

## Chuck Pivetti: A Brief Biography

My father, Charles Allan Pivetti, Chuck to friends, Charles to his aunt Erma, and just Dad to me was an only child...but with near a score of aunts and uncles. Chuck passed away, too soon, on August 3, 2021. He was a husband, family man, postman, pilot, civil engineer, boxer, friend, naval officer, traffic engineering manager, scout leader, dog's best friend, cyclist, adventurer, angler, backpacker, San Francisco Giants fan, and an award winning photographer.

Chuck was a small town kid, born February 26, 1929 in Hollister, California (then population 3,500 and now grown to 35,000). The Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company brought Chuck's granddad and great-granddad to California to work lime kilns at Little Sur. Chuck's dad, Zene, was born in Big Sur, California. Zene's father and grandfather worked the Little Sur kilns (the ruins of which are in Lime Kiln State Park) until they moved to Cienega, near Hollister, when a new lime kiln was opened there. Cienega was big enough to have a Wolworth's, a JC Penney's and a public swimming pool but only ruins remain. Cienega Valley wines are famous but Almaden's try at expansion was unsuccessful because the microclimate didn't extend past the old vineyards. Growing up in the depression, his parents and grand-parents were workers. Zene's father secured a contract to haul Hollister's garbage with his large wagon and big white horses with red tassels and retired when trucks took over. Dad's mom, Alta (also from Hollister), made 5 cents a box, picking, pitting and racking apricots. She also cut lettuce in a lettuce shed for \$15 a month while Zene was pulling down \$100 a month (which was good money then) with his uncanny woodworking ability. Zene was a self made man, who, with his grammar school education and sharp

mind, came to co-own a lumberyard and to make investments in IBM and Coca-Cola. Once, a fellow came into the lumberyard for split shakes and complained about the price, saying "Sam's got them for only \$15 a hundred." Zene replied "so why don't you get them there then?" The fellow says "they're out." And Zene turns back to him and says "well when we're out, our split shakes are only \$10 a hundred."

Zene worked in lumber his whole life. When Dad was 16 at end of WWII, a nephew (Roy Brown) made money in a ship yard business, and wanting to divest, asked Zene to partner with him in a lumberyard business (because he knew what a whiz Zene was at running a yard and generating woodwork). Zene got a \$30,000 BofA loan and George Jacossa co-signed. Later, BofA recalled the loan, requiring renegotiation and a refreshed co-signature. Jacossa didn't like the bank's handling of the loan and wrote Zene a check for the remaining balance and said "here, now you pay me the interest," closing the deal with a handshake.

Zene liked to tell stories including one about his school teacher in Cienega who drove a blind horse: once, when the teacher fell asleep at the reigns, the wagon flipped over in a ditch. Another story was about kids trapping a raccoon on the way to school. They brought the live trap crate into the classroom and when one student was exceptionally truculent, the schoolmaster made him sit on the "coon box".

Chuck recalled only once being called into the principle's office, and it was because of a fight. In the 5th grade, a boy stole his Sturmey-Archer 3-speed bike and when he caught up with him at the playground monkey-bar rings, the punk hit him with one of the bars, knocking out a tooth. Chuck went after him and got punished despite being in the right.

Chuck would help at his grandparents farm, picking lettuce and the like. Young Chuck earned 25 cents for mowing a few lawns, and that 25 cents bought him a matinee movie with a bag of popcorn, and after the movie, a hamburger and coke at Lees Famous Five Cent Hamburgers. When he was in the 6th grade, he started stocking shelves at the Purity Grocery, which he continued to do through high school.

Teenage Chuck had chicken pox before any of his friends because he contracted it while working one summer at the Gomes Hollister Hatchery injecting chicks against the virus (with miscues causing puffy hands). The Gomes also had turkeys which could stampede and knock down fences but would soon be rounded up by specially trained dogs. Yoshi Kishi was Dad's childhood best friend until Alta forbade his company after the start of WWII. Yoshi and his family got relocated. Chuck's first scoutmaster (at 10) was Japanese-American and a HAM radio operator. During the war, the citizens of Hollister railed until all of his radio equipment was confiscated (which had cost him his life savings).

Zene was a big hunter of deer, doves, quail, pheasant, duck and geese. Wild game was a staple of Chuck's childhood fare. Zene had a locker at a local ice plant to store the game. When Chuck was nine years old his folks bought him a Benjamin air rifle. At ten he got a 22 rifle and a 410 shotgun. He hunted with Zene and/or friends to bring in his share for the table. They brought home many ducks. Chuck told me that one year there was a nuisance duck species that was eating crops and the government set a ten duck limit with two limits allowed in possession, so he and his dad would come home with 40 ducks. They de-feathered birds by parboiling them in a vat topped with melted paraffin. They'd pull the ducks out and dunk 'em in cold water then

peel the paraffin and feathers off. The feathers were returned to the vat so the paraffin could be recovered. Dad continued hunting deer at the 101 ranch through the 80's and venison was part of my diet through my teens. Chuck started clamming with Zene and Alta when he was about ten, when Pismo was chock full of 'em. Clams on the half shell were a delicacy we often enjoyed at Alta's table (my brother Phil could down a dozen). Chuck's uncle, Don Cox (by way of marriage to Toots Ashbaugh), was a fly fisherman and took dad into the high Sierras with Zene on many an angling trip. Chuck also caught trout in the stocked Lone Tree Creek in Hollister. Chuck had a fishing hiatus after Hollister but took up fishing again in Carmichael with Gus. They often landed limits of steelhead and chad. The smoked chad was delicious.

Alta enjoyed her Brownny Box camera so much that she bought Chuck his first camera, a 616 Kodak Vigilant, when he was 10 years old. Soon after, she ordered a developing kit for him from Sears-Robuck. Chuck took an aerial photograph of Hollister for his 1946 high school yearbook. Chuck's second Kodak was a Signet 35mm which he used for Kodachrome slides. In the 50's, while in the navy, he bought a Japanese Canon camera kit for \$36. He took several photos while bike riding in Japan on liberty with his friend Ensign Davy Jones (no - they didn't share a locker). Soon after, Chuck joined his first camera club in Shell Beach and was a decades long member of the Sierra Camera Club (est. 1936).

Zene's friend, Clyde Smith, drove the Air-line Bus Co. bus between San Francisco and Los Angeles via the "air-line route" which was the most direct route possible and went through the 101 ranch and past Bitterwater. The Pivettis often shared Thanksgiving with the O'Conner's at their

Bitterwater ranch that had horses and a baseball field. Sometimes Thanksgiving was at Chuck's grandmother's house which was on three acres. Chuck's uncles Bob and Al lived there in the single men's' bunkhouse and kept a mare named Goldie there just for Chuck to ride. Al and Bob married the Silvera sisters and were One-A for the draft, but, since farmers could get an exemption, their father-in-law bought them a ranch and they became ranchers. They made deals here and there to grow the business and soon found out that dealing ranch property was more profitable than ranching and started the Pivetti Realty Company, specializing in ranch properties. Chuck's grandmother Garabaldi played pedro while his grandfather made wine, which dad drank diluted until he was ten. Chuck's uncle Edwin was only four years older and they shared wine siphoning chores every year. Young Chuck often rode the Air-line bus from Hollister to Taft where he spent many summer days with his uncle Fred who worked for Standard Oil Co.

Chuck started driving at an early age. He drove tractors on his grand-parents' farm and when he was around ten or so, his uncle Fred had him drive his 4-speed auto across Taft. At 14, his uncle Donald Cox got him a part time job at the post office which included retrieving mail from boxes. One day the chief of police pulled the mail truck over and advised 15-year-old Chuck to get a driver's license. He went to the post master who issued him one on the spot (no test and no photograph).

Chuck learned to swim in Taft and golfed there as well. The golf course "greens" were actually oiled sand. At 14, Chuck became an apricot field boss earning 25 cents an hour to punch cards for the workers. Chuck bought his first car from Clyde, a beat up Model T which he called the Easter Egg

because it was so badly in need of paint that a few high school classmates decided to secretly coat it using an assortment of paint from discarded cans. Chuck sold it when AAA wouldn't insure it any more and got a '36 Chevy that he rebuilt with David Cronin using tools from his uncle Ed's dealership garage. Chuck drove off to college (San Jose State) in it.

Teenage Chuck took flying lessons in an Aeronca at Los Banos with five classmates, including Bill Hightower and the Houston siblings. Chuck got his pilot's license at 16, and soon after his first solo, he helped ferry a crop duster from Dos Palos to Los Banos with his instructor. During his solo home, in the teacher's plane, he witnessed the crash of a twin-fuselage military plane 3 below him, and circled it a bit, which made him late in landing: so his anxious instructor ran out to meet him on the tarmac to ask him "what took you so long?" The high school club hitch hiked to classes except when an older classmate drove (Georgie Houston's sister). From the ground, they could hear Georgie scream in her spin test (which was a license requirement). They couldn't fly west of the Coastal Range as that airspace was closed during the war. Chuck's work at the Purity Grocery Store afforded him the ability to pitch in with friends to buy their own Sopwith Camel which they took turns flying. Chuck's last time piloting was in San Francisco (in the '70's) when he was up with a traffic guy who let him fly the plane.

A kid before Chuck at the high school guidance counselor's office said that he wanted to go to Stanford and be a civil engineer and was told that it "was impossible". Chuck only had B- GPA in high school but he and John Gillamette managed to enroll at San Jose State. In his 3rd year at SJSU, Chuck went to talk to a dean at Stanford who gave him 2 days of IQ testing. He did well on the tests and was

admitted. Stanford had just started a construction engineering school which was a coop. Chuck went to work in Peter Kewitt and Sons strength and materials lab and worked summers on construction projects in the field. A fellow Stanford student, Jerry Wurland had a girlfriend at Mills and invited Chuck to a mixer there where he met Jane Avery Wetzel. She asked him to take her to a market to get sodas and cups and during the next few hours, Chuck and Jane fell in love. That night one of Jane's friends asked Chuck what his intentions were and he replied "I think I'm going to marry her." Chuck continued working and Jane transferred to Northwestern medical school. Chuck got a job working for the Pullman Company in Chicago where Jane and Chuck were married in December of 1950. They lived there together for three months, then the war draft pressed Chuck into joining the navy with a direct commission as an ensign, and, after just three weeks of communications training in Monterey, he was shipped to the aircraft carrier Princeton off the shores of Korea.

Soon after boarding the carrier, a senior officer asked if he could touch type, which he could, so he took him under his wing to manage visual communications (lights and semaphores were used to foil Russian radio eavesdropping). When Dad earned his navy Q clearance, he received a large folio containing the details of his clearance investigation, and in it there was a record of his grandmother sending her wedding ring to Mussolini during WWII. He was the only one on the ship with a Q clearance, so he couldn't discuss nuclear arms communiqueés even with the captain. The navy launched several sorties off of the Princeton, earning the ship eight battle stars.

Chuck had shore-leave a few times during the war, and once a WAV Lt. sent Chuck to Sasabo by train for R&R. He had

two days in Tokyo first and made his way to the Club New Yorker, where he was surprised by an ensign that knew him at Stanford and they entered the club together. The booths were all fully occupied except for some room in one with a group of GI's. The two decided that, this once, it might be okay to fraternize with the army. They asked if they could join the GI's in their booth and one said "sure Navy, come sit here and here." Chuck soon got 4 nervous as he noticed that one "GI" had a star, another two, and one had three stars (commander of eastern operations). The generals took the two around Tokyo with them, including treating them to a meal at the Imperial Hotel.

The Navy sent Chuck to Monterey to join Jane just in time for the birth of their first child. Cathy was born at Ft. Ord and they all moved into an apartment in Pacific Grove. A while later the Navy moved the three to an apartment in Coronado. Soon after that, Chuck transferred to the reserves and joined the Department of Highways in Santa Barbara County as a resident engineer. David was born in San Louis Obispo and Phil in King City. In SLO, a coworker was also a reservist and talked dad into advancement and extra pay. They all lived in Shell Beach for a time where the Marines once practiced a beach landing and stomped through their backyard garden. Dad made his own beer and a neighborhood police officer thought he was making moonshine. After Chuck gave the cop a primer on beer and wine making, they became friends and shared home brews. But Chuck and Jane couldn't afford the \$4,000 down payment on the Shell Beach house and moved to Santa Maria, and then to Solvang, where Joe was born. They moved to Stockton, where Gus was born, and Chuck was promoted to commander of a reserve unit. Chuck eventually transferred to the SeaBees reserve and retired as a Lt. Commander in 1971. Chuck and Jane's last move was to



Carmichael, California. The Department of Highways became CalTrans. Chuck got an MBA from UC Riverside (taking the classes in Davis from visiting professors) and became Chief Engineer for Transportation Planning and Study. Chuck came to know almost every road in California. Dad liked to tell a story about a recruitment trip to Wilamatic, Connecticut, where the inn he stayed at had a manually operated elevator. One morning he could not get a response to the call bell and walked several flights down to the basement (where the operator sat awaiting the bell to ring) and there he was, asleep in a chair holding a book entitled "How to Wake Up and Live".

Cathy, David, Phil and Joe went to Cal with David transferring to UC Davis and Phil to Sac State. Gus went to Chico State (it had something to do with Chico being named the number one party school in America), but all was well, as he, like David and Joe, earned an engineering degree. Cathy earned multiple degrees and became a special needs teacher and counselor. Phil had a good career as a resuscitation therapist.

Chuck loved children and animals. He was active in the Boy Scouts of America for over 20 years (even after all four boys had grown out of scouting). He was a trained teacher (Philmont Scout Leadership Camp), leader and councilman and joined the Order of the Arrow (via ordeal). The Troop in San Bruno was well funded due to a partnership with a paper recycling company and chartered planes for trips to parks and scout gatherings (including Camp Lake Pillsbury). That San Bruno troop was headed by the Hungry Vultures including Mr. Dennis and Mr. Milam, a couple of cut-ups who once bought two identical password games so that they could memorize the answers and correctly respond to arbitrary clues. Dad taught scouts to sail in El Toro boats.

We got better at sailing when Dad took us to sail in a Scorpion at a very windy Redwood City 5 lagoon. Later on we sailed in a Flying Dutchman at the radiation free Rancho Seca nuclear power plant cooling pond.

Growing up we had a Siamese cat, a standard poodle and a black Lab. The cat was a holy terror but often enjoyed dad's lap and had dozens of litters (we didn't become Ruthless until she was well over 20). The poodle was blind but still got to chase a ball (Dad made sure to select balls that made noise on landing) and Fritz usually sported a French cut (dad also barbered us boys). We vacationed once at the Russian River and Fritz ran off the dock behind the house and Dad immediately jumped in the river to save him. Charity was really a Lab mix and also a jubilant escape artist. She often got in trouble for jumping our fence and cavorting with the children at Del Dayo School which was just around the corner from our Carmichael house. Once, at the Animal Safari Park in San Diego, Dad took Charity to the day kennel there and warned them about the dog's fight for freedom, to which they said "sir, we keep lions here." Chuck went back to the car to get some things and guess who was sitting there waiting for him? I was at the American River one day and I heard "that dog swimming for our beer is Charity - go ahead and give her one." After all his children had headed off to college, Dad got a yellow Lab. Maggie was so sweet and such a good companion at the river that when she passed, Dad got another yellow Lab named Buck. Some of the sticks Chuck threw for that big dog were 25 pound branches, which he eagerly fetched at the rapids near Arden Bridge.

The American River Parkway included a bike trail from Carmichael to downtown Sacramento. A fellow employee, Rick London, at CalTrans talked Dad into riding his bike to

work and he soon started commuting that way most days of the week. He rode with a panier once a week to restock his locker with fresh clothes. He also rode the bike path on weekends with the boys and with bike clubs. He became a very strong rider and went on trips with friends in Oregon that involved mountain passes, tube tent camping and 100-mile-a-day rides (including a near impossible 160 mile leg in 108 degree heat). After retirement, Chuck and Jane took bike tour trips all over Europe: Ireland, England, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal and six tours in France (because the French D-roads were so wonderful to ride). Sometimes they were joined by their good friends, Marshall and Irene Stadt. Bike touring means living out of panniers, washing clothes in a sink, and being sweaty at lunch or when checking in at a hotel. Once, in Denmark, at check-in on a very rainy day with Mom, Marshall and Irene, the proprietor told Dad "I'm sure there's a cheaper hotel up the road." That wasn't very nice so they indeed went up the road where they were warmly greeted with four glasses of brandy. On that tour of Denmark, at a Tively Gardens rock concert, dad ran into a Danish engineer he had met at an engineering conference years before. The tours also included some 100-mile days and Mom always managed to keep up (probably because Dad stopped frequently to take pictures). I got to join Dad on one ride in Oregon (which was hard on me) and a two-week tour in Provence (which I prepared for by riding daily for a few months). It was a fun-filled fortnight because of the companionship, the people, the scenery and Dad's meticulous itinerary.

Dad always had a complete wood-shop in the garage. He built out the basement in San Bruno, including a bedroom, bathroom, family room, laundry and dark room. He also turned out furniture, Christmas decorations (including Santa,

his sleigh and eight reindeer), and, most importantly, toy chests.

In retirement, Chuck really got to embrace his passion for photography. He kept journals of his trips overseas with Mom but the photographs bring the stories to life. Dad went on many trips with Mom, friends or camera club members with the express objective of photography, including the Mekong Delta and the African Savannah. He took wonderful pictures of castles, churches, ruins, landscapes, objects, people and nature. He also took pictures of candle smoke, oil on water, ferro-magnetic fluid, unique objects and flowers. He enjoyed entering his photographs in club contests and won over 500 ribbons. He became respected in the field and came to judge many photo contests himself. "Seeing is believing", so please visit the galleries via links at <http://www.ChuckPivetti.com>. Dad's memory will surely live on in our hearts and in his photographs.

Ancestry excerpt (Dad was named after his mom's dad, Charles Ashbaugh):

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|-----Pivetti, Giovanni (-)
|-----Pivetti, Augusto Banado (1878-
1948)
| |----- (unknown)
|-----Pivetti, Zelindo E "Zene" (1904-1994)
| | |-----Baraldi, Dio Febro (1844-)
| |-----Baraldi, Elena (1884-1953)
| |-----Mardea (1855-)
|-----Pivetti, Charles Allan (1929-)
| |-----Ashbaugh, John Cyrus
(1814-1898)
| |-----Ashbaugh, Charles Durant
(1862-1925)
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||-----Forsythe, Matilda (1818-  
1893)  
|-----Ashbaugh, Alta A (1908-1991)  
|-----Bush, Jonas P (1846-)  
|-----Bush, Ida May (1868-1925)  
|-----Bush, Eliza A (1843-