

THANKSGIVINGS, HALF-BRO (?) JOE, and MO

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The most important Thanksgiving for me was in 1938, eight years before I was born. Dad and Mom were married at Mom's aunt and my great Aunt Em's (Emma Dunn Cook, sister of my maternal Grandmother Nancy Dunn Beaty-I've written a little about Mom and her sister, Edna living at Aunt Em's in an earlier story entitled My Most Unforgettable Character about my maternal Grandfather, William Badger Beaty) house off Tuckaseegee Rd in Charlotte on Thanksgiving Day, 1938. I don't know who married them, who attended, whether they celebrated by eating Aunt Em's whole wheat biscuits (Bill, Harry and I thought they were delicacies, probably just because they were different from Mom's white flour biscuits), or anything else about their nuptials. I don't know where they spent their first married night, maybe in or near Asheville. Dad was living in Atlanta and they must have been headed there, but they at least stopped in Asheville because we have a photo of them in their Sunday best, Mom wearing a hat and corsage and Dad a tie, topcoat and hat, outside the Grove Park Inn in the snow. In commenting on the picture in the past, I've said that they didn't stay in the Grove Park because they couldn't afford to, but I really don't know if that's true. Maybe one of them told that but if so, I don't remember them telling it. Maybe, like how many stories from our past get embellished with time, I, to use a phrase of my sons, "put a little meat in" that story.

I said that Dad was living in Atlanta. To tell why is to tell one of the most baffling stories in my Dad, Joe McCamey Caldwell's family's history. Here's what I know about one of the most astonishing discoveries of Bill's, Harry's and my life. 8-10 years ago Janet came home from having lunch with brother Bill's wife Sylvia and my first cousin, Mary Lynn Caldwell Morrill, the Caldwell family historian, the daughter and oldest child of Uncle Frank, the oldest of Dad's 11 siblings (Dad, born Feb 27, 1908 was the 4th of John McCamey and Ellie Shannon Caldwell's 12 children) and said that Mary Lynn had asked her and Sylvia if Bill and I ever talked about the fact that Dad was married before he married Mom, and they said no, that they had never heard that. Mary Lynn was astonished that we didn't know about that and said not only had he been married before, but that he was the father of Joe McCamey Caldwell, Jr, born in 1933, and she showed them a copy of his birth certificate, showing Dad, 25 as Joe, Jr's father and Lucille Hemby, 18, as his mother. Well, of course I said "no way", that I'd never heard any such thing in my 67 or 8 years, and it couldn't possibly be true.

Of course I called Bill, and Sylvia had told him the same thing and he was almost as flabbergasted as I was. I say "almost" because many years before, shortly after he and Sylvia were married and they were attending Matthews Baptist Church, Sylvia asked JoAnne Hodge, who with husband Cecil were good family friends and very active members there, why Dad, superintendent of Sunday School there for many years and, along with Mom, one of the church's most active and faithful members, had never been elected as a deacon. JoAnne blurted out that it was because he had been married before. I don't know if Sylvia immediately told Bill but JoAnne called her soon thereafter to say that she had made a mistake about Dad's previous marriage, that it wasn't true. I don't know if Bill or Sylvia ever talked with

JoAnne about it again. They never mentioned it to me, and obviously didn't discuss it with Dad or Mom. Apparently Dad, knowing that Paul said in his Letter to Timothy that a deacon should be the husband of one wife, interpreted that to mean that he could only be married once, though it seems to me that it can just as, maybe more, easily be interpreted to mean that a deacon shouldn't practice polygamy (BTW, who gave Paul the authority to dictate such rules, any way?), and therefore thought that he wasn't Biblically qualified to be a deacon at Matthews Baptist. It's a good thing that Paul didn't lay down the qualifications for Sunday School superintendents or Matthews would have been denied the services for, I guess, close to 2 decades of, I would submit, if not the best superintendent, certainly one of the most conscientious ones its ever had. For several years, we stopped on the way to SS to pick up a couple of boys, younger than we, who lived in a ramshackled old house on Monroe Rd about where Family Dollar headquarters are now, to take them to SS. I guess they stayed for the worship service at 11:00 ("preaching", as we called it) but I don't know who they would have sat with in the sanctuary and I don't remember us dropping them off after preaching; maybe somebody picked them up after SS. Later we drove passed the church a half mile or so to pick up some kids who lived down near the Wagon Wheel on the Weddington Rd and brought them to SS. I suppose Dad, and Mom, thought those kids and all kids, especially their own, belonged in Sunday School.

Bill and I went down to talk with Aunt Dot, the 11th or 12th (she was a twin with Uncle Don; BTW, I think that I've mentioned in other stories I've written that Dot and Don were born on Feb 27, 1930, Dad's 22nd birthday and I was born on Feb 27, 1946, Dad's 38th and D&D's 16th) and the only one of the 12 children of John M & Ellie Caldwell still living at the time. As I recall, she told us the following info, which I deem(ed) relevant:

Dot was only 3 in 1930 and what she remembered was mostly hearsay. The Hemby family lived down below the Caldwell place in Union Co and Lucille had been helping Grandma around the house. One day her father drove up in the yard with Lucille in the car and came to the door with a shotgun in his hand, asking Grandma if Joe Caldwell was in the house. Grandpa was down in the field. When Grandma asked what he wanted with him, he said that Joe had gotten his daughter pregnant, and that unlike the fellow who had gotten another of his daughters, or maybe it was his sister, pregnant and hadn't married her, he wasn't going to let Lucille have an illegitimate child and that Joe Caldwell was going to marry her, and he pushed his way in and marched Dad out at gunpoint and put him in his car with Lucille and drove them to York(?), SC and got them married. (Bill has been to the courthouse there and has seen the marriage certificate.) Coming back through Charlotte, Mr Hemby stopped at a store or somewhere and went in and Dad got out and fled, to Atlanta.

Dot didn't know any of the details about Dad's escape, how he got to Atlanta, what he did for money, etc; she just knew that Wilkes Kiser was involved somehow. Wilkes had married Dad's 2nd or 3rd sibling, Aunt Verla, who was a twin with Aunt Vernon. I never knew Uncle Wilkes. I have found out in recent years and have written a little in a story called "KISER MEORIES" that he had dropped out of Davidson College where he was a pre-med student when he married Aunt Verla. Dad may have gotten to Uncle Wilkes and Aunt Verla's house (I wonder if they were living in the house Mr Neal Craig owned on Sharon Amity which we moved into in 1948 or 9 when Aunt Verla and her brood of 5 moved into the new house she built a few blocks away with the life insurance \$ she got when Uncle Wilkes shot and killed himself)

and maybe they gave him some money and put him on a bus to Atlanta. Apparently, maybe thinking he would be arrested for child non-support, Dad and Wilkes kept Dad's whereabouts secret for a while, even from Grandpa and Grandma, less they be accused of being accessories, and Wilkes was the line of communication between Dad and his family. Dot said that Dad always said that the baby couldn't have been his and that Grandpa got the marriage annulled.

Lucille moved to Union Co, NC and married Sam Aycoth, settling near New Hope United Methodist Church on Plyler Mill Rd. I don't know what Sam did for a living, but he played the organ at the Church and Neal Gill led the music. Mr Neal's sons Billy and then Jack would become the choir directors at Matthews Baptist when we were growing up there. Jackie and his beautiful wife Joyce were like members of the family. Jack sang a solo of the hymn Great Is Thy Faithfulness at my Grandpa Beaty's funeral and sang the Holy City and the Lord's Prayer at Dad's and joined Bill, Harry, me and others in a quasi-concert and sing-along at Plantation Estates after Christmases, which Mom started when Harry, Kate and their kids, Alexandra, David and Meredith (Tommy, Tim and I drove to Annapolis, Md a few weeks ago for Meredith's marriage to Winston Joe, where we saw Alexandra and her husband Mike and their precious 1+ yr-old Jo [lots of Jo(e)s with Caldwell DNA, at least allegedly] and David, whose wife Katherine stayed back in Halifax, Nova Scotia, great with child) would visit from Md after Christmas. They started with Harry, a terrific tenor with a good ear for pitch (I can't count all the times I was blasting out my baritone version of Trees, trying to imitate Nelson Eddy, and the Toreador Song from Carmen, trying to sound like the operatic baritone who I listened to dozens, probably hundreds of times on one of several semi-classical Firestone LP albums that Mom bought, in the shower on Rama Rd, only to have my performance rudely interrupted by Harry, walking by in the hall and opening the bathroom door to yell, above my bellowing, "you're flat, Tom", and I was, always have been though I longed to be sharp!) and Kate, with a gorgeous soprano voice, giving solo and duet performances and somehow Bill and I got pulled in, or more likely, inserted ourselves and it grew from there.

Those musical extravaganzas, at least to us and the Plantation Estaters, ran from sometime after Dad died on Dec 10, 1989 at 81 (he and Mom had moved to Planation in January of that year) until a year or two before Mom moved from her apartment into the "need a little help" wing a year or so before she died in August, '06, two months shy of her 97th birthday. (Little to do with this story but I like to say that no one but Mom ever balanced her checkbook, not because she didn't want anyone to know her business, but because she could and enjoyed the challenge.) The "concerts" were held in the community room which held 100+, maybe closer to 200 and several times there was standing room only. After several years of just Caldwells, we talked Jackie into joining us and after a few more years, with Mom advocating for more vocal power, I invited my good friend an pretty good tenor, Andy Boggs and one of my law partners and pretty good baritone, David Lee and Bill invited several of his friends and fellow choir members at Providence Baptist to join us until we had 12 or 15 singers. We were accompanied on the piano every year by Rachel Carr Hood, my good friend, Bill Carr's oldest sister and the organist at Matthews Baptist, I guess from when their dad, Bryant Carr came to be our pastor about 1956 or 7 until long after he retired 20+ years later. I know I didn't but I hoped Mom paid her at least a little something. (Rachel played and, as I've mentioned above, Jackie sang at Dad's funeral in Dec, '89. I'm sure Mom gave them a stipend. Bill Carr spoke and Rachel played at Mom's funeral in August, 2006. Brother Bill and I

were executors of her estate. I wrote a check from the estate to Bill Carr to help defray his travel expenses from Atlanta and wrote in the memo section "Good words", and on the check to Rachel, I wrote "Good playing".)

Mom recorded the music from the after Christmas concerts on a little, cheap cassette tape recorder she had and many a time when we would visit her throughout the year, she would be playing those tapes. She loved them and enjoyed her status at Plantation as THE Impresario! I think she looked forward to them more than most anything. As the season approached, she would tell us that everyone she knew wanted to be sure the concert was on and wanted to know when. And the word spread outside the Plantation. Many Matthews Baptist folks attended and some from Providence Baptist came from Charlotte. Aunt Dot and Uncle Bill Black and Uncle Don and Aunt Jo (another Caldwell but a non-DNA Jo) came a time or two. Mom even found David Lee's mother's # and called and invited her to come from Unionville, in northern Union Co, and I think she did come once with David. She had a box of those cassettes when she died. Bill, what became of them? If you have any, let's get together and play them this Christmas, assuming we can find a cassette tape player. No telling how soon we'll be joining Dad, Mom and Jackie in hopefully the Heavenly Choir! Hope I don't have to audition and if I do, hope I'm not too flat!

One other note about New Hope Methodist: Steve Lee, born and raised in Shelby, is a Davidson College classmate of mine, who is an outstanding organ and pianist, first becoming a minister of music and then an ordained United Methodist minister, now retired in Davidson, where the Wildcat sports teams, particularly the basketballers, have one of their most stalwart supporters. I'm not sure that I even knew Steve at Davidson, which says much about the archaic fraternity social system then in effect, coupled with my and many of my peers immaturity. I got to know him when we were both involved with starting an alumni service initiative 6-8 years ago and we have become good friends since. We had dinner together at Julia's Talley House family style restaurant in Troutman, NC in the spring. Steve served several Charges (I think that's what the Methodists call it when one minister serves several small churches) in Union Co, including the Charge which includes New Hope, so he was Joe's pastor for a time. I guess I learned of his and Joe's pastor/parishioner relationship when he told me that he had ministered in Union County and I shared with him that I'd recently learned that I had a half-brother in Union Co and probably told him where he lived and may also have told him that he was a member of New Hope. Several years ago I sat beside Steve at a Homecoming service at New Hope (Joe and/or his wife Lillian were under the weather and didn't attend), and a year or so after that, I sat beside him in the bass section at a Messiah sing-along at Davidson College at which students sang the solos, all accompanied by a small orchestra. I'm a tolerable (a word Dad liked to use) baritone when a good musician is singing in my ear (I wrote this before, while editing, inserting about my proclivity toward being, if not flat, partially deflated).

While Bill and I were performing investigative work regarding the shocking news we had just learned, Janet, ever the sleuth, struck out on her own, somehow discovering where Joe and Lillian lived (I don't know how we even found out that they lived in Union Co and I'm not sure that Janet even knew that when she started tracking them), and, despite my telling her that Bill, Harry and I should be the ones to

decide if, how, when and where we should meet Joe, she drives over to the little store at the corner of Plyler Mill and Griffith Rds, less than 5 miles from where we lived on Stack Rd and inquires about Joe Aycoth and is pointed to his small brick house directly across Plyler Mill from the store, and she goes over and meets him. For those who know me, you can easily imagine my reaction, a combination of irateness, bewilderment and the reaction of one who's a victim of skullduggery. Now that Caldwell, though thru a Tweed (Janet's maiden name) to Aycoth contact had been made, Bill and I decided we should meet Joe and arranged to meet him for lunch at the Palace (run by a family of Greeks in a less than palatial building but with food fit for royalty, that is, my kind of royalty, i.e. working class folks-can't beat their flounder sandwich or fried squash) Restaurant in Monroe, the perfect meeting place.

Bill, Harry and I obviously found the allegation that Dad had fathered a child before Bill if not preposterous, certainly hard to swallow, much less digest, and the thought of DNA testing crossed at least my mind if not theirs. Joe, like me, more than Bill who favors the Beatys and Harry, who's half and half, had the Caldwell hair coloring of reddish brown and some freckling on his face and hands and several times after we sat down in a booth, I noticed some slight mannerisms that reminded me a little not just of Dad but of the Caldwells in general, such as did his humble, almost self-effacing personality. Joe told us that his mother had always told him that Dad was his father but that Dad and the Caldwells had turned their backs on him and Lucille, so she took Joe and moved to Union Co and married Sam Aycoth and though Sam never legally adopted him, he adopted the name Aycoth as his last name. Skipping ahead, I'll tell now that Joe died just a few months ago and I just googled his obituary which gives his name as Joseph Allen "Joe" Aycoth, Sr, born March 6, 1933 and died July 25, 2021, "son of the late Sam Wesley & Myrtle Lucille Hemby Aycoth". Joe said that he legally changed his name when he applied for a Social Security card and had to produce his birth certificate and decided to make the name he had been using all his life his legal name.

Speaking of names, Grandpa's name was John McCamey and Dad's, Joe McCamey, and of course, Joe's, Joe McCamey Caldwell, Jr. Bill's is William (don't know who he was named for; Grandpa Beaty was William Badger and his oldest son was William and Dad had an Uncle Billy, whose name I suppose was William) McKamie. All Bill remembers in answer to his inquiry as to why his middle name sounds like but is spelled differently from Grandpa's and Dad's was that he was told by Dad and/or Mom that a preacher or someone of similar stature and purported authority had said that McKamie was the correct spelling instead of McCamey. Correct? We, that is Bill, Harry nor I (maybe Mary Lynn does) don't even know where the name came from, much less it's proper spelling, but it's pretty apparent that Dad and Mom wanted to connect Bill to the Caldwell lineage but that McCamey was already taken so they had to change a few letters. I just googled McCamey and found that it's a town in Upton Co, TX, the "Wind Energy Capital of Texas" and that McKamie is in Mars Hill Township, Lafayette Co, Ark and is 279' above sea level (amazing what you can learn on Wikipedia when looking for something else). If we have Longhorn or Razorback ancestors, it's news to me.

Of course Bill and I told Joe that we had just discovered him and his brotherhood. I'm not sure that he believed us at first, or maybe it just took a little time for it to sink in, but when it did, I could detect what to me was a noticeable difference in him, like a great weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He said

that he knew about us, knew that I was a lawyer in Monroe and lived on Forest Hills Dr, on its corner with Griffith Rd, which he drove past every day on his way to work as a house painter and wallpaper hanger. I asked him why he didn't make contact with me and he said that he assumed I knew about him and since I hadn't previously made any contact with that he didn't want to upset the apple cart. WOW! What a thing to learn at age 67 or 8.

I don't remember if it was that day after lunch or sometime later that Bill and I visited Joe and Lillian in their small home on Plyler Mill Rd. Their living arrangements were much different than at Bill and Sylvia's well maintained house and lot in the Cotswold section of Charlotte or mine and Janet's home on Forest Hills, one of the nicest streets in Monroe, or the home we had built in 2002 on 60 acres on Stack Rd. Their living room was cluttered with stacks of old newspapers and magazines and the toys and food and water dishes of the Doberman which usually lived in, but thankfully wasn't then in the house, though he was on a later visit I made. There was an old camper out back beside a huge pile of split firewood, with a Confederate flag flying on a pole beside it. Son Eddie lives in the camper, sells firewood and tints car windows in a small building nearby. I've met him but not Joe, Jr, who's married with, I think 2 children and lives several miles away. There is another metal Quonset hut type building on the property with an old vehicle or two in it and a small tractor with which they plowed a large garden .

Several, maybe most of our older cousins knew of Dad's marriage to Lucille and of purportedly fathering Joe and apparently thought that Bill, Harry and I knew as well but just didn't talk about it. When she found out that we had made contact with Joe, Mary Lynn spread the word and several of our more curious cousins wanted to meet him, so Joe and Lillian joined Janet and me, Bill and Sylvia, Mary Lynn and Dan, Dianne Wagstaff (Aunt Vernon Caldwell Alexander's oldest daughter), Ben Franklin (Aunt Faire Caldwell Franklin's son, middle of her three children), Ben being Mary Lynn's assistant family historian and who will probably step into her shoes when she retires (Ben are you training an assistant for when you are promoted?) and if I remember correctly, Aunt Dot was also there, at the Brown Derby (another Greek owned eatery, this one then owned but recently sold by Jimmy The Greek, which I call him, since I never can remember and couldn't pronounce if I could, his last name-a good friend) Restaurant in Monroe. Afterwards, we all went out to our house on Stack Rd. After Joe and Lillian left, Dot said that she had her doubts that Dad was Joe's father, saying that she didn't think they resembled each other at all, which I suspect was her way of keeping Dad's moral reputation intact. Sometime later Harry was visiting and Bill came down and Joe came over to our house. Dad sang bass, joined by Bill and then me, while Harry sang tenor and Mom soprano in the Matthews Baptist choir. We learned that Joe was a singer and had sung in some gospel quartets, so we four Caldwell brothers sang a few hymns, a cappella, as that's about the only music Joe, Bill and I knew, unlike our more urbane and worldly little bro, Harry. I think we harmonized pretty well. How flat was I, Harry?

I think that's the only time Harry met Joe and I don't think Bill saw him many more times, though I think he called Joe a few times, maybe on his birthdays, but living near, I visited him and Lillian several times. They also came to my office to review their wills, living trusts, powers of attorney, living wills, the typical end of life legal documents, all in a slick looking notebook which had been prepared by a law firm in Raleigh who received their personal information from a guy who sold them an annuity in which they

place the retirement money that Lillian had accrued years before when she worked for, I think she said, Exxon in Charlotte. Like for most folks, an annuity was not a good investment for them, but a lot of them get sold, particularly to retirees. They never met the lawyer, who'd hired a paralegal in Monroe to get a copy of the deeds for their home and send him so he could draw a deed from Joe and Lillian to the living trust he had prepared, all a relatively new legal technique, designed to avoid probate, and foisted on clients/victims after scaring them with horror stories about the cost, time and legal entanglements experienced by a few (probate and even living trusts can result in excessive cost and time if the heirs hire an unscrupulous or incompetent lawyer and can result in legal entanglements if the heirs want to fight, a lawyer's dream). I looked at the deed and it was only for a small strip of land and Joe said they had purchased a strip from their neighbor alongside the main tract of several acres their house was on in order to have room to plant some fruit trees beside their house. I got our paralegal to get me a copy of the deed for their home tract, which was still in Joe and Lillian's name because the paralegal who looked up the deed for the Raleigh lawyer only found and sent him the deed for the strip. If the lawyer knew anything about real estate law and taken the time to read the legal description in the deed, he would have seen it was for only a narrow strip and couldn't have been the deed for the tract their house was on, or if he had asked the paralegal to get him a copy of the property tax listing for that tract, he could have told by the tax value that a house wasn't located on it.

I think they paid \$12-1500 for the Raleigh lawyers services, which constituted malpractice because the only thing that would have avoided probate, the whole reason for going through all this, would have been the strip of land with a few apple trees on it, of negligible value, while the house, Joe and Lillian's only substantial asset, would have had to go through probate when the second of them died (it wouldn't have had to when the first died because the deed was in both of their names, which is called a tenancy – by-the-entireties, which means title passes by operation of law to the surviving spouse). I prepared and they signed and I recorded a deed from Joe and Lillian to their living trust, so that, unless they made later changes, there would have been no need for probate when Joe died in July and there won't be when Lillian passes. I retired from practicing law in 2008 but my former office let me hang around and avail myself of the copier and some secretarial help occasionally. I had Denise Beaver, who began working as my secretary probably 25 years before I retired and who is a better lawyer than some with a diploma, prepare the deed. I introduced Joe and Lillian to Denise, who witnessed and notarized their signatures and told them that if they ever needed help with their estates or anything else and I wasn't still around, to call Denise. I didn't nor could I, since I was no longer practicing (actually, when I stopped practicing, I turned in my law license so I wouldn't have to pay the annual licensing fee or take the required 12 hours of continuing education, which can be relatively expensive) charge them for my or Denise's services.

Sorry for all that legal stuff, but when I got started telling about it, I didn't know where to stop. Over the course of my visits with Joe and Lillian, I got the distinct impression that Lillian was rather bitter toward the Caldwells, including Bill, Harry and me, because of the way the family had treated, or in her view, mistreated Joe, and I can't say that I blame her. I never got that vibe from Joe, but I think Joe, Jr, who, as I said, I never met, felt like his mother did. Once, when Janet was travelling overseas with her friend,

Betty and Janet's dad, Mac Tweed, Col USMC, Retired was living with us, I took Mac over to meet Joe, which was a nice visit.

A not so nice visit occurred when our dog, Suzie was riding with me in my pickup, which she loved about as much as eating, to take our trash to the dump and while I was out, decided to stop by Joe's. He was out in his front yard and when he saw Suzie, whose head was poked out the window and who he had met and petted at our house, he came up and petted her and said to let her out, which, not seeing and thus assuming his Doberman was penned up or in the house, I did. Suzie hadn't trotted more than 20' from the truck when that Doberman came tearing out of the building where Eddie, I guess, was tinting some car windows, and jumped Suzie taking her to the ground, his jaws on her throat. DAMNATION!!! I'm almost reliving those few seconds as I type this, probably the most panicked I've ever felt in my life (close was the time I almost had a wreck in 1967 with Janet's grandmother sitting in the front seat with me, but that unfolded it seems a little slower, in full view, seeing it all in front of me, able to see almost from the instant it began what the outcome, fortunately, was likely to be), but this...this creature, this vicious killing machine, came out of nowhere and in an instant Suzie was down, whimpering at the top of her lungs, me screaming, knowing that he could crush her windpipe or rip it out with one bite. Joe ran toward them, yelling his head off and pulling on his dog's collar. I came up behind him, the Doberman, that is, not Joe, and kicked as hard as I've ever kicked a football, my toe right up his anus, maybe even got a little of his coddles, so hard it lifted his hind quarters off the ground. My kick combined with Joe's screaming and pulling got him off Suzie.

I thought Suzie was dead, but in a second or two, she jumped up. I looked for blood and not seeing any, I shooed her, on second thought, I didn't have to prompt her, she instinctively ran to and jumped in the truck when I opened the door, Joe right behind me, frantically apologizing and saying he told Eddie to shut their dog up when he saw me pull in with Suzie. I don't remember what I said; I was probably shaking like a leaf. I went around to get in the truck, Joe following me, still apologizing profusely. Then Eddie came driving up beside me in his truck, almost hysterical. He got out and came toward my open door and I thought he was going to try to slug me, but he was trying to shake my hand, yelling/crying loudly. I don't remember what, if anything, I said, but I backed out in the yard and took off down the driveway as fast as I could without throwing gravel. That's the last time I was ever at Joe and Lillian's. I think Joe called me to see if Suzie was all right. I don't remember when that nightmare occurred in relation to the other encounters I had with Joe which I've described, such as taking Mac by and straightening out his estate plan, but my guess is that those all happened earlier, and that I didn't have much contact with Joe after that. I don't remember how I learned that Joe died in July.

I probably should skip what I'm getting ready to say, but I think I owe it to Dad to say it. If there is any incongruity in my Dad's life that I know anything about, it is the alleged and, from all appearances, true story of his fathering a child and then abandoning him and his mother, never providing any financial support and, for the rest of his life, never even acknowledging his existence. Maybe, like Aunt Dot, I'm trying to defend Dad's reputation, not so much from his reputed getting a girl pregnant but, as I said above, from his allegedly completely turning his back on her and (his and?) her baby. That is completely inconsistent with everything I knew about Dad. I never heard or knew of him to tell a lie, break the law

(except seeing what our '55 Dodge would do on a long straight-away in SC when I, 9 or 10, was on an overnite, maybe two, business trip with him) or do anything dishonorable. I never even heard him cuss except when the guy who fixed and seeded our yard soon after Dad built our house on Rama Rd in 1955 with a mixture of fescue and Bermuda seed (to this day I don't know why anyone would intentionally plant, to use the term I heard a farmer call it, "wiregrass") and Dad told him to cover the seed in case it rained, and he didn't, and sure enough it came a gully washer and washed that wiregrass seed down into the garden where Dad fought it the next 35 years, and I heard Dad say "I told that son-of-a-bitch to cover that seed". I would have said much worse!

In order to get Dad and Lucille's marriage annulled, I think Grandpa would have had to have brought a lawsuit against Lucille, and maybe her father, alleging coercion, which, if it happened the way Dot said, it certainly was, but I would think that if the judge knew Lucille was pregnant by Dad, and you would think that she and her father would have sworn up and down that he was, if in fact he was the father, I would also think that the judge would have been reluctant to annul the marriage; like nature abhors a vacuum, the law abhors illegitimacy. Annulment would have meant that Joe was illegitimate, the very thing that, in Dot's telling, old man Hemby wanted to avoid. Even after the marriage was annulled, if Dad was the father, he still would have been responsible for child support. My impression was that the Hemby family was not nearly as well to do as Grandpa's family (though cash poor, Grandpa owned a store across Weddington Rd from his house and had begun to accumulate land by putting a black sharecropper family on each farm he bought to raise cotton to help pay for the farm, having, by the time he died in 1942, acquired nearly 1,000 acres in Mecklenburg and Union Counties) and that the Caldwell's would have been a good financial target. If Dad was Joe's father, he would have been legally responsible to help support Joe even after Lucille married Sam Aycoth unless Sam had adopted Joe, which as I mentioned before, Joe said he never did.

Well, enough of my speculations in an attempt to uphold Dad's honor. We'll never know for sure if Dad was Joe's father and Joe our brother. If they were, let me paint a legal scenario which could have occurred if circumstances had been different. Dad inherited about 50 acres of Grandpa's land, all of which was divided among his 12 children after Grandma died circa 1960. The division was done by cross deeds, that is Dad's 11 siblings, and their spouses, deeded their interest in the 50 acres Dad was getting to him, and likewise, Dad, and Mom, signed deeds to his 11 siblings for their respective tracts of land. The deed for Dad's 50 acres was just to him, that is the deed was not made to Dad and Mom as tenants-by-the-entireties, which, as I discussed before, would have meant that if Dad died first, the property would have gone to Mom automatically, regardless of whether Dad had had a will and regardless of to whom he left his property if he had a will. Instead, because the deed to the land was just in Dad's name, the land would have been part of his estate and would have gone to whoever he left it to in his will, or, if he died intestate, that is without a will, it would have gone to his heirs. Under the laws of Intestate Succession in effect at that time, if I remember correctly, Mom would have gotten a life estate, which meant that she would have the right to possession of and to the crops it produced until her death, but the title to the land after her death would have been vested in Dad's children, which would have included Joe if he was Dad's child.

As it turned out, after I started practicing law and saw the deed to Dad for the 50 acres, I drew a deed to him and Mom, creating entireties property because he wanted Mom to have the property anyway, outright, so that she could sell it if she needed or just wanted to and entireties would pass the property to Mom directly and avoid probate. Putting the property in both of their names also provided some protection from creditors, such as if Dad had caused a wreck with injuries which exceeded his car liability insurance, then the injured parties couldn't come after the land for their damages. And, even if I hadn't prepared the deed to both he and Mom, he had a will that left everything outright to Mom, so the issue of who Dad's heirs are never arose. Mom, to avoid inheritance tax, gifted the property to Bill Harry and me. We sold it 12-14 years ago. For more details, which you probably don't care about, see the story I wrote entitled "DOWN IN THE COUNTRY, WITH A FEW DETOURS a year or more ago.

Speaking of detours, that was quite a ramble I took from telling about THANKSGIVINGS, which I haven't mentioned since the first paragraph. The Thanksgiving days, hereafter "Tday" for short, that I first remember and which I guess continued until Grandma Caldwell died in '59 or '60 were all spent at her house, attended by all, or most all of her 12 children and their children, covered dish style. I can smell the aroma of the dishes brought for the feast and hear the clamor, commotion and cackling laughter of a big, happy, family, the loudest, or if not the loudest certainly the most memorable laugh belonging not to a Caldwell but to an in-law, Uncle, by marriage to my Aunt Vernon, Dwight Alexander, and I think Aunt Vernon and Uncle Dwight would also win the duo, at least the married duo first prize for the loudest and most distinct guffawing. I don't remember the main course, which I guess consisted of several turkeys, but I can still taste my favorite Tday dish, cornbread dressing, followed closely by pecan pie. YUM! (BTW, guess the name of the conglomerate which owns KFC, whose headquarters are only a few miles from where I'm typing this in Louisville: YUM Brands, whose name is on the 20,000+ seat, new within the last 5 years or so basketball arena right on the Ohio River in downtown Louisville, the YUM Center, which is just a few blocks from the also recently built on the River, Muhammad Ali Center.)

Tday was also the opening day for the hunting season, rabbits, squirrels and quail. There were few if any deer in the wild in those days; I don't know why. The only deer we saw was at the Cameron Morrison farm out Sharon Rd, where he, a former governor, kept deer and maybe some other "exotic" animals fenced in and the public could drive by and gawk. His farm is now South Park, one of the snazziest shopping, office and eating and drinking venues in NC, maybe the SE, which has made his 3 grandchildren majorly rich. The oldest, Johnny, built Quail Hollow Country Club where, I guess, a major pro golf tour event is still played annually, starting out, if I remember correctly, as the Kemper Open, then the Wachovia, morphing, as Wachovia morphed, into the Wells Fargo. Johnny's brother Cammie owns a house in an area called Gleneagles, adjacent to the golf course, high on a ridge that parallels one of the par 5's, where he's neighbors, or used to be, with one or more of the Belk Brothers, former owners of the Belk Department Stores chain, and other deep pocketed Charlotteans. The Charlotte Observer, once a year, featured in its Homes section the highest priced home, according to the value as determined by the Mecklenburg Tax office, in Mecklenburg Co. Cammie's house made it one year, maybe more.

The Morrison house was actually in his wife Deedee's name. It was built by Ray Helms, a Union Co builder, whose son Ken worked on the house for two summers when he was a student at UNC. Ray, may he RIP, was not only a terrific builder but also one of the most honest and decent men I've ever known, somewhat self-effacing and certainly not a fast talker. He called me and said he needed me to draw up a contract for him to build a house in Charlotte and gave me the owner's name as Deedee Morrison, who I didn't know and whose husband Cammie's name I probably wouldn't have recognized either. I asked for the details, such as cost plus a percentage or a fixed price or whatever the arrangement was. He said it was cost plus a fee and then he gave me a fairly large number and I asked if that was a maximum or what, and Ray said, "no, that's my fee." I've told this story more than once in a small group of folks who knew Ray in his presence and it always got a laugh, including from Ray, whose cheeks might have gotten a little flushed. After Carolina, Ken went to Wake Forest Law School. We hired him out of school, and he's now the Helms in Helms Robison Lee & Bennett, the successor to my old firm. Ray had built a number of big houses in Charlotte and decided to slow down but didn't want to quit. After Ken joined our firm, he, a couple of my partners and I formed a company with Ray and we signed the loans and Ray built several spec houses, and after paying Ray an agreed on price for his services, we split the profits when it sold. We made a few bucks but quickly learned that the money isn't in the house building, it's in the land development, maybe the grist for a future story.

Janet and I owned 60 acres on Stack Rd, 4-5 miles south of Monroe and I wanted to move to the country so I asked Ray if he'd build one more house, and he did. It's the only house we've ever built. You've heard it said that building a house can be a nightmare, ranking near the top of the list of the most stressful things one, and particularly a couple can undertake. Well, there was some stress, mostly self-inflicted, none caused by Ray, who deserved a medal for putting up with our indecisiveness. Building a house is made so much easier when you have complete and total confidence in not only the skill, but also the honesty and integrity of the builder, and we had that in spades with Ray. He built it on a cost plus a percentage basis, not even including in the cost the cabinetry because we found a terrific furniture builder in Waxhaw who had gotten out of the cabinet business but who took us on when Janet went down to his shop and cried because at the last minute the premier cabinet maker in the area said he couldn't get to it. Ray also didn't include in the cost the rather expensive tile on the kitchen counters and backsplashes, the fireplace, the decorative bird tiles around the mirror and the one tile high highlight around the wall and shower in one bath, the leaf motif floor tile in another bath, and the 3 bathroom sinks, all of which were hand made by a wonderful lady and artist named Kathy Skye (sp?), who, with her husband Bob, lived about as far as you can drive back up along the Cane River, which originates on the western flanks of Mt Mitchell, at 6,683', the highest point east of the Mississippi River, leaving the pavement and crossing the river on an almost touching the water bridge, before proceeding along a narrow, one vehicle wide drive through the trees to its end, at where I guess Bob still lives in their Deltech round house. The address is on Bear Path, Burnsville, NC. Kathy, may she RIP, died of cancer some years ago. She and Bob came down and spent the night with us and Kathy laid out the leaf tiles in the back bathroom and arranged the tiles, imprinted with burlap, on the front of the fireplace. Every bill Ray presented us with was accompanied by the invoices which he had incurred for labor and material, to which he applied the percentage (I think it was 10%). I was always afraid that if a mistake was made, it

would have been in our favor, not Ray's. Ours was the last house Ray built before dying, in 2006 at 74, a year younger than I am now, from sepsis or some kind of rare infection. Ken is a chip off the block.

Oops, there I go again, from hunting rabbits down in the country to chasing them to Cam Morrison's at Quail Hollow, to Burnsville and to Stack Rd. Okay, I'm back on Matthews-Weddington Rd at Grandma Caldwell's in the early to mid-50's on Tday and opening day for blasting critters. I don't know if hunting licenses were required in those days but I don't remember any talk of them. Dad wasn't an adroit or frequent hunter. In fact, Tday is the only day I remember him engaging in the ages old male quest to put meat, and not domesticated meat, on the table. Oh my, I just jumped a rabbit but I promise I won't chase him too far. Speaking of domesticated meat, my father-in-law Mac Tweed (I think I mentioned him earlier) used to tell the story of a hog killing in Madison Co. It seems like there were several hogs penned up and they were just going to kill one. They were going to kill him with a .22 rifle before butchering him and I think it was one of his half-brothers, probably Carroll or Albert who said "I'm the best shot, I'll shoot him" and proceeded to shoot him in the snout, which of course ticked him off, the hog that is, but probably the other onlookers as well, and he jumped around, slinging blood all over the other hogs and maybe some spectators, till finally another gunslinger put him out of his misery. Tears are streaming down my face as I type this, envisioning Mac's telling it and laughing so hard his eyes are glistening.

One of the fantastic benefits of writing memories is the joy and fun it brings, and the remembrance of the people who've shared their lives with you. I'm still laughing with Mac as he's telling his hog story, just like he's sitting here with me

Dad owned a 16 gauge double-barreled shotgun and a bolt action .22 rifle. On this Tday morning, the hunters were ready to stalk their prey. I'm not sure who all was along besides Dad; probably Uncles Jack and Irb. I don't remember if Uncle Frank went along. The posse took out across the field across the road from the house, down below the old barn (where Dad, as a boy, was almost gored by a bull till saved by one of the black sharecroppers) and pond (where I saw [not on the Tday I'm talking about, but on a warner occasion], I think it was Uncle Bill Black, catch a big, maybe the first I'd ever seen, largemouth bass, and below which, I once, for the first and last time peed on an electric fence). Dad was carrying his shotgun and Uncle Don Dad's .22. I, 7 or 8, was tagging along to witness the fire-fight, wearing a game vest 3 sizes too big, which I guess was Dad's, though I don't remember it from home. We came up on a setting rabbit and Don took aim and squeezed the trigger but the safety was on. I think there was some yelling about where the safety was, enough for Bre'r Rabbit to make his getaway, with Don chasing after him, trying to get the safety off while trying to take aim at a running rabbit with a .22; reminds me of a scene from Benny Hill! Alvin York couldn't have made that shot. Maybe Dad or someone with a shotgun got Bre'r or later, some of Bre'r's kinfolk because I remember triumphantly carrying a bloody rabbit, maybe two in that game vest and blood getting on my clothes, which didn't make the season bright for Mom. A few years later I remember carrying Dad's shotgun by myself one afternoon, probably not Tday, down in the field behind the outhouse, orchard and hog pen hoping to flush a covey of quail, without any luck. I don't think I ever shot anything with his shotgun. I don't know what happened to it. Bill, do you have it? If you were wanting to sell it and was advertising its virtues as you would a used car, instead

of “low mileage”, you could say “fired infrequently”, and for a little humor you could add “and inaccurately”.

The Charlotte Carrousel (don’t know why that’s in the name) Christmas Parade was Tday afternoon. The floats and bands and other marchers lined up down East Blvd, right in front of Uncle Frank and Aunt Margaret’s house, maybe down as far as Freedom Park, before marching up to South Tryon and up it to and through the square, right in front of Santa’s workshop(s), otherwise known as Belk’s, Efid’s and Ivey’s and I guess all the way up North Tryon to Santa’s northern annex, Sears-Roebuck. More than once we drove half way across the county, from Grandma’s to Uncle Frank’s to see the spectacular, to us, floats and TV cowboy Fred Kirby ride his steed. Twenty or more years later we took Tommy and Tim to Tweetsie RR near Beech Mtn to see Fred and the good guys fight off the bad guys trying to rob the train, on which we were passengers. They put on a good show with the pistol shots sounding real, smoke coming from their barrels. I’m glad Alec Baldwin wasn’t pulling the trigger and that the blanks weren’t loaded by whoever was responsible for the guns on the set of the movie Rust where Baldwin unintentionally shot and killed one and injured another a few weeks ago. How stupidly tragic!

I emailed cousin Mary Lynn Caldwell Morrill (have I mentioned her heretofore), Uncle Frank and Aunt Margaret’s oldest about some details and I just read her response, some of which, in my quest for accuracy, I will now interject. She says that her family never went to Granny’s on Tday because Aunt Margaret always cooked a turkey and invited Aunt Mary and Uncle Ray Yandle and their children, Jerry and Carolyn up from Pageland. Further, ML remembers that the last float, the one with Santa, usually parked right in front of their house and that the parade route was up East Blvd, right on South Blvd, left on Morehead and then right on S Tryon. On reflection, I do remember that we had to walk up the parade route from Uncle Franks to see many of the floats and other paraders.

Speaking of tragedy, President John F Kennedy was shot and killed on Friday, November 22, 1963, six days before Tday on the 28th. I don’t specifically remember anything about that Tday but I’m sure it must have been somewhat somber. They had the Carrousel Parade, though it may have been postponed a week or so. The reason I remember that it was held is because in my senior East Meck annual there is a photo of our Carrousel princess, Marilyn Lowry riding on a float in the parade. Marilyn and I were the superlatives “Best All ‘Round” at McClintock in the 9th grade and also at East our senior year. I think being best all round is kind of like my law partner, Frank Griffin commented when someone said that so-and-so was a “nice fellow” that “yes, but there isn’t much of a market for nice fellows”.

I don’t remember anything about Tdays in college until my senior year, 1967. Janet and I were married and living in a little house just north of Davidson, awaiting the arrival of Tom, Jr, who arrived on Christmas Eve around 7:00 PM, just missing being a Christmas baby. He’ll be 54 in a few weeks. I had hurt my knee against East Carolina in the 3rd game of my senior season, ending my football career, or so I thought. My injury was primarily strained ligaments and tendons, not torn cartilage, and therefore didn’t required surgery. After the college season ended, the inaugural Shriner’s East-West NC College All Star game was played at NC State’s brand new Carter-Findley Stadium in Raleigh on, I think it was, the Friday after Tday. Our head coach at Davidson, Homer Smith was an assistant for the West, the head

coach being Tom Harp from Duke. Five or six of my Davidson teammates joined players from NC State, Duke and some other smaller schools in the western part of the state against the East, its players from coming from Carolina, Wake Forest and some smaller schools in the east. I don't know who was supposed to punt for the West or what happened to him, but Homer called me on Wednesday and asked if my knee was well enough for me to punt, and I said yes and headed for Raleigh. I don't remember much about the game, like who won or how many fans there were, but I do remember that it was the best punting experience I had since I started punting for my team in the 8th grade. I don't know why but the rule for this game was that there was no rushing the punter, so I just took my time and teed off on the pigskin. Man, was that fun. (A side note: I guess NC State architects and engineers designed the stadium, with stands on two sides and the field house at one end, just behind the end zone. It was 2 stories, with all glass facing the field. There was a narrow balcony running the length of the 2nd floor. They had guys with long handle nets on the ground and on the balcony to catch extra points and field goals before they shattered the glass. I wonder what happened to the guy, or gal, who designed that sleek looking and impractical field house. Reckon he transferred to agricultural design, designing pig pens, feed lots, milking barns, and poultry houses, or maybe he designed the two courthouses in Monroe, one which opened in '72 and one maybe 15 years ago, two of the ugliest buildings I've ever seen and the practical design of which only barely exceeds their ugliness.

Janet stayed with Mom and Dad while I was off punting and spent her time organizing the press clippings Mom had saved of my football career. Thanks Mom and Janet. I plan to donate it along with my Bible 11(Old Testament) and 12(New Testament) notes from my freshman year and my History 11(European history) notes from my sophomore year to the Caldwell Archives which I intend to create and endow with \$75 to be housed in the furnace room of the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house in Davidson.

***I found the instructions for a paper we were required to write for History 11 in the front of my notebook and thought you might be interested:

"Instructions: 1) This is pledged work (Me: all papers and tests at Davidson required your signature at the end, following your writing of the word "PLEDGE" which was short for your promise, or pledge, that you neither gave nor accepted help on the pledged work, the penalty for violation of which was potentially expulsion from school); 2) due date is May 10(1966); 3) Papers must be typed; 4) Length: Approximately 1500 to 2000 words

Use the following questions as topics or suggestions for the themes of the essay:

- 1) Explain clearly the dilemma of the 20th century. Stress the problems and issues facing society. (Me: Dr Marrott did refer us to some pages in our textbook for guidance)
- 2) Describe the principles and appeal upon which the totalitarian regimes based their solutions to this dilemma.
- 3) Describe the strengths of the democratic systems as seen in Britain and France.
- 4) Comment on the nature of the totalitarian attack on the concept of individuality and liberalism.

- 5) To what extent were the various totalitarian countries antagonistic to each other. For example, show the ideological differences between Soviet Communism and Italian Fascism.
- 6) To what extent, and in what ways, do the socialist and liberal "solutions" differ?"

I found my Bible notes, which also had a test, half multiple choice in its front and the History notes shortly before driving with Tommy and Tim to Annapolis, MD for the Nov 7 wedding of Harry and Kate's youngest, Meredith to Dr Winston Joe. I took them along. The boys and brother Bill did pretty well on the Bible 12 multiple choice, mainly about Paul's letters. Meredith's brother David, a history major and buff rolled his eyes at the issues to be addressed in the History paper, saying, and of course, accurately that books and books have been and still are being written on these subjects. I wish I had a copy of my paper to see how I condensed them into less than 2000, more likely less than 1500 words. My motto was Osgood Conklin's (Our Miss Brooks' principal) standard words, without even saying "Hello" after answering a phone call: "Wasted words are wasted time, Osgood Conklin on the line. Make it brief!" One further note of historical importance: as kids we had a hockey game with players which were stationary except when we rotated them with a control we twisted on our end of the board in order to shoot the marble puck toward the other goal. Each of us had a goalie to protect our goal which we slid back and forth with a short metal popsicle-like stick. My goalie was Osgood! ***

After we moved to Monroe, I guess we ate most Tday feasts at Dad and Moms, along with Bill and Sylvia, Will and Ruth, though in the early 70's, when Tommy was probably 5 and Tim 1 or so, we drove out to spend Tday with Mac and Mary and Doug in Nashville. When I told Tim I was writing this story, he told me not to leave out the George Pinsak story. George was, and probably still is an orthodontist in Monroe who had bought a farm of 75-100 acres which had some old poultry and other buildings on it. He built a spectacular post and beam, timber frame house on it 25-30 years ago, but before building out there, he stored some muscle cars he collected in an old poultry house. George like to be on the cutting edge of new things so he bought two of the first 4-wheelers and invited me to stop by and see them in the barn where his cars were, so I met him out there one day after work and he let me ride one. He extracted a king's ransom from me over a few years by straightening Tommy and Tim's molars, so at that point he was probably working on and knew patient Tommy and of Tim. He told me to bring the boys out any time and let them ride his toys, whether he was there or not. So, one sunny Tday morning, we went out to George's farm. He wasn't there. Tommy got on one of the 4-wheelers and rode, slowly at first, but with increasing confidence, a little faster, all around the 20-25 acre pasture. I got on the other one, with Tim behind and we lit out, too. Tim was probably 7 or 8. I don't remember whether he was begging to drive it by himself or if I asked him if he wanted to, but in any event, he started driving it around, his speed increasing, like Tommy's, with experience. The pasture had one tree, a big oak, right in the middle. I don't know how or why, maybe Tim knows and can explain, but he ran smack into it. He must not have been going too fast because he stayed on. I guess it choked down as I ran over and to my relief and delight discovered that neither he nor the machine appeared hurt. I do remember this; it scared the mess out of me! I didn't see any dents or even scratched paint on George's expensive toy, thank goodness. To be honest, I'm not sure I told George about it. George, if by some chance you ever read this, I apologize for not being forthcoming about the accident. After our 4-wheeling adventure, we went to Mom and Dad's for turkey, with a tale to tell!

Mom and Dad moved into Plantation Estates, a retirement community in Matthews in Jan, '89, paying something like \$120K for the right to occupy their nice two bedroom, 2 bath first floor apartment with a screen porch, less than 50' from where they parked their car. Of course they also paid a monthly fee. I thought that the entrance fee, which they wouldn't get back regardless of how long they lived, was exorbitant, but was I wrong. As I've said, Mom lived at Plantation until she passed away at 96, 17 years after Dad died. It was probably the most sound financial investment they ever made. I think Dad was elected their floor's representative to the residents' council, and come spring, Mom was transplanting daylilies from their home on Rama Rd, which they hadn't yet sold but which, if I remember correctly, they were letting a foreign missionary family live, maybe rent free or at a below market rental, to the shrubbery bed, which she enlarged, along the porch. They knew some of the residents, including their neighbors, Hunter and Millie Pharr, of the Sardis Rd and Church Pharrs, a couple of miles from 2318 Rama Rd (Dad&Moms house), Sardis Church being the sponsor of the Cub Scout pack Mom helped lead and the Boy Scout Troop Bill was very active in when we lived on Sharon Amity.

I was in Cubs but not the BSA. I don't know what rank Bill reached as a Scout. The Mecklenburg County Scout Council's camp was Camp Steere on Lake Wylie and I remember that Bill attended at least one summer camp week there because Dad, Mom, Harry and I visited on Wednesday family night. I remember thinking how cool it was, camping on Lake Wylie. A boy ages out of Boy Scouts at 18. The next step is Explorers, which you may can join before 18. As the name implies, boys can Explore something that interests them. Bill joined an Explorer group (I don't know what Explorer groups are called, maybe a post) of Sea Scouts, sponsored by some church in Oakhurst, maybe the Methodist Church on Monroe Rd across from where my friend, Rusty Abernathy lived, with a real Navy Hellcat airplane in his backyard (I may have written about this in a previous story, but if not, I will at some point- can you imagine, a REAL WWII HELLCAT, still running in your backyard?). Their Sea Scout post(?) owned a large diesel powered boat which I think had been given to them by the Coast Guard and was docked on Lake Wylie, probably at Camp Steere. Bill and his mates were always going out there on Saturdays to swab the decks and generally maintain their ride, and I guess they usually took it out on a cruise. We went out there for a cruise on a Saturday family day. Cruising on that behemoth, when compared to the motorboats rocking in its wake, was way cooler than just camping at the Steere. What I mainly remember about the cruise was a bloody finger, not mine but of some kid who stuck his in the siren when they switched it on. Wonder if he ever became a Sea Scout?

Back to where I left Mom and Dad at Plantation Estates. Dad's ticker got weaker and weaker. He was in Presbyterian Hospital when Hurricane Hugo roared up from Charleston through the Charlotte and Monroe area (I stayed up most of the night listening to the wind howl- we didn't have much damage at our house but had over 20 large oaks blow down on a 4 acre lot we owned beside our friends, Andy and Sue Boggs, who fortunately were out of town but came home to several big trees across their driveway, but luckily, none on their house) on Sept 9, '89. I went up to see Dad in the hospital a day or later and he had been so busy getting jabbed and monitored that I don't think he even knew about the storm. If I remember, I drove him back to Plantation or maybe just around town to see the trees down and in the process of being cleared away. I think Dad came back to the medical wing at Plantation and stayed there until Sunday night, December 10, when Mom called to tell us Dad was on his way back to Presbyterian in

an ambulance. Janet and I immediately drove from Monroe to the hospital in Charlotte, but by the time we got there, Joe McCamey Caldwell, as someone said at the moment of Lincoln's death, "belonged to the ages". I'm so glad that Janet and I had visited Mom and Dad at Plantation the previous night. Mom was sitting with Dad in his hospital type room in the medical wing. I helped him take a shower because he was so weak. It was the last time I saw my Dad alive. Typing this reminds me and I hope you, that none of us are promised tomorrow, so don't put off what you should do today. My saying this is the height of hypocrisy. 25-30 years ago I saw the 50th wedding anniversary announcement of my junior high school football and baseball coach Tom Ligon and his wife, with their picture in the Charlotte Observer and I tore it out and laid it on top of my chest-of-drawers to remind me to go visit Coach (to me and I suspect most guys who played sports, your coaches remain "Coach", even 60 years later, they don't age into "Mister" or, God forbid, "Tom" or "Dal" (jr hi basketball) or "Don, Dave, Jim or Baker" (hi school football, with Baker also bball", "Dick" or "Haywood" (hi school AD and track, and jv bball), or "Tom" (college freshman football), or "Homer, Dave, Ken, Dick" and a few others (college varsity football) or "Heath" (college track). It laid there until I read Coach Tom Ligon's obituary in the Observer. Too late for a visit!

Tday, 1990, the first since Dad's death, Janet and I took Mom to Severna Park, MD to visit Harry and family. We drove up on Tday, a great time to be on the road; virtually no traffic. We came up through the Shenandoah Valley on I-81 and by Lexington, VA we were ready for some turkey. Serendipitously (Mom probably never used that adverb but she loved its noun core, "serendipity") we found an old inn that was serving a Tday buffet. It was exquisite. We all 3 loved it and ate our fill, topping off with probably the best pecan pie I've ever eaten, and that's a lot of pecan pies. I don't know how I stayed awake for the rest of the drive-Janet probably drove some. We got to Harry and Kate's about dark and stepped into the slate floored foyer, everyone laughing and hugging, and out of nowhere, David, probably 7 or 8 bounded up for a chest bump, anticipating, I suppose that I would grab him, but as I wasn't prepared, he bounced off my chest and onto that slate floor. I can still hear the sound of his head banging against that slate, the same hollow sound as when Tommy thumped Brewster's (Clifford Burch) noggin on the crowded, standing room only church van, the crowding necessitated by the 2nd van's water pump going out on a Sunday afternoon as we headed up I-77 to summer Boy Scout Camp at Raven's Knob, near Mt Airy, NC. All of Troop 109, including me, thought Tommy had killed the Brewster and the same thought passed quickly through my mind in Harry's foyer. Fortunately David sprang up from the floor and a Tday tragedy was averted. I know, I know, I'm always offering platitudinal clichés or is clichéic platitudes preferable, but my awareness thereof won't prevent me from offering another here: how our routine lives can be completely turned upside down, changed from great joy to unbearable tragedy, in an instant, or, as Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye". As the sergeant on Hill Street Blues used to tell his men before releasing them on patrol each morning, "Be careful out there". We can never be too careful! We drove home from Harry and Kate's on the Sunday after Tday, down I-95 and 85. Miserable! The worst long drive of my life! Bumper to bumper all the way! I've never driven any distance on the Sunday after Tday since.

About 10 Tdays ago Tim wrote a Tday play for all of us to perform before digging in to the grub. I don't know how historically accurate it was but it seemed pretty authentic to us actors. He assigned all

attendees a role and may have emailed us the script to bone up on our lines and in the email said something about costumes. The attendees were Tim and family, of course, Tommy and fam, Janet and me (I was Myles Standish-Emma and Anna made me a Lincolnesque stove pipe hat out of black construction paper-wish I'd had a blunderbuss), Pam, who's Sara's mom, and her husband, Wayne Hettinger, and Wayne's buddy Hank and his former tv announcer daughter, Michelle, I think her name is. Apparently Pam and Wayne were assigned the role of Indians and just as apparently, they took their roles as seriously as they did Tim's facetious mention of costumes. They had found a terrific costume store. Wayne came in wearing what appeared to be genuine leather of some kind, maybe even buffalo hide pants and jacket, sporting face paint and a headdress. Pam was the perfect squaw, with her matching skirt and jacket, matching Wayne's, that is, with a beaded head band holding her one feather. I don't remember whether she wore the feather in the front or back. The play was a huge success. I wish Mom and Dad and Mary and Mac had been there to see it. I'm hoping that one of the participants reads this and comes forward with a video of it. I know that Myles Standish, and I expect all of the now 10 year older Pilgrims and Native Americans would love to see it.

Which brings me to Tday, 2021, just a couple of weeks ago. Tim and Sara have friends whose daughter, Addy is Sophie's best friend, who, eschewing subdivision life, have recently bought a small farm where they're raising some animals for eating, including several turkeys which they had organically fattened up for someone's Tday table. Tim and Sara bought a big gobbler which their Green Acre friends had slaughtered and plucked and I guess eviscerated, ready for baking. Pam and Wayne were hosting a family Tday feast and Tim volunteered to cook and bring Big Bird. Unfortunately, the weekend before Tday, Tim came down with Covid, despite having received both vaccinations but being boosterless. Kim had invited me to lunch at hers and Tommy's, with her Mom Carole and Carole's husband Don, always a fun twosome and planned to eat around 1:00 so I could drop by and get dessert at Pam and Wayne's. Sara cooked Big Bird which they ate it at home in quarantine. I had way more of a delicious Tday feast at Kim and Tommy's than I needed, played a couple of games of Mexican Train dominoes, which Kim remembered that Mom loved to play, and watched a comedian on Utube who they wanted to introduce me to because his comedy is clean (he performs at churches-he was funny) but whose name I forget, all while Don slept on the couch while the Utube was playing on the TV and everyone was talking and laughing, with Emma and/or Anna sitting on and getting up and down from the couch while he slept, without missing a snore. Don can do some napping, made necessary by the mini-stroke and a multitude of other medical issues he's had the last few years. After he woke up, I decided I'd better head back to Louisville, just under an hour's drive from Tommy and Kim's, not far passed the Jim Beam distillery, which is just downstream from the Forks of the Elkhorn, in the outskirts of Frankfort, the capitol of Kentucky. I got home just in time to take a nap, a good conclusion to Thanksgiving day, 2021, and a good conclusion to this Thanksgivings story.

Hope you got a chuckle or two out of it. Thanks for reading, Rambling Tom. Writing finished at 1:00 PM on Saturday, Dec 11, 2021, in my recliner in Louisville, Ky. Editing completed in a less comfortable chair in the Florida room of our log cabin, under contract to be sold, the cabin, not the chair, at 2:15 PM on Wednesday, December 15, 2021.

