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# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## The Children of Gerald and Irene

*Phyllis, Richard (Dick) and Lawrence (Pete or Babe) were all born at home. Jim, Mike, Bill and John were all born at the Hotel Dieu Hospital (renovated house which served as the town's hospital) in Van Buren. Steve was born in a Caribou hospital.*

*Irene and Gerald had eight children over 25 years. The spacing between children is worthy of note. Years between children, starting with the space between Phyllis and Richard, are; 1, 2, 6, 2, 6, 2, 4. Irene and Gerald passed away at a relatively young age, but they left a long line of descendants to carry on their memory.*





**PHYLLIS (27 DEC 1933)**

Phyllis started school at St. John School in Van Buren at 4 1/2 years of age and her first teacher was a Mrs. McManus. In those days, the children who were advanced and could do first grade work, were allowed to do so. They were then promoted to second grade instead of first grade in the next year. Irene decided to send Phyllis to the Catholic School (Sacred Heart School, often called "The Convent"). The principal there felt that a product of public school kindergarten certainly did not merit advancement to the second grade, especially at 5 1/2 years of age, so Phyl was put back into

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kindergarten. It only took the nuns a few weeks to realize she didn't belong there and they allowed her to attend first grade. To their amazement, she performed so well, they advanced her into the second grade. This was the reason she graduated from high school at the age of 16. After graduation, Phyllis worked as a substitute for the Van Buren Town offices while employees went on vacation. While Irene was expecting Bill, she had quite a lot of work taking care of the others so Phyl stayed home and helped out until Bill was born. In January she worked for Dr. Claude Cyr as a dental assistant. After working there a year, a full time position opened up at the Van Buren Water District offices and Phyllis got the job. The fact that her father was on the Board never had any influence in her getting this job, which she kept for 4 years, until the family moved to Caribou.

In Caribou, Phyl worked at Grant's Dairy for about 4 months, then at WFST radio station for 12 years (starting salary \$50 per week in 1956). During this entire time she lived at home and helped raise the younger children.

Since she was earning an independent living, she found she could afford a bright red 1958 Chevrolet Impala Convertible with a white top. This was quite racy for such a quiet person. New owners took over control of the radio station, after 12 years, and Phyl was the victim of a cost cutting reorganization. Her \$115.00 per week job was eliminated as it was thought the other person (making \$75/week) could do both jobs.

Phyl's next employment was with the Diocesan Bureau of Human Relations Services and started there at a whopping \$90 per week; which eventually increased another \$12 or so. It was during this time that she bought her brother Pete's house on Russ Street and moved away from home. She was quite enterprising and refinished the interior of the house, built a garage and finished the second floor.

Phyl returned to the world of radio after five years at the Bureau. She first went to WFST, her former employer, for \$150/week and then moved on to WDHP/FM, a newly established radio station in the area. It only took 2 1/2 years until Phyl was, again, the victim of market place politics and she was replaced by the boss' daughter who had been learning the job under Phyl's direction. This was a case of bad timing as Phyl had just put her house on Russ Street on the market and had signed papers to buy a new house on McArthur Ave. Phyl made the best of a tough situation, rented the house on Russ Street for the winter and refinished the McArthur Avenue house while collecting unemployment. The Russ Street house sold the very next spring. Phyllis worked for Levesque Office Supply for about a month and then for Danny Brewer at \$135/wk to start. This eventually worked up to \$150/wk and she could walk to work for the next two years.

Gerald died while Phyl was working at Danny Brewer's<sup>1</sup>, and Bill and Chris moved back to Caribou and lived with Phyl for a month or so. Phyl was destined to be replaced by unfortunate circumstances and it happened to her once more. She trained a new bookkeeper who was a friend of Danny Brewer's and taught him what she knew. Since Danny felt he could not afford both salaries, he opted to keep his friend at \$60/wk more than he was paying Phyllis. It just goes to show you don't always get laid off for earning the higher salary!

After a short stint as a CETA bookkeeper for \$140/wk, a previous application for a job with the State of Maine materialized. Phyl was hired as a Medical Technician for the Department of Human Services starting at \$190/wk. Needless to say, she was in the driver's seat this time and left the CETA job for better opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup>An automobile dealership across the street from Belanger's Auto Electric, Gerald's garage.

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Having been the victim of employers' whims too often, Phyllis opted to try to run a business of her own. Bill had an eyewear boutique in Presque Isle, at the time, and had decided to sell it. Phyl had been training as an optician and after 2 1/2 years (Jan 1981) she left her job, changed her career and bought the boutique from Bill in July of 1981. She moved it to a new location in the lobby of the Northeastland Hotel and embarked on her new career with a brand new business.

In 1983, after Irene died (Phyllis had moved in with her mother and sold her house after her father died) Phyllis no longer had her heart in the eyewear business and, since it wasn't doing very well anyway, she decided to close it. Bill bought her inventory for his Caribou operation and Phyl closed up the business. She made two apartments in the original Caribou homestead and worked, part time, for Bill. Her spare time led her to take up doll collecting seriously.

Phyllis had started oil painting in the 50's and ceramics in the 60's. She had taken both hobbies quite seriously and this allowed her to teach both in adult education classes in Caribou for about 10 years. Putting her talents together, Phyllis now operates a doll hospital which meshes these talents into her porcelain doll reproduction business.

Although she never married, Phyl was a mother to all her brothers, from Jim on, and now is spoiling her nephews. Her surrogate family continues to grow while her younger brothers continue to populate Caribou.

In Caribou, Phyl joined Beta Sigma Phi Sorority and was president of her chapter three different times. Now a recipient of the Order of the Rose and the 25 year Silver Circle, she is a charter member of Laureate Xi Chapter in Caribou. Phyl is also a member of Holy Rosary Circle Daughters of Isabella. She has served as Treasurer, Recording Secretary and Vice Regent. Presently she is not an officer, having resigned her office as Vice Regent since that led to being Regent which is something she would rather not do. 1996 finds Phyl still living in the original Belanger home at 19 McArthur Avenue in Caribou. She has discontinued the small apartment on the main floor and expanded her doll collection into it. When you visit you get to sleep in the guest room, but you have to share it with Barbie. All the elements are there for a doll museum....will she do it? Phyllis is also going with the times and doing business electronically. Joining AOL just because she wanted to be part of the camaraderie she thought her brothers had thru email, she discovered the doll boards. Then a new fashion doll came on the market, with avid collectors on the internet. Phyl has been making and marketing Gene clothes online since December 95 and is still very busy keeping up with orders. Between bonding with "her kids" as she calls her nephews and nieces, and the doll business, Phyllis is very busy and happy.





### **RICHARD MICHAEL (11 MAR 1935)**

Richard Michael Bélanger, Dick, is the oldest of the seven boys. He was born in Van Buren, Maine on 11 March 1935 when Irene and Gerald lived in an apartment downtown over a store.

Dick was a freshman at school in Biddeford Pool when Phyllis was a senior. Although only 15 months apart in age, Phyllis and Dick seemed much further apart socially. Dick seemed to share more with Pete than he did with his sister, probably a natural phenomenon. It was a man's world, after all.

During high school Dick had many friends, many girl friends. He belonged to the Van Buren Drum and Bugle Corps and marched in many a parade. They used to go out of town a lot which gave Dick some experiences that the rest of us children didn't have.

Dick had a motorcycle and flew Gerald's airplane, without a license of course. After graduation from high school, he went to Maine Vocational Technical Institute in Portland for one year. He had a red and white Plymouth two door. When we moved to Caribou, Dick helped build the garage and the house, then worked for Gerald.

At that time, every young man knew he would be drafted, so Dick hastened the process by joining the Army for two years, so he could get his obligation over with and get on with his life. Before leaving for the service, Dick had met Marge Sirois, Artheline Levesque's daughter, and they were engaged. In the service, Dick went to school and was mostly stationed in Germany. Many of the international dolls in Phyllis' collection came from Dick.

Returning home from military service, Dick resumed working for Gerald and lived at home. On 11 July 1959, Dick and Marge were married. They had an apartment on Sweden Street in Caribou. Marge was an RN working at Cary Memorial Hospital in Caribou. By the time Marge's stepfather died suddenly, of a heart attack, Gerald had helped Dick start out on his own in Presque Isle. After Patrick Levesque's death, Dick and Marge gave up their apartment and lived with Artheline for a while, before eventually moving to Presque Isle. His first place of business was on North Main Street in Presque Isle. He later took over a new gasoline station on Academy Street. By that time, Dick and Marge had a son named Patrick, the first Bélanger grandchild, on 5 May 1961 in Presque Isle, Maine. By this time, flying had gotten into Dick's blood and he was doing a lot of private flying. After a few years, the company did not feel that the station was pumping its potential because Dick was doing too much automotive service and repair. They gave him an ultimatum, concentrate on pumping gasoline and bypass the auto work, or move out. He moved out.

Dick was offered service manager jobs at a couple of auto dealerships in Presque Isle and also a job teaching auto mechanics at NMVTI<sup>2</sup> in Presque Isle. Marge would have none of it so the couple moved to Connecticut when Patrick was around three years of age. Dick, therefore, was the first of the boys to leave the area.

In Connecticut, Dick quickly got a job at a garage and progressed to Service Manager as he worked for several different dealerships. Dick and Marge started out in an apartment but soon purchased a home on Timber Lane, where Dick lives today. Dick was always energetic in his work and never missed promotions and bonus trips for his progressive management.

Once when Dick was working, he had a bad accident. He was sitting on the fender of a car with a cup of gasoline in his hand, pouring the gas down the throat of the carburetor. There was a person in the driver's seat keeping the key turned so the engine would turn over as they were trying to get the car started. The person behind the wheel pressed on the gas peddle, which made the car backfire through the carburetor, and ignited the can of gas. When Dick jumped away, his arm hit the hood brace (which was holding the hood up) and caused him to douse himself in burning gasoline. He was a tower of flame and started running until someone caught him and put out the flames with a blanket. He was in the burn unit at a Hartford Hospital for a long time.

Dick's son, Patrick, was always the entrepreneur and had many little businesses over the years. After graduation from high school, he attended Tunxis College. One day, coming home from work very late, he was struck head-on by a drunk driver and killed instantly at the young age of 26 years. With Patrick's death, Dick and Margie's marriage of 30 years, already shaky, fell apart. They divorced in 1990 and received a marriage annulment from the Catholic Church in 1991. Margie moved into an apartment in the same building where her mother lived and cared for her until her death.

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<sup>2</sup>Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute at Presque Isle, Maine



Dick met Patricia (Szamier) Bianchi, and they were married in a civil ceremony on 23 June 1990 in Bristol, Connecticut. Later, on 27 April 1992, they were married in the Catholic Church. Patricia had two grown children, a boy and a girl, so Dick got a ready made family to fill his life. Dick and Pat soon became grandparents, the kind who offer to babysit. 1996 finds Dick retired from work with a motor home which he and Pat use to travel at any whim. They divide the remainder of their time between the house at 6 Timberlane in Bristol and their cottage at Bashun Lake in Connecticut.





### **LAWRENCE DONALD (7 APR 1937)**

Depending on when you knew Lawrence Donald Belanger, you might have known him as Babe, or Pete or Larry. During his early childhood, and probably up to high school age, he carried the nickname Babe. Some time around high school the family started calling him Pete and then, when he moved to Connecticut, he was called Larry. For the purposes of this document, I will refer to my brother in the familiar manner in which I have grown accustomed; Pete.

Pete, like Dick, also attended local public schools and private school at St. Agathe for a few months. After his graduation from Van Buren Boy's High he too worked for his father until he entered the military service. After getting discharged, he was recalled into active service for the Korean conflict which brought him into southern New England where he decided to stay. He sold his house in Caribou to Phyllis and lived, for a while, in New Britain, Connecticut before buying a house in Plainville, Connecticut. He worked several jobs in the area before starting his own business in lawn mowers, garden tractors and bicycles; Snow White Recreational Vehicles. He married Velma Martin from Keegan, Maine and they had two children, Mark and Gail.

When they sold the house in Caribou to Phyl, they bought a house at 152 Hilltop Road in Plainville, Connecticut. Pete started his own business, Snow White Recreational Vehicles, in Plainville, which he still operates today. He built a mini-mall which houses his business and rents to others. Then he built an apartment complex and became an apartment house landlord. In 1991 Pete

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had a triple heart bypass due to arterial blockage and he is still plagued by cellulitis. Velma has done the bookkeeping for all of their businesses over the years. 1996 finds them both still at Hilltop Road in Plainville, running their varied businesses and being doting grandparents.

The best window into someone's life is their own recollections. Pete has written about himself as follows:

My earliest memories are about going to school. If memory serves me correctly, I was in the first grade and we used to have to bring snacks to school. I recall bringing my snack which we called "pig ears" when, in actuality, they were apricots. We have all heard about the proverbial walk to school but, I did walk to school which was about one mile from our house. On the way there was a small river called Violette Brook with a bridge over it which we had to cross. We not only crossed this bridge on our way to school but on the way to church too. This bridge is now part of U.S. Route 1 on Main Street in Van Buren, Maine, and the bridge is shown on most U.S. Maps.

My brother Dick and I were only two years apart and we were inseparable while growing up. I can remember touching my lips to a steel cable one winter when it was about 20 degrees below zero or colder. As you may well have guessed, my lips became stuck to that cold steel and, if it hadn't been for my brother Dick helping me get free, I might have spent hours stuck to that cable. I have always had a vivid memory of that event and am always careful about placing bare flesh against cold steel. One side of Violette Brook has an operating grist mill where buckwheat flour was made. On Sundays, when the mill was not operating, Dick and I often played in the buckwheat instead of going to church. We left home on our way to Sunday afternoon services, we called them vespers, but somehow never made it to church when given the choice of romping through the buckwheat. Upon returning home, full of buckwheat flour, we were always reprimanded by our mother who had help from our sister.

There were many distractions for us along this familiar route from our house to church and school. One winter day, Dick and I were crossing the ice over the river on our way to school. With the long cold winters in Van Buren, crossing over ice was not thought to be dangerous since trucks used to drive onto the river ice and dump logs. In any case, on this day we crossed where the sewage was dumped into the river. This kept the ice from freezing as thick as one would have expected it to be and we were not observant enough to notice. I was fooling around and having a good time when, to my complete surprise, I fell through the ice. I nearly drowned and, after getting home to face my mother with the awful stench of my clothes, I almost wish I had. Mom made me take off all my clothes outside and, as wet as I was, I almost froze to death! I learned to recognize thin ice after that episode.

At the age of 9 or 10, Dick and I went to private school in Ste Agathe Maine. I remember thinking this certainly must be like being in prison. I am not sure if I could have stayed had I not been with my big brother Dick. We were not destined to remain there for long as we returned home soon after. I am not clear what the reason was but I certainly remember that we were never happy there. We were not sorry to leave and I still have vivid memories like eating breakfast cereal with grapefruit juice instead of milk. (Note: They were so miserable there that Irene took them home.)

I had my first run in with the law when I was about 12 years old. A friend and I knew of this vacant house and thought it might be fun to drop bottles down the chimney. Not the crime of the century but, it got reported and we were in for a lesson in life. We were brought to the police station and spent a few hours in the jail cell. I was not too worried as Dick had overheard the authorities talking to our father and Dick had informed me that they were going to put a scare into us. This experience

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may have taught me a lesson as I was more careful with my associates in later years. As a teenager, I was a member of the Columbian Squires, a youth organization associated with the Knights of Columbus. I enjoyed my membership in this organization and remember it fondly.

My years growing up in Van Buren were typical and mostly uneventful. I do recall working with my brother Dick at our father's place of business. Dad operated this Esso gasoline filling station and we helped pump gas, repaired lawn mowers and assisted in the normal jobs associated with operating a garage. Our father got involved in several varieties of business and one of those was selling a motorized bicycle called a Whizzer. For all visual purposes this looked like a regular bike with a gasoline engine built into the frame. It was a beefed up version of a Schwinn bicycle with the engine on the front frame and a chain to drive the rear wheel. The bike was quite a vehicle for us young guys and we would zip around town at speeds exceeding 30 miles per hour. You can just imagine how we were envied by everyone around town!

My Dad's Esso station was on Main Street just across from a rather large A & P grocery store. On an otherwise quiet summer day, this store was ravaged by fire. The fire burned rather hot and the rear of the store was devastated. Fearing a rekindle, the firemen kept some hoses inside the store to water down the embers and as a safety measure. The front of the store still has plenty to burn and it was feared that, if this rekindled, it could spread to other stores along Main Street. That evening, when most of the excitement of the fire had subsided, that store seemed like an open invitation to curious youngsters. Pat and Alphy Doucette had helped me come up with a plan to enter the rear of the store and work our way to the front where there were candy bars which had not been damaged by the fire. Our venture was successful until it came time to leave the store. We saw a police officer entering and blocking our exit. It seemed a natural choice to us to turn one of those water hoses on and attack that advancing officer so that we could get by him unrecognized. We ran by him while he was still trying to get up from the rubble he fell into from the force of the water stream. It seems I was always ready for new adventures. I remember welding spikes to quarters and then driving them into the wooden sidewalks downtown so I could watch people trying to pick up the quarter!

My experience with mechanics and motor vehicles gave me ideas about business ventures. I purchased a 1932 Essex automobile, from a Mr. Haddad, for \$25.00. It didn't run very well and I thought I could get it running by using my mechanical talents. The automobile's rear end was noisy so I filled it with sawdust which stopped the noise. I made that car do things only a 4 wheel drive vehicle would be expected to do. It took a lot of abuse before finally earning a place at the junk yard. My next automobile was a 1929 Durante which I obtained by barter. I must have had some of the business sense passed on by my mother and father as I have been involved in business in one way or another ever since. I used to go to junk yards and buy the old radiators from junked cars. Junking my own car had given me the idea and I would buy up the old brass radiators and resell them for the metal content. This was a lucrative business for me until I ran out of radiators to buy.

Working at Dad's gas station brought some interesting first experiences. Around 1950, a salesman came in to demonstrate a new rotary lawnmower. All we had seen before this were reel type lawn mowers. I first saw a gasoline powered chain saw at Dad's garage when they first came out.

Growing up with a father who was always on the cutting edge of new mechanical technology was always an experience. Our father owned an airplane which Dick and I helped maintain. I didn't like to fly but Dick certainly did. Our father was always understanding and would allow us to do things which most other parents would never have allowed. He gave us a lot of leeway in exploring our capabilities and, in this vein, he allowed Dick to do a lot with the airplane, unsupervised. One day Dick was taxiing up and down the river with the plane. He got careless and came up to a ground

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speed which allowed the airplane to become airborne. He flew for a short distance before coming back down on the water. The second time he did this, he just kept on going. As Dick used to say, 3 feet or 300 feet, what's the difference. His joy ride was not without notice but, the important thing is, he came back down safely and still flies airplanes today, legally.

By 1954 our father had an irresistible urge to establish himself in a new community. After some investigation and some serious decision making, he decided to move his business to Caribou, Maine, a town some 27 miles south of Van Buren. I was in high school when Dad decided to establish Belanger's Auto Electric in Caribou. With some degree of luck and, I am sure, some prayers from my mother, I graduated from high school in 1955. That summer, I helped build the new house which was to become the home of the Belanger family in Caribou. The home is still in the family today, having been passed down to my sister, Phyllis. I had become seriously involved with Velma Martin from Van Buren and felt it was a little soon for my age. I felt the US Army might be a good idea and would give us some time to plan so I went to the army recruiting office and had my draft advanced. I got my notice from the US Army to report to Fort Dix, New Jersey on 3 April 1957. The old adage of "Join the Army, see the world" was not to come true for me. My scheduled three days at Fort Dix turned into eleven days of straight KP before I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia for basic training. From there I went to Fort Bragg, South Carolina, Aberdeen, Maryland and then back to Georgia for the remainder of my tour of duty. I got into diesel engine work while in the Army and spoke of it with my father. He became very interested and, after my release from the service, he met me in Hartford for some schooling. Upon our return to Caribou, I worked with him for some time.

The separation from Velma had not cooled off our feelings for each other so it didn't take long before we were married. We built a home in a new development called Burgess Village in Caribou. Life seemed to have settled down to the "American Dream" for us. We were a young couple, in love with a new house and nice jobs and were making new friends. We all wake up from dreams and I was no exception. One day I received a letter calling me back to active duty because of the Berlin Crisis. Many National Guard companies from the Boston area had been called into active service and one of them needed a specialist to fill an empty slot. I was lucky enough to have that specialty and I was ordered to report to that unit. Leaving a new wife and house behind was very difficult and I didn't look forward to the next year with much joy. Velma must have felt the same loss as, in a few weeks, she moved down to the Boston area and we found a one-room apartment in Leominster, Ma. In order to convince the Sergeant to allow me to live off post, I had to agree to clean the shit house every day. I also worked in the mess hall which allowed me to get extra food. A few months later, Velma was able to get a job which allowed us to move into a two room apartment. Just about the time when my tour was up, I considered staying in the service as a career. Before I could make that decision, the US Army convinced me not to. I was called in to headquarters and told I was going to replace translators who had been killed in action. Since I was not actually on permanent active duty, I could not be sent to Vietnam unless I re-enlisted and I soon decided not to do that.

After being released from the Army, Velma and I decided to go to Hartford, Ct. Velma's brother was living there and told us of good jobs in the area. Our house, in Caribou, was rented and we had no job offers there so Hartford sounded good to us. My first job was with Hamilton Standard where I worked at calibrating fuel controls. My diesel experience got me into that position and it felt good to be employed right out of the service. Although I was earning a good wage, \$2.25 per hour, I had some worries. Velma was expecting our first child, we had no medical insurance and the hospital presented us with a payment book. I was very insulted and informed them I would pay the entire bill within 90 days and had no intention of making payments. To back up my intentions, I got a second

job and met my commitment to pay them within the 90 days. My second job was repairing lawn mowers for G. Fox Company and, although the pay wasn't the best, it helped make ends meet.

I then got a new job in the diesel field for a heavy equipment dealer. I became their trouble shooter and was on the road much of the time servicing all of Massachusetts and Connecticut. I felt confident in my work and my value to the company so I approached them for a raise in pay. My boss told me I was doing a great job and my job future was secure but there was to be no increase in pay. That was my cue to start looking elsewhere until I heard, on a radio program, that IBM needed men with four to six years outside sales experience. I felt my road experience qualified me for sales and resolved to get into sales. I got involved with Cutco Cutlery and sold door to door. Within 13 months I became the Assistant Field Manager for the State of Connecticut. The money was good but the work was much too demanding. I had five offices and over 100 personnel to manage and felt this was too much strain for me. I exceeded the annual sales record of \$104,000.00 worth of cutlery but found out that selling door to door was not the area of sales I wanted to be in. I had a friend who was in the business of selling and repairing snow mobiles who needed help. I joined him and this got me started on the road to owning my own business. I stayed with him for three months before we had to move into a bigger place. I bought out my friend and worked the business over the next six years until we needed to expand again. I built a new building and moved to the present location where we have been for the past 25 years.

My son, Mark Alan, was born 21 March 1963, in Connecticut. Gail Marie was born on 21 June 1966. Both Mark and Gail each have two children, all girls. Mark and his wife Lori gave birth to Lysie on 19 April 1989 and Haley Rose on 5 September 1992. Gail and her husband, Chris Duffy, gave birth to Stephanie Irene on 7 October 1993 and Alexandra Adele on 17 October 1995.

As a summary, as of June 1996 Velma and I still operate our own business, our son Mark is married and has two girls, our daughter Gail is married and also has two girls.





### **JAMES PATRICK JOSEPH (5 MAR 1943)**

Jim started school in Hamlin, Maine as there was no kindergarten in Van Buren and he wanted to attend school like all his friends; who were in the first grade. He took the bus to a one room school-house with a wood stove for heat and kindergarten to eighth grade in the same room. A Mrs. Louis Bélanger (no relation) was the teacher. The next year he attended Sacred Heart School in Van Buren where he started in second grade. Since the move to Caribou happened during Jim's eighth grade year and Irene was worried about his transferring during the middle of the year, she sent him to school in Sharon, Massachusetts for the year. With an eighth grade diploma, he enrolled at Caribou High School and stayed there until his graduation in 1960. Six days after graduation found Jim in Boot Camp for the U.S. Navy in Great Lakes, Illinois.

Jim stayed in the Navy for just under 8 years (November 1967) during which time he attended the U.S. Naval Academy Prep School at Bainbridge, Maryland for a year, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland for a year, was married to Sandra St. Pierre of Van Buren (married in Washington, D.C.) and had three of his four children (James Anthony, Julianne Hope, Jennifer Rae). During his military stint, he was stationed at Norfolk, Virginia., Washington, D.C., Great Lakes, Illinois, Vallejo, California, Brunswick, Maine, Boston, Massachusetts and spent many months at sea. Upon his release from active duty in 1967 he went to work for Sanders Associates, a manufacturer and designer of electronic military equipment, in Nashua, New Hampshire. Jayne Alicia was born in Nashua where the family lived for four years.

In 1971 the family purchased a place, in neighboring Hollis, which could be used both for living and operating a business. Jim and Sandy started their own business there and they are still operating that today. The business evolved from TV repair to stereo repair and then to two-way radio equipment sales and service. Jim also was active in the community in Hollis and Nashua. He served as an auxiliary police officer in Nashua for two years and as a Special Police Officer in Hollis for 17 years. He joined the Fire Department in 1971 and remains active as a volunteer fireman today (1996). He served as an elected member of the School Board for 6 years and then on the Board of Selectmen for 6 years and, at the time of this writing, is the chairman of the Hollis Planning Board. He had many other interests and participated in activities of the Blue Knights Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club, Hillsborough County Fair Board of Directors, 4-H leader, scouting, as well as several professional associations. Jim's life is presented in greater detail in the next chapter.



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**MICHAEL DAVID (26 APRIL 1945)  
AS TOLD BY MIKE**

Michael David Belanger was born on 26 April 1945 at Hotel Dieu Hospital in Van Buren. In late June and July of that year, I became very ill with whooping cough and pneumonia. My mother had pneumonia too and had to be admitted to the hospital. Because of the family situation, Dick and Pete were sent to summer camp in Gray, Maine for the month of July. Little baby Michael stayed at home with inadequate care (no hospital would take me because of the whooping cough). There was a Mrs. Ayotte who lived across the street who had a large family. Her husband had TB and their older

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daughter took care of her kids while Mrs. Ayotte came over and took care of the Belanger children. The doctor did not seem to care about my health and seemed to think I would die no matter what. Mrs. Ayotte would not give up, however, and is certainly the reason for my survival. One night, Dad and his niece took me to the hospital in St Basile, NB. The hospital would not admit me because of the highly contagious whooping cough so I was brought back home that same night. Mom had said, when she left for the hospital, she thought she would never see me again. When Mom came home, she said Mrs. Ayotte was most certainly the one who saved her Michael. I remember going to visit Mrs. Ayotte often because Mom would send me over to her house to "just visit." I didn't understand, at the time, but it later became apparent what was going on.

I grew up in Van Buren Maine and attended Van Buren schools. I kissed my first girl, Patsy, in the fourth grade, which is about normal. The reason I remember is that Patsy told the fourth grade teacher that I had kissed her on Saturday. The fourth grade teacher (Mrs. Cormier) and her husband lived just down the street from us and were very good friends with Mom and Dad. They played cards together almost weekly and Dad knew Mr. Cormier on a business basis in town. There wasn't much that went on in fourth grade without getting back to the folks at home. Well, Mrs. Cormier decided that she needed to help the family out and teach me, and the class, a lesson in morality and proceeded to lecture me in front of the class. I never forgave her and stopped going to her house.

In 1955 Mom and Dad set off for California to find a new home and start a new life. Dad got past Bangor and Portland but when he got to Boston, with multiple lanes of traffic, he turned around and came back home. On the way home, he stopped in Caribou to see a few friends and they talked him into moving to Caribou and set up his new business there. So Mom and Dad came home and announced that the family was moving to Caribou, Maine and not California. They had planned for us to move to Anaheim that year, 1954, the same year Disneyland opened their doors for business. Some of Mom's relatives, the Martins of Van Buren, lived there and felt it was a good place to start fresh. I wonder what life would have been like if Mom and Dad had moved to California? Would the Belangers have been part of the Beach Boys scene?

Mom and Dad designed their own new home, for Caribou, and built it with the help of my older brothers (Dick and Pete). Dad hired a contractor named Mr. Parent and his sons so build the house. Mr. Parent was a good finish carpenter and did much of the inside finish work. His work pace certainly did not meet with Mom's approval. She just couldn't get Mr. Parent to work as hard or as long as the others and she never seemed to understand why that was so. The house was built during the summer and the family, except for my brother Jim and me, moved in just before the snow set in. I was left behind with Aunt Angel so I could finish out the school semester. Jim had been enrolled in a boarding school in Sharon, Massachusetts so that he could complete the 8th grade at the same school with no mid year changes.

I later started school, at the Sincock School in Caribou, in the fifth grade. I should have been in the sixth grade since I had completed most of the same work the prior year in Van Buren. Mom wanted to move me up a grade but the school officials refused. I didn't mind because I felt I could "skate" for the better part of the year. The fact that this left me with a lot of time on my hands, coupled with my opinionated attitude got me into several fights at school. I didn't realize that being French in an English town wasn't a good thing and that didn't help either. I finally thought I had been accepted when I was allowed to be on the school patrol<sup>3</sup>. I had asked to go on "School Patrol" but had been told there was no room left. Since two other people had just come off the patrol I told the teacher that it was not fair that I should not be considered now that there was room. I was allowed to become one of the honored "Patrol" and I got into trouble right off. On my first day, I was watching

<sup>3</sup>"Patrols" were students who acted in some capacity as school policemen and helped the staff keep students in line.

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the street crossing in front of the school when the patrol captain motioned to a little girl, who was waiting to cross the street, to go ahead and cross. There was a car coming but she respected authority so she hurried across the street anyway. The patrol captain told the teacher that I was the one who had allowed a student to cross the street when there was a car coming. I was taken off the patrol the next day. A lesson learned in prejudice that has stayed with me for life.

The next year I was placed in Holy Rosary School, a catholic school supported by public funds. The nuns were definitely in control and most of my problems seemed to go away. I made a few friends but was always careful not to trust anyone very much through the seventh and eighth grades. Sister Henry was the eighth grade teacher and she took me on as her special project. I took an after school job sweeping the school for extra money. I was sweeping the school twice a week and this really old nun came from the convent every night to flush the girls' toilets. She had a hard time to walk and had to climb up the stairs to get into the school and then down the stairs to get to the girls bathroom and then repeat the return trip. So I decided that I could save her a trip and I would flush the toilets when I swept the area outside the toilets. Since I was the only one in the school, besides this nun, I felt safe in entering that forbidden area (girls bathroom). Well, wouldn't you know, I get found out and the old nun tells Sister Henry. She now thinks I'm a pervert and fires me from the job. Another lesson learned for life; perception is more powerful than truth.

My next stop is boarding school in Dieppe, New Brunswick at Saint Joseph's University. This was a traditional European style school which had three years of preparation and then four years of College. Since the curriculum was set for class seven days a week, the normal four years of high school were completed in three. Mom thought it would be better than public school and, it was only 3 years. Mom felt that would enable me to graduate with my age group since I had been held back one year when we moved to Caribou. I still have a few friends from those days, Scott Emack, Bob Ouellette and Peter Underwood. After the three years came the moment of truth; college or not. Mom said I had to talk Dad into it, if I wanted to go. Just seems that I did not have any really good arguments and Dad had some good ones on his side. He felt he was successful, had raised a family on a seventh grade education and felt college was not necessary. So I decided I wanted to go to trade school. Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute was just opening their doors that year and I wanted to be an electrician. Dad bought in to that and said yes so I went to school in Presque Isle.

The social side of my life had always been pretty restricted since I had been away at school so much. I tried to overcome that by dating Ruth Cyr who had graduated with me from Holy Rosary School before going to Saint Agatha for boarding school. We dated every time we were home during high school and during our summers together. Our relationship progressed to the point where a decision had to be made regarding marriage. I wasn't ready to settle down and work at her father's meat market and I was not ready to work with my Dad so I went off to NMVTI and she went to George Washington University in Washington DC. Later that summer I dated Mary Gahagan, who was more interested in someone from the air force base. I got my draft notice and decided that military life was my preferred option rather than declaring an educational deferment. In considering a branch of the military, I consulted my two older brothers, Dick and Pete, who had been in the Army. They recommended against it and since my other older brother, Jim, was happily serving in the Navy, I traded in my draft notice and joined the Navy for training in electronics.

I entered the Navy on 17 September 1964 and stayed until 1 October 1994; thirty years and thirteen days of continuous active service. After completing over twenty years of service my sister asked if I thought I was going to make it a career (go figure)! I guess she was still waiting for me to come home. After completing basic training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center, I was assigned to Great Lakes Administrative Command pending a further assignment to electronics school. During that

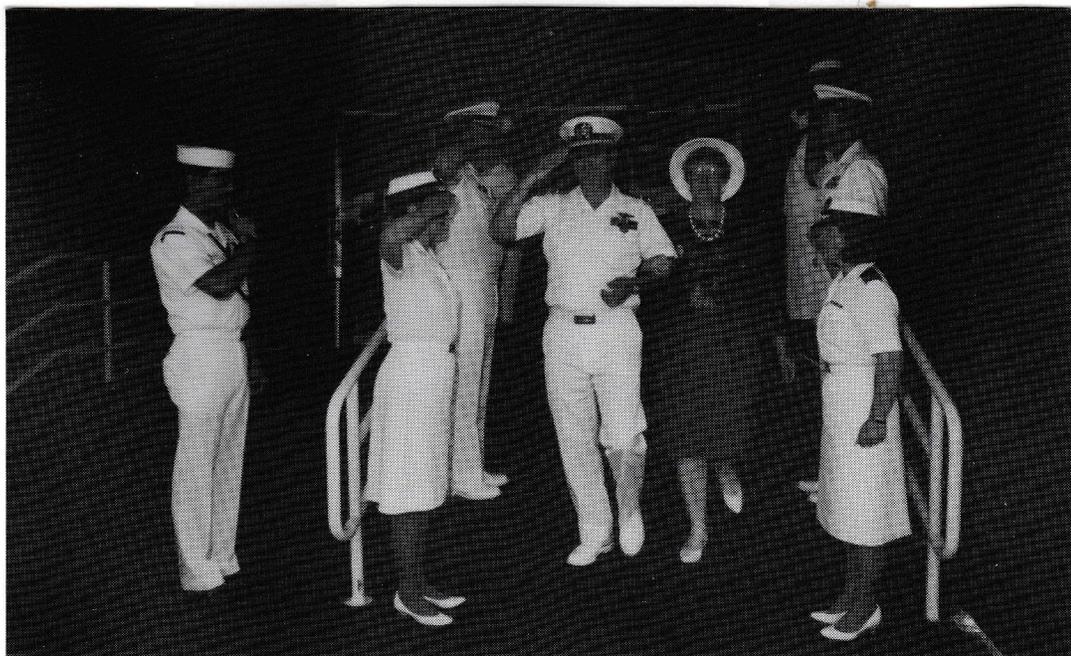
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time I met Elaine Rawlins on a blind date. Seems I was supposed to be dating another girl who wanted to ask me out, but, Elaine had the car so she had to be there too. On our second date, I knew Elaine was someone special. I proposed marriage on 1 November 1965 and we were married on 8 January 1966 at Great Lakes in the base chapel. Mom and Dad came from Maine for the wedding.

Life was now a "we" situation instead of a "me" free-style. My first duty station was Lowery Air Force Base in Denver Colorado where Michelle was born on 26 November 1966. My next duty station was Key West, Florida where Marylee was born on 21 July 1968. Then we got transferred back to Great Lakes for a tour of instructor duty and then off to Norfolk Virginia for ten years. In 1981 Elaine and I were fortunate enough to be asked if we wanted to adopt a baby girl, Megan, who was born on 6 November 1981. We said "yes" just before we were transferred back to Great Lakes in August 1982. I was assigned as a school director and Elaine became the Youth Director for Our Lady of Humility Church. In 1986 orders came for San Diego and, since Michelle and Marylee had both graduated from high school, the thought of going to California was intriguing. Michelle's daughter Ashton Lynn Belanger was born 24 May 1986 and we left for San Diego in June of that year. Little did we know that I was going to be gone for six to nine months out of every year. Marylee married Anthony Gonzales on 20 August 1988 and had their first child, Leandra Alicia on 20 February 1990. In April of 1990 we had the good fortune of going back to Great Lakes where I was now the Officer in Charge of Electronics Schools and Elaine started her own business with a friend. Michelle's second daughter, Amberle Ryan, was born on 1 November 1990. Marylee's second daughter, Kiersten, was born on 10 January 1992. In December 1992, I had a heart attack and Elaine cared for me during the next two years, while I recovered. Due to my time in service and my health, I decided to retire from the Navy with a disability on 1 October 1994. Elaine went to work as a Transition Counselor for the Department of the Navy in June 1994 while I stayed home until April 1995. I then went to work for San Diego Community College doing computer based training development. In December 1995 I went to work for Allstate insurance as a curriculum developer where I am still employed at the time of this writing. Megan's hobby has been horse back riding which works out just fine with Elaine and my enjoyment of watching horses. In September 1995, Megan got her horse "Hot Chocolate" and is showing her horse on the national level. She obtained the title of 1996 Reserve Champion, National Show Horse.

I started my military career as a Seaman Recruit (E1) and completed my it as a Lieutenant Commander (O4). I held all the enlisted ranks between E1 to E9 and the four junior officer ranks. My Navy highlights include shadowing the Russian frigate that entered the Gulf of Mexico in 1967 and attending the American Legion Convention in New Orleans. While there we ended up getting caught by hurricane Camille and spent a month coming down the Mississippi fixing everything from houses to communications equipment. The following year we spent six weeks in San Juan, Puerto Rico (learning the culture?). The Vietnam war was going strong but we were not effected too much since my ship was a submarine tender (USS Bushnell AS-15) and we stayed home most of the time. In 1975 I was part of the American rescue of the civilians left on Cyprus when Greece and Turkey declared war. While assigned to the USS Ponce (LPD-15) I went to the Mediterranean once, the Caribbean three times and the Northern Atlantic once. My next ship was the USS Eisenhower (CVN-69) which brought me to the Indian Ocean for the Iranian Hostage Rescue. I was later stationed on the USS Ranger (CV-61) while it went to the Indian Ocean for the Belligerent War between Iran and Iraq. While a member of the Ranger's crew, I participated in the blowing up of an Iranian oil platform. I again went to the Indian Ocean while a crew member of the USS Constellation (CV-64). During this trip our mission was to reflag the Kuwait oil tankers and escort them out of the Persian Gulf. I helped fit up the USS Independence in preparation for her Indian Ocean voyage and she ran into the Persian Gulf war, Desert Storm. Between the USS Eisenhower and my tour at Great Lakes I

was also stationed at the Atlantic Fleet Deception Group and was part of the Granada invasion planning. My extensive career in the Navy earned me 26 different medals and awards. Personal awards include; Meritorious Service Medal, Navy Commendation Medal, and Navy Achievement Medal (two awards).





**WILLIAM JOSEPH (21 NOV 1951)  
AS TOLD BY HIS SISTER PHYL**

William Joseph Belanger was born on 21 November 1951. It was the Wednesday evening before Thanksgiving that he started telling Mom he wanted out, so she went to the hospital, Hotel Dieu in Van Buren. Of course, after 4 boys in a row, everyone was hoping for a girl, but, he wasn't. His shock of red hair made up for it. He always had a sparkle in his eye and a little crooked grin that served him well over the years, they got him out of more jams! (His son, Jerry, has the exact same quality today). Bill lived in Van Buren until he was barely four, when in December 1955 we all moved to Caribou. So he really grew up in Caribou, went to Holy Rosary parochial school for eight grades, and then on to Caribou High School, where he graduated in 1970. During High school, Bill and some friends had a band, called the 4th Street Syndicate, and they played at dances and other functions. Bill pursued his college education on the GI Bill after four years in the Marines, getting a BA in Business from Unity College and an MBA in Business and Science from Husson College in 1996. Now, he's looking towards his Master's.

After graduation from Caribou High, Bill joined the U.S. Marines, where he served four years on active duty, mostly in California, with a stint in Guam and the Phillipines. Then he came back home from California with his 1963 Corvette, which he still has today, and enrolled at UMPI, working briefly as a stock boy in a grocery store, then stock boy at J.C. Penneys, until he found his niche as a

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car salesman for Danny Brewer in Caribou, Maine. The hours were flexible and allowed him to go to school and work at the same time. One evening in September 1975, Bill was driving his Vette through Caribou, when he saw this girl walking from the library (life is mysterious and this is one of those instances). He drove by, (being a car buff she spotted that Vette right away) and turned around. By some coincidence she had to stop and tie her shoe (yeah, sure) so, they got to talking and went for a ride. Her name was Chris Biehls, and she worked as a PIXY photographer for J.C.Penneys. Hailing from Warren, Pa, this was her first trip to the New England area (a transfer she had requested). They met on Monday, and on Wednesday he introduced her to our Mom, announcing that they were getting married. Mom's response was "Est tu foux, toi"? I guess he wasn't, because, 20 years and 5 kids later they are still in love. Her PIXY job took her from Caribou to Houlton, to Lewiston and then on to Connecticut, with a stay of about a week in each location. They got engaged in Connecticut, and she came with her parents to Caribou in November of 1975 to meet the family. Guess we passed the test. They were married on 17 January 1976 in Warren, Pennsylvania. We all went to the wedding, even Dad who was recovering from his heart attack. After a honeymoon cruise (gift from Chris' dad) they settled in Warren, Pennsylvania. Chris went to work for her Dad managing his Dairy Queen and Bill transferred to the University of NY at Albany; and they both sold Amway. In July 1976, Dad died and they drove up to the funeral. Then, during a semester break, Bill came back up to Caribou. Talking to Danny Brewer, he promoted himself a job as manager of the AMC dealership that Danny was setting up.

On Labor Day weekend 1976, Chris and Bill came back to Caribou. They stayed with me until they could find an apartment or buy a house. They bought a two bedroom house on Katahdin Avenue and moved in during Armistice weekend, November 1976. By that time, Chris was expecting Chelsea, who was born 12 June 1977, the first granddaughter and niece in a long time in Caribou. Then, on 18 July 1978, Casey came along. Two little kids for Aunt Phyl, and everyone else, to spoil! (All the other nieces and nephews were away). Bill worked for Dan Brewer for a few years, then on to selling cars for Maurice Fox, and then started his own business, a bottle redemption center. This he expanded to Presque Isle, Maine along with a beverage warehouse which Chris managed. Always the entrepreneur, Bill hired help and turned to a new vocation, optician. He set up and started the first ever eyeglass business in the area, the Eyewear Boutique. He expanded this business into Presque Isle, later selling it to me and changing the Caribou location to Bennett Drive. He named it County Optical when he bought out American Optical and opened a full service lab in conjunction with the retail store, which Chris managed. This business is still at the present location today but he now owns the building. He divided the business into Optix (retail) and Eyeris New England (the lab). By this time he had sold the bottle redemption businesses in both Caribou and Presque Isle.

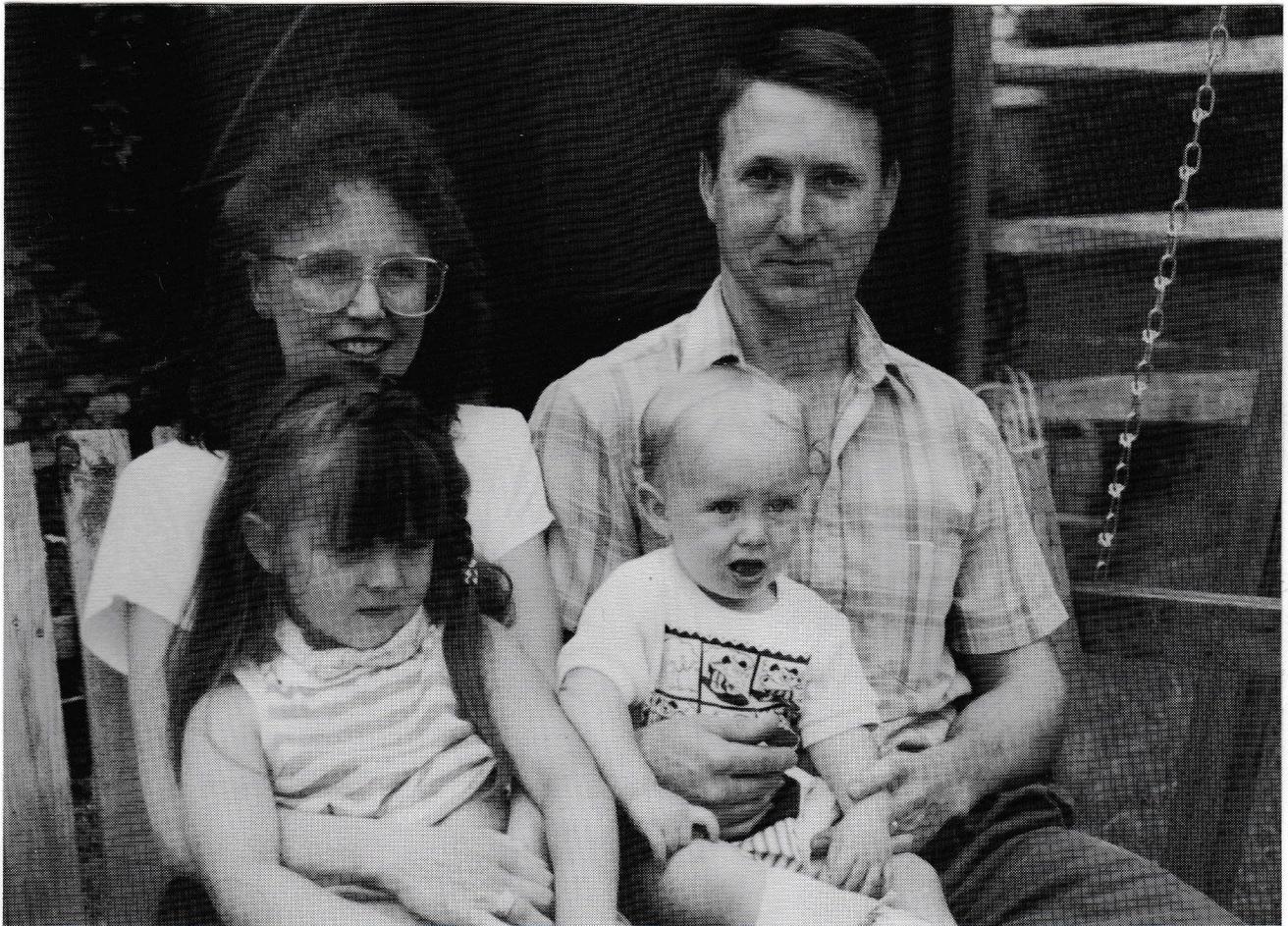
In Bill's life you can see many instances that point to a higher Being, perhaps a Guardian Angel. Just after graduating, before going into the Marines, he had a car accident. The car stopped at the edge of the cliff and God only knows why he was not killed. When Chelsea and Casey were two and three, Bill and Chris had an accident with the Corvette, the top came off, it rolled down the hill, they were all thrown from the car (Gail, Pete's daughter was with them) and once again nobody was killed; only God knows why. When Billy was born, in 1984, the umbilical cord was wrapped around his neck four times, but he survived. Once again, divine intervention, God wanted him here; he's a special kid. Six years later Jerry was born, a preemie, very at risk, needing blood transfusions and the medical people didn't expect him to make it. God knew better and Jerry brightens our lives today. One Saturday Bill and Chris rented a plane to go to Augusta to the state tennis match that Chelsea was playing in and the engine quit on them. They made an emergency landing at the Bangor airport. The cap was off the oil tank, and all the oil was gone but pilot Bill and Navigator Chris were

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fine since God must have been the co-pilot. In 1995 Chelsea was involved in a very bad car accident in which eight kids from Caribou were all hurt very badly. Thanks to God's kindness, they all survived.

Bill's family is partialled out, kind of like Mom's. There are Chelsea Lynn and Casey Joseph , who in 1996 are 19 and 18. Then, smack in the middle, six years later, came Billy, (William Joseph the second, born 7 July 1974) who is now twelve. Another six years later, along came Jerry (Gerald Robert, born February 19, 1991) and 1 1/2 years later, Georgie (George Michael born 29 October 1992). One girl and 4 boys. 1996 finds Bill and Chris managing the Optical business in Caribou, Chelsea recovered well from the car accident and is attending UMPI (she is majoring in Sports Management and works part time at Reno's Restaurant), Casey is looking towards attending University of Maine in Orono for Computer Engineering, Billy is going into seventh grade at Middle School, Jerry is going into Kindergarten at Hilltop School and Georgie is still at home (19 Montgomery Avenue in Caribou, Maine). Bill is presently Commander of the Civil Air Patrol regional wing and divides his time between this commitment, his business, his family, flying, golf, and whatever other entrepreneur idea that comes his way.





**JOHN PHILIP (25 DEC 1953)  
AS TOLD BY HIS SISTER PHYL**

John Philip Belanger was born in late afternoon on Christmas Day in 1953 at Hotel Dieu Hospital in Van Buren, Maine. He was due in January, but still jokes today about how, even before he was born, he knew enough to come early and save Dad and Mom money on their taxes. John grew up in Caribou, with Bill, (two years older) and Steve (four years younger). He attended Caribou schools; Holy Rosary to seventh grade, then public school for eighth grade and Caribou High School. After graduation in 1972, John went to NMVTI to study drafting for two years. It was at this time that Dad had his heart attack and was not well; so John worked with Steve at Belanger's Auto Electric. Later they would divide the business, and buy it from Mom, with John purchasing the Diesel and Steve the Automotive part of it.

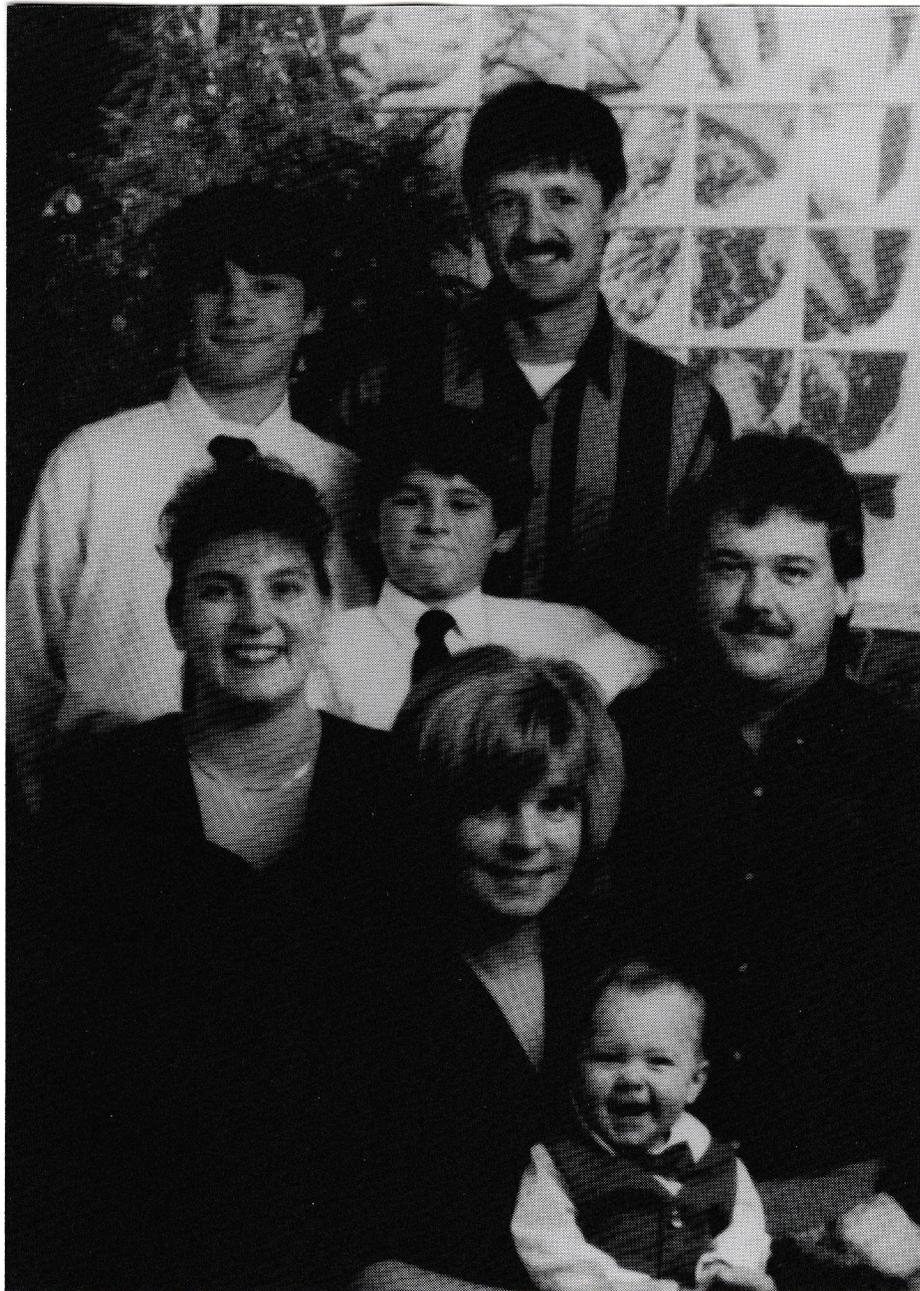
John didn't talk much when he was very little but he certainly mastered the word NO. He could say no to almost anything. He also became famous, within the family, for his early phrase of "Gimmie Dime". That's all you needed to buy candy and pop then. Little Johnny graduated from Frankie Henderson's Nursery School. The graduation consisted of a presentation for the parents which included a square dance, and some of the children had small parts. Johnny had a few jokes to say. He was kinda shy, so cute, and everybody thought he looked and sounded so much like his father.

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John married ChiChi (Denece) Burbank. Denece had her name legally changed to ChiChi. She was from Lexington, Maine, but was attending NMVTI in Presque Isle when John met her. She stayed in the Presque Isle area, working at the Northern National Bank. They were married on June 30, 1979, in North New Portland, and honeymooned in Bermuda. They lived in an apartment in Presque Isle for a short time, before buying a house on the Van Buren road, where they still live. They have remodeled this house over the years until it suits their family to a Tee. After seven years of marriage, John and ChiChi had a baby girl, Jessica Rae, born 16 August 1986 at TAMC in Presque Isle. Four years later they had a boy, Shane Philip Burbank, born on 23 June 1990 at TAMC in Presque Isle. John moved the diesel business out of the original Belanger Auto Electric building to a building on the corner of the same block. He is still there, doing a very good business as Belanger Diesel. Golf is his passion, while finances are his fashion.

1996 finds John and ChiChi at their country home, with their two children, plus two horses and varied other pets; a dog, a cat, fainting goats and a rabbit. Jessica, at ten, is almost as tall as I am, going into grade four at Teague Park School. Shane, at six, is entering kindergarten at Hilltop School. John is managing the business and ChiChi is keeping everything running smoothly .





**STEPHEN KEITH (24 AUG 1957)  
AS TOLD BY HIS SISTER PHYL**

Stephen Keith Belanger was born on 24 August 1957, at Cary Memorial Hospital in Caribou. The day was a Saturday, two days after Mom and Dad's 25th Anniversary, and the day before the party we had planned to celebrate the anniversary. Steve was the seventh Belanger boy in a row and Mom used to say he would be her Bishop. The seventh son is supposed to have a special gift. Steve attended Holy Rosary School until the sixth grade, then went on to Caribou public school. While a student at Caribou High School, Steve worked at the garage with Dad until Dad had his heart attack and Steve had to take over the running of the business, along with John. At that time it seemed right

for him, but no one really gave him a choice. Then, a year later, when he was only nineteen, Dad died and Steve and John kept on running the garage for Mom. In 1978 Steve married Tina Michaud and they lived on Limestone Street for a while, then bought a house on Washburn Street near the Caribou pond. The house had an apartment upstairs and appeased Steve's longing for a place in the woods by a brook. The marriage broke up within two years and Steve stayed in Caribou while Tina went to Florida. By that time John and Steve had divided the business and John had moved the diesel out into another location. Steve then met Debbie (Thompson) Myshrall. Debbie and her eight year old daughter Bobbie brought stability and meaning into Steve's life. Now he had his own family.

In 1983 Steve and Deb bought the farm next door to Sacred Heart church in North Caribou and sold the Washburn Street house. It was spring, and just the right time; the goats they kept in the garage were eliciting complaints from the neighbors. The farmhouse they bought was built over 100 years ago. Steve and Deb were married on 25 November 1983 at Sacred Heart Church. Jesse Gerald was born on 13 November 1984 and Joshua Stephen was born 3 February 1987. Both boys were born in Caribou. All this time Steve had been running Belanger's Auto Electric, but the day Joshua was born, he locked the door and went to work cutting wood; for two weeks. Two years later, he built a garage, with some help from his friends, and re-opened Belanger's Auto Electric at his farm in North Caribou. Steve started raising beef cattle, along with horses, dogs, cats, chickens, rabbits, even pigs once (he tried it all) but now have beef cattle, horses, dogs and cats. Debbie worked as a bartender and Steve tried to build up the business again, but it was hard being located so far out of town. He was taking correspondence courses in forestry, because his heart was still in the woods and he thought of becoming a Forest Ranger or a Game Warden. He is a Registered Maine Guide. One day he applied for, and got, the job as Caribou Animal Control Officer. This is only part time, but it exposed him to the law enforcement community. He went to Police Training school and was open to any opportunity that came up in that field. Meanwhile, Bobbie grew up, graduated from Caribou High school, went to Pierre's Beauty School for a year, then worked as an assistant manager at the Fashion Bug and Marianne's. She married Andy Scott, and is now a teller at the Katahdin Trust in Caribou. She and Andy are the proud parents of a little boy, Alexander, born 17 February 1996 in Portland Maine. (Imagine, our baby brother Steve a grandfather!) The two little boys are growing like weeds and Joshua seems to be mechanically inclined, like his Dad. Even if Steve is burned out on auto mechanics, he is still the best diagnostician in the area.

1996 finds Steve still living on the Van Buren Road on his farm, working part time for the Sheriff's Department, the Limestone Police Department and as Caribou Animal Control Officer. Debbie is a part-time bartender at the Caribou Inn and Convention Center. Jesse is 11 and going into sixth grade at Caribou Middle School. Joshua is 9 and going into grade four at Teague Park School. Everyone is happy, healthy and doing well.

In January of 1997 Steve was making arrangements to move his family close to Fort Kent, Maine where he had accepted a full time position with the Aroostook County Sheriff's Department. It meant moving the family but there seemed to be no second thoughts about the matter from anyone. He made that move and by May 1997 was living at Cross Lake.

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