

*A lot of living in 97 years and a journey well worth your time.  
Naval veteran, pool shark, musician, train car stowaway.*



Walter Bowden

Photographed by Diane Stevenson

#### A weaver of tales

At 97, Walter has a mind replete with facts and a vast network of amazing stories. Walter has terminal cancer and resides with the eldest of his four daughters, Connie, and her husband, Richard. Walter says that Willamette Valley Hospice staff treats him well and that everyone who visits him is very nice. With help from the music therapist, Walter is writing a song entitled, “way down where the roses bloom and fade.” He spends his days sharing stories with visitors, family, and friends.

Walter’s mother worked as a blacksmith and met his father at a livery stable in North Dakota. Walter’s father had run away from a farm in Canada where he was sent to work after being orphaned in England. As one of 8 children, Walter lived and worked through many 50 below winters in North Dakota hauling coal to ensure that neighbors had heat for their homes. “There were no excuses not to,” he says. “We didn’t know about recreation. Our recreation, I can remember it so plain. All it was, was a bunch of boys put a game together and enjoyed themselves. When the snow would melt and then freeze in low places, about 10 of us would get some beat up ‘ole cans and cut a branch from a tree as our stick and put together a game of hockey. It was a different living than today.” Throughout his life, Walter worked in construction, produce, poultry, and was a professional cook and a custodian. Walter was married for 57 years and is a WWII Naval veteran. From childhood, Walter has played the accordion and the mouth organ and at a young age handmade a holder for the mouth organ in order to play both simultaneously. He once stowed away in a refrigerated freight train car for a 1400 mile trip from Portland to North Dakota with nothing but a blanket. Once there, Walter made his living in the pool halls. Walter has done a lot of living in 97 years. Ask him to tell you a story sometime and settle in for the ride - it will be a journey well worth your time.