

Rainier Valley HERITAGE NEWS

Spring, 2024
Volume 33, Issue 1



Over 150,000 people watched the biggest sporting event in Seattle's history on June 28, 1947. Above: Top 12 University crew teams race to Seward Park's finish line. Credit: MOHAI, Seattle Post-Intelligencer Collection, 1986.5.5117, photo by Clarence J. Rote

Lake Washington Regatta at Seward Park

Rowing is the oldest intercollegiate sport in the U.S. that began with a race between Yale and Harvard Universities in 1852. Years later, in 1903, Washington's crew program started that reached World Championship ranks by 1936. At the end of WWII, the GI bill drew record enrollment to colleges, so did the enthusiasm and tryouts for crew.

Al Ulbrickson, UW Coach with an Olympic gold medal under his belt, was raring to get back at the National Championship stage after a lull in competition during the war. Washington State leaders, alongside the UW Sports Program, rallied for a national Regatta on the new Lake Washington course on the south side of the I-90 Bridge. \$50,000 was the price tag. Thanks to the Lake Washington Regatta committee, the reps of the Seattle men and women who put up the money, the event came to fruition on June 28, 1947.

The sprint course, 2000m (1.2 miles), started just north of Lakewood Marina heading toward Andrews Bay, finishing

at the swim beach in Seward Park. The top 12 teams, Yale and Harvard, Cornell, California, Penn, Syracuse, Princeton, M.I.T., Washington, Wisconsin, Columbia, and U.C.L.A., boarded the new Great Northern Railroad's *Olympian Hiawatha* train, following the IRA National Championship in Poughkeepsie, New York. For many of them, it was their first time to the Pacific Northwest. Royal Brougham writes the day before the race, "Doc, examine my silly head and see what makes me do things like this... through force of habit or the demands of an exacting public, a writer must attempt to tell in advance who will win a race of America's greatest boats. Ten out of the dozen have a chance. So closely are these crews matched, the width of a baby's hand may separate the winner." (Seattle P-I, June 28, 1947). Brougham's picks were Harvard 1st, Cornell, California, and Washington, 4th.

The Seattle P-I reported over 150,000 spectators showed up that day, the largest crowd and greatest (cont. on page 4)



2024 Events Calendar

RVHS Annual Meeting
Rainier Beach Community Club
May 11

Columbia City Night Market
June 22, Aug. 17, Oct. 17

Othello International Festival
August 11

San Gennaro Festival
Georgetown
September 7-8

9th Annual
RVHS Founder's Dinner
St. Edward Parish Hall
October 26

Holiday Open House
December 21

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Row, Row, Row Your Boat ... Rainier Valley's Connection to the 1936 Olympic Gold Medal

Reading the captivating and best selling book *Boys in the Boat*, inspired us to piece together the Rainier Valley connection to the story. Al Ulbrickson, Johnny White, Johnny Merrill and Royal Brougham, all former Franklin High School students, had a role in the 1936 WA Crew year. With the release of the movie, *Boys in the Boat*, new fans across the globe share in the enthusiasm for the "against all odds" Olympic Gold Medal win. The following biographical information was compiled from *Boys in the Boat*, our RVHS collections, Seattle Public School archives, Ancestry.com, Historylink and the UW Crew archives. - by Karen O'Brien

ALVIN ULBRICKSON - (1903-1976) UW Coach Franklin High School Class of 1921



ULBRICKSON, ALVIN (Al) [6]
Entered from District 191, 1917.
Course: Academic. Future: University of Washington. Activities: Class Basketball (2); Class Baseball (3); Manager House, Extravaganza (2); Honor Roll (4).
"This fellow certainly has brains in proportion to his height."

1921 Franklin High School Tolo Senior Class Page

Al Ulbrickson, the UW coach who navigated the 1936 charge to the Olympic Games, was born in 1903, in the Latona neighborhood. In the 1910 U.S. Census, the Ulbrickson family was renting a house in Rainier Valley at 4438 39th Ave S, near Rainier Playfield. Al was 7 years old at the time, with 4 siblings, his father 31 years old, listed as a City Park worker and his mother, a homemaker, aged 29. Ten years later, the census showed the Ulbricksons living in the Lakeview District, owning their home on wooded and considered affordable Mercer Island. Al's dad's occupation changing from park employee to a farmer. Al was enrolled

at Franklin High School in 1917, so it is unclear when exactly they moved to Mercer Island from the valley. The story goes, that Al rowed across Lake Washington from the southeast corner of the island to Rainier Beach to catch the streetcar to Franklin. The rowing distance, approximately 2 miles each way, no doubt paid off by the time he got to the University of Washington. Ulbrickson, a star oarsman for the UW, rowed in the Varsity-8 to the national championships twice and was ranked by the national press, as popular as Babe Ruth. He also excelled in his studies, earning a Phi Beta Kappa key at the UW College of Business. Here's a segment from our oral history collection between Dr. William Hutchinson and RVHS Founder Buzz Anderson, in 1996, where they talked about the ferry that transported people from Mercer Island, and Kenndale, to Rainier Beach. Bill discusses his dad's physician practice and how Al rowed to Rainier Beach from Mercer Island. (Dr. Hutchinson was 87 at the time of this interview).

Bill: *Well you see all those towns had to depend upon either my father or a doctor from Renton and he could get there actually easier than they could because they had to come over land. (My father) would come by Harry Patterson's boat which was a launch which operated between Mercer Island and Kenndale and Rainier Beach.*

Buzz: *We have a picture of that boat, with him, with the skipper, and --*

Bill: *It was a famous boat. Now the way they'd get along Mercer Island would be to put up on the dock, where they had the flags, and put up a flag and of course they'd know that they wanted them to stop, which they'd do and pick up whoever was coming into Seattle. Now interestingly enough, a great oarsman at Washington was Al Ulbrickson, as you know --*

Bill: *- and he was not only a great oarsman, but he was a great coach. And he would row across to pick up the street car, the Renton Express, at Rainier Beach, and then would stop there, and so every morning and every night he'd have to row home or row to get somewhere on the train.*

And so he was a great oarsman before he ever hit University of Washington. But they just couldn't compete with him.

Buzz: *I knew of him as a coach, but I didn't know, I had never thought much about whether he was a good oarsman, but he probably was, that's why he stayed with it then, as a coach.*

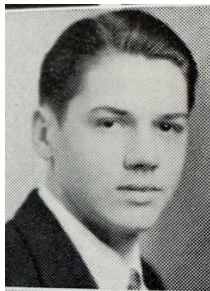
Bill: *And he had two brothers, both of whom made the varsity squad at the University, because they, too, would row a lot.*



Al at the UW, Wikipedia photo

What was interesting, while researching Al's early life, his student enrollment card at Seattle Public Schools showed his home address not on Mercer Island, but on the corner of Rainier Avenue and 57th, at 9246 57th Ave S in Rainier Beach (today where Jude's restaurant is). There was a pharmacy and apartments on this corner, just in front of the streetcar stop. Whether Al's father rented an apartment in Rainier Beach or used a PO Box there to show a Seattle residence for his children to attend FHS, is unknown. Al Ulbrickson was inducted into the Franklin Hall of Fame in 2001. He was just 24 years old when he took over the UW Crew program, transforming it to match the class of back east programs, and led the University of Washington teams to great heights over 31 years. He coached his team to six national titles with his two biggest wins, the 1936 Olympic Gold Medal in Berlin, and defeating the Soviet Union in Moscow in 1958. "He was Seattle's Man of the Year in 1936, was inducted into the Husky Hall of Fame in 1979, and was named by the Seattle Times as one of Seattle's top twenty-five coaches of the century" (Franklin Hall of Fame).

JOHN ("JOHNNY") WHITE - (1916-1997) Member of UW Gold Medal 1936 Crew Team Franklin High School Class of 1932



WHITE, JOHN ["Johnny"]
Entered from: Dunlap '29. Future: University of Washington. Production Orchestras 1, 2, 3, 4; Service Club 3, 4.
"Where did you get those big brown eyes?"

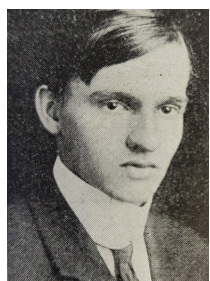
1932 Franklin High School Tolo Senior Class Page

Johnny White grew up in a house above Lake Washington at Pritchard Beach. He attended Dunlap Elementary, then graduated at the young age of 16 from Franklin High School. Johnny and his dad decided if he were to take a couple of years off to save enough money to enroll at the University of Washington, he would also have enough time to physically catch up in size. He found physically demanding jobs at a shipyard on the waterfront wrestling steel and a construction job for the new Grand Coulee Dam, improving his chances at making the UW Crew team. Johnny's father was a first rate sculler from Pennsylvania before moving out to Seattle. John Sr. spent long hours rowing on Lake Washington and most likely taught his son how to row. When we met the current owner of where the White family lived, we were told that Johnny's sister sold him the house, and she had shared some of Johnny's diary with him, the writings that helped shape the book, *Boys in the Boat*. The home owner also found an old rowboat in the brush... Johnny's Olympic gold medal is at an auction house with a starting bid of \$10,000. He was inducted into the Franklin Hall of Fame in 2001.



The White family home, perched above the Pritchard Beach parking lot, once a front yard garden to the lake that Johnny White's father planted for survival during the Great Depression.

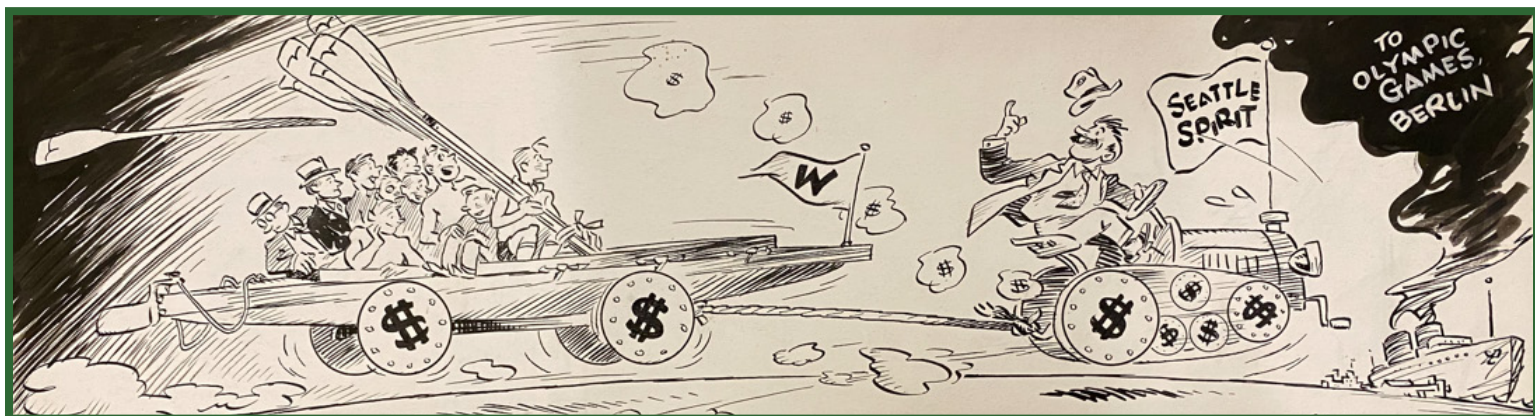
ROYAL BROUGHAM - (1894-1978) Sportswriter for the Seattle P-I, Franklin HS Hall of Fame



1912 Franklin High School Tolo

Royal Brougham attended Franklin High School from the Dunlap neighborhood until his Junior year, when he took a copy boy job in the sports department for the Seattle P-I. Royal's passion for covering sporting events for Franklin continued, the 1912-13 Tolos show his articles and title as Editor for Athletics. Despite lacking a formal education, Royal rapidly ascended from an errand boy to a part-time writer, eventually establishing himself as a full-time sports journalist as the P-I's Managing Editor. As a senior sportswriter, Royal had the honor of covering numerous major sporting events including the 1936 Olympic Games. With Brougham's support in leading the newspapers' drive to send the team to Berlin, the UW successfully raised \$5,000 to secure their attendance. Unfortunately, none of Royal's Olympic Games' reporting was published locally due to a strike at the P-I. Undeterred, Brougham famously attempted an impromptu interview with Hitler, although he was turned away after a brief encounter. Later he described the team, "All were merged into one smoothly working machine, they were in fact a poem in motion, a symphony of swinging blades."

Royal's impact extended beyond journalism. He befriended many athletes, coaches and managers as he actively engaged in community service, advocating for recreational amenities and fairness in sports. His legacy is underscored by honors such as the "First Citizen," founder of the Royal Brougham Sports Hall of Fame and Museum; he served on the board of directors of the Seattle-King County American Red Cross; was Washington director for the National Commission of Living War Memorials; and was twice a member of the Olympic Games Press Committee. South Royal Brougham Way, near the stadiums, was named after him in 1979.



Boys in the Boat, artist Stuart Pratt, 1936, Photograph courtesy of the Dave Eskenazi Collection (Cont. on page 5)

150,000 See Harvard Win; Yale 2d, U. of W. 3d

Seattle Post-Intelligencer



Lake Washington Regatta, intercollegiate crew, Andrews Bay 2000m race course, finish line at Seward Park, 1947.

Photo courtesy of Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum (Find the newsreel "1947 Giants of the Galley WA Invitational" on YouTube).

sports spectacle in Seattle's history. The newsreel claimed 200,000 people flooded the shores of Lake Washington. The crowds were there from the start, to see a swimming competition, a log-rolling exhibition, a speedboat race, a Native American canoe race, a water-skiing exhibition, a quad rowing race, and a Seaplane show. All took place before the sprint. Two thousand boats of every kind lined the log boom, "hordes of policemen, patient, cheerful and briefed to the hilt on the special traffic arrangements." Homes along the boulevard held open houses, lawns crowded with friends, spectators filled windows and porches and every inch of the hills, wherever a view of Andrews Bay could be found.

The race was over in less than six minutes. So close was the finish that Royal Brougham's live KOMO broadcast, from overhead in the blimp, brought the news to the jam-packed shore. Harvard first, followed by Yale and Washington 3rd.

Brougham reported the following day in the P-I, "It was a lightning fast race, as the time proved, Harvard did it in 5:49, a new world's record for the 2000m. Settling a blistering pace down the beautiful Lake Washington course, Coach Tom Bolles' Varsity-8 carved itself another chunk of glory with its crimson blades winning the championship of America from the finest field in crew history. The perfectly coordinated, expertly trained boat from Cambridge led its ancient rival, Yale, over the finish line by nearly a length. And driving furiously into the roaring maelstrom at the finish came the Cinderella crew from Washington, the glamour boat load of freshmen which only a week ago found itself in the Husky varsity. A fine Washington showing, brought to a close a highly successful year so capably coached by Al Ulbrickson. All in all, it was a day which made American rowing history, and more than that, it proved that Seattle has the water, the climate and the brains with which to

stage a regatta unmatched by any rowing event ever held." (Brougham, Seattle P-I, July 29, 1947). Visiting coaches from all over America were unanimous in their praises for the highly successful regatta and its perfect location.

The last intercollegiate regatta on the Lake Washington course was in 1969. It was University of Washington coach Dick Erickson who revamped the crew program in the 1970s, bringing back crew for female students after a 50-year hiatus. He connected the Seattle Yacht Club and Seafirst Bank in combining and sponsoring Opening Day with a regatta. For the past 38 years, Windermere has hosted the annual Windermere Cup/Opening Day Regatta at the Montlake Cut. This year was special with invitations to Italy's and Wisconsin's crew teams and special guests from the *Boys in the Boat* acting crew. They celebrated the history-making Varsity-8 from 1936 in the hometown Conibear Shell House.

- Karen O'Brien

JOHN MERRILL - (1914-1984) Franklin High School Grad - Rainier Beach resident - UW Crew



MERRILL, JOHN ["Doc"]

Entered from: Emerson '28. Future: University of Washington. "Prince of Pilsen" 1; Mid-winter Concert 1; Productions Orchestra 1, 2; Hi-Y Club 4; Class President 1; Publicity Manager of Weekly 3; Assistant Sports Editor of Weekly 4; Chairman of Commencement Committee 4; Matinee Committee 4; Football Manager 1, 2, 3, 4; Basketball Manager 3; Student Grade School Adviser 3, 4.

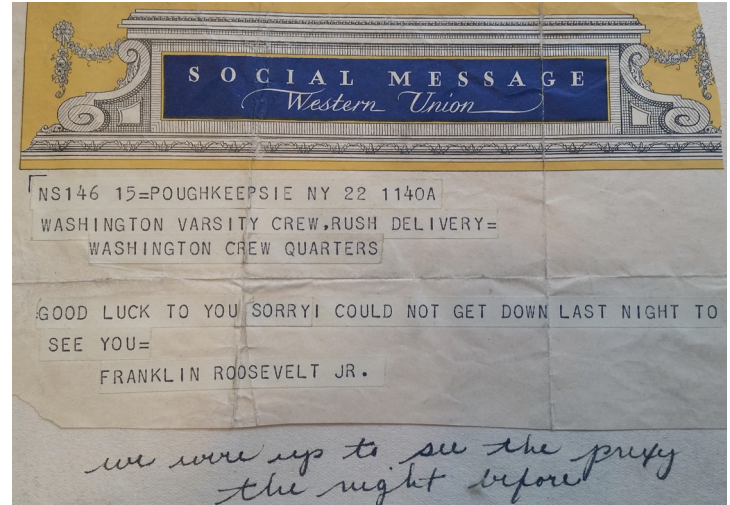
"To know a thing is nothing unless others know you know it."

1932 Franklin High School Tolo Senior Page

Poughkeepsie with the coaches, team and George Pocock signatures, he was there. John is mentioned in *Boys in the Boat* on page 106 as the coxswain navigating the '34 freshmen boat, when they nearly collided with a tugboat in Lake Washington. It is likely the other mention in the book was about John as well, in Poughkeepsie the night the Varsity-8 asked coach Ulbrickson if they could journey up river to find the President's house. Instead of meeting FDR, his son Franklin Roosevelt Jr. answered the door and invited the team in. On page 261, "the boys recruited one of the crew's student managers as pilot and navigator, and piled into the launch...when they found the cove, they left the manager in charge of the boat." Merrill's keepsake in his scrapbook, the Western Union social message from Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., to the team saying "Good luck to you" and an apology for not making it to see them the night before the race.

Following the Poughkeepsie National Championship, the UW team traveled to Princeton for the Olympic trials, from there they were off to Berlin to represent the United States in the '36 Olympic Games. John did not make it to Berlin, not everyone on the team did due to the budget. - Karen O'Brien

John Merrill, also known as "Johnny", graduated from Franklin HS the same year as Johnny White. John didn't share much about his early years with his family, they knew he lettered in Washington Crew, but not much else until they discovered his scrapbook. John had memorabilia from the '36 National Championship sweep on the Hudson in Poughkeepsie, NY. John was a coxswain for the team, perhaps a substitute, and possibly a student manager. Though his name does not show in the program he saved from



Franklin Roosevelt, Jr.'s message to the Varsity-8, 1936

Honor Roll

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What's New in the Archives!

- 2023.006 – Photo of Eagle Hardware. Thank you Judith Yarrow
- 2023.007 – Valentine's card for Tim Raetzloff's daughters from his aunt, Ellen Summers and uncle Carey. Thank you Tim Raetzloff
- 2023.008 – Four Franklin High School Tolos belonging to Ed Tazioli. Thank you Pamela Tazioli
- 2023.009 – Hamilton Trucking material and Hamilton and Auker family photos, including photos and a book. Thank you Lynnet Auker Keihl
- 2023.010 – 1890 White Sewing Machine & Cabinet owned by Elsie Charles, former Columbia Pioneer and mother of Lifetime Member John Charles. Thank you John and Mary Charles
- 2023.011 – Books, photographs, and maps. Hand made model of the Stonehouse Cafe in Rainier Beach and hand carved wooden items made by Keith Wiltse. Thank you Ann Wiltse
- 2024.001 – Plumbing wrench set, copper toilet tank weights, wooden Soreano's Plumbing signs, photos, newspaper clippings from Soreano's Plumbing. Lions Club vests, blazer, jacket, adorned with Lions Club pins owned by Lou Soreano, Columbia Centennial hats, and a Soreano's magnetic truck sign. Thank you Ron Soreano
- Uncataloged.812 – "Seattle Times" Obituary of Peggy Maxie
- Uncataloged.813 – "Italians in the Pacific Northwest" book, written and donated by Tessa Floreano



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GHOSTS ON THE CEILING

SHARED BY JOAN NEVILLE, CHARTER MEMBER OF RVHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

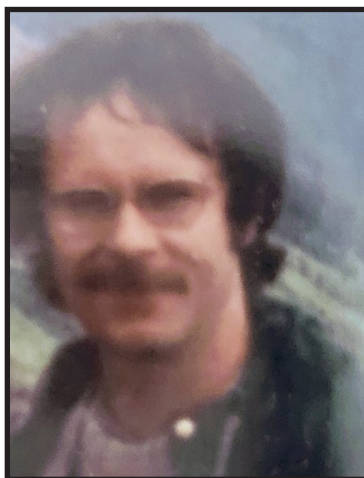
I was born on March 30, 1947 in Rochester New, York. I came to live in my grandmother's house, where my dad and uncle grew up. The house was on Whiteford Road and my grandmother, "Nana" lived across the street. There were aunts, uncles and cousins who also lived on this road. My Nana was born on March 30, 1886 and since we shared a birthday and the fact I was her first grandchild, we loved each other very much. I always felt safe and cared for on this street. My Nana was a widow and for many years she worked as head of nursing in the Rochester State mental hospital. She was a force of nature at 4'11" tall. They called her "Tiny" but I have been told that she was tough and and some of the older folks told me they still shook at the thought of disappointing her.

For me, Nana was perfect. At approximately 6 years of age, my family moved to a larger house in Brighton, New York, a suburb of Rochester. I still saw my Nana every week and I learned how to call her on the telephone. Nana was a convert to Catholicism and took great interest in my upcoming Holy Communion. In fact she sat next to me during the ceremony. We shared many whispering words to each other during my first communion. It seems I was talking too much and she put her finger to her lips to quiet me. The only problem, she had died several months before my big event and I continued to see her for many years to come...



Nana

I moved to Washington state in the 70s, by the 80s I had a full family of five children. Like my Nana, I had a husband, Tom Neville, who passed away very early. By the late 2000s most of my family was away to work and in college. My house in the Lakewood/Seward Park neighborhood felt too large for me. I considered a condo but realized I didn't really like sharing very much, so I changed my home into a duplex and had created a small cottage house in the lower part of my historic home. I lived very close to work and I often went home for lunch. (I was still wearing high heels at the time.)



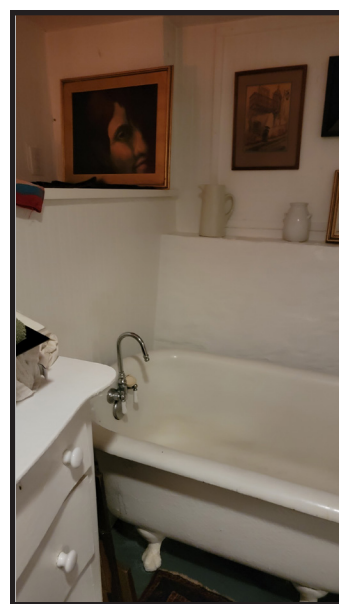
Tom

In the little house, I had a lovely claw foot tub with a large shelf next to it. I always had flowers and art near the tub. But sometimes I would leave my purse on the shelf. I did forget my purse one day and ran back to the house to get it. I was in quite a rush. I stepped into the tub with my heels on, grabbed my purse and went to get out and fell flat on my face onto the concrete floor...

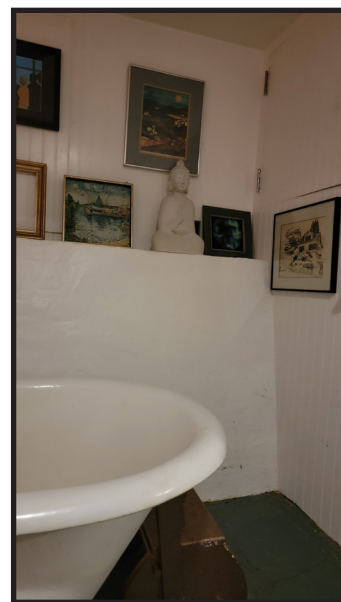
I couldn't move and still do not know if I was conscious or not. While laying face down on the floor, I heard two people talking and recognized their voices. "What is she doing now?," Nana said. A low male voice replied, "she is something of a klutz." That was Tom. I was getting very annoyed with them talking about me, and they said together, "Joan! You need to get up now!" I did get up and saw them clear as day. Tom was sitting up on

the ceiling on the left part of the tub and Nana was on the right side. It was like a Mary Poppins tea in the ceiling story but there was no tea. They kept on laughing at me.

I got up, called the medics, and ended up in the hospital. My head looked like a pumpkin and my face bruised. The worst part of it for me was they kept laughing. I did know that both of them loved me and I loved each of them very much, but really, their laughing was troublesome. So ends my ghosts in the ceiling story!



The bathtub and ceiling





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