

# Allie's Stories



## Sports

The area around Saxton where I grew up had four geographic areas. I think Saxton was the center, but on the western side was a town called Stonerstown, where Nankey grew up, and on the eastern side there was a town called East Saxton. Beyond that was a town called Puttstown. Basically they all ran together, but we would identify different areas of the locale by saying we're going to Stonerstown, or let's take a walk to East Saxton, or something like that. When I was a boy the high school football team played its games out on a big open field out in East Saxton, and it was like a baseball field with a wooden grandstand that people could sit in and watch the game. Then along the sidelines they would put up small wooden bleachers for the crowds to sit on to watch the high school football games. There were no lights on the fields in those days. All the games were played in the afternoon.

Saxton Liberty High School, where I went to school, played their games on Saturdays, and they usually played about ten games each fall, five home games and five away games. From the time I moved to Saxton in 1942 I would go out to East Saxton to the football field every Saturday afternoon in the fall and watch the high school football team play their different opponents. One of the interesting aspects of the game was it was not highly formalized. There was a goalpost at each end. There were lines on the field where they were supposed to be. And there were wooden planks stuck in the ground marking the goal line, the ten-yard line, the twenty and thirty and forty and fifty. But crowd control was not very good, and it was not unusual for some fool to run out on the field in the middle of the game and have to be chased off by one of the officials.

One of the things I remember about going to those games was that somebody had a dog by the name of Skip. Skip was the biggest dog that I had ever seen in my life. I would say I was about nine years old and I went out to one of the football games and there was this huge, gray dog. It must have stood as tall as I did. He had a medium-length coat of hair. I don't know what kind he was, but he was huge, and basically a very harmless dog. Everybody in town knew Skip. Nobody

in town seemed to know who owned him. But Skip would arrive with the crowd at the football game, and it wouldn't be uncommon for Skip, sometime during the afternoon, to be lured out onto the field and interrupt the game of football. For example, if Skip were on one sideline, the kids in the town might go to the other sideline, and during the game yell, "Here, Skip! Here, Skip!" And Skip would run across the field right in the middle of the players. So it wasn't just Skip's fault. I think he was being tricked by some of the boys and girls in the town. But Skip was absolutely the biggest dog I ever knew when I was a kid, a great huge dog who must have been three and one-half feet at the shoulders and a medium length of hair, pleasant disposition, just as huge as can be. And when he licked your face you thought you were going to get knocked over on your behind.

Watching the high school football games always was intriguing for us young guys when we were 9, 10, 11, and 12, but too young to go out for the high school team. So it wasn't uncommon for us to sort of dream about playing on a team of our own. Now the guys I went to Saxton Grade School with were boys like Bob Bailey, Bob Gribble, Roger Garner, Charlie Hayes, and guys like that that I ran around with a lot. Out in the next elementary school was Stonerstown. Stonerstown had all the kids from Stonerstown plus the kids that lived in East Saxton and Puttstown, so the Stonerstown Grade School had perhaps as many kids if not more than the Saxton Grade School.

Not knowing much about demographics or counting student population, a group of us up at Saxton decided we would challenge the Stonerstown Grade School to a football game. We were all seventh and eighth graders, and we said we would only bring a team of 10 players, all 7th and 8th graders, we'd pick our best, and we wanted to play a game of football against Stonerstown Grade School 7th and 8th graders and they could bring their best. And we would play game up on The Knob, up on the grassy field, and we would play by our own rules. Well, Stonerstown kids took up the challenge. Now what we didn't reckon on was the fact that a lot of the kids from Stonerstown Grade School who lived in Puttstown and East Saxton were big boys who had not advanced in school year by year. Some had been held back because they weren't very bright, some were behavior problems, some came from homes that were not very desirable. And what happened was, while all the guys at Saxton that were going out playing football in 7th and 8th grade were 12 and 13 years, we were going to run up against a group of big, big guys in Stonerstown who were more like 14 and 15 years old.

Well, we figured we could deal with that once we found out that there were some awful big boys

and older boys coming to play. But what we didn't count on was Stonerstown had what they called their secret weapon. And their secret weapon was a man, or a young man then, by the name of Jim Richey, commonly known as Big Jim. Now Big Jim, when he was in about 8th grade, probably stood 6'3" and weighed nearly 275 pounds! The last time I saw Jim Richey when he was about 50 years old he was still about 6'3" and weighed about 400 pounds. But as a grade school boy he was probably the biggest person in the school, including the teachers and the principal. Well, we heard about Big Jim. I had never seen Big Jim. But the day of the game came and sure enough Stonerstown shows up with this pile of guys, some to play and some to cheer, and there we are from Saxton with our gang of maybe 10 guys who've practiced and thrown a soft bale of straw around just warming up and getting ready for the game.

It was just like Oakwood High School playing the New York Giants. We were really frightened at the beginning of the game. And here was Big Jim Richey and all these older guys from Stonerstown, and we thought boy are we going to get creamed today! And we very well could have been right, except for one thing. Bobby Bailey, who was a good friend of mine, was always a very gutsy young man. And he talked to us before the game. Bob's father had been a high school football coach, Jiggs Bailey, and he coached Uncle Chippy in high school. Bob had learned a lot about football and a lot about sports. One was he knew that if you really, really wanted to do something and you put your mind to it and you put your body too you could make it work. And Bob talked to us and he said look, we're not going to take a licking from these guys just because they're big. If they beat us, they're going to have to beat us on our terms. But we're going to hit them hard and knock them down and play as rough as we can, and we're going to try to win this game.

Well, we played the game and it was back and forth and back and forth. At the beginning of the game it looked like everyone was still afraid of Jim Richey. Of course, Jim, of all things, they didn't even play him in the line, they would snap him the ball, and then he would come wading through us guys, grab him by the legs trying to drag him down. Most of us weighed 95 pounds, 100 pounds, 110 pounds, and Jim coming in there at 270. On one play I remember they snapped the ball back from Rosko Dick back to Jim Richey, and Jim was so heavy he couldn't really run, but he started trotting through the line. And Bob Bailey bailed through that line and hit Jim Richey with his head right in the stomach, knocked him over backwards, the ball flew in the air, and one

of our buddies, Bob Gribble, picked up the ball and ran it back the other way for a touchdown.

Well, we were jumping and cheering and clapping Bob Gribble on the back and Bob Bailey, and we looked around and there was poor Jim Richey laying in the dirt, so sick that he threw up his lunch right on the field. And everybody got sick and said this is awful! And they left him lay. Even his own teammates were disgusted with him. Jim looked like a fool. Bob Bailey looked like a hero. The game was stopped because of Jim's awful sickness. The two teams decided they wouldn't finish the game, and they would call it a tie. I don't even remember what the score was. We would say it was even, and we all went home. And I tell you, the guys from Saxton were glad to get out of there with a tie or an even game. I guess the lesson I learned from that was no matter how big some of these guys are and no matter how tough the reputation, if the right guy clips him good and hard you get even and you get squared away very, very nicely.