

Marrowstone Island Brief 7

FREE FALLS OFF MARROWSTONE'S CLIFFS. Throughout the years, the high banks of Marrowstone have captured victims unmindful of where the land ends, and have dropped like falling stars. At the turn of the century when The Stump Saloon stood adjacent to Fort Flagler, soldiers leaving the saloon sometimes missed the beaten path and fell off the bank. They were the lucky ones who were seen falling. Skulls have been occasionally found on the beach below but it had not been determined whether or not they were of the soldiers', or from preceding victims of once warring Indians.

Sometime in the '30's, Merritt Duncan age 10, fell 60 feet to the beach while playing near the cemetery and sustained long lasting injuries. Finis Stevens (who moved on the island in 1927), wrote in his autobiography of hiring Dana Packard, a farmer from Chimacum, to bale the hayfield behind his house on the east side of the island near the cemetery. Dana disappeared over the bank with his Farmall tractor pulling a super 8 baler. Major Stanley Kolwalski, a resident of the island stationed at Fort Flagler in 1950, arrived with the Army's crane and barge to pull the tractor and baler off the beach. Although Dana survived the fall, the machinery was totalled.

Willian Schwartz, known formally as "Mr. Schwartz" was a Sunday school teacher who was frequently seen walking as he recited psalms and Lbible proverbs. In the 50's he lived on the road named after him, Schwartz Road. He, too, was surprised by a fall when he edged too close to the bank to cast out a pan of dirty dishwater.

A trail leading down to the beach from the cemetery grounds in bygone times still remain in the memories of a few long time residents. The powerful winter tide action possibly washed it out as many residents with access to the beaches soon discovers.

Marrowstone Island is basically made up of two soil types, according to Bob Simmonds, resident geologist. When the glacial cover began to melt and recede to colder climes it deposited a mix of odd size rocks called glacial till. The other type is sand which settled from the melt water. Both of these types can be seen in the bluffs south of East Beach Park where the sandy layers are at the base of the bluff, and the till forming the top 15-20 feet. The sandy layers show "cross-bedding" which are tilted layers caused by the currents which deposited the sand. From East Beach Park, facing south, there is a corridor across the water clear to Edmonds through which the southern winter winds, and wave action slam into the vulnerable sand bluffs of Marrowstone. It undercuts the soft soil and causes frequent landslides.

It was from this changing edgeline, in 1976, where June and John Anderson fell one winter night watching the mesmerizing display of the northern lights. A neighbor's call sent them out into their yard to view lthe rapture of the heavens. To escape the bright light pouring out from their house, (which dimmed the view), they looked skyward walking backward into the darker recesses of their yard. Then June disappeared over the bank, and John anxiously ran after her only to fall off himself. They miraculously survived the 70 foot drop to the beach suffering a few broken bones, and stoically made the half mile trek to East Beach Park where June waited at the shelter while John walked back home to get the car.

Other residents have suffered similar fates. In the bright spring sunshine, Bill Jansen was mowing the lawn with his self-propelled mower when his knees buckled. The power mower pulled him over the edge. His bank was at a 45 degree angle to the beach where the vegetation thrived in the lee of Nodule Point. It was the buffer he needed to survive the 60-70 foot fall. When Bill appeared back at his house with scratches and scrapes his wife Frankie called their neighbor, Joe Lovato, to help retrieve the mower. Joe found the machine hanging on sapling trees with the throttle running on full. Olof Ford was a lucky man who also survived the same fate a mile south of Bill Jansen. He, too, was mowing the lawn on a tractor with a 24 Finch swath. Turning in a narrow space near the bank, Olof backed the machine to where one

of the rear wheels slipped over the edge. His wife Zelma was close enough to attempt grabbing him but failed. Olof and the tractor parted on their fall down the bank, he landed on a jut and the tractor continued to the water's edge.

In April of 1979, eighteen month old Bo Russell escaped his dad's vigilance and walked to the bank to watch the waves lapping the beaches 70 feet below. A young dog with a nervous habit of jumping on people pushed Bo over the edge. He fell half way down the bank where the cliff's gentle incline was softened with vegetation. Bo clutched the sides with tiny fingers, calling out, "Come, come, daddy!" Chuck Russell does not remember how he slipped down the sheer first half of the bank without shoes, but it was a slow walk over rocks for a couple hundred feet to the nearest trail up the bank.

The west side of Marrowstone lapped by the waters of Kilisut Harbor and Scow Bay are mostly low waterfront. The land is mainly rocky as evident along the low bank of Indian Island when crossing the bridge.

In 1987, Gunner Scholar, who lived on Griffiths Point Road was learning to operate his new lawn mower. As he was acquainting himself with the machinery, during a moment's inattention, he drove over the 13 foot embankment. He lay on the beach unable to move, and his calls for help were absorbed by the distance of his neighbors. His wife June was gone helping at the Jefferson County Fair, but since she was expected back in a short time he waited for her return. In the meantime, their dog, Fred, ran to neighbor Chuck Sample's house and alternately offered up his paw, and licked Chuck's hand. Chuck did not detect anything awry although he thought it unusual for Fred to dally from his own yard. Meanwhile, the tide was lapping closer to where Gunner lay, unable to move because of a broken back. The incoming tide became a teasing threat but June returned in time to find him on the beach and called for help.

BLUE MOON OVER MARROWSTONE: Folks living on the east side of Marrowstone have been witnesses to a spectacular monthly event: The rising of a gigantic orange orb over the silhouette of Whidbey Island. Whether it's an orange moon, silver moon, honey moon, or pumpkin moon, a rare moon happening called the blue moon will occur on January 31st and March 31st. There will be two full moons in each of the months, the second rising being referred to as the blue moon (although the color of the moon is not blue). What makes this occurrence rare is that it will happen twice in one year and the last time this happened was in 1915. Be a witness, you'll never see it happening in your life time again.

WSU LEARNING EXCHANGE. Bob Simmonds of E. Beach Road has been a volunteer instructor for the Learning Exchange program since it's inception. He has taught geology, astronomy, and tides and currents. For anyone who is interested in the program as a volunteer instructor or student call the WSU extension office: 379-5610.