

“Before I Was, There Were...”

In truth, I almost was not. Let me explain.

My mother and father were married on St. Valentine’s Day at the Red Jacket Community Church in Red Jacket, WV. The bride wore an ivory satin tea-length wedding dress, and a luminous strand of pearls, which were a gift from the groom. The groom was attired in a tailored black suit. The wedding ceremony and reception were perfect.

The excitement started when my grandmother, my uncle, my mother, and, my father arrived back at my grandparent’s two-story house in Red Jacket. My grandmother, wise woman that she was, noticed my grandfather looking out from their upstairs bedroom window. He was holding a shotgun.

Without a word to the wedding party disembarking from the car, my grandmother went inside the house, upstairs to her bedroom, and without so much as a raised voice calmly took the shotgun from my grandfather along with the half empty fifth of sherry sitting on the windowsill. Sherry was grandfather’s drink of choice; other rough hewn men of the mountains might have chosen bourbon or some other more common spirit such as moonshine. One would almost expect to see him lounging around the house in slippers and a velvet smoking jacket, sipping a glass of sherry!

My grandfather had not wanted my mother - valedictorian of her graduating class from Matewan High, Golden Horseshoe winner, Sunday school teacher - to marry someone like my father. Although he was from a fine, upstanding family. He had quite the reputation around the area as a “playboy”, certainly not the type of guy a father wants his lovely daughter to date, much less marry. Therefore, grandfather refused to walk my mother down the aisle and give her away. That honor went to my uncle Stuart. Grandfather was so deadset against these nuptials, he decided he would “nip things in the bud” by killing my father.

Naturally, if grandfather had succeeded, neither I, nor my older brother and sister, would be here today.