was Bob's reply. "I don't blame the department for being upset."

"Maybe it was," I said, "but they're going at it the wrong way," I said. Bob spent a few minutes explaining to me why the story was in error then closed the conversation by saying, "I'll get chief (Jim) Land to look into it."

The tickets stopped. I went to the police station and visited the chief. He pulled out the computer sheets and explained to me how some cops work traffic, others worked investigations and how the computer read-out didn't always tell the correct story.

I muttered something about why didn't you explain all this earlier instead of ducking me, then I finished with this: "Did the city manager call you and ask you to look into the harassment?"

"The tickets stopped didn't they," the chief replied.

The next week I wrote an amended story explaining more fully what the computer sheets didn't show and that was the end of it - - I thought - - until I had to go to court.

I was looking forward to going to court. Not only did I know the judge and the city attorney, but I was convinced I had been wronged and wanted to prove it. As part of my defense I had subpoenaed all the cops who had written me tickets as well as the police chief and the city manager. I was ready.

Came the day and the judge had been replaced by a temporary fill-in, an attorney who was substituting on the bench for my case. The city attorney had withdrawn from the prosecution and one of his assistants, whom I didn't know, was handling the case.

Since I was being charged only for the first ticket, the judge didn't allow me to call the other cops, but he did allow me to place the 12 other tickets in evidence.

I called Jim Land to the stand and asked him if he had been aware of the organized harassment effort against me. The chief pleaded ignorance. I asked him if the city manager had contacted him and asked him to look into it. The chief said "No".

I called Bob Williams to the stand. Under questioning the city manager said that he had, indeed called the police chief and asked him what was going on. He said that he wanted it stopped.

The police chief had been caught in a lie. I rested my case.

The acting city attorney asked for a guilty verdict but in addition asked for court costs totaling several hundred dollars which included the costs of the time for all the police witnesses I had called.

I still remember the judge's words; "It's obvious from the testimony that there was an effort on the part of some members of the Lacey Police Department to harass Mr. Balsley. I order it stopped - now."

He went on, "Every accused has the right to call witnesses and confront his accusers. Therefore I am denying the prosecutor's call for court costs."

Turning to me he said, "Mr. Balsley, while it appears a systematic effort to harass you has been underway, you have not proven you are innocent of the charge of going four miles over the speed limit.

"I am therefore assessing you a \$44 fine and suspending it. Court adjourned."

That was it.

As I was leaving the courthouse the acting judge passed me in the hall, now wearing a business suit after having shed his robes. "Good work," was all he said as he hurried past me and out the door.

I didn't get another traffic ticket in Lacey for several years.

(Larry Dickerson went on to become Lacey's police chief for a short time after John Mansfield retired.. Ed Sorger spent 30 years with the department and became the head of police services at The Evergreen State College.)

Chapter 4

Karen Fraser

Karen Fraser used to frustrate me to no end, yet I made her mayor of Lacey. When I was covering her for *The Lacey Leader* I remember writing that she seemed a little naïve and a little slow in comprehending material. While my opinion of Karen has improved, she still manages to cause me frustration.

I first met Karen in the early 70's when she was appointed to a seat on the Lacey Planning Commission. She had moved to Olympia from Seattle after receiving her master's degree in public administration from the University of Washington and had gone to work for the Washington State Department of Transportation where she worked primarily as their lobbyist.

She gained a reputation on the planning commission for fairness and hard work and when a vacancy occurred on the Lacey City Council she was appointed to fill the seat. (This is a trend the council has continued. Several mayors including Bill Bush and Kay Boyd have come up after being appointed to an open seat on the council.)

During Bill Bush's reign as mayor, the Lacey Police Department was going through some hard times. Lacey Police Chief Jim Land was under constant pressure including allegations of wife beating and alcoholism. Lacey City Manager Bob Williams appeared to be unable to keep the lid on the situation and Mayor Bush seemed unwilling.

Then more serious allegations about Land's conduct arose. Mike Wales, a reporter for *The Daily Olympian* had uncovered charges that Land was taking drug evidence from the evidence room and reselling it. The most serious charge centered around 10,000 hits of speed that had disappeared from the room.

Wales said he had received information from members within the police department that Land had sold the drugs, but they were unwilling to step forward and speak on record.

One afternoon, while working at *The Lacey Leader* office I received a call from Wales. He wanted to meet me as soon as possible and we settled on an old abandoned drive-in restaurant site on Martin Way.

Wales was from the old "muckraking" school of journalism and had come to *The Daily Olympian* from a Gannett newspaper in Florida where he earned a Pulitzer Prize for information he had uncovered linking the Nixon administration with the Cuban refugees and Watergate. While at *The Olympian* Wales had concentrated on the police beat.

When I met him Wales was furious. He felt confident in his information but his newspaper editor wouldn't publish the story. Because of my contacts within the police department and my relationship with Land, he wanted me to pursue the story and see what I could uncover.

Armed with the all information he had given me, except the names of his contacts within the police department (although I think I knew who they were) I set up a meeting with the chief.

Land admitted taking the drugs out of the evidence room but told me he flushed them down the stool. He said that as police chief he was responsible for the disposal of all unneeded evidence and he had disposed of other drugs at other times in the same way. It was unneeded evidence, he said.

Unless one of the cops came forward with additional information it was obvious to me that I wasn't going to get anywhere. As I was ending our meeting he dropped the "bomb."

"I want to show you something," he said and reached into his desk drawer where he pulled out a file folder. "I'm letting you see this," he said "because this is a bigger story."

In the file were signed statements from two young men who accused Lacey Mayor Bill Bush of sexually abusing them. Accompanying their statements was the results of one lie detector test which had proven "inconclusive."

I was astounded that Land would let me see this information until it finally hit me that he was attempting to divert attention from himself and on to the mayor. It had worked.

"Does Bill know about this," I asked?

Bill and his wife Sally had been licensed foster care parents for a number of years and had taken in many foster children during that time. Bill always dressed and looked unusual, but other than that had never given me a reason to suspect he might be involved in anything like this.

"I talked with him," Land said. "He claims the boys had stolen from him when they ran away and were just getting back at him for filing charges against them."

It was obvious we had a stalemate. The police chief was under theft and drug allegations while the mayor was under the shadow of unsubstantiated charges the chief was leveling. It was obvious something had to be done.

I was convinced that Land had to be removed as police chief and the mayor wouldn't be able to bring any pressure on him to do so as long as Land had the signed statements. And, while the responsibility belonged to Lacey City Manger Bob Williams, the mayor was the only person who could force Williams to act and Williams's nature was not to do anything if he didn't have to.

Like Wales, I didn't have enough concrete proof to publish a story but I had to do something. Printing unsubstantiated stories was no good for me, no good for the paper and no good for the city.

I set up a meeting with Williams and told him everything I knew. While he was surprised to hear about the mayor, he still wasn't willing to do anything. He wasn't going to move against the chief.

I called the Department of Social and Health Services and got in contact with the family that licensed foster homes. I asked them to take a closer look at the Bush home and see if they had any information which might make them have a second thought.

Then I determined that Bush had to be replaced so that Land could be removed as police chief.

The City of Lacey was then operating under the Optional Municipal Code where the mayor wasn't elected by the people but was selected by the council. The City Council was required to select a mayor after every municipal election, but it could change mayors as often and whenever it wanted.

At this time there were a number of lightweights on the council and those with any smarts had made enemies. The only person on the list who stood any chance at all of overturning Bush and becoming mayor was Karen Fraser.

I talked with Karen, and gave her all the information I had. I told her that for the good of the city she had to become mayor. I think she really liked the idea, but her super cautious manner took over. "I won't consider running against Bill unless I'm sure I have enough votes to win," she told me.

I told her to leave that all up to me and began the process of contacting all the councilmembers except Bush. I lined up someone to nominate her, someone to second the nomination and finally, with her vote, I found the four votes necessary to give her a majority.

The morning of the council meeting I called Bush where he worked, at the Washington State parks and told him that Karen would be nominated and elected mayor that night. He was silent during my talk but finally said, "thank you" as he hung up. I thought maybe I had made a mistake, that he would be able to change some minds and stay as mayor. It was going to be a long night.

That evening, Bush ran the council meeting as usual until they got to the item of "New Business" the next to last item on the agenda. Councilmember Richard Johnson spoke up saying something about the advantages of selecting a new mayor and how that responsibility should be spread around.

The second came, and then the vote. Karen was elected mayor of Lacey on a 6-1 vote with Bill Bush voting for himself.

Shortly thereafter, Williams fired Jim Land.

Chapter Five

Anna Homann

I knew Anna Homann. That wasn't very significant, almost everyone knew Anna. The important thing was whether or not Anna knew you. If she did, then you were important because having Anna know you made you important.

I first met Anna following a Lacey City Council meeting in late 1973. I don't remember the month but it must have been winter because it was cold outside and I had ventured out to have a cigarette. Ed Bagley, the owner of *The Lacey Leader*, who was also smoking at that time, went out with me. Anna was standing by the building, arms crossed in front of her, cupping the elbow of the hand that held her cigarette.

We talked for a few minutes, about some action the city council had taken, when it became obvious that the cold was about to force us inside.

"I'm freezing my balls off," Ed said, forgetting for a moment that Anna was standing there with us. When the impact of what he had said hit him, Ed cast a glance Anna's way. "That's alright," Anna said. "If I had a pair, I'd be freezing mine off to."

That's the way Anna was, down-to-earth, blunt and to the point. When she agreed with something you said she'd shake her head up and down uttering "yup, yup yup." But when she disagreed with you those steel eyes would pierce whatever statement you were making and even if you were positive about your comments, her look would force you to reconsider.

Anna, her husband Al and their kids had moved to Lacey in the 1940's settling where the Clearbrook Race Track once was. Anna always referred to herself and her family as the "hicks from the sticks" because she said that was the way they were treated by the downtown Olympia establishment. But, she always said it as a positive statement, as though the Homann's later success made it a badge of honor.

Al worked at various jobs and ended up in construction eventually working on many major projects in Lacey including Panorama City and South Sound Center.

Al and Anna were instrumental in starting the Lacey Fire Department which first operated out of their house and garage.

Anna always claimed the reason they led the fight to incorporate Lacey as an independent city was to protect the Lacey Fire Department from being taken over by Olympia, and to protect what they had created.

I think it was deeper than that. I think Anna wanted to show the downtown Olympia establishment that "hicks" from Lacey could do alright on their own.

So, the Homann's, together with many others, led the fight for incorporation and after a misstep, realized the fruits of their labor when Lacey was incorporated as a separate and independent city on December 5, 1966.

Al became Lacey's first mayor, and because he was a businessman, saw growth as the key to the city's success.

Rumor had it Al never made a move without first consulting Anna. Anna always denied that Al consulted with her. She often said, "If you knew Al, then you knew that Al made his own decisions." But whether or not he consulted with her, Anna always took criticism of Al as a personal attack on her and her family. If husband and wife had disagreements on the way the city should proceed, they had them in private, because in public Anna always supported whatever move Al made.

Al and Anna were always making contributions to charity and projects which could benefit the city they founded. Anna was particularly fond of St. Martin's College and contributed large amounts of money for various college activities. Anna's contributions alone, for several years, supported the St. Martin's College Saint's basketball team. Anna bought all new uniforms for the team one year and traveled with them on the road games, then helped to pay for the refurbishing of the St. Martin's Pavilion.

That was just one of the many contributions the Homann's made. Anna wanted to keep their charitable donations private, and many, if not most people never knew what Anna and Al gave to this community.

But, because they were a high profile family, and because of Al's political involvement as mayor, they began to make enemies within the city government and in the community.

One contribution which brought them pain was Homann Park. Al and Anna had created a housing development called Alanna and as part of that development built a park and a baseball field called Homann Park. When later they donated the park to the city, as the city's first park, people began saying they did it for the tax write-off and maybe even made money on the deal.

I don't know if they made money or not. Anna always said the donation was made from the heart and she was hurt by the allegations they donated the park for any other reason than to make a gift to the city.

Anna used to call me up at all hours of the day and night, to feed me information, to ask my opinion or just to tell me what was on her mind. While her calls were sometimes inconvenient I always felt good that Anna would call me.

I carried her "private" phone number in my wallet and made certain I didn't share it with others. Probably because I felt privileged to have it, and not because I often needed it.

After Al died, Anna took it hard, at first. Then, accepting the death of her soul mate, she blossomed into her own, traveling and spending as much time as she could with her children - - but all the time keeping a close eye on Lacey.

Some slight on the part of the city, no one really knew just what, caused her to throw up her hands and say goodbye to Lacey.

Eventually she moved out of town, to Tumwater, and claimed she was through with Lacey. She even helped start the Tumwater Chamber of Commerce. Her allegiance she said now belonged to Tumwater. But even after I left the newspaper I'd still get a call from her now and then often complaining

about some action taken by the Lacey City Council. She may have moved to Tumwater but her heart never left Lacey.

Anna worked on many community projects. When I became the president of the 1989 Washington State Centennial Organizing Committee I got Anna to serve on the board of directors. But after suffering major medical problems her public involvement began to decline.

My last contact with Anna came in a Sunday evening phone call. I don't remember what we talked about but it was just nice to hear Anna's distinct voice and know that she still cared.

A couple of days later, she died. I couldn't believe it. I had just talked with her. But she was gone.

Her funeral was a private affair. I don't even know where it was held. Anna wanted it that way just like she wanted her contributions to Lacey kept low profile.

A few weeks after her death, a couple of dozen of her friends gathered at Tumwater Falls Park on the DeChutes River to share memories of Anna. Then one by one we each threw a flower into the river and watched as they were carried away over the dam and into Capitol Lake.

And, while I don't think of Anna everyday, I do think of her now and then, particularly when I watch Lacey grow and expand. Then I wonder "what would Anna think about her "hick" town now.

Chapter 6

Lacey Civic Committee

It was one of my great ideas that actually bore fruit. The idea of the Lacey Civic Committee grew right out of my own thoughts. I felt Lacey needed an organization which would be able to tackle large projects. While the service clubs were doing a good job, sometimes something more encompassing was needed. Hence, the Lacey Civic Committee.

It was 1975, when Bob Wark approached me. Bob was working as the public relations director for the Washington State Community College System. I knew Bob from the Lacey Rotary Club.

Bob said that the Green River Community College had a performing group which was traveling around the state putting on performances. They were willing to come to Thurston County but any money raised from their performance had to go to a Bicentennial project.

The nation's Bicentennial was two years away and as far as I could tell, no one in our area seemed to be doing anything particular. We decided to get a committee together and see if there was any interest in proceeding. Bob sent out letters to all of the service clubs in the Lacey area inviting them to participate in the project.

I contacted the Lacey Area Chamber of Commerce and asked them if they'd be interested in participating. We set the first meeting on Friday at noon at the Red Bull Restaurant. We weren't sure who would show.

That first meeting found Bob and myself sitting at the middle table in the Red Bull dining room waiting. Ann Mayse came representing the Lacey Chamber. Ann was a military wife, the wife of Lt. Col. Harvey Mayse. She was active in the republican party and volunteered at the Lacey chamber office. Soon Neil Good from the Lacey Sunrise Lions Club showed followed shortly by Jim Sheerer and Walt Schefter from the Lacey Kiwanis Club and Gene Dolan from the North Thurston Kiwanis Club. Neil Good was the Lacey Fire Chief while Walt Schefter was an attorney in private practice. Jim Sheerer was the manager of Pay N Save our local drug store. Gene Dolan was a retired banker and had also served as president of the Lacey Chamber and a short stint as its executive director. Our group was set - - for now.

We talked about projects and decided that we should help establish a community identity by creating a "Welcome to Lacey" sign. We kicked around several locations and settled on a location between South Sound Center and Interstate Five on Sleater-Kinney.

The Green River Community College performed to a small crowd, but now we had a small nest egg and were on our way. We contacted South Sound Center and asked for permission to build the sign. After several weeks we

received word that the property we wanted didn't belong to Capital Development but to Sears. We wrote a letter to Sears asking permission to build a sign on their property. Several months passed before we received a letter back from them stating "We don't think it's our property, but if it is, you can't build on it."

Because we liked each other so much we kept meeting during the long wait for an answer. We debated issues of the day, talked about events affecting Lacey and even came up with a name for our group - - the Lacey Civic Committee. Walt Schefter found it difficult to make all of the meetings but came to a few. His place was taken by John Mangham a member of the Lacey Sunrise Lion's Club. John was retired, and while I never really understood what he was retired from, he continued to manage some family property.

Nearly a year passed when we finally realized the property was owned by the Washington State Department of Transportation. We contacted them and asked for permission. It took some government paperwork but the land was transferred to the City of Lacey which gave us permission to do the work.

We talked to local businesses to get work done. Jon Powell, the owner of the local John Deere franchise agreed to grade the property. We had others who agreed to do the cement work and we got Bob Bright, owner of Nu Dor in Lacey to get us the flag poles.

He ordered the three poles from Taiwan. The freighter carrying the poles sunk and so he ordered another set. Several months passed before they arrived.

The Bicentennial passed as well, and we were still working on our Bicentennial project.

Volunteers from the Lacey Rotary Club and the Lacey Sunrise Lions clubs pitched in and put in a sprinkler system. The two groups worked hand in hand to landscape the property.

Everything was set, but we had a problem. What was going to go on the three flagpoles. We agreed on the national flag and the state flag but couldn't determine what to put on the third. I suggested a city flag. Since we had no city flag I designed one. I put the city logo on a field of white and sent it off to the city for approval. They did.

Thus the Lacey Civic Plaza was built. On a wet and rainy day in 1978, the plaza was dedicated, the first project for the Lacey Civic Committee.

During the time we were working on the civic plaza we continued to meet weekly. At one of our Friday meetings it was announced that the City of Lacey was considering an ordinance requiring property and business owners to landscape their property and businesses. I suggested that perhaps there was a better way of encouraging beautification.

I proposed that we create an award which would be given to businesses and individuals who "made Lacey a better and more attractive place in which to live," to use a carrot instead of a city stick. I suggested we call it the Community Improvement Award. Bob thought it was a great idea and approached the Lacey Rotary Club to act as hosts. We gave the award for several years, always at a Lacey Rotary Club meeting. Eventually the Lacey Rotary Club took over the award and later renamed it the Ron Rowe Community Improvement Award. Ron

had been a longtime community activist and served as president of the Lacey Rotary Club and of the Lacey Chamber of Commerce.

Once the Civic Plaza project was completed we continued to meet, keeping our eyes open for another project. It didn't take long before the next project came before us.

Denise Fuchs was working as an intern for the City of Lacey doing historical compilation for the city. One day she approached me and wanted to talk about the old Lacey City Hall. Fuchs said that the Lacey Fire District had bought the property and was going to tear down the old building. She thought it should be saved.

I thought she was right.

I brought the matter to the Lacey Civic Committee and they agreed. So began our third and largest project.

We managed to get the fire district to agree to postpone demolition of the old house while we looked for possible alternatives. Someone, and to this day I'm not sure just who, approached the Lacey Women's Club and asked them to donate a portion of their property on Lacey Street on which we could move the old city hall. The property was only a couple of hundred yards away from the site on Pacific Avenue and would be the perfect location.

With some stipulations, the Lacey Women's Club agreed to donate the property. We got Rainier House Movers to move the two-story building and on August 30, 1979 the building moved to its current location behind the Lacey Women's Club house.

Now came the hard part. Turning the old house into a museum. Many Rotarians and Lion Club members donated money, material and help. Foremost among those were John Mangham, from the Lacey Sunrise Lions, who oversaw the entire project and put a good deal of his own money into the renovation.

One Friday noon, Bill Bergquist came to our meeting. Bill was a Lacey Rotarian and on the board of CETA (Community Employment Training Act, a federal program) and let us know that money was available to train students in building and construction. With his help I wrote a grant to CETA for \$35,000. The grant was approved.

John Mangham went to work, supervising the students and spending a great deal of his time at the site. Through my Rotary contacts I got Pete Fleutsch from Sunset Air to donate and install a furnace. On October 26, 1980, the Lacey Historical Museum was opened.

After those three projects, the Lacey Civic Committee slowly faded away. In the 1990's it rose one more time when the City of Lacey was looking at building a bandstand in Huntamer Park. Using the Lacey Civic Plaza name and letterhead we solicited private funds to help build the bandstand. With volunteer help from the Olympia Master Builders the bandstand was completed. That was the last gasp for the Lacey Civic Committee.

Chapter 7

Bob Blume and radio

Everyone who knows Bob Blume has their favorite Bob Blume story. Here's mine.

Bob always wanted to be involved in the media. He supported *The Lacey Leader* in its early days but turned away when the paper wrote articles he didn't like. But being a media owner remained one of his interests.

When word came that the FCC had allocated a new 50,000 watt FM radio station for the greater Olympia area, Bob jumped at the chance and filed the necessary paperwork to obtain the station. After months of paperwork and money, the FCC made their decision. They awarded the station to Dave Rauh and Toni Holm, two former Evergreen students. They started and continue to operate KXXO FM radio station in Olympia.

But Bob found an alternative. Leasing property from him in South Sound Center was an am radio station KLDY AM. Owned by a Tacoma woman the station played a female oriented music selection. When Bob had an opportunity to buy the station, he did so.

Now bear in mind, that Lacey had a long history in radio. KGY radio began at St. Martin's College, and though now headquartered in Olympia, it at one time had a studio in South Sound Center where it broadcast daily. Other radio stations have also had a Lacey location. KITN Radio moved from downtown Olympia into Lacey in the 1980's and operated from a facility off of Sixth Avenue until it moved away and eventually went out of business. KTOL radio broadcast from studios in Lacey off of Pacific Avenue until it too eventually moved away and faded out.

So, while Lacey was no stranger to radio stations, the same couldn't be said for Bob Blume. Bob had absolutely no concept of radio or just how it worked but he had his radio station and began pumping money into equipment, facility and staff. He hired good staff, well-paid staff and set off to turn the world of broadcast on its ear. He even hired me.

I did "Man on the Street" interviews. I took a tape recorder and each day would ask people a "Question of the Day." I took the tape back to the station and they edited it for broadcast. Bob paid me \$10 an interview. Without much effort and in just an hour or so, I could do 10 interviews and make \$100 a day. That was good money at the time.

But after a few months it became obvious that the station wasn't doing what Bob wanted it to do - - and it was losing money. Bob never liked to lose money. One day he called me into his office.

"I'm losing \$30,000 a month on this radio station," he said. "Why?"

Being honest like I was, it didn't take me long to give him the answer. "You've got too many people working for you and you're paying them too much money," was my reply.

The next morning Bob called me into his office and fired me.

The story ended for me there, but KLDY continued to operate for several more months with a very reduced staff and eventually, like KITN and KTOL it just kind of faded away. B

Bob never again entered the radio business.

Chapter 8

John Gott

Many important people have secrets, but John Gott was the biggest enigma I've ever encountered. He was gregarious and out-going, loved parties and was well-respected by everyone, yet he held his secrets close to his body and seldom let anyone in.

I learned a few things about him and I suspect that he's revealed his personal secrets to others in dubs and drabs. He was a Missouri farm boy, but too intelligent to stay on the farm very long. He was drafted during World War II and was sent to college to be trained as a doctor. The war ended before he graduated and he couldn't afford college on his own, so he burned all of his medical books in the college's plaza and left.

He worked for Sears for awhile collecting bad debts. Somehow, and I'm not certain just how, he managed to get a degree in civil engineering and somehow, I'm not certain just how, he ended up in New Mexico working in a capacity where he was in charge of funding for all of the New Mexico schools.

He was on his way to political office. It was said he was next in line to run for governor of New Mexico. Something happened. John always said that he had a heart attack and when he recovered a career in politics had passed him by. Others tell me that it was something different. Whatever the reason he ended up at Washington State University perusing his doctorate in education.

When the North Thurston School District was looking for a superintendent John Gott was their choice. That's when I first met him.

He relished his name – Gott. Many people in the school district referred to him as the "Gott Father." Whatever his personal demons, and John wrestled with his personal demons all of the time, he was well-liked and well-respected. And, he had the ability to see the future and adapt to trends not even on the horizon.

He foresaw the 24-hour work day and created a school to teach students 24-hours a day. It was New Century, a high school which started in the late afternoon and ran into the evening. John told me one time that he thought students who used New Century were students who had to work during the day, maybe by taking care of younger siblings.

He also understood that more than one-quarter of the high school student never graduated from high school, and so he started South Sound High School, designed to offer an alternative education. Bear in mind that he was doing these projects in the 1980's before most educators understood the need.

John also knew that not all students would go on to college, and invested district money in vocational programs. During his time as superintendent, vocational education was a significant part of the district's budget. To that end, John wanted a high school devoted strictly to vocational education.

He worked with the adjacent school districts to form such a school program. He wanted the school so badly that he even allowed it to go into the

Tumwater School District, which would get the state funding and the bragging rights to vocational education. The New Market Vocational Skills Center was formed. And, while Tumwater officials reaped the public relations, the school was the brain-child of John Gott.

Over the years his programs have been shunted aside in the search for more money and accountability. He asked me once, when he was in one of his blue moods, what he thought his legacy would be. His programs were ruined and he thought that was his main contributions to the district.

I told him that those who he hired and trained would be his legacy. Two of his protégés - - Dave Steele and Jim Koval - - have gone on to serve as superintendents of the North Thurston School District (now the North Thurston Public Schools.)

John liked to compete, whether it be in poker or golf, or in the professional arena. He also invested himself into the community through his involvement with business.

John was one of the founders of Lacey Bank (later Venture Bank) and served as the first Chairman of the Board. His firm hand in the early years of the bank, made it a success.

When John retired, he disappeared, throwing away many friendships made through his work. I heard about him one time. He had taken over the job of superintendent of the Port Townsend school district for a short period of time, and turned it around. The Port Townsend newspaper said that the people of the school district would never know or understand the significance of John's involvement.

I ran across him once, at SeaTac airport. He had just come back from a fishing trip to Alaska. The meeting was short and cordial but nothing more.

That's just the way John ended it too.