

Sonny Bridges followed the family restaurant business and now owns five

By: LaRAYNE WATTS

Lowell E. (Sonny) Bridges was born in Raymond to Ilene Morgan Bridges and Lowell (Sonny) Bridges, Sr.

Sonny remembers growing up in Raymond. He says, "When I grew up, you could walk from South Fork to town and over to the ball field in Riverdale without any worry. From eight years of age, we all walked to South Bend, to town, home in the dark after shows, and no one that I ever heard of was bothered by anyone. I know now that all the people in all the houses and in their yards and the people in cars and gas stations, and businesses were all watching out for us. Everywhere you went there was community watching and caring. Today, who lets their kids go around the block with concern? Growing up in Raymond was as good as it gets--- and still is. We were free to be kids." He added, "I even remember walking up and down First Street with its 23 taverns in three blocks and there wasn't anything to worry about--- just fun."

Sonny says that he enjoyed all his school days in Raymond schools, "except the third grade." He offered no further explanation about the third grade. Wonder what went wrong.

Sonny was very active in high school. He was in Boys' League for four years and was president one year, a student council representative for one year, Class Vice-President in his senior year and in "R" Club for three years and Pep Club for two years. He was on stage crew and in the Senior Play. He also played basketball for four years. He says, "All the activities taught me how to get along better with everybody."

Sonny graduated from Raymond High School in 1962 in a class of 40 students. After graduation he went to Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma for two years. Then he went to Grays Harbor College for one year.

In 1965 Sonny bought the Former Jim's Café in Aberdeen and renamed it Bridges' Restaurant. The restaurant has been open for 37 years now. Sonny said, "I've been in the restaurant business all my adult life. We also operate Billy's Restaurant in Aberdeen, Ramblin' Jack's and Mercato Restaurants in Olympia, and Country Cousin Restaurant in Centralia. I started in the restaurant business at age 14, working for my grandmother Mable at Bridges Inn in Raymond. She passed away in May 2002 at the age of 93."

In 1965 Sonny married Ann Petersen (Raymond grad., Class of '61), and they had three children: Lowell J. (Sonny) Bridges, Gina Ilene Bridges, and Carmen Leigh Bridges. They were divorced in 1982. In 1990 he married Kim Loncar from Aberdeen. In 1998 they adopted Toni Nicole, who is now five years old. Sonny has seven grandchildren (four girl and three boys).

Sonny lived in Aberdeen from 1965 to 1990 when he moved to Olympia, where he still lives.

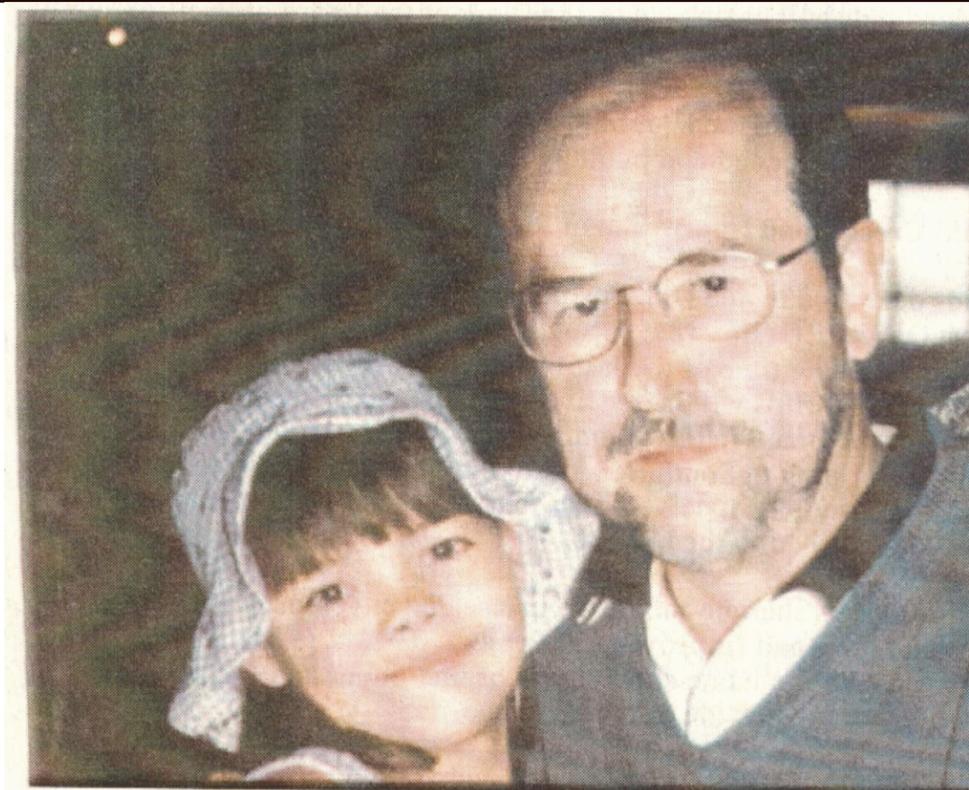
In addition to keeping up with all his restaurants, Sonny enjoys golfing, fishing, skiing, and spending time with his family and friends.

Sonny says that he likes staying home and then reels off a long list of places he has traveled to. He said, "I have been through the Panama Canal, cruised the Caribbean, went to Denmark, England, Switzerland, went skiing in Austria and visited Germany and Venice. We have been to Canada, Hawaii, Mexico, and Christmas Island (fishing- 300 miles south of Hawaii). We have skied in several states."

Sonny says he returns to Raymond to visit his grandmother and other relatives. "I get most of the current news," he said, "from Ed Bridges, Amelia Keller at the Barge Restaurant, and Bob and Anita Sagen. A drug store, a restaurant, and a historian keep me current."

Sonny's advice to this year's seniors is, "Remember that growing up in a small community is a great experience. You know all your classmates---in your own class and in the classes above and below you. You know your neighbors and business owners around town. You become friends with your teachers. You have all of these experiences to carry forward with you. It's always good to come home to Raymond. The best people will always be there."

"Focus on your dreams," he continued. "Work hard and take time for you to enjoy all of your life. Time does go by very fast. It's been 40 years since my graduation, and it seems like a very short time ago."



RHS Alumnus Sonny Bridges, 1962 (shown with his daughter Toni Bridges)