

Rags to Riches to Rags, 2

by Jerry Ratch

My brothers, who helped support our poor mother, were Rudy and Emil, and there was a sister Blanche, who got married early on and ran off to Atlanta and never looked back at our dire situation. And Helen, who stayed in Chicago. And Silvia, who moved out to California and married a Jewish man who ran the famous Stars Deli on Hollywood Blvd with the mile-high sandwiches next to the Walk of Fame. Myself I never identified as anything, other than one who despised the Catholics who would walk out the church door on Sunday mornings right into traffic as if they were eternal and couldn't be run down by a car. They couldn't have been more wrong, because I was out there every other Sunday morning heading to work, and I couldn't wait to nail one if they ever crossed my path. Get it? Nail them? Crossing my path? It's all very, very symbolic. And I never went to college. Hell, I never even went to high school, so symbols should have been lost on me. But they weren't.

Bessie, my lover since high school, fortunately never identified with that school of thinking either, though her sisters and brothers were a bunch of Catholic nut-cases if there ever was one. Don't get me started. Well, it was smack dab in the heart of the Great Depression, in 1932, that Bessie and I decided it was time to get married, and then in 1934 we moved out of Chicago to a suburb near the Ovaltine Factory in Villa Park, and surprise, surprise, we bought a house, with the help of this real estate agent we met by the name of Herb. Bessie and I were so indebted to this man that we came to name our first boy after him. That was four years later, as our country was struggling to get out of the Depression, as we also approached the Second World War, with all that mess going on with Hitler in Europe.

But enough of history. Here's what really happened, down in the trenches, back in Chicago, Illinois. The Windy City.

I had bought an Indian motorcycle, as I said. Me and a bunch of pals drove our motorcycles up to Wisconsin, drinking beer and just for the heck of it, you know? Because we could. Though Bessie tamed me down some, when we started going out steady. Well, that and the fact that I was broad-sided by a car making a left turn, which broke my leg so bad and in so many places that the doctor told me I was going to lose my leg, unless I walked on it, to make it mend. And was that ever painful. I could feel the bones crunched up together inside the cast. But it worked, and I kept my leg. I was lucky! And that helped me settle down a little, with my sweetheart. And anyway, when I got a car, she would take trips with me up to lakes in Wisconsin, to go swimming, and the like. I took this wonderful photo of her sitting on the bumper of my car parked right in the water at the lake's edge, in her one-piece bathing suit, smiling at me, with those long legs of hers. She was something, all right, and she was all mine. We loved each other so much. Yes, I was a lucky man indeed. She tamed me, and saved my life, I think.

