

Terry Smith

A legend in His Own Mind

One day as I was considering the state of the world--I think I was occupied with the problem of North Korea at the time--I had a call from my grandson, Daniel, who had an unusual request. He wanted me to tell him what it was like when I was growing up. My silent thought was "Goodness, Daniel, that's 85 years!" But this was a request from Daniel, after all. So I immediately laid aside the problem of North Korea and turned to his request. This is my response.

1935-1940

By the time I had gained entrance into the home of Roy and Lola Smith (May 6, 1935) , two siblings with a roughly ten year head start, had already staked out their claims and established the power relationships. But they were kindly dictators, and made me welcome. I had the advantage of being unbearably cute, plus providing entertainment to all. It was a very favorable situation, of which I took maximum advantage.

In addition to my parents and two brothers, our household included my aunt Emma and her daughter, Marilyn Jean. Aunt Emma was the widow of my mother's brother, Lloyd Shedd. They stayed with us for several years. Aunt Emma was a second mother to me, and was a loving presence for me all her life.



Recollections of these years are sparse. My parents' favorite home remedy was castor oil--a vile concoction that I detested. I remember being bound up in a blanket and held on Mom's lap, while Dad pinched my nose till my mouth opened, enabling him to slide a spoonful of oil in my mouth. They occasionally would put the castor oil in orange juice to disguise the taste, but all that did was cause me to hate orange juice for the next decade or two.

Before going further, I should address a possible source of confusion. Roy and Lola Smith chose to name their second son Roy, leaving the world with two Roy Smiths in the same household. In order to tell them apart the new arrival became “Roy Merrill,” making use of a perfectly good middle name. Thereafter he was RoyMerrill (one word) to everyone in the family, and without as well, until he began to accumulate friends who didn’t know better.

One evening my parents made plans to go out, which immediately raised the question, “What do we do with Terry?” My Aunt Toots¹ contributed her baby sitting skills, and agreed to stay with my brothers and me. My brothers had a set of double bunk beds in their bedroom, and, while they lounged on the lower bunks, I climbed to the upper and peered over the edge at them. Predictably, the bedspread slid off the bed. I made a rapid descent, followed by a sudden stop, breaking my collar bone. A picture of Aunt Toots sitting in her living room chair in her pajamas when I was brought in to her has been fixed in my mind ever since.

I was born in our home on Eaton Street in Hammond, Indiana, across the street from Hammond High School. The football field fronted our lot, and when there was a football game Dad had to stand guard to keep parkers off our lawn and driveway.

My Grandpa and Grandma Smith would occasionally come to visit, and I recall Grandpa taking me by the hand and saying, “Come on, Terry, let’s go bummin’.” We would go up half a block to Calumet Avenue and walk down the street till we found some ice cream. ²

Not long after I was born we moved to an area in southeast Hammond that was called the Orchard Addition. Several family and friends from church bought homes side by side on New Hampshire Street. The Wheelers lived next to us, and I spent most of my time with my cousins, Dan and Jean.

Our peaceful existence was disturbed one day when a dog turned up that was frothing at the mouth and threatened to bite us. Some adult called the police and an officer came to the house, trapped the dog under the porch, and shot it dead. I was struck dumb by the drama, and as an eye witness I was keeper--and teller-- of the story.

One of my uncles drove up one day in a two-door coupe with a rumble seat. It could have been a junker, but the picture in my head shows a beautiful classic car. We got to ride in the rumble seat which was a great adventure. I'd like to do it again.

One early winter day my Uncle Win Wheeler came to our door to ask my dad for help. The roads were icy and he had crossed the first set of a double pair of railroad tracks, and stopped before the second pair for a train to pass. Bad for him, the road was inclined toward the tracks and his car slid down the slope and impacted the moving train. He had come to our house to ask Dad to take him to work. I kept returning to our garage, where the car had been temporarily parked, to see the car with the smashed front end.

1940-1946

I was born at one of the hinges of history--an era when colossal forces were inexorably moving and building and destroying nations, making them into monstrous things, and taking them into killing fields. The Great Depression had beggared the nation, and vast numbers were unemployed and poverty-stricken. At the same time, armies were mobilizing by land, and navies held gunnery practice at sea. And here comes Terry, bouncing onto the world stage, with his toy rifle, ready to play war.

From the time I was six years old, until I was ten, I doubt that I had a thought that was not shaped or colored in some way by the Second World War. Movies had newsreels they played between features, to keep the public informed; billboards advertised US savings bonds for sale. Women entered the work force, taking over "men's work." Servicemen were everywhere in uniform; railroads hauling flat cars carrying tanks rolled through town. And grade school boys played war every day.

When the war started, Hugh and Marilyn Jean were seniors in high school, and Roy was a year or so behind. I remember my mother saying, "Surely the war won't last long enough to take my sons into the service." In fact, both of her adult sons were drafted and rendered honorable--and safe--service.

I don't know how they managed it, but somehow my parents ensured that both Hugh and Marilyn enrolled at Graceland in 1942. Marilyn

continued to complete both years, but Hugh got drafted into the service mid-year and didn't return to college until after the war.

Hugh was drafted into the Navy, and was sent to the Great Lakes navy training center north of Chicago on Lake Michigan. When he completed boot camp we had an opportunity to visit him at Great Lakes. Dad, Mom and I drove up to see him. I missed him at home, and that outing was a matter of high excitement.. Somewhere we have a picture of Hugh taken that day in his enlisted winter blue Navy uniform. Roy's number came up next, and he too went into the Navy. With both my brothers serving, we were consumed with thoughts of their safety. Their letters home were read eagerly, and once in a great while one of the boys would call home. In those days long distance calls were expensive and not undertaken lightly.

Meanwhile, we grade school boys had our own warlike responsibilities. The empty field behind our house was a daily scene of battles between the japs and us, or the Nazis and us, or us against the japs and the Nazis. When we found ourselves up against the Nazi spy house, however, we thought we should call the FBI, but none of us knew how to do that.

The spy house was an ordinary looking two -story house just outside our neighborhood. The spies operated in the basement. Someone had peeked in the basement window and swore he saw a framed picture of Hitler hanging on the wall. The spies were clever enough to hide the picture on the evenings we would attempt to catch them, because we never did actually see the spies do their spying. If we had known how to call the FBI we could have been heroes.

Young men in uniform were everywhere--coming, going, passing through, home on leave between duty stations, traveling on orders, a quick visit with the girlfriend, looking out windows of passing railroad cars.

Homes of families with someone in the service would often display in a window a red, white and blue flag, about 5 inches by 7, that carried a blue star in the center. Sometimes the star was gold, which indicated someone from that family had been lost in the war. There were some with more than one gold star.

Occasionally our family would drive into Chicago to meet or greet some young friend of ours with weepy parents. Chicago Union Station was a dynamo of energy, all centered on the war. Servicemen by the thousands passed through making train connections. The Station was mammoth, with a huge central atrium. Overhead, fastened to the ceiling, were scores of model airplanes, all off to fight for the nation. I loved those trips to Union Station, always filled with the drama of loved ones, and threat of war, and full of emotion and sentiment, the joy and the pain that filled the place. Besides, somewhere Hugh and Roy were in the war, and perhaps traveling as these men were.

Each of my brothers were fortunate to get at least one trip home on leave. I came home from school one day and when I entered the house I spotted a pair of black leather uniform dress shoes, and I knew that Roy was home on leave. He was hiding upstairs to surprise me, but the shoes gave him away. I hadn't seen him in over a year, so I was almost terminally excited.

Hugh came home in 1945 on emergency leave to attend the funeral of my Grandpa Smith. Dad and Hugh and I visited the funeral home prior to the service, and Dad walked up to the casket and laid his hand on Grandpa's hands. It was a solemn moment. When her grief was eased, Grandma Smith kept a bag packed and was usually in the car when one started on a trip. She was a fun lady and loved to laugh.

Mom was a farm girl from Pepin County, Wisconsin. Grandpa Shedd owned a farm on the hogback next to Porcupine, down the road from Arkansaw, and several miles short of Durand.³ Mom's best friend was Della (Delila), later married to Clive Metcalf. Della was stricken with rheumatoid arthritis, which froze her joints, and in her late twenties was forced to choose the position in which she would spend the rest of her life. She chose sitting.⁴

Dad lived in Chicago, and visited a church reunion at Chetek, Wi., where my mother happened to be playing the piano. Dad demonstrated an unfortunate Smith characteristic by climbing a windmill on the farm and doing a head stand on the top to impress my mother. It worked, and the rest, as they say

When I was in grade school we spent most of every summer on the farm. Grandpa Shedd, was a presence I found it best to avoid. Nothing much good would come from being noticed by Grandpa. Grandma, on the

other hand, was a warm and loving lady. Everybody loved Sarah. She wore a thimble on a finger in church. Roy Merrill and Uncle Bob⁵ were a combustible mixture, and if one or the other drew undue attention Grandma would deliver a crack on the skull that echoed through the church.

Some of my aunts and uncles were there occasionally helping out on the farm. There were horses for motive power--tractors were on the way, but a couple years off. Roy and Hugh got to go to the fields with the men, but I was not yet field hand material. I hung around the entrance to the horse barn, and when Uncle Lawrence brought the horses in he would sometimes lift me up and deposit me on the back of the horse, and I would ride it into the barn. A farm is a great place for a kid to live.

Sometime around 1943 or 4 we moved from the Orchard Addition back into town and lived in a two story brick house at 425 Waltham Street. It ran east and west, and was the base of a triangle, with two railroads (the Monon on the west and the Erie on the east) as the two sides that met at the top. My battles against our nation's enemies took place in the empty field enclosed by the triangle. On the other side of the Monon tracks was Harrison Park--a nice city park, offering a lagoon for swimming in the summer and ice skating in the winter.

On two blocks of Waltham street, between the Monon and the Erie tracks, lived all my usual friends. We would call a friend out to play by going to their front door and shouting their name. We were always outside, usually in the field or at Harrison Park. In the summer we played kick the can; we spent the winter on the ice rink, where the daily game was Stink, which was a form of tag.

High up in the peak of the rear wall of the house there was a decorative glass window. I was bouncing a ball off the wall when I realized that my last throw was headed straight for that window. Propelled by an explosion of panic, I made tracks, and when I heard the glass break I was standing on the sidewalk in front of the house. I don't think my folks ever noticed the broken glass.

1945--the end of the war

I was ten years old when the war ended. In May. 1945, Germany surrendered, followed in September by Japan.

As one would suppose, there was general celebration that convulsed the whole world, or what I knew of it. There were parades everywhere, and parties going non-stop in residences, apartment buildings, and downtown businesses. Because the surrender dates were separated by several months, the celebrations continued on through the summer.

The German surrender occurred while we were in Wisconsin at the farm. Even though we were out in the country, we could hear celebrations taking place around us. Every bell was ringing--church bells, school bells, farmyard bells. We visited the Metcalfs, down the road, and their daughter, Geraldine (of later fame herein), went to the church across the road and climbed up the ladder in the steeple and rang the bell. I climbed up right behind her and joined the general excitement.⁶

With the ending of the war, the world was transformed. My brothers were home and would not be called back to fight. Mom did not have to worry any more whether her two older sons might be drafted into the service. Hugh and Roy Merrill suddenly were civilians, and some plans needed to be made. While these weighty matters were considered by grownups, I was busy being a ten-year old kid, and hanging (when allowed) as the younger brother of two older brothers.

The Rest

Hugh came home in late 1945, and began making plans to enroll again at Graceland (after his four year interruption in 1942). He started his college career in the fall of 1946.

When he returned Roy Merrill got a job driving a city bus in Hammond. He was a great story teller, and his job serving the public provided him with a never-ending source of humor. One of his fares spoke broken English, and wanted to get off the bus "by the poppies." He couldn't understand her, till she finally said "you know, the little dox."⁷ He let her off at a pet store. Like Hugh, he saw the value of an education, and followed Hugh to Graceland in 1947.

These were great times for me. The boys were home, and I loved having them there. The influx of energy they brought pumped up all of the aspects of our family life. I developed what I thought was an exciting repertoire of skills performed on my bike, and would do demonstrations for the admiration of my patiently appreciative brothers. The world went from black and white to Technicolor, and I began a process of learning

and experiencing the rapid expansion of my knowledge and experience. I was growing up.

The departure of my brothers from home to college changed, but did not diminish, my excitement over their activities. We had continuing contact with them through correspondence, which kept us up to date with them; and we visited the campus at least once to see them for Homecoming in the fall.

Hugh and Roy were extraordinarily good to me. They tolerated my adulation and my hovering presence without objection.

One evening my folks were in bed but were talking with Hugh, who was home on a visit. I was asked to join them, which was a clear sign that something was being discussed. Mom said, "Terry, what would you think about gaining a sister?" That was a shocker, I impulsively shot a look at Mom to detect any sign of pregnancy--there was none. The newsmaker was not my parents, but Hugh, who had just informed my folks that he was going to get married. That was how I first learned about Ruthie.

Hugh had made the most fortunate decision of his life. Ruth was--is--a sweetheart, and became my first and continuing sister.

With both Hugh and Roy away at Graceland, the focus of my interest and excitement shifted to Lamoni. The stories of their activities and friendships were the stuff of college life.

One glorious spring weekend the boys and my folks arranged for me to take the Burlington railroad train from Chicago to Osceola, Iowa, where the boys picked me up. I spent the weekend with them and with their friends. I was the group mascot, and I was entertained by them all. It was an unforgettable experience.

Roy was next up to the line, and some time later he announced that he and Geri Metcalf were going to be married. The relationship my folks had had with the Metcalfs over the years--and especially the life-long friendship of Mom and Della--gave the marriage instant familiarity.

The paths had been set, and events continued to unfold. Hugh and Ruth graduated from Graceland and were married on Dad and Mom's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. They soon moved to Denver, where Hugh

attended Denver University. Roy and Ger were next. They got married one Labor Day weekend, and it snowed. Roy enrolled at Drake University, and they moved to Des Moines.

These developments caused a natural evolution of my relationships with my brothers. it was still important to me, but necessarily more distant.

The first summer they were in Denver, Hugh and Ruth invited me out to visit them. I wanted to set off some fireworks, but they were not allowed in Hammond, but they were legal in Denver. I again boarded the Burlington Zephr and railed my way from Chicago to Denver. I had a great time. Hugh and I went to a nearby river and disturbed the peace with explosives. The three of us went to a performance at Red Rocks, which is a rock formation forming a striking natural theater. Altogether, it was a wonderful visit.

The next summer Roy and Ger invited me to spend a week with them in Des Moines. Once again it was a week to remember. Roy took me with him on his truck delivering dry cleaning which was fun. But the most interesting thing was the trailer home adjoining Roy's, where a couple had long and very loud arguments, interspersed with "Shut up!," and "Shut your mouth!," and "Be quiet!" it was very entertaining.

Daniel asked me to tell him what it was like when I was growing up, and that is what I have tried to do. I have not included historical information or stories that did not serve my purpose. I tried to convey the feel of the times as I lived them. I hope this is helpful, Daniel. I was not born to fortune, but I was fortunately born. I could not ask more of my family. I hope that those who read this will be as fortunate.

This isn't the end--I'm only 85.

¹Louisa Shedd Wheeler, sister of Lola Smith

²The house where I was born still exists--or did the last I knew. It was moved from Eaton Street around the corner and down a couple of blocks. There was no plaque advertising my nativity, which was a disappointment.

³This part of Wisconsin is very hilly; the hogback was—is—a particular hill formation.

⁴The story of Clive and Del Metcalf is an inspiring one of devotion and loving service. Mom and Del were friends from grade school days, and came to have an even closer connection, as we shall soon see.

⁵My mother's brother.

⁶The timing doesn't seem to work out quite right, but I know that Ger and I rang the bell!

⁷Why did I remember that story after all these years?

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