

My 27th Great-Grandparents

by Nonnie Augustine

Early Spring, 1075, Northumbria:

Judith, too ashamed to speak, too angry to cry, waves her handmaiden away. She wants no food. Wind drives icy rain across the thickness of arrow-slit, wets her thick wool gown, stabs her cheeks. Still, she keeps watch. Out there speeding horses will pound the rough paths through forest, slow over plains of sucking mud, try to reach Hallam before night falls and the storm will not stop them.

Husband Waltheof drinks in the Great Hall, plots revolt with the Ring of Earls. She hears his booming laugh, pictures his grey beard greasy with meat-fat, his canny eyes glazed by mead and her resolve hardens. Frightened by her betrayal when she sent word to her Uncle William, the Countess is sure now, strains to hear the coming hoof beats. Young Judith damns her husband's ambition, will not let it kill her children.

Late Spring, 1076, Hampshire:

The last Saxon earl, Waltheof of Northumbria, is beheaded on St. Giles' Hill, Winchester. The condemned prays "Lead us not into temptation," then the crowd hears "and deliver us from evil" from his severed head. The Conqueror's niece, Judith of Lens, and her three small children bear witness from the stands.

Tracing my Nana's bloodline eases once I find our Kennedy that connects to JFK's. Hundreds of Kennedys have done the research

before me, and the names go back and back until they stop in the 10th century with a Scottish king and his wife; along the path is this sad family. I swell with link to royals, saints, torturers, and beggars; my thousands of living cousins—you ancient spirits alive in my blood.

