

Senior profile: John Wilson

By Caleb Cochran, Senior Center Volunteer

Do you remember a time when train tracks in Sudbury carried passengers into Boston each day? When residents of Waltham and Watertown had summer cottages near Willis Pond? When a dairy farm sprawled on the site of the current Whole Foods on Route 20?

John Wilson has lived through all of this and much more during his 76 years as a Sudbury resident. The youngest of 11 children, John moved to town from Needham with his family in 1946. He attended eighth grade at the school located in the current Flynn Town Office Building before moving on to vocational school in Waltham for high school, graduating in 1950.

John worked in construction before heading off to work with the United States Naval Construction Battalions, better known as the Navy Seabees. He trained for four months in Oxnard, California before moving to Guam, where he built houses for military families using material made from coral harvested from the surrounding waters. John then moved on to the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, where he worked on a naval base for a year.

After the Navy, John went to work in construction for his father. Much of the work was on “summer cottages” off Hudson Road, near Willis Pond, mostly owned by residents of suburbs closer to Boston. Some of the projects John and his father took on included building basements under some of those homes, as well as building chimneys for a development of homes off Landham Road.

In 1958, John married Faith, a co-worker of his sister-in-law. Around that time, a minor recession prompted John’s father to encourage him to look for other work. (“My dad told me, ‘We don’t have much work for the winter, John. You better start looking for something.’”)

After a friend told him that Raytheon was looking for carpenters, he got a job with the multinational aerospace and defense conglomerate and ended up staying for 35 years. He worked in Sudbury, Andover, Wayland and Waltham, commuting to the Andover site just after Route 495 opened for travel in the late 1960s.

John and Faith were married for 60 years, until her passing in 2018. They had five children—two boys and three girls—and also provided a home for a number of foster children over the years. John now has eight grandsons and one granddaughter.

John lights up at the memory of family trips with Faith and the children, including a 1984 cross-country drive to the Los Angeles Summer Olympics.

“We had a brand-new station wagon and bought a used tent trailer,” he remembers. The month-long drive west included stops in the Dakotas, Colorado, and Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks.

"We didn't make any reservations for camping," John recalls of his arrival in greater Los Angeles, "and we were up in the hills, and kids were running around and playing with snakes in the creek. So the next day we went down to the AAA in L.A. and they put us in this beautiful park." The family enjoyed watching soccer at the Rose Bowl, swimming at the McDonald's Swim Center, and track and field at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

John is a founding member of Lady of Fatima Church, and through the church became involved in many activities, including coaching soccer. ("I didn't know anything, but I read a few books," John laughs.) In 1973, he helped incorporate Sudbury Youth Soccer, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

John and Faith were very active in the Sudbury community, and very involved in the Senior Center for many years. John worked with the F.I.S.H. (Friends in Service Helping) group for 12 years, driving seniors to Boston and other locations for appointments. He also volunteered for the Friendly Visitor program for six years, visiting seniors in their homes for about an hour each week, time he remembers as "quite rewarding."

"I've seen a lot of changes here," John says, reflecting on more than three quarters of a century in Sudbury. "I'm very blessed."