

Monogram Club, August 4, 2022

DICK	RANDY
<p>We were asked to tell the rest of our athletic story in October, but instead we're filling in for today's speaker. For those of you who missed our introduction back in December, let us reintroduce ourselves.</p>	
<p>This fellow next to me is my brother Randy Sleight. We can talk about his five varsity letters in a bit, but it says something that his nickname growing up was Pancho, after the great Tennis star Pancho Gonzalez.</p>	
	<p>And my younger brother here is Dick Sleight whose nickname was Mowglie, after the little kid in Rudyard Kipling's <i>Jungle Book</i>. That he eventually earned six varsity letters at West Seattle was a surprise to us all.</p>
<p>Hey, I have a ping pong ball here that says I beat you two games in a row 21-16.</p>	
	<p>Yes, and I have one that says I beat you in 100 straight games.</p>
<p>You see, that was my problem. Because of one bad eye, any sport that involved a ball was a challenge for me, while Randy excelled at Baseball and Football and every other sport he tried.</p>	

	<p>Last time, we introduced our athletic family, beginning with our brother Don, eleven years older than me, who lettered in tennis at West Seattle.</p>
<p>Don led the West Seattle ski team to three consecutive All-City championships and now at age 80 is still an avid skier in the winter and wind-surfer in the summer.</p>	
	<p>We talked about our sister Laurie who lettered in Swimming and was voted Most Inspirational on the first Girl's Tennis team.</p>
<p>Laurie is my twin sister. She was voted Best Female Athlete by our 1973 senior class. But let me tell you a little more about Randy. His first varsity letter came in Cross-Country as a junior, and as a senior he was voted Captain of the team.</p>	
	<p>Our team in 1970 was the first West Seattle team to win the Metro Southern Division Championship, edging out Franklin by a single point.</p>
<p>As a two-time winner of this region's Ford Punt, Pass, and Kick competition, Randy was initially expected to be the punter on the West Seattle football team.</p>	

	But the coach insisted that punters take a tackling drill resulting in a concussion, so the switch to Cross Country was an easy call.
Randy also lettered in Soccer and was the team assist leader his junior year.	
	I was good at corner kicks which our midfielder headed in for the goals.
We grew up across from Lincoln Park, and when the city put in six tennis courts a block north of our house, they set up my sister Laurie and brother Randy for great futures in tennis.	
	After All-Star years of Little league, Pony league, and Colt league baseball, I had planned to play baseball for West Seattle. But Coach Alslaben promised to letter me if I switched to tennis.
Randy went on to earn two varsity letters in Tennis, was voted Most Inspirational both years, was on the #1 doubles team both years, and was #1 in singles his senior year.	
	Maybe the biggest surprise in our family was when little brother Dick here earned his first varsity letter in Track & Field as a Sophomore.
It takes a whole lot of 3 rd Place finishes to earn enough points to earn a letter in Track.	
	The three juniors on my championship Cross Country team were seniors when Dick joined the varsity in 1971.

<p>We dominated the Southern Division that year. I finished in 11th place out of 49 runners in the division championships. But that was only good for 5th place on our team.</p>	
	<p>As a senior in 1972, Dick was voted both Captain and Most Inspirational on the Cross Country team. I cheered him on as he took 2nd Place in the Southern Division championship race.</p>
<p>I caught teammate Kevin Adams at the foot of the last hill in that race. I was fortunate to race Kevin when he was just a junior. The next year, Kevin was the top runner in the entire Metro League.</p>	
	<p>To stay in shape, Dick turned out for the West Seattle swim team his senior year.</p>
<p>Wouldn't you like to still have your old jersey or part of your old uniform from your playing days? Well, I still have my entire uniform!</p>	
	<p>From Spring of 1970 through the Spring of 1973, Dick trained and raced the equivalent miles as if he had run from Seattle to Boston and back.</p>
<p>Until my final Track season, I had been exclusively a distance runner. But our team was not a strong one, so the coach had Kevin Adams run the Mile and Half-mile, while I ran Quarter-mile and the Two-mile races.</p>	

	So how did it go as a sprinter?
<p>Our first race of the year had us going up north to Shoreline Stadium. We had no way of knowing that our opponent Shoreline would win the State 3A Track & Field title later that spring. I had the only 1st place finish for West Seattle at that meet, winning the 440 yard dash.</p>	
	<p>But when the Metro League championships came around, you were able to drop the sprint and concentrate on the eight-lap race.</p>
<p>Somewhere out on the Internet there is a web page titled “The Gods of Running.” There it lists all of the High school runners who have run two-miles in under nine minutes. Most of us would be satisfied if we ever broke the 10-minute barrier for two miles. In the 1973 Metro League Championships Two-mile finals, we had one of those Gods, Gordy Braun of Shoreline could run sub-nine minutes.</p> <p>I ran my personal best with a 9:52 and a 4th place finish at Husky Stadium, and was happy that I wasn’t lapped by Gordy.</p>	
	<p>There was one other athletic endeavor we both participated in during August 1972 before your senior year. Exactly 50 years ago this week.</p>
<p>Yes, our older brother Don decided it was time for the three of us to climb Mr. Rainier together.</p> <p>Is there anyone else here who has climbed Rainier?</p>	

	I remember training hikes earlier that summer before the big climb. How many of you have hiked up Mt. Si?
Now imagine hiking up with full packs including all your water and gear needed to camp out on top of Mount Si. I have a fond memory of sitting on top of the mountain at sundown looking out over the Snoqualmie Valley listening to a Seattle Sounders game on the radio.	
	Are there any former Boy Scouts here? Dick and I are both Eagle Scouts and brother Don had been a Scoutmaster, so we signed up with a climbing program out of the Chief Seattle Council's Camp Sheppard.
When the time came for our Mount Rainier attempt, we learned we were not going up by way of the Camp Schurman route on the northeast or via Camp Muir on the southeast. No, we were packing for a week on the mountain.	
	On our first day of the climb our big group of 36 men and boys headed up the Fryingpan Creek trail to the high meadows called Summer Land on the east side of Mount Rainier. Our low camp was near Meany Crest.
On Day Two we crossed the Fryingpan, Ohanapecosh, and Whitman glaciers.	

	That afternoon, we had our steep slope arrest training, learning how to handle our ice axes to stop a fall that could pull our roped-up teammates to our doom.
In the afternoon, we reached the spur of Little Tahoma Peak and looked over a cliff down onto the crevasse-laced Ingraham glacier below.	
	One by one, we put on rock climbing helmets and each of us belayed down onto the glacier below.
On the Ingraham glacier it was finally time to form up into nine four-man rope teams.	
	Our brother Don was an experienced mountain climber although he had yet to summit Rainier. He was assigned to lead the fourth rope team.
Our lead guide Denny asked, “Who was that singing earlier?” I confessed that it was me. I’d been belting out German beer drinking songs at 9,000 feet. Denny wanted me right behind him on the first rope team.	
	As you’ll hear, I was very fortunate to be assigned the fourth position on that first of the nine rope teams. I guess it meant I could keep an eye on my little brother.
That second night we made camp on the Ingraham glacier. Surrounded by crevasses, it was time to practice crevasse rescues.	

	<p>Each of us was lowered one-at-a-time deep into a frigid blue crevasse. Our job was to take the prusik ropes out of our pockets while dangling below, put them on over our cramponed boots and learn how to use them by trying to climb up the rope we were hanging by.</p>
<p>I think they forgot about me because I was nearly out of the crevasse before they remembered to pull me back up.</p>	
	<p>Our third day of hiking led up the Ingraham glacier to an area know as Ingraham Flats. This was to be our High Camp. Some of us pitched tents and others built igloos. Some of the guides set out their lawn chairs that they'd carried up. Someone put a whole pineapple on top of one of the igloos.</p>
<p>When you look south from Seattle at Mount Rainier, you see Little Tahoma on the left. Imagine us making camp in the notch between Little Tahoma and Mount Rainier. We were already at the 11,100 foot level, 900 feet higher that Camp Muir.</p>	
	<p>On day four, a Wednesday, it was time for us to make our final ascent. We were up before dawn. It was an awesome sight to look east past the spire of Little Tahoma as the dawn slowly broke.</p>

<p>All nine rope teams headed out in order up the mountain. But soon we were stopped by a seemingly unpassable obstacle. There was no clear route up from Ingraham Flats.</p>	
	<p>We faced a huge ice fall barring our way. A jumble ice blocks, some small, and others the size of semi-trucks had fallen from the glacier above. Our lead guide Denny had to scout out a route ahead through the confusion of ice in our path. And as ropemates on the first rope, we had to follow Denny everywhere.</p>
<p>Eventually, Denny found a way through which included climbing a vertical ice wall onto a narrow flake, seriously, only a foot or two wide. I recall laying atop that narrow sliver of ice, belaying others as they joined me on top of it.</p>	
	<p>On the downhill side of the icefall, the leader of the third rope team was directing traffic. The 2nd rope team followed us, and the 4th team was moved ahead of the third.</p>
<p>Because of the delay finding a climbing route, it turned out that only three rope teams made it through the ice-fall that day. But that at least meant that the three Sleight brothers were together on the final ascent.</p>	

	<p>Now a much smaller group, those of us new to the mountain were surprised to come across a deep trough running across the mountain side. We'd come across what climbers affectionately call "Interstate Muir," the trail in the ice formed by a season of climbers.</p>
<p>Our next obstacle was the infamous Disappointment Cleaver, a long outcropping of rock and ice pointing straight up the mountain.</p>	
	<p>We found a narrow snow field up the middle of the Cleaver. I have a picture here of us resting on the top of the Cleaver looking down on Little Tahoma. Here we were surprised by a team of Japanese climbers descending. They insisted that the weather higher up had forced them to turn back.</p>
<p>Wary of their advice, we nonetheless pressed on. The climb from Disappointment Cleaver to the east side of the crater was a slow, windy, but uneventful slog.</p>	
	<p>We hiked west across the flat crater to our initial goal of signing in at Register Rock. Off to our right on the north side of the crater we spotted steam vents.</p>
<p>Randy did not seem to suffer from altitude sickness. I felt kind of crummy but my excitement at reaching the summit masked my discomfort. Alas, brother Don looked and felt like Death warmed over.</p>	

	<p>The zinc oxide we called “clown white” protecting our faces from the sun’s glare off the snow made Don look like the Tin Man of Oz. We all got a great tan that week.</p>
<p>It was just a short stroll further up to Columbia Crest at 14, 411 feet. Randy and I planted our flag, a Troop 288 Scout neckerchief to mark our success.</p> <p>People have assumed we had a great view from up there. What surprised me was that, because we were above everything else, the view we looked for blended into the horizon. The Olympic Mountains just looked like a patch of white below us.</p>	
	<p>The trip down back to our high camp on Ingraham Flats was quick but uneventful, except for my boot’s sole coming apart and watching my little brother stumble his way down the mountain.</p>
<p>You know very well I only stumbled once, but didn’t fall. But by the climbing rules, I should have yelled “Falling!”</p>	
	<p>Thursday, we lounged around in camp while the other six rope teams followed in our footsteps. It was nice to have a relaxing day to recover before our rapid descent. I took the time to study for my last Calculus final exam the next week.</p>
<p>What had taken us two days to climb up from Summer Land to Ingraham Flats took us a single day to descend.</p>	

	This successful climb was a Bucket List item for all three Sleight brothers; the bonus being that we all reached the top together.
Back at West Seattle High School for my senior year, I got some credit for this adventure when I presented a slide show in 12 th grade Language Arts class and again for a Sports Writing class.	

Thank you for the opportunity to share our memories.
We'd be happy to answer any questions about our time at West Side High or our climb up Rainier, 50 years ago.