



A rags to riches relationship born in west Texas, incubated during the Vietnam War and culminated in California.

From Texas, With Love

By Lewis Allen Lambert

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FROM TEXAS,
With Love

Lewis Allen Lambert

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1. SHE (1947-1964)

Since its founding in 1853, the town of Tarpley Hills, in west Texas was reputed to have had a shady past. Joshua Tarpley and his three brothers acquired 5,000 acres of land to raise cattle. Some say the Tarpley family grabbed the land through nefarious deeds. However, in nearly 100 years no one contested their ownership.

The Joshua built a mega cattle business after the civil war that attracted hundreds of people to the ranch seeking work. Oil was discovered on Tarpley land in the early 20th century that resulted in the population of Tarpley Hills to swell to more than 7,500 people; eventually a vibrant small city took root.

The Tarpley's owned or controlled everything in Tarpley Hills including the bank, the sheriff, the newspaper and most of the retail businesses that the Tarpley kin owned. When Joshua died in 1910, at the age of 90, his two sons inherited everything. Joshua's brothers started other business ventures over the years that passed on to their kin. However, the Tarpley cattle and oil business empire remained in Joshua's sons' hands. The eldest son, who never married, died in 1912 of natural causes. The other son, Josiah, had a son and a daughter. Josiah wasn't very bright so people took advantage of him. It was reported he was swindled out of a fortune.

Josiah's son, Caleb took revenge on those that swindled his addled father. Caleb took after his grandfather Joshua in every way including the Tarpley's bright red hair and blue eyes. In 1915, during first world war, Caleb persuaded the federal government to build an ammunition plant near Tarpley Hills to support America's

allies in Europe. The plant expanded four-fold by the time America entered the war in 1917.

In 1918, Caleb's sister, Cassie died of pneumonia leaving Caleb the sole heir to the Tarpley business empire.

By 1925, Tarpley Hills was a respectable city of nearly 18,000 residents. During the depression most of the descendants of the original Tarpley family moved away. Caleb, always the shrewd businessman, took over all the businesses his family members owned for pennies on the dollar. In addition, Caleb purchased more land from neighboring ranchers that left west Texas during the depression. By 1937, Caleb owned more than 150,000 acres.

Tarpley Hills survived the depression partly because Caleb won a new government contract to manufacture munitions, his prospering cattle business grew and the amount of oil pumped out of Tarpley owned wells increased to feed the growing needs of the American economy. Before the second world war Caleb was one of the richest men in Texas.

Caleb's daughter, Tessa married Robert Browner after she graduated college. Her husband, a lawyer, knew he had to settle in Tarpley Hills with Tessa or he'd never reap the benefits of marrying into the Tarpley family.

In 1947, Robert and Tessa had a baby girl named Patricia. She also inherited her family's red hair and blue eyes. By the time she became a teenager she was known to be high-spirited, flirtatious and behaved like any other rich young girl from the most celebrated elite families that resided on either coast of the United States. Patricia Browner, who went by Trish, was a brilliant student that excelled throughout elementary and high school.

2. HE (1947-1964)

Tony Morelli, was the son of Maria Cassani and Frank Morelli, a decorated second world war Marine veteran. The Morelli family lived in San Antonio, Texas. In 1950, three years after Tony was born, his father was recalled to active duty and sent to Korea. Frank was killed in action one week before Tony's fourth birthday.

Tony didn't really know his father though he had photos of him when he was in Okinawa during the second world war and a few photos of him in Korea. That's all Tony had to remind him of his father.

When Tony was six years old his mother met and married Cyrus Cavanaugh, a journalist from Waco, Texas. He was 20 years older than Tony's mother. Cyrus didn't spend much time with the six-year-old boy he never adopted. Cyrus had children from a former marriage and didn't want Maria's son to have a claim on anything that would eventually be inherited by his own children. Tony didn't care much for Cyrus.

In 1960, Cyrus informed his family that he bought a newspaper business and they had to move to Tarpley Hills, Texas. Tony wasn't very happy to leave his friends and he knew his mother didn't look forward to moving to west Texas.

Tony's freshman year at Tarpley Hills high school was difficult for him because he was an outsider. All the other students grew up in Tarpley Hills and some were related to each other.

Tony's passion was baseball so he was happy his high school had a baseball team; however, football was what people in Tarpley Hills looked forward to. Though there were only 1,500 high school students the school fielded a very good football team. They went

to the regional playoffs every year since 1946 and on three occasions made it to the state championship game for small high schools.

In Tony's sophomore year he made the baseball team. The school barely had enough boys that wanted to try out. Tony was a pitcher but also could hit so he played the outfield as well. The team wasn't very good but Tony was happy to play and made a few friends. One day after practice the football cheerleaders came onto the field to practice. His friends decided to stay and watch them. That's when Tony set his eyes on Trish Browner. He mentioned to one of his friends that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. His friend said she was a Tarpley and was very stuck up.

"I don't understand what you mean by a Tarpley," Tony said.

"I forgot you aren't from around here. Well, the Tarpley family founded this town and are very rich. No one gets close to a Tarpley especially no one like you or me, only football players have a chance with her," his friend explained.

The baseball team had a better-than-expected year winning nine games and losing seven. The coach hadn't had a winning season in eight years. Unfortunately, no one cared because the football season was about to begin. Tony went to all the football games just to watch Trish; he was smitten.

Tony was very handsome and a good athlete so many students knew who he was. However, an Italian Catholic boy from San Antonio wasn't socially acceptable. Tony felt his heritage didn't meet Tarpley Hills' standards. He heard people talk about the civil rights movement. They said if a black family ever moved to Tarpley Hills, they'd run them out of town. Tony sometimes felt people might run him out of town.

His stepfather was always in trouble with the Tarpley Hills elites because he was politically liberal and supported the civil rights protests that occurred in many cities throughout the country. Fortunately for Tony only a few people knew the newspaper owner was his stepfather. They didn't share the same last name and his stepfather never attended any school functions or baseball games; he showed no interest in Tony.

In all the years Tony attended Tarpley Hills high school he never spoke to Trish, nor did he make eye contact. He was never invited to any social functions that she attended.

Tony had good grades but not good enough to earn a scholarship. He was a very good baseball player but no college scouts attended baseball games at a rural high school that never qualified for the regional baseball playoffs. Tony's stepfather didn't have the money to pay for college so Tony had nothing to look forward to after he graduated high school.

About a week after graduation a man knocked on Tony's door and introduced himself as a baseball scout for a semi-pro team in Iowa. He said Tony's high school coach contacted him and recommended he speak with him. Though Tony was only 17, he begged his mother to let him play for the team. He was offered 75 dollars a week plus most all other expenses would be paid for. Tony's stepfather gladly signed the paperwork to get him out of the house. On the last Monday in June, 1964, Tony boarded a bus for Iowa.

3. SHE (1964-1966)

Though Trish and Tony were high school classmates they never exchanged a single word. On a whim the day before graduation Tony asked Trish to sign his yearbook.

“You’re that Italian baseball player. What college are you going to?” She asked without looking at him.

Tony didn’t want her to know he couldn’t afford to go to college so he told her he didn’t know yet. She didn’t pay attention to him as she scribbled her signature under her picture. She didn’t ask him to sign her yearbook.

Trish’s parents wanted her to go to an elite school back east, however she disappointed them when she enrolled at the University of Texas where her boyfriend received a football scholarship. She never told her parents the real reason why she chose to go there because they never approved of her boyfriend since he came from a working-class family and his mother was Mexican-American.

In the beginning of her second year of college Trish became pregnant. To make things worse her boyfriend was injured in an accident and eventually lost his football scholarship. He quit school to support Trish and their expected baby. A month after he quit school he received his draft notice. They were very upset especially since she was pregnant. One evening her boyfriend had too much to drink, wrecked his car and as a result, Trish suffered a miscarriage.

When her boyfriend left for the army a few weeks later Trish quit school and returned to Tarpley Hills but never told her parents

she got pregnant and lost the baby. Her parents were upset that a Tarpley quit college.

Trish promised to return to school in the fall. Her mother, a prominent Tarpley family scion, told her daughter she had to get a job because she didn't want her sitting around doing nothing until September.

4. HE (1964-1966)

Tony played baseball for the semi-pro team for two months. He was very unhappy with the financial arrangement. The team took the costs for cleaning his uniform out of his pay as well as his meals when the team was on the road. In September, 1964, two weeks after his 18th birthday Tony followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Marine Corps.

Nine months after enlisting Tony was sent to Vietnam as an advisor to a south Vietnamese Marine regiment. Since Tony was an athlete, he excelled in everything he did. When he had the opportunity to qualify as a sniper he jumped at the chance. However, since American advisors weren't allowed to engage enemy forces unless attacked, Tony only provided training and support; he never used his sniper skills.

In August, 1965, Tony was transferred to San Diego to train Marine recruits in the skills they needed to survive in Vietnam. Tony hadn't returned to Tarpley Hills since he left for Iowa. He wrote to his mother to let her know he was in California.

Tony was an exceptional Marine and was promoted to corporal in October, 1965. Three months later Tony was sent to Okinawa to join a special combat unit. He was told he would be sent to Vietnam as a sniper to protect his new unit. In March, 1966, Tony went to Vietnam again. He was promoted to sergeant and became a squad leader. His unit nicknamed him 'the hit man' because he was Italian as well as a sniper. Up until that time Tony never killed anyone.

Three months later Tony's squad was ambushed, two of his Marines were killed and three were wounded. Tony directed his able-bodied Marines to take the wounded men back to their base

camp. They couldn't call for an air evacuation because they were too far from a landing zone. Tony held off his attackers to keep them from taking the bodies of his two fallen Marines. Tony remained alone for 10 hours picking off his attackers.

The following morning another squad of Marines rescued Tony and extracted the two dead Marines. Tony was informed he had killed seven Viet Cong soldiers.

Tony's company commander said intelligence reports were wrong and he was sorry about his squad's casualties. He put Tony in for a decoration for what he accomplished. The following week Tony was wounded when his squad's point man stepped on a booby trap and was killed. Tony received a shrapnel wound in his right leg and was evacuated to the military hospital in Da Nang, Vietnam.

While he was in the hospital Tony's battalion commander presented him with a purple heart. He told Tony he was being sent to Hawaii to recuperate. Tony spent two months in Hawaii and after he passed his medical exam he asked to return to his unit in Vietnam. Before Tony left Hawaii he was presented with the Bronze Star Medal for Valor. He returned to Vietnam in October 1966. Unbeknownst to Tony the soldier seated behind him on the aircraft to Vietnam was Trish's former boyfriend.

The Marine Corps sent a press release to Tony's hometown newspaper about being awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. When Tony's stepfather received the press release, he was surprised because he didn't know Tony joined the Marines. At first, he didn't want to publish story in the paper but knowing about Tony's father's military service he realized it would be a great story. Cyrus was even a little proud of the boy he ignored.

Once the story was in the newspaper Tony became the talk of the town. His mother spent all day answering phone calls. The Tarpley Hills high school athletic department decided to name its best male athlete of the year award after Tony Morelli.



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