

## Cousin Betty's Aspen Chalet

*08-01-2013 by Harry Zirkelbach*

I married onto a large Denver family. The men tended to businesses; women dominated the households. They tended to be second and third generation native Coloradans and, slow to accept any marrying into the clan, even other women.

Through sons of this group, I became aware of the niceties of these family ties before marrying into the inter circle.

It happened that Harry Schnibbe and Harry Zirkelbach married into the Foley family, and that Betty Gardell and Betty McConaty were sisters-in law. So any casual conversation around the table gathering, it was necessary to pay attention. It would not be unusual to have one participant say something unflattering about a "Betty", then another praise; if not really observant, the listener would miss the subtle change in objects reference.

"Harry" had the same concern, not important here.

The negative "Betty" had married into the family; the other was a daughter to a matriarch. Both portrayed dutiful wives, mothers. Acceptance was another issue.

The family of interloper "Betty", a Kansas City beauty, was very rich. Indirectly, both facts may have been part of her problem.

She and her husband had built a comfortable home in Mayfair, southeast Denver. And with other money she had built a large chalet next to downtown Aspen in the late 1950s. That family with 4 daughters used the home for skiing, parents and children avid in this sport. For summers she rented this chalet to visiting dignitaries, fully furnished with food and liquor. Her pad, a business investment,

In spring of several early 1960s years she volunteered "let" the chalet to the Harry Zirkelbach's (the Schnibbe's having moved to Washington D.C.) for spring vacation, between ski and summer seasons. It was a gift. Simply have a good time.

We owned a Volkswagen, had six children. Between seasons, Aspen was almost deserted. Merchants and Ski operators vacationing, or buying for summer visitors. Businesses that had not closed were happy to talk to any walking into their store.

Still, the mountains were the magnet. Imagine climbing the mountains around Aspen, snow still covering everything but melting rapidly in the spring sunshine.

Then, adults and children tumbling down unable to run as fast as gravity demanded.

And a treasure hunt. Whenever a skier had stopped that winter season, made any adjustment, it was possible something fell from their clothing. If that had metal, now the sun absorbed heat (snow reflected sunshine) and that object melted itself into a hole the melt created. These circles were fairly obvious to the climber, and a game was created -- who could amass the most interesting collection at the return from each climb. Treasures, mostly coins, included, watches, combs, sun glasses, lipstick, compacts, small treasures owners probably never missed.

Then there were former gold mines to explore, the entrance inviting and dangerously accessible. And sun and quiet gave signs of wild life everywhere.

After a day of adventure, the body cleanup in a shower, parents cleaning each child, burning off tics, band-aids for injuries Then a special meal with fireplace, games, while listening to Betty's extensive musical records, Tom Lehrer anecdotes. After the children slept, the parents listen to recordings of entertainers who had been guests, left their recordings.

Finally sleep, children and parent re-enforcing moments to carry their joy into the beyond.



Bustling downtown Aspen, 1962



Julie, Paul, Jo, Amy, Tom, Barbara, Dave, Grace. Zirkelbachs in Betty's back yard.