

## THE BOYHOOD YEARS

The Good Book commences with the words, “In the Beginning,” which seems like a good place to start this autobiography.<sup>1</sup> I was born October 18, 1924, in Clarksville, Tennessee, then a town of ten thousand people. No part of this biography is more fictional than this tale of my early years. What I describe about those years is befogged by the mists of time and layered over by the construct which I, as an adult, have built of those years. Caveat reader.

My mother, Georgia Ruth Edmondson, and my father, Charles Percy Warfield, Jr., married when Mother was only eighteen years of age. I, their only child, was not born until mother was thirty years of age. When I have sometimes been teased about being an only child, I have often responded, “that they got it right the first time.” Both of my parents were raised on farms in Montgomery County, Tennessee. The Warfield farm purchased in 1835 was on the Red River side of the county and the Edmondson farm was on the Cumberland River side. There are Edmondsons still living on that farm. But you could not keep my parents down on the farm. It was the roaring twenties. The Florida land boom had the nation excited, so Mother and Dad with their toddler moved to Delray Beach, Florida to get rich. They didn’t. My only memory of Delray Beach, Florida is of the 1928 hurricane which destroyed most of Uncle Dick

Shuttlesworth's home in which we were living. Mother liked to tell that my only reaction to the destructive winds was to describe them as "cool breezes." Whether it was the hurricane experience or not, I have always loved storms, the bigger the better, on land and on sea.

We came back to Clarksville. When I was four or five years old, Mother and Dad divorced. Divorces were rare in Tennessee in those days and they were somewhat of a blight on one's reputation. Today divorce is more frequent but whenever it occurs, it is unfortunate for the parties, but I recognize there are situations where it is necessary. Both of my parents were fine, decent people and I did not experience the dysfunctional life which many children in broken homes do. I was in my Mother's custody; the custody of a minor child was almost always given to the mother in those days. I had weekend visitations with my Father and I have pleasant memories of going to the Warfield Farm or going with him on Saturdays to the cowboy movies, but the visitations became a point of conflict, so I did not see my Father much as a young child or even as I grew older. I don't blame anyone for this situation, but I deeply regret I did not get to know my Father better.

Mother and I went to live with Mother's oldest sister, Mabel, and her husband, Horace Ritter. They owned a white clapboard two-story house situated on a large acreage tract on Greenwood Avenue in Clarksville. It is from my years in this house that my first clear childhood memories come. Aunt Mabel ran the place. She raised chickens, cows and hogs – a girl raised on a farm can do that. I can

recall her dashing out to the henhouse at midnight firing her shotgun at the marauding foxes. It was she who personally killed the hogs each year. She would stab the hog behind the ear with an ice pick. Hog killing had to wait until after the first frost so the meat would not spoil. When we were going to have chicken for dinner, Alice, Aunt Mabel's wonderful black cook, would simply grab a chicken and wring its neck off in a second. It looked so easy and Alice showed me how, but all I got was a sore arm and a mad, but alive, clucking chicken. I understand the phrase, "mad as a wet hen."

There was a large orchard at the back of the property filled with apple and peach trees which needed climbing and I obliged. Aunt Mabel also had a large garden and she canned fruits and vegetables. She grew most of our food. There were many children in the neighborhood. The Garnett Ladds lived next door. Their son, Garnett, was a little younger than I. Our other next door neighbors were the Durrets, who had a daughter, Ruth, who was my age. The dentist, Dr. Pickering, had two pretty daughters and one of them, Priscilla, was my friend. Buddy Collier lived up the road a piece. (When I was proofreading this section, I wondered if "a piece" was spelled correctly and if there was such a phrase which I have used all my life, so I consulted the dictionary. "Piece" is defined as, "Midland and Southern U.S. a distance," and in the example shown, it is preceded by an "a.") We had a neighborhood bully that we were all afraid of and avoided whenever possible. One day he caught me and was pummeling me good until I decided to wrestle him. We fell to

the ground, I got a neck hold on him and I squeezed tight until someone pulled me off saying, “You’ll kill him.” I didn’t and he was fine, but that was the end of his bullying, at least with me. I had tried to run from this fear but when I was forced to face it, I found that the fear was worse than the reality. There was absolutely no bravery on my part in the fight. It was as the country folks said, a case of “root hog or die.”

The reader must have noticed that I have barely mentioned my Uncle Horace. I was named for him and for my father. He was the Circuit and Criminal Court Clerk for Montgomery County and that post consumed most of his time, but I think he had little interest in running the place. As an adult who has owned property, I am sympathetic to his feelings. Uncle Horace influenced me in two vital parts of my life – ice cream and the law. Every night before we went to bed, he and I would eat vanilla ice cream which Aunt Mabel had made. I have continued this tradition, in his memory, so to speak. His influence on my law career stems from his position as Court Clerk. When school was out, I would walk to the courthouse to ride home with him. If a case was being tried, I would sit with him in the Clerk’s elevated desk and listen to Mr. Horace Stout, Mr. Hubert Porter and the other lawyers try cases. I suppose this was my Harper Lee “To Kill a Mockingbird” experience. I was enthralled by what I saw and heard. When the lawyers asked me what I was going to be when I grew up, I always said “a lawyer.” I kept on saying that until I became one.