

Spencer Burmester

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Lake Washington High School

The Lakeside Paradise

Sixty-six years ago, in 1950, my great grandparents, Vern and Corine Burmester, moved their family from Renton to Kirkland, WA. Back then, Kirkland was just a quaint, blue collar town. However, my great grandparents fell in love with this charming little community and made it their permanent home, residing just off of Waverly Way in West of Market. They were very involved in the town and owned the Burmester Kirkland Furniture store on Park Lane. Both of their sons, Jay and Neil, attended and graduated from Lake Washington High School. My grandpa, Jay, went into the Coast Guard after high school but still returned to Kirkland and took part ownership in the furniture store. Jay and his wife, Lori, bought their first home in East of Market on 2nd avenue and then built a home in the Wildwood Heights subdivision of Houghton. That's where my dad, Bobby Burmester, grew up. He nostalgically talks of his upbringing in Kirkland, pointing out homes of his childhood friends on every corner, telling personal anecdotes of different locations as we pass them, describing what restaurants and shops that once inhabited current downtown retail spaces. I can't count the amount of times that he has told me he was born in the hospital where the Heathman Hotel now stands. All of which truly depicts his deep roots here. Just as his father did, my dad attended and graduated from Lake Washington High School and expected his children to do the same.

When my mom, Val Burmester, was pregnant with me, my parents lived in Clyde Hill. Overlake hospital was by far the closest choice when my mom went into labor, but my dad wanted me to be born in Kirkland so they made the trek to Evergreen Hospital instead. It was as if I wouldn't have "Kirkland Citizenship" if I was not born on Kirkland soil. Our house in Clyde Hill was practically on the border of Kirkland and Bellevue being right off of the Lake Washington Blvd and 520 interchange, but this was still too far away from Kirkland for my dad's liking. Even when living in Clyde Hill, we were always in Kirkland. I vividly remember my parents taking my sister and I to Ben and Jerry's every free cone day, waiting in line for an hour for a single scoop of ice cream. My dad would always take me to watch the baseball games at Lee Johnson Field. To this day, I can almost feel the warm, summer-evening breeze and smell the aroma of freshly cut grass that surrounds the field at sunset. My family's affinity of Kirkland drove my parents to begin house hunting in the area. When I was 5 years old, after searching for the perfect home for over a year, we moved to the Rose Point community of West of Market. This is where my own story in Kirkland begins.

The first memory I have of moving into Kirkland was sitting on the counter of our new house crying because I didn't want to move away from my best friend, Cole, who lived across the street from us in Clyde Hill. Looking back, I wonder why I ever cried because I could not live without my friends that I have made over the years in Kirkland. During our first few weeks in the new house, we met all of our neighbors and my parents instantly became best friends with them. I loved this because I met all of these new kids in our neighborhood and it made the transition a little easier.

While moving houses is the first step, changing schools is a new challenge to conquer. I entered the first grade at Peter Kirk Elementary with Ms. Piro as my teacher. I went from an overcrowded kindergarten class of 28 kids at Clyde Hill Elementary to a much more manageable

class of 17. Ms. Piro was the best teacher to have coming to a new school. She was young, fun-loving, and enthusiastic. She made school enjoyable and I still have vivid memories of reading time, projects, and show and tell in that classroom. In fact, she actually worked for our family as my nanny for the next four summers. We are still close with her to this day.

As I continued through Peter Kirk, I blended in just like any other kid and it would have been hard to tell that I was once "the new kid". I made incredible friends, many of whom I am still close with today. School wasn't the only part of my life growing up though. Baseball was another activity that I heavily participated in. Starting out in t-ball with my dad as the coach, I played on the Devil Rays up at Taylor Field, otherwise known as the dump. Maybe this original love of the game stemmed from those summer nights at Lee Johnson when I was young. After t-ball, I advanced to the ranks of Kirkland American Little League. Getting to play at Everest Park my first year of minors was the equivalent of playing at Yankee Stadium. My teammates and I felt like we had hit the lotto and were playing in the big leagues, despite only playing on the swampy "Field D". As a chubby little kid, I enjoyed nothing more than a good cheeseburger. After almost every little league game, I would devour the famous Everest Park Burger. Little League consumed my spring every single year and it is one of the greatest memories of my youth. The sense of comradery within the team environment, the ping of the bat as you made contact with the ball, and the excitement of winning a game against your classmates, giving you bragging rights the next day at the lunch table, all influenced my social skills and strong work ethic that still shine today.

Baseball in Kirkland was a major part of my life from first grade all the way through freshman year. I advanced from little league to pony league in 7th grade and finally was able to play at the place that my admiration began, Lee Johnson Field in downtown Kirkland. I played under those bright lights in the heart of Downtown Kirkland, with traffic roaring by, the scent of food in the air, and the hot sun setting over the horizon up until the end of freshmen year. That's when I said goodbye to baseball for good.

In the midst of baseball, making the transition from Peter Kirk to Kirkland Junior High to Lake Washington High School also added a new dynamic to my life. Kirkland Junior High was an absolute blast. I already knew many kids going into the school because of sports, but I was amazed at the amount of new friends that I made in the first few days of junior high. The teachers were outstanding, the class choices were impeccable, the students were insanely kind, and the administration loved watching students succeed. There was this immense feeling of community at KJH, something we called panther pride. Since there were only about 500 students when I attended, you could walk down the hallway and know who every single person was. That community feel really mirrors the town around it. Junior high was an incredible growth and learning opportunity. It helped to create greater maturity and independence, as well as providing astonishing opportunities to learn about your own interests.

Moving on from junior high to high school was a much grander task. The stakes rose and so did the population of the school. I have had the blessing to be a part of the first freshmen class ever at Lake Washington High School. We had some big shoes to fill and were truly the babies of the school. But our class was up for the challenge. My dad's dream of his son attending LW just as he and his dad had done was finally coming true. High school has not been a breeze though, as many will also agree. Although enjoyable, it becomes difficult to balance school, sports, clubs, social life, family, free time, hobbies, and especially sleep. But that's part

of growing up I guess. I myself have had to balance multiple AP and Honors courses each year throughout high school, leading two clubs, DECA and Beta, as the VP of both, participating in baseball freshmen year and then moving onto swim team sophomore through senior year, work, and of course saving time for my amazing group of friends and family. This has not always been a breeze, and there have been many late nights trying to fit everything in, but it has shaped me to be the hard working and responsible person I am today. But soon, I will be graduating from LW and will have to say goodbye to all of my friends and my family and of course, to my home, Kirkland. This saddens me greatly.

As a realtor in Kirkland, my mom's slogan is, "I live, work, and play in Kirkland". This statement stands true for me as well, especially in the summer. Summer time is when the true enjoyment of Kirkland can be exploited. During this time, I work as a lifeguard for City of Kirkland and as a swim coach for the Kirkland Orcas kids swim team. The water is my playground and Kirkland is so special because it has this immense access to Lake Washington. What other downtown of a suburb, so close to a major metropolitan area, is situated directly on such a usable, freshwater lake? I mean, every few blocks there is a beach! Starting with Houghton, then moving down Lake Washington Boulevard to Marsh Park and then to Settler's Landing to David E. Brink Park, otherwise known as T-Dock, and then to the marina park, and then there is always Waverly and Kiwanis and Juanita Beach. Wherever a person goes, they can find the water.

The downtown is what gives Kirkland character. I grew up waltzing around town with my friends during the heat of the summer. Walking up and down Park Lane and into the marina with ice cream in hand, just enjoying the beauty of this cute little town. As we grew older it became piling my friends into my SUV and blasting music as we cruise down Lake Washington Boulevard to spend a day on a boat or at the beach or playing a little sand volleyball at Houghton. Or maybe it was to catch a brilliant sunset over Seattle from Settler's Landing, or as we call it, Secret Dock. My favorite day in the entire world is the Fourth of July because Kirkland goes all out. It's just one giant celebration around the water and the people. I have countless memories of being a part of the kids' parade when I was younger and other memories of watching the elaborate floats pass by with friends at my side. Then we would head to the beach and spend the rest of the day either there or on a boat and would end the day with a barbecue and fireworks. Independence day is a magical day in Kirkland. There is truly nowhere I would rather call home. The nostalgia of shuffling around Kirkland with my best friends is priceless. All of the smells of food and the sound laughter coming from the numerous restaurants and bars, all of the cars whizzing by, all of the sounds of boats roaring away from the marina, and of course, the friendly and outgoing people that reside here make Kirkland unique. It really is the Gold Coast of Lake Washington.

When I was going into junior year, we moved out of West of Market and into the Silver Spurs neighborhood of Bridle Trails. It was hard for my whole family to accept being a little bit further from the heart of Kirkland, but we realized that we could adjust. We were still technically living within Kirkland, and nobody could take that away from us. Living here now, I have had the opportunity to reminisce on the terrific experiences I have had in Kirkland. A lot of "firsts", a lot of friends, a lot of fights, a lot of laughs, a lot of tears, a lot of fun, and a whole lot of challenges. Kirkland is my home and hopefully will be where I reside for the rest of my life. It is the most magical place on the planet and I'm thrilled to call it a part of me.