

## Esperanza

By Pete Clark

My earliest and vaguest recollection of a person named Hope is a man who had a farm in the valley between Hartville and Guernsey, Wyoming. I don't remember much about the man. I do remember he had a windmill that produced something called electricity which he used to light his house in lieu of the kerosene lanterns used by other farmers in the valley. Hope's console windup Victrola was the first record player I saw. The family listened to hillbilly music. One record, Roy Acuff's *Wreck on the Highway*, could never be played because the husband of an ancient woman who lived with the family had been killed in a wreck on a highway.

Another Hope I have known was my daughter Lori's best friend from elementary through high school. Hope and Lori were like peanut butter and jelly, almost always together. They did overnights at each other's homes. During one of their nights together, something about an antique picture of an unknown woman had terrified them. I found the picture on my porch the next morning, as I had left it behind when I had moved. The portrait had come from my Dad's house so I hung it in a back bedroom that we used for storage. One day I was in the room looking for something. When I turned to leave and glanced at that picture on the wall, the face of the woman turned into something horrifying and I beat feet out of there, never going back in unless it was absolutely essential.

I told a friend living in Kansas about the two incidents involving the picture. He was both a Wiccan High Priest and a Warlock. When he came to town for a MileHiCon, he asked if he could have the picture since I didn't want it. I told him he could have it under the condition that he would soon burn the photograph and destroy the frame. I would have done that myself, but I could not have an outside fire on my property. He accepted the condition, but did not comply with it. Not long after he arrived home in Kansas he receded into alcoholism, unemployment and poverty. The process took six years, culminating in his death on Halloween, 2018 at a hospital in Denver. He had been run over by a truck in his home town a month before. I don't know what happened to the picture.

The last Hope in my life was a Hispanic woman who was part of the outstanding team that worked for me when I managed Domestic in a big box department store. Her name in Spanish is Esperanza. Her family and Hispanic friends called her Espie. She was a hard worker and extremely reliable, always at work. She handled Bedding and Draperies and her departments were always straight and her counters full. Her husband was in the Air Force and I lost her services when he was transferred to a different base.

The Hopes in my life have ranged from good to great. I hope their lives were as full as mine.