

Family Presentation – FINAL VERSION
by Catherine Gruye Alexander and Rob Gruye
Southwest Seattle Historical Society
Champagne Gala Brunch
Saturday, Nov. 7, 2015, Salty's on Alki

CATHERINE

Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming out today to this lovely setting for this grand occasion. As Clay said, I'm Catherine Gruye-Alexander.

ROB

And I'm Rob Gruye.

CATHERINE

For a few minutes, we want to share a bit of our West Seattle story with you. We trust that you will find some of your **own** story in ours, because we are all here today for the same purpose – to show our **appreciation**, and to **share** and **celebrate** and **support** the heritage of this beautiful peninsula that we call home.

ROB

Of course, the core of our story today is our family and the **Alki Homestead**.

CATHERINE

It is a **legacy**, and it has nestled in all of our hearts, whether – like me – who stayed in West Seattle almost all my life –

ROB

Or – like me – moved away, in my case, to Port Townsend. But I keep coming back home. **Home to the Homestead.**

Many of you know that our dad, Bob Gruye, was the first long-term chef of the Homestead. The building operated as **Fir Lodge** until 1950, when Sven and Babe Nielsen converted it to a restaurant, gave it a classic name and put the iconic Alki Homestead neon sign on top.

My dad – man, what a rascally guy. He was handsome. Outgoing. Gregarious. An inventor. An endearing person – at the same time a practical joker with a little smirk.

He had learned to cook during World War II, when he worked for the Navy on a landing craft in the South Pacific. He also was an entrepreneur, always cagey and looking for fun and interesting things to do.

CATHERINE

He met our mother, Lucille, in 1948. She was a beautiful widow, with an adorable 5-year-old son named Joey. Some of you may remember him as an adult – our brother, the late **J.B. Webster**, who was **so** active in this community and even served on this organization's board.

Our mom lived on **Alki** – doors from the now-Log House Museum – and one day a new neighbor, our dad, a Fuller Brush man, knocked on the door. “I’d like to make a proposal,” he said.

Eventually, it became a wedding proposal. A year later, Rob was born. Two years later, I came along.

ROB

Our dad wore many hats. He sold ice cream from a little three-wheel vehicle for a business he called Jingle Bob's. He was a zealot and organizer for the annual Alki Kids Fishing Derby. He sold real estate here in the community.

But the biggest and best thing he ever did was to run the Alki Homestead. It was close to home. He could walk to work. He loved being the boss. He was **in his element**.

CATHERINE

Our mom worked there as a salad girl. And in the 1950s, we kids literally grew up there, even lived upstairs for a short time. Rob and I both remember climbing the tall, back stairway by walking on the **outside** of the metal railing, which was **really** dangerous. But we never told our parents about that – did we, Rob?

ROB

No! In fact, one time, back in the Homestead kitchen, for a joke Dad hung me upside down inside a laundry bag.

CATHERINE

You probably deserved it, Rob. I confess, I was a little red-haired terror. I was not a “Sit quietly and color” little kid. I was always running through the kitchen – “Slow **down**, Cathy!” – being placated with Shirley Temples so that I wouldn't be under foot.

ROB

Of course, the Homestead was known for its family-style **fried chicken**, and Dad put that on the map.

CLAY

(Interrupting) Do you guys have the recipe for that?

ROB

Uh, no. Do we?

CATHERINE

I'll never tell.

ROB

Anyway, as a kid, I rode in the front seat with Dad when he drove to Poultry Products down on Airport Way to get the chickens. What a scene. It was basically a **slaughterhouse**, with a giant conveyor belt and a big pressure tank, and – wellllll, it's probably best not to talk about it any further at a brunch.

Let's just say that as kids we knew that fried chicken was **the** thing at the Homestead. But it wasn't the **only** thing.

You were offered an appetizer before dinner – fruit salad from a can, with a Maraschino cherry. And shrimp cocktail. Dad also served prime rib, Crab Louie and steak. Mid-century cuisine, for sure.

And then there were the desserts: Ice cream, with cinnamon applesauce. The best dessert was called sticky pudding. It was Eagle canned milk on a plate, boiled for **four hours** with the lid on. It would be pushed out and sliced. It was so sugar sweet, it tasted like caramel. It was **so** good – and **so** bad for you.

CATHERINE

Dad took me on errands, too, to get things for the restaurant. We would go to Blake's Bakery in the Junction to get dinner rolls, and Mr. Blake always had a maple bar for me.

ROB

As we got older, Dad moved on, and Doris Nelson took over the Homestead. For more than 40 years, she was the **face of the place**, the one most people remember today. She had those **huge** glasses, and she had a low voice, right in your face: "Hi, Honey."

CATHERINE

Dorrie certainly had a lot of flair. She added antiques to the dining room and the newly enclosed porch. She also drove a pink Mercedes. Remember the license plate? HOOP-T-DO.

ROB

When we got old enough to get jobs, guess what kind of work we landed? I worked at Hal's Diner on Alki, where Phoenecia is now, and at Quesnel's Charcoal Broiler on Beach Drive, where I was "assistant to the boy."

CATHERINE

Restauranting does get into your blood. **My** first real job was just up the road from here at The Shack Drive-In. During high school, I worked at Spud Fish & Chips. And in the 1980s and '90s, I was co-owner of Webster's Restaurants.

ROB

I kept telling myself that I would **never** own a restaurant. It's a **lot** of work, the hours are **terrible**, it's hard on your body, you have **no** friends, you're never outside, you get burns and knife cuts all the time.

Today, I run a business restoring Morris Minor cars, but also – you guessed it – I am ensnared in another restaurant, called Hanazono Asian Noodle, next to the Rose Theater in Port Townsend.

CATHERINE

When you grow up in a restaurant, you end up in sales, with a strong personality – fearless. And for us, it all comes back to the Homestead.

ROB

When I was a little boy, the Homestead was like a monolith. You would soak it in. It was almost daunting. It was like a cartoon character, where you go to eat, and eat what you want.

And it just looked like one big **mouth** to me. With a big hat on it, and eyes. It was big and happy.

CATHERINE

It **was** happy, Rob, and it was always a place for our whole family to go for important occasions.

When our dad passed away, 23 years ago, it was almost midnight. The next morning, I called Doris and asked if she could accommodate you, me and J.B. for dinner that evening, and she did. It was a time for us to heal and reminisce. It was absolutely the **right** place to go.

On my 50th birthday, my husband, Jim Alexander, told me he was taking me out for dinner. He drove me down the hill via Fairmount Gulch, and he pulled **right here** into Salty's. For a moment. Then he pulled out and drove us to where my brothers and kids waited to surprise me – at the Homestead.

ROB

You know, when I think of the Homestead, I think of lights. There used to be a little Homestead billboard toward the beach, next to Trig's Grocery, with lights. Every night my Dad would turn that on. And in my mind, all the way back to being a child, that neon sign on top of the Homestead was always on.

CATHERINE

We are **so** happy that the Southwest Seattle Historical Society got the Homestead its landmark status 20 years ago – **and** has been working so closely with the new owner for it to be restored. By the way, Dennis, **I** want to come work for **you**.

The Homestead is truly one of a kind. It's where people gather to break bread – or **chicken legs**. They take time to **feel** the ambience. They sit down and share family-style food – along with family-style memories and dreams.

But it's not just about people **our** age. It's all the **next** generations. I'm predicting that today's West Seattle kids will be taking their **own** kids there 20 years from now.

All of this comes down to one word – **gratitude**. We are **so grateful** for the Southwest Seattle Historical Society. The work that everyone in this organization does to preserve the photos and stories, the historic buildings, and yes, the family legacies, is **so** important.

ROB

It's all about bringing people together for a common purpose. What **we** are doing today, right now, in this room, is fundamental to our **happiness**, to our **satisfaction with life**, to our **sense of well-being**.

We know that the heritage that we **share**, that we **celebrate**, that we **support**, has value to all of us and will one day have deep value to young people who may not realize it yet – young people like **we all** were.

CATHERINE

We ask you to think back to when you were a child and the influence of your **own** family and upbringing. We all have common threads of **gratitude**. Those threads have become the ties that bind, that have connected us all to **West Seattle**.

We hope you have seen some of yourselves in our story, and we trust that you will give the Southwest Seattle Historical Society your **full support**. Thank you!