

Joy, shipmate, joy!  
Pleased to my soul at death, I cry.  
Our life is closed. Our life begins.  
The long, long anchorage we leave.  
The ship is clear at last, she leaps.  
She swiftly courses from the shore.  
Joy, shipmate, joy!

Walt Whitman

Walter Barber LaBerge...Walt...my dad

Maywood, Illinois in the 1920's and 30's. How different that must have been from Santa Cruz, CA of today.

What events does one remember from youth?

In his memoirs, Walt told of his excitement and awe at age 7, to ride in the cab of Grandfather Barber's Chicago and NorthWestern steam locomotive, hurtling across Midwestern land towards DesMoines. What an amazing thing that this same boy would one day play a role in a spaceship hurtling toward the moon.

By Walt's accounts, his mother, June Barber LaBerge, was nearly worthy of sainthood. Walter C. was as honest and full of kindness as they come.

My childhood 1950's memories were of visiting them in Pasadena, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans in the Rose Parade...and plenty of cookies.

A family constantly on the move. It would become a recurring theme.

But before that...Walt always claimed that he was an undistinguished student, though I never believed it. He enrolled at Notre Dame with a major in Physics and was also in the NROTC program. He graduated in 1944 and as a Naval Officer, was soon shipped off to the Pacific on a minesweeper. I remember a picture of him, all smiles, in the ocean, clinging to a (hopefully) disarmed mine.

He came home from the war and resumed his studies at Notre Dame. He met Pat Sammon in 1946 at a St. Mary's College social. I often cannot think of Walt without Pat. She complemented him so well and made him whole. By 1950, they packed up the Studebaker with an infant and were off to the Mojave Desert.

A few years later, he referred to the desert in verse:

Come ye back to Inyokern  
Where your many friends sojourn  
Can't you hear the sands a-blowin'  
From Ridgecrest to Inyokern.

Walt was at the wheel of so many memorable adventures, from desert ghost towns to hikes up Mt. Whitney. 'Carry Me' we sang and he carried us to the New York World's Fair, many Civil War battlefields, across the vast country to Chicago, the bleachers at Candlestick Park and to a backyard barbeque, complete with astronauts. Walt shepherded us to many homes in several states and all were filled with love. There was a willingness to let us test our ideas, though those young ideas sometimes crashed like the early Sidewinders.

Walt once arranged for a summer job for Steve and I at a satellite tracking station on Oahu. A 16 and 17 year old living in an apartment, with no supervision, on the beach in Hawaii...Recipe for disaster? How did Walt know that out of sibling rivalry, a lifelong friendship would be forged?

During the 1960's, as the young family grew, Walt led us from coast to coast and back again. Through rebellious times and changing lifestyles, I always felt that although Walt may not have agreed with me, he always respected me and loved me.

Pat left us way too soon, but Walt was blessed to find another love in Bette Deeley, who he had known in high school. They were married for 20 years and traveled the world together.

Walt never retired. He was not the retiring type.

He loved his work and had an active mind that never shut down.

On his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in March, he ran the table on Civil War quiz cards, recited poetry and was, as always, the gracious host, though his body did not comply.

Walt accomplished much in public life, but today I sing his accomplishments in private life...as a husband, father, brother, grandfather, stepfather and good friend to so many.

More than just his memory, I believe that a part of his essential goodness will remain with all of us who have traveled with him.

So, let us joyfully celebrate a life well-lived.