

Nat Boonin

Nat watched the world speed by below him. He was on a test flight over the Delaware River in a helicopter. Suddenly, the pilot veered the helicopter downward, straight below the Delaware memorial Bridge. The pilot was very experienced, but Boonin still felt odd flying under something. As he looked up at the bottom of the bridge, the pilot remarked, "This is something to tell your grandchildren about."

Nathaniel Boonin was born on July 2, 1929, in North Bergen, New Jersey. He was the child of proud Mendle and Gertrude Boonin, and he already had a sister, Miriam. When the Great Depression began! Mendle was working on a highway called the Plasaki Skyway. After the work was complete, all the workers were laid off due to the Great Depression. As a result, the Boonins moved to Philadelphia and rived with Nat's grandparents and his Uncle Milton (Gertrude's brother). The move occurred after Nat was finished with first grade.

When Nat went to school, the main differences were discipline and technology. If someone misbehaved, the person would probably get whipped with a belt. Computer and television-related learning methods were impossible without the computers and televisions. The teachers often used repetition methods to drill facts into the students' heads. There weren't any buses back then, so everyone had to walk to school.

Nat liked many things but loved going to movies. The Saturday matinee cost just ten cents and consisted a newsreel, a cartoon, a serial story, and the main feature. The serial story was shown in installments, so each installment usually ended with the hero in trouble to attract viewers the next week, The serial ran for weeks, so the Nat often went many weeks in a row. Movies were especially important to Nat since VCRs didn't exist back then. Each movie could only be seen once, but Nat still remembers adventure movies such as "The Lives of the Bengal Lancers" and "Mutiny on the Bounty" as his favorites. If Nat missed a movie, he wouldn't be able to see it until VCRs were invented.

Nat did also many other things as a child other than going to the movies. The toys were just as interesting then as they are now. Nat especially enjoyed his toy electric train set, car, airplane! and steam-powered boat. All of those toys were made of metal. However, they weren't made out of plastic, and they usually didn't contain any batteries

or lights. Nat wasn't a huge athlete, but he did play football and baseball as a child. Nat enjoyed following high school football, college football, and baseball. He also played games such as kick the can and other old favorites.

Mendle found no engineering jobs in Philadelphia, so he helped his brother run a grocery store. The family lived with Milton and Nat's grandparents for two years but soon found different a grocery store for sale in Upper Darby, PA. The time was ripe, and the Boonins bought the store. Housing was no longer a problem as Nat's family lived behind the store. The Boonins ran the store from 1932 to 1942. As demand for engineers grew during World War II, Mendle found work at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. The family no longer needed the store and sold it.

When Nat turned eighteen in 1943, he was drafted into the Navy. This was very different for Nat as he had never been away from home. He wasn't used to sleeping with someone in his room, let alone 120 people. However, he was ready to fight for his country. Life on his ship in the South Pacific was actually okay, and Nat luckily never saw action.

After school, the Navy sent him to Drexel for college under the GI Bill of Rights. He followed in his father's engineering footsteps and majored in Electrical Engineering. Many veterans went to school under this law that granted government aid, so many people, including Nat, were older than usual college students. While in college, he married Rose Kashoff.

Nat soon got a job with RCA in Camden, New Jersey after graduating from Drexel. He was working on Radar systems for the government. He only worked there for a year before finding work at Franklin Institute Labs across the Delaware River in Philadelphia where he worked on a readout system that was used to test steel at a steel plant. His job could be completed with a desktop computer today. Since he had married Rose, Rose and Nat had lived in an apartment owned by his sister Miriam in the area where Nat moved to from New Jersey, Upper Darby. Nat was all about to change.

Rose and Nat had a boy, Alan, in 1952 while Nat was working with RCA. Deborah Boonin was born three years later. Having trouble fitting the family in a tiny apartment, Nat moved the four of them to Lawrence Park, another Philadelphia suburb. Now that he had a family, Nat had to find a stable job.

Boonin jumped jobs for a few years until finding his niche in the Boeing company. A coworker at his last job before Boeing had worked there previously and was going back. Nat thought he would go along, and the person got Nat involved in building helicopters. This was a high-paying job that he found interesting. Nat had found what he had been looking for and subsequently moved the family to yet another suburb, Newtown Square. The house was of the same size but had more land around it. After a brief adjustment period, everyone was happy. Nat had found what he was going to do with his life, and he was going to stick with it.

Nat indeed did stick with the Boeing job until the children were well out of the house. He didn't retire from Boeing until 1987. In his retirement, he loves to tinker with ham radios, a hobby that dates back to the early 1940s. In fact, Nat is in a radio club for ham radio enthusiasts such as himself. He and Rose take advantage of their free time during retirement and take many vacations. They love being able to go on a trip at any time, and it is always enjoyable for Nat to listen to traffic reports without having to worry about them. However, during his retirement, Nat is still extremely active. Nat gives to the community by delivering food to needy senior citizens in conjunction with the program Meals On Wheels. Nat talks to each of his children on the phone every week and enjoys talking to his grandchildren from time to time.

Nat has never been "behind the times." He already loved technology as a teenager with ham radios. He learned many modern technological skills with Boeing. Even now, Nat has learned much about computers. Family has always been number one with Nat, past and present. I am grateful to be one of his grandchildren because of his high regard for family. He is always ready to pass on knowledge to anyone that seeks it, including me. One would be hard-pressed to find a more interesting grandparent. He heads into the new millennium and beyond with good health, a loving family, and plenty of things to tell his grandchildren about.