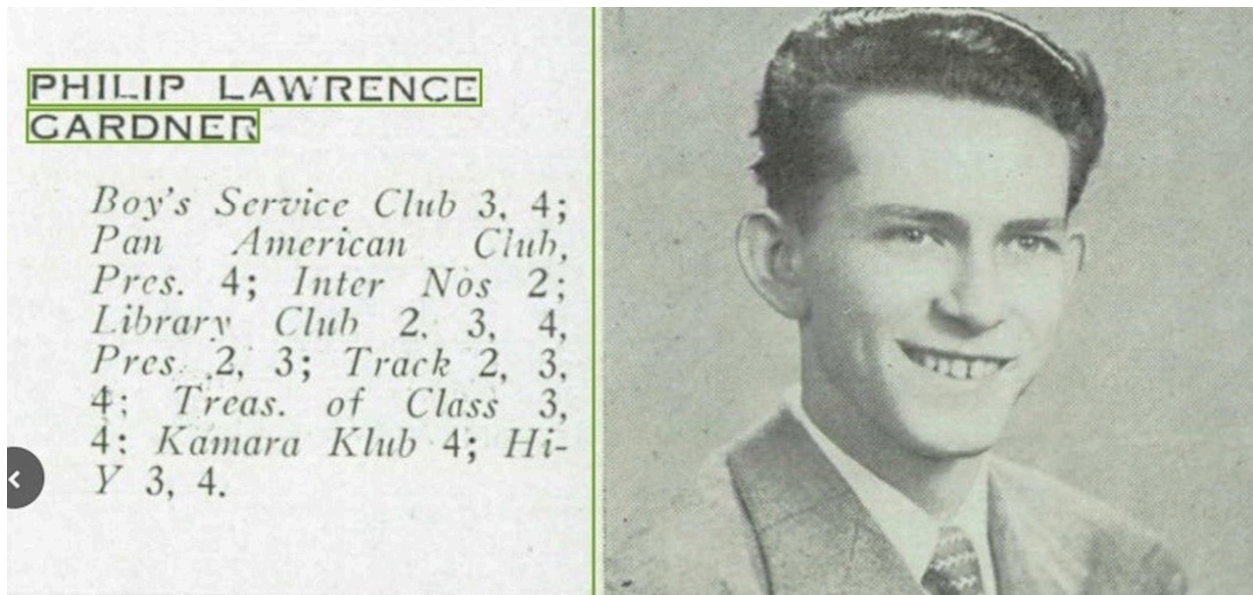


Dad: Philip Lawrence Gardner



Philip Gardner entry in 1945 Holmes Yearbook

Philip Gardner graduated from Holmes High School in 1945, so he was in high school all during WWII. Mom graduated in 1940 1/2, but with her polio would not have been considered for anything military.

Even in high school, he was in leadership positions (President of the American Club and Library Club and Class Treasurer). Inter nos is Latin for between or among ourselves and was the name many high school Latin clubs.

Borrowing from a Facebook relationship status type, my relationship with Dad was "complicated". I have fond childhood memories. My parents divorced when I was in 7th grade and although we went through extremes in closeness and not ... including a period when I refused to see him ... as I see how custody battles rage in today's families, I had it better than some.



Company 1: Main Firehouse in Covington, KY until 1975

Phil Gardner was a fireman for about 32 years and I grew up around the firehouse. My first memories were of an old firehouse built originally for horse-drawn equipment. The sleeping quarters were on the second floor. When an alarm sounded, the men would slide down the pole landing next to one of the trucks.



Pre-mobile phone Call box.

24hrs and then off for 48, we would sometimes visit him at work. I remember getting to sit in the driver's seat and pull the cord that rang the bell as well as in the seat atop the rear ladders of the "hook and ladder" truck. Eventually, he was one of the three deputy "chiefs" (each had a 'shift') of a moderately large fire department in Covington, Kentucky.

He moved into the new station in 1975.

He was not afraid of controversy. At different times in his job as one of the chiefs, Dad was accused of both racism and sexism.



Hiring the first Black

When the city asked why he didn't have any blacks on the force, he replied that they hired from those who passed the fireman's test. He was ordered to re-write the test. ...and then to re-write the test a second time, and a third time. He then refused to continue to modify the test, which he insisted was about finding out what someone knew about fire and he didn't want to send people into burning buildings who didn't understand what they were up against.

When he hired an African-American, he told me about his first conversation with a guy who eventually became a strong friend.

"I want you to know that you're a rookie on this shift. You're not a black rookie, you're a rookie. You're going to scrub the tires on the trucks, not because you're black, but because you're a rookie. You're going to get to wash the trucks because you're a rookie. There are a lot of grunt jobs around here that you are going to have to do because you are a rookie. They are the same jobs I had to do when I was a rookie and which every other man on this force had to do as a rookie. I will treat you the same way I treat everyone else on this force, and will expect respect in return. Oh, and another thing. You need to trim your hair, not because you're black, but because if you go into a burning building with that Afro sticking out the bottom of a helmet, you're gonna burn. So just to make sure that we understand each other, if you don't show me your 'black power' (common phrase at that time), I won't show you my white (i.e. I'm the fire chief) power."

Hiring the first Woman

He was also in charge when they wanted to hire women and wanted him to have one on his shift. He fought it but eventually lost. His reasoning:

“Other than the fact that you’re requiring me to build another restroom, shower/locker area, and sleeping quarters in this building without giving me any additional space in which to do it, I have no problem with any female firefighter who can get all the hair under the helmet, can hold a hose with high-pressure water coming out and can climb out of an upper story window with a 250-pound person of dead weight on her shoulder as she climbs down the ladder.”

Keeping a school from opening

He got in trouble with the Covington School System when they built a new elementary building where my two sisters would attend and he refused to let them open the building until they added windows.



Latonia Elementary School

Anywhere in the city in 90 seconds

He claimed that he could have someone on the scene anywhere in the city 90 seconds after an alarm from one of the city’s 10 firehouses.

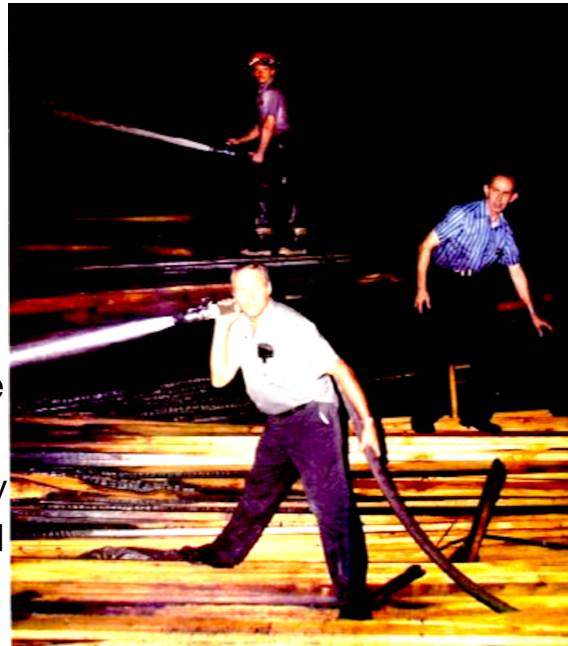
I saw that first hand once as my siblings and I were in the firehouse as an alarm sounded. His instruction was to “stand over there against the wall RIGHT NOW and I’ll have someone come and get you”. As the firehouse PA system was announcing the location and description, 8 firehouse doors were going up, firefighters were scrambling, engines were starting and in about 15-20 seconds, the chief car, ambulance, rescue truck, pumper, and

ladder truck were GONE. One of the dispatchers had us come in and spend time with him until our mother could arrive to take us home.

Over the years, I got to watch him fight several kinds of fires. In the winter he might be covered with ice and walking on several inches of frozen water around a building. In the summer there were firefighters passing out from heat exhaustion. One of the problems dad had was that he would go

to a fire while off duty — without his gear. Here he is in his street clothes (striped shirt) doing something to help at a lumber yard.

The most memorable example of his running off without equipment was to the horrific fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in 1977. This was the location of my high school prom not long before and it is the fire in which my high school clarinet teacher was among the 165 fatalities.



Off duty, without gear

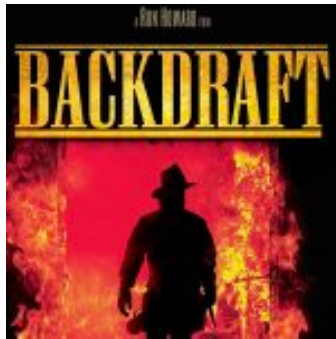


Beverly Hills Supper Club - 1977

What happens when you block a fire truck?

I was coming down the one-way street where we live. There is parking on both sides, but that doesn't leave much room. Years ago, when I had a conversion van, I managed to take off someone's mirror with mine. (Yes, I dealt with it.)

On this particular trip, in addition to normal cars parked, I encountered a lawn service truck, an Amazon van, a City Truck and one collecting trash...and I barely made it through with my car. I commented in a post that a fire truck wouldn't make it and was reminded of a couple of Dad's firetruck stories and events, one courtesy of my sister.



The movie, 'Backdraft' fascinated me. Dad was a 32-yr veteran firefighter in a full-time city department that had about ten "houses" around town. He was one of three "Chiefs". He said "Backdraft" was pretty accurately done. I asked about the scene where there is a car parked in front of the hydrant and they break the windows and take the hose through the car.

"We would probably just use the truck to push the car out of the way. The car would be a wreck, but don't put your car between my truck and our getting to a fire."



Dad's Company No 1 Firehouse @1975



Close to that in real life that involved Dad and his trucks happened at my high school around 1980 when my sister was a sophomore. There is a long driveway through the school and at times they would have problems with people speeding through there during school. On one particular day, someone chained shut the large ironworks gate. They weren't supposed to do that, I'm sure, but those drivers and that long driveway could be disturbing and a safety concern.

There was a fire alarm and Dad was on duty.

When the trucks arrived at the school, they encountered the locked main gate. Guess what they did?

Dad never talked about that story, but sister tells me she remembers faculty talking about the Fire Department "busting the gates down".

Retirement

For years, dad's dream was to retire from the Fire Department, move to the hills of Tennessee, and build a log house. But by the time he was forced into retirement by the disability of Emphysema caused by the combination of years of chronic cigarette smoking and fire fighting smoke inhalation, he had to settle for moving to Tennessee and buying a log home.

He tried to do all those fatherly things that seem to be expected. He taught me how to fish, but I never developed the patience to wait for the fish to decide to jump onto my hook. He took me camping, but my allergies made that a miserable experience. He was an Eagle Scout who became a scoutmaster so I'd get involved....and I did, but again, the outdoor stuff was not allergy-friendly. He became a summer league baseball coach so I would play and I did.....for a while. He taught me how to shoot and hunt. I was good with the shooting part but never got into hunting. As a child, I had a good dad.

And I realize now how hard he tried to be a good father even after the divorce. At Christmas, he would bring toys to Mom's house so we'd have things to open there too. We never had forced visitation but were often invited to his home. He never fought or failed to comply with child support and helped with some of our expenses. He gave me half what I needed for a bicycle and a clarinet. He never said an unkind word about my mother, although I suspect their problems were not as one-sided as she led us to believe.

Dad worked two jobs for years. On the off days from the fire department, he worked at a department store in Cincinnati. He would have one day (a Sunday) off per month.

I did not make things easy for him during my high school years. The worst was my refusal to see him for about 2 years when he had a child by the second wife. I regret that because I know it hurt him. I also regret the out

of anger demand to have myself removed from child support a year early when he insisted I thank the step-mother for money he had given me for a European Band tour that he said (correctly) was from them both. That was selfish because it put additional hardship on my mother.

Once he retired and moved to Tennessee and I was in college, dad and I made up. Well, I made up....he was never angry at me. When Joan and I got married we started making visitation trips to Tennessee and more so after our children were born.



Buckskin Trading Post

A few years after their move to Tennessee, he and his wife, Betty, bought a souvenir shop, "Buckskin Trading Post". There were tables of trinket-type souvenirs, all stamped with the Smoky Mountains. Quilts hung outside. Their big moneymaker was fireworks. After all Dad's childhood rules about fireworks,

other than the money, I could never understand that.

It was in the early 90's that I got a letter from Dad asking for a \$5000 loan to get the business out of trouble. He sounded both desperate and depressed.

For such a proud man to be so desperately asking for money was crushing. Joan and I discussed it. We did have the money in savings, it was just a loan and it was my Dad, so we sent him a check without any written agreement or even an understanding on interest, payments, or timetable. I trusted him.

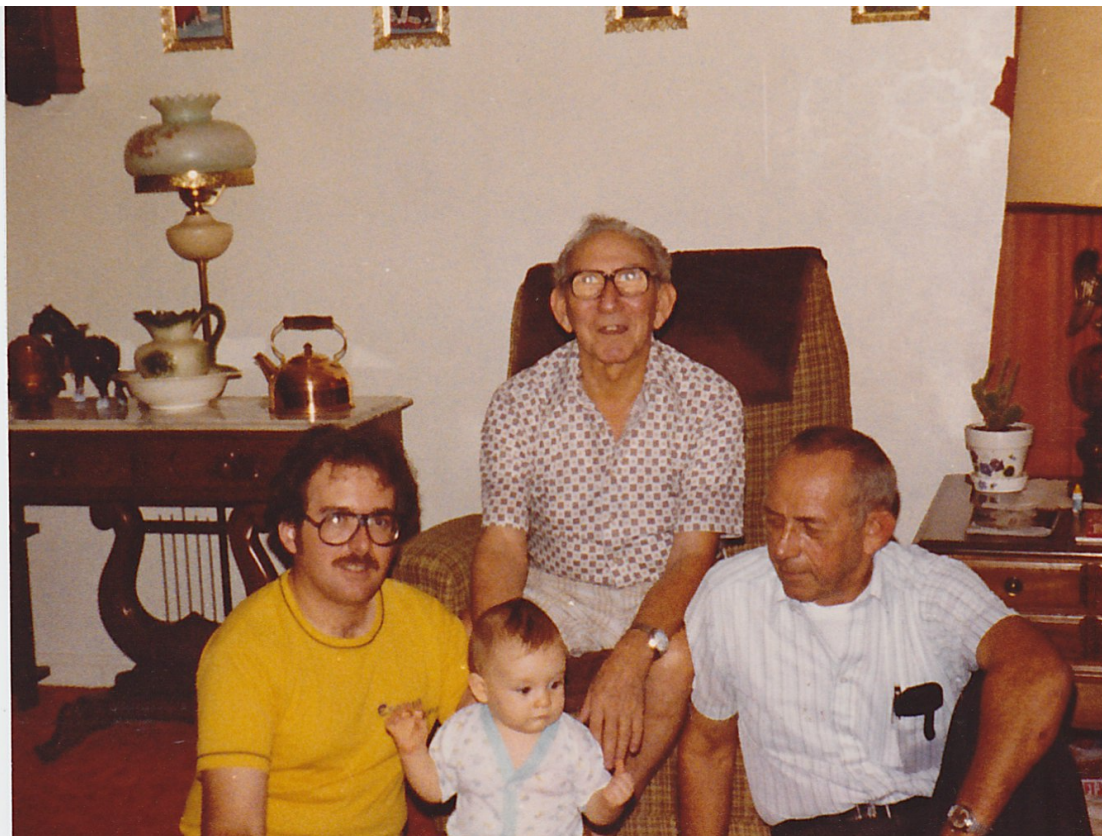
Not very long after that, however, I received a second letter asking for ANOTHER \$5-10,000. At that point, I wasn't confident of getting it back, so I wrote back and declined. He never mentioned it again.

He died of cancer in December of 1996. By that time, the bank had foreclosed on the business. When he died, Betty promised we'd get our money back, but then she died not too long after.

Betty's daughter, Joy, called me once to ask if I had gotten my money. She had made them a loan as well but had been more aggressive in getting repayment. She tried to assure me that Dad, who she described as a kind man, had every intention of getting the money back to me.

My only comfort in all that is that we did what we could when we could and for the right reasons.

We never made it to five generations, but this is Grandpa Bruce Gardner, Dad, me and first son, John.



John Sr, John Jr, Bruce and Phil