

## **TIMELINE (#13C)**

### **WORKING AT GREENBUSH GOLF COURSE**

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

1. In February, 1947; when I was 11 years old, my family moved from Detroit to Greenbush (200 miles north).
  2. At the beginning of each of the 5 summers from 1947 through 1951 (ages 11 through 15), I lived with the Gordynec family for about 3 weeks. See **Timeline (#13B), Summer Fun With Bobby Gordynec**.
  3. With the exception of the summer of 1947, I spent the majority of the remaining summer days (1948 through 1951) working at the Greenbush Golf Course.
  4. Every day I rode my bicycle to the course, about a mile away from home. Very often my dog Pepper came with me, riding in the metal basket on my bicycle. Pepper stayed at the clubhouse when I caddied. See **Timeline (#13D), My Greenbush Pet Dogs**.
  5. For the 2 full summers of 1952 and 1953 and the beginning of summer 1954, I worked at Lost Lake Woods Club. See **Timeline (#18), Working At Lost Lake Woods**.
- 

#### **GREENBUSH GOLF COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This golf course was and still is located about a mile north of the village of Greenbush, Michigan, just east of highway U.S. 23. The course is sandwiched between the bluffs of Lake Huron to the east, the Detroit and Mackinac railroad tracks to the west and the woods on the north and south sides. When I worked there, it was owned and maintained by the now defunct Greenbush Inn. It was an old course then and was probably built in the 1920s. There were only 3 buildings, all located near the first tee: an old barn, used to store a metal-wheeled tractor and other equipment, a 15 foot diameter "open air" caddy shack, and a 2-story building used as the clubhouse starting in 1949. This building was created as a large, rectangular dance floor surrounded on 3 sides by one row of tables and chairs. The fourth side consisted of a small bar, backbar, and the restrooms. Although there was indoor plumbing and electricity, there was no refrigeration or cooking facilities. Cold drinks were provided by a large Coca Cola cooler filled daily with a block of ice.

The 9-hole, 3250 yard, course was very compact with 6 of the narrow and close together fairways being exactly parallel to each other and to the Lake Huron bluffs. It was not unusual for a golfer to find his stray shot 2 fairways over from the one he intended. Although there were several fairway bunkers, there were no water hazards, doglegs, and the only sandtraps were the ones surrounded the greens.

The course was never adequately maintained even though it was owned by the seemingly prosperous Greenbush Inn. The greens were hard, uneven, bald in spots and had tiny pebbles remaining from the adjacent sandtraps. The fairways were hard and lumpy. The roughs were thick and tall. The woods adjacent to fairway #1 were so thick that it was very difficult to find a stray golf ball there.

The following excerpt, lifted from my 10/24/52 letter to the 1950 golf pro, illustrates the condition of the course:

*You should see the course this year! It's really a mess! The old barn has fallen down, the roughs have been plowed up so a ball hit in them is almost impossible to find, the fairways are rougher than usual and the greens are even rougher. They [the Greenbush Inn] finally broke down and got a new caretaker who believes, **by working all year around, that in a couple of years** he can get the course in tip-top shape. He is Tom Burkemo, the older brother of Walter Burkemo, pro at Franklin Hills Golf Course, Birmingham, Michigan [best known for winning the 1953 PGA Tournament].*

## CADDYING

My only "formal" training in caddying took place in the summer of 1948 at the Greenbush Golf Course when I caddied 9-holes for Walter "Flash" Jarocki. He was a Hamtramck fireman, professional photographer, and family friend. His photograph can be found on Page 5 of **Timeline (#8B), The Saga of "Heck", the Cottage and Beyond**. He taught me the etiquette and rules of the game such as where to stand and walk, when not to make noise, when not to talk to your golfer, proper placement of bags on greens, when to pull the pin and other things a caddy needs to know. Not only did I receive my basic caddy training but Walter paid me a dollar for my services. I was unaccustomed to getting paid such a large sum of money for only a few hours of work.

After that, I began to caddy regularly. There were usually 2 or 3 other caddies at the clubhouse. The green fees were \$1.00 for 9-holes and \$2.00 for 18. The caddying fee was 75 cents for 9-holes and \$1.50 for 18. Most golfers played only 9-holes. Usually, the golfer would give me a 25 cent tip for a total of \$1.00 a round. Sometimes the golfer would tip me only a thin dime.

Often I would caddy "double," that is, caddy for 2 golfers, one bag on each shoulder. Such caddying is not as bad as it may sound. Often one golfer would hit to the left and the other would hit to the right. I would hand each golfer his anticipated club and walk straight up the fairway (the shortest distance) instead of walking right or left. Some days I would caddy 18 or even 27 holes (single or double). Although the total straight-line distance for 9 holes was 3250 yards (1.85 miles), I walked at least 2.5 miles for each round. This includes the distances between greens and subsequent tees and the deviations from straight line hole distances. I don't remember ever being tired or sore after walking those distances and carrying 1 or 2 bags.

At one point, my mother felt sorry for my poor shoulders and gave me some thick kitchen hot pads to cushion the weight of the heavy golf bags. This seemed like a great idea and did help to distribute the weight of the bag. However, the pads became a nuisance when I took the bag off my shoulder and had to retrieve and adjust them.

All my caddying days occurred before the advent of two-wheeled, pulled caddy carts and well before the days of motorized golf carts. We started renting the pulled carts in 1951, my last year at the golf course. I couldn't believe my good fortune when, twice that summer, a golfer rented a cart and then rented me to pull this cart!

Although my primary job was to carry golf bags, I also earned money by finding and selling golf balls. I could usually find lost golf balls along the railroad tracks and sometimes in the woods. Depending on their condition, I could sell them to the pro shop for 5 or 10 cents each. They, in turn, would sell the used balls to golfers for as much as 25 cents each. At that time, new, high-quality, golf balls sold for \$1.00 each.

## **SHAGGING BALLS**

One of the jobs we did was "shag balls" for the golf professional or his student. "Shagging balls" meant, essentially, being at the receiving end of a driving range. We'd go to some position on the fairway (depending on the golfer and the club he was using) and set up the empty shag bag (capable of holding, perhaps, 100 balls) which was used as his target. We'd chase after and retrieve the balls he hit and throw them toward the empty bag. After the golfer was out of balls or the lesson was over, we would pick up the balls, put them in the bag and return to the golfer. We would either restart another cycle or get paid for our "shagging" work. The usual fee was \$1.00 per hour and we'd sometimes receive a 25 cent tip.

This was not a bad job when the pro was hitting the balls. He would usually use only one club, tell you where to place the target bag and then try to hit it with each shot. Thus, we didn't have to run very far to retrieve the balls he hit. We did have to be careful and watch his every shot to make sure we didn't get hit by the ball.

In fact, to spice up this practice and to improve our baseball fielding skills at the same time, we'd attempt to catch the golf balls in midair using our baseball gloves. It was usually pretty easy if we watched the ball from the time it was hit. For even more fun, sometimes 2 or 3 of us would shag balls at the same time. It was almost a certainty that one of us would pluck the ball out of the air and then throw it "around the horn" to the others before throwing it to the shag bag. To make catching the ball even more challenging, we would try to do so while riding our bicycles. I don't remember anyone ever successfully catching a golf ball while doing so, but I do remember some near misses when the ball hit us or our bikes. Fortunately, nobody was ever severely injured.

Shagging balls for someone taking golfing lessons was very tiring and much more difficult than shagging for the pro. Not only did these golfers scatter the balls everywhere with any given club, they used a variety of clubs and hit the balls wide in all directions. In addition to covering more ground to retrieve their balls, we often had to find the balls in the roughs. I never liked to shag balls for this caliber of golfer especially since the fee was still only \$1.00 per hour.

## **A CLOSE CALL ON FAIRWAY #6**

I came very close to getting hit in the head with a golf ball while caddying. The tee for the 6th hole is set far behind the 5th green. The 6th fairway becomes very narrow at a point about 50 yards from the tee by the woods on the right and a clump of 6 or 8 large trees on the left. It was our usual practice, after finishing hole #5, to hand our golfers their drivers and park ourselves, along with their heavy bags, at the clump of trees. The reason for this, we told the golfers, was that we could better watch the flight of their balls, which was true. But the real reason for staying at the clump of trees was to save ourselves 50 yards (each way) of not having to lug their heavy clubs and bag. Thus, hidden behind the trees with only our heads exposed, we were very safe and could get a better line on where the balls landed.

I had done this ploy many times successfully until one day when I became careless. Although I was completely hidden behind the front tree, I wasn't paying attention to the golfer about to hit his ball. When I heard the crack of the ball being hit, I stuck only my head out from behind the tree. I saw the ball bearing down on my face like a bullet! Through only a reflex action, I pulled my head back as the ball whizzed by the position my head had just been. Had the ball hit me in the forehead, I would probably have been dead on the spot! It's possible that the ball would have missed me by a few inches even if I hadn't ducked back but it would have been way too close for comfort. After that experience, I continued to hide behind the same tree but I always paid close attention when the golfers were about to tee off.

## A CLOSE CALL ON U.S. 23

This anecdote is also described in *Timeline (#14), High School Essays* [Paragraph: 12th Grade English Class]

I came very close to getting killed or seriously injured while riding my bicycle home from the golf course. This trip is about 1 mile long via U.S. 23, a 2-lane highway, where cars travel at speeds of 60 or 70 miles per hour. Since the traffic is usually very sparse along this stretch of highway, I drove on the very right side of the pavement. When I detected a car approaching behind me, I would veer onto the right gravel shoulder. When the car passed, I would return to the much smoother concrete pavement.

I had just completed one of these maneuvers as U.S. 23 came to a sharp curve to the right and another car loomed up behind me. Before I had a chance to think or react, the car hit the rear of my bike and sent me sailing a goodly distance in the air. Somehow, I landed perfectly and got up without a scratch; my baseball cap was still on my head. My bicycle was not as fortunate; the rear end was completely mangled. Then I realized how close I came to getting killed. Luckily, I was not carrying my dog Pepper in the metal basket on my bike that day.

Of course, the car pulled off the pavement and parked on the gravel shoulder. Several people (I was in too much of a daze to remember how many) poured out of the car. They were very kind, examined me by having me move all my body parts, and questioned me. They expressed their sorrow even though the accident was mostly my own fault. However, they didn't inquire about my parents or offer their names or license plate number. Then they got back into their car and continued on their way. I was so "shook up" and inexperienced that I had no idea what to do. The entire episode lasted no longer than 10 minutes. When my parents learned of this accident (a few minutes later), they were outraged that they were not sought or located by the adults in the car, and medical care was not sought either.



Tom (age 14) and Pepper; 9/18/50

## MAGAZINE PHOTOGRAPHS

In 1951, two professional photographers showed up at our golf course. They had the assignment of advertising the State of Michigan in 2 very popular magazines, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The National Geographic*. They said that ours was the only course in Michigan near a large lake (Huron). They asked permission to photograph one of our greens with Lake Huron in the background. We drove to green #5 and they took many photos of it and the lake. One of the photographers posed as a golfer putting the ball while I posed as the caddy and held the flag for him. They told me that the advertising photographs would appear in the May, 1952, issues of both magazines. I waited anxiously for several months and checked every issue of both magazines in case the ads appeared earlier than anticipated. Finally, the Michigan advertisements appeared but I was sorely disappointed by the results. The ads were so small that I was unrecognizable in either of them.

## PLAYING GOLF

One of the advantages of working at the golf course was that I could play as much golf, free of charge, as I wanted. I played almost every day after working; sometimes it was a complete round of 9 holes, but more often it was just a few holes before darkness. Other times I practiced hitting balls out of the sandtrap or putting. I did reasonably well with the long irons and chip shots but was never very good with driving or putting. For variety, I would sometimes play using only one club, usually a 5-iron, for driving, roughs, fairways, sandtraps and putting. I found that a person can shoot a pretty fair round of golf using only a 5-iron.

Although I often received advice from our pro and other good players, I never had any formal golf lessons. Whatever skill I had at the game came from watching, asking questions, being critiqued, and many hours of practice and playing. Although I improved my score, I became only an average golfer at best. I was quite content to shoot 45 strokes for 9 holes.



Tom (age 14), practicing with his driver;  
9/18/50

In 1951, I bought a new, complete set of men's Spaulding Sure-Flite clubs, putter and golf bag. This set cost me about \$100 (discounted from \$150), which was about half of my total summer's earnings. This new set replaced my previous partial set of women's Patty Berg clubs that I had used for several years. These same Spaulding clubs are still languishing in my garage in 2016 (65 years later) as I write this Timeline.

## WORKING IN PRO SHOP

During my last 2 summers (1950 and 1951), when I was 14 and 15, I worked part-time behind the counter of the pro shop in addition to caddying. My new job responsibilities included collecting green fees, registering golfers, renting golf clubs, and selling minor golf equipment such as balls, tees, gloves, visors and shirts. I operated the concession stand and sold soft drinks, potato chips, candy and gum. All calculations were done using pencil and paper, and the cash register was old and manually operated.

During these last 2 summers, I kept close track of all my earnings:

- In 1950, I worked from 7/1/50 - 9/6/50 (64 working days) and earned a total of \$170 (average of \$2.66 per day). My maximum earning was \$5.00 a day and my minimum was \$1.00.
- In 1951, I worked from 7/16/51 - 9/5/51 (51 working days) and earned a total of \$212 (average of \$4.16 per day). My maximum earning was \$9.75 a day and my minimum was \$1.00. My earnings averaged \$1.08 per 9-holes (caddying), \$1.02 per hour (shagging balls) and \$2.66 per day (working in the pro shop.)