

The Guy in the Tie

Part 2: Family, 19th Century Rebar

After describing the ignominious nature of my conception, my birth unto the world and naming, as well as the commonness of my being numbered among the plethora of post-war progeny – I proceed to the nurture and contortions of my family.

We weren't as nuclear as the Walton's but close. "Like a bird who wanders from its nest is a man who wanders from his home." Proverbs 27:8. Someone must have preached that verse at sometime in the earshot of the Perry's and Nelson's, cuz they stayed close to mamma. We were on Wenz Ave. Three blocks east was great grandmother Mimi. Six more was Robert and Eula Perry my grandparents. Seven more blocks was Humphrey Hillard Neslon – "grandpaw" (the connotation forbidden to the above more cultured Perrys). Within this perimeter was Aunt Jimmy and Fat Uncle Ray Bible (my Daddy's 6 foot sister and her three hundred plus husband) as well as Aunt Netta and Uncle Falvy, then "Aint Annie" and Uncle Van (until 1960 then it was Uncle Alton, who had no teeth). Slightly north was Aunt Eunice and Uncle Dub (equally 6 feet, cigars and drunk frequently on Jack Daniels – Dub not Eunice – except for the 6 feet, that *was* Eunice), uncle Robert (alcoholic) and soon to be forsaken Aunt Juanita, replaced by Dorothy the thief who promptly died, then a third women (the swindler who cremated Uncle Robert immediately upon his death then clutched at his belongings like Gollum did the Ring). This woman's name could only be spoken if followed by a curse and an oath. Then Uncle Aubrey and Aunt Teresa - the Catholics – with 4 boys all who became priests and 3 daughters who didn't become nuns to our amazement. They were always well dressed having always come straight from Mass. Outside of Waco was Uncle Clyde, Aunt Reba, and Uncle Gorge in Abilene and Houston respectively.

Cousins? Like Rabbits! Donna Anice Paul Patricia Aubrey Philip Lawrence Mark Rosanna Regina Annette Joannie Ricky Larry Rodney Tammy Ried Rebecca Douglas Boyd Georgia-Lynn. Throw in Bob Tom Bill and Jim of "Aunt Bill" and Uncle Herbert (Bill being the childish ineptness of "LaVelle") and you have the gaggle.

We all knew who we were.

Our parents passed on our heritage like African tribal chanters. We knew Nettie Miller of Georgia had married John Logsdon who died on Christmas Eve of a heart attack in his bed – "he gave a deep snore and he was gone." John Logsdon and "Mimi" had Eula who met Robert Perry at a Sears & Roebuck in Abilene and married and came to Waco where they had four girls and three boys who became our parents. Grandmother Mimi and Grandmother and Granddaddy Perry were pious, hardworking, patriotic, enduring, God-fearing, Depression and 2 World Wars experienced Methodists and Baptists. They were revered by all. They never raised their voices. The kids revered them and acted around them ever after as though *still* children. These 3 Perrys were our rocks . . . our Rushmore . . . our patriarchs and plumb-lines. We were proud to have their blood in us. Granddaddy Perry was an old artist and craftsman. He was a floor finisher with huge knotty arms. He had a black paneled truck that hauled massive sanders that he would strap to his waist and rein them in and subdue them while they made wooden floors smooth as glass . . . then fill in the cracks then varnish them then polish. The smell

of turpentine today still sends me back 50 years. We touched his tools like Van Gogh's pallet and brushes. He would get tickled at my daddy's stories and laugh till he cried. Grandmother Perry smiled but never laughed. She was sober and, like her daughter that became my mother, she was restrained and always under absolute control. I loved her and feared her displeasure till the day she died when I was eleven. Hers was my first funeral. We grandkids sat like doves perched silently about her casket amidst low muttering adults and our wet eyed granddaddy. We all beheld this ominous new power – death – that could subdue this woman and make that man cry. My father had lost his mother to heart problems when he was a boy, just 15. Grandmother Perry's death was the only time I ever saw my daddy cry.

Daddy's father was named Humphrey Hildred Nelson. He lived 8 blocks from Granddaddy Perry but he was the *exact* opposite. Grandpaw could only be called "Grandpaw". He was a transplant from Corinth, Mississippi to Eola, Texas outside San Angelo. A dairy farmer who did whatever he could to stay alive – mostly catching catfish on a trotline and hunting doves and quail and squirrels. When the Depression came he and his 5 kids and ailing wife (myocarditis) piled everything in a freight car and came to Waco. They weren't just country, they were rural! The Perry's house was pristine, elegant, lovely of décor, furniture, art and fabric. Grandpaw's however smelled of Prince Albert (he rolled his own) and catfish guts. He was always in a wife-beater A-shirt with a stain. He was ruddy, red-headed, big, bony with big ears with hair on 'em with "tobakker" teeth and big gnarly hands. He was just like his 2nd son, my father Herbert. Grandpaw Humphrey lived in an old house with a screen door and fished with a cane pole on "minners" bought from the bait house next door. Then he'd rub on Off and head to the Bosque River. Me 'n Daddy 'n Bobby stayed in a shack down on the river with Grandpaw one night – my first night away from home. I had my first cup of coffee with him. Straight black. Rich. Made from coffee in a sock. Been hooked since. He taught Bobby to fish.

These were my Victorian influences. Mimi's father fought for Georgia in the Civil War. Granddaddy Perry was in the Navy in WWI. They connected me with who I was. They worked hard. Cared for their families and sacrificed. They buried their wives, and Mimi her husband. They were tough and enduring. I never heard an angry word or a curse word from them. They weren't educated, rich or famous. But they were great. They left me a standard and a long shadow. A high bar. When the 60's came in its arrogance – my grandparents mocked.

Men either live up to their ancestors or live them down.

How blessed this boy was on Wenz Avenue.

I had every chance to live like a king.

Still their shadows fall on me. Still I say, "What would Granddaddy do?" "Grandpaw must have been here." What memories they unknowingly crafted. My brothers and cousins still talk of them with reverent hushed voices, laughter, and bright eyes. They finished. I can finish. I long continually stronger each day to see them.

To be gathered to my people.