

Readers Digest, a staple at our house growing up, had a regular feature called My Most Unforgettable Character which I found interesting. I've known quite a few UC's in my life but I'd have to rank my maternal grandfather, William Badger Beaty as, if not my MUC, then certainly very near the top of the list. I can't tell you anything about his lineage. We'll have to call on cousin Pat Hughes, the Beaty historian for that (Pat extensively researched and wrote about our Beaty family tree and I have a copy somewhere but can't put my hands on it-Pat, will you send me another copy-thanks). I think his father's name was Felix, weird enough, but BADGER? Who in the world would name their kid after a "short-legged omnivore in the families Musteliade (which also includes the otters, polecats, weasels, and ferrets), and Mephitidae (which also includes the skunks)" (Wikipedia), or maybe Felix was just a University of Wisconsin fan. Apparently cousin Max Head was impressed by the moniker; he, with I assume his wife, JoAnn's concurrence, named a son Badger. Ouch.

Grandpa was born on the west side of Mecklenburg Co, near Mountain Island on the Catawba River. Global warming hadn't kicked in yet, as evidenced by two of his stories that I remember. One was about mules pulling logs across the frozen river, which I probably half believed. The other was about it being so cold you could throw a bucket of water in the air and it would freeze before it hit the ground. Bill or Harry may have bought that one but I sure didn't. He would describe a snowfall as being peter deep. I never could figure out how he was measuring.

Somehow Grandpa sweet talked Nancy Dunn into marrying him. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out how. Grandma was one of the sweetest, most soft-spoken and cultured (relatively speaking) ladies I've ever known. Somewhere I have a collection of poems she wrote. One I remember was about Louise lighting up when Joe Caldwell's name was mentioned.

I think Grandpa farmed a small tract of land in Paw Creek which I guess he inherited but it must not have been large enough to make much of a living from, so he sold it and bought a larger farm near Huntersville. I don't think I'd ever seen that farm until after Dad died, Bill and Sylvia and Janet and I took Mom to Huntersville one Sunday afternoon and she was able to find it in the Ramah community. If I recall, it was down a long gravel road which Mom said they had to walk down to catch the school bus. When the weather was bad, Grandpa would drive them in a buggy. I think Mom enjoyed her Huntersville years and kept friends (I remember the name Nell Ranson) from there for years. She walked so much in a cheap pair of shoes that didn't fit that a sore spot developed on her big toe. I guess they were too poor or maybe just too country to take her to the doctor and the sore got infected and she had to have the toe amputated. She was probably 11 or 12. I can only imagine how that affected an adolescent young lady, not just physically (which it did for the rest of her life, resulting, many years later, in having to have the next toe removed), but socially and psychologically as well. But she seldom complained about it other than being a bit obsessed (which I now completely understand since I've been suffering low back pain for over 3 months) with finding comfortable shoes, which were hard to find.

Mom said the cotton grew tall and green at the Huntersville farm but produced smaller than normal bowls and consequently not much marketable cotton. The land must have lacked some kind of essential nutrient which is probably why the former owner sold it cheap enough that Grandpa could afford to buy it. I guess due diligence prior to buying land hadn't been invented yet or if it had, Grandpa hadn't heard about it. I don't know if he was able to sell that farm or whether it was foreclosed, but when Mom was 14-15, he bought a small farm off Matthews-Weddington Rd, less than a mile from the Caldwell homeplace, and moved his family with 7 children into the small house on the farm. Bill, wasn't that house still standing when we were kids?

Grandpa preferred fox and coon hunting over farming and his livelihood suffered as a consequence. I'm sure he and Grandma must have known John and Ellie Caldwell, Dad's folks, but I don't ever remember that acquaintance being mentioned by Mom or Dad. My guess is that Grandpa Caldwell, a pretty successful farmer and businessman who owned a store (I wonder if the Beatys shopped there?) and

acquired over 1000 acres of land with the help of black sharecropper families, was not favorably impressed by Badger's prowess as a farmer or businessman. I don't expect they fox hunted together. In fact, Dad, we could tell, though he never said much about it, and though he was always respectful toward Grandpa, saw him as a bit of a n'er-do-well, and I guess, at least compared to Grandpa Caldwell, who I never knew as he died in 1942, he was.

Mom finished high school in Matthews a year behind Dad and went a year to business school at what is now UNC-Greensboro, which is where, ironically, Janet was a freshman when we met on a blind date. Mom then went to work with Travelers Ins Co in the Johnston Bldg in downtown Charlotte, eventually becoming office manager. She and Aunt Edna, who sold hats at Belks, lived with Grandma's sister, Aunt Emma Dunn Cook, Aunt Em to us, off Tuckaseegee Rd and took the bus to work. Mom worked till noon on Saturdays and many, maybe most, Saturday afternoons, Grandpa would drive to town and pick her and Aunt Edna up and bring them down to the farm, I guess primarily to visit but probably also to help with what needed to be done on the farm and he would drive them back to Aunt Em's on Sunday afternoon. I think Mom and Aunt Edna helped make the mortgage payments on the farm, but at some point, it was lost to foreclosure. Grandpa and Grandma were living in a house just outside Matthews owned by their son-in-law, Aunt Bertie's husband, Harvey Hatfield and Mom and Dad were living with them when they brought me home from Presbyterian hospital where I was born on Dad's 38th birthday, Feb 27, 1946, which also happened to be Dot & Don, twins, the youngest of Dad's 11 siblings, 16th birthday. For years we all celebrated our birthdays by going to eat at the fish camp on a Saturday night.

Grandpa was short, probably not over 5'6" or 7" and bald when I first remember him. All his daughters, Bertie, Edna, Mom, Ruth and Nig (Jeanette) were short and Mom's hair grew very thin in her later years. His sons, William and Leighton, Mom's twin, were bald when I first remember them but of moderate height. Uncle Leighton married Eva Dell Godfrey(?) from Matthews and bought a small farm between Grandpa's and Matthews where his oldest son, Frank and maybe his next, Ray were born. For the last 20 years or so, their younger brother, David, has hosted a Beaty get together at his shabby chic retreat on Lake Wateree. I took Mom and Aunt Ruth once and Bill and I have attended a number of times. It's where I last saw our now departed cousin, Billy Dick, Uncle William's son, and his wife, Ann, and cousin Nancy's (Aunt Ruth's oldest) husband, Ed, whose funeral Bill and I attended in Chapel Hill a year or so ago, which is where I saw cousin Mickey, Aunt Ruth's youngest and who bears the closest resemblance among my cousins to Grandpa, for the first time in, well, I was going to say 50+ years, but actually, I did see him at his brother, Max's funeral 8-10 years ago. Grandpa's namesake, his great grandson and Max's son, Badger Head was there as well.

I remember Uncle Leighton as being slow in speech and step and usually pretty jovial. I never saw him mad. At one of the Beaty reunions I ask Frank if he ever saw his dad angry and he said the only time was when they were living on the Matthews farm and a hired help teenager abused a cow which was down in a ditch and Uncle Leighton took a barrel stave to the teenager, not the cow. Dad always liked Uncle Leighton, who had a slight speech impediment. Dad loved to imitate him telling about a member of Orr's Baptist Church, their church in Chester, method of eating a fried chicken leg at church picnics: "He'd pull it fru his mauf one time and fro the bone down". Dad wasn't making fun of Uncle Leighton but loved hearing him tell stories, much as he loved listening to Herb Shriner and George Gobel on TV.

Uncle Leighton sold his Matthews farm and bought a larger one outside Chester, SC and started a dairy farm. Grandpa built a small asbestos sided house thru a little patch of trees from Uncle Leighton and Aunt Eva Dell's house, a euphemism for their ramshackle, not shabby chic, just shabby, abode. I don't remember much about it except that it made our old frame house on Sharon Amity look like something out of Southern Living, but they always made room for us cousins to visit in the summer. That was summer camp for many of us Beaty cousins. I won't digress too far from this story about Grandpa to talk too much about Uncle Leighton's dairy farm. It deserves a story all its own. Let me just say that Frank, Ray and David are exceptional men who learned hard work, along with many other valuable lessons on

that farm under Uncle Leighton and Aunt Eva Dell's tutelage, such that it's a wonder Bill, Harry and I didn't grow to resent them as Mom would usually throw them up to his as examples of how we lazy city boys ought to be when we griped about pulling bermuda grass out of her day lillies.

I said Grandpa built his house in Chester and I expect he literally did most all the carpenter work as he had been a carpenter helping build Camp Sutton in Monroe during WWII, which was closed down after the war and converted to housing and industry and where Janet and Tommy and I moved into a little rental house when we moved to Monroe in Sept, 1971 and where we brought Tim home to from Union Memorial Hospital, also built on former Camp Sutton, in March, 1972. I used to have Grandpa's door plane and brace and bit which I let rust before I gave them to Bill, who, unlike me, knew how to care for and use them. I think most of the lumber in the house was cut off Uncle Leighton's farm.

We visited Grandma and Grandpa and Uncle Leighton and his family pretty often in Chester, usually on Sunday after church. I always liked the drive down, out Carmel Rd, which was mainly rural until they built Carmel Country Club, to Hwy 51 where the Kendall Co, where our backdoor neighbor on Craig Ave, JD Poole, Bill's inspiration for a career in textiles and the father of one of his best friends, Joe, and East Meck's head cheerleader my sophomore year, Bobbie Ann, worked, thru Pineville and across the narrow bridge across the Catawba River, marveling at the size of the Celanese plant just on the SC side. Once, on a frolic and detour (that's a common law term for when an employee veers from his assigned course of travel, thus shielding his employer from liability for any damages he may cause while thus detoured), Dad drove down to Van Wyck and we crossed the river on a one car barge, pulled across the water by a cable operated by a native, I guess a member of the Catawba tribe, American. What an adventure for 3 kids weened on Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, and Wild Bill Hiccock; we saw Tonto in the flesh, retired from being the lone Ranger's faithful sidekick to an even more illustrious career, guiding palefaces across the treacherous waters of the Catawba! WOW!

One of my earliest remembrances of Grandpa was arriving at their little white house and going in the little living room and him whipping out his pocketknife, opening a blade while saying "I think I'd better sharpen these boys' peters". My Grandpa wanting to whittle away my budding manhood? What the hell was that all about? And as I fled, he actually chased me around the house. I was scared to death. I don't remember Dad saying or doing anything. I remember complaining to Mom who responded that he was just kidding. Kidding? What do you mean, kidding? It wasn't kidding to me! It was grandchild abuse. I wonder if I still have deep scars, psychological, that is, as he never put the blade to my member, thank goodness-one circumcision was enough- from that trauma. Geez! But I guess all was forgotten on the return trips when we would talk Dad, though I don't think he needed much urging, into stopping for ice cream at the creamery in Rock Hill. That's still the best ice cream I've ever eaten. My favorite was strawberry, or, when in season, peach. Dad's, and another of mine, too, was butter pecan. We usually passed travel time playing a game, I've forgotten what we called it, in which we counted animals we saw on our side of the car (I don't know whose team the one in the middle played on; maybe he was a switch hitter). A graveyard buried the number of animals you had accumulated up to that point and a creek washed them away, necessitating starting over.

Shortly after we moved to our new house on Rama Rd at Christmas, 1955, Mom decided it was time for her to help further with Grandma and Grandpa's care, as they were getting more feeble and it was difficult for Uncle Leighton, who ran his farm with a terrible back which he broke years earlier when the horses pulling the wagon he was on got spooked and ran into a barn and he, standing in the wagon, hit a ceiling joist, and Aunt Eva Dell, who ran a school cafeteria, to look after them. Dad and Mom bought a little house beside them from the Warners. As I think about it, maybe they bought it when they bought their 2-3 acres from Mrs. Wallace since the well that served our house was behind the Warner house. The main house was masonry of some sort, not brick or cinderblock, and a frame addition containing a bedroom was added at some later time. Grandma and Grandpa lived there together until Grandma had a heart attack and Mom moved her into Harry's bedroom and Harry moved in with Bill and me, sleeping on a fold

away cot while Bill and I slept in the double bed which we slept together on from when I got out of the crib until Bill left for the army.

Grandpa chewed Brown Mule tobacco from a plug and spit in a coffee can beside his easy chair. He was easy to shop for at Christmas. He was happy with a box of Brown Mule, Christmas wrapped or not. I'm easily tempted and that Brown Mule apparently was delicious since Grandpa had it in his mouth constantly when he wasn't eating or sleeping, so I decided to try a sample. I cut off a little corner and popped it in and the juice started flowing, so much that a little slid down my guzzle, resulting in a major eruption. I never put another molecule of Brown Mule in my mouth again, but in college, I did chew a little Beechnut. In fact, I caught myself triple-dissipating (football coach Homer Smith's word) while sitting at the bar "Up the road", Davidson students name for a beer joint just across the line in Iredell Co whose formal name was "Hatties", with a chew in my mouth, a Winston dangling from my lips, and a Blue Ribbon in my hand. I was sitting in the stands at Johnson Gym watching a wrestling match, chewing and spitting in a Coke cup when Dickey Dickson from High Point, came running up the steps and grabbed the cup out of my hand and took a big swig before I could say a word. He made to the front steps to the gym before exploding. Impoliteness will come back to haunt you most every time!

Every Saturday it was my job to mop the floors at Grandpa's, which often required scraping dried tobacco juice that missed the can from the linoleum, and cleaning his bathroom. I guess I was Grandpa's favorite, maybe because I loved baseball, as he did. He played it in his younger years. I've sat and listened to many a game with him on the radio. He loved Willie Mays. I'm not sure he knew his color, though that might not have mattered to him. When Grandma was living and even thereafter, Grandpa usually ate supper at our house and would listen rather than watch tv as he was legally blind. He loved to listen to Dizzy Dean announcing games on Saturday afternoon, describing a player has he "slud" into third base or breaking into some country song. Grandpa often chided us for watching those "silly" cartoons, but when we left the room, we would peak in and watch him raise his head, which was usually dropped down, toward the screen and giggle quietly at Bugs and Tom & Jerry.

Dad bought an english settler that we named after the president, Ike. When we got off the bus from school one day, we were dismayed, to say the least, to learn that our blind Grandpa had killed Ike with one shot thru the heart with his snub nose pistol. Ike was still young and had not been wormed and was slobbering a little and Grandpa thought he was foaming at the mouth and had rabies and was afraid he might bite and infect us when we got off the bus. Though he was trying to protect us, we had a hard time forgiving him, particularly when tests showed our beloved Ike didn't have rabies. I felt like shooting his little white non-descript mutt named Pat (cousin Pat, was she named for you or you for her?).

The original Warner house was built right on the ground and the kitchen floor was spongy because the floor joists on which the subfloor was laid sat on the ground and had rotted away. Grandpa wanted a new floor. I don't know if he ever complained to Dad about it but one day he talked me into tearing the floor out, and I went at it with a vengeance. I was good at demolition, a much better ripper outer than putter backer. When Dad got home and saw the remains of the floor in the backyard, he wanted to know what the heck had gotten in to me. I told him I just did what Grandpa wanted and I think his response was something like "don't ever listen to him again". I don't remember whether Dad himself had to replace the floor or he had to hire someone to, but from then on, I heeded his advice.

Grandpa loved to walk up and down (how ironic that he lived in the Ramah community in Huntersville 40-50 years before and ended up on) Rama Rd. One day he came back from a walk and excitedly told me to get the wheel barrow and a shovel, and remembering Dad's admonition, I cautiously asked why, and he said we were going down toward the railroad and scoop up a possum that was lying in the road after being run over but was still in pretty good shape, and when I asked a further why, he said he was going to have Louise cook it for him with potatoes and carrots. He was sorely disappointed when I disabused him of the notion that Mom was going to cook him that possum. When nature called during his excursions,

Grandpa would just relieve himself along the road, just like he was in the country. I guess that's where my sons and I get our predilection for a nightly leak under the stars. Once, riding home on the bus, we passed Grandpa taking a leak in the ditch and some kids pointed to him while yelling, "Look at that old man peeing in the ditch". Of course I didn't tell them that he was my flesh and blood. When I complained to Mom, her simple solution was just not to let on that I knew who he was, and I didn't.

We knew something was wrong when we saw a wreath on the front porch when we got off the bus when I was in the 6th or 7th grade. Grandma had died. I don't remember whether she was actually at home or in the hospital when she expired. Her funeral was at Matthews Baptist and we sang one of Mom's favorite hymns, Great Is Thy Faithfulness. She was buried at Cooks Memorial Presbyterian Church on the Mt Holly-Huntersville Rd, named for and, I assume, founded by Aunt Em's husband, Dr. George Cook, who was much her senior and died before I was born. We used to have a rattlesnake rattle which I think Uncle George cut from a rattler he killed while riding the circuit on his horse.

Grandpa continued to live beside us until a short while before his death, when we could no longer care for him and Mom had to put him in a nursing home. He developed gangrene in his foot and went to Charlotte Memorial Hospital where it was amputated. Mom spent several nights in the hospital with him. I was 16-17 and volunteered to spend Saturday nite with him. He was heavily drugged and didn't know me or that I was in the room. He was in a semi-private room and he didn't have a roommate, so about 11, when the old recliner in the room grew uncomfortable, I climbed in the other bed and went to sleep. Long about midnight I was awakened by a commotion caused when a colored orderly came in to take Grandpa's temperature rectally, and I heard something like "get your finger out of my ass, you black son-of-a-bitch". When the orderly saw me in the other bed, I just pulled the sheet up over my head. Grandpa died the next day or so.

His funeral was also at Matthews Baptist and Jackie Gill sang Great Is Thy Faithfulness. Grandpa was buried beside Grandma at Cooks Memorial. Some years ago when Janet's Dad, Mac, was living with us in Monroe, Tim was flying somewhere and had a several hour layover in Charlotte, Janet, Mac and I picked him up, got some lunch, and as we had time to spare, we drove out to the cemetery at Cooks Memorial and visited the graves of Nancy Dunn and William Badger Beaty. It was the first time Tim had visited, and I expect the last time, he or I will visit their graves. Grandma and Grandpa, thanks for giving me a wonderful mother, Tommy and Tim a wonderful grandmother, and Janet a wonderful mother-in-law, and Grandpa, thanks for being such an unforgettable character!