

# UPHILL - BOTH WAYS



**Volume 5 - Seward 1941**

**James R. Jensen ©**

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- Dedicated to Rachel Beissner -



"Aunt" Rachel Beissner 1945  
Without her generous kindness  
and varied efforts James A. Jensen  
and Marie Merrill would never  
have been married on May 17, 1941.

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(THE NAMES PRINTED IN PARENTHESES IDENTIFY THE AUTHOR OF THE TEXT WHICH FOLLOWS, UP TO THE POINT THAT THE NEXT WRITER STEPS IN.)

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**EDITOR:** Before getting up a head of steam here, I need to remind you about the naming convention used in previous volumes and will introduce another actor.

To identify the source of the information/text, a name (in RED) appears after the subheading where that source (re-)appears: Alvin, Rondo and here, Blaine Sampson. You can keep track of the players by watching for the names after the headings; when it changes, the source has also changed at that point. Note that middle names are used for father and son since their first names are the same. Blaine is the sole survivor of a threesome formed in Delta High School. Let me introduce him.

### Blaine Sampson (RONDO)

Blaine Sampson, the only survivor of the threesome -Bud Hegyesey, Alvin and Blaine- is hungry to talk. He has severe macular degeneration so uses a large button telephone to call people to chat with him. His wife died in July 2004 so he is very lonely and needs company, any company. His son lives in Utah and Susan of the ham-juice-hair lives on Montana so he has few visitors.

Blaine managed to dig up my phone number in December 2004 and called to ask how mom was doing. He didn't know if she was even alive but it was a topic to start a conversation with the son on one of his best friends. He left two messages in December which I didn't return until after Christmas. It was a pleasant surprise and was the beginning of what has turned into a weekly conversation during which he congratulates me on the excellence of UBW and urges me to publish .

I mailed him Volumes 2, 3, 4 of UBW last month. A week or so later, he called again and exclaimed that it was excellent "use of the language", superior to the writing in his own autobiography. He said, "My son I want to congratulate you. I am very very proud of you.", as if we had known each other for years. I did meet him one time that I remember, 1953 on our way back to Seward from Naples, we went through Seattle and spent some time with him. He apparently spent time with dad and mom and me when I was a baby but I can't seem to remember those visits.

He talks about dad as one of the most extraordinary people in his life and can't say enough good things about him. Dad has become a sort of demi-urge, scarcely human, who rose from the humble setting of the arid central Utah desert to international prominence. His wish would be that "Dinosaur Jim" be enshrined in

some eternal manner. That's how it came to pass that I sent him those volumes. He asked me if anyone was writing his biography. Well, I just happened to have some inside information about this topic which excited him, but not as much as the volumes themselves did.

He had decided that he should adopt me, now that he likes me and my writing. On two occasions he has asked me if it's ok for him to adopt me. Sure, I said, that's great. I love talking to him because he reveals more nuggets about Alvin's childhood which will also find their way into Volume 2. He has even made the point several times that his (other) children both call him every day, son in the AM, daughter in the PM, hinting broadly that he would be pleased if I, too, would favor him with regular phone calls -as if it were a sort of an obligation on my part. He's lonely and I should call him but I can count on hearing from him at least once a week. Today he called with his son Reid on the line to instruct me how to deposit UBW in the "Special Collections" at the BYU library, with email instructions to follow.

I will call him for both of us. It's apparent that he quickly runs out of things to talk about when he calls and since I want to collect as many nuggets as I can, I will call him as well. I have a recorder so I can tape our conversations and make them available on a CD with the text and images. I'll cut and paste his stories into the appropriate places in these volumes.

## Introduction

At this point we are joining mom's and dad's stories into a single volume. From here on out, UBW tells the story of their lives together. I appear in the next volume so my personal story starts at that point. UBW continues to tell their story until their deaths and will continue telling mine until I'm gone. There is a posthumous volume for you that will be made available at my death. I'll provide you digital copies of these volumes so you can print them and add your own stories at the appropriate points.

Start with two extracts from dad's Work Chronology that I published in Volume 2 - Leamington:

## 1940 to 1941

*[Note from his Work Chronology]*

Spring: Got job at Toole smelter, then met Marie, went to Alaska in August, worked on Alaska Rail Road till freeze up, went on to Anchorage, worked at Elmendorf Air Base till late winter.

Late winter: Went to Seward and began longshoring for Alaska Railroad with Les Rafter as time keeper. Marie came up in May, we were married by Judge Bryant, US Commissioner. Nov. 1941.

He covers a lot of territory in those six lines. I've put this information together with some other data from various sources and summarize it here. These items are discussed in detail below but this synopsis gives you an overview of what is in this volume:

Date	Event
8-1940	Thumbed to Seattle, took SS Mt. McKinley with Dick and Lavon Lynch, the ones who persuaded him to go homestead in Alaska
8-14-1940	Hired by the Alaska Railroad in Seward
	Worked for Alaska Railroad (out of Seward) till freeze up (probably early October)
Early 1941	Went to Anchorage, worked on Elmendorf Air Base till late winter
	Back to Seward, longshored for Alaska Railroad
1-22-1941	Signed up with Seward Draft Board - tried to join Seabees but rejected because he was married
5-1941	Mom went to Seward with Mable on SS Alaska
05-17-1941	Married by US Commissioner Bryant
06-30-1941	US Grant arrived with first garrison for Fort Raymond
07-02-1941	Fort Raymond activated by Army
7-13-1941	Furloughed by Alaska Railroad
8-21-1941	Purchased two lots in Seward to build house
11-23-1941	Downtown fire, mom still in Seward
12-??-1941	Mom left Seward alone for Naples; dad stays to finish and sell house
12-07-1941	Dad goes to Fairbanks to buy a box of mammoth ivory
12-25-1941	Dad arrived in Naples

The bookends are August 1940 and Dec. 1941, a little less than a year and a half that dad was there. Mom met him in May 1941 so spent less than a year in Seward, being ousted by the forces of World War II.

## Seward 1940

As usual, I want to place this volume geographically. You know where Alaska is but do you comprehend its size? It is three times larger than Texas, the largest of the lower 48 state, and is one fifth the size of the 48 continental states. It is huge. In 1940, there were less than half a million people in the territory. Anchorage the largest city was on the order of 30,000 people with few paved streets. The map on the following page is excerpted from Map 182 of the old Britannica Atlas that I conned out of "James", the slightly disreputable, disheveled encyclopedia salesman, for you kids back in 1982. He said, 'I'm not supposed to do this so don't tell anyone. I'll sell you my demo volume for \$40. That way you get a good deal and I can buy a new demo.' Great deal. I took him up on the offer and still consult the volume. To this day, I don't know who conned whom.

I selected the mid-section of the map, from the Gulf of Alaska up past Mt. McKinley to Fairbanks to show you my old stomping grounds.. Nenana is there on the Tanana River, the place we put our 18 foot freight canoe into the river in 1956 and floated 650 miles - 6-5-0 MILES- down the river. In 3 weeks, alone, no one with us, just the four of us. We got to Nenana from Seward on the Alaska Rail Road that goes straight north from Seward. We saw Denali as McKinley is called and could scarcely take in its size. Too immense. 18,000 feet free standing. Just enormous.

Seward is on the Kenai Peninsula and is a gorgeous location. Resurrection Bay is a fjord with a deep bay, 3,600 feet deep, lined by vertical cliffs and craggy mountains topped with glaciers. The bay is 3-5 miles across and just stunning. Some rare days in the summer a miracle happens. The bay become still, absolutely still, no waves, no wind, nothing moving. At that time, it becomes a flawless, flat mirror and you see absolutely perfect upside-down images of the mountains and joined to the feet of the real ones. Just breath-taking as if you were seeing a 4 mile wide silver-backed mirror. Boats that streak out into the bay make a stain that disappears in a short time in the brilliant sun light.





Dad took this photo in 1940 from Big Bear Mountain. This is what the town looked like, not much different than it did when I went there 10 years later.

I can pick out the house we lived in on Home Brew Alley, the left-most alley in this photo. Our house was dug part way into the mountain.

The large dock in the front is the City Dock, the one where most of the shipping was handled. Behind it is a small Tank Farm with a boat moored off-shore a ways. That was the Chevron Dock. The Army dock was later build between the Chevron Dock and San Juan Dock which is a long, whitish structure north on the shore. The tall white building on the left, in the center of the building is William H. Seward School where I attended school when I was there 10 years later.

Along the north end of the bay was a road called Nash Road. Resurrection River enters in about the middle of the bay and has created a low alluvial fan such that the bay is shallow. So when the tide goes out, it goes out a quarter mile. That is the place to troll for salmon as the school before migrating up the Resurrection River.

The town underwent cataclysmic changes in 1964 as a result of the Easter Day Earthquake. Here's a photo looking at the town from the north, showing how it looks after earthquake. When we lived there the town relied on the docks and railroad, neither of which play a role today in the economy. Instead, the town has been discovered by yuppies who hike and fish and canoe. This has stimulated the growth of a large number of businesses that prey on them. That's OK I guess but it seems a sad end for an authentic frontier town that had real men and real women. But typical after all is said and done. *Get over it, Jim.*

This image astounds me. It shows that absolutely every dock, the small boat harbor and the breakwater that existed back then are gone. Kaput. Nothing of them was left after the tsunami created by the enormous quake of 1964 had swept through and wreaked havoc -barring a few pilings where the Army Dock was that I saw in 2003. I've read reports that 30 people in this tiny town were drowned in that disaster. 60 foot boats in the harbor were shoved half a mile to the left of the bay in these photos by the enormous waves. The town looks foreign to me today, though it is obviously recognizable, because it looks so different now. The



Figure 5 Joe Luman Photo©

familiar landmarks of the Cannery, the City Dock, the Standard Oil Dock, the San Juan Dock, the Army Dock and the Small Boat Harbor are all missing. We fished on the Cannery Dock, hung out fishing for herring on City Dock, etc. Even the "lagoon" region was re-shaped by the massive wave.