

Uncle Leo's Trip
07-23-2012 By Harry Zirkelbach

Great trips begin with that single step, determination, a concept.

This trip involves my mother and a man I never met, her brother Leo, Lee to all.

It began early in the last decade of the 19th Century, was completed mid-decade of the 20th Century.

Mother was Josephine Hernon before she wed Harry Zirkelbach. Both were 29.

Josephine's Pennsylvania birth may have been a surprise to James and Mamie her parents, for there was a gap between her birth and her youngest sibling John. The family called her Babe at birth, then all her life. This would fit. Babe's three brothers heavy, 6' 3", two sisters nearly 6' tall. Josephine would not grow to be 5' tall.

She was not raised with her siblings. A few years after this birth, Mamie Hernon died. Babe was sent to be raised by James' sister Nora (Masterson) in Warren Pa. Aunt Nora had two daughters, also cared for a spinster sister Mary.

Dad Hernon, was Road Supervisor in the Pittsburgh area for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Each fall he sent Babe via railroad to Warren Pa. She returned each spring, that migration until she was 18, had finished High School. Initially Dad hung a sign identifying Babe by name, destination, holding his RR employees responsible for safe cargo passage. Later she ditched the tag.

Mom always said her dad fair, firm. That was not his work identity, managing independent youth on railroad gangs. Firmness extended to his boys. This brings us to his second son Lee, the center of the TRIP. Lee quarreled with his dad; may have been a young alcoholic. After one bout, still a boy, the family front door closed on Lee Hernon, forever. He had chosen to become a miner, in Park City Utah where he knew no one.

Leo worked in the gold/silver mines daily, drink nightly, matured, accepted the demands of the Mine Operators for his own safety.

In time he had a visitor. His younger brother John was sent by Dad to bring Lee home. Didn't work. Instead John, robust, young, took to mining. His failing;

smart, juvenile, always the prankster, to the annoyance of older miners. He was also not beyond cheating them. Leo was told, tell John go home, or else.

John returned to Pittsburgh, where he became a household name, a wordsmith Sports and Agriculture reporter for the Pittsburgh Telegraph, and on KDKA radio.

All Herson's had Irish charm. The sober Leo exuded it. After one night of drinking and fun at the bar of his choice, he helped the owner clean up the mess he had helped make. The bar owner suggested that Leo quit mining, come, work there.

The unexpected offer was accepted. In a short time Leo found managing was enjoyable, the purchasing before opening, the friendship of the evenings. And he stopped drinking. Later the owner died, gave the bar and property to Lee.

Lee married, raised a family in the second floor above the tavern, then and even now, known as THE CLUB, downtown Park City, Utah.

Lee never returned to Pittsburgh, died in Park City, having sold The Club.
He never saw any family, excluding brother John.
And Except

In 1948 the Cleveland Indians won the American League Pennant.
Lee rode a train there from Slat Lake, watched the 3 games
played against the Boston Braves.

He also invited Babe, living 90 miles east in Erie Pa, to visit. She exited the Cleveland Terminal wearing the replica name tag. They joyfully cried most of these three days of unity after a lifetime separation.
Babe would tell her two children of a facet Lee's character,
indelibly woven into her memory, now mine.

That visit in Cleveland, say hello or anything to Lee, you'd get a tip, a mint condition Silver Dollar. He spread these to baseball fans and others that 1948 October. Uncle Leo must have brought a satchel full of Silver Dollars. He was that Silver Miner, Cleveland Baseball fanatic, from Utah.

Of course he is also my mythical Uncle Lee,
forever living large on his own terms,
etching this moment shortly before both he and Babe died.

