

What are your stories?

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“Family Trees”

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Her phone call was timely. My wife had been gallivanting in Virginia with high school girlfriends. I was feeling lonely, a pity party brewing. Then our daughter called. Her five year old's kindergarten asked them to draw their family trees. Our daughter phoned knowing my Grandma's had invested me as keeper of family lore and photographs. A prized Kodak shows me sitting on Grandpa Young's lap wearing his fedora, smoking his pipe.

Her timely call pulled me out of my funk from watching today's news. I'm looking forward to not having to write political columns. We are so done with Donald. It's time to write about strawberry festivals, free will, baseball, happy things. After we hung up, I exhaled and began watching “Young Frankenstein.” Then I listened to cassettes of Tom Bodett's storytelling.

I enjoyed telling stories of our ancestors on my side -- Andrews, Estey, Young, Ansley, Dickson, Rush -- including the scoundrels and opinionated. Granddaughter giggled when I told her that Grandma Florence's maiden name was Valentine. Count us among America's original immigrants, proud to watch America's family improve over time with new names, many names spelled with more vowels and consonants. We each have our own stories of risk, movement, travel, change, trying to make a go of it in the face of adversities, failures, reversals, opposition – natural, social, personal. Daughter and I agreed that when her daughter becomes old enough, she should learn what each generation faced in their times. What are your stories?

We've never been a deferential bunch. An Estey fired musket at Lexington, the first Andrews switched sides to fight for freedom with the Continental Army, Joseph Andrews wounded at Chancellorsville. How many recessions, depressions? Grandpa Young tried to enlist despite his age because he wanted personally to rid us of Hitler. A drill instructor and Jenny pilot from World War I, he knew how to deal with Nazis. Dad served in China for the Army for three years, returning home to finish his degree and preferring to marry the freshman queen and make babies rather than attend Law School to enter practice with his father. That didn't go over well with his mother, stories tell. Dad's father's father was killed when a train crashed into the Olean station. Grandpa Andrews died at 58 from a heart attack. Aunt Ruth's husband died in a plane crash. Add to these, an influenza epidemic, polio scares, divorces, alcoholism, cancer resulting in Grandpa Young's death before I got to know him. On his deathbed he gave his three grandson's pencil boxes.

Because of hardships, my family was blessed by wanting succeeding generations to gain opportunities for expanding their children's imaginations, giving them chores so they appreciate the virtue of work, helping them travel and experience other cultures and foods, bequeathing an appreciation for honest history, education, public service, surrounding them with great art, great literature, great music, great science, great religion.

Stories to share. A lamp in our guest room was lathed by a Rahway Prison ex-con Grandpa Young hired for the paint plant – a thank you gift. Florence and George drove home early from a vacation because they respected the privilege and responsibility to vote, even though they knew they'd cancel out each

other's vote. George ? An ardent Republican. Florence? She loved Roosevelt. There's a sacred, snickering letter of sheer delight she sent my mother after Truman was elected, confessing it was she who clinched his election: "Dear Lib: You're confused, I'm surprised and startled, Dad and countless others here in turn bursting with wrath! I'm afraid almost to show myself, because my one vote has brought business disaster, floods, plague, war, and general ruin to the whole world!!" Her vote mattered.

One day at the plant the phone rang. Dad answered. The woman on the phone asked for Mr. Young. Dad called out: "Phone for you, George." George got on the phone. "Mr. Young?" the lady asked. George confirmed it was he. She continued: "I'm calling for the President of DuPont. He would very much like to talk to you." Bear in mind, Young Paint & Varnish Company, Inc., had just been named by Consumer Reports as manufacturing the best white paint on the east coast. Grandpa's recipe. DuPont Chemical calling this corner lot factory. Grandpa's reply to the lady? "When he's ready to talk to me, have him call me." Then he hung up.

Dear Granddaughter: It's good to realize who you come from; It matters more to know where you're going.