

Meet John Sundsten, longtime Union resident and a man of many talents.



His story starts when in 1915 his grandfather and a bunch of Swedes bought a big piece of land to the east of what is now Alderbrook Resort. They flipped a coin to see who got which part of it and John's grandfather won, securing the best property, right on the water where he built a log cabin ten years later. His grandfather was Carl Wallin of the original Wallin & Nordstrom, Seattle's premier shoe store.

John's mother was an opera singer, moving to New York to pursue a career, returning to Seattle some years later to teach voice. His father was a concert pianist and also taught in Seattle. He was born into that musical family and throughout his growing up, would visit the Hood Canal cabin on weekends and spend his summer breaks there. After graduation, he did a stint in the Navy as a Medical Corpsman in California during the Korean War. Then he enrolled at UCLA, eventually getting a PhD from its medical school in Neuroscience.

During his time there, he married. The first of three wives. He and Dorothy had two children. Wife number two was Roberta and they had three more. Joan was number three, and no surprise, two more came along. A big family over the course of his life. He admits he doesn't keep track of his seven kids' grandchildren. "They just come up like mushrooms," he says with a shake of his head and a grin.

John's first and only job was in the Neuro Anatomy Department at the University of Washington. He taught there for forty years. One major accomplishment was putting the human brain and nervous system into a 3-D digital format, modeling the structure, functions and cognitive processes so they could be taught more precisely. He's a contributor to several scholarly articles about this effort. But don't think they're just for the science-oriented; they go further to talk about the mind and how it can produce poetry, music, art, science, and philanthropy. My favorite of John's quotes: "The mind doesn't exist; it's an illusion. To chase it is like chasing a cloud." If you want to read more on his work, look online. I recommend the website (<https://pauldorpat.com/2009/11/30/more->

from-morphologist-john-sundsten-on-characteristic-brain-faculties/), which includes interesting diagrams and photographs.

As I said, John is a person with numerous interests and talents. He liked horses and worked as a stable boy at the Stark Stables, belonging to Alderbrook when he was young. He loved his Clinker-built rowboat with its lap strake construction. After many years, it saddens him that it has disappeared. Who knows where or when. He hiked for years, but at 92, no longer takes to the trails. He was a frequent participant in yoga classes taught by Denise Carrico at Harmony Hill and is reconnecting with it at Sacred Waters.

Having musical parents, it's no surprise that he, too, is a musician. John learned guitar, banjo, harmonica, blues harp and notably, the flute. He played in the Seattle Flute Choir and then with a trio playing classical baroque music. Since then, he moved to the alto flute, the bass flute, and finally the contrabass. On occasion, you can hear him play it in Union at The Canale or The Deli with Randy Baugh's group, The Rehearsals.

Another thing he loves? Woodworking. The sign at his outdoor workshop reads "Faulty Wood" and most of his pieces are made from found wood—logs that wash up on his beach, downed trees, parts of stumps, limbs and branches. Most of the pieces are abstract sculptures, others stylized masks, and from the beach wood he has milled tables and benches. His home and the property show a rich collection of all of them. He loves the work of shaping the wood into something special and then giving it away. He's particularly proud of the canes he's made from his 'finds'.

John's also famous for being a jigsaw puzzle master. He says fanatic, "A meditative practice where I disappear into the pieces for literally hours." Many people who share his passion pass along their puzzles to him. I've seen the closet full.

That's John... a fascinating multi-faceted man.

Dawn Hanson Smart