Reminiscences of a very special career

By Darlene Field

In 1984, a friend of mine (and eventually a co-worker) asked me, "Why don't you apply to be a school bus driver for Fruitport?" At the time, I had been a noon mom for Fruitport Community Schools at the Edgewood building since the spring of 1978.

I decided to apply, and with approximately 10 or 11 others, took the required class from Betty Weise, the supervisor of Fruitport transportation at the time. She was a very conscientious instructor. In addition to her training, we had to do other required training and get a CDL license to drive the bus.

Over the years, different things would happen, such as making our maps. One could say that was a challenge. The driver of today doesn't have to worry much about that, as we have what's called "transfinder" — all computerized. But when I started, we had a note or two that someone wrote to tell you where the stops were. Very interesting when going down Apple Drive and all you see are trees everywhere. Now many homes in those areas have those wonderful Red Cross green address signs that help during early mornings.

That all happened before the intercom system, so how do you talk to 60-some middle schoolers going down Highway 104, after your maps have flown out the window? I must say, at the end of each day everyone was home safe and sound.

During my career, I was fortunate to go to Eaton Proving Grounds near Mashall, twice. Eaton Proving Grounds is where truck drivers go to learn how to maneuver their trucks. This particular day, it was designed for school buses. We were put on a wet skid pad and had to correct the skidding bus. Another obstacle presented was: As you are driving the bus at 35 miles per hour, you come to a split in the road. The instructor waits until the last minute to tell you to go right or left, and you must turn that way without hitting any of the cones that are set up. These interesting exercises make one aware of what a bus can and cannot do.

Every year, our region has a bus rodeo. The rodeo is a challenging course where we drive the bus through obstacles such as a student pick-up, railroad crossings, parallel parking, and ally dock parking (that's backing into a parking space) to name a few. And there is always a written test to complete. I have been very fortunate to come in first place for Fruitport Schools eight different years; the first one in 1992, and the last one was in 2012. The last time, I earned enough points to go to the state level competition. What a wonderful experience!

Some days, just driving along puts you in a good mood. The sun comes up — or on a snowy day you are the first one to make a trail. Other times you see a lot of wildlife.

The most gratifying moments for me as a retiree are when your former students come up to you and say, "You were my bus driver" back when.

Once, that happened to me while watching the fireworks at the Grand Haven Coast Guard Festival. I was up on top of what I call Ferrysburg Hill on my blanket waiting for the fireworks to begin, when out of the blue a young gentleman came over and said, "You were my bus driver." He introduced me to his family, way up on top of Ferrysburg Hill. How cool is that?

To help one child is a blessing, but to be remembered makes it ten-fold.•

FCS bus drivers place third in rodeo

(Submitted by Darlene Field)

In April, 2013, Fruitport Community Schools participated in the Region 20 Bus Rodeo.

The team came in third place overall with Cheryl Buter taking first place for Fruitport. Cheryl went on to compete at the state level in Lansing in June.

The team would like to thank those businesses that donated to the Region 20 luncheon and door prizes. Our thanks goes to 5/3 Bank of Fruitport, Grover Pharmacy, Fruitport Orchard Market, Teddy's Spaghetti in Cloverville, and individuals Bonnie Christopher and Kris Cranmer.

Fruitport's Bus Rodeo team (left to right): Darlene Field, Kris Cranmer, Nancy Christianson, Cheryl Buter, Bonnie Christopher and Nancy Walker.

Big Brothers Big Sisters awarded grant

(Submitted by Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Lakeshore)

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Lakeshore recently received a $5,000 grant from Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) of Outstate Michigan that will support the agency's efforts to match five Muskegon County Littles who are waiting for their Big. Currently, over 100 children are waiting to be matched or to begin the enrollment process for the agency's community-based program. With the right staff in place the agency can begin finding positive adult mentors for our community's vulnerable at-risk children.

The agency is faced with an ever-increasing number of parents requesting mentors for their children. The Ronald McDonald House Charities' grant will be coupled with funds from individual, corporate donations, United Way support, and upcoming fundraisers to pay for the professionally trained Match Support Specialists who monitor the safety of the Littles and assist with the healthy growth of the mentoring relationship. Match Support Specialists are what differentiates Big Brothers Big Sisters' mentoring programs from all others. These are the people who provide long-term support for our volunteers, children and parents after Enrollment Specialists first carefully recruit Bigs and match them with the Littles. It is this professional staff that is key to the agency's success with long-lasting and positive relationships. Additional community financial support is now necessary to ensure adequate staff needed to seek and support the volunteers (Bigs) who will be the positive adult influence needed for these Littles.

Big Brothers Big Sisters, the nation's largest donor and volunteer supported mentoring network, holds itself accountable for children in its program to achieve measurable outcomes, such as educational success; avoidance of risky behaviors; and higher aspirations, greater confidence and better relationships. Partnering with parents or guardians, schools and others in the community, Big Brothers Big Sisters carefully pairs children (Littles) with screened volunteer mentors (Bigs) and monitors and supports these one-to-one mentoring matches throughout their course.

Locally Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the Lakeshore has served thousands of children, volunteers and families in Ottawa, Muskegon, Oceana, Mason, and Lake counties since 1969. The agency currently serves over 165 Littles through traditional one-on-one community based matches and will again serve up to 16 Littles at Edgewood Elementary in Muskegon Heights through a Lunch Buddy's mentoring program.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Outstate Michigan's mission is to seek, find and support programs that directly improve the health and well-being of children. This year marks the 25th anniversary of RMHC helping change children's lives. RMHC has awarded more than $6 million in grants and supported more than 350 non-profit organizations in 58 Michigan countries.

Additional information about the agency is available at www.bbbslakeshore.org or like us on Facebook.•

Gospel quartet concert at Northside Bible Church

(Submitted by Northside Bible Church)

The Lumber River Quartet will be at Northside Bible Church in a return visit for a fall southern gospel concert. On Saturday evening, October 12, at 6:30 p.m., both lively and worshipful music will fill the walls of the church.

The quartet's southern gospel harmonies, lively performances and humor have been an encouragement and a blessing to people everywhere they have been. Spreading the Good News throughout the U.S. and Canada, the quartet has sung in churches, auditoriums, gospel singing cruises, and are frequently featured on TV and radio.

Northside Bible Church has been hosting southern gospel concerts for over 20 years and continues to fill the church with each concert. We are located at 1937 N. Whitehall Road (just north of Tractor Supply Company) in North Muskegon.

No tickets are needed for this concert. A freewill offering will be taken. Light refreshments will be available for an hour prior to the concert, and winners of the evening's drawings will be announced after the offering.

For directions or more information, please call (231) 777-1588 or (231) 329-1477.•

Trails of Peace

by Sharlene Stanhope

Have you ever enjoyed a bike ride for a few hours, taking in the beautiful natural scenery, the aroma of the outdoors, and the pure satisfaction of exercising your mind, body and spirit? Being outdoors has always made me feel at peace. Tranquillity from nature brings a certain calming effect, away from the hustle and bustle of day to day mandatory responsibilities. I met an individual whose hobby was riding his bike for long distances; usually 20 miles at a time, as often as a dozen times per month.

One random Wednesday, I was outside Sacred Suds Laundromat, located off Laketon Avenue in Muskegon, and noticed what appeared to be a long-distance rider with a loaded down bicycle. He had a tent, sleeping bag, and perfectly shaped bags designed to fit on every side of his bike surrounding his wheels. I noticed a healthy looking red tomato popping out of one of the zippers from one of the custom bags. I could see he was self-reliant. I was definitely intrigued by his travel, and I approached him to see where he had just come from or where he was heading. I truly expected this avid cyclist to say he biked for the last few weeks in Northern Michigan on vacation or something. To my surprise, he indicated he visited not just the entire state of Michigan, but all across most of the Western United States, including California, Montana, North Dakota, Colorado and more. He also experienced the travel of the Natchez Trace trail from Nashville to Mississippi, which is a 400 mile distance with no stop signs.

This unique individual, who appeared to be well-taken care of, in good shape and mild mannered, was determined to travel and visit most of the United States on bicycle, traveling approximately 30,000 miles. Imagine doing that for two years! It is my great pleasure to introduce this inspiring man to you. His name is Dan Segelstrom.

Dan lives in Hesperia; however, he went to school at Oakridge, graduating in 1972. Right out of high school, he took classes at M.C.C. where he studied ad design and dynamics. Still with an eye of creating and building his 30-year profession, Dan became a skilled framing contractor. Similar to my growing up, he also raises animal on a small farm. His self sufficient farm contains two cows, rabbis, chickens, and a vegetable garden. While Dan is on his adventure, his family watches over his home, collecting his mail and maintaining his property. The only means of communication that Dan had was his cell phone. Often, the reception was not the best in the mountains and considering his naturalist living arrangements, but he had a phone for a lifeline and emergencies. He did have to buy a new phone, as he lost it in the water while fishing one day. Dan lived as a minimalist and carried a bank card with him for access to cash. From time to time, he did end up bicycling to McDonald's for a $1 cheeseburger as the urges hit.

Dan inspired me to write this story, as I believe the people we meet in our lives can influence our perspective and actually make us slow down and reflect on our own lives. Individuals like Dan can either make you jealous or bring you to a state of self-realization. He made that feeling of realizing that doing something that your heart inspires you to do is actually what living is all about — whether it is biking, art, relationships, kids, volunteering, college education, family, or anything you set your mind to.

If we all were to just fill the potential of our hearts, we would feel complete, even if our dreams may sound a little crazy to others. Dan's daughter was not surprised when her dad wanted to take this trip, as she knew her father was inspired to complete this journey in his life.

My kids try out for sports and extracurricular activities, and our house rule is that if you start something you must finish. Most people, when they do finish a season, even if they think they don't like it at first, learn true discipline and teamwork — qualities that are instilled in them for a lifetime. Dan completed this two year conquest alone, but he had the support of his family along the way.

Dan usually slept along campgrounds, national forests, and in the wilderness. Due to the drought, not many campfires were built. Most of the cooking was done on a propane stove that he carried with him. A lot of meals that he prepared were flatbread burritos, as he could roll them up and take the leftovers with him. Soups were another common meal that he enjoyed. He enjoyed most of his trip by riding alongside the road; however, he did get pushed off the side of the road in Albuquerque, New Mexico and woke up on the side of the road. So, of course, to every adventure there are some downfalls, I guess. But to Dan, all the obstacles to making this journey didn't outweigh the enjoyment of fulfilling his dream.•