

SEP. 2022

THE EARLY LIFE OF THIS GUY....



If you are wondering what the hell this is about, go to [here, the winter when we went to the dogs.](#)

I was born in LA, as in Lethbridge, Alberta. It was a small town in the 1950's, out on the Great Plains; but within sight of the Rockies. From the upstairs window in our house I could look west and see the Rocky Mountains. Perhaps that is what defined my life.

My first memories are of mountains; of jumping out of bed and running to the window where I could look west and see the Rocky Mountains, shining blue in the first light of sunrise, a shimmering mirage along the prairie horizon. My town of birth, Lethbridge Alberta, was about 60 miles out on the Great Plains, but the mountains were what held me. In those distant days, 75 years ago, the wilderness of the Rockies stretched from the 49th parallel north to the Yukon, scratched only by a few narrow roads and railway tracks. Logging was a minor business then and cows and mines and human intrusions barely dented the vastness of the mountains that stretched in huge waves of rock and snow and forest, west to the coast and north into the barrens of the northern Yukon. Life has blessed me with time in some of the best of that vast wild country, but then, at five years old, I only knew that it drew me like some distant magnet, pulling my concentration from schoolwork and the other pieces of life, to that distant ragged blue line. How is it that at only a few years of age, one can know that such a thing, that distant allure of mountains and wildness, will be your life? I wonder sometimes, if somehow it is somehow twisted into my DNA and my Scottish roots. It is as if the distant green hills of Scotland had been twisted into my DNA and led me always, to the hills and some distant blue horizon. Or perhaps it goes even further back, to when we were all African, leaving the mother continent, forever searching over the next distant horizon as we wandered into Asia and Europe, until, much later we came over the Alaskan land bridge to the best of all, the Rocky Mountains.



That was back when I was actually cute....

We grew up in war time housing, built for the young families trying to get a start after the end of the war. I was the eldest of three. We lived right on the south edge of the city, looking down over the coulees and the Old Man River, where I first learned to charge around, unattended, in wild places.



Our family, about 1955 when I was 7 years old.

If you are interested in our family history, back into the foggy hills of Scotland, then click on [family history](#). If you would like to learn about the stories of my mom's life, or dad's adventures in World War II, then click away. Some of our earlier family history (Jamieson side) is recorded in a 1908 book called "Bemocked of Destiny". I have no idea what the book title means, but it is available electronically.

<http://www.e-bookdownload.net/search/bemocked-of-destiny>

This book was written by a distant cousin who came west in the 1880's. This book has given us all a sense of our family history. It is fascinating to be able to read about of our family and especially, the love affair between our great-great grandfather and grandmother in that now distant time.

The legends of my family say that my father's family was from the far north of Scotland, from the edge of the northern sea and that the red-head's in the family come from the genes of raiding Norsemen. My Y chromosomes, from mom's family, were from the Isle of Skye and the southern hills of Dunbar in southern Scotland. The story I like best of our true beginning is of "Jamie the Black", a horse thief in the 1300's who not only stole the

king's horse, but somehow, while imprisoned in the castle, got under the coarse linen wrapped about a lady of the court, and then absconded through a high window in the castle and rode off laughing into the hills; leaving behind a bastard who became known as "Jamie's son". I cannot vouch for the veracity of this tale, but it is surely true that I have oft been called "that bastard Jamieson"... In fact, as recently as last week; now that you ask...

My mother's side of the family was from the lowlands of Dunbar in southern Scotland. They were more sedate but made good whiskey. Not that they were not made of stern stuff. One of my distant aunts came across the Atlantic during "the clearances", when the lords of Scotland turned out their people and the lucky of them boarded disease infested boats for the new world. My mother's family was landed on Anicosti Island, off Quebec, in quarantine for the fever that was on the boat. All of the family died but for one young daughter, who was 13. She survived; then somehow she got off the island and then walked, alone, to Renfrew, north of Ottawa, to the new home of the Farries clan in Canada.

But I digress... If you want to learn more, we have a family history that my dad and I put together in his last days. Below are some photos from that book. The photo directly below is from the 1890's, I think, of the Jamieson family, taken in Eastern Canada. My granddad is the young man between his father's legs.



It is of my great grand father's family, likely taken in Renfrew, Ontario. Even then, I like to think, that distant blue horizons beckoned to the Jamieson clan; and in the 1890's, my great grandfather came west to the edge of the mountains. The three Jamieson brothers settled in the Red Deer and Sylvan Lake areas in central Alberta. Our grandparents on my mother's side came to Grassy Lake, near Medicine Hat, to homestead a desolate rocky ridge with a view of nothing grass and sky for 100 miles in every direction in southern Alberta. They were among the first people sucked in by Canada's first great real estate fraud, perpetrated on an entire generation. It was called the Homestead Act. William Pearce, western Canada's first conservationist and resource manager was fired because he opposed settlement in the Palliser Triangle (the dry country in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan).

My recollections of family history date from visits to my grandparent's home in Sylvan Lake. They were perfect grandparents.



I remember swimming in the lake, running around town and one day, going for a walk along the lake with Grampa. There was an old aspen snag with a hole in it. I asked him what was in the hole. He held me up so I could look in the hole. A wood duck, nesting there, flew out and right into my face, flashing all the colors of the rainbow. I can remember that like it was yesterday.

One famous family story involved me and my Uncle Bob, who was the black sheep in the family, a bit of a drunk, but a wonderful character. We were at a family reunion at Gramma and Grampa's place. He took me to the Benalto rodeo nearby. He knew everyone and we ended up sitting on the corral rails right beside the chutes. I can remember the way the bucking horses grunted when they bucked, something you don't hear from the stands. When we got back home I raced into Gramma's home, through the screen door, to all of my aunts sitting around the kitchen table. Gramma said:

"Henry, did you have fun?"

To which I replied....

"Jesus Christ Gramma, you should have seen all the fucking horses...."

My newfound words fell into dead silence. I can remember the screen door banging shut in the ensuing silences. Both Bob's spent the night in the dog house.

Growing up in Lethbridge was special. Post war. I didn't learn until much later that we were living at one point in a house with cousins, three entire families in one house. There was no housing available. Finally a block of "wartime housing" was completed, right on the south end of the city, on the edge of the prairie. You had to have at least three kids to qualify for this first row of new houses. So I began life with dozens of kids as neighbors. We didn't have water fights; we had water wars, with 25 kids charging around. When we got tired or hungry we just picked a house and the whole bunch of us went in and were given lunch and milk, delivered by a horse drawn milk wagon. This was still in a time when there was a horse drawn milk wagon that came by every few days, and in summer, an ice cream man on a bike. The Fifties. It was good.

Dad ran an appliance store and was having trouble making ends meet. But I knew nothing of that. All I remember is the coulees of the Old Man River, just off the end of our street, and the coyotes and rabbits and shallow, algae filled lagoons down by the river. And weekends, when dad would pile us all into an old station wagon and we would go to the mountains, to Livingstone Falls, and Waterton, where the mountains were not distant blue shadows but vast rock faces rearing up above us. The times I remember best were fishing with my dad and uncles, in the Old Man and the Belly Rivers. And one trip to a place called Spring Creek. We camped by a beaver dam, hard up against the first high rocks of the Rockies. The creek was full of little cutthroat trout that I would catch and then run immediately to my dad to show him. It was the most perfect of times, by a fire, cooking fresh trout, then early in the morning, roaring up and down the creek, feeding

worms to the little blue streaks in the creek. One day I went far downstream, to just above the Old Man River. There was a waterfall and a deep pool that was accessible for fish from the river. And I caught a big one, a fish reared in the river, coming up to spawn. He was huge, in a twelve year old's eyes. (I went back just a few years ago and found the same hole).

CALGARY

When I was 14, we moved to Calgary. It was a big move for me. I didn't really know how to get to know people. In Lethbridge, on our block, in our schools, I just knew everyone. But that move led to a whole set of life adventures in the mountains of Banff and the Kananaskis, back when that area was not a tourist place, but simply the "forestry trunk road", a dusty gravel road running through the mountains. My first real mountain adventures were; with some climbing and skiing buddies that I lost track of decades ago, and then re-discovered, via the internet, just a few years ago. They hadn't changed and had had their own adventures all over the world.



Climbing gear, circa 1968, on Mt. Eon, near Lake Louise.

In the summer of my second year in university I got a job as a park naturalist in Waterton National Park. It was a perfect summer. I ridge walked all over the park, listened to Sargent Peppers Lonely Heart Club Band in the room of a good friend there, and late in the summer, I climbed Mt. Cleveland, the highest peak in the area, slept by the cairn and watched the sun come up over Chief Mountain and the prairies.



It was a wonderful time, and I had my first real camera; thus the photo essay called [A Waterton summer](#).

After another winter of school, I got a job, my first job as a biologist, working for the wildlife branch of the Alberta government. Fools, they let me loose to study large mammals on the east slope, and actually paid me for doing so. The Highwood, the Elbow, the Ghost, all wild and empty in those days.

AND THEN...

On a warm summer day the next spring, a few of us that were studying at desks we had hauled up onto the top of the science building where we could see the mountains and pretend we were studying for finals. We were talking about what we were going to do when we finished school. Some were going to teach school, others were going to work for an oil company. Someone asked me, and without much thought, I said. "I think I am going to go skiing". And so I did. I worked that summer for the Wildlife Branch again, and made a few bucks. In December I walked away from the life I had known...



[Me and Truck 1969.](#)