

Wednesday's Child, the autobiography of a retired Cardiologist, spans seven decades and is written in three parts: Youth, Manhood, and Old Age. It is an intimate vignette of incidents, personal and medical anecdotes, facts, and opinions.

**Wednesday's Child:
The Autobiography, Musings, and Rants of a
Contemporary Physician - Part One**

By Alan N DeCarlo M.D.

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WEDNESDAY'S CHILD

The Autobiography, Musings, and Rants of a
Contemporary Physician

PART ONE

ALAN N DECARLO MD

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Part One: Youth

Nativity

I was born in 1947, on a Wednesday at 8 a.m., the first of two siblings to follow. It was three days before the shortest day of the year, and eight days before Christmas. One of the worst blizzards of the year and possibly the worst storm of then recent memory occurred nine days after I was born, on Boxing Day. For some reason, just after the snow stopped falling, my mother took me outside for a photo shoot swaddled in blankets. Hopefully, it was because the sun finally came out to shed both light and warmth on the rotogravure.

I am convinced that these quasi-horoscope factors had an immediate as well as an indelible effect on shaping my persona—somewhat like a bad tattoo, or one that looks good when it goes on—but passively fades, wrinkles, or becomes passé as time goes by.

For example, I have first child syndrome, the one expected to be the best, to seek perfection, and to bear the burden of both parent's vicarious goals and expectations—all of which becomes an oxymoron at best. This fate also includes being the one to bear the burden of testing the parent's boundaries and softening up their rigid standards for those siblings who come behind.

I hate the Northern winter's frigid weather but paradoxically love cold fresh air. Being stuck in the northern latitudes after summer forces me to flee, hide or sometimes to even hibernate, both emotionally as well as physically. It makes me wish that I could spend every wintry day in the balmy South, or the Caribbean. Because of this incurable addiction to fresh air, I crack a bedroom window open on winter nights, then poke my head out of the covers to sniff the air like a long-eared dog with its head hanging out the window of a speeding car—squinting, and happily drooling into the face of an artificial gale.

Conversely, because even on the hottest days of the year I need the security of sleeping under heavy quilted blankets, I turn a floor fan toward my face to generate a constant breeze. This habit has the secondary benefit to prevent being parboiled in an artificially manufactured swaddling bed. Then to maximize the time spent outside, I wake up with the sunrise only to crumple into bed with the waning light of a setting sun. Thus, I lament the fact that the Earth is tilted

twenty-three degrees on its axis. This produces the tiny wobble that dooms the planet to seasonal changes and is the root cause of those winter days that seem to consist of only dawn and dusk.

Enjoying excessive sleep during those winter months, I feel like I should nod off in November like a fat salmon gorged grizzly bear who crawls into a cave, then wakes up in March and blissfully skips over the miserably dark, cold season. Sleeping, dreaming, snoring, and shedding weight.

When ‘they,’ whoever ‘they’ are, set the clocks back an hour on October 31st, I begin a countdown calendar that slurries its way to December 21st. Then I celebrate the winter solstice with a few shots of Vodka, rejoicing in the fact that each new day will subsequently be a minute longer than the last one. I call this the Double D-Days: “Fifty Days of Desolate Doom.”

The frigid winter gloom leaves little to do but drink enough alcohol to quash the misery of waiting for the sun to re-ascend its summer arc. I also imagine how an angst-ridden Stonehenge Druid might feel as year after year, he harbors a seasonal pathetic fallacy—steeped in dread—that perhaps after the very next dreary winter, the sun may arbitrarily or capriciously decide not to return at all. Not like me, however, this ancient soul probably said prayers or offered sacrifices to that effect—unless he only punted on the pleas to God and instead defaulted to the spirits in a handy bottle of mead to ward off his bone chilled fears.

This is but one reason I came to believe that Daylight Savings Time should be permanent—a bias based on a paranoid conviction that Eastern Standard Time may be a political conspiracy intended to foster public apathy by imposing planetary darkness on both ends of the day. Is tinkering with time a calculated plan designed to promote large scale SAD: Seasonal Affect Disorder? Who knows, except for the fact that mob psychology—being anesthetized by perpetual darkness and an excessive reliance on the counterbalancing effects of alcohol or Prozac—is not a likely inspiration for activists to summon the energy needed to rail against a King, a Dictator, the Congress, or a President.

Some pundits postulate that the rationale behind rearranging time is more simplistic, and only done so that school age children will not have to go to classes in the dark, or that farmers will have more daylight in the morning. For farming it does not matter, because for him, time is relative. The sun comes up. The farmer goes to work. When the sun goes

down, he goes inside to eat. Then he goes to bed. He essentially lives in his own time zone and does not need a watch to calculate arbitrary deadlines.

As for children, either start school an hour later or outfit the kids with spot-light coal miners' helmets to guide them on their daily academic treks to those big yellow buses. After all, they are not the ones required to go to real jobs or to invariably end up requiring anti-depressants to get them through the SAD season. Or better yet just shift the worlds' time zones one notch to the right. Who made Greenwich, England, the arbiter of Time Zero anyway?

Another way to look at it is the paradox of "saving" extra daylight in the summer evening when days are already at their longest, only to take it back and make it worse in the winter when days are significantly shorter. At the Equator, day and night are equal, no matter the time, while at the poles days or nights can be 24 hours long, depending on the season. December in Nome, Alaska, is 'daylight nothing time.' The point is that the sun does not have a clue as to what time it is. The rest of us, however, become slaves to sundials.

Although I am often accused of having a cold affect, or worse, cold blooded, aloof sang-froid—possibly related to being a winter baby—this is only a hardened defensive shell that protects an otherwise warm and somewhat residually optimistic heart. Despite this, and even though I tell myself to try harder, I cannot help being introspective, cautiously realistic, and at times morose or decidedly sarcastic.

This is not equivalent to being misanthropic. I simply do not believe that any one person can universally be everyone else's best friend—an ambition that would require far too much emotional output with predictably much too little return on the investment. Politicians skirt this issue with disingenuous promises, making their constituents believe that they really care, when in fact they only care about themselves. This is the worst kind of friend—the hypocrite who supposedly loves everyone.

Most people, in fact, tend to put themselves first, being interested only in how much they can get, while at the same time furtively planning or deviously calculating how little they should give back in return. To put it another way, the world is divided into two camps: The Givers and the Takers, with the ratio clearly favoring the Takers. This explains why there are so few anointed Saints and why the proof of Sainthood remains

elusive. It becomes a conundrum of bedrock conniptions for Vatican pundits when they discuss a potential nominee's relative merits on the living balance sheet of "naughty and nice."

- Well you know he really was a Saint in every way.
- Yes. Except for his hypocrisies, philandering, and occasional crass deceptions—along with the fact that that we have no definitive proof of his actual existence.
- True. But even if he never lived, the very idea of him is simply divine.

When I enrolled in grammar school, I was the runt of the litter. Anyone born in January was already a year older, biologically making the other boys bigger and stronger. I am also a Sagittarian born on the cusp of Capricorn, which I suspect intrinsically made me half-man, half-assed, perpetually somewhat confused, and incurably inquisitive.

At some ill-defined point in time I became a "Minimalist." This philosophy suggests that during his lifetime a person should undertake only enough tasks, jobs, activities, projects, or relationships that will permit devoting enough time to doing all of them reasonably well. Minimalism does not imply, nor does it condone the seventh deadly sin of Sloth. It also does not apply to the likes of professional athletes or Astrophysicists, who usually do only one thing to a maximally perfect degree—with gifts bestowed in their DNA.

In not holding any unrealistic expectations of anybody or anything I never risk much in the way of being disappointed. This was learned the hard way early in life as I became accustomed to having my "Birthday-Christmas" present combined into one gift and given at some arbitrary defined point during that December week. Even that does not bother me now as much as it did in my youth because I finally corrected the problem by celebrating my very-merry-half-un-birthday on June 17th. The downside has left me owning or possessing just about everything I need and sometimes even two or three of each. Drawers, closets, and shelves full of reduplicated junk and little worn clothing that exists as a monument to overconsumption.

In fact, the best 'Birthday-Christmas' present I ever received from my parents was a monolithic bottle of Vodka, which served me well in getting through the dreary mandatory personal responsibilities and social obligations attached to the so called "season to be jolly." After all,

Jesus too, received his birthday salutations on Christmas, yet always managed to turn the other cheek in the face of any potential personal insult or slight. And, as everyone knows, except possibly for the holy roller teetotaling Baptists, he never turned down a good glass of vintage Roman wine.

In finally paying for that state of grace, however, he was tortured and killed, a fate I eschew for obvious reasons, and therefore reminds me to always maintain the small remnant of a mean streak that will ensure my continued survival. Sometimes this results in the desired outcome after I have been tested to the limit by some niggling person. The pestilent adversary can be put off, not by me turning away, but instead by facing him squarely and revealing the contra-lateral cheek—the mean-streak cheek—otherwise known as, “Please. Just go-away, get out of my space and leave me alone.”

Unfortunately for the Catholic Church, whose tautology was shoved down my naively innocent youthful throat, I was born a natural scientist and as such never became religious. In never buying into nor comprehending the mystiques, veils, rituals, and hocus-pocus of organized religion, I eventually came to believe that everything we know—as well as everything we do not know—is explainable by the physical and scientific laws of the Universe.

Perhaps I choose to call this my God. And although trained as a scientist, I do not entirely discount the possibilities of miracles. More likely, however, miracles are probably only nature’s accidental and occasionally benevolent events. What some people fail to realize, however, is that most of nature’s malevolent and destructive events are also miracles. For example, a double rainbow riding on the coattails of a Force-5 hurricane.

This does not mean that there is no role for religion in society. However, empirical observation led me to the conclusion that most religions have so distanced themselves from, or so obscured their original tenets, that when it comes to promoting world peace and brotherly love, they consistently seem to cause more harm than good. Instead, they often leave in their wakes, veils of tears, trails of death, torture, witch hunts, wars, destruction, misery, poverty, contention, bias, despair, greed, and egotistical power mongering over at least a six-thousand-year legacy of failing to deliver on their promises.

In general, I believe that people waste much of their lives pursuing both wrong tangible as well as intangible goals. These can include work, wealth, materialism, power or getting ahead—usually occurring at the expense of pursuing good interpersonal relationships, friendships, healthy habits, and emotionally fulfilling leisure time or recreational activity.

Most people also expend a great deal of emotional energy and anxiety over things that have not yet happened or what in fact may never happen—often trying too much to control what cannot ever be controlled. This is otherwise known as the incapacitating syndrome of ‘Nonspecific Angst.’ One inspirational speaker succinctly posited this in a different way by suggesting that ‘Worry is interest paid in advance on a debt that never comes due.’

I also believe that mankind is hopelessly out of balance, harmony, and synchrony with nature, and that the world is uncontrollably overpopulated. Then as mankind in an unrelenting zeal to destroy the natural resources and habitats of the planet he lives upon; he also slowly and irrevocably destroys himself. The spread of humans on this planet is like the scourge of marauding army ants in a jungle or locusts blighting a cornfield.

Everything occurs in cycles and everything is relative. In some distant future, mankind will be little more than a pencil point footnote to the great saga that the Universe continuously, irrevocably, and randomly writes for itself every day as it chaotically and unpredictably expands into a yet larger, more enormous uncharted, and unknowable void. It boggles my mind to realize that our Milky Way Galaxy travels through the ink-black void of the universe at 1.3 million miles per hour—ostensibly on a trip to chase an ever expanding edge that it can never reach. And this is only one of the other one hundred billion galaxies that each contain perhaps three hundred billion stars or more.

Our Universe is a system we have only begun to comprehend. But it is also a living organism with an agenda entirely its own—an agenda that is racing to an endgame we shall never witness nor ever remotely control. If the moon is a harsh mistress, and the sun is a jealous lover, the universe then can often be an ice-cold, cruel, and indifferent bitch.

The universe is between 11 and 20 billion years old.

The earth is approximately 4.5 billion years old.

Wednesday's Child

Lie on Earth began 3.5 billion years ago.

Man has been on earth for only a few hundred thousand years

The life of a single man is about 7 decades.

This life is a fractional blink of an eye in the scale of cosmic time. This life is also a uniquely precious gift.

In fact, all life is unique, precious, and miraculous although “life” itself may only be a natural phenomenon. Life—the result of a quirky cosmic experiment of colliding, massed molecules, consolidated, clumped, and hiding inside a semi-permeable membrane—that for some unknown reason decided at an ill-defined point in time to begin reproducing itself.

John Lennon once said,

- Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.

A man lying on his deathbed should never have to look back and come to the realization that his life was merely what happened to him while he was preoccupied making plans for the future, worrying about everything beyond his control, desperately trying to get ahead—or worst of all—succeeding only in ignoring and destroying his health, family, personal relationships and intimacies.



Outside Grandma's house after the Blizzard of December 1947

Alan N DeCarlo M.D.

*Monday's child is fair of face
Tuesday's child is full of grace
Wednesday's child is full of woe
Thursday's child has far to go
Friday's child is loving and giving
Saturday's child works hard for a living
But Sunday's child is fair and wise, and good and gay
(Nursery Rhyme)*

Perpetual woe might be a dicey karma at best. But compared to Sunday's child, for the time being I will just stand pat.

Gene Pool 1

My father was a first-generation son of Italian immigrants. In a ridiculous bias, he always thought that he was one hundred percent Italian. However, his DNA indicated he was a J clade, originating in Sudan or Ethiopia more than 10,000 years ago, with subsequent migrations to the Middle East, Crete, Greece and finally to Italy. Additionally, he might be a small percentage Jewish, possibly originating with Y Chromosomal Aaron, the brother of Moses. Nonetheless, far from being "Out of Africa," as far as he was concerned, the sun only rises and sets on good old Italia. Having died at 101 years old, Salvatore was the youngest of three other siblings, Rose, Michael, and Katherine.

His father, Erberto, (Albert) booked passage to America from Italy in the early 1900s to escape the hardship of old-world poverty. The family says he came from the small town of Calitri, near Naples, and then settled in the New York City suburban area. As romantic as any embellished version of this odyssey sounded to my father, it is more likely that Erberto escaped from some Italian slum. In leaving no traces behind, nothing was ever known nor recorded of Erberto's forbears after he left this little village. When I finally traced his ancestry, it was so convoluted, the only sense to be made of it was that everyone in his hometown was related to each other by consanguineous marriages—a factor that did wonders for the local DNA pool. Calitiri—Italy's European Appalachia.

Erberto was an enterprising man, who first made a living by pushing a hot dog wagon up and down Mamaroneck Avenue, in White Plains New York, then working as a bartender. Eventually he saved enough money

to buy a diner. At least, that is what they say. Apparently, during the hard times of the 1930s, he was relatively well to do, owned a three-story house, and drove a fancy car. I have a photograph of him with some of his cronies, and although to the day he died, my father insisted there is no Mafia, I sometimes wonder where the seminal money or the leg-up came in Erberto's life. Underworld connections are probably validated by the fact that when he lost the diner, he still made out well "selling cigars" at a speakeasy.

He never did get that chance to fulfill his American dream because in the early 1950s he died of a stroke at the age of fifty-seven. I had little opportunity to know him, yet vividly remember him dying naturally in bed at home, in a dignified manner, with his family around him.

Unfortunately, our modern society no longer condones this style of personalized death or dying, as though the corpse might somehow immediately contaminate or later perpetually haunt the household. Or worse, perhaps deprive the dying person of that last desperate yet tortured shot at some medical miracle in the barbaric confines of a sterile Intensive Care Unit.

Much later in life, I found his death certificate. Apparently, he had atrial fibrillation, a heart rhythm disorder notorious for forming clots inside the heart, which break off and embolize to the brain. This catastrophic complication of the arrhythmia is now preventable and only one of many medical advances, which since 1900 has prolonged the longevity of the average American male by over thirty years. On the negative side these same advances can also unnaturally prolong death, as well as sometimes contributing to undignified and extremely expensive ones. On some occasions physicians with good intentions somehow end up torturing hopeless cases to death in the Intensive care units of America. Grandpa was lucky.

I sometimes muse about how different his life may have been and subsequently my own, had he lived long enough to fulfill his dream. For example, I might now be heaving pizza dough in the family diner, sporting a crisp white chef's tunic instead of the black rubber stethoscope I wore for a necktie. Or better yet, might perhaps be living the high-rolling, high-risk lifestyle of a hard-nosed local Mafia Capo, culminating in my own premature un-natural death with a piano wire necktie garrote.

In any event, my grandmother, Grace, only wore black clothes from the day of Grandpa's death, never dating, remarrying, or even entertaining the company of another man in her house. She became overly sedentary, then obese, and eventually developed weight related Type 2 Diabetes. She literally died on the same day my grandfather did.

My mother often said that after the death of a spouse, Italians either mourned forever—making sure at every opportunity to passive-aggressively rub it in everyone else's face—or alternatively shed crocodile tears at the funeral with one split fingered hand splayed across their faces. The slits would be just wide enough to get a better glimpse of their next potential partner standing alone in the group of mourners.

- Peek-a-Boo, I see you. Who's next?

My grandmother was one of the former and except for her kitchen, she always had the shades pulled down in a dark pall, which gave her house an aura of perpetual funereal mourning.

Until we moved out when I finished the second grade, we lived downstairs from her. It was a large three-story house that after Grandpa's untimely death she owned without a lien, because he had paid for it with cash. She rented the bottom floor to my parents, and the third-floor apartment to anyone who would take it.

My father set up a dental office in the front, while we lived in the several rooms behind the clinic that housed the chair with the drill. Grandma lived on the second floor. The upper level boarders usually seemed to be itinerant societal misfits, leaving me to wonder why Grandma always told me to leave them alone. After all, she owned the place, while all I wanted to do was to see inside their apartment—something I furtively attempted each time she knocked on the door to collect the rent. I would try to crawl under her as she blocked my inquisitiveness with her pasta plumped body, and then kicked me with a black point-toed laced up leather boot-shoe. It might have been about personal privacy or perhaps she just did not want me to witness any potential fuss about the monthly rent collection.

That was the first time I noticed that she always wore her nylon stockings rolled down to the ankles, a habit that seems to creep up on aging Italian women as they slowly lose their past-prime virginal shapes to an ever-expanding derriere. Paradoxically, when the stocking rolls hit the ankles, this is a secret cultural code symbolizing that the woman is "no longer available for sex."

My father required me to regularly go upstairs for a visit with Grandma, who did nothing but sit in a kitchen that always seemed to reek of kale or escarole being boiled in garlic water. Although she was an excellent cook, I genuinely believed that except on holidays this was all she ever ate. To a little boy, she always smelled musky-stale, and although she tried marginally hard enough to get by with it, she never mastered the English language. My mother said that Grandma was too lazy to learn the language because after being in America for over forty years, she was a living legacy tied to an astounding apathetic lack of ambition.

Always pushing hard with Old World guilt trip filial obligations, my father forced me to visit her more than I ever wanted to.

- Go up and see your grandmother. She's lonely, and you're her favorite.
- But dad. She's fat, she's smelly, and she doesn't talk.
- Don't speak about your grandmother like that. If it wasn't for her, we'd be out on the street.

So, after the usual insufferable twisting pinches on the cheek, as she always predictably said, "Que facia bella, una facia cum un angelo," I held my breath as long as I could or kept a safe distance to avoid having to smell her. Then she reached into her smock and gave me a nickel to "go buy a bicycle." What she was trying to say was, "Here's a nickel. Go buy a Popsicle." Although I explained to her that bicycles cost substantially more than five cents, and despite my angelic seductive face, I never got the extra cash out of her.

Going out to buy the Popsicle, was the only blessed reprieve I had from having to sit across from her at her tiny two chaired enamel topped side-table, bored to tears and trying to manufacture palaver. Then as I gleefully escaped the ennui by scampering down the winding back staircase, she predictably bellowed her cautionary warning to slow down.

- Hey. Take it eedz, eedz, eedz. You falla down, you gonna break-a you head.

With that, I ran to the candy store, the entire time wishing I had that speedy bicycle for the long potentially dangerous trip through neighborhood backyards or alleyways. Instead I had to go on foot through the domains of local bullies—or worse—back yards guarded by

snarling unchained dogs. Therefore, my routes were often circuitous enough to cause great parental consternation when I did not arrive home until sundown. But clever evasiveness ensured that I made it in one piece—always unscathed and always too late to have to go back upstairs and revisit Grandma.

However, most of the time Grandma was frigid and quiet like a cold marble Greco-Roman statue, sitting alone for innumerable hours while only staring into space. It was pure torture to make those obligatory visits as usually no conversation ever took place. How could it? She did not speak or understand the nuances of my native language and her I.Q. operated at the primitive level of an uneducated widowed immigrant housewife. Because she had little or nothing left to do after her husband's diner was sold, and she lost her job in the kitchen, she was only left to cook escarole, eat, pine away—cook, eat again—then pine away some more, like a desiccated stale Pinole nut.

Her only entertainment was watching evening television variety shows, and always perked up when Perry Como, Tony Bennett or “Frankie Sa-not” appeared on the tube to sing maudlin Italian songs. Thankfully at least, and not like many the self-proclaimed Italian opera stars lurking around the neighborhood, she never tried to sing along.

Occasionally, however, in a fit of rage, when she had her fill with little kids running underfoot, she chased us out of the house with a broom screaming,

- Ah pesce-a-stoke-a-Bacalao.

When hearing these dreaded words, we knew she was serious, as a rough translation would be, ‘I’m going to whip your butts black and blue with a Bacalao’. I did not even know until I was a grown man that Bacalao was a hard, dried, brine-cured codfish, which is reconstituted in water, then cooked in many Italian households on Christmas Eve. I thank God to this day that we must have been reformed Italians and were never subjected to that culinary calamity. The problem with Bacalao is that no matter how you make it or what you make to go with it, the fish still tastes like a hard, dry, brine-cured, reconstituted thousand-year-old fossil. The Swedes have their own version, call it Lutefisk, and like Italians, they revel in similar ceremonial hype.

Bacalao and Lutefisk must be the Italian and Swedish versions of Jewish Gefilte. I can only assume that the excited hysteria reverts to

atavistic cave man days when our Neanderthal ancestors put aside the everyday nuts and berries, then brought out the dried pemmican for the national holiday. Neolithic survival techniques brought forward as culinary fossils—but not culinary delights.

Whatever the case, my Italian Grandmother never smelled as bad as my cousin Skippy's widowed Grandmother, "Gommie,"—another old lady who required obligatory guilt trip visits from the grandchildren. She also sat alone for uncountable hours in a shade drawn darkened living room.

I loathed when we had to pile in the car and go all the way to Torrington, Connecticut to see her, as nothing ever transpired during the visits. It only wasted a young boy's chance to get into trouble with his friends on an otherwise beautiful Saturday off from school. But the worst part of the ordeal was the fact that she got prepped by dousing herself with her favorite perfume.

To this day, I do not understand why old ladies do not comprehend the fact that perfume as it exists in the bottle at Bloomingdale's, does not smell the same when they apply it to themselves. After application, a sudden chemical reaction occurs between the petroleum-based perfume and the octogenarian post-menopausal skin, resulting in a phenomenon that defies scientific explanation.

If another person touches them or breathes near these women, the toxic mixture is immediately absorbed through the skin, where the deadly combination dissolves into the unintended victim's bloodstream. After making its rounds through the circulatory system, it gets exhaled through the lungs where it sticks to the victim's lips for hours. Deodorant I can understand, but the feminine concept of perfuming is one that will always elude me. Or even more obscure, as she becomes progressively less appealing sexually, why the noxious habit of using perfume increases linearly in both the frequency and the amount applied as the woman gets older.

When I performed cardiac echo studies on elderly women, I was often choked or gagged by the worst chemical scents imaginable—the great paradox being that these women thought they had to get "gussied up" because they were going to see the doctor. The scents stuck to me like a thin film of aromatic crazy glue. Because of this I purposefully scheduled these women at the end of the day to prevent the office from being

gassed in the morning, followed by a slow scent decay curve, like radioactive atoms, that lasted until we closed.

These aromatics were also difficult to explain away when later meeting a girlfriend, or when married, having to face my dour, suspicious, irrationally jealous, finger-tapping first wife, as she launched into her interrogation about the possibility of furtive sexual liaisons.

- Why do you smell like a French hooker?
- Honey. I can explain that. On my last case I had to use an echo probe on an old lady who overdosed her perfume.
- Oh really? So, just how old? And exactly where were you probing her. Or what else were you probing her with, beside that silly little machine of yours?
- Eighty-five years. On the chest wall. Under the left breast. With an RN chaperone.
- Oh, so you probably fucked that little nurse whore too, right?

I am convinced that these chronic proximate chemical exposures are responsible for many women's sudden onset of adult asthma—or the premature deaths of some of their husbands. Eventually I came to believe there should a perfume specifically designed for post-menopausal septuagenarian women: *Old Gommie*. It should be a water based semi-placebo, or if not that, perhaps only sold if there was definitive proof of the woman having no living relatives. Revlon would make a fortune. As a corollary, Old Spice could make a fortune if it discovered the molecule in the sweat of paranoid schizophrenic men that makes women magnetically flock to them. As far as I can tell, this scientific study would have been the only justifiable reason to keep Charlie Manson alive.

However, more to the immediate point, the most tragic thing about my Italian Grandmother, was the fact that she never received flowers or perfume from anyone until the day she died. Then her hearse was filled to the brim with bouquets—an ironic twist that finally made her smell like a fresh breath of Spring.

It has always been a mystery to me why most people, men and women alike, get the bulk of their flower bouquets all at once, heaped one on top of the other like a small floral mountain—but only after they died.



Grandma and Grandpa DeCarlo

*The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.
(Psalm 103:15-16)*

Gene Pool 2

My mother was a Texan who died in 2008 at the age of eighty-four from complications of Alzheimer's Disease. She grew up on itinerant subsistence share-crop farms with five siblings, William, Louise, Pauline, Thelma, and Robert, and although her first name was Alyene, she went by her middle name, Ruth. The oldest and the youngest siblings were boys, leaving the composite unit of the four girls to essentially behave as one middle child.

She never knew how colorful her ancestry was, but then again would have been indifferent anyway because the circumstances of her impoverished environment placed her psyche beyond caring. On her side of the family one lineage can be traced to William the Conqueror, via Richard Fitz Roy, a bastard son of King John I of England. Five other family lines; Stafford, Briscoe, Durham, Neville, and Morris go directly back, and legitimately, to William, the English Saxon kings, the Normans, the Plantagenets, the Capetians and the Carolingians. This is not unique because it ultimately makes me, as well as a billion other individuals, descendants of Charlemagne, a man who had no trouble keeping his

pants zipped as he sired eighteen children by various available—and hopefully willing women. It also makes me the product of numerous first-degree kissing cousins' consanguineous marriages.

Other family lines can be linked to the Machel's, an old English family dating to the Roman period, while my 13th Great Grandfather was the notorious Baron Richard Rich of Leighs. In literally taking King Henry VIII at his word, he brutally quashed English Catholicism. He was so sadistically vile that he was widely known as “a man of whom no one has ever spoken a good word.”

My 10th great-grandfather, John Dods (Dodson), settled Jamestown with Captain John Smith's Virginia Company in 1607. Having survived the “Starving Time,” as well as probably going native, Dodson's first consort may have been an Algonquin woman. After all, since these settlers were all men, why should any of them have to wait fourteen years for the bride-ships to come over before getting laid?

He also may have been among those who resorted to cannibalism when the food ran out, leaving only leather boots, belts, domestic animals, and the emaciated corpses of their compadres to eat. Also, in the same company of men was Edward Morris, another lineal ancestor who died suddenly only three months after his arrival in the new world.

One other 10th great-grandfather, John Neville was among the first Maryland colonial settlers under the auspices of Lord Calvert, Baron Baltimore. Neville is one of the most common modern English surnames, and dates to an admiral, Ricardus de Nova Villa, who accompanied William Conqueror when he invaded England. Unfortunately, some of the Neville's picked the wrong side in the War of the Roses and many of their bloodlines became defunct royalty. Some other lines, including my 16th great grandfather, Humphrey Stafford, who also picked the wrong side, were literally made defunct by royal execution. Henry VII had him drawn and quartered in 1468 for fomenting the Lovell Rebellion against the Crown.

Then there is the Haynie family that settled Virginia in the late 1600s—a family some believe was immortalized in William Michener's novel *Chesapeake*. However, the progenitor, John Haynie, had so many descendants that by the time it filtered down to my 5th Great-grandfather William, the only thing that his father, Anthony, had to leave him in his Will was his emancipation when he turned sixteen.

- Goodbye bye son—and good luck, too.

William, born in 1753, with no choice but to leave home and join the North Carolina militia. He then fought with the North Carolina Continental line in the Revolutionary War—first as a private—then eventually as a lieutenant adjutant to General Nathaniel Greene. He saw action in six battles, three of which; Camden, Cowpens, and Guilford Courthouse, were fought in the Carolinas and stylized in the movie “The Patriot.” For unknown reasons after that, the family eventually made its way to Tennessee.



Grave marking ceremony for William Haynie Sr.

William’s daughter married Samuel Evetts Sr. who was expelled or expatriated from Tennessee for fighting while inebriated (FWI) at a political rally and migrated to Texas. Whether or not Samuel was one of the famous Tennessee Volunteers is not certain. However, if nothing else and although not as notable as his quasi-inspirational lily-livered alcoholic leader, Sam Houston, he followed Houston’s footsteps by eventually becoming a famous Tennessee alcoholic himself.

Samuel Evetts Jr. was one of the first Texas Rangers and was there in time to partake in the conflict with Mexico. His assignment before that was to ‘protect the frontier from Indian predation,’ which gave him carte blanche permission to kill any Comanche he could find while riding out on the desiccated Texas plains.

After recovering from a musket ball shot through his face at the Siege of Bexar, he reenlisted, joined Sam Houston's Army for Texas Independence, then participated at the Battle of San Jacinto. The Texans defeated the ruthless dictator, Santa Anna, and then sent this sadistic monster back to Mexico. This was a kinder fate than what the Mexican's had already done at Goliad where they executed every man in the village, or the savage pike-poling of the victim's severed heads at the Alamo.

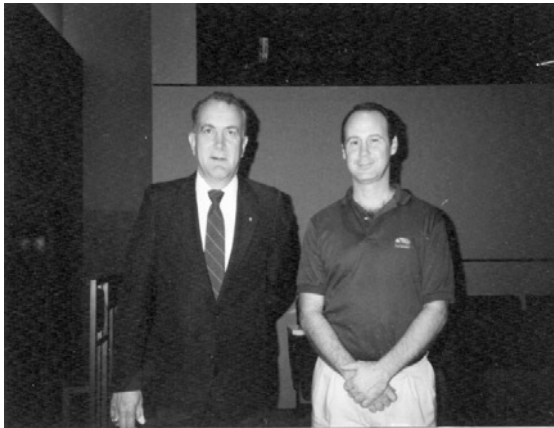
Another curiosity is that if Samuel Jr. had not been wounded several months before the Alamo battle, which forced him to take leave from the fighting, there is a good chance he may have fought and died there—meaning that I would not be here today. Sam essentially took a hit for posterity.

As a reward after the war, he received four thousand acres in land grants. Because this land abutted the next county line, he presented himself to those separate local authorities as being his recently deceased father and received another contiguous four thousand acres of property. Deviousness, a well-known Evetts trait that afflicts many members of the clan, might have originated here with Samuel. Unfortunately, this eight-thousand-acre tract and other deeded plots, now located near the shale oil and natural gas ranges near Dallas, were all lost to the family by a series of subsequent early deaths, remarriages, and relinquished inheritance rights.

Little did some of my honorable ancestors know that by stubbornly walking away from the evil stepfather this was not the best choice for my future. Instead it caused the unfortunate circumstance of me having to work for a living instead of inheriting oil shares as an avocation. Taking it a step further, the family that could have also owned large tracts of land in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, somehow managed to end up with nothing.

In the latter case I might have squandered my life like J.R. Ewing, swaggering through a neurotic, self-indulgent soap opera. Outfitted in alligator skin shit-kicker boots, a Stetson hat, and an oversized Lone Star belt-buckle, I would have had nothing better to do than pace the halls of my sprawling Texas ranch-house swilling single malt Scotch and puffing Cuban cigars. Or if not that, perhaps sit outside shooting beer cans off a log when not otherwise preoccupied by the trivialities of the daily crises attached to my immediate or extended family's dysfunctional interactions. Drink a beer, shoot an empty tin can, then find out later from my Private Investigator who was screwing my fourth wife.

As it now stands, all I can show for it is a wallet card validating that I am a member of the Sons of the Republic of Texas—a credential that combined with \$1.75 buys a cup of coffee at any good diner. Eventually I stopped being so lazy about sending in the application for membership in the Sons of the American Revolution, but even that entree will not get the land back. Also, by the time the paperwork finally percolated and filtered through that organization's bureaucratic genealogical microscope, the cost of the coffee had inflated to \$4.50.



With Sam Houston IV (left). Full circle descendants

Watch Out: There's a Melungeon in the Wood Pile

I originally thought that my two percent Jewish DNA originated with my father because many Italians can trace their genetic origins to the Middle East. However, a second cousin on my mother's side has DNA nearly identical to mine, as well as some derived from the Berbers of North Africa and Spain.

Further investigation revealed that my 7th Great Grandfather, William Abraham Cooper, whose father was a Sephardic Jewish London shopkeeper emigrant to America, was roaming around Southeast America in the 1700s. He was an Indian Trader, acted as a Spanish speaking scout for Daniel Boone, was one of the first Kentucky corn planters and was also among the twenty-five men who carved out the Wilderness Road. He married a half breed Choctaw woman, Malea

Labon. Her father, Patrick Isaac Labon, was another dispossessed Sephardic Jew who emigrated from London and may have been a Scot-Irish crypto Jew. He married a full-blooded Choctaw woman. This means that both of my 9th great grandparents on this line were full blooded Native Americans. Ironically, during the Indian Wars, William was killed by Indians at the Battle of Nashborough.

John Houston Cooper, my first cousin five times removed, was a Choctaw chief. He was recruited in 1814 by then Major General Andrew Jackson to take members of his clan and help Jackson fight the Upper Red Stick Creeks. This action was a sidebar agenda in the War of 1812.

The Upper Red Stick Creeks opposed American expansion into their territory and sided with the British, whom they thought would treat them better. This U.S. ploy of utilizing fractious Amerindian tribes to fight against one another was one that worked out well and was used in most of the western Indian battles in the late 1800s. Deceit was also a lynch pin of seduction as most Indians who helped the whites were always given false promises of allowing them to keep their lands.

At the Battle of Horseshoe bend in central Alabama, Jackson defeated the Upper Creeks with an army of 2,700 soldiers and 600 Indians consisting of Cherokees, Choctaws, and Lower Creeks. Nine hundred Upper Creeks were killed, including another two hundred innocents who were slaughtered for sport along the way. The Red Sticks then ceded twenty-three million acres of land to the United States, two million of which was promised to the recruited Indians. Soon after that, however, Jackson reneged on his promise, took all the land for U.S. colonial expansion, and put the Indians on the Trail of Tears. This dislocation of 60,000 people killed 16,700 of them in the process.

John Cooper's mother died on the trail. Then because he was two days late in signing papers allowing him to own land in Oklahoma under the Dawson Commission, he was left as a man without a country. His legacy was to tell his progeny to never again trust or vote for forked tongue duplicitous Democrats.

The best explanation for my Jewish ancestors coming to America was rooted in the great diaspora created by the Spanish Inquisition, which lasted for over three centuries after 1440. Spanish and Portuguese Sephardic Jews, as well as Muslim Berbers were given three choices: convert to Catholicism; not convert and forcibly leave the country without money, jewelry, and personal belongings; or stay and face

immediate execution, often by burning at the stake—the infamous *auto-da-fe*. Many Jews who stayed faked their conversions and still practiced their faith in secret as crypto-Jews.

The Berbers may have been descendants of the Carthaginians, who settled North Africa, then went to Spain in the Islamic conquest of the southern part of that country where they probably intermarried local Sephardic Jews.

In the Spanish Catholic re-conquest of Muslim controlled southern Spain, all these groups were persecuted, murdered, and dispossessed, causing over a million souls to flee to other European countries or elsewhere. Some, including William Cooper's ancestors became French Huguenots, who were then subsequently persecuted in that country and fled to England.

The Coopers variously described their origins as Black Irish, Black Scots, Portuguese, Spanish, and French Huguenot. In this case, although other mixed-race early Americans may have descended from shipwrecked slaves, the references to "black" had more to do with olive dark skin color than continental African racial origin.

In fact, it was commonplace for East Coast Indians to intermarry the dark-skinned outcasts from Europe, who found their way to the New World and circulated easily among the native populations. Then over many generations, Indian and Jewish/Berber features tended to fade as more of these people, or their offspring married European Caucasians. Additionally, and not race related, by the late 1800s, at least twenty-five percent of the Cherokees were mixed race Amerindian and white.

Eventually being labelled *Melungeon*, this group settled large enclaves in the Appalachians. As secretive crypto-Jews, they built Original Baptist Churches, created a faith retaining semblances to Jewish culture and ceremonies, then practiced that faith secretly. They also had a significant presence in starting Masonic Temples, that also eschewed conventional New Testament ideology. George Washington and numerous other revolutionaries or Founding Fathers were Masons.

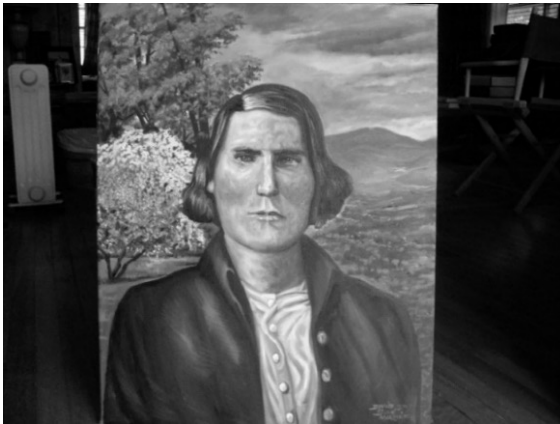
Masons do not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and default rather to the teachings of John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist. Original Baptists have no steeples or crosses on their churches, no icons or crucifixes in the interior, they chant Cantor led acapella lined-out hymnodies, subscribe to full immersion Baptism, avoid using Christian Saint's names for their children, and circumcise their males.

In one tragic case of 18th century Appalachian genetic misinterpretation, a man married a woman who was a light skinned Melungeon. She was afraid to tell her husband of her mixed-race heritage, and when their baby was born dark-skinned due to latent genetic penetrance, he killed both his wife and child thinking that the boy was not his. Of interest is that Daniel Boone, Elvis Presley, and Abraham Lincoln are also felt to be members of this “last lost tribe.”

Ironically, and although my mother was a cognitive bigot, she frequently told us that family folklore suggested we were French Huguenot and part Cherokee. We thought she was crazy, but now realize the power of verbally transmitted heritage. Coincidentally both my second cousin and my brother have dark skin. My brother never burns in the sun and my mother always referred to him as “her little Indian”—a little wild Indian that my father occasionally wanted to kill too—but not because he thought the child was a bastard.

However, we all eventually passed for White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant, leaving the Native American/Jewish/Berber heritage buried somewhere close to the bottom of the family wood pile.

Also, having survived the 15th century Spanish Holocaust, as being part Sephardic, we can rightfully say to the Ashkenazi that we reserve bragging rights and go to the head of the line for various attempts at European Jewish genocide. The same thing holds true for surviving the American Indian holocaust as well.



John Houston Cooper by David Bunn Martine

My Texan grandfather, Arthur McClinton Cooper, a Sephardic Jew/Amerindian descendant, was a tall soft-spoken, humorous man who seemed to wear only striped railroad engineer coveralls. Because he chain-smoked unfiltered Pall Mall cigarettes, this habit colored the calluses on his hands to an un-washable dingy yellow, making them look like multi-layered old varnish on knot bumped teak wood.

My grandmother, Nora Evetts, otherwise known as Grannie Cooper, deplored this habit and constantly nagged him about it. This only led him to take numerous furtive smoke-breaks out to the barn.

- Hey Nora. I'm going out again to check things over at the barn.
- Arthur, there ain't no sick animals out there that ain't been sick in the last half hour. I know what you're up to.

He enjoyed doing the jig and had an innate talent for playing the spoons—both skills being hand-me-down folk-arts that I regret never having learned from him. But I was too young to understand their cultural or historical significance, or more likely thought that he would probably live forever. After all, when you are seven years old, you never think that anyone will ever die.

Arthur owned a subsistence farm. But just before World War II when the Federal Government confiscated his property to build an ordinance factory—under the euphemistic legal right known as “Eminent Domain,”—he became a sharecropper. To feed his family, this forced him to lease farmland from the Moore family.

Eventually this arrangement failed, and he moved on to become a garage mechanic. Although he did not own the garage, my brother Larry and my cousin Byron, thinking that he did, helped to keep the poor man penniless by raiding the old tin Coca-Cola ice box and the candy counter whenever we visited him at work. After drinking our fill of Coke and Dr. Pepper, Granddad quietly paid the tab, while our mothers later scolded us for taking advantage of his good nature and Grannie harped over the lost wages.

He was a laconic man of few words and rarely spoke unless spoken to. This trait and the fact that his responses were usually consigned after everyone else rendered an opinion on the subject at hand, tended to make them come out as unanticipated blindsiding Texas proverbs. For example, my Aunts collectively argued about which of us three boys were tallest or who was growing the fastest. When they turned to Arthur

for his fatherly take on it, he chided them by comparing it to the level of a woman's crotch.

- Hell ladies, I don't rightly know. And what's all the fuss about anyhow? None of them little towheads ain't got any taller than knee-high to a poontang anyway.

Arthur Cooper did not complain, was not bitter about his lot in life and never had an unkind word about anyone he knew. Or if he did have to describe a less than savory friend who may have slighted him, he would once again make it more parabolic and diplomatic.

- Why, after all what he done to me, I wouldn't even piss on his damn head if his brains was on fire.

He eventually died of emphysema.

My grandmother, Nora, was a short, fat, mean spirited woman, who loved to gossip and indiscriminately criticize. Everyone or everything was fair game, despite her otherwise hypocritical touting of good old fashioned Southern Christian ethics and values. For example, she once told my Uncle Bill that his beer belly was getting too big, a critique which given the size and shape of her pumpkin-like figure was something akin to the pot calling the kettle black. He just winked at her.

- Momma—just lay off now. Can't y'all see I'm tryin' hard as I can to build me a monument over a dyin' soldier?

Later in life, after his beer gut fully blossomed over a bloated liver and alcohol mediated shrunken testicles, he announced that the little soldier had finally succumbed to a combination of old age and a chronic overdose of booze.

- Hell, momma. I couldn't get it up no more even if Marilyn Monroe herself came a slitherin' 'cross my lap.
- Yeah well, if'n Marilyn did come over right now, your whole dang body and not just your dried-up pecker would be dropped dead and pushin' up daisies.

Nora's hypocrisy was also typified by the night I caught her by herself out in the kitchen after she served desert. She was gobbling up the remnants of a black raspberry cobbler after she had parsed out small portions to everyone else while stating,

Wednesday's Child

- Well...looks like there just ain't enough here to go 'round for ever' body gettin' even-handed seconds.

She solved this difficult problem the easy way by deciding to eat all the rest of it. When she saw me, I thought she was going to choke. She had stuffed so much cobbler into her craw that she resembled a pre-hibernating fat cheek nut-chocked squirrel. She was trying to get it all down with one gulp before anyone at the dinner table sensed her unusually prolonged absence and popped into the kitchen to see if she was all right.

I suppose that my grandmother's sense of perpetually seeking perfection rubbed off on my mother and her three sisters, because I came to believe there was not anyone, anywhere on this planet who could live up to their extremely high yet artificially and personally contrived standards. And God help the person who was not in the room to defend himself when those five harpies congregated to over-eat and gossip away their boredom on a hot summer afternoon.



Four sisters: The perfect middle child.

Cognitive Bigotry

In retrospect, my grandmother, my mother, and her sisters suffered the serious character flaw of Cognitive Bigotry. This is a form of social and interpersonal inductive reasoning. Cognitive bigots will focus on a

single small flaw in another person's looks, actions, or personality. Then they expand that to the inverse logical level that the entire person is essentially no good at all and without any redeeming features. This flaw then obviates any further desire to socially interact.

If looking at a picture of Marilyn Monroe, a cognitive bigot would only see the small black mole on her face, utilizing this insignificant smudge as making her wholly ugly and undesirable. Not a gorgeous woman at all, but only one large ugly black blemish. Jacqueline Kennedy might harbor this opinion of Marilyn too, but not because of the mole, whereas President John apparently saw perfection in other anatomical parts of pulchritudinous Marilyn.

My mother once objected to me dating a girl whose only flaw was having a few acne-pit scars on her face. When she met the woman not only would the overprotective maternal shrew not even speak to her, but as she turned a cold shoulder and retired to her bedroom, I heard her make disgusting pseudo-puke noises instead. Beside the furtive embarrassing insult, the gross sound effects alone were enough grounds for matricide.

This behavior was not limited to a personal level either. For example, she might look at beautiful or handsome movie stars on TV and with some uncanny ability, drew a mental line through their faces. After that she suddenly proclaimed that the actress or actor had facial asymmetry resulting in the person having both one good side and one bad side.

- Everyone does, you know. You do to, Alan. Look in the mirror and try it yourself sometime. You'll see.

I am sure that the vanity-based personalities of those movie stars would probably agree with her. But when one is that good looking, I suppose even the smallest personal flaw is irksome and worthy of correction. Ergo, on the eighth day, God created Botox, and on the eighth night he created Plastic Surgeons.

Already having enough trouble with other more pressing adolescent neuroses, such as perfecting my pomade glued hair, than having to tuck on the angst about always showing the good side of my face, I never attempted the Janus mirror exercise. When I became older, I realized that looking at the sometimes-lopsided good side or bad side of a person's character or soul counted for much more than his or her asymmetric external looks.

The real problem with my mother and my aunts was that as they got older, they forgot to look in the mirror themselves. If they had, they would have seen a small pod of graying, wrinkled, overweight, cackling matrons slowly losing their looks as they subconsciously blended themselves into a collective clone of their chubby little mother. Just all-around obese and symmetrically mean.

Cognitive bigotry is a lethal character flaw that on the smallest scale precludes the possibility of meeting or interacting with people who, given the chance, may turn out to become a best friend or even a soul mate.

On the larger scale it can lead to racial bigotry, genocide, and war.

- Hey. Get a load of them nasty lookin' people. They dress bad—and they smell funny too.
- Yeah. Just like some stinkin' old gommies.

*He that is without sin among you,
Let him first cast a stone at her.
(The Bible)*

Opposites: Personality but not Genes



Granny Evetts and Granddad Cooper

A typical repartee that defined the different personalities between my Texan grandparents, was Arthur's wholly unbiased statement when asked after the wedding reception what he thought of his son, Bill's second marriage—followed by Nora's cryptic response.

- Hey Arthur. What's yawl's family thinkin' bout Bill and his brand new sexy hot-pants wife?
- Well. I suppose that right about now Bill and Jean are purdy darn happy about the whole thing. He's happy about the hole—and she's happy about the thing.
- Oh Arthur. That is totally dis...gusting, and just about as dis...gusting as each of their shameful divorces, too. Shame. Then more shame—and shame on the whole lot of you and your cigarette smokin' whiskey drinkin' friends. If'n ya ask me the whole damn bunch of ya needs to be puttin' in a bit more of some good old-fashioned Bible readin' church time. Y'all oughta' start out with Genesis 19 and read that piece again about Sodom and Gomorrah.

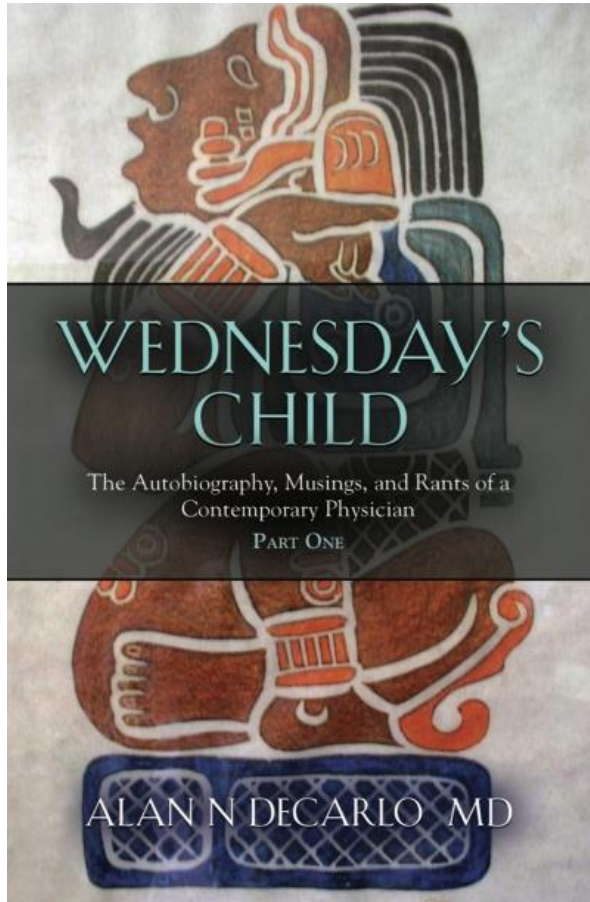
Texas Fried Chicken

*Help, help. The sky is falling.
(Chicken Little)*

There is one clear memory I have of being out in the chicken yard one day watching Grannie Cooper grab a hen, then give it a propeller twirl to break its neck so we could fry it for dinner. That old, decapitated bird must have run around in chaotic circles for thirty seconds before it finally collapsed in a heap of headless neck, spurting blood, and stirred up crimson feathered dust.

That was when I finally understood what she meant by telling us kids that if we did not behave ourselves, she would "have to wring our necks." This threat, being far worse than a swat with a dead salt brine fish from my Italian Grandmother, forevermore deserved my full attention when my poor behavior warranted the sudden eruption of those dreaded words.

But after the hand wrung decapitation, the most difficult part of the ordeal is to pluck the carcass. It is a task where pliers do not even work very well. To this day when I see a few feather quills sticking out of the wrinkled skin on a pre-packaged supermarket bird, I can't help but think



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