

Neighbors of *East Wallingford*



**PETER
HAZELWOOD**

*A Story
for the
Generations*

Hazelwood

Jack

SAWMILL



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COVER PHOTO BY AMY PARISI OF AMY'S ARTISTRY



PETER HAZELWOOD

A Story for the Generations

Stephen “Peter” Hazelwood Jr. celebrated his 91st trip around the sun this past October. His daughter-in-law, Eloise, who made our introductions, describes him as a “colorful character,” which couldn’t be more appropriate. His life story has played out with a similar determined innocence as that of Forest Gump; From running milk at age 9, to recording an album with the “The Valley Playboys,” to racing midget cars on Daytona Beach, his life has been every bit extraordinary. As Peter himself describes, “I’ve lived a very fast and interesting life.” Along the way, he’s recognized and been grateful to the many good folks, who left lifelong impressions, and the lucky circumstances that led to amazing opportunities.

This past July, Eloise arranged a visit with her charismatic

father-in-law. We met at the home he shares with his wife of over 60 years, Sharon, who Peter affectionately refers to as “Sherry.” The couple have lived on High Hill Road in East Wallingford since 1959, on a parcel of land adoringly named, “Sherry Wood Acres.” They’ve raised three children, Stephen III, Jack and Jill, enjoy five grandchildren, and three great grandchildren.

As Sharon entered the room to join the conversation, Peter promptly directed his attention to his “childhood bride,” as he lovingly referred:

“We married in 1959,” Peter proudly proclaimed.

“She was a lot younger than I.” He said with a grin, “...And, she was the prettiest girl in the world.”

“Awe, Peter.” Sherry bashfully responded.

“Well, it’s true.” He assuredly replied.

“What’s the secret to your enduring partnership?” I curiously asked?

“A good woman.” Sharon playfully responded.

Peter and Sharon met through Sharon’s father, Jack Smith, who would transport excavating equipment when Peter was just starting out in the excavating business. Their courtship was initially discouraged by Sharon’s grandmother, Bell Smith, who thought Peter was too old for Sharon. Peter, who

had just come back from serving for the U.S. Army in Korea, was 10 years her senior, while Sharon was still in high school. Remarkably, as Peter’s luck would have it, his grandfather, Fred Andrews, many years before had saved Bell’s life from a wagon that took off uncontrollably by a spooked horse:

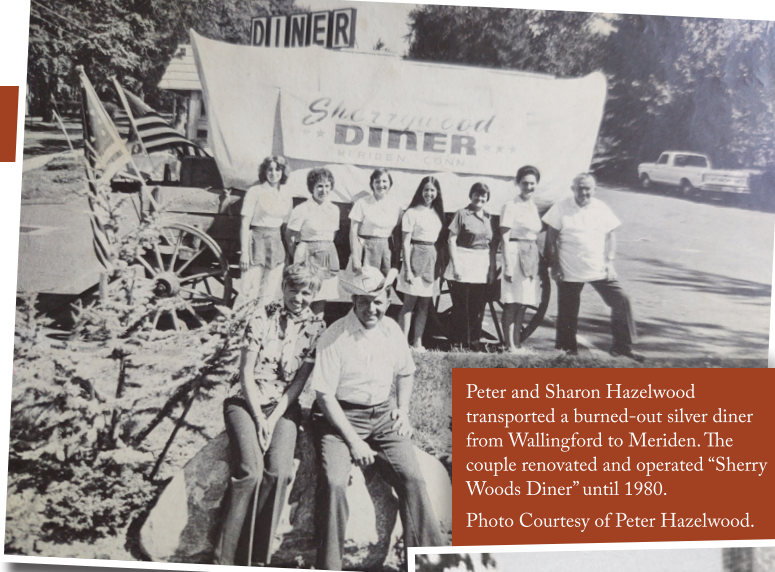
“Fred Andrews was your grandfather?” Bell exclaimed.

“Yes, Ma’am.” Peter respectfully nodded.

“Well, he saved my life!” She cried out.

As Peter claims, from that day forward his status went from machinery salesman to the Prince of Wales.

Peter grew up behind Lawrence Brother’s Dairy on Cottage Street in Meriden. The delivery routes for the milk processing plant ran directly behind his house. For a curious kid, it created opportunity for adventure as well as occasional mischief. A fellow by the name of Art Rohde, who worked for the milk company, became a mentor to young Peter. “Arty” as Peter referred, got Peter delivering milk off the side of a milk delivery truck at the



Peter and Sharon Hazelwood transported a burned-out silver diner from Wallingford to Meriden. The couple renovated and operated “Sherry Woods Diner” until 1980.

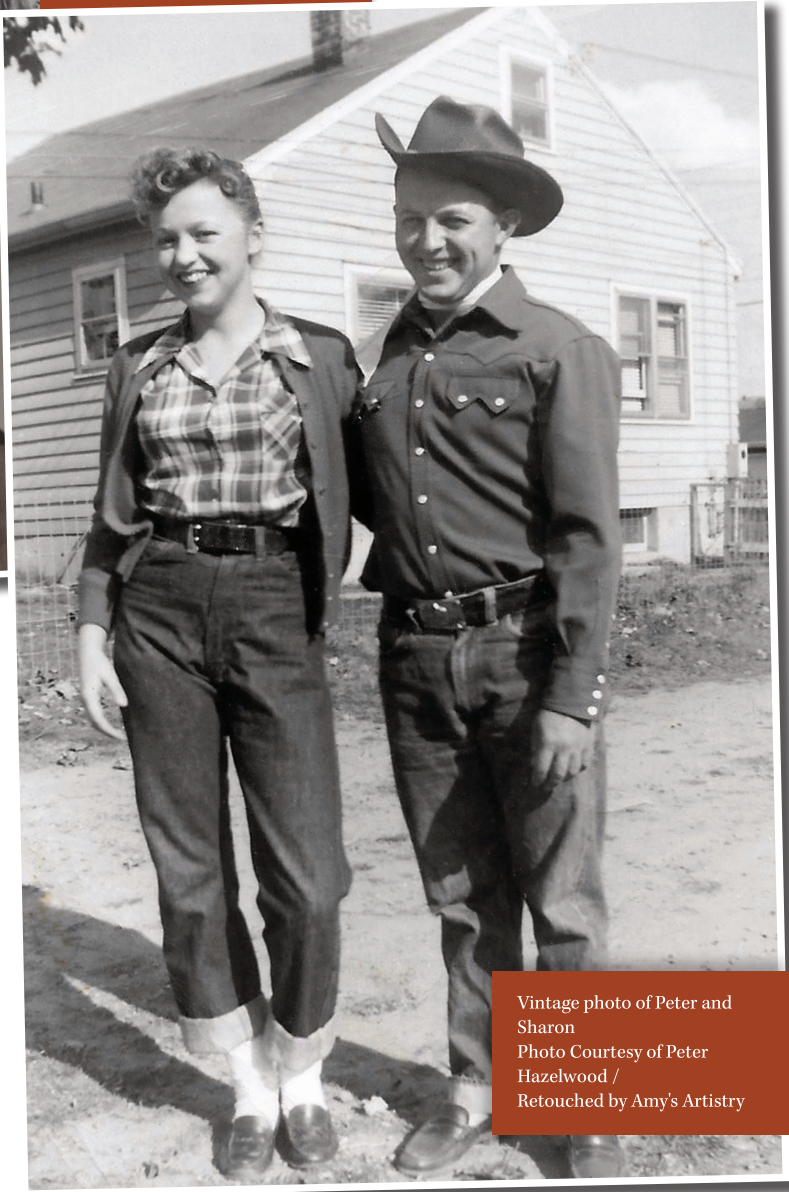
Photo Courtesy of Peter Hazelwood.

age of 9. “I learned a lot from Arty, both good and bad.” Peter chuckled. “But not anything too, too bad.” Peter recalled when Arty sent him to the local hardware store for a pail of steam and a sky hook. “Of course, everyone in the hardware store



“Peter” Hazelwood served for the U.S. Army in the Korean War from 1952-1954.

Photo Courtesy of Peter Hazelwood



Vintage photo of Peter and Sharon

Photo Courtesy of Peter Hazelwood / Retouched by Amy’s Artistry

got a big charge out of it,” Peter cried out in laughter. “It was the chuckle of the neighborhood for quite some time.”

Even as a young child, Peter loved animals and the outdoors. As luck would have it, his uncle had a farm in Middlefield Connecticut, and any weekend he could, he’d hitch a ride on a

dairy truck from Meriden to Middlefield to spend time on the Landandy Farm. On one visit, his uncle offered Peter a gift of a baby lamb, with the challenge that if Peter could get the young ram back to Meriden, he could keep him. His aunt offered to drive Peter to the Meriden line, but she didn't trust the old car any greater distance. Still determined to save the young ram from auction, Peter developed a plan that trusted in the goodness of people for the final leg of the trip. Although neither he nor his aunt were certain if he'd be allowed on the public bus with a ram in tow, as Peter recalled, his aunt handed the driver 25 cents, and Peter took a seat on the bus with his new friend. "I held that little lamb in my arms the entire trip," Peter retold.

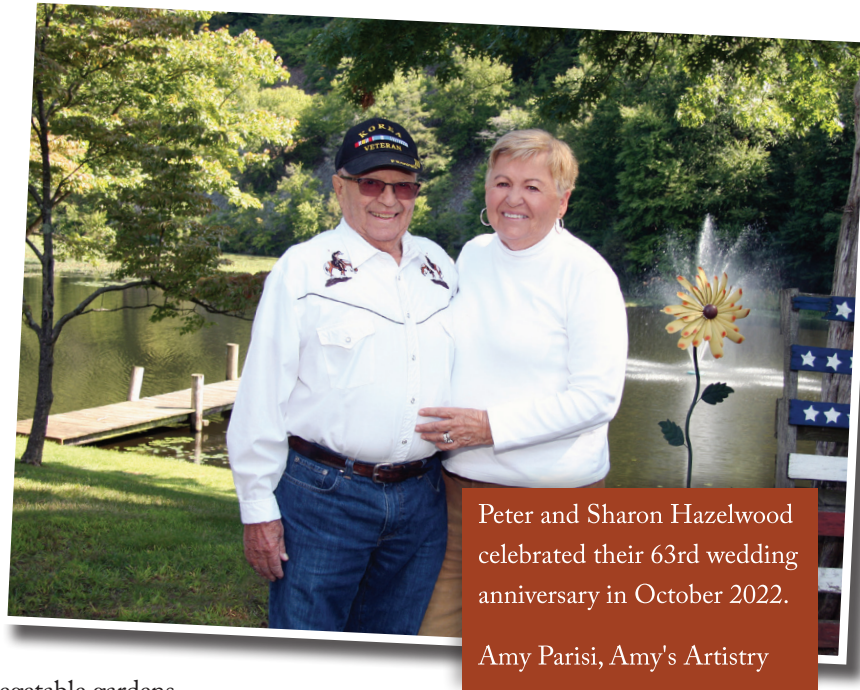
"...and he was heavy too." Years later, his granddaughter, Brooke Whiles, would chronicle her grandfather's story in a book titled, "Bucky the Ram: A True Story by Pete Hazelwood."

Born on October 20, 1931, Peter was only a young kid during World War II, but he remembers how his family, as with others during that time,

were encouraged to grow vegetable gardens to supplement their food rations and reduce demand on the local food supply. Referred to as Victory Gardens, Peter's father, Stephen Sr., planted and tended to the garden, which took space on a small corner of their lot. His dad, who worked for Stanley Tools in New Britain, hired a young man with a tractor to plow the soil. Peter was quickly curious about the machinery the operator used and was eager to try for himself. The operator, Ralph, who was only a teenager himself, took Peter under his wing, and taught him how to operate farm equipment. Peter soon began to work for Ralph's family digging victory gardens for the neighborhood. His mom, Mabel, agreed to allow him to move to Ralph's family's farm only if he promised to stay in school. Although Peter didn't like being at school, he kept the promise to his mom, and earned a high school degree as well as acceptance into the UCONN School of Agriculture.

Peter earned a small wage for the work he did on the farm, plus room and board. He eventually set his mind on purchasing his own tractor. "I'd come home having earned \$100 for the farm, and

only be paid a dollar for the day." Peter said with a sneer. Except, when he approached Mabel with the idea, she adamantly objected to the purchase. According to Peter, she didn't believe he had obtained the proper experience and knowledge to safely operate a tractor. As Peter recalled, it was the only time his mother and he ever strongly disagreed on a matter. "Eventually, she gave in," Peter shared. "...And [at 13] I purchased my first tractor." He soon took on his own jobs and saved money to purchase a backhoe and other excavating equipment. In 1949, he officially started Hazelwood Excavating, which remains owned and operated by three generations of Hazelwoods.



In 1952, at the age of 21, Peter was drafted and served for the U.S. Army in the Korean War from 1952-1954. A few years after his return home in 1957, he was at the right place at the right time and became privy to a parcel of land that was up for sale in East Wallingford. Mr. Doeher, the owner who was a local farmer, had turned away reasonable offers for the estimated 20-acre parcel that was densely wooded

and off the beaten path. By chance, Peter's mom knew Mrs. Doeher from church, who shared with Mabel what her husband would accept for the land. With his mom's advice and money he'd saved from his time in Korea, he made a deal on a handshake that considerably outbid the other interested parties. "I've always had reason to take a chance," Peter conveyed. "I knew five years down the road the property would be worth at least what I paid." Later, Peter's intuition would prove correct, when after the land was surveyed, the 20-acre parcel turned out to be 32 acres.

Two years after purchasing the land, in the autumn of 1959, Peter and Sharon exchanged wedding vows and began their first chapter at Sherry Wood Acres. Initially, the property offered little more than a running brook, but they soon built a home, and eventually added additional structures that were occupied over the years by various family. Currently, all three of their children reside in homes on the property. Additionally, it continues to serve as headquarters for Hazelwood Excavating Inc. Peter stated that over the years there's been opportunity to sub-divide the land, but

he and Sharon made the decision to keep it in the family for future generations. “We made a decision, with this farm, to use it to make things better for those coming behind us.” Peter proudly stated. “That’s what we’ve done, and so far, it’s worked out pretty well,”

With every adventure, Peter remains appreciative to the valuable life lessons each uncovered. “During my life, I had many good teachings.” Peter concluded. “Like how life should be less about “me, me, me,” and more about what I can do to help others;” Or, how not to take life too seriously, as humorously crafted by his early mentor, Arty; Or, the memorable handshake that sealed a transaction of land and demonstrated trust in one’s word; Or, his aunt and the bus driver, who gave courtesy to a fellow human and his wooly companion and instilled faith in the prosperity and goodness of people. “My mother always said, you can catch more bees with honey, and that’s what I’ve always aimed to do.” Peter surmised. “When people get in trouble, and we all have down days, the right thing to do is to show them true love.”



Secret Symbol Math Puzzle

By Rose Alexander

Determine the value of each symbol to solve the puzzle!

$$(\blacksquare + 17) / 5 = 4$$

$$7 + (\blacktriangle)^2 = 43$$

$$(\bullet / 2) - 4 = 1$$

$$(6 \times \heartsuit) / 3 = 10$$

$$\blacksquare + \blacktriangle + \bullet + \heartsuit = ?$$



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