

Second Degree of Sarah Separation: *Sandpoint locals who know the folks who know the governor well.*

by Marianne Love

February, 1964

Beatlemania was invading America. Sandpoint Motors was cleaning up after a fire. Ivan Smith's Milking Shorthorn, Midwood Dolly 9th, was leading the nation in milk production.

Three babies were born at Bonner General Hospital in less than a week. Hardly a record, but stunning in the fact that their parents all taught at Sandpoint Junior High School (SJHS).

Tom Albertson, arrived Feb. 5, greeting his parents, Don and Terri. SJHS English instructor/*Sandpoint News Bulletin* correspondent Paul Drinkwater wrote that Don Albertson looked "tired and happy," and that he "would recover."

Four days later, the same date the Beatles first appeared on the "Ed Sullivan Show," Bill and Andrea Parenteau welcomed their fourth child, Joseph, into the world. Drinkwater noted that the Parenteaus were proud of their baby boy.

On Feb. 11, an early-morning fire broke out at Sandpoint Motors. Friends recall that Chuck Heath, who lived just a few blocks away at 716 North Fourth, went down to watch Jack Parker move the cars from the building only to be summoned home by his wife Sally who was going into labor.

That evening at 6 p.m., Dr. Helen Peterson, Sandpoint's first woman GP/surgeon, delivered a 7 pound, 11 ounce baby girl. Though her legal name would be "Sarah Louise," Chuck Heath, known for his light-heartedness, told reporter Drinkwater that he would call her "Oscar" and raise her as a tomboy.

The Heaths would later move to Alaska and remain there. Albertsons stayed in Sandpoint, where Don and Tom even taught together for a few years at Sandpoint High School. Most of the Parenteau family live in Southern Idaho. Bill Parenteau works part-time at a Boise golf course, while Joe, an information technologist, also resides in Boise.

Fall, 2008.

Sarah-o-Mania has come "South from Alaska," invading the Lower 48 and the World. Sandpoint Motors, now Taylor-Parker Motors, has reported no fires recently. Ivan Smith has long since died, and if any Milking Shorthorns are still in the area, they aren't making headlines for high-ranking milk production.

Like the doctor who delivered her, 44-year-old Sandpoint native Sarah Heath Palin has broken through barriers. In 2006, she was elected as the youngest and the first woman governor of Alaska. In late August, Republican Presidential nominee Sen. John McCain named her as his running mate.

Gov. Palin sealed her spot in history as the first woman Republican nominee for Vice President of the United States. Like the Beatles, her name rose from relative obscurity to worldwide ubiquity. Almost overnight, the mother of five, who could field dress a

moose, transformed into a cult figure inspiring Sarah dolls, Sarah glasses and Sarah hairstyles and even quickly penned Sarah books.

Sen. McCain's initial announcement of his VP pick also resonated instantly throughout the Sandpoint community where scores of locals proudly recounted their connections with the governor and her family.

"I was in the eighth grade. I held her. I remember a ton of black hair; the others [siblings] were blondies." says Susie Puckett, one of Chuck Heath's science students and babysitter to Sarah. "They were a great family." Susie recalls feeling devastated when "Mr. Heath," the teacher who turned her on to science, and his family left for Alaska that summer.

Though Sarah spent just three months in Sandpoint, her father's roots run deep because of his Sandpoint High School athletic achievements, coaching, teaching, and, according to friends, even a few pranks.

"If I were a principal and something happened, I'd be looking for Chuck," says friend and longtime Sandpoint barber, Mike Winslow. "He probably knew something about it or did it himself."

While growing up, Winslow knew of Chuck Heath but got to know him better after Chuck hitched a ride with him to Sandpoint from Spokane Airport several years ago. Since then, Winslow has added several Heath family photos to his wall and scrapbook at Mike's Sportsmen's Barbershop.

His collection even includes last year's Christmas letter where Sally Heath [the consummate cookie lady] wrote, "we got Chuck [the consummate outdoorsman] into four suits for inaugural balls."

After moving to Hope as a young boy with his parents, Charlie and Marie Heath, Chuck began to distinguish himself early as a gifted athlete.

Don Albertson knew Chuck as a worthy opponent in Thursday-night county league basketball games, organized by Coach Cotton Barlow.

"He was a very fine athlete," Albertson remembers. "He played for Hope. I played for Pack River. Pack River didn't win that year."

"We also played on the same [high school] football team and competed in track," Albertson adds. "[He participated] in anything fast in track. He held the SHS 100-yard dash record until Caleb Bowman broke it in the '90s." Heath also led the Bulldog football team his senior year, with 12 touchdown receptions, including the winning catch to beat Lewiston for the first time.

He continued his athletic career at Columbia Basin Junior College, where he met Sally, a Richland native. After graduating from Eastern Washington State College, he taught 3 years in Sandpoint and 30 years in Alaska.

In 2004, Chuck was inducted into the SHS Athletics Hall of Fame.

"It's quite an honor," he wrote. "Coach Cotton Barlow once told me to never blow your own horn. If you do well, someone else will blow it for you. Thanks for blowing my horn."

By 2004, while daughter Sarah was quickly rising as a star in Alaska political circles, Chuck had retired from a successful teaching career and was employed as a government trapper and wildlife specialist. He even spent time trapping rats in New York after the World Trade Center attack in 2001. He also worked as a commercial fisherman, gold miner and big-game guide.

His Athletic Hall of Fame biography, states that three of his athletes from 1963, Larry Jacobson, Brian Timblin and Adrian Lane had moved to Alaska and had become his hunting and fishing buddies.

Lane is married to Marilyn Gray, daughter of former Sandpoint Mayor Floyd Gray. The Lanes, living in Alaska since 1984, have watched the Heath children grow up. Their own children have babysat Sarah's.

"Adrian and Chuck are best friends . . . they do everything together from hunting, fishing, trapping---you name it!" Marilyn Lane says. "We go to the movies together, play cards and travel [New York, England, Arizona, and Africa]."

Marilyn and her sister Lorelee have also spent time at the governor's mansion. In a recent *Idaho Statesman* article Lorelee, now living in Boise, described her "a fly on the wall" status last March, installing a huge birch wood map of Alaska in the governor's office, while Palin conducted business.

Gray's take on the mayor-turned-governor: very, very capable, very measured She was no nonsense . . . not dictatorial . . . playing things out in different scenarios . . . just the way you'd like to think politics are done."

Idaho State Rep. George Eskridge of Dover met Palin at Pacific Northwest Economic Region forum in January. PNWER includes representatives from the Pacific Northwest and Canadian provinces.

"Our meeting . . . centered on Northwest economic issues and the natural gas pipeline proposal," Eskridge explained. "I was impressed with her sense of direction, where she wanted to go and that she had a strong sense of resolve as governor of her state.

"I told her that she had been babysat by my sister-in-law [Susie Puckett]," he added, "and that, given her origins were in Sandpoint, we were all impressed with her and that she had 'better not mess up!' She appreciated my humor, indicating that she would try not to."

Whether or not Chuck Heath ends up having to wear another suit for an inaugural ball, the outcome will be okay.

"They are so proud of Sarah," says Marilyn Lane, "They have never doubted her ability to achieve whatever she set out to do."