

Composition: 3

generations and a porch

by David Ackley

The first house on Broad Street that I remember was sided with deep stained shingles; it had a screened porch with a trellis of what must have been climbing roses, though I remember the added shade of the vines, and the cool secret sense of sitting on that porch, looking invisibly out on the sidewalk at passersby, kids on Schwinn bikes, and the cars hissing, or roaring past with big V-8 engines on big, fat tires—the Fords, Chevies and Dodges of my youth, and of my uncle Philip's, twenty or so years before. This house was the one he had grown up in, the one he would return to from his first war.

In one of the earliest photographs I am standing supported on my grandfather's lap, on their front lawn with my father on one knee beside his lawn chair, my fat baby's face mostly masking from the camera my grandfather's lean and humorous visage. It is sunny and my father squints and grins against the bright light. Behind us is that house I would grow to love with its weathered look, screened porch and rose trellis. It is 1939. The war in Europe has begun. Poland, the home of my other, immigrant grandparents, is being overrun by the German Blitzkrieg. I am one year old, my father, Harry, is 29, my grandfather, Fred, is 63. In another year, Philip will be in the army and in two our country will be in the war. From his medical tent he will see much of the war's potential for carnage, all over Europe, before coming back to the house in 1945. In 6 or 7 years my grandparents will have sold the house and moved to another, further down Broad Street at number 27, one without a porch, plainer, with grey asbestos siding. In ten years, I will be in the sixth grade, and of the three in the photograph, I will be the only one left.

