

FRED PRATT MEMORIES

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By Chip Griffin

My task is to remember Fred Pratt as a Rotarian. Sort of like how Fred recounted the weather each week for decades in the *Boothbay Register*, it's our turn to recount his life here over the past 59 years.

Fred Pratt joined the Boothbay Harbor Rotary club on February 23, 1948, a mere nine years after our club had been formed, when the club met in many different places around town. In 1948 when Fred joined our Rotary club, he was 31 years of age and weighed 110 pounds with his clothes on. He had just moved here from Waltham, MA and was working hard here in the Harbor, toiling in excess of 12-hour days. He had to work even harder when his boss, Mr. Bullock, the leading jeweler in Boothbay Harbor, died, and Fred bought out the jewelry business from Mrs. Bullock that year. A mere nine months after joining Rotary, in that fall of 1948, the Rotary club began a massive reconstruction project of what remains our clubhouse (the only Rotary-owned clubhouse in the U.S), enlarging the building and finishing its interior. Fred had few free moments and fewer building talents, but that didn't deter Fred Pratt from pitching in – he regularly brought beer to bolster the spirits of the construction workers, as he watched fellow Rotarians Paul Abbott lead the effort, Ernest Pilman lay the floor, while Phil Blake and Maynard Dodge did all the wiring.

By December of 1958, ten years later, the *Register* reported Fred Pratt bragging that he had gained 50 pounds and topped the scales at 160 pounds. Fred credited the Maine climate and beauty for his weight gain.

Five years later, as kids in the 1960s, we would often go into Pratt's Jewelry and Gift Store downtown to get our watches fixed. Fred would often pin the strap back in. He would help us out on the spot and charge us little or no money. He'd always be curious and ask what we were up to, in and out of school and around town.

During the next few decades, the Boothbay Harbor club had many first place finishes in regular attendance contests amongst all the Rotary clubs in Maine, northern New England, and much of Quebec. This was largely due to the consistency and persistency of Fred Pratt, who would kindly nudge members who missed a meeting and suggest that they travel with somebody else to another club's meeting for a makeup. True to form, Fred would attend virtually every meeting, except that he would intentionally miss one meeting a year to escape the trap of perfect attendance.

Fred was also near perfect attendance for many high school sports events, especially basketball. He was one of our greatest fans, cheering us on at all home games and at most away varsity basketball games. In 1973 I missed a tournament game (with the understanding and support of my varsity basketball teammates) in favor of our family trip to Florida during February vacation; Fred was still chiding me for that absence ten years later when I returned to begin my law practice.

Fred was president of the club in 1984-85. I was a member by then, and Fred enthusiastically led our club of 61 members, close to an all-time high, that year and kept membership at its usual high attendance level. Here is a squib from our club history of Fred's year as president: "The song books had become somewhat ragged. A new set was ordered from Rotary International. They came, were considered, and returned, as undesirable. A local firm placed new covers on the old books." You can tell that Fred was at the helm, devoted to tradition and tighter than bark on a tree!

I, like so many of you, fondly recall his garden with the black plastic stunting the growth of weeds that he and Sonny Hodgdon liked to work on. Fred would gather some of his vegetables and bring this fresh produce to Rotary for us to enjoy, on many summertime Thursday nights.

Our Rotary club bestowed the highest Rotary honor on Frederick J. Pratt when the club gave him the coveted Paul Harris Award in 1994. More recently, when Fred could no longer attend Rotary meetings, we awarded him the status of honorary Rotarian.

Finally, I must tell a story of Fred when, one late spring afternoon on April 11, 1997, I dropped by to Fred and Gladys' on a Rotary errand. We were talking in their driveway. I needed to then visit with Lorraine Nickerson, right across Montgomery Road from where Fred and Gladys lived. Since the Lorraine's house is hidden from the Pratt home, I asked Fred if he knew whether or not Lorraine was home. Fred simply looked straight up into the sky, pondered, and said, "Yup, she's home." I grilled Fred as to how in the heck he could tell by looking straight up at the clouds. Fred replied simply that the seagulls always hover over Hannafords in the late afternoon until they see Lorraine's car leaving the Thrift Shop, headed home, and then the gulls would follow her car along Route 96, up Montgomery Road, and then to her home where Lorraine daily fed the gulls on her grounds. No gulls flying overhead; Lorraine was home. Fred's predictions were just as precise as his Rotary attendance; his daily jewelry, watch, and clock work; and his weekly weather reports. We miss you, Fred.